

Children and their research a process document



*The story of how Working Children decided
to improve the lot of their Entire Community
through a massive Survey*

Lolichen PJ

The Concerned for Working Children

Children and their Research: A Process Document

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India

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Foreword

Ever since our inception we, the Concerned for working Children (CWC), have been grappling with the area of 'research'. Being primarily activists, we were never good at making sense of tables, charts and complicated progressions. It was only with difficulty and some discipline that we taught ourselves to understand these. One of the few uses we found for traditional research was to quote them to substantiate our own experience.

In the late 70s when we started our work in the field of child labour, there was very little available in the way of valid data or serious analysis of the issue. Our initial forays into getting a deeper knowledge of child labour were useful to us as well as to the general debate on child labour and contributed another dimension to the sparse body of knowledge that already existed.

We had always recognised the importance of information as a basis for our programming and strategic planning; but relevant information was rarely available. The secondary data we had access to was always out of date, a description of trends past, a bird's eye view where the micro situations were subsumed. For us and the children we work with, the field reality was dynamic and constantly changing. What we needed were the specifics with names and faces, not statistics; we needed them here and now.

For our work in the field, our conventional attempts at research were disappointing. In some of our studies, the children and their families were the objects, our field activist the data collectors and our research officer in Bangalore, directing the whole process. No one really understood the purpose of the exercise, least of all the children. Our activists soon got frustrated, they did not see this as an integral part of their work; it was some additional task not relevant to their day-to-day work and they soon rebelled specially when asked to repeat and correct information. The results of these research exercises took very long to process. When the results were finally available they made little sense to the field staff or the kids, as the situation had in the meanwhile transformed.

It was only when the children of Bhima Sangha¹ and the Makkala Panchayats² felt the need to collect information about their villages that we began helping children to carry out Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRAs) that they used to collect information about their villages. These unconventional methods were exciting, empowering and extremely useful to both strategic planning and programming. However, soon the children found that they needed more specific data and requested us to give them the skills to carry out a door-to-door survey of over 7500 households.

The whole experience was a very sharp learning curve for all of us as we began to understand the power of applied action research. We still made some mistakes as the threads of conventional research still lingered and so we had to do some damage control along the way.

The children carried out the survey in 10 months and produced a wealth of data. We requested Julian Kramer, a consultant to CWC to facilitate a process documentation workshop. During this workshop we found that the children had already begun to act on their findings and we had not even correlated the data yet!

¹ A union of, by and for working children in Karnataka facilitated by the Concerned for Working Children, with a membership of over 13,000, striving for the realisation of child rights

² A children's Village Council or parallel government of children, set up in Karnataka jointly by Bhima Sangha and the Concerned for Working Children. It is a forum for all children to participate in decision-making and governance at the Panchayat level.

The whole concept of research is turned on its head when the subjects turned researchers and protagonists. The children generated the data, they are using it to transform their lives and they keep updating the data and track changes and progress. The Panchayat³ sees them as a source of valuable information. For instance, they ask the Makkala Panchayats (Children's Panchayats) to decide the beneficiaries for Ashraya Houses⁴, to give them the list of households below the poverty line and to decide beneficiaries for other schemes. The children own the information and it has empowered them beyond imagination.

Now the field programme is working with relevant data on a day-to-day basis. The Makkala Panchayats can track every single child in the village and intervene when necessary to remedy situations immediately. Research has been a very empowering process for the children and us. We have demystified the principles of research. Now data and information have become our close friends.

Nandana Reddy
Director Development
October 2001

³ Panchayat is the lowest level of administration in the system of local government. The term Panchayat refers to both the geographical and administrative units, as well as the elected body, which acts as the local council. A Panchayat is composed of a cluster of villages and several Panchayats constitute a Taluk.

⁴ The Ashraya Scheme is government subsidised housing for those below the poverty line.

Introduction

From September 1998 to May 1999 the children of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats, carried out a house-to-house survey in their villages. The survey was done in eight Panchayats, covering over 7500 households. About 270 children conducted the survey. In April 1999, I was asked by CWC to facilitate a 3-day workshop in Bangalore with some of the working children and adults who had been involved in the survey, in order to document some of the processes related to carrying out the survey.

The most important impression I have from the workshop is a confirmation of the old maxim that 'Knowledge is Power'. This rather trite saying gained a new meaning for me when interacting with the children and seeing what this experience had meant for them. According to the children the survey had not only given them new insights into the factors defining their lives. It had also increased their self-confidence and had gained them respect and recognition from their families and community. As one of the participants at the seminar put it: "I studied in a school where the teacher had ill-treated me saying that I was fit only to break the neck of fish. I left the school many years ago because of this. During the survey I had to interview this teacher. He did not remember me but I reminded him about what he had told me. He was extremely surprised to see me conducting a survey. His attitude towards me totally changed and he said that I spoke with a lot of confidence and he was proud that I was doing this survey."

For the children the main reason for collecting information is that it should be used. They wanted to be able to take the results of the survey back to their villages in order to identify what could be done to improve the situation of children in their villages. The children were therefore involved in discussions with the adult researchers about how the information from the survey should be systematised and correlated in order that they would be in a position to use it in discussions with adult decision makers in their villages. The adult research team was to systematise this information as a whole, as well as develop statistical booklets for each of the villages and Panchayats according to the suggestions of the children.

The survey was originally conceived of by CWC who also developed the first draft of the questionnaire that was used. The children however were actively involved in suggesting changes to the questionnaire. They were responsible for all the data collection and they were also highly involved in deciding on how the data should be analysed. As a result there was a definite feeling of ownership of the process. The children clearly expressed that this was their survey and that they clearly saw how they would be able to use the results.

The children showed a high degree of commitment in getting the survey done. They had to somehow find the time to interview people in addition to their work, attending the extension school¹ and doing household chores. This was not always easy, but through rescheduling activities, helping each other or convincing their parents or employers for time off, they managed to find necessary time.

But since the children were true 'action researchers' they did not only sit back and wait for the results of the correlation before taking action. During the course of the survey they discovered a number of concrete problems relating to children as well as other members of the communities. They did not just let these issues lie, but took them up with the relevant authorities and solved them. An example of this is that in one village the children from a particular household had not been enrolled in school. The children took this up with the headmaster and the children were subsequently enrolled.

⁵ An Extension School is an extension of the formal school, where all the children are registered with the formal school, but are able to study at their convenience with regard to timings, location and scholastic needs.

It was a fascinating experience to interact with this group of children, several of whom had very little if any, formal schooling. In spite of that they had a very good and nuanced understanding of what the implications of the survey were. They had realised that not all the information they had gathered was of the same quality. Some of the information they were completely confident mirrored the real situation of the families concerned. But what the head of households told them about certain issues, especially related to income, land-holdings, indebtedness (important issues which have implications for why children in most families do some form of work or another) was not always true. They therefore tried to substantiate this through other sources that they thought might be more reliable, such as the ration shop⁶ or the land recording office.

The way in which the research was done also highlighted the difference between doing research for academic reasons, or as part of a large scale impersonal project, as opposed to interested parties trying to collect information in a systematic way in order to understand their own situation and do something about it. Several of the children also stated explicitly that this exercise has raised their confidence in their ability to gather relevant and useful information. In addition they also feel that it has enhanced their esteem in the eyes of their parents and other adult members of the community.

This experience should also be seen as contributing to the discussion on how children can be involved in research in a meaningful way. There has been some work done on how adult researchers should relate to children as informants. These children, however, have been involved, not primarily as informants, but as data collectors as well as partners in defining the issues that should be analysed. The survey has shown that with proper training and guidance children (and by extension, other marginalised groups) can collect information in a systematic way and contribute fruitfully to the analysis and conversion of the information into plans of action.

Julian Kramer⁷
(Save the Children⁸ - Norway)

How this was document compiled

This document is the result of an innovative and successful experiment in child empowerment involving a participative research project conducted by children. The researchers⁹ were facilitated by the adults of CWC through a series of workshops. The information contained in this document is compiled primarily through these workshops. Detailed discussion among/between the researchers, their parents, school teachers, Panchayat members and other key players in the conduct of the survey also contributed largely to this document.

Having completed the field research, the researchers documented their experiences of the survey. This compilation by them is called *Our Survey Story* by Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats. A process documentation workshop was organised by CWC and facilitated by Julian Kramer of Save the Children, Norway, for representative researchers. *Our Survey Story* is a description of the various strategies employed by the researchers during the research process as well as the problems encountered, the solutions found, and alternate methods used by them to collect more sensitive information.

The methodology of the research project is presented in an easy-to-grasp table format to serve as a quick reference tool for anyone who wants to facilitate participatory research by children. Several interesting case studies and the 'voices' of participants in the research process have been included.

⁶ Fair price shop, where essentials provisions are provided at a subsidised rate by the government for the poor.

⁷ Julian Kramer is the Special Policy Advisor to Save the Children - Norway and a consultant to CWC

⁸ Save the Children, an international development funding agency.

⁹ In this document, 'researchers' refers to children who conducted the research.

Part I

The Research Methodology and Training

The Methodology

Research Objectives

To enable the active participation of children, especially working children, by equipping them with the necessary research methods and skills to plan the research, gather and analyse relevant and accurate information pertaining to their lives.

To empower the members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats and enhance their participation in governance and decision-making processes in their communities through access and use of accurate and appropriate information.

To strengthen CWC's database on the existing programme areas in order to monitor the progress of its specific programmes, and to determine its future action plans and specific strategies

Research Design



Research Concept: The research project was a socio-economic baseline study of the Panchayat Toofan¹⁰ areas of CWC.

Research Approach: The project was participatory in approach, conducted primarily by working children who are members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats and their communities (the constituency), facilitated by CWC.

Research Tool: Survey schedule was used to collect information.

Designing the Research Tool: The survey schedule was developed by CWC taking into consideration all the variables, which children had identified as important to them and their communities. Other socio-economic variables considered relevant to CWC's projects in this region were listed by CWC. A research consultant¹¹ compiled the schedule, integrating all the variables identified by the children and CWC, as well as other parameters relevant to a baseline socio-economic survey.

Research Methods: The methods employed by the children to collect information were face-to-face interviews, participant observation, focus group discussion and case study.

Sources of Information/Informants: The primary source of information were the members of each household, especially women and children. Secondary sources of information included members of the neighbouring households, school/anganwadi teachers, Secretaries, Presidents and Members of Panchayats, key persons in the village, records and documents of the Panchayat, revenue office, school, anganwadi¹² and ration cards.

Research Design

The indicators on which the children required information were presented to CWC through their (CWC's) activists from time to time. CWC also had compiled its own list of variables for the baseline socio-economic survey, to augment the database in its project area. A combination of these two lists provided the content of the study.

R Vidyasagar was engaged by CWC to assist the young researchers and the organisation to conduct the study. The consultant compiled a survey schedule in English which included all the variables proposed by the children and the organisation, as well as other parameters required for a comprehensive socio-economic baseline survey. The survey schedule required collection of detailed information on housing conditions, demographic details of all adults and children, educational status, occupation, annual income, family history, information on the disabled, migrants, child labour, assets and farming implements owned, land owned and leased, indebtedness, distances to sources of livelihood, expenditure patterns, chronic illnesses, frequency and causes of death, etc. A section of the schedule was based on issues identified as very important by children during their meetings. This section focussed on information related to children of the village. Other than general information on age, gender, education and work, Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats wanted very specific information related to working and migrant children. So the schedule included details of hours of work, wages paid, conditions of work, distance to workplace, mode of transport to the workplace, place of migration, reasons for migration, etc. as specified by them. They also wanted information on variables related to education such as distance to school, drop-out rate, number of schools in the Panchayat, etc.

¹⁰ Panchayats where CWC's Toofan programme is implemented. This is a programme of comprehensive development implemented by CWC with primary focus on the empowerment of children. It aims at enabling children to play a proactive role in decision-making and governance. Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayat, Namma Sabha (an association of youth) and the respective Gram Panchayats are partners in this programme.

¹¹ R Vidyasagar, a research consultant from Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), assisted CWC in the research.

¹² A pre-school or day care centre for children below the age of 6 years.

Further, at the request of these children, several variables relating to the disabled and the chronically ill were included in the schedule.

Once the English version of the survey schedule was completed, it was translated into Kannada, the local language. Illustration of the survey schedule made its contents more comprehensible to the researchers and their community members who were not well versed in reading and made reference easy for children, besides evoking curiosity in the respondent goading them to respond to questions. Although the schedule was very long, the illustrations kept the children's interest alive. The illustrations were designed by Himaker¹³.




The survey schedule was illustrated by using locally recognised symbols and signs. The illustrations made the schedules simple, easy to understand and attractive.

CWC - Socio - Economic Survey of Households - 1998
ಅ-ಹಿಕ್ಕಾ-ನಿ - ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಅಧ್ಯಯನ-1998

ಪಂಚಾಯತ
I ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ: _____ **ಪುರು:** _____








ಹಳ್ಳಿ/ವಿಲ್ಲಾಜಿ: _____ **ಮಾರುಕಟ್ಟೆ:** _____

ನಾಮ
ಹೆಸರು: **II ಕುಟುಂಬದ ಹೆಸರು:** 

ಅವಧಿ: _____ **ಜನಪದ:** _____

ಮನೆ: _____ **ಜನಪದ:** _____

ಮನೆ:
III ಮನೆ:

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ಯೆಸ್ <input type="checkbox"/> ನೋ <input type="checkbox"/>	

¹³ Himaker was involved with CWC in documentation and training children in cultural and theatre activities.

Geographical Location of the Project

CWC's Toofan project is located in four districts of Karnataka state, in Southern India, namely, Udupi district in the west, North Kanara district, towards the northwest, and the Bellary and Davangere districts, to the north of the capital city of Bangalore. Udupi district is located in the coastal region along the Arabian Sea, while North Kanara district lies in the hilly (Malnad) region. The other two districts, Bellary and Davangere are located in the plains. CWC also works in Bangalore urban district. However, Bangalore urban district is not part of this research project.

The research project involved a comprehensive socio-economic survey of 7,573 households in the Toofan Panchayats. The study was conducted in eight Panchayats, covering twenty four villages, located in the four districts mentioned above. Five of these Panchayats, namely Alur, Balkur, Belve, Kerady and Uppunda are situated in Kundapur Taluk of Udupi district. The other three Panchayats are Bairumbe in Sirsi Taluk of North Kanara district, Mathihalli in Harapanahalli Taluk of Davangere district and Holagundi in Hoovina Hadagali Taluk of Bellary district.



Fig 1. Map showing CWC's programme areas

¹⁴ An administrative division in India. A Taluk comprises of many Panchayats.

Research Time Frame

July – August 1998
 Conceptualisation of the Research
 Project and Developing the Research Tools



Sept. – Oct. 1998
 Training in Data
 Collection and
 Pre-testing



Ongoing
 Analysis of Information
 Application of Information (Intervention)
 Updating of Information



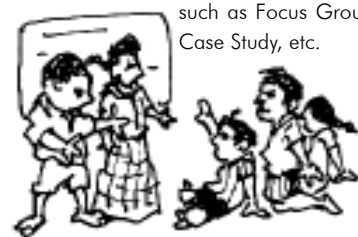
Oct. 98 – April 1999
 Data Collection



June – Dec. 1999
 Tabulation and
 Correlation of data



March 1999
 Training in other Research Tools
 such as Focus Group discussion,
 Case Study, etc.



April – June 1999
 Process Documentation Worksh
 ops and compiling 'Our Survey Story'



April – May 1999
 Training in data coding,
 tabulation, correlation and analysis
 and Presentation and use of information



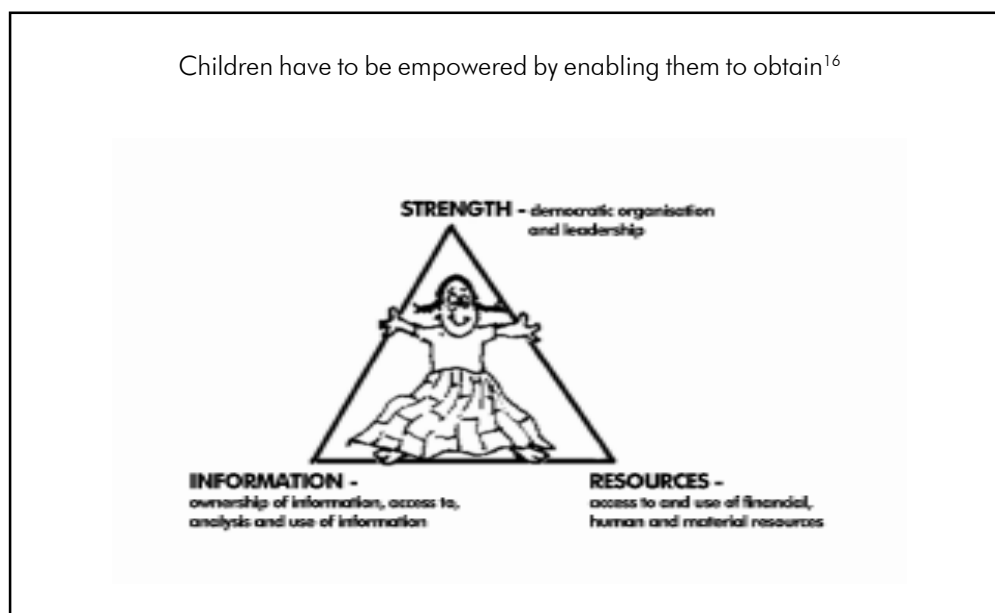
The research process was initiated in the second half of 1998. Conceptualised in July and August 1998, the research tools were planned and designed by children and CWC with the assistance of R. Vidyasagar, a research consultant from Madras Institute of Development Studies. Once the research tool (survey Schedule¹⁵) was developed, it was translated into the local language, Kannada and illustrated. In the months of September and October, the first and second phases of training in data collection were organised. Pre-testing of the research tool was conducted during the first phase of the training in September, during which certain changes in the content of the research tool were suggested by the children and effected. Data collection commenced in October 1998 and was completed in April 1999. In March 1999, the researchers were trained to acquire skills in research techniques/methods such as case study, focus group, etc. They also received training in various analytical procedures including tabulation, correlation and analysis of data, and how to use the information to make interventions in the village. From April to June 1999, primary information for documenting the experiences from the survey was compiled through a series of workshops and field-based interactions. Although assisted by adult data entry persons and statistical analysts, computer data entry and the preliminary analysis took more than 6 months, given the magnitude of the data from the twenty-four villages surveyed. By October of the same year, children were provided with the information that they asked for urgently. This was information on certain basic issues on which they had to intervene immediately. However, children intervened throughout the process of the survey and after, depending upon the urgency of the matter.

Children’s Prior Research Experience

CWC’s strategy has been that of enabling these children to gain a better understanding of the specific problems affecting them, by facilitating them to collect relevant information, make analysis and correlations and find appropriate solutions/alternatives using such information. This had been constantly done with the intention of ensuring that the children are well equipped to find solutions to problems they face in their daily lives/communities. CWC has been consistently using information as a tool to strengthen children’s protagonism and has been equipping them with various research skills.



Globally, most of the existing research on the conditions of working children has been conducted by academicians. While some studies incorporated components of participation, not many have attempted to involve children in researching their own lives.



¹⁵ See page 16 for an illustration example of the survey schedule.

¹⁶ A Journey in Children’s Participation, Nandana Reddy and Kavita Ratna, The Concerned for Working Children, January, 2002

Members of Bhima Sangha have been using different research techniques to gather information and plan strategies in their areas. For instance, they have compiled information pertaining to children in their communities, including the total number of working children, number of non-literates, migrants, disabled children, etc. Through training programmes and practical applications facilitated by CWC, the members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats have been introduced to participatory research methods. They have been conducting Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRAs), small surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, and have also reviewed secondary data compiled by Panchayat offices, schools and other sources. They have also mapped the entire course of the Varahi, a major river traversing through their region, and documented the natural resources, infrastructure, history, demographics and culture of the region.

In 1995, members of Bhima Sangha participated in conducting a PRA of their villages. This provided them with a general overview of the social, economic, infrastructural and demographic factors of their village. The children analysed the information and applied it to initiate certain changes in their village. During the Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayat, Task Force¹⁷ and other meetings, it was evident that these children were substantiating their arguments with information they had collected and analysed. They were utilising specific facts and figures to convince the adult members of the Task Force about the legitimacy of each of their demands, whether it was a footbridge, an anganwadi, an extension school or a public health centre.

Justification for the Research Project

As the scope and depth of children's participation in governance and decision-making processes in the Panchayat and the community increased, they required detailed and in-depth information, both qualitative and quantitative. They were being consulted by the Panchayat for planning and implementation of projects. Hence they required information on very specific indicators, such as child labour, child migration, disability, distance to various resources and related problems, government schemes availed by community members, families eligible for different government schemes, demographic factors, annual family income, amount of land and other assets owned, general diseases, etc.

The scope of the research emerged not only from the need for information expressed by the children, but also from CWC's own need. The organisation required the socio-economic baseline data of its programme areas in order to assess the impact of the programmes being implemented and formulate/modify plans of action and strategies based on the results of the study. Moreover, as work began to grow and the need for upscaling the programme areas became evident, the organisation also felt the need for an accurate database of the programme areas.

Children as Researchers: Rationale

Over the years, experience had taught the child workers associated with CWC, the significance of valid and reliable information. These children had become quite adept at collecting, analysing and utilizing this information to improve their lives.

During the pre-test stage of the research, the children stated that the information being collected about their village would be used by them at various forums and levels. At the first training workshop, the children felt that the research process would be very empowering, as it would enable them to get a better understanding of the lives of every family in their hamlet, the issues and problems of their village and its residents. CWC also felt that the children themselves should conduct the study, as it would be both an empowering and socialising process for them. Moreover, the project was an excellent opportunity for enabling children's participation in research.

Although many organisations and groups were debating how to facilitate children's participation, there were not many initiatives in this type of research. Therefore, CWC felt that a step in this direction would provide valuable insights into children conducting research on issues that matter them and would open new dimensions for practitioners and activists. Having considered all these factors, it was decided that children themselves would conduct the survey and that the adults' role would be to facilitate the process which included training them in research methods, monitoring the process and providing them with logistical and other support.

¹⁷ A tripartite body, devised by CWC, comprising of children's representatives; government officials and elected representatives; and community based organisations. This body was set up to link the Makkala Panchayat with the Gram Panchayat and focuses primarily on issues related to children that are raised by the Makkala Panchayat.

Profile of the Researchers

The researchers comprised both boys and girls, all of whom were members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats. Most among the 270 researchers were working children in the 8-18 age group. Most had only elementary formal education, having dropped out after the primary level, with very poor reading and writing skills, while a small percentage were illiterate. A few school-going children from some Panchayats also participated in the survey, assisting the researchers in documenting the information collected. Although they were members of Bhima Sangha or Makkala Panchayats, some of the researchers were participating in an activity of this nature for the very first time.

The researchers who were working children were engaged in a variety of occupations including daily labour, agricultural labour, fishing and allied activities, domestic labour, cattle/sheep rearing, collecting firewood, pot making, bamboo/cane work, carpentry, beedi¹⁸/agarbathi¹⁹ rolling, etc. In addition to these paid forms of labour, most of these children were required to participate in a variety of chores for their own households.



In Bairumbe Panchayat, most of the researchers who worked outside home were engaged in agriculture, especially in areca²⁰ gardens. Some girls in this Panchayat worked either as paid labour or for own household farms removing weeds and clearing the land. In Holagundi and Mathihalli Panchayats of Bellary region, a large number of the researchers were involved in agricultural labour. One of the most predominant and difficult occupations of child workers in this region is sheep rearing. Here, child workers as young as ten years are required to lead the sheep several kilometres away in search of green pastures, sometimes returning home after 8-12 days.

Loading, cleaning, sorting and selling fish was the primary occupation of the researchers from Uppunda Panchayat, in Kundapur region. In this Panchayat girls had the additional responsibility of collecting firewood for their households, from a distance up to 15 to 20 kilometers. Nearly all the researchers, especially the girls, were involved in household chores, which included cooking, collecting water, fuel, looking after younger siblings, washing clothes, sweeping and swabbing the house, etc.

¹⁸ A kind of local Indian cigarette

¹⁹ Incense sticks

²⁰Betelnut, chewed in some Asian countries with Betel leaf

Training for the Research Study



Training: After the survey schedule was designed, the researchers were provided training in participatory research methods and techniques.

Identification of Researchers: Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats identified children who would conduct the research. The selection of these researchers was based on the criteria they had formulated during their ward²¹ -level meetings. This included boys and girls, as well as working and school-going children.

The training was conducted in two phases :-

First Phase: Initially, an adult resource team from CWC trained a group of thirty five children in the participatory research method and processes. This entailed a four-day workshop where the researchers and a group of adult activists were familiarised with the participatory research methods of data collection and the administration of the survey schedule. These initial trainees formed the core researchers. They would later form separate research teams after they identified and trained more children in their respective villages to conduct the survey. Each of these research teams would then co-ordinate the study in their own Panchayats.

In this workshop, the participants were provided assistance to comprehend the research concept, its objectives, and the contents of the schedule and were trained in the methods of data collection. Emphasis was laid on the researchers to acquaint themselves with the interview schedule. Discussions, role-plays, pictorial presentations, mock interviews and games were some of the techniques used to train the researchers. Simultaneously, training sessions were also held for the field activists and volunteers who were to facilitate the research process at the field level.

Pre-test/Pilot Study: On the final day of the first phase of training, the participants conducted a pre-test of the survey schedule. This also served as a pilot study. The objective was to test the feasibility of the survey tool and to make any changes to it if required. Further, it allowed them to explore other possible problems in the conduct of the study and find appropriate solutions to the same.

Revisions of the Survey Schedule: Drawing from the lessons learnt from the pre-test, certain modifications were made in the contents and structure of the schedule as suggested by the participants.

The Second Phase: In this phase, researchers trained in the first phase in turn trained other children identified by Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats to conduct the survey in their respective villages. These training sessions were conducted by the initial trainees in the same manner as in the first phase.

Initially, the field activists of CWC visited the villages in their project areas and introduced the research concept to the office-bearers of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats in each village. They were given the responsibility of identifying their representatives to participate in the initial training workshop. Although facilitated by community members, Panchayat officials and CWC activists, the selection of the participants was done entirely by Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats. They developed a set of guidelines on the basis of which they selected their representatives to participate in the training.



Criteria for selection of participants for the training:

“Children who had the capacity to imbibe information at the workshop and go back to their respective centres and share the same with others...
Those who were brave enough to talk...
Those who were able to understand issues...
Those who participate well in activities...
Those who were able to give time for training...”

Further discussions were held among children at the village and ward levels. Based on the above-mentioned set of criteria, working children sent 35 representatives to the first training workshop in September 1998. Of the eight Toofan Panchayats, only seven were represented. This was because Balkur Panchayat was child labour-free²², with no working children. As the workshop coincided with the mid-term exams, school-going children of Balkur could not participate in the workshop.

²¹ A Panchayat is composed of one or more wards

²² Child labour-free means:-

No children have to do work that is detrimental to their normal growth and development

No children migrate from the Panchayat for employment

All children in the Panchayat get an education that is appropriate to them and compatible with the formal system

First Phase of Training

The first workshop for the researchers was organised at Namma Bhoomi, Kundapur in September 1998. A group of thirty-five child representatives and eleven adult activists participated in the four-day training session. The workshop was conducted by a team of adult members of CWC. The workshop focused on various aspects of participatory research, including methods of data collection, with specific emphasis on interview, focus group discussion, case study and the alternative strategies to gather information. Particular emphasis was placed on the significance of reliable and accurate statistical information to enable children to quantify the social changes that had taken place so far in their villages and hamlets and to develop future course of action.

The participants were also equipped with several research skills such as building rapport with respondents, eliciting information which is sensitive and difficult, cross checking the accuracy of information, etc.

The content of the survey schedule was discussed in detail with the participants. The relevance of the data collected and how it can be used was also carefully elaborated. For example, the participants learnt that collecting data on the occupations of the past generations would reveal whether any of the traditional occupations of the village were dying out, and that the information collected could be used to develop strategies to revive the dying occupations in their respective communities.

Pilot Study/Pre-test

To enable the researchers to get acquainted with methods of data collection as well as to pre-test the survey schedule, a pilot study was conducted in two Panchayats, Alur and Uppunda, during the first phase of training. On the third day of the workshop, the participants were divided into small groups of 4-6 members with each group conducting a survey of two to four households.

Initially, many of the researchers were vague about certain aspects of conducting the interviews for the survey, such as not knowing how and when to ask the questions. Some felt overwhelmed by the survey schedule. Initially, gathering of information on sensitive variables, such as loans availed, income, occupation of the previous generations, etc. proved to be difficult. However, as they pursued the activity and gained more practical experience, they became more comfortable and confident in administering the survey schedules.

The pilot study was followed by a review session where the researchers expressed their feelings about their experience and shared the practical lessons they had learnt during the process.

They also suggested some important changes to the survey schedule:

Expenditure on utilities: They pointed out that the section of the survey schedule dealing with expenditure patterns omitted the monthly expenditure on utilities such as electricity, telephone and fuel (kerosene, gas and firewood) as well as medical expenses. They emphasised the importance of including these expenses, as they were significant sums for the households interviewed.

Expenditure on agriculture: They noted that the schedule should not only gather data on agricultural income, but also include agricultural expenses, which would allow them to assess the net income.

Regional Differences: They observed that the schedule did not take care of regional differences, as it ignored many peculiarities of Sirsi and Bellary regions. For example, while cashew plantation was applicable only to Kundapur region, the schedule had ignored the areca nut plantations specific to Sirsi and the oil mills in Bellary region. In the assets column, they wanted to include items such as the bullock cart, tiller, plough, etc.



"While going through the forms we had initially thought that it would be very difficult, but actually it was quite easy and interesting. We enjoyed doing it."

- A researcher at the end of the pilot study

Recurring expenses: They also emphasised the importance of including recurring expenses on the maintenance of cattle, vehicle, etc. The researchers contended that information on these variables, which had been overlooked in the pre-test survey schedule, was essential to them as they pertained to their daily life.

The pre-test thus proved to be useful in providing very specific inputs for review of the research tool and incorporating some of the changes suggested by the researchers. However, not all their suggestions could be incorporated into the final version of the survey schedule due to some practical problems.

Second Phase of Training

As intended, the children who were trained in the first phase of training returned to their respective villages and not only identified more children through Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats, but also were responsible for training the new researchers. This second phase of training was conducted in small groups at the hamlet level. Data collection commenced directly after this training. Although the adult field activists who were participants in the initial training were present during the second phase of training as facilitators, a few problems emerged at this stage. During the first phase of training, the participants, both adults and children, were not equipped with the skills to train others. As a result, the training of children in the second phase was inadequate. The trainees in the second phase also lacked the pre-test/pilot experience. These inadequacies led to misinterpretations of certain indicators in the survey schedule and misunderstanding the objectives of the survey, leading to poor quality of information being collected.

Since the quality of the research was being affected, it was decided to conduct field-based re-training at the hamlet level so that all those who would be involved in the conduct of the survey would be well trained. CWC also took particular interest in ensuring that this training was localised. This training was conducted in small groups of three to five, where adult trainers once again explained the purpose of the survey, and discussed the survey schedule in great detail with the old and new batch of researchers. Long sessions were held, where the adult trainers clarified the questions and doubts of these researchers. Following this training, information collection resumed in a more systematic manner, ensuring more accurate and better quality data.

Part II

Information Collection, Analysis and Documentation

Preparation and Planning



Preparation and Planning: Soon after the pilot study, the researchers began extensive planning and preparation for the administration of the survey.

Publicising the Study: The survey was well publicised in each village community through word-of-mouth, presentation in schools, posters, wall papers and banners. In addition, researchers held detailed discussions and left sample survey schedules and pamphlets about the research project with key persons in each ward

Ensuring Support of Key Persons: The researchers identified key/influential persons in each area whose support and collaboration could be enlisted in the conduct of the survey. After clarifying the purpose of their survey, the researchers requested assistance from key persons, especially in households where they faced difficulties to gathering the required information.

Formation of Survey Teams: At the village level, the Makkala Panchayats and Bhima Sangha formed teams of two to four researchers. The researchers established a set of criteria to select team members. Various factors were considered in determining the number of teams needed for each hamlet/ward/village and in dividing the area to be surveyed by each team.

Selection of Team Members: They decided to include representatives from both genders in each team and at least one person who could read and write well. Other criteria for selection of team members included common timings when the members of a team were free from their work/school to conduct the survey, their proximity to the households being surveyed, and their degree of familiarity with the respondents.

Division of Survey Area: The number of survey teams allocated by the researchers per village was based on the number of households, the geographical area, proximity of dwellings, the number of trained researchers, capability of the team members as well as the availability of common time for members of a team to allocate for the research. Each village was divided into smaller units for surveying purposes. The teams were allocated to a survey unit according to their residential proximity to and familiarity with members of the households being surveyed.

Publicising the Study

Prior to administering the survey schedule, the community's acceptance of the research project and its support had to be established. Therefore, it was essential to create awareness about the value and relevance of the survey, its specific objectives, how the information obtained would be utilised, who would be conducting the study, etc. The researchers, assisted by adult field activists and volunteers, drew up a plan to publicise the survey in the villages through several ways:

By word-of-mouth: Assisted by Task Force members, Gram Panchayat officials, teachers, youth associations, parents and elders, the researchers publicised the survey. They emphasised the uniqueness and innovative nature of the study, and pointed out that it would be conducted by members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats. They also pointed out that they would use the information generated from the research to find solutions to various problems faced by the village and its people. The Gram Panchayat was also informed that it would have access to the information obtained from this research study for Panchayat planning purposes.

Presentation in schools: The researchers made presentations in schools, garnering the support of school children and teachers. They felt that school-going children would be interested and excited about a survey being conducted by children in their village and would go home and motivate their family about it. This was an opportunity for the researchers to take the help of school children in the conduct of the survey. The school children were extremely responsive and supportive of the idea proposed. While some children from some schools participated in the survey, some others helped by providing information about their household or by publicising the benefits of the survey.

Posters and Banners: In certain Panchayats, posters and banners were put up at key locations such as ration shops, Panchayat Office, bus stops and so on. These posters and banners publicised the survey and invited community's support and participation.

Since some parents had been contacted during the training phase, they were aware of the research and also helped in spreading information to others in the village. In Alur and Uppunda Panchayats, where the pre-test was done, news of the survey spread very fast. Publicising the research was an ongoing process; it did not end even after the data collection had started.



During data collection, the researchers found that previous respondents often helped prepare other members of their community for the survey. For example, positive comments to the neighbours about the survey and about the researchers by members of the surveyed households often created a conducive atmosphere for the researchers.

Discussions with Key Persons

During the planning and preparation process, the researchers made an all out effort to gain the confidence of key persons in the community. In each village, the researchers met and discussed the survey in great detail with the local Panchayat elected members, government officials, school and anganwadi teachers, political leaders, parents, shop keepers, members of youth clubs and other associations as well as other key individuals.

Formation of Survey Teams

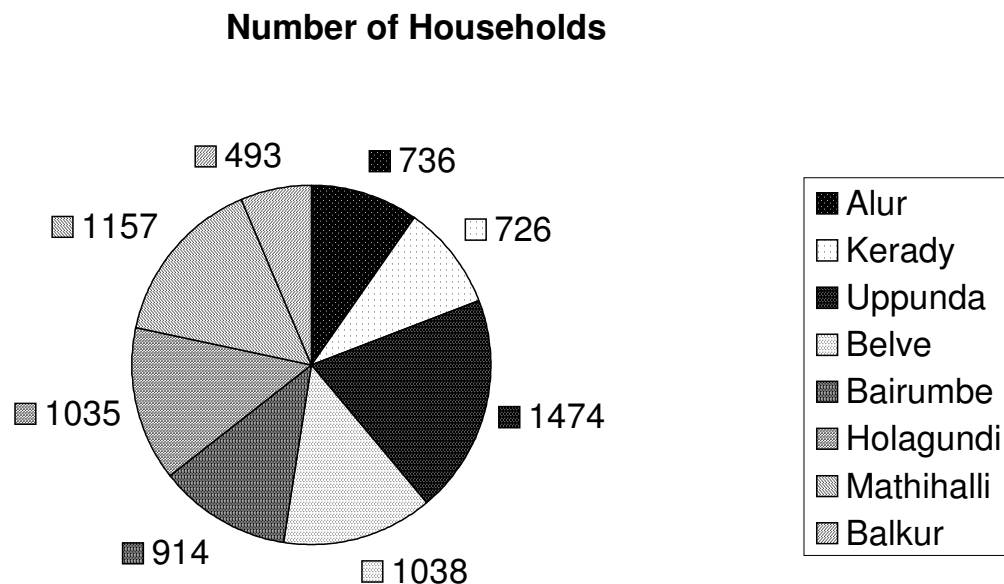
At the village level, the Makkala Panchayats and the Bhima Sangha formed teams of two to four researchers. The researchers formulated a set of criteria to select team members. Various factors were considered in determining the number of teams needed for each hamlet/ward/village. The researchers facilitated by adult activists in each Panchayat, obtained the number of households to be surveyed in each hamlet/ward/village from records maintained by their Gram Panchayat. In the Toofan Panchayats, PRAs and small surveys previously done by Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayats and/or CWC also provided more accurate data on the number of households. The researchers considered various factors in determining the number of survey teams that would conduct the survey in each hamlet/ward/village.

Criteria for selection of survey team members

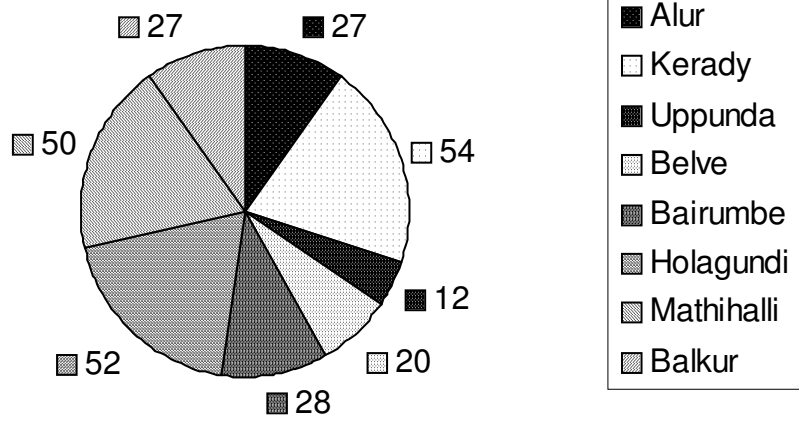
Each team comprised two to four children, normally a mix of girls and boys, with at least one member who could read and write well. Although most of the members of these survey teams were working children, school-going children were also included in some teams, as they were more adept in reading and writing. Other criteria included their residential proximity to and/or the degree of familiarity with the members of households to be surveyed. Often, the set of households surveyed by a single team of researchers were that of a friend, relative, neighbour or other persons known to one or more members of the team. The availability of common times when they were able to get away from their work/household chores and/or education to conduct the survey, was also an important criteria in the selection of members for each team.

Division of the Area

The number of survey teams allocated per village was based on the number of households, the geographical area, the proximity of dwellings, the number of trained researchers as well as the amount of time the team members could allocate for the survey. The researchers divided each village into smaller units (like hamlets) for the purpose of conducting survey. The number of teams per unit was based on the team's capability and the availability of common time when the members of a team would be free to conduct the survey. The greater the distance between the households in a hamlet/ward/village, the smaller the number of households that



Number of Researchers



The process of planning and preparation helped the researchers pre-empt some of the problems/issues related to conducting the survey and propose possible solutions to them. They were both excited and anxious about the entire process, anticipating several otherwise unforeseen problems. They were also nervous about the large number of households to be surveyed and the tight deadline to complete the survey, given their busy work and education schedules.



Process of Data Collection



Data Collection

Introducing themselves and the survey: The members of the research team introduced themselves as members of Bhima Sangha or Makkala Panchayat. They introduced the survey as an information collection process, which would lead to implementation of action plan to improve their living conditions.

Establishing Rapport with Household Members: In order to create a conducive atmosphere for their research, the researchers initially enquired about issues which people were comfortable with, postponing the more sensitive queries for later. Great care was taken to build rapport with the respondents and gain their trust. Once this was achieved, the respondents freely shared information with the researchers.

Interviewing Respondents: Interviews of the respondents were conducted on the basis of the indicators listed in the survey schedule. The researchers phrased questions in simple manner, using colloquial terms and phrases. Often the questions had to be repeated with further clarifications and interpretations.

Documenting the Information: During the interviews, meticulous, legible and systematic documentation of information was maintained. While one researcher asked the question, another noted responses in the survey schedule.

Ensuring Accuracy of the Information :The information gathered was consistently cross-checked in order to ensure its accuracy. Researchers made a second visit to certain households to fill the gaps and/or to clarify doubts. In rare cases they had to repeat the survey.

Although the first phase of the training was completed in September 1998, the actual data collection started in the first week of October 1998 in some Panchayats. In the other Panchayats such as Balkur, the survey was delayed on account of the harvest season, where the researchers were involved in agricultural work. In Bairumbe Panchayat, the adults as well as the children were busy with areca nut processing activities. So in some of these Panchayats, data collection did not start until November. Another reason for the delay in some of these Panchayats was the scheduling of school examinations. The researchers who were school children could not participate in the survey until their examinations were completed.

Building Rapport

The researchers were very innovative in building rapport with the households. They would begin by introducing themselves and greeting the family. After some casual conversation, they would enquire about the well-being of family members leading on to informal enquiries about their work, while humouring the toddler in the house occasionally. During this process, they would carefully assess the atmosphere in the house before proceeding to ask questions contained in the survey schedule.



In Mathihalli Panchayat, when a grandmother growled at the survey team as they entered her house, Kavita, one of the members, sensed it to be an inopportune time to conduct the survey. Spotting the beautiful garden in the courtyard, Kavita said,



“You have a beautiful garden.” Soon the team members were talking to the now no longer surly grandmother about gardening, what her children were doing, where they were, etc. The team members left the household for the day on a positive note, without initiating any conversation about their survey. Returning the next day to the same household, the researchers found the grandmother extremely receptive and willing to answer all their queries.

Introducing themselves and the purpose of the Survey

After establishing adequate rapport with the household members the researchers would introduce themselves as members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat. Everyone in their community was aware of these two forums and had some degree of familiarity with their objectives and activities. The researchers would then provide details of their research project, including its specific objectives.

As the researchers proceeded from household to household, news about the survey quickly spread in the community, and soon, most of the households were aware of it. The researchers found that surveying their neighbours' households was quick and the data gathered was more accurate as the respondents were familiar with the researchers and their survey. Moreover, the researchers had better knowledge of these households, having lived in close proximity to them. But in many cases, the people were surprised to see children conducting a



they soon became adept at providing suitable and convincing responses to the numerous questions posed by such respondents, especially with regard to the relevance and value of the survey to the community. Questions related to household income, debt, landholdings and other assets were particularly sensitive.

The researchers explained to such respondents that, as members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats, they were attempting to understand the problems in their village with the aim of solving them. They pointed out that in order to be able to do this, they required accurate statistical information about each household, which they could use to substantiate their demands at the Task Force meetings and other forums. Citing examples of the different problems faced by their community such as inadequacy of resources and amenities including water, sanitation, fuel etc. and pointing to the urgent need to address these issues, they were able to effectively convince people of the purpose, need and use of the survey. The researchers stressed the need for people to voice freely and strongly about their problems if they were to be addressed.

When respondents were reluctant to talk about their problems, the researchers pointed out that they were not alone in their crisis. In a household in Kerady village, for instance, the researchers pointed out that every household had problems and wished they could be solved. Therefore, as Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat



survey, which is usually done by teachers, police and other government officials/adults. Some of them were rude and aggressive and would grill the researchers with questions such as, "What is this survey? Why is it being done? Why do you need this information? How will we, the people of the household, benefit from it? What will you give us after the information is collected?" and so on.

The researchers were aware that establishing support of these respondents was critical to the success of their survey. Although it was difficult at first, as their experience with surveying such households increased,



"When they asked us 'why do you need information about our income and assets', I explained that 'with this information we can identify the number of poor and rich in our community. Once we have this information, we can work towards solving the problems of poor people'."

– A researcher from Holagundi Panchayat

members, they were there to collect information to be able to pressurise the concerned authorities to find appropriate solutions/alternatives. They requested the household members to identify the most crucial problem they were currently facing. The respondents stated that they wished to send their children to school but lacked money. The researchers promised them that they would take up the matter in the Panchayat Task Force meeting and try to find a solution. In fact in the following week, the researchers were able to mobilise money to buy books and uniforms for four children in one of the hamlets and enrol them to school.

Interviewing the Respondents

The researchers approached the most responsive member of the household. This was possible since they were familiar with most people. In all their interviews, the researchers framed questions in a simple manner, using colloquial terms and phrases, and repeated questions with additional clarifications and explanations whenever it was necessary.

The researchers were extremely careful about contextualising their questions and giving due importance and respect to the respondents. They displayed both instinct as well as a great deal of tact in avoiding touchy/sensitive questions when they found any respondent emotionally weak, unstable or resistant. For instance, they refrained from asking questions relating to deaths in the family in the recent past fearing that the respondent would be emotionally disturbed. Instead they collected such information from the neighbouring household. Care was also taken to avoid placing the respondent in a difficult predicament where he/she did not know the right answer, or was avoiding certain questions that made them uncomfortable. When their knowledge or common sense suggested that the information they received was false, the researchers verified the same with other members of that household.

Often more than one member of the household was eager to co-operate with the researchers. In most of the interviews, it was an adult male member who opted to provide the information. However, the researchers soon realised that adult male members were not always giving the right information or were reluctant to provide information on income, landholdings and other assets as well as indebtedness. Instead, they realised that the adult females and children of such households were better informants, especially with regard to the more sensitive data. In such households, the researchers returned later on to gather/verify this type of data from the women and children of the household when the male members were not present.

However, it was not always easy to collect information on all the indicators present in the survey schedule. Since the schedule was long and contained questions on a wide range of issues, it required on an average one-and-a-half hours to survey each household. Given their various responsibilities, often the respondents were unable to make themselves available continuously to complete the survey at one go. There were a few cases where the researchers had to make more than two visits to the same household to complete the survey.



Prema is a 17 year-old girl from Uppunda Panchayat in Kundapur taluk, a coastal region. She is the President of Uppunda Makkala Panchayat. She dropped out of school very early and is only very scantily literate. Her primary occupation is fetching firewood for her household. She and her friends walk several kilometres to fetch firewood, normally leaving home as early as 3 a.m. and returning only at noon, burdened with head loads of firewood. Her father is a fisherman and she assists him by cleaning and sorting the fish. She also has to do the normal domestic chores of her household.

Prema took an active role in the research conducted in Uppunda. She identified and trained several children to conduct the survey. The number of households a research team surveyed per day often varied, as they had to juggle the survey activities between their other occupations/chores and schooling, whether extension or formal. As Prema observes, "Sometimes we would miss work and survey more households. At other times, we would come back after collecting firewood and conduct the survey. Though we were very tired after collecting firewood, we felt that this was an excellent opportunity we had and we should use it well. We had to manage and adjust our time well. Talking to people and trying to find out their economic situation was a learning experience for me. Initially I was very nervous and scared. But after surveying a few households, I was confident."²³

²³ Narrated by Prema at the Process Documentation Workshop in Bangalore.

Documenting the Information

The researchers were very meticulous in documenting all the information shared by the respondents in each household on their specific survey schedule. While one researcher in the team was interviewing a respondent, another would note down the responses. The researchers were emphatic about the legibility of the survey schedules and used pencils to write down the information, which allowed for the correction of any mistakes, without compromising the neatness of documentation. The researchers were so systematic and meticulous that not one of the survey schedules filled by them was incomplete or lacked the required information.



Saraswathi, a member of Bhima Sangha, is 17 years old and dropped out of school in the eighth standard. She works as a helper in an anganwadi and also has to do several household chores everyday. However, she still made time to take an active part in conducting the survey.

While Saraswathi with her friends was surveying a household, she learnt that an elderly woman of the household was not receiving widow pension from the state, although she was eligible to get it. While surveying other households she discovered that there were a few other widows as well in the same state. As they were engaged in the survey, they compiled a list of eligible people who were not receiving widow and/or old age pension. The very next day the researchers met the President of their Panchayat and informed him of the oversight and sought urgent action. With the assistance of the president the researchers obtained the appropriate application forms and filled in the details for the applicants who were mostly illiterate. The researchers then obtained signatures or thumb prints from the applicants and submitted them to the Panchayat officials and pressurised the latter to contact the concerned authorities. To their surprise the pensioners began to get their pension within a month.²⁴

Ensuring Accuracy of the Information

The researchers consistently cross-checked all the information they were gathering. While cross-checking, if common sense indicated that the information collected in a household was suspect, it would be either partially or fully re-surveyed. In situations where there were gaps in the data collected or doubts about its accuracy still persisted, the researchers would avail information from secondary sources such as the documents available in the Panchayat, Revenue Office, school, etc., or by consulting key people in the community or neighbours.

Problems faced in collecting data

Complexity of the survey format: The survey schedule was very extensive and comprehensive, covering a variety of social and economic indicators of a household and was therefore very lengthy. Consequently, collecting information on all the listed socio-economic variables was challenging, time-consuming and arduous.

Non-co-operation of the respondents: While in some households, they were able to complete the survey in one hour, in others they had to spend nearly two to two and a half hours to gather all the data needed as some respondents were not easy to interview, while some were unwilling to give the required information easily.

Poor comprehension: The difficulty in comprehending certain questions, clarifications and repetitions sought by the respondents added to the surveying time.

Unreliable sources, suspect information etc: The slew of problems that the researchers faced had a lot to do with incorrect/suspect information given by respondents, scarcity of reliable sources to verify the information obtained and the type and nature of respondents within the household.

²⁴ Narrated by Saraswathi at the Process Documentation Workshop in Bangalore.

Unwillingness of the respondents to disclose certain information: Several respondents were not willing to reveal information on certain indicators such as income, land and other assets owned, indebtedness, etc. because of certain fears and social norms prevailing in the community.

Fear of divulging information: Certain respondents in the lower middle class feared that if they revealed their income and assets, they would be denied government assistance. Some higher middle class and richer households, on the other hand, were keen to inflate their indebtedness, and often lied or failed to reveal the truth about their income, landholdings and other assets owned. This class of respondents were apprehensive that such information, if revealed in its entirety to the young researchers, may end up in the government records and they would be subjected to high taxes and fines by the State. On the other hand, the poorer respondents were more open about giving the necessary information.

Expenditure on habits and stimulants: The researchers also found that collecting accurate data about respondent's personal expenditures such as the amount spent on alcohol, beedis, cigarettes and other stimulants was not an easy task. Given the social norms, people preferred not to reveal such information for various reasons including the fear of losing respect and status within the community.

Information on diseases/illnesses: Another indicator which proved difficult for the researchers was information about health related issues, particularly data on the prevalence of chronic illnesses in the community. Some respondents said that public knowledge of chronic illness in the family might cause problems in getting good matrimonial matches for their children, especially daughters.

Caste intricacies: Most researchers belonged to the most socially and economically marginalised groups in their villages. During the process of data collection, they had to cope with caste prejudices time and again. In Holagundi village, for instance, two of the researchers went as a team to survey a *Lingayat*²⁵ home. One child being a *Lingayat* was allowed into the dwelling, while the other had to wait outside because his caste status was lower than that of the household.

Cynical attitude of the rich and high caste: The most difficult households to survey were often that of the rich and upper castes who were extremely critical and cynical about the survey. In such households, the researchers were usually bombarded with many questions, both cynical and embarrassing. For example, when the researchers enquired about the household's indebtedness, the respondent shot back, "Are you going to repay our loan?" In another household, when the researchers probed about recent deaths in the household, the respondent snapped, "What, are you going to bring the dead back to life?"



Quite aware of the way they would be treated by such households, some researchers expressed their fear of conducting the survey in upper caste and/or wealthy households in their villages. In such cases, they requested the adult field activists to accompany them to the households. Once, a researcher from a lower caste, who had to survey an upper caste Brahmin's household, got an adult field activist to accompany him. When they reached the Brahmin's house, the household members objected to the boy entering their house, given his lower caste status. The field activist, the Makkala Mitra²⁶ and other children had to intervene, before the Brahmin household allowed the child into their dwelling to conduct the survey.

The researchers found that most often it was the poor households that were very welcoming and respectful towards them. In such households, mats were rolled out for them to sit on and often food and beverages were offered.

²⁵ A social upper caste in the Indian caste hierarchy

²⁶ A children's friend or ombudsperson, an adult chosen by children to provide support and assistance to children in crisis or difficulties

Researchers' limited availability of time: The researchers themselves had problems such as scarcity of time to conduct the survey, given their busy schedule of work within and outside home. In addition, they had to attend their regular training/extension school. While surveying, the researchers found that in many households the members were not at home during the day. Then they were forced to return late in the evening or at night to conduct the survey. These late hours were especially difficult for the girls due to the risks they were likely to face in the dark, as well as the fear of censure from their own families and other village members about young girls venturing out at that time of day.

Distance between households: In some Panchayats, the long distance between houses proved to be a major obstacle. In Bairumbe and Kerady Panchayats, for instance, some researchers had to walk as much as 3-5 kilometres to conduct the survey. In some of the Bairumbe Panchayat hamlets, the survey team members from neighbouring hamlets had to walk long distances to do the survey as no local children were part of the survey teams.

Restrictions by researchers' own parents: The parents/kith and kin of the researchers in some cases were very critical of the whole process of the survey and raised objections and imposed restrictions on their children, especially girls. They had great difficulty in convincing their parents to allow them to go outside and conduct the survey. While some parents eventually gave in, others imposed restrictions on the times their children could conduct the survey, or the places they could conduct the survey.

Informants not responding in the specified sequence: Although the researchers posed the questions very systematically in the same order as present in the survey schedule, the respondents often did not stick to the question asked. They sometimes gave additional information, or information that was part of another section or in a different sequence from the schedule. Consequently, the researchers were sometimes unable to keep pace with the respondent. For example, when the researchers asked the head of a household for the details regarding their eldest son, the respondent sometimes would continue with details about all the members of the family, what they were doing, how much they were earning, what problems they had, etc. In such situations, the researchers were unable to document all the information coming to them. They requested the respondents to pause until they could finish writing or occasionally repeat what had just said.

Strategies to Elicit Information

The researchers used simple, but innovative techniques and strategies to elicit information from the respondents. They did not limit themselves to asking questions to the male or female head of the households, but also utilised indirect sources very effectively.

Children and Women more willing Informants

The young researchers realised that the male heads of families were reluctant and often refused to disclose or gave falsified information about their incomes, land and assets owned, debts, chronic illnesses, etc. In such cases, the researchers decided to be very selective about what questions they addressed and to whom.

The children and women proved to be the best sources of information. Learning this, the researchers conducted survey of certain households when the men had gone out and the women and children were available. In fact, some children who were not involved in the survey but were supportive, told the researchers to "Come when we are at home. Our elders may not give you the right information." They were even willing to provide sensitive information such as indicators such as alcohol consumption and smoking expenditures of household members, despite resistance from other household members, and sometimes at the risk of being reprimanded by them. For instance, Srimathi, a researcher from Alur Panchayat, recalled that in a household in Alur, the residents were not willing to give any information. The adult members commented that it was rather ridiculous that children should attempt to collect such vital information about their lives. The twelve-year-old daughter of the family, who had been observing the interaction between her family members and the researchers, quietly followed the research team out of the house when the latter had been asked to leave by the adults in her household. When they were outside, the little girl sat with the researchers by the roadside and supplied most of the information. On her return she had to face angry family members.



Neighbours as useful informants

Neighbours turned out to be very good source of information in certain situations. Sometimes where information was not disclosed on variables such as expenditure on habits, amount of land and assets owned, illnesses, etc. by any of the household members, the researchers gathered it from the neighbouring household. Neighbours were able to provide the needed information, as they are usually familiar with issues next door. However, the researchers crosschecked such information with other sources to the extent possible.

Use of secondary/alternate/multiple sources of information

In order to ensure the quality of the data collected, the researchers also referred secondary sources of information. In certain instances where information was not disclosed by direct sources or where empirical evidence was not entirely available the researchers referred secondary sources, such as:-

Village Revenue Office: They obtained the village landholding records from the Village Revenue officer and noted down the required details of land owned by each household.

Ration Card: The ration cards provided them with the number of members in the family, the household income grouping and other details.

School Records: They used the records maintained by school to fill in the age and educational qualifications of children.

Village Banks: Certain documents in the village bank were verified to assess the amount of bank loans taken by some of the households.

Documents Maintained by PHCs: Documents in the public health centres (PHCs) were referred to, in order to determine the type and frequency of chronic illnesses and other diseases prevalent in the village.

Anganwadi Records: Records maintained by anganwadis provided them with information on infants and pre-school children.

Key people as Resources

The researchers were very resourceful in garnering and using the support of key persons in the village. They established the support of Panchayat Presidents and the elected representatives to tackle some of the problems that they came across during their survey. For instance, when a family in Alur Panchayat refused to co-operate with the children and provide the necessary information, the researchers approached Manjaiah Shetty, the president of that Gram Panchayat and requested him to go along with them and convince the family to co-operate. When the household members saw their Panchayat President had accompanied the researchers, they keenly participated in the study and answered all the questions posed by the researchers.

Similarly, in Uppunda, Manjamma Shedthi, the lady who is the Makkala Mitra, accompanied the researchers at their request, while they surveyed several households. In different villages, the assistance of prominent adults and children, including school/anganwadi teachers, Panchayat secretaries, clerks, village accountants, shop keepers, Public Health Centre workers and members of youth and women's associations was resourcefully engaged by the researchers to aid them in cross-checking and correcting the information gathered. In many cases, such people accompanied the researchers to several households.

Calculation and Estimation

During the data collection process, the researchers had to make several estimates and calculations quite frequently, to arrive at appropriate figures for a household. They estimated the income of families when circumstances indicated that the information given was incorrect. They could arrive at average figures, for example, when they had knowledge of the amount of land owned, crop grown acreage-wise and the agricultural product price. In such cases, it was not difficult for them to assess the annual agricultural income. They were also aware of the daily/monthly wages for most of the occupations in their localities, such as the tile and cashew factory work, beedi rolling, agricultural labour, cattle rearing, etc. In such cases, by finding out the number of days worked, the researchers were able to use the wage figures to make approximate calculations and verify if the information given was accurate.

There were also several instances where the members of the household being surveyed were not aware of certain details. For example, many were not aware of their daily or monthly expenditure on food, etc. In such households, the researchers spent longer time probing details about how often the members of the household shopped, how much they normally bought at the weekly markets, how long their supplies lasted, etc. On the basis of the information thus gathered, the researchers arrived at approximate figures for such expenditures.

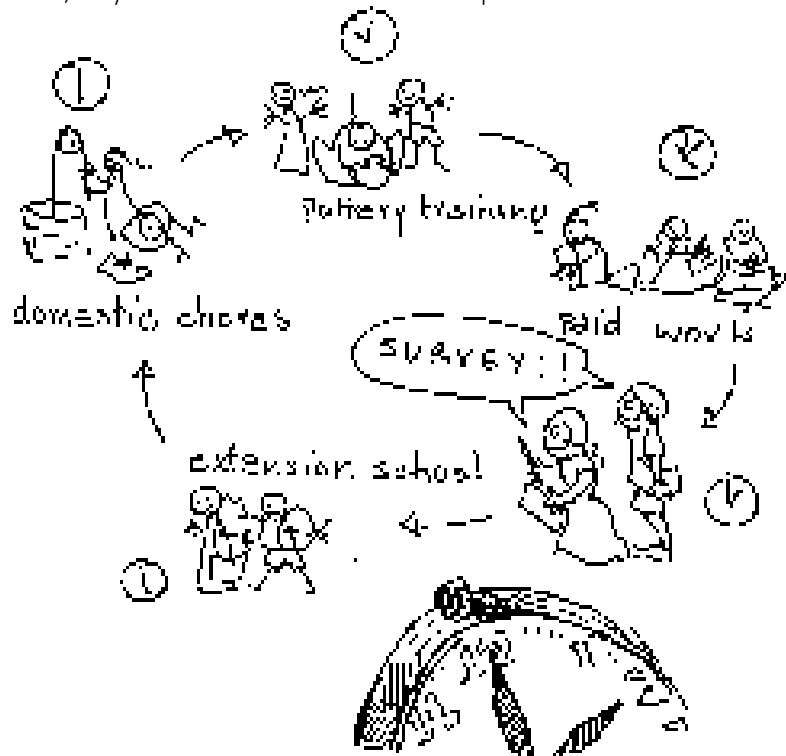
Persistence and Conviction of the Researchers

The researchers were determined to collect information, which was as accurate and complete as possible. Here is an interesting example. A group of researchers in Nadegodu hamlet of Bairumbe Panchayat took off from work for a day and conducted the survey. This is because the employer did not permit them to leave early from work to conduct the survey. The next day, their employer was furious at their absence and demanded to know why they had not turned up for work the previous day. The researchers replied, "We had gone to conduct the survey." This made the employer even more irate and shouted at them. The field activist of the Panchayat who met him later with the children tried in vain to convince the angry man. However, the researchers decided to request him to grant them four days' unpaid leave to complete the survey. Realising that the employer was unyielding, they said, "In that case, we prefer to do the survey than work for you any more." To this the employer maintained a deep silence. They further persisted, "Or else, we will come to work for you and you could conduct the survey of the entire village." Moved by the persistence and keenness of the researchers to complete the survey, the employer let them take time off from their work to conduct the survey, without any risk of losing their wages.



Time Management

Most of the researchers had several responsibilities, both at home and at work. Some worked all day, and had to help with the housework when they returned from work and before going to work. In addition, they also attended extension schools. The researchers in each Panchayat discussed their work schedules and developed a mutually convenient time schedule for conducting the survey. For example, in Alur Panchayat, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. the researchers participated in the pottery training programme, and they attended extension school²⁷ in the evenings from 5 to 7 p.m. Besides these they had to do their normal domestic chores. Given their paid work and household chores, they arrived at a consensus that 2-4 p.m. was the most suitable time to conduct the survey.



In other Panchayats where the children worked in the mornings, they conducted the survey in the evenings. In Uppunda Panchayat, for instance, most of the girls would leave their homes at 4 a.m. and walk several kilometres to the nearby forest to collect fuel. They could conduct the survey only on their return at noon, often rushing through their afternoon meal and adjusting the survey timings based on their other household chores and extension school activities.

Many researchers rescheduled their activities to suit other children's work demands. Nirmala, a researcher from Nandrolli village of Keradi Panchayat said that since she had mainly household chores while most other researchers were employed, she tried to adjust her time to suit their convenience.

The researchers also helped each other complete their work, whether it had to do with the household or paid employment. For instance, Vishwanath of Bairumbe Panchayat helped his team member Manjunath complete

his work in the areca nut field, so that they could go together to conduct the survey. In Holagundi, Manju's younger brother assisted him with his household chores, which included grazing, feeding and milking the cows, on the days Manju had to do the survey.



In Kerady, where the hamlets lack electricity and are located far from each other, the researchers, armed with torches, ventured out at night after their day's work was finished, to conduct the survey.

Researchers who were engaged in beedi rolling carried their interview schedules along with them to their place of work. On the way to work, they would apprise the households of the survey and fix an appointment for a mutually convenient time in the

evening on their return. On their way back, they would stop by each of these households at the scheduled time and conduct the survey.

²⁷ Our Survey Story, Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat, 2001

In some cases, the researchers had to wait for hours for the respondents, who were engaged in their daily work and/or household chores. In such cases, the researchers too joined them in their work/chores. This served two purposes, namely, speeding up the completion of respondents' work and freeing them for the interview, as well as establishing rapport with them. When a team of researchers went to a household in Sadashivalli of Bairumbe Panchayat, the family members were busy dehusking areca nuts. The researchers too joined the work along with the household members, even as they started conversing with them. This established a strong rapport very quickly between the interviewers and the respondents. The latter were very willing to provide the information the researchers were requesting.



"Normally whenever we got a little time free, we would immediately start playing with stones, but now whenever we got a little time, we would try to do the survey."

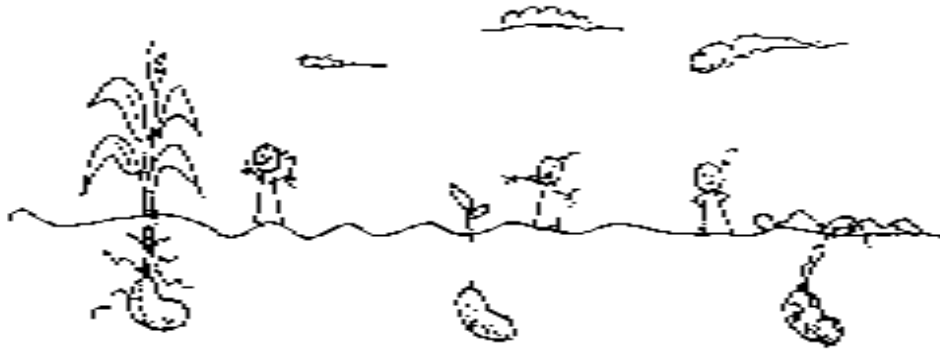
– Suguna, Bairumbe Panchayat

The researchers were highly time-conscious. If a particular team of researchers were able to find at least 15 minutes of time free from their other activities, they would rush to the nearest household on their list to conduct the survey.



The Seed Exercise: Reviewing the quality of Information

During the process documentation workshop, the representative researchers were helped to review the information they collected. Facilitating the workshop, Julian told them that the information collected is like seeds about to be sown. Not all seeds sown will sprout and grow healthily giving a good harvest. Some seeds are very sure to grow and yield fruits, while others may or may not sprout and a few are sure to die. He pointed out that in the same way, all the information collected by them was not of the same quality in terms of its accuracy. Subsequently they were helped to classify the information they collected as very accurate, less accurate and doubtful. The accuracy assessment of the information collected by them is as follows:



Accurate information

Name of the Panchayat and village

Caste
Housing condition
Demographic details

Primary and secondary occupations

Name of school and anganwadi

Migrants and immigrants

Distance to different resources

Assets and instruments owned by poor

Situation of the handicapped

Household expenditure on various items

Land owned in the case of poor households

Slightly Doubtful information

Income of the family and individuals

Information on migrant working children

Amount of land owned and returns from land in the case of wealthier households

Assistance received from government
Level of education

Details about migrants

School dropouts

Causes of death in the household

Age especially of girl children

Expenditure on entertainment and social ceremonies

Taxes paid

Very Doubtful Information

Chronic diseases

Assets and instruments/owned by wealthier households

Loans taken

Expenditures on personal habits

However, in each of the above cases they made maximum effort to verify and validate the information using secondary/alternate sources of information.



Children engaging in social analysis

The representative researchers at the workshop made very significant analysis of the people in the village from their experience during the survey. They said that "The poor were very good to us and shared their snacks with us, but the rich did not" (Nirmala, Kerady Panchayat). According to them, those people who had become rich in the recent past were more arrogant and egoistic than others. They further said that the rich tend to magnify their liabilities and problems and give a very conservative impression of their assets. For example, if they have 5 acres of land, they say only 2; if they consume 2 kilograms of rice a day, they say 4 or 5 just to exaggerate their expenditure. But the poor people provided them accurate information. In their view, "The harijans are treated very badly. They (harijan children) are not encouraged to go to school. They are taken for granted to be doing only menial jobs like carrying cow dung (manure). Their children who go to school are failed repeatedly by the teachers. They receive no encouragement from teachers to continue studying. Therefore many of them leave school."

- Chandravathi, Belve Panchayat

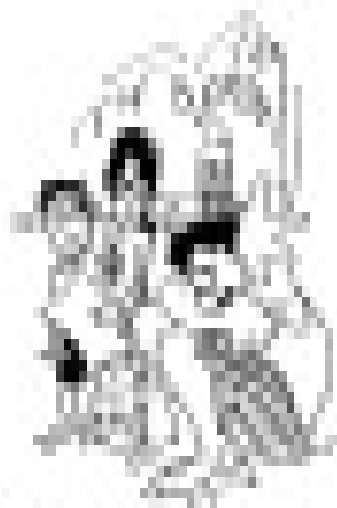
Reactions and Response of the Community

The response of the community to the research project varied in different Panchayats as well as across villages. In areas where children were fairly active as Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayat members, the community reacted favourably to the research. This was due to the fact that working children in such villages had already achieved a good standing in their community.

Adverse Reactions



Some of the children who were active in the community were not interested in the research project and some were even hostile to it.



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Favourable Responses



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“Usually when surveys or censuses take place, some strangers or unknown people come and collect ‘some’ information from our households. But in this case, it was our own children collecting information about us. That was very appealing and we felt the need to give them correct information.”


- Vasudev, clerk, Alur Panchayat

Assistance and Support to the Researchers

Being fully committed to the project, the researchers were not hesitant about getting help from different individuals in their community. The kind of support and assistance they received from many of their community members, both adults and children, was rather remarkable. During the data collection phase, the children were facilitated and assisted by several members of the community in a variety of ways. These included spreading awareness about the survey in the community, sharing information about their households and helping the researchers write down the information given by the respondents, accompanying the researchers to homes of those who were difficult to interview or where the children needed to be introduced, cross-checking the information collected, etc.

Researchers' Family

The attitude of the researchers' own family members, especially parents, was critical to the success of the research done by the children, i.e., whether their parents were supportive of or antagonistic towards their children conducting a study of their villages. The degree of support, or lack of it, differed from family to family. Most of the parents were extremely proud that their child was involved in what they termed as excellent work. A few were indifferent, while some were resistant to the whole idea of the survey and/or their children conducting it.



In Belve Panchayat, Saraswathi's father who was very supportive of the research project as well as his daughter's participation in it, observed: "When she came and told me about the survey, I was very excited. I felt that no one had collected such information. It would be very useful. I helped them check and verify the data. At night I would accompany them to some people's houses since they could not go during the day."

If the researcher was a girl and needed to conduct the survey after dark, a male member of the family, usually the father or the brother, would accompany her and sometimes would even assist with the survey.

Shekar, a parent from Bairumbe Panchayat expressed how proud he was of his daughter, Geetha, who conducted the survey in a household with which his family had a longstanding feud.

Many other parents also helped their children in one or more ways, including cross-checking the data, verifying it through others, accompanying them to other homes, convincing neighbours, friends, etc. to give their support to the survey and share information readily with their children when they came to conduct the survey. The researchers quite often verified data on daily and monthly expenses of households with their mothers, asking them how much their own household expenses were. After the researchers returned home from collecting data in other households older siblings would sometimes help cross-check the information collected. The siblings would work together to identify the errors and make the necessary corrections. Parental support in some communities was so great that some, whose children were not part of the research teams, demanded that they should be included in it. In Belve Panchayat, a mother who was upset that her son was not involved in the survey, requested the researchers to allow him to join them. When they told her that his assistance to the survey was most welcome, she was extremely pleased and offered her own support to conduct the survey.

On the other hand a few parents were opposed to letting their children conduct the survey. The main reason for this was that these parents were afraid that the household chores or the paid work that their children normally did would remain undone, if they were engaged in the survey. The children had to convince their parents that their regular work or household chores would not be neglected. Aikkya, a researcher from Uppunda Panchayat said that it was only after completing her household responsibilities that she would go for the survey. This ensured that her parents were not upset.

A few parents who were initially hesitant became more comfortable about their children conducting the survey once the research gained general acceptance from the community. A parent of a young female researcher in Alur village admitted to having reservations about his daughter participating in the survey initially. He admitted, "I did not know why the girls had to go out and collect such information. However, as people began to accept the children doing the survey and understood how they would use the information, I felt comfortable. It was also only then that I saw the importance of such an exercise."

School Children

Although not all the schools were represented in each Panchayat, a few school-going children joined working children in the survey. They were especially helpful when a particular team did not have researchers who had writing skills. There were many school children who were very curious to know what the researchers were doing, 'going from house to house and filling up some sort of forms'. Several wanted to be involved in the process. So some would accompany the researchers during the survey and assist them in any way they could.

In some villages, such children would take the researchers to different houses in their neighbourhood, introducing the researchers to the household members and some would stay long enough to help them establish rapport with each other, before returning to their homes. They also would provide certain information to the researchers on certain households such as, the number of cows or poultry owned, the economic situation of the household, etc.

Participation/involvement in the survey was exciting for the school children who were used to seeing their teachers conduct such surveys. The notion of participating in such a survey made the school children feel important and grown-up. The students who participated in the survey had a very good relationship with the other researchers because they were former classmates or neighbours or childhood friends.

School Teachers

Many school teachers played a major supportive role in cross-checking and verifying the information collected by the researchers. They helped by providing information pertaining to school dropouts wherever the household members were unable to provide the exact details. They gave the researchers access to some of the school records when the data had to be verified or when the information provided was insufficient. In addition, they assisted the researchers in correcting the information collected. In Bairumbe Panchayat, a teacher gave time off to school children during school hours so that they could help with the survey. However, a few teachers were critical and cynical of the children conducting the survey.

Panchayat Council Members and Officials

Many key people of the community such as the Panchayat Presidents and Task Force members were quick to extend their support to the research project and the researchers in a variety of ways. Some accompanied the researchers to several households to introduce the children and garner support for their research.



"Once we get the information, we will prioritise and see which of the problems need to be urgently looked into. We will plan and work towards solving them."

– Mr. Balakrishna Hegde, President, Balkur

These village officials also helped persuade many 'difficult' adults to provide information that the researchers required. They also requested the officials at various levels to provide all possible support to the researchers, including making available any document they required.

Some Panchayat Presidents and Vice-Presidents aware of the possible problems the researchers might face with certain people briefed the researchers on how they should approach such people and pose questions to them. The Panchayat officials readily provided the researchers all the information

they had pertaining to house number, house tax, land details of each household and any assistance given by the government. Some assisted the children in the verification and correction of the data obtained from households. The Panchayat clerks in a few Panchayats, such as Alur and Belve, were particularly supportive.



"The survey done by children will reveal the reality of the families. Now when any official comes to the office we can give them the real facts and figures. It will be easy to show them our problems and convince them of what we need."

– Mr. Narayan Mukhri, President, Bairumbe Panchayat

In fact, many council members and officials like Balakrishna Hegde, President of Balkur Panchayat and Manjaiah Shetty, President of Alur Panchayat identified themselves as part of the research process, and were as anxious as the researchers themselves to obtain the findings of the research and start planning actions on the basis of the results. Others like Narayan Mukhri, the President of Bairumbe Panchayat expressed their confidence in the survey done by children. They felt that this would provide them with accurate facts, which could be used to address many of the problems and to substantiate their requests from the officials of the Taluq and State Government.

Makkala Mitra

In each Panchayat, the 'Makkala Mitra' (Children's Ombudsman) assisted the researchers in various ways. They helped them in planning the data collection process and publicising the survey. They accompanied the researchers to certain households during the data collection whenever they requested, and assisted in verifying the collected information.

The Makkala Mitras were particularly helpful in easing various problems encountered by the researchers at different stages of their research. The researchers turned to them when members of certain households refused to disclose the information needed. They intervened on request from the researchers in such situations where the researchers were refused entry into the dwelling of a household that needed to be surveyed or where the parents did not allow a child to participate in conducting the survey.

Neighbouring Households

Neighbours often proved to be willing and reliable sources of information. In households where researchers were unable to collect certain information on sensitive issues such as death in the family in the recent years, illnesses, indebtedness, etc. they asked the neighbours who often helped to fill in the gaps.

Elders

The researchers also approached the elders in the community to seek support for the conduct of the survey, as they were familiar with most of the households in the village. In Uppunda Panchayat, Chandakka, an elderly woman accompanied the researcher, Padma, to several households during data collection. Since Chandakka is well respected in her community, the people were open and willing to give Padma the information she required.

Employers' Support

In most cases employers did not stand in the way of the researchers. This is because the researchers, who were employed as paid labour, did not take too much leeway in reducing the hours of their work to conduct the survey. When there was urgent work to be completed, they succeeded in meeting their work schedule. Generally they conducted the research during the day only if they were free from their scheduled work.

Honorarium to the researchers

The researchers had to spend a considerable part of their day conducting the survey; their working life, especially in the case of those children who were doing paid work, but without any strict time schedule (eg. beedi rolling, petty business, etc.) was affected to a large extent. Their contribution to the household chores and financial contribution to the family got reduced during the period of survey. Therefore, CWC realised that it was important to make a small financial compensation. It was decided that the teams would be paid five rupees per household surveyed. This was also taking into consideration the prevailing practice of paying people engaged in data collection on a piece rate basis.

The compensation of five rupees received for survey of a household had to be shared equally among three to four members who composed the survey team. The paltry monetary benefit certainly provided support to the researchers, but it in no way compensated for their regular earnings. However, for the researchers the non-monetary benefits were more valuable. Some researchers decided to use money received from the survey to make improvements to their schools. In Mathihalli Panchayat, the researchers used part of the money they earned from the survey to buy a clock and get electrical wiring done for their Extension School.



"We earned pride and respect from the community; the fact that elders in the village now recognise us is more important than money. Additionally, to earn money, one can work hard, but respect and acceptance do not come that easily."

— A Researcher from Holagundi Panchayat

Issues Identified by the Researchers

During the process of data collection, the researchers identified and listed several problems faced by their communities. Some of the problems pertained to individuals or individual households, while others were community related problems, affecting a particular section of the population or the entire village or Panchayat. Among them some were issues, which could be solved immediately while others pertained to long-term issues.

Issues known prior to the survey

Many of the problems or issues faced by the researchers, or their families or other members of their community, although known to the researchers prior to the research, became much clearer to them during data collection. They now understood the same issues/problems in greater depth, detail and accuracy.

Some of the issues/problems identified by the researchers during the data collection phase included child migration, prevalence of child labour, indebtedness, poor roads, lack of health facilities, inaccessibility to schools, scarcity of firewood and water, lack of or poor supply of electricity, etc. They also noted problems affecting their entire community such as the doctor rarely being present in the Primary Health Centre, the lack of cattle grazing grounds in Mathihalli Panchayat and the poor maintenance of water tank in Holagundi.

Issues they were not aware of prior to the Survey

The data collection process also revealed several problems the researchers had previously been unaware of. For example, Kaliamma from Belve Panchayat observed that it was only after she participated in the survey that she learnt most of the houses in her hamlet were located on encroached forest land and the owners therefore, faced the problem of non-ownership of land.

Issues identified by them to be addressed in the long run

The researchers identified several issues/problems, which they were unable to address immediately due to various constraints. They prioritised them as issues requiring focussed attention in the long run so that they will figure prominently in their future action plans. For example, they noted that solving the problem of migration of children in search of work was currently beyond their control. This issue, they realised, needed to be perceived within the larger developmental context of the village. Other issues identified by them as important to be looked into included poor condition of roads, lack of electricity, location of the ration shops, child labour and poor quality of education.

Making Immediate Intervention

The researchers did not wait for the findings of the survey to be statistically analysed and documented for determining the possible actions/solutions. Instead, even during the data collection stage, they started initiating immediate action on problems, which could be solved quickly. For the researchers the main objective of collecting information was to use it to improve their situation.

As mentioned earlier, the researchers in Belve Panchayat were able to get State allotted pensions for eligible widows and the disabled. In the same village, the researchers took on the task of re-enrolling children to schools. With the assistance of the officials the researchers also succeeded in procuring ration cards from the State for at least five households.

Tackling community issues in a hamlet in Bairumbe Panchayat, the researchers were able to solve the water problem of thirty households. They approached their Panchayat officials who helped them get the bore-well repaired.



While surveying a household in Alur Panchayat, a team of researchers met a young boy, Gopala, who was forced to do domestic work for that household. After they finished the data collection in that household, they had a brief chat with him separately. The next day, the researchers discussed Gopala's case with the Makkala Mitra, and with his assistance decided to rescue the boy from the household. They enrolled him in CWC's vocational training programme at Namma Bhoomi.

The children's interventions reveal their proximity to the issues affecting their village and that such issues were very 'personal' to them. Moreover, it reflects the researchers' spontaneity and expresses their need to respond to such incidents. The researchers used existing structures such as the Makkala Mitra, Panchayat, Task Force, CWC and CWC's professional training centre to deal with the problems they identified.

Equipping the Researchers with other Research Skills

The researchers were very proficient in using the survey instrument for data collection. However, they needed to be trained and their knowledge strengthened in other tools and methods of research and analysis.



Research Techniques

Data Coding: The resource team of trainers discussed the importance of coding the information gathered, and how coding could be done.

Data Tabulation: Data tabulation skills were learnt through practical training and group activities. The researchers learned how different units of data could be compiled together and how raw data could be converted into meaningful information.

Data Analysis and Correlation: Through practical means the researchers learned how data on two or more indicators could be combined together to form more complex and categorised information, e.g., caste-wise male/female population. They also learned to analyse the tabulated data, and summarise the findings, making sure local variations are reflected in them.

Application of Statistical Data to Initiate

Action: The researchers learned how to employ the statistical information generated from the study to illustrate or substantiate various issues/problems in meetings, discussions, reports and presentations. They also understood the need to use appropriate information in the process of planning, implementation and evaluation.

Research Tools

Secondary Information: They learned the use and importance of secondary sources of information, the types and sources of information available, and when it should be used.

Given the difficulty of processing the vast amount of data manually, the data was coded and processed with the help of computers. However, it was important for the researchers to be equipped with data analysis skills such as coding, tabulating and correlating the results and presenting the finding in a usable form. Such research skills were essential for them, as in the future, they as members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats would have to frequently conduct small studies, which would involve not only collecting information, but also the coding, tabulation, analysis and interpretation of data, the results of which they would use to identify the problems in their communities and try to find appropriate solutions.

A series of training workshops were conducted to train children in such research tools and techniques. The workshops were organised in Sirsi, Bellary and Kundapur in March 1999. Each workshop was attended by 25-30 representative researchers. All the sessions in the workshop employed practical exercises and group participation. The research tools they learned in these sessions included the application of secondary sources of information, the case study method and focus group discussions. The children were equipped with knowledge of research techniques such as data coding, tabulation, correlation and other analytical techniques as well as how to apply the information generated from the study.

During the workshop, the representatives held discussions on the presentation of information collected from the survey to different stakeholders. They discussed the type of data, how it should be presented and how to use it to initiate appropriate action. They stated that depending on the issue, there were different groups they would have to interact with, to deal with a problem. They were aware that Panchayat officials, Taluq and district level representatives, parents and school teachers were some of the people that they would have to approach in the future, depending on the problems they were tackling at that given time. For example, the relevant authority to discuss the need for an Extension School was the Panchayat while the issue of ration cards would be raised with the Tahsildar,¹ they said.

¹ Administrative head at the Taluk level

Case Study: The researchers also learned the concept and value of the case study method and its significance as a research tool. Through group exercises they became proficient in conducting case studies.

Focus Group Discussion:- The researchers learned the concept and method of conducting focus group discussions as well as its significance in research.

They realised that each issue/problem raised by them would have to be substantiated with relevant statistical information. Citing an example, they observed that if their demand was an Extension School, they would have to raise the issue with the Gram Panchayat officials, and the demand would have to be substantiated with information such as the number of working children in the village, their occupations, reasons for their dropping out of school, location of the empty sites to build Extension Schools, the number of Extension Schools required, and so on. Such statistical information if well presented, would establish the need for the Extension School in their community and

strengthen their argument for the proposed Extension School. As the various groups of researchers worked out different issues/problems that they would encounter and their information needs, they discovered that the type of information needed as well as its presentation would differ from issue to issue and situation to situation.



Data Tabulation, Presentation of Information, Analysis and Action Plan



Classification of the survey schedules village-wise: The information was to be made available to the researchers at the village-level and hence all the survey schedules were categorised according to the respective villages

Coding the survey schedules: The schedules were coded with an eight-digit number for identification, indicative of the District, Panchayat, Village and the Household.

Data coding: All the information in the schedule was manually coded on the survey schedule based on a code book prepared by CWC's research team. This procedure was required to enable data entry directly into the computer.

Classification and Coding of Survey Schedules

The members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats wanted the information from the survey compiled first for the village level, which is the level at which they want to intervene immediately. Therefore all the survey schedules were categorised village-wise.

The next step was to code the survey schedule according to the respective villages. An eight-digit number was designed, the first digit indicating the district, the second representing the Panchayat, the next two standing for the village and the last four indicating the household. For example, the ID number 11010221 is 1 = Bellary district, 1 = Holagundi Panchayat, 01 = Holagundi Village and 0221 = house number of Devaramane Kotrappa.

Data entry: It was felt that data entry was essential to protect the data from being lost and to have systematic computerised database. The magnitude of the data collected could be handled only by a computer. So data was entered onto excel spreadsheets by professionals hired by CWC.

Data Tabulation: Based on the type of information, a statistical programme was designed and the required information was tabulated village-wise, using a computer

Analysis and correlation of the information: The researchers analysed and correlated the information considering local problems and the specific context to arrive at appropriate conclusions.

Sharing the information with the community: The information that they arrived at after their analysis and correlation was shared and discussed among them and shared with the community.

Preparation of action plans: The information generated from the survey is used by Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayats and Gram Panchayats to prepare action plans to initiate positive changes in the village through the Panchayat Task Force.

Data Coding and Entry

A data code book was prepared listing all the information provided in the survey schedule. The data in the survey schedule was manually coded based on the code book. This was done on the survey questionnaires to facilitate the easy entry of data into the computer.

Computerised data entry of the entire volume of information gathered by the researchers was done by professionals hired by CWC. This was done to protect the data from being destroyed, to create a systematic database of the villages and to facilitate easy and fast tabulation of data as well as for later reference. Excel spreadsheets were used for this purpose. As mentioned earlier, this whole process took a much longer time than anticipated, given the problems CWC had in finding suitable social statisticians with adequate computer experience.

Tabulation

The data was tabulated on the basis of the information required by the researchers. In a series of discussions, the members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats stated the type of information they wanted from the survey and how it should be

presented. Using excel spreadsheets, professionals tabulated and correlated the data. All these activities were coordinated and guided by the adult facilitators in CWC.

Analysis and Correlation of Information

The members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats examined, discussed and analysed the information they collected. They also drew appropriate conclusions from the information generated. Their analysis and interpretations were based on the application of the information within the framework of their local situations and problems. This is an ongoing process and CWC facilitates the process of discussion, analysis and drawing appropriate conclusions by children.

Sharing the Information with the Stakeholders

The Bhima Sangha and Makkala Panchayats share the findings of their study with all members of their community as well as officials at various levels. These findings are presented at the Task Force meetings, to representatives and officials of the Gram and Taluq Panchayats, school teachers, officials of various departments as well as people of the community and other stakeholders.

Preparing Action Plans

Based on their findings and in consultation with the Panchayat level Task Force, the Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats prepare action plans to initiate appropriate changes in the village. The researchers had identified a series of issues/problems requiring action. They have dealt with some of them immediately after their identification; however others have been classified as problems to be considered over the long-term. Each of these long-term problems are prioritised and dealt with through the concerned office or the department. The action plan is presented, discussed and implemented through the Panchayat Task Force.

Documentation of the Process



Methods of Documentation

The documentation of the entire process of the survey was done in a very systematic manner.

Field Notes: The researchers as well as the adult facilitators maintained field notes on a regular basis, which formed one of the sources for the document.

Documentation workshops: A series of 3 workshops were conducted for representative researchers and the adult facilitators to document the experiences, strategies, problems and process of the survey. Techniques such as role-plays, discussions, pictorial presentations, symbols and analogies were used.

Researchers documenting the process: At the process documentation workshop, the researchers themselves compiled their process document of the survey called *Our Survey Story*. Interviews and discussions were held with all the partners involved in the research process.

Field-based interviews and discussions: A series of field-based person-to-person interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in all the Panchayats. Interviews and discussions were held with all the partners involved in the research process.

The Documentation Workshops

A series of three workshops were conducted for the researchers and the facilitating adults to document the process of the study. The first, held in Bangalore in April 1999, was facilitated by Julian Kramer of Save the Children - Norway and twelve researchers from different areas and adult facilitators took part in it. The second and the third workshops were held in May 1999 in Bellary (Holagundi) and Kundapur. Approximately 30-35 representative researchers took part in each of these workshops. Three child participants and a few adult facilitators from the first workshop facilitated the second and third workshops.

The workshops were organised with the objective of gaining an insight into the researchers' individual as well as collective experience of the research, evaluate the entire process and document the same. It was also to highlight the importance of the process of any such initiative or project. It was during these workshops that the children as well as the adult participants were able to reflect upon their individual and collective experiences and realised the richness of their experiences. The workshops enabled all the participants to reflect on every phase of the research, critically analysing its strengths and weaknesses, recommending suggestions for the future.

Need to Document the Experience

The young researchers emphasised the importance of systematically documenting their experience as that would prove to other individuals, adults and children within their community and outside, and to organisations, both non-governmental and governmental world-wide, that working children were capable of conducting a survey on their own. Simultaneously, the difficulties they faced could be avoided if they shared their experiences with other groups of children. Also, once they had documented the experiences, the document could become useful resource reference material for other groups of children and adults to conduct participatory research.

Researchers Documenting the Process: *Our Survey Story*

A significant outcome of the process documentation workshops was *Our Survey Story*, which the representative researchers prepared. It was a difficult process for them to document the various experiences, culling out commonalities, yet ensuring that individual nuances were not lost. Facilitated by an adult, they prepared a framework, on the basis of which *Our Survey Story* was written. *Our Survey Story*, written by 12 research representatives, is a document of their experiences of the survey, successes and failures, problems encountered and solutions found, strategies used to elicit information and to counter critics and their reflections and analysis of the process.

Part III

Conclusion

What the Researchers gained from the Research Process?

In less than a year, working children had successfully completed the challenging and enormous task of studying their entire Panchayat. They had undergone training, completed the entire data collection, decided how to present the collected information to the community and other stakeholders, documented the entire process and made interim intervention on issues requiring urgent action. Each process had been important and unique, offering different learning experiences to the researchers.

Acquired Research Skills

At the end of the study, the researchers gained the skills and knowledge needed to conduct a research and felt confident of being able to conduct one on their own in the future. They realised that they had made mistakes during the process but had learned from them. They also pointed out that if they had to replicate the research process in the future, they would not repeat those mistakes. Elaborating on these, they noted, "We have learned that the interview schedules should contain questions and illustrations appropriate to each Panchayat, and that training should be done by child trainers who have prior experience in conducting research to ensure greater participation of children."

Their enthusiasm to immediately put into practice what they had learned became apparent. They wanted to share their knowledge and information with children of other areas and felt that they could help them conduct such research in their communities. It is significant to note that these young researchers wanted the benefits of what they had learnt to be passed on to other children immediately.

Identification of Problems and Issues in the Village and Panchayat

Shashikala, a young researcher from Alur Panchayat observed that, "From the survey we have understood the situation of our villages and the problems faced by our people. We collected information on population, basic amenities, number of children who have dropped out, number of handicapped persons, etc." The researchers stated that they had become clear about the social and economic conditions prevailing in their villages and had become aware of problems they had no knowledge of prior to the survey. The research process had enabled them to gain a deeper insight into the real issues of their communities.

Besides this, due to interaction with researchers from other Panchayats, they had also become aware of the issues of those areas. They were able to see and understand the differences that existed in the eight Toofan Panchayats.

Courage and Confidence

For the researchers, the learning had not been limited only to acquiring research skills and understanding the problems of the village but had gone deeper, giving them confidence and courage to talk to and negotiate with different people.



“Irrespective of how important people are, we have got the confidence to talk to them. Before the survey, I had not spoken to the Panchayat President. After the survey, I have the courage and I know how to talk to him.”

– A Researcher, Belve Panchayat

The research process was a catalyst in raising the researchers’ self-esteem, empowering them to interact confidently with powerful members of their communities. Their self-confidence was discernible in the fact that some of the researchers from Alur (who were not active members of Bhima Sangha or Makkala Panchayats) interacted with State Government representatives during the research process to help eligible women get widow pension in Alur.

Gained Respect and Acceptance from the Community

An extremely valuable and meaningful consequence of the research process was the respect and acceptance they gained from the community. With a deep sense of pride, the researchers expressed that the research process had enhanced their standing in their communities, wherein people now recognised them, would talk to them, and even approach them with their problems. The researchers were pleased that different members of the community, elders, teachers, Panchayat Council Members and other children had begun to respect them. Even those who had previously looked down upon them had changed their attitude towards the children. This is extremely significant since many of the researchers belonged to the most marginalised groups in the community.



“We have gained a lot of respect from the community after conducting the survey. Earlier they would ignore us because we are children of poor families. Now they call us and say, ‘Come let us talk and discuss our problems.’”

– Poornima, Alur village

Built Relationships with Individuals and Groups

An important benefit from the research experience was that the researchers learned that it was possible to break barriers and build relations with people who had not been favourable to them in the past. The researchers pointed out that the research had enabled them to make friends with such people. In addition, they felt that the survey process had helped them create and strengthen relationships with various associations, clubs and organisations in their Panchayats. This was particularly advantageous, they noted, as it would help them in future collaborative initiatives.



“Before this experience I thought that only adults could conduct a survey. I am glad that working children also got the opportunity to do this.”

– Sidhalingamma, Holagundi Panchayat

A Sense of Pride

Participating in the different processes of the survey made the researchers feel a sense of pride. The fact that they had successfully completed an activity normally undertaken only by adults (and in their perception, generally teachers) strengthened this feeling. They were particularly proud that they had been able to convince the community of the need for research, had successfully collected and analysed the data and prepared an action plan for their Panchayat. They had also felt a great deal of pride when people in the village were

watching them with awe and curiosity while they walked through the village conducting the survey. As Ganesha said, “I feel happy that the survey which is normally done by adults was done by us working children.”

Adults as Facilitators of the Research

The overall objective of the project was to enable the active participation and empowerment of the young researchers. The primary role of the adults was to facilitate the participation of children and make the research valid, reliable and accurate, and the process empowering.

The idea and concept of the research was born out of the combined needs of children and adults. The survey schedule was compiled by an adult consultant hired by CWC, taking into consideration all the suggestions given by children, with regard to specific information they wanted. The first phase of the training was conducted by adults in partnership with children. The adults facilitated the administration of the survey schedule and assisted the children whenever they encountered a problem they could not handle. The adult group played a vital role in checking and verifying the data collected by the researchers. The workshop dealing with data coding, tabulation, correlation and other analytical research techniques as well as important research tools including the case study method and focus group discussions was conducted in three regions separately. While the first was conducted entirely by adults, the following two workshops on same issues were conducted jointly by child resource persons and adults. The coding, entry and statistical computation and tabulation of data was managed entirely by the adults, while the analysis and presentations of the results, and the preparation of actions plans were managed entirely by children. The adults only facilitated the process. Adult assistance was also amply used by the researchers in documenting the research process.

Throughout the study, the adults' role was one of facilitating and strengthening the role played by the young researchers. Their focus was to enable the effective participation of children in the research process. This was enabled through frequent consultation with children, equipping them with the necessary research skills and monitoring of the entire research process. The adults' active intervention was limited to only such situations when absolutely essential or when requested by the researchers themselves.

The group of adults involved in the research project played different roles at various levels, depending upon the researchers' needs. The field activists of CWC accompanied the researchers in the field, monitoring and supporting the process on a day-to-day basis. The research team, consisting of some of the research and documentation personnel and a consultant, made frequent field visits, intervening only when necessary, assessing and guiding the process. Support of adult professionals hired by CWC was used in data coding, computer entry and tabulation of data.

For CWC, as an organisation, this was a tremendous learning process - to facilitate the use of research techniques, skills and methods by children that they interact with, and enable them to find solutions to their own problems. A team of adults was equipped to help the researchers access, analyse and use information, while dealing with different developmental issues in their villages and Panchayats. This was an extremely challenging process for the adults, as they had to ensure effective participation of children and enable their empowerment.



“When we started the survey we were confident that children were capable of doing the survey, but we were not very sure how to facilitate this process with children; but now we know how to enable children to do a study.”

– Sharada Devi, CWC's Panchayat-level Co-ordinator

The adult activists recognised that it was a two way learning process and that they had a lot to learn from the young researchers they had been facilitating. As Bharathi, field activist in Bairumbe Panchayat pointed out, “Children have excellent skills in asking questions, interacting with the people and developing suitable strategies. We need to learn from them. They have done the survey very well.”



“Children are capable of doing much more than we imagined. We have to constantly redefine our role vis-à-vis our children in order to maintain the right balance of interdependence.”

- An adult during the Process Documentation Workshop, April, 1999

For the research team, the research process was an eye-opener. They realised that their role was to design research activities with children, support them to carry out the research and assist them in the process of accessing, analysing and applying the information for improving their living situations. This process enabled the adults and children to develop a better partnership, working more closely and interdependently. All the adults involved in this process had gained new insights and a better

perspective on working with children, as well as on the relevance, significance and methods of true participatory research with children.

Lesson learnt by the Facilitating Adults

During the process documentation workshop, Julian Kramer, the facilitator introduced the analogy of the survey tree comparing the research project to a tree. He said that the objectives of the project were the roots of the survey tree, the data collection and the strategies they used were the trunk and branches and the lessons learnt from the project were the fruits of the tree.



“This survey process has been unique in the world, where children have taken the responsibility and proved that they have the capacity to do it. I have gained a lot from this survey. I feel there is life in this research and this is the first time I have seen this in my 20 years of work.”

– R Vidyasagar, Research Consultant

This research project was a tremendous learning process for the organisation, especially in facilitating participatory research by children. Although this research had been very participatory, the adults realised that there had been certain oversights. On completion of the research, the researchers expressed that some of the problems they had faced could have been avoided if they had been more involved during the design stage of the research, especially in designing the survey schedule. They pointed out that they would have included some of the region-specific aspects that had been left out from the interview schedule. Even during the pre-

test, the researchers had recommended certain changes in the content of the survey schedule. Unfortunately, due to practical difficulties, only a few of them could be incorporated.

During the first phase of the training, children and adults were not fully equipped with the necessary skills to train other children in conducting the survey in their own communities. Consequently, there were initial hiccups in conducting the survey efficiently. Initially data collection was inaccurate, the contents of the interview schedule were not properly understood, the objective of the study was not very clear and the researchers were not sufficiently equipped with the skills to conduct the study. A cross check revealed that some data collected in the first 500 households was inaccurate and had to be re-surveyed. Consequently, a second phase of training, after consulting children was conducted by adult resource persons.

Yet another problem was the timing of the survey as it was harvest season in some Panchayats. Therefore, conducting the survey during this time was not the best choice as children who were participating in the research and the members of the household being surveyed were extremely busy with harvesting activities. In the midst of their hectic work in the fields they had to find time for the survey. In addition, some children could not participate in the research, as they were busy with their exams.

A major flaw in the whole project was that there was the undue delay in providing the analysed information from the study to the researchers and their community. This was caused mainly due to inability to find appropriate statisticians, well-trained in social research methods to handle data entry and analysis systematically, without losing the accuracy and validity of the data. There were many hiccups during the data coding and data entry stage. The coding and entry of data had to be re-checked and in some cases, it had to be redone due to errors. Lacking appropriate software for data analysis, a lot of time was wasted designing a statistical programme. In addition, the magnitude of the data made the whole process more time-consuming.

"What we have gained from our Research"- child researchers



Advantages of Children doing their own Research

This experimental study has emphatically proved that children can be excellent researchers, if well facilitated and monitored. The children left no stone unturned to ensure that they collected correct and complete information. They also made sure that they visited every household, in certain cases more than once, to ensure that they had gathered accurate information. Where they suspected invalid or wrong information, they crosschecked by consulting various alternative sources and validated the data. Moreover, children did not take recourse to unfair means of filling forms on their own or with the help of somebody else, without visiting the household.

The greatest advantage of children doing their own research is that they had ownership over the information they collected. The children's research was action oriented; they were committed to using the information derived from their study to initiate positive changes in their villages. This helped them exercise control over the information they collected, given their vested interest to use the same for the development of their community.

The entire research was an empowering process for all the children who participated in the study. Their capacity to effectively participate increased manifold as testified by the researchers themselves. It is evident that children equipped with research and problem-solving skills can make decisions, design and plan action for the development of themselves and their communities.

In Conclusion

This entire research project contributes significantly to the debate on how children can be involved in research. Most of the work in the area of children and research has focused essentially on the role of the adult researcher. For instance, the emphasis in what has been labelled 'participatory research with children' in most cases has typically been on how the adult researchers should relate to children as informants. Involving children in actual research from the start to the finish, as undertaken in this study, is a relatively new and less explored area. The children, in the current research study were not only informants and data collectors but also partners in defining the issues to be analysed and acted upon.

This study has raised several significant issues, adding new dimensions to the debate on child participation. Though it was a formidable task, the entire process has been a powerful experiment in the field of participatory research with children, showing that they are capable of not only collecting and understanding information but also of converting this information into action.

The research process posed a challenge to conventional models of research. It strongly brought out the stark differences between research conducted by 'outsiders' for 'objective' reasons in comparison to one done by a group of 'affected' people interested in collecting information to understand their own realities and take action to change these. Contrary to any academic or impersonal research, the data had meaning and value, reflecting the researchers' realities and was of immediate use to them. Thus the children became 'action researchers' during the process, addressing issues and solving problems with an ease that implied that this was the 'normal' course of research.

Moreover, collecting information about their realities gave children from marginalised communities a little more control over their lives. They had not only 'felt' and experienced problems that were part of this reality but could now also understand them from a larger perspective, which would help them act towards alleviating them. Having gained a clearer understanding of the problems in their village, the researchers felt confident about addressing the issues, reflecting that their participation had increased. This experience reinforced the fact that information is a very powerful tool in negotiation and action.

Research is considered a domain of learned and academic adults. However, the successful research conducted by children, by working children in particular, exploring the problems faced by themselves and their communities goes a long way in demystifying this myth. This project proved beyond any doubt that children could conduct research activities successfully and apply the information generated for initiating appropriate intervention.

Postscript

It has been 4 years since the children of Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats conducted their first survey. In this time they have made great progress in both the generation and use of information. They have also used their skills in a variety of situations, some extremely innovative.

Since the first survey they have updated their information with regularity and now they have this information at their fingertips. They have divided the constituency in such a way that each child is responsible for a small group of households. They have found ways of tabulating the information at the ward level and then collating this at the level of the Panchayat. At any given moment they know where each child is, what s/he is doing and the action taken if any. This has proved to be an invaluable tracking system and we have benefited from this as well. This has enabled us to monitor our progress, evaluate our interventions and plan strategically.

This information has proved very useful for local government planning and programming. The Makkala Panchayats and Gram Panchayats have used it to argue for more schools, day care centres and high schools. For drinking water and footbridges.

However, what is most amazing is that the children have put their research skills to very different uses. They have used it to argue for a ban on liquor shops and prevent child marriages. Their interest in research methodology has increased in proportion to the use they have been able to put it to and they have upgraded their skills and capacity in research and documentation, some examples of their efforts are the environmental scan they did for UVIC¹, the 'children with disability study' and 'Work we can and cannot do', children's definition of child work and child labour.

Now children routinely collect relevant information before participating in any meeting or programme where they are able to raise issues of their concern and negotiate for their redressal. They quote statistics to substantiate the points they make at meetings of the Task Force, Gram Panchayat, Makkala Sahaya Vani² and other official fora.

This experience has been a real life demonstration that 'information is' most certainly 'power' and when children generate and own the information, it is a powerful tool to exercise self-determination, make informed decisions and transform their lives. We feel that as a result of this intervention we have gained valuable experience and developed useful methodology and skills that need to be shared with others; and the Concerned for Working Children now offer a training programme for activists and children titled 'Children and Their Own Research'.

Nandana Reddy
Director Development
2002

¹ University of Victoria, Canada

² MSV is a help line for children in crisis and difficult circumstances. This intervention is facilitated by various participants including the police, NGOs, community, local government, Makkala Mitra. CWC is a founder member of MSV Bangalore and has facilitated the starting of such intervention in Udupi, Kundapur and other towns.