CASE STUDY: Siliguri

SILIGURI URBAN PILOT PROJECT

Urbanisation is a global megatrend that is changing the aid and development landscape. The world’s population is already over half ‘urban’, with more than one billion people living in slums.

World Vision has established a Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming that is leading urban pilot projects in six countries. The pilots are testing innovative, locally-driven urban poverty solutions such as securing urban land rights, influencing municipal policy implementation, and creating livelihood opportunities — with children and youth leading change in their communities.

The Siliguri Urban Pilot Project promotes sustained civic engagement to reduce the incidence of child labour and child trafficking.

CASE STUDY, AUGUST 2012

Project name:
Kopila Siliguri Project
Start date:
October 2009
City population:
509,709 est.
District population:
1,842,034
Direct project participants:
6,000 children & youth, and
10,000 adults
Proportion of national urban population in slums:
34.8% (2005 est.)
Annual national slum population growth rate:
2% (2001 est.)
Projected Indian urban population by 2030:
611,406,700
(Source: UNDESA Population Division, 2008)

SILIGURI CITY, CHILD TRAFFICKING & CHILD LABOUR

Siliguri is the biggest and fastest growing city in North Bengal, and is situated in a narrow corridor of land between the borders of Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. Siliguri is the largest urban agglomeration and source of employment within Darjeeling district, which has a population of more than 1.8 million people. As such, the city has a largely transient population and urban footprint. The city is a transit hub for trade, commerce and human migration both within India and from surrounding countries such as Nepal and Bhutan.

Siliguri is a known transit point for human trafficking, which is driven by a demand for cheap labour within India and neighbouring countries. Along with locals, children from nearby areas are trafficked through Siliguri to cities such as Kolkata, which has a notoriously large red light district, or as far as Pune and Mumbai, and even the Middle East. The practice is clandestine enough to remain mostly hidden from sight.

Trafficking is made easier by the fact that nearby borders are porous. At the Indo-Nepalese border there are virtually no physical deterrents from illegally crossing into India from other countries. Security personnel are under-resourced, often bribed, and due to insufficient training may not even be aware of any illegal migration taking place.

Due to their difficult economic circumstances, many children who live in slums within and around Siliguri have been forced to work in their parents’ businesses, or as ‘rag-pickers’ and rock breakers to help support their families. This means they are often not able to start or complete schooling, and can end up trapped in the cycle of poverty.
CASE STUDY: SILIGURI

PROJECT GOAL

Sustained civic engagement to reduce the incidence of child labour and child trafficking.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

1. Stakeholders in the target area empowered to prevent, protect and restore children at risk of child labour and child trafficking.
2. Stakeholders effectively monitor and manage the vigilance mechanisms on child trafficking.
3. Stakeholders share and adopt good practices and processes for combating cross border child trafficking.
4. Continual project review to inform development of an urban model.

First Project Phase:

October 2009 - September 2013

PROJECT APPROACH

The project operates in six target slum areas of the city, which includes establishing local vigilance committees and child protection units. These units include school teachers, social workers and local leaders. Their aim is to strengthen social protection, monitoring and reporting mechanisms to reduce incidences of child labour and trafficking in Siliguri.

Non-formal education (NFE) centres have also been set up in the six communities as homework or extra lesson clubs, especially for slum children who have dropped out of, or not started, formal education. Volunteers maintain a level of basic education, while World Vision provides uniforms and basic stationary and integrates children back into the formal system.

Other community-based activities include supporting local child well-being groups and youth clubs to create positive peer environments for children and youth. The project has also encouraged the observation of special days such as International Children’s Day and International Women’s Day to unite and mobilise communities around relevant causes.

The other major component of the project is the Siliguri Anti-Trafficking Network (ATN), which consists of seven local and national NGO partners, and works closely with government authorities. The project takes initiative in providing training to West Bengal Police, Border Security Force (BSF) which guard the Indo-Bangladesh border, and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) which guard the Indo-Nepal border.

PROGRESS TO DATE

• The ATN has collectively helped in the repatriation and reunion of many trafficked children with their lesson clubs, and several network members have shelter houses set up for at-risk or rescued children.
• The ATN has helped in bringing different partners together and addressing issues which are common to all the city.
• In the three years since the NFE centers were established, around 500 children have been enrolled in the formal school system.
• The project has coordinated training on child rights and anti-trafficking laws for BSF and SSB personnel. Officers are often not aware of the legal mechanisms designed to prevent human trafficking and child labour, as well as what to look for in illegal activity on the border.
• The project has also led awareness-raising activities in Siliguri and the district through local media (radio).

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

• Networking among civil society organisations has increased the social protection network for vulnerable children. Together, ATN members cover a much broader spectrum of anti-trafficking and child protection work.
• Networking has also led to shared external influence. Government officials are more likely to respond to a request from the network, due to its size and influence, than any single NGO. Before the Kopila Project there was no common platform or shared strategy among these diverse local and national NGOs.

Children in the Dharam Nagar slum area of Siliguri City.

For more information, please contact:
Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming
World Vision International
Email: urban_programming@wvi.org
Phone: +61(3) 9287 2750
Web: www.wvi.org/urban

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