Empowering the lives of informal sector workers in India

Profile

MAYA (**M**ovement for **A**lternatives and **Y**outh **A**wareness) is a Karnataka-based development organisation working to create an empowered and equitable society that systemically address livelihood and education.

For more detail about MAYA's philosophy and approach, please read about our **Perspective**.
Programs

All programs build upon MAYA's core values of collective approaches to systemic problems, as well as procesess of continual learning and reflection. MAYA's interventions are at the level of policy, social and political structures. All are strongly rooted in personal and collective empowerment of the poor. MAYA currently has two broad areas of focus addressing issues of: **The right of every child to quality education** and **Labour and livelihood**.

Major programmatic areas include:

Prajayatna - *(Quality education)* Prajayatna, MAYA's elementary school education reform initiative, addresses the quality of Government schools in 8 districts of Karnataka and 2 districts in Andhra Pradesh, through working with children, parents, school committees, Gram Panchayats, Zilla Panchayats, district and State education bureaucracy.

Early Childhood Care and Education - *(Quality education)* ECCE facilitates the formation of community-owned preschools in 2 districts and 7 of Karnataka which reflect local needs and realities, are managed by local community institutions, and are networked for institutional support.

MAYA Organic - *(Labour and livelihood)* MAYA ORGANIC addresses livelihood issues of the working poor through organising the informal sector workforce into worker-owned enterprises and providing supportive marketing and business structures to ensure success of the collectives.. MAYA Organic is currently working with the garments, lacware*,* and metal work sectors.

LabourNet - *(Labour and livelihood)* LabourNet addresses issues of workforce development in the construction sector by networking all stakeholders in the sector. LabourNet routes workers to jobs, encourages skill development, influences policy, and facilitates access to social security schemes for the construction workforce. LabourNet seeks to offer a legitimate framework for skill development and fair practices.

Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness
– 10 years On ....

In Learning How To Learn

In the past ten years, MAYA has grown from a few volunteers to over a 100 full-time staff and hundreds of volunteers. The organisation has learnt a lot from its successes and failures. Often, these learnings have led to an understanding that has given us the confidence difficult to obtain from mere reading or academic training.

Some of the insights, though fundamental and simple, are hard to notice in the myriad problems one encounters as an organisation. It takes careful consideration to focus on the problem at hand. It also takes a self-critical review and a passionate criticism of one's ideas and actions to identify the appropriate solutions.

The following is a vignette of our insights and understandings over the last decade. By no means are these insights truths in themselves, but are in fact relative truths. Each one has to see the problems in their own context and find their own solutions, even though there may be similarities.

1989-1991
MAYA begins work as a development organisation in Bangalore City. Prarambha (a voluntary organisation in Bangalore) provides the necessary working space and support to MAYA during this initial phase. Volunteers support MAYA, since the number of full time workers at this stage is only one! Reaching out to children working in hotels and other youth allows MAYA to understand the complexities of child labour as an issue. This experience sets the basis for street youth workshops, the next phase of MAYA's work.

1992-1993
During this period, MAYA's work continues to focus on enrolling college students and other youth into the development process. Mobilising public opinion and action for larger developmental concerns such as the Babri Masjid issue and the Narmada Valley movement also constitutes an important part of MAYA's work. It is during this year that MAYA seriously begins action to create awareness about child labour.

1994
Workshops for street children and youth initiated in 1992 at the micro level, together with co-ordinated action with the national body of CACL(Campaign Against Child Labour) at the macro level, forms the primary thrust of MAYA's work during 1994.

1995
MAYA focuses upon enrolling working and loitering children into non-formal education classes to prepare them for formal school. Although staff members visit families and local schools, MAYA concentrates upon working directly with children. Through experiences during this initial stage of work, MAYA realises that parents and community members must be involved in the process to eradicate child labour.

1996
Staff focus on creating awareness among parents and the larger community through public meetings and campaigns. MAYA, along with other organisations, takes legal action against employers of child labour. Internally, the organisation initiates processes to reflect on the work and make required changes in its approach and strategies.

1997
MAYA's interventions during 1997 focus mainly on directly preventing children from

entering the workforce and expanding the scope of its experience to include intervention in certain rural areas surrounding Bangalore. During this period MAYA also begins conducting ongoing studies and assessments of various factors influencing the incidence of child labour in the areas. These studies provide useful insights and support the work in the areas.

1998
Enhancing community participation and creating sustainable processes in the community forms the major thrust of MAYA's work during this year. There is also geographical expansion of the work in Bangalore Urban and Rural to reach out to a larger number of children and families. At the policy level, MAYA initiates the prevocational programme to develop an alternate skill based curriculum to be implemented in Government schools.

1999
MAYA focuses on creating child sensitive community interventions and structures in the slums and villages and facilitating maximum community participation in maintaining a child-friendly environment. Community- school interaction is also enhanced through definite programmes, meetings and other interventions at the community level. A significant macro level intervention is the Citizens' Initiative on Elementary Education to initiate processes for reform in elementary education in the state through citizens' participation.