Background

Throughout India there are thousands of brickfields – open air factories where clay bricks are made by hand. Most of the workers are migrants who, with their children, spend up to eight months of the year in the dusty fields in temperatures reaching 40°C.

The children begin the task of making bricks from 8 years of age or even younger. No formal education is provided within the brickfields, except in the schools run by Kolkata Mary Ward Social Centre (KMWSC), and in a few places by other NGOs. The migratory nature of these families results in haphazard educational opportunities, if any.

Since 2008, KMWSC has facilitated open air schools for three hours a day for children living in brickfields on the outskirts of Kolkata. Each brickfield involved is assigned two teachers for every 50 children. Last year, thanks to generous supporters, 51 schools were operating.

Project Objectives

- Deliver basic education in literacy, mathematics and life skills to the children of the brickfields who cannot be enrolled in local government schools.
- Build the children’s self-esteem and confidence so that within their family and community there can be an improvement in their physical security, life expectancy and future choices.
- Provide basic healthcare for children and adults through medical camps and assistance in times of emergency.

Challenges & Learning

- Convincing parents to send their children to school rather than making them work in the brickfields has been identified as the biggest barrier in this project. Overcoming this barrier to bring about cultural change will begin with an awareness campaign targeting parents and decision-makers.
- Maintaining data on children is difficult with some only staying at school for a month.
- Lack of infrastructure, time, availability of doctors, nurses and medical supplies makes conducting health camps in the brickfields very difficult. Keeping medical supplies locally will assist with this issue however much time is still spent negotiating with brickfield owners to gain access to land to conduct these camps.

Opportunity

- Increase awareness about the importance of education through community meetings.
- Conduct further training for the brickfield school teachers.

Impact & Achievements

- 20 teachers completed 6 training sessions throughout the year thanks to donations to MWIA
- 650 children went to school in the brickfields in 2015-16 due to MWIA funding.
- 12 new schools were started in new brickfield areas.
- Over 3,200 children, at any one time, receive an education from the Brickfields schools.
- 10 brickfield schools are run independently by KMWSC without the help of partner NGOs.
- Health and awareness sessions for all Brickfields schools have been completed successfully.
- Older children, especially girls, are attending the classes despite working in the brickfields.

Did you know?

- In India 115 million children labourers are involved in hazardous work and 61 million children are shut out of primary schools.
- India has one of the fastest growing economies. As its economy grows, so does the demand for bricks.
- While child-labour is outlawed by law in India, families, including children, often have no choice but to work.
- Watch: Brick by Brick: Education in the brickfields.