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School Rescues Children from Work in the Brick Kilns of Nepal

- A special report by CONCERN and The Advocacy Project

Imadol, Nepal: Hunched up against the cold and dark, KB slapped mud into the mold and produced a brick with the practiced ease of a veteran. He gave his age as 15 but is probably 13. Both ages violate Nepali law, which forbids dangerous work by children under sixteen.



With daylight, more workers arrived to flip (turn) and carry bricks to the kilns. They receive 320 rupees (\$2.9) [for every thousand bricks they carry](#). Back injuries are common, particularly among older women.

Such was the scene that greeted a recent early morning mission by The Advocacy Project (AP) and [CONCERN](#), an AP partner, to one of seven brick factories outside Kathmandu that work with CONCERN to end child labor.

Children flip bricks at a factory near Kathmandu

CONCERN has placed [51 children from the factories](#) in school since 2015, with funding from AP and the [Global Fund for Children](#). The goal is to enroll 210 child workers for at least 5 years and set an example for other families with working children. "Sustained education is the best way to

ensure that a child never has to work in bricks again," says Bijaya Sainju, who directs CONCERN.



Buddhi Ram and Manisha study at the Faidoka school

children in work. Most workers migrate to the factories from impoverished districts and many lost homes to the earthquake last year. Factory owners add to their problems by sending brokers (known as *naike*) to offer an advance at high rates of interest. This looks attractive but imposes a

large debt.



Taking the strain: This girl, 15, left school after marrying a fellow worker

Living conditions do not help. The five members of Sanu's family live in a tiny dwelling (known as a *jhyauli*) that they built from bricks. (Many *jhyaulis* have collapsed during earthquake after-shocks.) Toilets are foul and drinking water is hauled from a deep well, which means more backbreaking work.

Teachers at the Suryodaya school say that any child like Sanu who lives in a factory will be exposed to bricks and that this will probably affect his or her academic performance. But, they say, this is vastly preferable to no school at all. CONCERN does what it can to help schools by

The recent monitoring mission met with 15 of the 51 young beneficiaries at their schools and found that much progress has been made. Manisha (photo) was working in bricks for five hours a day as recently as July - she has now stopped work and is getting good grades at the Suryodaya school. Nabina and Rojina, at the Faidoka school, are top of their class and wear their uniforms - provided by CONCERN - with evident pride. Enrollment at the schools has risen sharply in recent years. "Parents are getting the message," says Dr Sainju.

In spite of this, a visit to three of the seven factories also revealed the many forces that keep

As a result, entire families arrive in the factories in October under enormous pressure to earn as much as they can during the brick season. The pressure increases because they are paid by the number of bricks they produce and this naturally becomes a family affair. Children play a role because their small fingers can get between the rows and flip the bricks [as seen in this video](#). Children can also step on and around bricks without breaking them.

CONCERN asks parents that receive education support to keep their children out of work altogether. While twelve children interviewed during the recent mission have honored the pledge, three admitted that they flip bricks before they go to school. Sanu, a lively 11 year-old, said he often gets up at 4 am to help his parents before going to Suryodaya school.

providing extra tuition for brick children.



Bricks are stacked in the kiln to be cooked

The greatest challenge comes from children like Govindra, 13, who has to support three younger siblings. School is not, at present, an option for Govindra. CONCERN has found a job for one of his brothers in a tea shop and hopes to place Govindra in training. But in the meantime, he works to stay alive.

Such cases call into question a pledge by the owners to ban child labor, but Ram Lal Maharjan, who manages a factory, said he could not force children like Govindra to stop working. Hari Awal, who owns another factory, said he would never ask families to leave children behind when they migrate down to the factory. "That would be inhumane," he said.



Hari Kakhe, left, owner of the BM factory with Prakash Basi from CONCERN

Owners hold the key to improvements, and CONCERN mixes pressure with praise in dealing with them. One of the more progressive owners, Hari Kakhe (photo) at the BM factory has built a dormitory for workers, installed water and toilets, paid for medical care, and set up a center where infants can play while their parents work. In time, he said, the brick owners' association might be persuaded to end the debt bondage - a major goal for CONCERN.

AP will continue to support CONCERN's program by raising funds for individual children through [Global Giving](#) and deploying talented Peace Fellows like [Lauren Purnell](#) who put 20 brick kids

in school this year. We welcome your support and feedback!

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- * Meet the [51 brick children](#) who have been enrolled in school by CONCERN
- * [Donate here](#) to support this program and place a child worker in school
- * Click here to see AP's [video footage from the brick factories](#)
- * [Donate here](#) to help us deploy a Peace Fellow to CONCERN in 2017.

Thanks to Humanity United for supporting our 2016 program and to the Peace and Collaborative Development Network for re-posting our bulletins.