Working Children’s Organisations: A Case Profile of Four Outfits

International policy debates on child labour issues have recently witnessed the emergence of a new set of actors – working children’s organisations from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Many of these organisations have been in existence for over 20 years, but have become the centre of attention after the renewed focus – international and institutional – on the issues surrounding child labour in the last decade. The renewed focus has mainly stemmed from the CRC’s articles conferring children and young people the right to participate in decisions about issues that affect them and the right to organise themselves. These rights conferred on the children have often been interpreted to mean the involvement of organisations of working children in international debates, conferences and discussions on child labour issues in their own countries and internationally. The involvement of working children organisations, however, has been extremely controversial. It is often charged that the children concerned are not really representative of the child workers, particularly those involved in the most hazardous and exploitative forms of work; or that adults manipulate them.

The International Labour Organisation, however, considered the participation of these organisations during the drafting of the Convention on the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour as a crucial indicator of the ‘vigorous and historical attempt by organised working children and youth’ to take part in the international decision-making process.1 Historically the movement of working children is at least a century old if one chronologically looks at the attempts of the working children to organise themselves. The numerous attempts of the working children to organise themselves into movements at different locations and contexts in the world involve tens of thousands of child workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These movements have a long collective history of fighting exploitation and abuse of working children and of protecting their members against abuse. A number of them are
playing an important role in their own countries in the development of children’s rights and some are even contributing to the formulation of local and national policy.²

From the viewpoint of involvement in formal policy formulation at the institutional level, the children representatives of the working children organisations first made ‘their voice heard’ at the international debate about the proposed ILO convention banning worst forms of child labour at the Amsterdam Conference on Child Labour in 1997. Using ingenious and ‘non-bureaucratic’ methods, the children delegates managed to put across their perspective on the issues discussed through songs, short dramas and sketches.

They spoke to the issues with great confidence and adroitness, holding their own with government labour ministers, trade union leaders and captains of industry. It was hard to believe that they came from remote villages and city slums.¹

The most compelling reason for the adult delegates to take these children seriously came when the little ones presented a list of 10 demands worked out by their organisations and movements in 33 countries. The demands were earlier worked out and adopted by the organisations at the First International Meeting of Working Children held in Kundapur in Karnataka, India in 1996. (Kundapur is a small town in the southern coast of Karnataka and is one of areas where Bhima Sangha – my case study – a working children’s union is active. Twenty nine working child delegates from thirty two countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa met at the first International Meeting of Working Children held in India from November 27-December 9, 1996. Based on the Kundapur declaration one of the first demands of the young workers was ‘recognition of our problems, initiatives, proposals and our process of organisation’. The other demands focussed on the economic aspect of their working with the young delegates argued the need to work so that they could contribute to and sustain their families. Logically extending their argument, the young delegates asked the ILO to force member-governments to give them the right to work and divert their attention, resources and efforts at tackling the root cause of child labour – poverty – and not adopt an ‘abolition approach’ to child labour. They wanted the international institutions and member-governments to regulate rather than ban children’s work, giving them access to dignified employment, attuned not to their age but their
personal development, properly remunerated and with working hours that leave ample room for education and leisure needs.

Government should also make sure working children get quality schooling and occupational training adapted to their lives as workers. None of the young delegates regarded work as a substitute for school, but as the means by which children, given the impoverishment of their families might get an education and be contributors rather than dependants. Once the economic compulsions of child work were removed, children ought to have the choice of whether to work or not. Finally the movements wanted to be consulted in all decisions concerning working children at local, national and international levels.⁴

While the children supported the new ILO convention targeting the most exploitative forms of child labour – use of children in slavery, prostitution, drug trafficking – they wanted the entire issue of child labour to be seen and tackled within the context of its structural linkages – the development models followed by the member-states and the consequent emergence of poverty. They also wanted the children to be affected by the convention to be consulted at each stage arguing that the effectiveness of the consultation process would increase dramatically if organised groups and movements were involved.

The demands of the children, especially of beneficial work and an international assault on poverty, were in direct conflict with governments and trade unionism who wanted the retention of ILO minimum age convention 138, which seeks to remove children from workforce on the basis of their age. The emphasis on age as restrictive factor embedded on the approach dealing with child labour has to do with the conventional ideas of childhood, which were dealt with in the previous chapter.

While critics may variously question the relevance, the motives, the actors involved and the representative character of the working children movements, it cannot be denied that these movements today are leading exponents of participation and organisation of children. Here it must be stated that the term participation itself is furiously contested lending itself to a whole set of definitions. But most of the writers of various shades agree that the majority of the children’s movements came into being because of the lack of
concerted action by the State, or anyone else, to provide most basic protection or development opportunities to the children of poor neighbourhoods.⁵

What the movements have done is build on children’s ability to help protect themselves against the physical and psychological traumas that poverty and social exclusion exposes them to. They have gone further, enabling children in varying degrees to become protagonists for their right and for social change rather than victims of poverty.⁶

For example, the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls, which will be one of four organisations studied in this chapter, has played a major role in exposing the killing of children by death squads. Similarly Bhima Sangha, which is my case study and will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter, have taken effective action against employers who abuse and exploit child workers. The membership of a movement also provides elements of protection, access to information and opportunities for personal development, which are generally unavailable to unorganised child workers. For that matter even school children undergoing conventional education do not get an opportunity to be organised.

The intervention by young delegates at Amsterdam was first of its kind, though governments and institutions found it difficult to connect to their approach on the child labour debate. The head of the United Nations Children’s Fund, Carol Bellamy, said that it was something very new for policymakers to encounter children and young people demanding a say in their decision-making process.⁷ The general lack of understanding of the position adopted by the young delegates translated into a reduction in the representatives of working children’s organisations – from eight to three – in the next ILO consultative committee meeting at Oslo, Norway. Many adult delegates argued that the children were being ‘led’ by their organisations to speak within a particular approach, while other questioned the right of the teens to speak for the children. But Anthony Swift, who prepared a working paper based on the deliberations of the working children at the Amsterdam conference, disagrees

Anyone observing the intensive deliberations of the young delegated immediately before and during the Amsterdam conference could see that they were not manipulated. These were meetings at which they prepared their strategies, allocated tasks among themselves and planned their interventions in what was a highly unfamiliar and sophisticated
conference arena. Although most of the delegates had experienced great hardship, and some of them abuse, they appeared very balanced young people, affirming, if anything, the newly emerging insight that being active participants in society is – more than a right – greatly beneficial to children’s personal development. They conducted themselves in a dedicated and thoroughly democratic manner, reconciling differences with considerable skill, drawing on the adult facilitators present for additional information and practical support and occasionally checking their interventions when they threatened to interfere with their work. Every now and then, they would break the tension with a joke, or a game or a rousing song. Their concentrated energy often left the accompanying adults flagging.

The development of the participation and organisation of working children in the South began some 30 years ago within the context of governments pursuing national and international policies that resulted in the social abandonment of millions of children along with their families and whole communities. In many parts of the world the process was marked by large and rapid migrations of people from neglected rural areas to overcrowded, unserviced urban slums; the weakening and breaking up of communities; the undermining of families’ struggle to survive poverty; and the translation of a traditional role of children as contributors to the family labour force to a cash-economy. The process has also been marked by the flow of children to the streets. While some children are abused and exploited by their own families, the vast majority play an essential part in their families’ resistance to poverty – they work to help themselves and their families survive.

Most of the children’s movements grew from the localised actions of small groups of individuals who were appalled at the waste of human life and potential unfolding before their eyes. Despairing of the likelihood of the State acting in the best interest of all the people, they voluntarily took responsibility upon themselves.

Unconventional Salesian priests working closely with groups of young adults with a strong spiritual motivation started the first initiatives in Brazil – National Movement of Street Boys and Girls (MNMMR) – and Peru – Movement of Working Children and Adolescents from Christian Working Families (MANTHOC). These pioneers were
themselves from poor neighbourhoods and identified with a growing popular resistance to social exclusion and oppression being developed by organised labour, neighbourhood associations, women’s and indigenous peoples’ organisations and others. They were inspired by liberation theology, which identified Christianity with commitment to the liberation struggle of the poor, and they viewed human life as having an inherent value and consequently to ignore that value in others was to turn your back on your potential for good. The pioneers also had a utopian vision of society that was based on mutual concern, love, respect and development of the individual within the community, which they contrasted with ‘marketplace models’ based on personal gain. Like the Leftists, they wished to dismantle the hierarchical power relationships that informed the State, church and the society and consequently had to evolve a new approach to tackle the dominant power relationships. The need for an unconventional approach to tackle the power equations gave rise to the ‘child-centred’ approaches. Such approaches, according to both the organisations, primarily developed with the full participation of children through a process of observation, action and review.¹⁰

Though both the movements share similar characteristics, their frames of reference are patently different. MANTHOC is decidedly ‘more Christian’ deriving its methodology of ‘education through collective observation, action and review, directed at building the new society from the grassroots’ from the Young Christian Workers’ movement founded in Belgium in 1925. The methodology of the MNMMR, which started off as the Republic of Small Vendors, on the other hand is marked by the innovative use of participatory democracy. The two movements also differ in the structural relationships that have been established between the children and the adults. MANTHOC was conceived of as an independent movement of working children. The adults, who initiated it, planned to support the movement from the outside, but were included at the children’s insistence. The MNMMR was formed by adult educators as an organisation of both educators and children. But the adults have evolved a mechanism of children’s participation that has encouraged children to define their own form of organisation, expression and lines of action within the movement. But the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY), one of the outfits to be studied in this chapter, or the Bhima Sangha are
examples where adult supporters are located in a separate voluntary organisations, which foster and act as resource centres for the organisation of working children.

Differences in methodology, structure and the relationship between adults and children are often symptomatic of the differences in their approach to the basic issue of child labour. For some, the work of the children is of positive value and a right and consequently children are conceived as social protagonists. For others, work is a necessity. They want the economic compulsion for children to work to be removed, and until that is done the work to be regulated. For some others like the MNMMR, the prime requirement for children is access to undisrupted schooling and concomitantly an end to work below the age of 14. These differences have consequences – some tactical like the MNMMR participating in the Global March Against Child Labour and others more deep-rooted. In March 1998 delegates from the working children’s movements in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, but not Brazil, met in Dakar and formed the International Committee of Working Children’s Movements. In anticipation of the June 1998 ILO conference they also issued a statement containing a list of demands, including a request to participate officially in the ILO conference at which a draft of the new convention was presented. The bid failed because the movements did not meet conference requirements in terms of statutes. While the differences between the movements are intriguing, the reasons for them may range from different cultural, political and socio-economic frameworks to diverse ideological orientations.

Differences in methodology, however, do not mask the emergence of such organisations as reactions to the failure of existing state and voluntary sector responses to street and working children. In many countries, state policy towards such children has been oppressive, violent and corrupt – administered through courts and police. The mainstream approach has treated child labour as an ‘evil’ that needs to be abolished to protect the society, rather than the child. Many church institutions, especially in Latin America, were also disciplinarian and oppressive. Their initiatives, as of the organisations in the voluntary sector, at best rescued a few children and at worst created dependency in them.
alienated them from their families and communities and failed to equip them to survive as independent adults in the labour market.

But as movements and organisations of street and working children have spread and grown new social actors have got involved. These range from activists from other churches, other religions to people from trade unions, neighbourhood associations and from wide range of academic, professional and ideological backgrounds. While the pedagogy of Paulo Freire became the reference point for the development of the movements in many countries of Latin, the ideas of Gandhi helped inspire similar movements in India and Africa, which mainly developed from the initiatives of secular voluntary organisations. Many other movements started spontaneously with groups of people deciding to take responsibility for the difficulties faced by children in their immediate neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{11}

All have had some impact – in some cases considerable – on public attitudes towards working children. Their achievements are wide-ranging – persuading local authorities to repair bridges and roads used by children, developing and persuading schools to pilot curricula for working children, supporting neighbourhood struggles for improved services, negotiating access to health care for street and working children, tackling abusive employers and negotiating better working conditions.\textsuperscript{12}

This chapter will focus on four such movements – MNMMR from Brazil, MANTHOC from Peru, AMWCY, which originated in Dakar, Senegal but now includes working children from many countries of West Africa, and Bal Mazdoor Sangh from India. The idea is for the readers to have an introductory glimpse into these working children’s movements to reveal their structure, methodology, achievements and weaknesses as they play a crucial part in the battle against systematic exploitation and abuse of children. The chapter is also intended to act as a base for the reader to delve deeper into the case study of Bhima Sangha in the next chapter.

\textbf{The National Movement of Street Boys and Girls (MNMMR)}

The MNMMR was founded in 1985 making it the oldest of the national movements of street, working and poor community children. But the participation and organisation of
such children in Brazil has a much longer history, going back to the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{13} Its pioneers were activists of liberation theology trying to ‘express Christian values through their actions in the community’. Prominent among those activists was Bruno Sechi, a Salesian priest who later on became a co-founder of MNMMR. Though having religious roots, the group signalled a break from conventional Catholic tradition by bringing together young men and women on an equal footing. The group also decided to focus its attention on large segments of population oppressed by poverty and who had been abandoned by mainstream institutions. Importantly, in a radical departure from groups having links with religious institutions, the group rejected the prevailing State and church policies for abandoned children. The mainstream policies treated street and working children as a ‘social scourge’ that needed to be eliminated through legislative and administrative mechanisms. Finally, the group operated on the principle that working children contributed immensely to the survival of their respective families and any approach advocating their removal from the street without providing for their sustenance was bound to fail.\textsuperscript{14} Consequently the activists had to engage the children in their own environment – in the streets and squares of the city centres – to learn about the children’s circumstances. In allying themselves with social outcasts, the activists were already departing radically from the norm.

By consciously building with the children a social relationship based on the human capacity for love, respect, solidarity and playfulness, they were investing in the ideal of the development of the individual with – rather than at the expense of – the broad community of other. In this transforming process both they and the children would simultaneously become learners and teachers, in the sense they later identified as Freirean.\textsuperscript{15}

The key characteristic that defined the emerging social relationship between the adult activists and the children was that of a participative democracy. In the most oppressive phase Brazil’s military dictatorship, they decided to call their movement the Republic of Small Vendors. At the beginning of the 1970s, children in the Republic became organised into cooperatives based on their different street occupations – bag sellers, market porters, newspaper sellers and so on. As cooperative groups the children would discuss their lives, identify problems, propose solutions, try them out and reflect on outcomes. The
adult activists provided the tools of dialogue and participation, while taking upon the roles of animators and the facilitators. Among the most successful actions of the cooperative groups was the elimination of middlemen by bag sellers, who began making bags themselves.

The success of the cooperative groups, where shared occupation was the primary organising force, also brought before the activists the need to complement work on the streets with preventive work with children from marginalised communities. It was during this period of mulling over the mechanisms for proactive actions designed to protect street and working children that the activists discovered that the children felt that their basis of organisation need not always be occupational. The children felt that they could be organised around any common interest, for instance a shared problem such as police violence or a shared environment such a market place where they all worked. Later the children organised themselves around a shared organisational context for instance around an assistance organisation or social movement or even a school.

These groups were called as nucleos de base (grassroots nuclei) – the name later adopted to designate the basic units of organisation of children with MNMMR. With the development of numerous such groups, the earlier system of representation with the Republic whereby any member who attended a general meeting could exercise a vote became impractical. The grassroots nuclei, which had always elected delegates for particular tasks, began electing leaders to represent them in the policy-making processes of the Republic. Such a development meant that the children had to necessarily take a greater degree of responsibility for their own organisation, which manifested itself for instance in holding meetings of their grassroots nucleus whether educators were present or not.

Throughout the 1970s there were a handful of other organisations, apart from the Republic, also working with street and working children. But the military dictatorship necessitated such organisations to keep a low profile and there was no networking between them. In 1981 the ‘opening up’ of the Brazilian society heralded the end of the
military dictatorship. The Brazilian government, in collaboration with the UNICEF, launched the Alternative Services for Street Children project. Its purpose was to learn about, propagate and strengthen voluntary organisations working with children and establish a platform for the government and the voluntary organisations to collaborate and cooperate. The UNICEF also sponsored a series of workshops and the ideas generated there became the basis of national and international policy framework on the issue of child labour. Some of the main ideas that were incorporated in children’s rights legislation were:

- Protecting and meeting the needs of all children should be a top priority of society;
- The key purpose of social policy for children should be their well being as opposed to security of the public;
- Children should participate as subjects of their own development and not as objects of welfare or other interventions by adults, and should be enabled to actively engage in the making of decisions affecting them;
- Services should be developed locally where they could be attuned to local needs and not delivered through massive, centralised state bureaucracies, which should be dismantled;
- Means should be found to enable local communities to become actively involved in addressing the needs of children at risk.\(^6\)

The workshops also threw light on the important role played by the street educators in facilitating a relationship and a dialogue between adults and the street and working children. Consequently training of the educators acquired importance and became the focus of the UNICEF project. The project’s workshops also promoted the formation around the country of some 35 activist groups of educators working in community and voluntary organisations as well as government departments.

It was educators from these groups who in 1985 decided to form the MNMMR. The organisation has three kinds of membership – permanent (educators and activists), affiliated (children) and collaborators (citizens, professional and technical advisers and assistance organisations that embrace the methodology and practice of the movement). According to its website, the movement describes itself as an ‘independent expression of
the civil society’. The movement defines ‘independent’ as being autonomous from ‘factional or institutional controls, whether by the government, churches, political parties or UNICEF’. Describing its main, the MNMMR says it is committed to ‘fighting for the recognition and observance of the rights of the children as citizens and identifying with the broad popular struggle against poverty and for democracy’. Enunciating its methods the MNMMR says its main lines of action include securing and defending children’s rights, the organisation of children and youth, training educators and strengthening and developing the movement.

Originally, the organisational structure of the adult members of the movement comprised a national executive committee, located in Brasilia, composed of the elected representatives of five regional committees. Over time, state level and local level committees have been formed in 25 out of Brazil’s 27 states. Most of the adult members are educators.

Though the participation and organisation of children were a priority from the beginning, few educators has any experience in how to achieve this goal. However, since participation was key component of the methodology conceived it was decided that children themselves should determine the nature of their participation and organisation in the movement. Children from different assistance programmes in Belem, with the support of educators, took the first initiative and started meeting independently. At one such meeting it was decided that it would be a ‘good idea’ to meet street and working children from other cities. They wrote, via the secretariat of MNMMR to other children proposing a national meeting. As a result the First National Meeting of Street Boys and Girls was held in Brasilia in 1986. The MNMMR referred to the meeting as the ‘first cry’.

The meeting caused quite a stir. It contributed to the inauguration of a concerted struggle for children’s rights which became identified with the nation’s thrust for democracy and was further reinforced by the drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The children’s accounts of their experiences contributed to the formulation of a new children’s section in the post-dictatorship Brazilian constitution. Educators in the movement were very active in helping shape the new legislation and securing its passage through Congress. The constitution incorporates key components of the CRC.
establishing comprehensive rights for children as developing members of society. One
the issue of child labour, the movement took the position that no child under the age of 12
should work. Work by children over 14 should be conducive to their continuing their
education or to training that will equip them for work.18

The first national meeting also contributed a long way in changing perceptions and
attitudes about street and working children. The MNMMR website quotes a prominent
government welfare activist as saying:

Society was accustomed to looking at these children exclusively as needy, seeing what
they did not have, what they did not know, what they were incapable of – a totally
negative profile compared to the middle class norm. Now the national movement
presented them in a positive light, emphasising what they could do, what they did know,
what they could offer the country.19

National meetings have since been held about every three years, each increasingly
planned and run by the children and contributing to the progress of children’s rights in
Brazil. For instance the second national meeting in 1989 exposed the killing of street
children by militias triggering publicity that eventually forced the government to
recognise the problem. Similarly, the third meeting contributed a great deal in pushing
the government machinery to set up new municipal, state and federal policy-making
Children’s Rights Councils.

The basic and most crucial element of children’s participation and organisation in Brazil
are grassroots nuclei. It is through membership of a nucleus that children acquire the
skills of participation, solidarity, organisation and learn to become key defenders of their
own rights. That is where the ideas and issues, which find expression at the national
meetings and inform the policy decisions and actions of the movement are first raised.

Nuclei are composed of groups of 20 to 30 children, supported by one or two educators.
As animators and facilitators of the participation of all the members, educators are
developing within themselves – and providing the children with the experience of – a
new kind of leadership, appropriate to a participative democracy.
Educators are skilled in communicating with children and offer them an affectionate, respectful, stimulating and reliable companionship, demonstrating concern for the wellbeing of all in the group. For many of the children involved, this is a rare, if not unique experience and is in itself transforming - if they can experience what it is to be a valued member of the community in one part of their lives, why isn’t that experience available more generally?

While establishing a participative and a collaborative relationship with the children, the educators also enable the children to develop their analytical skills and reinforce their ability to take decisions and action in their own lives. This is achieved by encouraging them to discuss issues that most interest them – experiences in their work, in the community, at school or at home – identify problems, resolve ways to overcome them together, try out their solutions and reflect as a group on the results. Describing the role of educators, MNMMR says that they provide the children with additional information, but restrain themselves from trying to determine the outcome of the children’s deliberation, even when they think they know better. Even if the children do not succeed in a particular initiative, they learn more about the context in which they live, develop strategies to influence events and come to understand the value of solidarity. “By these means they gain experience of themselves as social actors rather than as defensive social survivors or victims of fate.”

Educators, according to the MNMMR website also encourage children to continue with or return to regular schooling while augmenting this with a different kind of educational experience related to the events and issues that affect the children on a daily basis. They also work to strengthen the children’s understanding and appreciation of their families, their communities, their cultures and their role in the history of popular resistance to the processes of social exclusion. The educators achieve this through a combination of direct dialogue with families, by the children’s participation in cultural and community events and participation in events like the May 1 Labour Day celebrations. Such activities developed as pedagogical experiences, enable the children to reappraise in a positive light, and begin to take pride in, their families, cultures and class – all of which are being systematically dismantled by the consumer-corporatist culture endemic in a city. Finally,
educators intervene where parents, police or anyone else abuses children or where schools victimise, seek to exclude children from poor communities, or refuse to admit them. Anthony Swift who showcases the various actions undertaken by the organised children aptly explains the positive character of the educators-children nexus.

Organised children have taken a wide variety of actions from successfully lobbying local authorities – one group persuaded the municipality to repair a broken bridge – to challenging the content or implementation of policy at a national level. The solidarity established between members of a grassroots nucleus through their shared experience and collective action gives them the basis for an increasingly critical awareness of the fragmented and opportunistic social relationships about their group, leading to discussions about family and social responsibility – issues of citizenship. Everything is up for discussion inside the groups, from sexuality and health and education to questioning practice within the assistance programmes the children are involved in or within the national movement.²²

Organisationally there is a certain structural flow that has been established to tackle issues at all levels and in its entire complexity. Issues that are identified as priorities within the nuclei if the movement – such as lack of access to education or violence against children – are taken by elected delegates to municipal-level meetings of children and then to state-level assemblies organised with the assistance of local and state adult committees of the movement. At such meetings, municipal and state-level priorities and lines of policy and action are defined and planned. From each state, a representative is also chosen to participate in the National Commission of Animation (Comissão Nacional de Animacao) – the group that coordinates the activities of the grassroots groups and chooses the theme of the national meeting.

The mechanisms of participation for children are also transparent and structured. Children participate directly as members of their grassroots nuclei and a number as representatives of their groups while a few have the opportunity to represent the movement at state level, nationally and internationally. While participation is a given, the quality of participation is difficult to measure and depends on many factors. In many cases the greatest accomplishment is achieved at the point at which the children leave the
movement – on becoming 18 years old. Many of those who leave the movement return as volunteers and educators. Some grassroots nuclei are more successful than others and this is also dependent on the localities that they are situated in and the specific issues endemic to the locality.

For such reasons one cannot access the quality of participation and solidarity achieved by children in the movement at a single point in time or in one place; one would need to make observations throughout the duration of the process. Educators themselves directly experience the progress of the children they with. Another means would be to compare children in grassroots nuclei with their peers outside and, possibly, children in the leadership with more conventional school children. Yet another indicator would be the life choices made by the individuals after they leave the movement. Certainly a number of them continue to be involved in the struggle for social change.23

The national meetings can also been considered as an indicator of the developing quality of children’s participation. For instance among the 500 children who attended the first national meeting, only some of those from Belem came as elected representatives of their groups, while the rest were chosen by educators. But by the fourth national meeting the majority of the children who planned, executed and participated were elected by their grassroots nuclei.

Currently, according to the MNMMR website, there are some 800 educators as well as some 5,000 young people in the movement – one-third of whom are below the age of 12 and the balance of whom are aged between 12 and 18. They are organised in 200 nuclei in 25 out of the 27 states of Brazil. Most of the children in the movement are also involved in various assistance programmes. At the time of the fifth national meeting in 1998 there were 4000-5000 assistance programmes.

A third or so of these programmes has some concept of the participation and organisation of children. A hundred programmes have become associate members -- those organisations that employ the same methodology -- of the movement since 1990. Another hundred or so have pedagogical and methodological affinity with the movement and the idea of children’s participation and organisation is growing. Nowadays you cannot talk about acting on the behalf of children without listening to what they have to say. We are
at a stage where we see a rough draft of the child as citizen beginning to emerge in people’s minds. I would say the greatest achievement of the national movement in its first ten years wasn’t the Children’s Act; it was creating the historical possibility of children being politically active as a mobilised force in society – creating it not just an idea but in practice. This is a great contribution.24

The common theme dominating all actions of the MNMMR is that children, especially working children, should be heard and given a prominent role in deciding on policies and legislation that are designed to affect them. They also hold the view that child labour will only be terminated internationally if a new economic order based on equity can be achieved. They also realise that such an economic order goes against the paradigm of development advocated by the World Bank, IMF and the G-8. It is also critical of what it calls the twin-track policy being opened up by the ILO – convention 138 (removing children from work on the basis of age) and the new Convention for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Such a policy, it fears, will lead to ‘worst forms of hunger’. Like the other movements, the MNMMR is critical of the response so far to its efforts to participate in international policy-making, feeling that the views of the children have not been taken seriously. It has also established links with similar movements across the world and its methodology is currently being piloted among young people in deprived urban districts in the United States of America.

Movement of Working Children and Adolescents from Christian Working Families
The history of the regional movement of working children of Latin America and the Caribbean originated in Lima, Peru, more than 25 years ago. The mid-1970s in Peru were characterised by economic upheaval – national strikes, sweeping redundancies, widespread youth unemployment and a flow to the capital of work seekers and their families from impoverished rural areas. The Peruvian branch of the International Young Christian Workers movement (YCW) focussed on the growing number of children on the city streets. Its national assembly commission Alejandro Cussianovich, a Salesian priest and national chaplain of the YCW, to find out if such children could be organised so as to strengthen their position and struggle for their rights.
Founded in Belgium in 1925 by Joseph Cardijn, a priest, the YCW is a Catholic activist movement of workers aged between 15 and 25. It offers a utopian vision of society liberated from personal and collective exploitation, rid of class distinctions and based on ‘love, respect and recognition of the inherent value of all human beings’. It defined its methodology as that of education through ‘collective observation, action and review directed at building the new society from the grassroots’. These ideas, which were at home with those of liberation theology, appealed to young activist workers in Peru at that time who organised themselves to face workplace-related problems. The second-generation of workers, who had seen their parents organise themselves also found a strong resonance with the worker identity constructed by the YCW, which chimed strongly with the value attributed to work in Andean cultures – work as an integral and even part of life.

Nelly Torres, one of the eight young workers, liberation theology proponent and an active trade unionist, who along with Alejandro Cussianovich, founded MANTHOC says:

In the 1970s and 1980s the church was deeply committed to the people’s struggles. Like others we were engaged in that struggle on the basis of our faith. Our neighbourhood was known for being well organised on Christian base community lines. None of us belonged to a political party, though unions had political affiliations. The struggle at that time was much broader than that of a political party or union.\textsuperscript{25}

Guided by the YCW methodology the pioneering group, whose members had done some literacy and religious education with children, arrived at some reference points for their work with the children.

- Rather than organise child workers they would enable them to organise themselves to become protagonists in their places of work and their neighbourhoods;
- The resulting organisation would not be the adjunct of any other organisation;
- It would develop its own pedagogy and methodology on the basis of the protagonism of the children;
- It would grow to be a national organisation and aspire to developing an international profile.\textsuperscript{26}
The group was also particular about the terminology to be used and arrived at ‘working’ children rather than ‘poor’ or ‘street’ children. The term working children, the group contended, gave the children a positive connotation as contributors to the economic life of a society. In fact the concept of ‘working children; enabled the group to extend its mission in a ‘very natural way’. He explains the ‘natural way’ thus: logic to include the concept of citizenship. Cussianovich says the group set about their

Nelly Torres’s experience provides an example. Her concern and respect for child workers stemmed from her own experience. As a former child worker she had staunchly supported her mother’s struggle for the family’s survival. The economic contribution of children, like that of women, is generally taken for granted and it was only through her membership of the YCW that she understood the value of her work and that of working children in general. As a young adult she worked in a factory during the day and studied at secondary school at night before catching the 10:30 pm bus home. She struck up a friendship with children from her own neighbourhood who took the same bus. Most attended school in an earlier part of the day and worked in street occupations until late in the evening. They started to meet her at the school and walk with her to the bus. They were finding it hard to keep up with their homework and Nelly offered to help. It was too later to go to any of their homes and so they set up a makeshift shelter on a patch of open ground and did the homework there by candlelight. They would also talk and play some games before heading for bed around midnight… One day, a shoeshine boy reported that his workbox had been stolen. In their first joint action, the children decided to replace it. Nelly suggested that, to raise the money, they hold a drawing competition for children in the neighbourhood, charging a small entry fee and offering a fee. The children chose the topic, made up the rules and allocated responsibilities… The context raised more money than expected. After much discussion, the children decided to spend the excess on shoes for a child in the group who had no shoes and medicines for child’s mother who was in hospital with tuberculosis… Through such actions, the children contributed to social cohesion in their neighbourhood, developed a sense of solidarity among themselves, and they experimented in contributing to a common wellbeing rather than acting from narrow self-interest. 37

In all, five MANTHOC groups were started by the original YCW group of activists. The activists who perceived themselves as supporting and not participating in what they
intended was a children's movement had to reorient and reinvent their roles when the
children made it clear that they wanted them to be both supportive of their deliberations
and actions and participants in those deliberations but without directing them. The adults
have to be involved in decision-making, the children argued, or they would be absolved
of all responsibility. Following discussion about different kinds of support, the children
chose to refer to the adults as 'collaborators' rather than educator or animators.

The relationship between collaborator and child is intended to be individually and
socially transforming. It dismantles the conventional power relationship between adults
and children, replacing it with a more 'horizontal' relationship in which children respect
adults not just because they are adults, but because they see that they act with their best
interests at heart. Critics, however, find it difficult to believe the idea of adults can
suspend the assumption that they can decide for children and instead engage in collective
decision-making.

Confronted by working children who have benefited from the process and so are able to
argue cogently for their right to education, social security, health care, sufficient food and
dignified work, some adults assume that they have been manipulated, reflecting a general
view that children are unable to think for themselves.28

But engagement of children in a framework of dialogue and decision-making processes
also involved a process of transformation for the collaborators, especially a de-learning
curve oriented towards changing some of their own inherited attitudes towards children.
In 1982 MANTHOC gained official recognition as Catholic Action Movement. By 1984
there were MANTHOC groups in a number of other parts of the country and the first
national annual meeting of the movement was held, which was attended by 15 delegates.
They produced a short document, In the Hands of Children, chronicling their
experiences. By 1998 MANTHOC groups had been formed in 16 towns and cities of
Peru. Independent organisations working with children also began to consult MANTHOC
about its methodology. The national meetings also fostered the realisation of the need to
take action on scale wider than just the neighbourhood level. A common issue was the
failure of state education provision to meet the needs of working children. Another matter
of concern was the growing number of children living on city streets and the need in Lima for some kind of refuge or meeting place for them. But for the movement to embark on this direction and evolve a curriculum appropriate for working children it needed legal status. By law, children had no status. In order to overcome this lack of legal status the MANTHOC National Assembly in 1986 decided to elect three collaborators to staff a MANTHOC association to legally represent the movement. The association is answerable to the National Coordinating Committee of Children, elected by each National Assembly. MANTHOC subsequently approached the Ministry of Education with a proposal to develop a new curriculum for working children. At the time there were two million working children in the country and a further million children were thought to be surviving and living on the streets. The ministry agreed to the proposal and MANTHOC set out to engage other organisations interested in fostering the protagonism of children. Together they formed the Coordinating Committee for the Defence of Children’s Rights. Eventually some 30 movements and organisations became involved in this forum. They were involved in diverse localised actions – setting up alternative schools, providing occupational training, operating revolving funds for the development of small business initiatives, negotiating health care agreements with clinics and hospitals, negotiating with employers and local authorities for better employment terms and conditions for working children and youth. In 1988, the forum began to hold national policy making meetings. It identified as its main areas for action as education, work, health and organisations.

The existence of the forum enabled children and collaborators in the member organisations to have a marked impact on the formulation in 1992 of the National Code for Children and Adolescents. Of special importance to the movement, given the value it attributes to work, is the Code’s recognition of the right of children to work from the age of 12, while not forbidding children below that age to work. Other highly valued rights are the right of children to organise and express their views, the right of those below the age of 12 to belong to working children’s organisations, the right to social security and the recognition of children as citizens. The law established a new structure within the Minister for the Family and Women’s Affairs, allowing for representations to be made by
voluntary organisations and installs ombudsmen at local authority level. Any child could apply to her or his ombudsmen for a social security card providing access to free health care, so the members of movement no longer have to negotiate deals with individual health providers. In 1994, having developed its alternative curriculum, MANTHOC called for a diversification of the regular school curriculum to take account of the big regional cultural differences found in the coastal, Andean and Amazonian regions of the country. Its own curriculum, which runs in ten independent schools and nine state schools, had certain core features:

- Recognition of the circumstance of working children;
- Subject learning based on child’s own experience;
- The Protagonism of children in the development of their education and in their school, allowing them to encourage the participation and organisation of other children.²⁹

In February 1996, the fourth national meeting of more than 1200 children from more than 30 organisations throughout the country decided to disband the forum and form the National Movement of Organised Working Children and Adolescents in Peru (MNNATSOP). Unlike Brazil’s MNMMR, the Peruvian movement has no independent grassroots structure. Its delegates are elected by member NGOs and movements, which share a common commitment to the principle of children’s protagonism. MANTHOC started to attract interest from other Latin American countries from 1979 onwards, initially through the Catholic Church. An enduring association was established with International Movement of Apostolate Children in 1982 when MANTHOC sent delegates to the World Assembly in Brazil. IMAC helped broadcast MANTHOC’s work in other countries, particularly Latin America. For instance, Organised Working Children and Adolescents (ONATS) formed in Paraguay in 1994 drew its inspiration from MANTHOC and MNMMR. Various factors in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s, including the drafting of the CRC and the move in Latin America away from the old dictatorships towards democratic models of government, stimulated interest in the promotion of democratic practice among socially excluded children and supported recognition of their struggle as part of democratisation. The work was no longer restricted
to the church with many NGOs, social activists and academics getting involved. This led to the development of organisations initially and then national movements of ‘self-organised’ working children in other countries resulting in a series of regional meetings. The series of regional meetings led to the formation of the Latin American and Caribbean Movement in 1988 with organisations from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Paraguay being part of the umbrella group.

African Movement of Working Children and Youth
The participation and organisation of working children in Africa was initiated by the international voluntary agency, Enda Tiers Monde (Environmental Development Action in the Third World) in collaboration with a number of non-governmental, governmental and church agencies in West Africa. Enda originated in Dakar, Senegal and works in association with grassroots groups and organisations in several countries around the globe exploring an empowering development strategy based on the principles ‘know better, act better, act locally, think globally’. Unlike the movements in Brazil and Peru, it has no religious affiliation.

In 1985, with a growing number of children from impoverished rural areas arriving in West African cities to look for work, Enda helped organise a regional forum, Children and Youth of the Street. The forum involved selected West African voluntary organisations. They were critical of two established types of intervention on behalf of children. One – designated as ‘helpful and caring’ – was characteristic of charities. Inspired by compassion or pity, such interventions attempted to reduce the suffering of children who had been abused and neglected. The other, generally undertaken by governments, aimed to ‘rehabilitate’ and reintegrate into society children who were regarded as delinquent or abandoned. These approaches were paternalistic and limited in their impact – taking little account of the causes of social exclusion of children and their families. They were also unsustainable and tended to create dependency on the children.

Enda was chosen by the forum to head the development of a new regional approach to supporting working children. It set up the Jeunesse Action (Youth Action) team with
operational bases in Bamako (Mali) and Dakar and Ziguinchor (Senegal). Sister organisations also started programmes in Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries in the region. The common logic behind all these efforts was the belief that children had greater ability than they were credited with to identify both their problems and solutions.

Jeunesse Action wanted to explore and build on this capability so that children might become protagonists in their own development rather than falling victim to social exclusion and ill-conceived welfare interventions.\(^{30}\)

Such an approach forced the adult activists to give up their traditional stance of being helpers and providers and reinvent themselves as facilitators and animators so as to support and encourage children to think and act for themselves and learn from their actions. Till 1991 when the African Programme of the Formation of Animators (PAF) was launched, the adult activists were supported by a number of regional training workshops. The PAF says its mission was to develop an African training expertise and a methodology for working with children in the urban environment. In its first four years of operation, it reached some 1,500 animators in government services, NGOs, churches and grassroots associations in 25 countries in Southern, Central and West Africa.

Working within PAF guidelines, animators set out to establish a partnership with young people in the situations in which they found themselves; support their initiatives; enter with them into reflection about their lives and futures; promote and document exchanges between them and young people in other countries; and raise public and government awareness of the rights of children. Key aims were to increase the self-esteem of socially excluded children, mobilise public support for them and their cause and strengthen their efforts to earn a living.\(^{31}\)

An important moment in the realisation of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth occurred in 1992 when 60 young domestic workers aged between 10 and 22 discussed their working conditions. During the discussion one of the proposals was participation in International Labour Day celebrations. Encouraged by the animators working with them, they approached union leaders who agreed to their taking part. They then contacted other groups of maids and other working children in Senegal – shoe
shiners, porters, touts, tourist guides – as well as people supported by Jeunesse Action in other countries. Their first involvement in May 1st celebrations was in 1994. As part of preparations for their involvement the groups discussed among themselves their grievances and demands, which they presented to the National Confederation of Trade Unions of Senegal (CTNS). They highlighted the lack of respect accorded to young workers, low and erratic rates of pay, long working hours, lack of access to education and training, exposure to unsafe conditions, abuse and daily hardships. Their main demands were to be recognised as contributing through their work to their country’s development, to be treated humanely and respectfully and to be able to take part in decisions that affected them. They identified as rights:

- To be able to earn a living without being harassed;
- Access to basic education and vocational training adapted to their working responsibilities;
- Access to medical care;
- Time for relaxation and leisure

Encouraged by the cooperative and collaborative decision-making, delegates of working children from Burkina Faso, Cote D’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal met in July 1994 in Bouake, Cote D’Ivoire, to share their experiences. They identified 12 rights:

- To be taught a trade;
- To be able to stay in their villages and not migrate to town looking for work;
- Freedom from harassment and abuse in the workplace;
- Legal aid (when in trouble);
- Rest when sick;
- To be respected;
- To be listened to;
- Access to light and appropriate work, suited to their ages and abilities;
- Access to health care;
- To learn to read and write;
- To play;
- Freedom of expression and to form organisations
These rights and an action plan to achieve them were adopted by the movement, but it was left to local groups (unions) to choose which of the 12 they would make their focus. An important early point of debate in the movement was how the children should refer to themselves. They rejected the commonly used phrase ‘street children’ as having only negative connotations. They wanted to be respected as contributors and not regarded as dependants. In Senegal, child workers are legally defined as being under 18 years of age. However, just as young adults often learn alongside children in regular school classrooms – due to a history of unequal access to education – the movement is not rigid in its application of an age limit. The average of its members is 15 to 16 but there are also young adults in the movement. The cut-off age is 30. Girls form 75 per cent of the membership in Senegal. The young adults wanted the animators to assume the role of information providers in terms of creating associations and as companions while visiting medical, police and other authorities and as advisers in approaching the media and financial, material and moral support.

The structure of the movement in each country has evolved at its own pace and with some variations. The basic unit of organisation is the ‘union’. Unions are formed on diverse grounds such as shared occupation, shared district of origin in the case of migrants to the city, or shared neighbourhood. Some groups of working children approach Jeunesse Action on their own initiative and ask to become involved. More often animators identify groups, which might wish to join. They then local leaders in the movement who arrange to meet the new group to explain how the movement works and how to join. Each group decides by majority vote which of the 12 rights they will work to promote and establishes in order of priority what action to take. This is achieved through participatory action research, involving the children in an investigation of work they do, the overall context in which they do it and the problems they encounter. Animators provide additional information, facilitate group discussion and accompany the groups to meetings with the authorities but do onto direct or conduct negotiations. Depending on which of the 12 rights they have given priority to, young workers in the movement variously begin to dialogue with the police and community and health authorities. In
Senegal, the children’s unions have been invited by the Ministry to Labour to take part in the National Programmes for the Elimination of Exploitation of Children at Work. The children have negotiated access to better and cheaper health care from medical institutions, established and learned to manage group health-care funds, discovered or negotiated access to occupational training or literacy classes, collectively bought materials used in their work, negotiating a lower cost; planned and undertaken cultural and recreational events and excursions.

In 1995 groups of domestic workers organised their own regional meeting in Lome (Togo) to define the particular problems they faced and propose lines of action. Problems included being overworked, not being paid, being fed leftovers, being hit and harassed, being barred from watching television or playing with the employer's children and lack of medical care and attention. Lines of action adopted included: reaching out to and informing other domestic workers about the movement, establishing solidarity funds to support training, health and small enterprise initiatives, raising awareness through conferences and the media and setting up their own Domestic Workers’ Defence Groups to support members in difficulties.

Some groupings of unions have occurred at municipal level. These groupings are known as ‘associations’. In the Senegalese capital, for instance, 16 unions of working children have formed The Association of Working Children and Youth of Dakar. Initiatives flowing after the Bouake meeting stimulated the formation of many small associations. Cote D’Ivoire has formed a national association, but in other countries a National Coordination of Unions is the preferred concept. Member of unions are also automatically members of their associations, although, in practice, each union normally elects a delegate to attend general assemblies of their association. The role of associations is to improve, consolidate and expand the movement, provide spokespersons at municipal and national levels, establish national policy and elect delegates to represent the movement in international meetings.
The movement currently boasts some 10,000 members and twice that number of supporters. It started out as a West African movement, but with the recent incorporation of groups from other countries, is now known as the African Movement of Working Children and Youth. It is most strongly organised in 17 towns in Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry and Togo and is establishing itself in other towns in these countries as well as in Niger, Mauritania, Chad, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. Some developments are also taking place in Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda.

**Bal Mazdoor Sangh**

Bal Mazdoor Sangh came into being in 1991, the offspring of the work developed by Butterflies, a voluntary organisation, which has operated a programme for street and working children in Delhi since 1988. In founding Butterflies Rita Panicker became aware of the limitations of the programmes designed *for* rather than *with* children. The former views children as vulnerable and dependent on adult protection and underestimates their ability to make responsible decisions about their lives. In practice such programmes often fail to protect marginalised children, while undermining their ability to fend for themselves. In developing its own programme, Butterflies drew inspiration from the approach being explored by street educators in the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls in Brazil. Butterflies set out to work with socially discarded children with the idea of finding a way forward with them. It believes that children have the right to protection but also to respect, opportunities and having a say in decisions that affect their well being and personal development – in other works, scope to develop an identity and a sense of themselves as social actors.

A basic conviction of Butterflies is that only through community participation and the development of democratic practice – best begun in childhood – can the fight against poverty be won. Butterflies aims to build on the knowledge, skills and abilities of street and working children; engage them in planning, monitoring and evaluating their activities, enable to develop a critical awareness of their environment, including the actions of the street educators who work with them; strengthen their links with their
families and, where possible, reinstate them within their families. It also mobilises public support for children’s rights and uses the CRC to hold the authorities accountable for the wellbeing of all children.\textsuperscript{33}

Street educators form an important cog in the process wheel of the Butterflies. The educators operate at eight contact points in the city – markets, transport terminals and other sites where street and working children congregate. Currently they are in contact with 1200 children, of whom 650 regularly participate in collective activities. The children are variously employed in cafes, garages and small-scale businesses, or self-employed as ragpickers, shoeshiners, porters and vendors. Many are migrants from rural areas and separated from their families. Their earnings are erratic but average around Rs 25 a day, though some children can earn considerably more than that. Their hours of work are long – in extreme cases up to 15 hours a day. Most of the children (up to 80 per cent) have had no education and most of rest have to dropout of school to earn a living.

The street educators lay the foundation of their work by establishing a friendly and dependable relationship with the children. They stimulate them to identify and discuss problems they face and what collective action they might take and also help them to plan recreational activities. Nothing is given free, as children are more likely to continue to participate in a planned activity if they make a material investment in it.\textsuperscript{34}

Butterflies carried out most of its work on the streets and squares of the city. Educators even hold classes out in the open, using the ideas of Paulo Freire and developing a curriculum and educational materials based on the life experience of the children. History, for example, begins with the personal history of the children, and includes the history of common people’s struggles. Language learning starts from the language of the streets and geography from the local geography and the child’s own experience as a migrant and it encompasses physical and social geography. Educators also encourage children to attend regular or open school.

Butterflies does not have its own infrastructure and rather than creating it taps community resources. For instance, instead of buying premises in which to hold meetings, do theatre work and other activities, it has acquired the use of a room rent free from the local
authorities. Similarly, instead of providing occupational training, it negotiates with local workshops and businesses to set up apprenticeships for teenagers who decide they want to learn a skill. Since health of the children is major area of concern, a medical team visits the contact points regularly providing street-level medication and ensuring that children who need hospital treatment gain admission. Educators also provide preventive health education on such issues as personal hygiene, knowledge of one’s body and common diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases.

The children and youth are involved in the planning and provision of the services developed by Butterflies. With support from the educators they run a savings scheme and have been experimenting in operating a credit union to which each member makes a small investment (two rupees) and through which it is hoped members will gain access to education, vocational training, medical care and credit to start small enterprises. The children are also planning to reformulate Butterflies’ health programmes as a cooperative which they will run. Issues of membership, charges, rules and regulations giving the children complete ownership of the cooperative are currently under discussion. Members of Butterflies also run a restaurant at the interstate bus terminus. The idea came from the educators but young people were involved in planning the project. They now help manage it, including determining schedules, maintaining cleanliness and ensuring punctuality. Twelve teenagers are employed in the project and the restaurant serves the general public with subsidised prices for children.

A key feature of children’s participation within Butterflies are the Bal Sabhas (children’s councils). Children at each contact point meet to discuss issues of importance to them. If there is an important issue, they might all turn up. Where there is a more routine agenda they will nominate representatives from among themselves to hold the meeting. The meeting elects a chairperson. A literate child takes the minutes. Common issues of discussion are police harassment, wage level and employers are defaulting on wages, the need for better jobs, education, the savings scheme, problems of drugs and gambling, and planning of outings. Decisions are taken by consensus between whoever taken part.
Through the Bal Sabhas, children develop democratic practice and the recognition that everyone has the right to an opinion and to express it freely.

Sometimes educators will call a meeting of the Bal Sabhas, setting the agenda and inviting expert speakers, particularly if there is some event of great moment or national debate, which impinges on the children’s lives. An example was the killing of one of the children from the Butterflies in violence following the demolition of the Babri masjid in Ayodhya.

Involvement in the Bal Sabhas prepared the ground for the formation in 1991 of the Bal Mazdoor Sangh. At moments of crisis – such as incidents of violence, abuse, exploitation – the children would hold an emergency meeting of their Bal Sabha. But often there was very little they could actually do about such incidents. The educators pointed out the need for an instrument through which they could take collective action and suggested the formation of a union. Their suggestion was eventually taken up by the children after a boy associated with the Butterflies programme was falsely implicated in a case of theft. Bal Mazdoor Sangh was initially formed on a six-month trial basis by just 14 street and working children and today has a membership in excess of 500. Its purpose is to:

- Negotiate better wages and working conditions;
- Raise awareness of the rights of all children as guaranteed under the Indian Constitution and the CRC;
- Highlight and take action in cases in which rights are denied or infringed;
- Mobilise the public to put pressure on political leaders to tackle the conditions that force children to work – including poverty and adult unemployment.

Membership of the Sangh is open to any street or working child, not only those associated with Butterflies, though most of its members are children active in the Bal Sabhas. Because the members want their Sangh to be registered, its structure has to comply the Indian Trade Union Act. It has elected office bearers and the members pay subscriptions. The members have nominated two adults, one a lawyer, as joint secretaries. Meetings are conducted by the members. Butterflies’ educators are often invited to attend
as observers and might be asked to participate on certain issues. It is the Sangh representatives now who visit the Butterflies contact points to talk with children and call general meetings to discuss important issues. Similarly it is the members of the Sangh who are currently negotiating with Butterflies to form the health cooperative. The Sangh also produces a ‘wall newspaper’ – news sheets which are flyposted at strategic points. The paper is addressed to street and working children as well as adults. The Sangh acts against infringement of the rights of the children, whether they are members or not and have responded to incidents outside Delhi. Its armoury consists of demonstrations, sit-in strikes, press conferences, meeting with politicians and negotiations with employers. It has also gained the support of a network of human rights lawyers who act on its behalf.

Bal Mazdoor Sangh believes that the worst forms of child labour should be banned and that policies about child work should take account of children in the context of their families and communities. Children’s work, according to Bal Mazdoor Sangh, part of the fragile survival strategy of families and communities consigned to lives of poverty and unemployment. Banning their work would destroy that strategy and compound the suffering of the excluded classes, including the children. What the children demand is for the work to be regulated, assuring them of safe and non-exploitative working conditions, attuned to their needs, as well as access to good quality appropriate education, training and health services. At the same time they demand a concerted drive to create adult employment and reduce poverty. Most children are not working as skilled labour or in factories and they are not doing work that adults might otherwise do; most are supplementing the work of underemployed or exploited parents.
References


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


17. There are some variations in children’s participation in the movement in different parts of the country. Older teenagers are represented on some of the adult local committees.


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


23. Ibid., p 17.
Benedito dos Santos, coordinator of MNMMR being quoted in the movement's website.


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