

thankyou.



October 2020 - September 2021

THANKYOU AND IJM

IMPACT REPORT

“Our goal is to protect 317 million men, women and children from bonded labour in India.”

The partnership between Thankyou and International Justice Mission has had a direct contribution to the rescue of thousands, and ultimately, the protection of millions of people from bonded labour who are in extreme poverty.

This partnership could not have come at a more important time than with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The World Bank estimated in September 2020 that most of the world's additional 88 million people pushed into extreme poverty, through the pandemic, lived in South Asia¹. Many of these people were as a result at greater risk of being forced into debt bondage and trafficked into bonded labour.

The partnership between IJM and Thankyou has helped make it possible for us to keep going and bring protection to the vulnerable. Despite the lockdowns, the pursuit of justice continued.

The lockdown itself illuminated the location of many abusive worksites, where families had to fend for themselves with no money and nowhere to go. IJM leveraged our strong relationships with government and NGO partners that we have been building over the years. Through these relationships, we were able to provide visibility as to where governments could practically meet the needs of vulnerable migrants. As a result, we saw the government rise to intervene in significant ways to help and support migrant communities by providing direct services such as safe transportation.

In a year where challenges were mounting on every side, we saw the Indian government prioritise the protection of vulnerable communities and rise to take ownership to eliminate forced labour in the country. The government's ownership of this issue and their commitment to ending bonded labour is a testament to our growing partnership and the strength of IJM's model of protection as it was stress-tested during the challenges of the last year.

Sincerely,



JACOB SARKODEE
Chief Impact Officer, IJM Australia

AT A GLANCE

CASEWORK IMPACT October 2020 - September 2021

IJM, TAMIL NADU



348

Victims Rescued



5*

Perpetrators Restrained



2*

Perpetrators Convicted



120

Survivors Restored

* Due to the Pandemic escalation in March- July 2021, priority was given by the government to combat the pandemic with Tamil Nadu state announcing lockdowns and officials tied to COVID-19 relief work rather than bonded labour cases. Hence, IJM activities, casework and court cases slowed. IJM India also paused almost all program activities to protect our staff and attend to urgent needs.



1. Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: The effect of new data (7 October 2020)



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PARTNERSHIP IMPACT

Summary of Partnership Impact on IJM Program Outcomes

Thankyou's partnership with International Justice Mission (Oct 20-Sep 21) has made a significant contribution to protecting those in poverty from the violence of bonded labour slavery. The impact goal of the Bonded Labour Program in the State of Tamil Nadu (the project area) is that:

The people vulnerable to the crime of bonded labour are confident in and protected by a functioning justice system, which **deters perpetrators** and results in the **reduction of the prevalence** of the crime.

The program has four primary outcomes:

OUTCOME 1

The Tamil Nadu State takes the lead in ending bonded labour.

OUTCOME 2

Public justice system implementers (e.g. the police and public prosecutors) address the crime of bonded labour to create deterrence.

OUTCOME 3

The Tamil Nadu State builds, monitors, and holds accountable the implementation process.

OUTCOME 4

Survivors experience care and protection from the system.

“

How has the partnership enabled IJM to progress towards the primary outcomes in the last 12 months? The following pages are a few examples of significant steps forward.



OUTCOME 1

TAMIL NADU STATE TAKES LEAD IN ENDING BONDED LABOUR

Tamil Nadu Government Observes India's First-Ever Bonded Labour System Abolition Day

On 23 September 2020, the vision became a reality as the Tamil Nadu government accepted the proposal from the Commissioner of Labour and directed that 9 February be observed as Bonded Labour System Abolition Day.

This was a significant milestone for the program as this indicates the Government's will and ownership towards combating bonded labour.

The Tamil Nadu Labour Department, Police, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders came together under the leadership of the Commissioner of Labour to launch this historical day in the State of Tamil Nadu.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. The Government released a documentary film highlighting its efforts and achievements in making Tamil Nadu a Bonded Labour free state. It was aired on Door Dharshan (Government broadcasting channel) and copies of the film were disseminated to all District collectors for further broadcast in villages and towns.
2. The Additional Deputy General of Police (Crime Against Women and Children Unit) directed all the District Superintendents of Police to rescue bonded labourers across Tamil Nadu as part of Operation Smile, a national program set up to combat child labour.
3. Bonded labour awareness programs were conducted across the state. Members of the Released Bonded Labour Association (RBLA) performed street plays on bonded labour and the Government's initiatives to eradicate bonded labour in Tamil Nadu.
4. All 38 District Legal Service Authorities (DLSAs) observed the bonded labour commemoration day by conducting various awareness programs and taking the pledge to eradicate bonded labour. In all districts, the judicial magistrates, paralegal volunteers, and panel lawyers attended the events. The effort taken by both the State government and the judiciary to observe this day not only shows their acceptance of the prevalence of bonded labour in the state but also demonstrates their will and grit to eradicate this crime.
5. Surprise checks by One Stop Crisis Teams (OSCTs) were conducted in different worksites across the state of Tamil Nadu.
6. There was widespread media coverage—mostly initiated by members of government, police, judiciary, NGOs, media and academia—which increased visibility and the profile of the issue across the state and country.
7. The Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Mr. O. Panneerselvam tweeted this message on the commemoration of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Day:

“To break the shackles of the suffering bonded labourers and to provide a safer life for them, I am proud to say that the Tamil Nadu government is the First State in the whole of India to celebrate Bonded Labour System Abolition Day on the 9th of February.”



MR. O. PANNEERSELVAM
Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

BONDED LABOUR DETERRENCE

Public justice system implementers address the crime of bonded labour to create deterrence.

OCTOBER

Kids and Parents Rescued After 5 Years in Bonded Labour

Local authorities rescued five families from bonded labour at a wood-cutting site where many had been enslaved for the last five years after a middleman promised good work and fair pay. He and the owner gave them payment advances of about 10,000 rupees (A\$180) that they could pay off with their labour.

The 17 labourers had to chop down trees and brush from an isolated rural area every day for the profit of a local businessman. Six children were forced to do this work alongside their parents, including a 12-year-old girl and five boys (ages 5 to 12). At night, the families slept in crude tents made of tarps and branches but were otherwise open to the elements.

“It was a sad sight to see the victims’ quarters,” one IJM staff member shared later. “Children were exposed to these precarious living conditions during inclement weather and were undernourished. They were forced to work—missing the joys of their childhood.”



MARCH

Lumber Business Owner Convicted After Nine Years for Enslaving Nine People

On 30 March 2021, an Indian judge convicted a local business owner for holding nine people in brutal bonded labour in a tree-cutting business. Some had been enslaved there for up to 15 years until they were rescued in July 2012. The survivors (eight adults and one child) went through a rehabilitative aftercare program as they rebuilt lives in freedom.

This legal trial was innovative in several ways:

1. The case initially moved slowly through the courts, until the High Court ordered it to be fast-tracked and completed in just eight weeks. This demonstrated the government’s commitment to addressing bonded labour, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The High Court also admitted the Release Certificates as formal evidence, proving these families were in bondage and strengthening their testimony against the denial of the accused. This will set a precedent for future cases to allow these certificates as evidence.

3. The judge allowed the lead police officer to provide evidence over video conference, rather than in person—allowing the case to move forward on schedule. This was the first IJM case to use video conferencing, and it helps courts see how technology can be a trustworthy tool to enact justice.

DECEMBER

Enslaved at 5 Years Old – Freed After a Decade

IJM’s trained casework partner Social Health and Education Development (SHED) India helped authorities rescue a 15-year-old boy from ten years of bonded labour slavery.

The team tracked this boy for several months as they tried to learn more about his story and experience. They later discovered that he had been working as a shepherd for a local goat farmer since he was five as his family took a loan of about 150,000 rupees (less than A\$2,7000) from the farmer to make ends meet, and he was therefore sent to work and pay off their debt. Further, he had never been to school and has very few memories of his family and hometown. He’s had to fend for himself over the past years – sleeping outside with the 300 goats and rarely getting enough food.

Shocked by the abuse this boy has suffered for a decade, SHED India staff brought the case to the One Stop Crisis Team, a task force of government officials who respond to bonded labour and human trafficking. On 10 December, this team scoured a huge open grassland where the boy was known to graze his goats. They finally found him, confirmed the truth of his story, and brought him to safety at a government office.



APRIL

IJM Partner Helps Free Two Families from Slavery at a Sugarcane Farm

Four adults and three children are now free from violence at a sugarcane farm after an urgent rescue operation led by local authorities, IJM’s casework partner SHED India, and a survivor advocacy network. The two families rescued on 21 April had faced particularly brutal conditions under the control of the farm owner.



The farm owner had lured each of these young families with an advance of 30,000 rupees (approximately A\$525) -- a massive sum in these impoverished communities—and then used this debt to keep the families trapped. Over the last five months, he also used verbal abuse and frequent physical violence to control and terrify them. The three children—aged 10, 7 and 6—were not able to attend school. Instead, they watched their parents suffer.

A survivor shared: “When I was there in the farm—even though it was only for five months—it was like five years. The owner had complete control of my life. I was told where to go and when to go and was often denied permission in desperate situations. Today I can walk about freely. I get to do what I like, go where I want, and I am free.”

THE TAMIL NADU STATE BUILDS, MONITORS AND HOLDS ACCOUNTABLE THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS.

New State Wide Helpline for Bonded Labour Complaints

In the September Quarter, the Tamil Nadu government established a toll-free helpline to receive complaints related to bonded labour. By calling the toll-free number, citizens are connected to a polite and professional operator who can receive any grievances pertaining to bonded labour. The Tamil Nadu Labour Department's official website has displayed the toll-free number in the banner of their landing page.

This is a highly significant win as six years ago, some officials denied the existence of bonded labour. Today, the state prioritises the eradication of the bonded labour system and is taking proactive measures to achieve this goal independently.

The state of Tamil Nadu has always prioritised addressing child labour and has conducted numerous events to raise awareness on the issue. Today, the bonded labour helpline number is listed alongside the child labour helpline, indicating the high level of importance that the state attaches to these two crimes.



This is a highly significant win as six years ago, some officials denied the existence of bonded labour. Today, the state prioritises the eradication of the bonded labour system and is taking proactive measures to achieve this goal independently.”



PROTECTION AND CARE

Survivors experience protection and care from the system.

EXPLORING SKILL-BUILDING AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR SURVIVORS:

In the September 2021 Quarter, IJM worked with the RBLA to support survivor-led businesses and explore new income generating activities to support survivors long-term. RBLA leaders and IJM representatives met with the Entrepreneurship Development Initiative Institute (EDII), a unit of Tamil Nadu Rural Development, to explore opportunities for survivor empowerment. The teams discussed plans to enhance the skills of woodcutters from the survivor community. EDII also sponsored an exposure field trip to Sivagangai District to visit a charcoal-manufacturing unit, and two survivors participated in an e-workshop to learn about establishing their own start-up units. Furthermore, survivor-led brands Varnam and Siragugal successfully completed orders and exported the survivor-made products earning over Rs. 300,000. Varnam has clinched a deal worth Rs. 615,000 and is on track to complete their sixth order of block-printed home décor products. The progress of bonded labour survivors in enhancing livelihood opportunities and broadening their scope beyond what they have always known is indicative of their sustained freedom and transformation.

GOVERNMENT VISITS TO MODEL REHABILITATION PROJECT:

Government officials from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs visited the bonded labour survivor model rehabilitation project at Meesanallur village in Tiruvannamalai district. This village is entirely made up of survivors of bonded labour, with concrete houses built by the government and numerous survivor-led businesses (like charcoal units, dairy production, and a petrol pump). The officials inspected the houses and public utility infrastructure to see that the government's funds were utilized well. The survivors welcomed the inspection team in their traditional way. On the same day, the government helped inaugurate a midday meal program in the village, which will ensure that all children attending the Anganwadi (daycare centre) would henceforth receive their regular noon meals. The Covid-19 vaccine was also administered to survivors of the community who were willing to take the vaccine.

PARTNERSHIP IMPACT MILESTONES

Summary of Partnership Impact Milestones

✔ Achieved
 ✘ Not Achieved
 — Closed

Impact Milestone	Status	Impact Comments
1st case independent of IJM where the Vigilance Committee (VC) was part of the rescue	✔	Independent action of the Vigilance Committee and the local government indicates governmental will and ownership to address bonded labour.
1st case where the District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) para legal volunteers support prosecution to argue the Bonded Labour case	✔	DLSA para legal volunteers fill an important gap in strengthening the prosecutions case against the suspected perpetrator.
10 Identification sweeps by Vigilance Committee (VC) in project area	✔	Sweeps by the Vigilance Committee indicate that proactive efforts are being made to identify bonded labour crimes.
Bonded Labour was discussed at a Chief Secretary/ Chief Minister Review	✔	The discussion of bonded labour at the highest levels of governmental leadership indicates prioritisation of the crime.
Partner with an Artist group and /or cultural troupe to do annual widespread grassroots education campaigns	✔	Grassroots education campaigns ensure that vulnerable communities are kept informed about the evolving nature of the crime of bonded labour.
All 13 Identification sweeps conducted in each sub division in project area	✔	Sweeps by the Vigilance Committee indicate that proactive efforts are being made to identify bonded labour crimes.
A judge /judicial magistrate passes conviction within 3 years from the date of First Information Report (FIR) in one Bonded Labour case in Project area	✘	All court processes have been significantly delayed due to the spread of COVID-19 as reported earlier.
Facilitate an annual workshop to train journalists on bonded labour	—	IJM decided not to pursue these milestones due to COVID-19 restrictions.
Facilitate annual television debate and /or press conference on Bonded Labour	—	IJM decided not to pursue these milestones due to COVID-19 restrictions.

CASEWORK DASHBOARD

India Summary Casework Results	Oct-Dec '20 Actual	Jan-Mar '21 Actual	Apr-June '21 Actual	July-Sept '21 Actual	Total 12 Months Target	Total 12 Months Actuals
Victims Relieved	166	6	81	95	437	348
Perpetrators Restrained	2	0	3	0	15	5
Perpetrators Convicted	0	1	0	1	8	2
Survivor's Restored	100	13	5	2	92	120





CASE STUDY

KEY PROGRAM PARTNER

The Released Bonded Labourers' Association (RBLA)

WHAT IS THE RBLA AND HOW WAS IT FOUNDED?

The Released Bonded Labourers' Association (RBLA) was launched in 2014 as the brainchild of our partner Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD) with input from IJM. IJM has observed that creating a strong foundation for survivors through the RBLA is a powerful tool that will empower survivors and create lasting change.

The group started small, but then enrollment camps were conducted from the year 2017 in nine districts in Tamil Nadu and close to 2,000 people have now become a part of the RBLA.

WHAT IS THE GROUP'S OVERALL VISION? WHAT DO THEY WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

RBLA has the unwavering vision of bringing together rescued bonded labourers and making them champions who have successfully overcome bonded labour. The following are RBLA's objectives:

- Shape survivors' resiliency and coping skills.
- Inspire and educate the survivor to lead a life of freedom and with purpose.
- Elevate a voice to stand boldly and create awareness of the world outside.

RBLA GROUP CHARTER GOALS

- To create awareness on bonded labour and function as a community watchdog, protecting the vulnerable.
- To advocate for the rights and entitlements of the survivors.
- To establish linkages for the economic empowerment of its members.
- To promote solidarity among members

KEY IMPACT ACHIEVEMENTS



RBLA leaders have worked with the government on more than 20 rescue operations, leading to the freedom of more than 250 bonded labourers. This is indicative of the significant impact freedom has on survivors. The RBLA leaders were once timid victims but today they are bold people who are bringing other victims out of bondage.



RBLA leaders successfully advocated for the government entitlements for members of RBLA. When they were victims, the restriction on their movement hindered them from accessing government schemes. They did not have government documents or identity cards. There have been instances where owners have confiscated their identity documents. Today, RBLA leaders are ensuring that survivors receive what is legally theirs as citizens of India.



RBLA leaders regularly meet with state-level officers, district administration officials, and legislative assembly representatives. This is significant because these survivors were once scared to look directly at police or government officials. Today, they are no longer timid; they are empowered people who work alongside the government.



I was rescued from a brick kiln and had a big dream. We wanted to form an association for ourselves. The main reason was to spread awareness of the bonded labour system among our own people. Through our efforts, we have secured freedom for more than 250 people. We have also lobbied with the government and helped them avail the rightful entitlements. We continue to work for the welfare of our people, and we are immensely satisfied.

VASANTHA
A member of the RBLA



IJM

**INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE
MISSION AUSTRALIA**

PO Box 124
St Leonards NSW 1590

ABN: 56 164 514 694

☎ 1300 045 669

🌐 IJM.org.au



INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION is a global organisation that protects people who are poor from violence throughout the developing world. IJM partners with local authorities to rescue victims of violence, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors, and strengthen justice systems.

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ACFID
MEMBER

