

## **EVALUATION STUDY OF CENTRALLY SPONSORED SCHEME FOR REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOUR**

### **1. The Study**

The problem of Bonded Labour was one of the deep-rooted problems prevailing in larger parts of our country particularly in the rural areas. A serious view on this issue was taken in the post independence era by making special provisions under Article 23 of the Constitution to prohibit trafficking in human beings `Begar' and other forms of forced labour. The Government of India passed the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act in 1976. In the light of the Act, the steps were initiated for identification, release and rehabilitation of bonded labour in different States. A Centrally Sponsored Scheme for rehabilitation of the freed bonded labourers was also initiated in 1978-79. Under this scheme, the Central Government provided matching grant assistance to the extent of 50% of the total cost, which was fixed at Rs. 4000 per bonded labourer.

The rehabilitation of the bonded labour was also included as one of the items in the 20 Point Programme of the Prime Minister, which inter-alia aimed at the upliftment and rehabilitation of bonded labour and the measures to ensure that there could be no relapse into bondage in due course.

At the instance of the Ministry of Labour, the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) conducted an evaluation study of the scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour during February, 1979.

### **2. Objectives of the Study**

The study mainly aimed at finding out the extent to which the aims of the scheme to identify, free and rehabilitate the bonded labour were fulfilled with particular reference to the following components:

- i) the administrative arrangements made at various levels for the implementation of the scheme to identify, release and rehabilitate the freed bonded labour,
- ii) the detailed contents of the various schemes and the extent to which they have been implemented,
- iii) the impact of the various schemes towards the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers in terms of employment and income generated to the released persons,

- iv) the administrative support being given and the follow up methods adopted to prevent the lapsing back of the bonded labourers into bondage,
- v) to study the impact of the programme in bringing about any social change in the life and living conditions the beneficiaries and the village community, and
- vi) the extent of integration of the released labour in the mainstream of the village community.

### **3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection.**

The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of rehabilitation of bonded labour was being implemented in 18 districts of 8 States (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh). The study was conducted in all these states/districts. From each district, 2 blocks having maximum number of bonded labourers were selected. In case, the number of bonded labourers fell short of the required number of beneficiaries, more blocks were selected to complete the required number of beneficiaries. Thus 38 blocks, 112 villages and 782 beneficiaries were selected for the sample.

### **4. Reference Period**

The data was collected for the period 1980-81 to 1981-82.

### **5. Main Findings**

1. The officials of the Revenue Department, who were equipped with judicial and administrative powers, were more effective in identification and release of Bonded Labour.
2. Though the officers at the district Taluk/Sub-Division/Block level looked after the rehabilitation and programme of Bonded Labour, it was observed that the staff of the Labour Department in Bihar was not effective in dealing with this problem.
3. The Vigilance Committees played an important role in the implementation of the programme. However, in one district of Orissa, the non-official members did not take interest in the working of the Vigilance Committees.
4. The Statutory registers giving details of the bonded labour were not being maintained in some districts.
5. According to the study, the origin of Bonded Labour was traced mainly to the economic compulsions, coupled with social customs and traditions, customary

bondage and contractual bondage. Taking undue advantage of the economic hardships and social obligations of the poor peasants, the money lenders advanced small loans to them from time to time. As the labourers could never free themselves from the vicious circle of poverty, they had to perpetuate the bondage. About 98% of the beneficiaries were bonded due to indebtedness and 2% were bonded due to customary or social obligation. While about 40% of the beneficiaries reported to have signed the agreement for entering into bondage, remaining 60% were bonded on verbal agreement.

6. It was observed that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together formed 83.2% of the total selected beneficiaries. Scheduled Castes were more prominent in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and U.P. A higher number of Scheduled tribe bonded labour was found in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.
7. About 43% of the selected beneficiaries were bonded when they were less than 15 years of age and about 8% were bonded when they were less than 10 years of age. The masters preferred young persons as bonded labour as they could work harder and longer.
8. About 72% of the selected beneficiaries had remained in bondage for 5 years and above, and about 25% of them remained in bondage for 20 years and above. The states where bonded labour was prevalent for more number of years were found to be Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
9. A number of functionaries had confusion in mind about the proper definition of bonded labour as distinguished from attached labour, contract labour, migrant labour, etc.
10. In all the States, it was observed that no preparatory work was done before launching the process of identification of Bonded Labour. Only in case of Karnataka, the Bonded Labour Abolition Act, 1976 was given due publicity.
11. Involvement of voluntary agencies in identification of bonded labour was not observed except in Andhra Pradesh. There was not much time lag in identification of majority of the selected beneficiaries except in case of Bhagalpur and Santhal Praganas Districts of Bihar.
12. Though there was not much difficulty in getting the bonded labourers released from the landlords in majority of the State covered, in case of Orissa prosecution was recorded as inevitable in each and every case. The freed bonded labourers had lack of protection of State officials in case of Bihar.

13. Out of 8 States evaluated, only the states of Bihar and Orissa reported some problems created by the landlords. In these two States the Bonded labourer were either forced to leave the States or were forcibly prevented from appearing in the Court.
14. Of the 782 beneficiaries, 739 were really released, while 1% of them were partially released and about 5% of them reported that they were not at all released. The cases of the bonded labourer not released till time of Evaluation study were reported from Bihar only. This reflected lack of administrative will and non concern to the important item of 20 Point Programme.
15. Majority of respondents reported that their condition improved after release.
16. At the time of formulation of programme neither any norm as such was prescribed by Government India nor by the State Governments for allotment of various items of rehabilitation, nor any proper planning was made in prescribing economic size of units, which could provide suitable income to the beneficiaries.
17. In 8 out of 18 districts covered under study, some sort of selection was made on the basis of aptitude and experience of the beneficiaries while giving rehabilitation scheme to them. In the remaining 10 districts, it was left to the implementing agency.
18. The main source of financial assistance for the rehabilitation programme was the 100% rehabilitation grant from Central and State Government on 50:50 basis. In a few cases, some nationalised banks also provided assistance to the beneficiaries for purchase of bullocks, buffalos and iron ploughs. As the Collector at the district level and BDO/Tehsildar at the block level were appointed for coordination, not much difficulty was faced in coordinating the programmes.
19. Except for Kolar district of Karnataka, in all the 17 districts covered, there was no arrangements for marketing of milk and other products which reflected the lack of planning and foresight.
20. The progress of rehabilitation of released bonded labourer was reported to be very slow. Only about 40% bonded labourers were covered under various schemes in all the 18 districts. The official at various levels did not accord priority to this issue. There were also several avoidable administrative problems like lapsing of funds, delays in the allotment of funds, frequent references between the State Governments and the Ministry of Labour for clarification etc.
21. In all districts except one, (Kolar district of Karnataka) no efforts were reported to have been made to integrate rehabilitation of bonded labour schemes with

other on going beneficiary oriented programmes like food for work IRDP, PWD, etc.

22. Only 48% of the beneficiaries reported to have been provided some benefit of subsistence allowance.
23. 93% of the beneficiaries have reported time lag between the release and rehabilitation. Out of those 52.55% reported that their income during the intervening period was not sufficient to support their families. About 10% of the beneficiaries covered reported to be those starving and struggling hard for existence during this period. Thus, such beneficiaries were exposed to the danger of relapse into bandage.
24. Regarding rehabilitation, 42% beneficiaries reported that the schemes were thrust upon them while 58% reported that they had the choice of the scheme.
25. While 33.5% of the beneficiaries reported that the rehabilitation benefits were partially adequate, about 40% reported that the benefits were not adequate.
26. Majority of the beneficiaries said that the disbursement of assistance to them was irregular and procedure involved was cumbersome and time consuming. Some of the beneficiaries reported that the assistance was not sufficient and suggested for increasing the quantum of assistance.
27. In case of land allotted to rehabilitate the bonded labourers, it was observed that in majority of cases it was reported to be not of good quality and was located generally far away from the houses of the labourers. Irrigation facilities were also by and large not made available to the beneficiaries due to which they could not utilise allotted land. Due to modest temperature, and lack of good feeding arrangements and veterinary facilities, the beneficiaries could not extract appropriate benefits from improved variety of milch animal provided to them.
28. The amount of Rs. 4000/- per bonded labour fixed by Government of India was not found enough for proper rehabilitation. The study of models in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka indicated that an amount between Rs.10,000 to 15,000 should have been provided for proper rehabilitation of those bonded labourers on the long term basis.
29. Only about 1/4th of the beneficiaries became members of various cooperative societies like agricultural cooperatives, multi purpose cooperatives, milk cooperatives and industrial cooperatives, but none of them became member of marketing cooperatives, poultry cooperatives and consumer cooperatives.

Surprisingly, no social worker or beneficiary agency was instrumental in making the beneficiaries the members or involving them in the cooperative efforts.

30. About 66% of the members of the various Cooperative Societies reported certain difficulties like non-availability of loan, cumbersome procedure, higher rates of interest, low price being received for their produce and ineffective functioning of the societies. By and large the cooperative credit societies have not been able to do much in assisting proper rehabilitation of the erstwhile bonded labourers.
31. 37% of the beneficiaries reported full satisfaction, 30% reported partial satisfaction and 33% reported full dissatisfaction with the rehabilitation programme. About 63% of the beneficiaries were not satisfied with their rehabilitation assistance, dissatisfaction was overtly articulate in the districts of Raigarh (M.P.), Ganjam, Phulbani and Kalahandi (Orissa), Periyar (Tamil Nadu), Kota (Rajasthan), Rangareddy (Andhra Pradesh), Nalanda (Bihar).
32. Some of the labourers though reported to have been released and rehabilitated were still working with the old masters. The NSS surveys also brought out that there were much more bonded labour than what the 8 States have identified and rehabilitated.
33. Though the 92% of the selected beneficiaries reported that they were leading an honourable life after release and rehabilitation, 8% of the beneficiaries particularly from the States of Bihar, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh reported to have insufficient earning and dependence on their ex- master for petty things.
34. The beneficiaries from all the districts covered under the study except Nalanda (Bihar) reported that they were able to spent money on several new items such as education of children, social functions, visits to religious places and relatives, entertainment, medical care, etc.
35. While 46% of the beneficiaries reported that their earning were sufficient to meet their day today requirements of their family, 54% reported that due to insufficient income they supplemented it through borrowing from landlord or money lenders or from friends and relatives. Among the beneficiaries in the districts of Bhagalpur, Monghyr and Nalanda of Bihar, Chitra Durg and Kolar of Karnataka, Korput of Orissa, the percentage of beneficiaries resorting to begging was quite high.
36. About 30% selected beneficiaries were indebted prior to rehabilitation. After rehabilitation only 17% had loan outstanding with them. After rehabilitation, the

percentage of beneficiaries depending upon borrowing from moneylenders got reduced by 10%

37. About 29% of the beneficiaries reported the social prejudice due to lower economic status, untouchability and being ex- Bonded Labour. While from 3 districts Raigarh, Phulbani and kalahandi no beneficiary reported any prejudice. 64% of the beneficiaries reported that they were handicapped and looked down upon by the society because of their belonging to Scheduled castes.
38. It was observed that there was no specific staff or specific arrangement for follow up action with reference to :
  - a) watching the progress of rehabilitation of programme for ex-bonded labour, and
  - b) to protect them from relapsing into bondage.

## **6. Major Suggestions**

1. For effective implementation of the programme, the identification and release of Bonded Labour should be dealt with by Revenue Department whereas rehabilitation aspect under various schemes should be under the Social Welfare Department, as far as possible.
2. The Vigilance Committee should be constituted in all districts and Divisions wherever they have not been constituted so far. Only active and committed members should be nominated in this Committee. The statutory registers giving details of the bonded labourers should be kept up-to-date and should be maintained systematically.
3. The concerned State Governments should integrate the rehabilitation programme with the special component plan and tribal sub--plan so that the scope of rehabilitation assistance could be enlarged.
4. There is a need for further research to determine the causes for varying duration of bondage of the labour.
5. The State Directorates of social welfare, tribal development and researchers should undertake further indepth studies for reorienting the better off sections of the rural areas for creating conducive atmosphere for rapid socio-economic change and upliftment of the rural poor.

6. State Governments may hold training workshops to explain the various sections of the bonded labour Act including correct definition so that the implementing officials could clearly understand proper applications of the definition.
7. Fresh efforts should be made to identify the remaining bonded labourers by adopting the measures such as household surveys, detail survey of the bonded labour by NSSO in collaboration with State Govt. and the house listing for the identification of bonded labour both in rural and urban areas through CSO.
8. The State Governments should encourage reputed organisations and Social Welfare Organisations and associations to undertake work of identification and rehabilitation of bonded labour. The State Governments should also involve an Organisation of bonded labour themselves. Efforts should also be made to associate university students like NSS, young people from weaker sections like Dalit panthers, etc. for utilising their energies for social good.
9. The Voluntary Social Development organisations, Directorates of social welfare/tribal development, researchers, Sociologist, Anthropologist should undertake indepth studies and make suggestions for reorienting better off sections of the rural areas for upliftment of the rural poor.
10. Only the committed officials should be entrusted the responsibility to emancipate the bonded labour from the clutches of their masters.
11. In the light of the suggestions of the implementing agencies, it would be appropriate to integrate the rehabilitation programme with other beneficiary oriented programmes. Efforts should also be made to provide adequate staff and necessary technical know how to the beneficiaries.
12. The concerned state authorities should carry out the studies on economic benefits of the size of land allotted to the ex-bonded labourers so that more land could be allotted if it is necessary.
13. Ministry of labour may advise the State Governments to provide rehabilitation on group basis. The Ministry may also examine increasing the amount of rehabilitation assistance from Rs.4000/- to Rs.10,000/- or Rs.15000/- depending upon the nature of rehabilitation.
14. The concerned State Government should take prompt follow up action to see that borrowing by the released bonded labourers do not relapse into bondage. Efforts should also be made to see that sufficient income is generated to the beneficiaries, who were going without meals and resorting to begging.

15. Efforts should be made to completely eliminate the dependence of ex- bonded labourers on the landlords and money lenders in the interest of abolition of bonded labour system.
16. The civil right may be enforced strictly and reputed voluntary organisations may be encouraged for undertaking social movement, social reforms, etc. to emancipate the weaker sections from the yoke of bonded labour.
17. In the light of the suggestions given by the beneficiaries, it is suggested that social education programme should be speeded up, voluntary organisations should be encouraged to deal with social reforms by involving religious heads/groups. Persons who resort to discrimination should be punished.
18. The State Government and Social Welfare Organisation in different States should seriously consider the suggestions for educating people to overcome the age old handicap and prejudices for bringing rapid social change in the rural areas.
19. The Government of Bihar, Karnataka and Rajasthan need to undertake urgent steps to give protection to the harassed bonded labourers.
20. Specific arrangements should be made by the respective State Government and Ministry of Labour for introducing machinery for follow up action and provide necessary protection to emancipate bonded labourers from relaxing into bondage so that the basic purpose of Centrally sponsored scheme for rehabilitation of bonded labour could be fully served.