



MUMBAI
MOBILE CRECHES
FUTURES UNDER CONSTRUCTION



**MUMBAI MOBILE CRECHES - LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR
CHILDHOOD ON CONSTRUCTION SITES**

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1. Brief overview of Mumbai Mobile Creches

Mumbai Mobile Creches (“MMC”) is a well established organisation that aims to transform child care arrangements and services, especially those on construction sites. Its **mission** is to support child-friendly sites – where children are safe, healthy and educated. This is done by running demonstration centres of comprehensive child development, training community women as well as other organisations in early child education and care, and linking with resource providing organisations to influence the policy environment. Over the last three decades, MMC has developed and pioneered a model that supports the development of the very young child, frees young children from the burden of looking after younger siblings, helps children applying to school and ensures they stay in school. Such an approach – which has the needs of young children at its core – creates the foundations for healthy development and overall growth of our society. When nations and communities invest in their children, they invest in the future of current as well as coming generations.

MMC believes that stimulating care, development and education is every child’s inalienable right, and provides the most powerful and profound tool to escape the cycle of poverty. The MMC programme is a **proactive poverty alleviation strategy** focused on championing the rights of the child on the construction site. The reason we focus on the migrant child on the construction site is because she is among the most vulnerable and invisible population among the urban poor. Currently the organisation aids nearly five thousand children every year.

2. Institutional Background

The construction industry is the single largest employer of migrant labourers, the poorest of the poor, in Indian cities. Approximately 35 million men and women work in this sector and they are largely unorganized. Moving wherever they can earn an income, most migrant labourers are illiterate and only able to speak their native language. Their lives are characterized by insecurity of wages, dangerous working conditions, and lack of access to any kind of welfare.

The children of these workers – estimated to be over 50 million – are even more vulnerable. Because of their families’ extreme poverty and also since their parents are constantly working (sometimes mothers go back to work as soon as a few days after delivery), they are left to fend for themselves. They suffer from malnutrition, under nourishment, accidents, and innumerable health problems. They are marginalized from formal schooling, day-care centres or any sort of support system. The dangerous construction site is their only playground.

Mobile Crèches was founded in 1969 in Delhi on the belief that every child has the fundamental right to security, education, health care and protection. Running day care centres on construction sites for the past 37 years, Mobile Crèches has run over 500 centres in

Mumbai (since 1972), Delhi and Pune (since 1980) and reached out to over 600,000 children. It has developed a comprehensive day care service programme that meets children's emotional, physical, cognitive and social development needs. It has pioneered the first Early Child Care Education ("ECCE") programme for migrant workers' children in this country. In April 2007, Mobile Creches split into three organisations - Mobile Creches (Delhi), Mumbai Mobile Creches and Tara Mobile Creches (Pune). The work, focus, staff and board of these organisations, however, remains unchanged.

MMC the only NGO in Mumbai that focuses on **children of migrant construction workers, estimated to be over 80,000** in number. It is deeply ironic that the children of the very people who produce the symbols of economic development - skyscrapers, residential and commercial complexes - are denied the ability to participate in and benefit from the progress the city promises.

While the Construction Workers Act 1996 was progressive and included a number of social welfare benefits, most states, including Maharashtra, are yet to ratify this Act. As a result, MMC is, most likely, the only support service a child on a site will encounter.

3. Context on the Site: An Invisible Population

Workers on construction sites live in appalling conditions, housed in makeshift shanties and working under dangerous conditions, without benefit of machinery or safety equipment, often perched precariously on bamboo scaffolding high above the ground, building sky scrapers for the affluent. Many construction sites are located in areas where development is just being initiated and therefore there are few facilities of drinking water, sanitation, health care or schooling for the children. In the villages or in urban slums, the extended family would have looked after the children, but here they are left to fend for themselves. This migrant population usually does not get registered on any municipal rolls, is not considered a political vote bank and consequently falls through the cracks. The children grow up, playing in the rubble of the construction work, and are in constant danger from falling debris, pits, open lift shafts, drains, chemical fumes, trucks and bulldozers.

Inequalities start even before birth. Mothers are ignorant about the kinds of nutrition they need for their growing child, and once their child is born, about the immunisations and foods their infants require. Indeed, in India, more than half our women are anaemic, 400 out of every 100,000 babies born die at childbirth, 6% of children do not live to see their first birthday, 30% are born underweight and nearly 50% of children under three suffer from malnutrition. All these deprivations have devastating consequences that are life long. **On the construction site, where the poorest rural migrants work, levels of deprivation are much higher than the national average.** Coupled with the lack of information, families also face a lack of

support to look after their children. In a situation, where government services through the Integrated Child Development Services only reach 30% of children in need, that too, primarily in villages, the urban migrant child is completely isolated from any kind of social security or safety net.

The young child then spends most of her days being looked after by a slightly older sibling. Naturally, both are denied their childhood. Low levels of stimulation, malnourishment, and vitamin deficiencies result in slower brain development and poor performance and confidence. The cycle is repeated as more children are born. Moreover, since these children remain uneducated and have no support to enter school; they are vulnerable to being put to income-earning work. While children are not involved in hard labour on the site, boys frequently work serving tea, and girls work as domestic help in neighbouring residential buildings. Girls are also expected to manage all the chores at home. Their low skills sets and low income earning capacity means that they are vulnerable to further exploitation and early marriage. And thus the cycle of poverty is perpetuated.

4. Aims and Objectives

MMC views the following as its main challenges: (1) to break the cycle of poverty on the site by creating the support mechanisms and structure for children to receive stimulating child care and education and improved wellbeing; and (2) to promote the importance of child friendly construction sites among care givers, builders, contractors, civil society and the government.

Providing stimulating child care is a poverty alleviation strategy that has numerous positive and empowering consequences for entire communities; such as improved nutrition, enhanced performance, self confidence, and higher school attendance, a reduction in teenage parenting, smaller, healthier families, and more economically productive individuals. Child development centres focussing on young children are essential to child protection, survival and growth.

MMC sees its role as multi-pronged. When set up on a site, our child development centres:

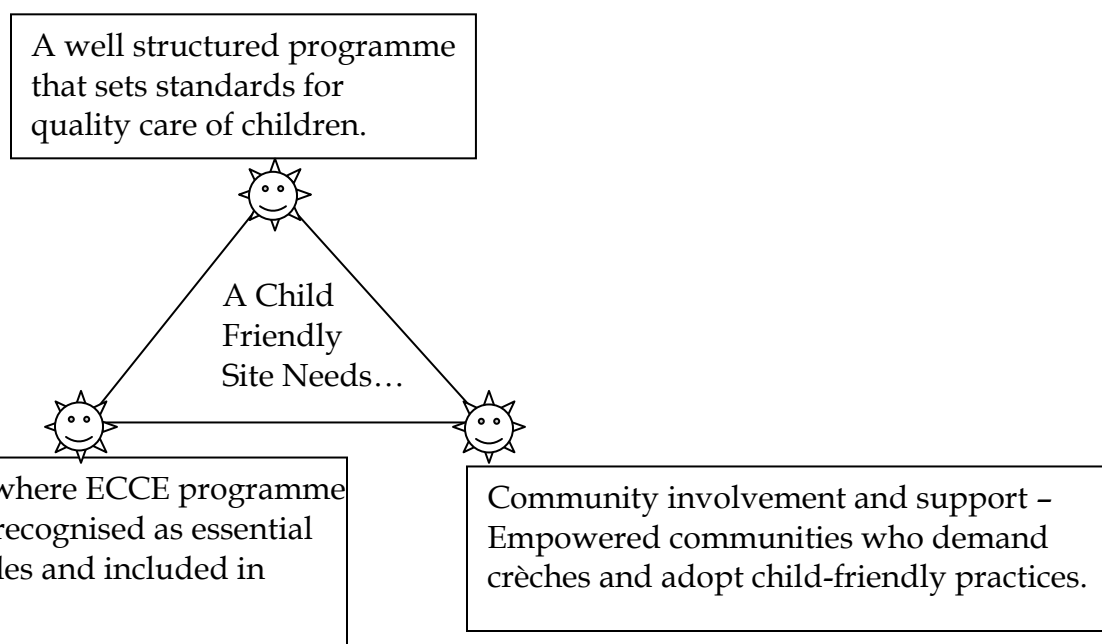
- Support the intellectual, emotional and physical development of the very young child and create the foundations required for school entry and high individual achievement;
- Free older children from the burden of child care and child labour and help them enter and perform well in school;
- Support the working mother who is reassured in the knowledge that her children are safe and looked after;

- Provide guidance and support to parents on child rights, health and care, especially educating parents on the importance of crèches and balwadis on construction sites.

In 2009-10 Mumbai, MMC ran 29 centres and reached almost 6000 children.

Moreover, MMC champions the cause of young children on construction sites through its advocacy efforts with builders, civil society groups, NGOs and the government. MMC's slogan - 'Futures Under Construction', refers to the future of children living on construction sites, as well as the organisation's vision for inclusive futures throughout India.

The following diagram represents our areas of work.



5. At the Centre

Child development centres are set up on the construction site itself, in finished or unused rooms allotted by the builder. This could be in a range of locations, such as a constructed car park, unfurnished apartment rooms, or the remains of a demolished building. Each centre is different although all centres have a kitchen, bathroom, electricity and clean water.

Centres run programmes that focus on comprehensive development that include education, health and nutrition components.

a. Holistic Development and Education Demonstration Models through Child Development Centres

- Children from birth to three years of age are part of our crèche programme where emphasis is placed on creating a stimulating environment that nurtures motor, cognitive, social, emotional and physical growth. This is, in fact, what the organisation is best known for promoting – a model of Early Child Care and Education where learning happens through music, dance and play.
- Children from three to five years of age are part of our pre-primary programme that includes school preparedness.
- Children above six are part of our non formal schooling that assists out of school children to enter and stay in school.

Apart from language, general knowledge and mathematics, the teaching methodology of the pre-primary and non formal programmes includes art, song, puppetry, theatre, leadership training and a monthly project. The curriculum is planned yearly and teachers meet every other month for feedback and support. Centres are standardised and follow the same programme to ensure consistency and better sharing, learning and monitoring. Financial assistance is provided to children who are enrolled in school but require support for materials, travel and tuition classes.

b. Health, Hygiene and Nutrition – All children attending the centres are given lunch, snacks and receive curative, preventative and rehabilitative care, monitored by weekly doctor's visits. This is a critical intervention since we find that a significant number of children are malnourished and suffer from various deficiencies. Such deprivations can seriously damage brain and physical development and have life long consequences, and therefore, we ensure that they are immediately identified and addressed at our centre. Moreover, financial assistance is provided for serious illnesses or ailments, and health and hygiene awareness workshops are run with children and in communities.

c. Community Outreach – MMC sees the community as the central focus for creating awareness and sustainability of the intervention, whether it is regarding health, education or any other relevant social issue. Through workshops, training, monthly community meetings and street theatre, various issues such as child care, child labour, hygiene, nutrition, health care, family planning, AIDS, substance abuse, and many other issues are discussed. **Mumbai Mobile Creches is also committed to empowering women living on construction sites by training them to be teachers. Last year we have trained and hired 14 women, and this year we have 30 women in our training.**

6. Beyond the Site - Linkages with Civil Society

a. Government advocacy - **Consistent time at advocacy with the government has meant that for the very first time, the government is including over 250 children on construction sites through their under 6s programme.** The largest national programme for children under six - the Integrated Child Development Services - was yet to include migrant children. However, **we signed an MOU with the ICDS and are now jointly running** three pilot programmes on construction sites where we will run these centres in partnership. The eventual goal is for the government to scale this programme across the city and also the state. It has enormous implications for the future of children living on construction sites throughout the country.

b. Campaigns for child rights- Mobile Creches is a founding partner in the national Forum for Creches and Childcare Services (FORCES) and Mumbai Mobile Creches participates in the Maharashtra chapter. Mumbai Mobile Creches is also a member of the Coordination Committee for Vulnerable Children, which networks with 40 Mumbai-based NGOs working on child rights. The organisation is also involved in city-wide campaigns and coalitions with NGO partners on issues of child labour, education and health and to especially ensure that construction workers' children's issues are included. Finally, the organisation links with the Maharashtra Chamber of Housing Industries and the Builders' Association to advocate for children's rights on construction sites.

c. Early Childhood Care and Education Training - Every year, MMC trains people interested in becoming child care professionals. Over the past thirty years, the Mumbai Mobile Creches has gathered a tremendous amount of knowledge, skills and experience and developed an enormous resource base as one of its core competencies. In 2008-9 we trained about 300 people across educational institutions, NGOs and the government's education department.

7. Creating change: The Impact of our work

Mumbai Mobile Creches tries to provide the best possible care to the children of the city's poorest and most vulnerable. This is the population that suffers from malnourishment, extreme poverty and hunger, deplorable levels of child and maternal health. Our work has **long term impacts** on the welfare of children in the following manner.

a. Childhood interventions are not only an essential component of **human development** but are also a support to **universalisation of elementary education** and a programme of **women's development**.

The importance of our crèche and preschool programme cannot be underestimated. They are absolutely essential to lay the groundwork a child to go to school and interact successfully in her community. 80% of brain development occurs by six years old and deprivations at this time have life long consequences. A healthy and stimulating early childhood enhances enrolment, retention of girls in primary schools by providing substitute care facility for younger siblings, and is critical for proper social, cognitive, physical and emotional development. Moreover, for the poor working mother who has no alternative, a crèche is a pre-requisite to health, overall development and education for the child.

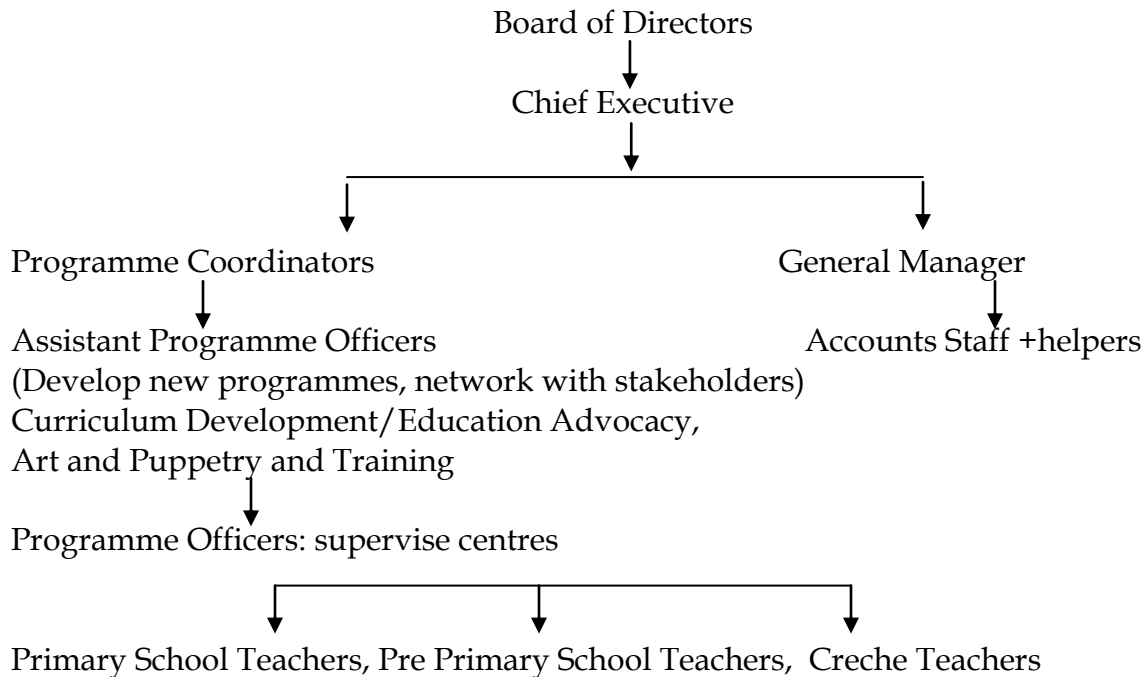
b. Mumbai Mobile Creches crèche and preschool sets the necessary foundation for school entry and our non formal programme supports the school going age child be enrolled as well as stay in school When Mumbai Mobile Creches surveys a new site, it routinely finds that up to 80% of children of school going age are not attending school, a figure that is far above the city or national average. By setting up a Mumbai Mobile Creches centre, school going age children are immediately freed from child care as they enter the crèche or pr-primary programme. The older children are enrolled in the non formal school programme and their education levels assessed. The inability to speak the local language increases the parent's unwillingness to send the child to school, and teaching the local language and working with the parents are the first steps in our centre towards reducing exclusions faced by the child. Scholarships are also provided for children who need support once they move off the site. Moreover, once children are enrolled in school, since the municipal system allows children to change school in the middle of the year, even when the children move to another site, they are able to continue school. The main stumbling block is getting them to school in the first place.

c. Supporting the migrant girl child. For most young girls of school going age, the choices are sibling care, domestic work, or early marriage. Motivating parents to educate their girl children increases gender inequality, reduces incidence of child labour, increases child survival, increases income earning capacity, empowers families in the long run, and decreases chances of early marriage and sexual abuse.

d. Keeping quality and human resources high. The organisation's most important resource, without doubt, is its teachers, most of who have been working at the grassroots for over twenty years. These teachers are models and mentors who, while monitoring numeracy and literacy progress, also create the space for children to explore their potential, to improve self confidence, to be aware and articulate, and to begin to dream of and work towards a brighter future. This is precisely why the organisation maintains low student - teacher ratios. For the older children, no more than twenty five to thirty children are assigned to one teacher.

e. Demonstrating a workable model. While the Government of India's Integrated Child Development Scheme has been in operation for several decades and is meant to reach every child under six, this department has never worked on construction sites. **As mentioned earlier, the first ICDS centres - in partnership with Mumbai Mobile Creches - are now being run on three construction sites.**

8. Organisational Structure



9. Budget and Support

MMC encourages developers to pay the majority of the costs for running centres on their sites. Contribution amounts vary from site to site and last year, these contributions covered 30% of the organisation's expenses. About 10% of the costs are also met by central and municipal government allocations. However, every year, the organisation faces a shortfall and has to raise the majority of funds through individuals and organisations. Our expenses are itemised as follows.

Rs 500 - supports a child's comprehensive development - health, education and nutrition expenses - for one month
Rs 1,200 - supports a child's nutrition expenses for the year
Rs 6,000 - supports a child's comprehensive development -- health, education and nutrition expenses -- for the year
Rs 11,000 - supports 22 children's comprehensive development for a month
Rs 25,000 - supports a small child development centre for a month
Rs 50,000 - supports one balwadi teacher for a year

Apart from financial support, MMC highly values the support it volunteers and friends – whether it is time or resources. Here are some ways to partner with MMC:

- Get involved and spread awareness about the cause – ensure builders have child friendly sites.
- Sponsor a centre.
- Sponsor an event.
- Sponsor a health, education or nutrition programme.
- Encourage employees to get involved with children at the centres
- Encourage employees to volunteer their professional skills to help Mobile Creches in strategy and planning and developing better communication and advocacy materials.

10. Conclusion

Children living on construction sites are a particularly vulnerable group among the urban poor. Their location – behind the high private walls of the construction site – has meant that they are rendered invisible to the city and policy makers alike. Moreover, apart from MMC, no organisation focuses on their rights, and most children have no access to any form of social or governmental safety net. Unattended and uneducated, they are particularly vulnerable to being forced into taking on adult responsibilities such as running homes and earning an income when they should instead be learning and having fun.

MMC has developed a comprehensive model that works on the ground and promotes child-friendly sites – to ensure the safety, health and education of children on construction sites. By running a crèche, pre-primary and non formal school, the centre addresses both women and children’s issues at multiple levels. For the time the child is in the centre, she enjoys all the benefits and freedoms of childhood. Moreover, this exposure increases her likelihood of attending and staying in school, and reduces her chances of getting married and working at a young age. Supporting our programme will assist extremely vulnerable and marginalised children to have the opportunity and space to enjoy their right to learning and fun. We need to invest in our most precious human resource – our children – so that they can be successful and confident members of our nation and society.