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CHILDREN'S LIVES AT STAKE: Working Together to End Child Labour in Agra Footwear Production

DECEMBER 2017: Final Project Report 2015-2017

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The **Fair Labor Association** promotes and protects workers' rights and improves workplace conditions through collaboration between business, civil society, and colleges and universities. The FLA conducts transparent and independent monitoring to ensure that rigorous labor standards are upheld wherever FLA affiliates source their products, identifies root causes of non-compliances, and proposes solutions to workplace problems. The FLA is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and maintains offices in Geneva and Shanghai. www.fairlabor.org

The **Stop Child Labour Coalition** is an alliance of six Dutch NGOs and trade unions working closely together with local organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Stop Child Labour partners work with an area-based approach that has proven to be an effective method to get all children in a certain area out of work and (back) into school. This enables the creation of 'child labour free zones:' a specific area (village, neighbourhood, etc.) where all stakeholders – community-based organisations, teachers, parents, children, local authorities and companies – work together around the norm that 'no child should work – every child must be in school.' www.stopchildlabour.eu



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research conducted by the Fair Labor Association and iMentor between October 2014 and December 2016 demonstrates a high prevalence of child labour in Agra, India, a city where the production of shoes is the most important economic sector after tourism related to the Taj Mahal. Twenty-five per cent of Agra's population is involved in making shoes, producing around 200 million pairs annually and supplying up to 65 per cent of the domestic market.

The research project, commissioned and supported by the Stop Child Labour Coalition (SCL), and supported by international footwear brands sourcing from Agra, found that low wages for adults and insufficient educational infrastructure for children were the two primary root causes of the widespread incidence of child labour in Agra. The project team also found that while export-focused factories in Agra have taken steps to prevent child labour among their regular workforce, informal piece-rate work and the use of subcontracting present clear child labour risks.

With the goal of reducing the incidence of child labour in Agra, upon the project's conclusion, the team recommended the establishment of a "Child Labor Free Zone" pilot through a collaboration between the government, brands, suppliers, civil society, and members of the community in one or more communities in Agra. In creating a "Child Labour Free Zone," participants focus not on a specific industry sector, but on eliminating all forms of child labour from a specific geographic area, whether children are working to produce footwear, in the tourism industry, or in some other sector.

The MV Foundation, a partner of SCL, has pioneered this approach initially in Andhra

Pradesh, India, and replicated the approach in several rural and urban communities in India and Africa, successfully moving one million children from work to school in India alone.

RESEARCH ON CONDITIONS IN FOOTWEAR-PRODUCING COMMUNITIES

Early in the project, a research team from MV Foundation joined project staff from iMentor and the FLA on a visit to Agra to learn more about local educational challenges facing families with children.

The team spoke with government officials, visited both government-run and private schools, and conducted a survey of 36 families in a neighbourhood where employment in informal footwear manufacturing is prevalent. The team learned that nearly 20 per cent of children from the families surveyed were involved in making shoes. Interviews with labour department officials, civil society organizations, and industry officials yielded agreement that child labour is a widespread and significant problem in Agra, with the informal footwear industry as the largest employer of child labour. In visits to small manufacturing units, including home-based units, the team observed children involved in hand stitching, machine stitching, thread cutting, pressing, adhesive application, marking, packing, and other shoe-making tasks.

Local officials informed the project team that child labour is officially forbidden in Agra in all registered manufacturing units employing more than five workers. Home-based work units, or others employing no more than five workers, need not be registered with the government; all stakeholders agreed that these units posed the greatest risk for child labour.

Officials pointed out that other workplaces — such as hotels and auto mechanics — run a high risk for child labour in Agra as well.

Numerous stakeholders reported poverty as the root cause of child labor, explaining that parents alone are not able to earn enough from making footwear to adequately provide for their families, with wages in the home-based footwear sector often falling below the legal minimum. The team also found lack of access to education to be a root cause of child labour in Agra, where government high schools (for children 12 and older) do not exist in the communities visited by the project. For children younger than 12, local primary schools are dilapidated and not adequately equipped to provide children with a robust education, and there are not enough free or low-cost schools to serve all children in the area.

CHILD LABOUR IN HOUSEHOLDS AND INFORMAL WORKPLACES

To more comprehensively explore the issue of child labour and its underlying causes, the project team conducted an in-depth survey in 200 households across four shoe-manufacturing communities in Agra. The team conducted eight focus group discussions — two in each community — with one discussion per community for child workers and one for adults.

For nearly 95 per cent of families surveyed, the informal footwear sector provided the primary source of the families' livelihood. Most families included five to seven family members, and most families surveyed had a combined monthly income lower than INR 9,000, with 40 per cent of families' incomes lower than INR

The research team observed children involved in hand stitching, machine stitching, thread cutting, pressing, adhesive application, marking, packing, and other shoe-making tasks.

6,000. Meanwhile, the legal minimum wage for a single unskilled worker is just over INR 7,000,¹ and the World Bank international poverty line for a family of three is just over INR 5,000.²

The majority of respondents reported that children begin to work in the footwear industry between the ages of eight and fourteen. The survey revealed that while

boys may either work at home or travel to neighbourhood workshops (sometimes with a family member), most girls contribute to footwear production brought into the home. In workshops, boys work from around 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The team found that only half of the children age 12 or younger in the families surveyed were attending school.

RISK OF SUB-CONTRACTING TO INFORMAL WORKPLACES BY EXPORT FACILITIES

For the next phase of the project, the team visited ten tier-one manufacturing facilities, all of which were manufacturing leather footwear products for multiple brands, and nine of which were producing footwear for export.

All ten suppliers confirmed that the minimum age is 18 for workers they formally hire. Suppliers acknowledged that they can legally hire young workers between the ages of 14 and 18, but stated that the administrative burden of doing so makes employment of young workers undesirable. All factories reported that they require age documentation before hiring, and

¹ INR 7,107.64. The minimum wage for a skilled worker is 8,757.85.

² INR 5,103.25: Find World Bank poverty statistics, minimum wage levels, and further wage-related benchmarks for India in the FLA's Fair Compensation Benchmark report: http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/india_benchmarks_and_charts_072916.pdf

confirmed that they are being audited by their brand customers for compliance with strict standards against child labour.

However, nine of ten factories also confirmed that the majority of their workforce is composed of piece-rate workers, rather than regular hired workers. Factory management cited high worker turnover, and the seasonal nature of customer orders as factors in the high employment of informal workers that do not have long-term employment contracts, and are not on the company payroll. Factories reported that they verify the ages of all their piece-rate workers, though this could not be independently confirmed.

All factories visited for this study reported that their buyers forbid subcontracting, and suggested that subcontracting is not done. However, over the course of the study, several indications of subcontracting emerged. For example, one factory reported subcontracting the production of leather uppers. This factory's management does not conduct compliance visits to its subcontractor, has not disclosed

its use of subcontracting to its buyers, and requested that the researcher not disclose this information. Two other factories similarly disclosed that they subcontract hand-stitching work, sometimes to households, while two others provided contradictory information about subcontracting.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Export-focused factories in Agra are aware of child labour issues and have taken steps to prevent child labour among their regular workforce. Informal piece-rate work and unauthorized subcontracting present the greatest risks of child labour. A strict policy against subcontracting may not be sufficient to ensure an international brand sourcing from Agra that work is not being outsourced to small workshops or home-based manufacturing units where children are working.

While the project team recommends broad multi-stakeholder collaboration on the creation of a “Child Labour Free Zone” in Agra, in the meantime, international brands sourcing from Agra should also:

- ▶ Directly and regularly collaborate with suppliers to build trust, provide guidance, and obtain accurate information about subcontracting and child-labour issues in upstream supply chains;
- ▶ Conduct regular monitoring visits, focusing closely on issues facing young workers, and taking steps to eliminate unauthorized subcontracting;
- ▶ Avoid purchasing practices that exert economic pressure on suppliers, contractors, or subcontractors that may encourage child labour.

Further recommendations for brands, and other stakeholders — government, civil society, suppliers, and others — appear on p. 12 of this report.





INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) and implementing partner iMentor began working on this project in October 2014, after research was commissioned by the Stop Child Labour Coalition (SCL) to examine the use of child labour in the leather and footwear sector in Agra, India. The goals of the SCL-FLA project were to measure the prevalence of child labour in the footwear supply chain in Agra, from home-based units all the way up to export-oriented units, to detect where it occurs and determine its underlying causes. The project also sought to analyse two potential remediation strategies: an “area-based approach” to work towards a Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) in a specific geographic area; and a “supply-chain approach” that seeks to prevent and address child labour (and other labour issues),

in all factories, home workshops, or other manufacturing facilities, through the leverage of the companies in the supply chain. Four international companies sourcing footwear from Agra supported part of the research and a subsequent multistakeholder convening that defined next steps to be undertaken in the cluster.

This report consolidates several interim reports. The condensed version of the report contains the primary conclusions and recommendations emerging from this project. The full report provides an in-depth review of the research, documenting project activities and findings over time; each section in Part II of the full report includes its own conclusion and recommendations aimed at different target groups.

PHASE I: Desk-Based Research and Exploration, October 2014 – May 2015

The first phase of the project, consisting of extensive desk-based research, was conducted to map footwear production in Agra and interview the various stakeholders. These included household-based production units, small units based in the communities, and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individual civil-society representatives working on issues of children's rights, health, and education, as well as government representatives from the Department of Labour, Department

of Education, and Department of Health. Additionally, a research team from MV Foundation³ joined project staff from iMentor and the FLA on a visit to Agra. The purpose of this visit was to learn more about local educational opportunities and challenges facing families with children, as well as to conduct initial inquiries into the existence and magnitude of child labour.

³ MV Foundation is a resource organisation working with SCL and is originator of the Child Labour Free Zone approach: <http://mvfindia.in/>

Main Findings of the Exploratory Phase I

Twenty-five per cent of Agra's population is involved in making shoes, producing around 200 million pairs annually and supplying between 53 and 65 per cent of the domestic market. Several international footwear companies also retail in the domestic market under the same brand name or a local brand name. In addition, Agra-based businesses produce large quantities of shoes for export. The research team's visits to "fabrication units," small independent subcontractors that produce mostly for the export market, yielded limited information about specific international brands, as staff in these fabrication units stated that export facilities forbid disclosure of brand names. Nevertheless, the research team could identify two international brands⁴ products being made in these units where workers between the ages of 14 and 18 were employed. The project team along with MV Foundation conducted a household survey of 36 families in a neighbourhood where employment in footwear manufacturing is prevalent; the survey showed that 26 out of the 130 children in these families (nearly 20 per cent) were involved in making shoes.

Stakeholder interviews with labour department officials, civil-society organisations (CSOs) and industry officials indicate that child labour is a widespread and significant problem in Agra. In visits to manufacturing units, the team observed children involved in hand stitching, machine stitching, thread cutting, pressing, adhesive application, marking, packing and other shoemaking tasks.

Child labour is strictly forbidden in registered export manufacturing facilities in Agra. All manufacturers employing more than five workers must register with the government. However, it is difficult to accurately determine the number of registered units in Agra, due to inconsistent record-keeping and contradictory reporting. Home-based work units, or others formally employing no more than five

⁴ Researchers found no products for the companies supporting this research being made in the fabricators or home-based units. In addition, researchers found no evidence that any factory, workshop, or home-based unit they visited in Agra was producing for any FLA affiliate at the time of the project, and no FLA-affiliated company reports that they are currently sourcing export-oriented products from the Agra area.



workers, do not need to be registered with the government, and all stakeholders agreed that these units posed the greatest risk of child labour. Individuals interviewed suggested that other workplaces, such as hotels and auto mechanic shops, run a high risk for child labour in Agra as well.

Many of those interviewed reported low household income as the primary driver of child labour, with poor education infrastructure — including non-functional and dilapidated schools — cited as another important factor. The project team found that any efforts to eliminate child labour in Agra would be hampered by the lack of educational opportunities. Local primary schools are

insufficiently equipped to provide children with a robust education and an alarming number of the working children in the investigated area have never attended any school. Schooling beyond lower primary education (upper primary school and high school) is not available in the visited areas at all, seriously limiting the options available to children after around ten years of age.

Working from this initial research, the team concluded that the development of a Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) to overcome economic and educational challenges in Agra would be both “necessary and feasible”: *necessary* given that most child labour is not subject to inspection or monitored during supply-chain audits (and prone to move into other sectors such as the service industry when inspected or monitored); *feasible* given that the communities have the required preconditions such as social cohesion, parental interest in education, and commitment from influential community members. The ‘area-based’ approach of the CLFZ model has proven to be effective in helping all children in a certain area transition out of work and (back) into school. This approach calls on all stakeholders — community-based organisations, teachers, parents, children, local authorities, and companies — to work together to make it a reality that no child should work and every child must be in school.

Involvement of Footwear Brands

In April 2015, SCL and the FLA invited several footwear brands and retailers for a meeting in Amsterdam to present findings from Phase I. These international companies were then invited to engage in research in Agra as their cooperation was considered essential to gain further insight into the supply chain, production patterns, and remedies

for child labour. SCL and FLA stressed the need not only for additional research but also for a concrete industry-wide action plan involving multiple stakeholders. The FLA gratefully acknowledges the leadership of these companies in supporting the project to determine a strategy to reduce child labour in the entire cluster.

PHASE II: Continued Research with Support of Companies, January – December 2016

Phase II of the Agra leather and footwear research project comprised two separate research activities:

1) Household survey in four communities conducted in May 2016, in Agra. The objective of this survey was to study the magnitude and underlying causes of child

labour in workers' communities identified as footwear hotspots by local stakeholders.

2) Leather footwear supply chain mapping during the first half of 2016, with visits to 10 tier-1 exporters located in Agra to determine labour recruitment practices and risks of child labour.

Main Findings from the Household Survey in Agra, May 2016

iMentor and FLA undertook the household survey to obtain detailed information concerning conditions for families in areas with considerable footwear production, mostly in informal workplaces. Researchers did not know beforehand if the areas were linked to the supply chains of companies producing for the international market. The footwear sector provided the primary source of livelihood for 188 of the 200 families surveyed. Most families (an average of six people per household) had a combined monthly income (including income from children) below INR 9,000 (US\$ 139); 84 families (42 per cent) earned less than INR 6,000 (US\$ 93). The World Bank's international poverty line for a family of three is INR 5,103.25 (US\$ 79); 113 of the 200 families reported monthly incomes below India's legal minimum wage for a single person, which ranges from INR 7,107.64 (US\$ 104.52) for an unskilled worker to INR 8,757.85 (US\$ 128.80) for a skilled worker.⁵ The Asia Floor Wage Alliance calculated the living wage for India to be INR 18,727 (US\$ 275.40)⁶ in 2015.

Three-fifths (60 per cent) of families reported low wages as the cause of child labour, with

another one-fifth (20 per cent) declining to name one specific cause. The remaining one-fifth (20 per cent) provided various answers, such as lack of access to education or a perceived need for children to acquire workplace skills. Other data from the survey highlighted the fact that families report loan repayments as their second largest expenditures (17 per cent of income), a clear indicator of the poor financial situation of the families. Families also reported spending 5.15 per cent of income on alcohol, compared to 4.3 per cent on education.

In addition to low wages, poverty is further compounded by a lack of regular work, and, at present, the relevant local workers' groups and trade unions lack capacity to have a substantial impact on workers' rights. The communities surveyed had no collective bargaining mechanisms that might support home-based workers demanding better procurement prices for their services and goods.

5 http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/india_benchmarks_and_charts_072916.pdf

6 <http://asia.floorwage.org/resources/wage-reports/asia-floor-wage-figures/view>

The survey also highlighted the priority of many families to put children to work instead of sending them to school. Just over half (55 per cent) of the school-aged children of surveyed families actually attended school,⁷ and more than half of the working children (52 per cent) were never enrolled in school at all.

The majority of respondents (117 of 200) reported that most children begin to work in the footwear industry between ages 8 and 14. The survey revealed that most girls work in their homes (stitching uppers, for

instance), while boys in shops generally work from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., sometimes performing tasks involving chemicals, which is considered hazardous work.

Low enrollment in school is exacerbated by the reality that there are few government-run schools in the region. Some children (mostly girls) are sent to private schools or tuition centres, but for most families working in the footwear sector, private education is simply unaffordable.

⁷ This survey considered school-age children ages 5-14.

Main Findings from the Tier-1 Supplier Visits, May – August 2016

To understand the labour recruitment process and risks of child labour at export units, the research team contacted 10 Agra-based tier-1 suppliers exporting footwear and held interviews with both factory managers and workers.

All 10 factories manufactured footwear for multiple brands and had contracts with international companies (nine of the 10 factories were producing footwear only for export). All reported six-day work weeks, with facilities employing between 100 and 1,000 workers. All suppliers confirmed that as per their factory policies, the minimum age for employment is 18, stated that they require age documentation, and confirmed that they are audited by buyers for compliance with strict child-labour standards. Suppliers acknowledged that they can legally hire workers between the ages of 14 and 18 but only under burdensome administrative procedures. The team detected no child labour in any tier-1 facility, but did not visit any factories subcontracting for these suppliers, where the risk of child labour is greater.

Nine of 10 factories confirmed that the majority of their workforce is composed of seasonal or temporary workers (often at piece rate), the result of the seasonal nature of customer orders. Seasonal or temporary workers are not part of permanent payroll records. They are brought in by a lead stitcher (as his assistants or helpers) and paid by him through an arrangement with factories based on weekly output. In line with the industry-wide practice, workers are paid weekly, regardless whether they are contracted on a piece-rate or monthly basis. Of the workers interviewed, most workers are not registered with the factory and receive no social-security benefits. Also, researchers found instances of double-book-keeping that made it impossible to verify workers' actual wages and hours of work.

Despite the presence of numerous subcontractors, or "fabrication units," working for the export market, in Agra, factories reported that buyers forbid subcontracting. One factory reported subcontracting the production of leather uppers; management

did not conduct compliance visits to the subcontractor and did not disclose the subcontracting to buyers. Two other factories similarly informed the research team that they subcontract hand-stitching work, sometimes to households, while two others provided contradictory information about subcontracting.

Factory managers explained that, for the past three years, the footwear export market has experienced a 25 per cent slowdown, with several factories operating below available capacity. Challenges have arisen with the slowdown, including timely securing of raw materials (especially from domestic vendors), shortage of workers, chemical testing of raw materials before buyer approval and, in some cases, securing last-minute approvals from buyers. According to the factory managers these challenges are not considered as threats to the production cycle, however some managers expressed concerns about the future of the footwear industry in Agra due to an expected shortage of skilled labour if fewer children are working to acquiring relevant skills. Currently many children learn manufacturing skills while working in home-based units, and factory managers emphasised

there is currently no other infrastructure or resource available for training a skilled workforce.

In response to these concerns, factory managers say they want to focus on institutionalising skills and vocational training. Several suppliers mentioned that education must be related to the trade prevalent in a geographic region—for example, the integration of footwear manufacturing skills into the curriculum of Agra's government high schools. It is their opinion that only the government can effectively eradicate child labour and at the same time meet the industry's requirement for a skilled workforce. In such a scenario, children would attend school rather than stay at home to learn the trade.

Overall, the factories' management are aware of the issue of child labour in Agra and have made efforts to create mechanisms to prevent it. These mechanisms include age verification systems and relocating production from community-based factories to industrial areas. Community-based factories are susceptible to the informal and unorganised nature of their production methods and employment systems, where records may be fabricated.

Multi-Stakeholder Consultation in Agra, February 16-17, 2017

Stakeholders operating in the cluster were brought together as part of a convening titled "Strengthening Children's Rights and Decent Work in the Agra Leather and Footwear Cluster." CSOs and government representatives convened in the morning of the first day, while the afternoon session brought together eight international companies and 11 Agra-based footwear suppliers. The purpose of these two sessions was to provide an opportunity for discussion with the goal of arriving at possible

solutions to improving workers' and children's rights in the footwear sector in Agra. On the second day, 64 participants gathered in a multi-stakeholder setting to reflect on ideas proposed on the first day. A panel of experts presented the community-based child-labour mitigation strategies currently being implemented in India. The group came up with practical recommendations and next steps that are included under the recommendations section.

CONCLUSIONS

The research and surveys conducted over the past two years show a high prevalence of child labour in Agra. Footwear is the most important economic sector in Agra after tourism, employing a large part of the population. The number of children working in the footwear sector, mostly in informal smaller production units where they are exposed to hazardous chemicals and work, is alarming. A large number of children are dropouts or never attended school at all.

Schools in Agra are inadequate, with most primary schools in deteriorated condition in communities with a high number of footwear workers. Many communities offer no public schooling beyond grade 5. Schools offering higher education are either far away from the communities or do not have enough space to accommodate all the children. Private schools are available but well beyond the financial means of the majority of the families contacted for the research. These families, mostly working in the informal footwear production, are in a perpetual cycle of debt,

given that compensation is often well below legal minimum-wage standards.

The high level of child labour (and the general impression that the situation in Agra is not up to today's labour rights standards) deters some international buyers from sourcing from Agra. No FLA-affiliated company reports that they are currently sourcing export-oriented products from the Agra area, and researchers found no evidence that any factory, workshop, or home-based unit they visited in Agra was producing for any FLA affiliate at the time of the project.

Export-oriented factories in Agra are aware of child labour issues and have taken steps to prevent child labour amongst their regular workforce; however, informal (often piece-rate) work as well as unauthorized subcontracting presents child-labour and other risks for companies. A strict policy banning subcontracting may not be sufficient to prevent outsourcing to small workshops or home-based manufacturing units. Companies exporting from Agra must take effective and visible measures to ensure



their supply chain is free of child labour. Equally important, companies sourcing from Agra must create a safe space for suppliers to discuss openly and without fear issues such as supply chain mapping and compliance with labour standards. Business relationships must nurture good-faith partnership models. Additionally footwear companies, both buyers and suppliers, can contribute to a number of multi-stakeholder approaches to tackling child labour in footwear hotspots to help make their supply chains and the city of Agra free of child labour.

Companies and suppliers should advocate to the local government for development of a more strict registration and inspection system

for informal workshops. The suppliers should work with the local government to support vocational training programs for youth in their factories (in the form of regulated internships). The companies and suppliers should conduct further research into the procurement prices and their impact on working conditions in the footwear value chain. Finally, companies and suppliers should financially support a pilot to set up a “Child Labour Free Zone” project in Agra and showcase its results to the local and central government to seek long-term support. The business community in Agra should take a collective stand against child labour and strongly advocate for children’s rights at industry association meetings and with the government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on research conducted in Agra as well as key inputs from conversations during the convening.

Recommendations for Buyers and Suppliers

1. International companies should **foster positive collaboration with their tier-one factories** to build trust and learn more about their full upstream supply chains, to ensure that supplier practices around subcontracting and sourcing of raw materials do not lead to child labour. It is important for both suppliers and buyers to identify and understand any challenges factories face mapping supply chains, and to provide support in terms of tools and guidance to overcome them.
2. Buyers sourcing footwear from Agra should **establish a system for assessing working conditions** against a strong Workplace Code of Conduct designed to uphold international labor standards. Buyers should use the assessment process to develop an understanding of the prevalence of young workers, informal and piece-rate workers, and subcontractors within their supply chain; specific attention should be given to conditions for workers aged 15 to 18.
3. Suppliers should **ensure that they always have up-to-date information available** on all of their raw materials suppliers, sub-suppliers, and subcontracting units to help identify and address potential child labour risks.
4. For buyers, it is important to **avoid purchasing or other practices** (like very short production times, small orders, or frequent design changes) **that exert economic pressure on suppliers,**



contractors, or subcontractors, and that may encourage child labour or the infringement of children's rights (including the right to education and the right to health and development).

5. The government labour department should **ensure that all footwear units are officially registered** and that none of the units engage in child labour. Officials and company representatives should visit such units to train and educate them about children's rights and proper working conditions.
6. Buyers in collaboration with suppliers and in consultation with relevant stakeholders like SCL, trade unions, and NGOs should **assess the relationship between procurement prices, wages and compensation, and the mechanisms for determining wages** (including collective bargaining and union involvement) in the entire value chain of footwear manufacturing. Given that most people interviewed cited the inability of families to secure decent wages purely based on footwear manufacturing, a procurement prices assessment should provide insights into where in the value chain efficiencies can be achieved that can financially help footwear workers.
7. The footwear industry should advocate for the government of Agra to provide a comprehensive education for children that may include a **vocational curriculum** for those who wish to learn about the footwear sector.
8. Buyers and suppliers should conduct **further research to map the supply chains** of international and domestic companies to determine if they use the same or different production locations (factories and clusters) for export and domestic markets. Agra produces a large volume for the domestic market and a number of international companies also retail in the domestic market, hence it is crucial to understand the procurement process and production for domestic retailing in India.
9. Representatives from the footwear industry, government, local civil society organizations and community members should join forces to **pilot a project that raises awareness about children's rights, addresses child labour in the local workforce, and improves the local education infrastructure**. This should begin with coalition building, strong local coordination, and collective defining of concrete actions to take in select communities. Other international and local organizations might be brought in for their specific expertise, cooperation in implementing programs, and ability to provide funding.

Recommendations for Building a Child Labour Free Zone and Conducting Other Community-Based Interventions

Any programme to mitigate the incidence of child labour must incorporate a way to increase school enrollment and, more importantly, the attendance rate of school-aged children. The two objectives depend upon each other. In other words, child labour can only be eliminated effectively if all children have access to quality education and attend school full time.

1. In Agra, **improving the educational infrastructure** is essential. Both physical buildings as well as teacher quality, require improvement, and transitional education must be provided for the large group of children who were never enrolled or who have dropped out of school (as is stipulated in the Indian Education Act). **The government has the responsibility** to implement these improvements, while local organizations and private enterprises can provide support to make this possible.
2. Parents should be made aware of the benefit of **sending their children to school and of demanding quality education**. This should be done in close collaboration with the departments of labour and education, which implement existing on-the-ground programming that can be leveraged and enlarged to include awareness building.
3. Community leaders, buyers, suppliers, civil society organisations and others in Agra should collaborate to launch an initiative to mitigate child labour using an “**area-based approach**”. A pilot could be started in one or two communities where both shoe manufacturing and child labour are prevalent. This approach will help **enhance collaboration between government, companies, parents, teachers, and CSOs**
4. In order to **build the capacity and technical expertise of key local CSOs and community-based organisations** on area-based approaches to address child labour, the research team recommends that the MV Foundation conduct an action-based training for local stakeholders. Education officials and other government departments working on child labour should be invited to these sessions to learn about transitioning children from work and integrating them into school. Similarly, the capacity and expertise of local school management committees and ward members must be strengthened through training and capacity building programmes. This can be taken up with the support from other expert organisations in India.
5. Orientation programmes for parents, community members, and teachers on **child labour laws and the right to education** should be offered. Local CSOs can develop awareness campaigns using posters, pamphlets, rallies, and public meetings to sensitise the communities about the topic.
6. The Education Department should conduct a **mapping of all out-of-school children** — potentially with the assistance of a local

to ensure that all forms of child labour are addressed within a geographical location and all children are able to receive quality education. NGOs and trade unions have already successfully used this approach to work towards Child Labour Free Zones (CLFZ) or child-friendly communities in both rural and urban-industrial areas in India. More than one million children have been enrolled in schools as a result.

CSO or research agency — and take immediate measures to ensure enrollment and retention of these children in schools. This initiative must be undertaken at the local level (*bastis* and wards), where each child can be tracked by name, their status reviewed, and specific action plans drawn up to enable them to attend school. This recommendation should be accomplished alongside efforts made by the Department of Education to improve the condition of local schools and establish new ones where there is a deficit.

7. Footwear workers — especially informal and casual workers — should explore economic opportunities outside the footwear industry. Government or NGO bodies may also wish to establish programs to help workers diversify their incomes as part of a broader effort to **create additional income opportunities**. This

can be part of a larger programme (run by the government or civil society) to address child labour with the active involvement of local community members.

8. Buyers and suppliers working together should **increase wages and piece-rate compensation** for footwear production and offer more secure contracts to casual workers, as the research shows that current piece-rate prices are not enough to keep families of casual workers and home-based workers out of poverty.

To break the vicious cycle of poverty and child labour, all stakeholders should come together to design holistic solutions. Buyers, suppliers, government, civil society, and members of local communities, by working together, can and should all be part of the solution. ■

