



## MAYA ORGANIC: An integrated strategy to alleviate poverty

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*"In order for empowerment practice to broaden its focus on individual enlightenment and emancipation to be relevant to collective action and social transformation, new structural arrangements may be called for. Existing structural mechanisms that are resistant to creative change must be recreated."*

### 1 BACKGROUND

Since its beginning, MAYA's main focus has been on children's rights and the eradication of child labour. Over the years however, its understanding of these problems has become increasingly complex, moving away from an exclusively individual empowerment approach towards addressing child labour as an effect of inherent weaknesses in the system. The following paper discusses the evolution of this understanding and its application into MAYA ORGANIC, an integrated strategy to alleviate poverty.

### TOWARDS A SYSTEMIC UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD LABOUR

#### *COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF SCHOOLS*

MAYA's efforts towards the eradication of child labour initially comprised work with street children, non-formal education (NFE), supplementary education and early childhood care organised directly by the organisation, leading to mainstreaming of working children to formal schools. Reflecting on this experience of working intensively at the local level to address issues related to child labour led the organisation to examine the effectiveness of such an approach.

It was realised that the problems of child labour were not necessarily specific to certain areas but rather manifest as typical patterns across all the communities that MAYA worked with. The complete absence of any forum for articulation which is accompanied by lack of Govt accountability to deliver quality education (with regard to material and teaching which is relevant to the students) had brought out a situation where the community has no means in hand to assume ownership of the quality of schools. These causes of systemic nature resulted in high drop-out rates and poor performance of the education system raising the probability of child labour.

To ensure that this strategy is effective in the long run, MAYA started addressing these systemic weaknesses through building the inherent capacity of communities and ensuring their true involvement and active participation in the process of eradication of child labour. While earlier, MAYA was addressing issues of participation through parent's initiative within the communities, today, the approach facilitates community ownership through the building of new institutions at the local level.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, these institutions have become part of the mainstream political structures. It is argued here that social change needs to go beyond political mobilisation, which is characterised by pressure groups that ask the government for specific entitlements. Instead of thus confining their roles to that of passive receivers, communities are encouraged through these new structures, to take active ownership for the quality and functioning of the school. Such a process of learning within the community, to take ownership of schools and education, will also encourage the people to go beyond education in the local area but also articulate policy agendas and other developmental issues related to livelihood and employment.

#### *THE WORKING POOR*

An equally important learning for the organisation was the understanding that livelihood related problems contribute to the systemic cause of child labour. Almost all the adults and working children in MAYA's programme areas operate in the informal economy, most of them belonging to the working poor. Consequently having to deal with irregular employment, low-income (in most cases below minimum wages), poor skills, no opportunities for training and development, family indebtedness and, above all, no bargaining power at the economic, social and political level. MAYA believes that these various forms of deprivation faced by

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<sup>1</sup>Herrick, (1995:p.3) : <http://www.interweb-tech.com/nsnnet/docs/herrick.htm>

<sup>2</sup> See perspective paper on Prayajatha, [www.ciee.net](http://www.ciee.net)



people represent a status of poverty that increases the incidence of child labour. Unless one does not address poverty from this perspective, it is assumed here, that child labour can not be addressed in a sustainable way.<sup>3</sup>

### ***MISSING INCOME SECURITY***

Similar to education, the working poor lack a structure for collective articulation of their basic requirements as workers and as community members with the Govt, markets and other formal bodies; It was also found that the individuals begin to perceive their situation as an individual rather than as a collective structural problem. This lack of organisation prevents them from responding to the ever-changing requirements of the labour market in a planned manner, resulting in limited opportunities for improving their skill-levels or working conditions. The lack of organisation and formal structure also have an influence on the relation with the employers, their status as workers, regularity of employment and therefore income security. This in turn results in disorganisation in every aspect of their lives, which limits their planning horizons within the family, affecting their spending patterns of the household and finally the functioning of community life. In a study conducted by MAYA, it was found that work security and regularity of income have a strong influence on children's school attendance, in fact more than the absolute income. There was a similar influence on planning and spending patterns - resulting in the fact that a majority of the families who do not have income security fall into the vicious cycle of indebtedness which in turn increases the probability of child labour and bonded labour.

### ***LIMITATIONS OF THRIFT & CREDIT AND TRADITIONAL FORMS OF TRAINING***

MAYA's earlier efforts to address financial shortcomings of the communities through saving and credit initiatives in the form of self-help group (SHG) development, as well as through employment generation activities led to the conclusion that thrift and credit did not empower the members to the level expected. While such micro-finance interventions provided the members with access to capital, it did not alter their status with regard to power equations either within the family or community. Similar to findings from other studies, it was realised that women, while being the main responsible bearers of loans, did not necessarily gain control over the spending within the household<sup>4</sup>. Internal studies also revealed that loans were often taken as collateral for repayment of external debts or even new loans taken from the middlemen. Though thrift and credit gave the women's groups their own financial capital, which they could draw on for their credit needs, there was little scope and possibility available to invest their capital in productive areas to enhance their income and therefore improve the family's livelihood.

Similarly, early efforts of MAYA with regard to vocational training for youth and enterprise development training for women also had a limited impact on livelihood and empowerment. This was also found in initiatives of the Govt, other NGOs and the private sector. Reviewing the reasons for this led the organisation to the understanding that such an approach is restrictive to trainees' development, since it was supply-driven and highly curriculum-based; not taking into account the learning needs of the individuals, and the various ways in which they learn. As a consequence, the trainees are not able to translate this learning so as to cope with the changing market demands or to utilise the learning in their daily lives and environment. With regard to enterprise development training, one also realised that the assumption that women need only access to finance and some financial and trade related training equips them to become successful entrepreneurs, had limited empirical validity.

### ***NEED TO ADDRESS CAPABILITIES***

Despite these different efforts to ensure access to entitlements<sup>5</sup> such as access to skills upgradation and training, to finance, information and markets for better employment, it was realised that the interventions had limited impact, as they did not address the cause of the problem of poverty— people lacking the capabilities<sup>6</sup> to incorporate such learnings in their daily lives while making use of such entitlements. In contrast to the neo-liberal perspective, where empowerment of the workers in the informal economy is ensured if access to

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<sup>3</sup> Poverty hereinafter used refers to this understanding and perspective

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Piush Antony, 2002: Memberbased organisations;

<sup>5</sup> MAYA understands under "entitlements" basic civic rights of various forms an individual should be able to access and use for his/her personal development. MAYA draws this definition from A. Sen's entitlement definition. This definition includes the political rights perspective, as well as social and economic rights which are defined as basic civic rights in a democracy (Sen's article in: Quality of Life...).

<sup>6</sup> Similar to entitlements, MAYA draws its definition of capabilities from A. Sen's definition in Quality of Life



resources is provided and state intervention minimised, we argue that people have to develop capabilities to see the advantages and then make effective use of these entitlements. It was realised that the environment people live in determines their aspirations and how they operate in society; approaches that do not take into consideration that life-perspectives & actions are shaped within a given environment would not have the expected impact on people's lives. Consequently, any instance of impact would be rather coincidental than planned.

### ***NEED TO ADDRESS EQUITY***

Closely linked to MAYA's understanding of the structural causes of child labour is the aspect of equity. It is believed that in order to address issues of poverty (and therefore child labour) there is an imperative need to address equity (in terms of gender, class, caste, etc).

In MAYA's programmes, women have been crucial partners for community development and for the eradication of child labour. Over the years, women have increasingly taken responsibility for school enrolment, monitoring of drop out rates and the 100 pre-schools in the communities. It was realised that through these activities, and within the structure of SHGs and later cooperatives, women created a public space for themselves and started to articulate their interests and needs. Though there was a clear move towards more autonomy of the women in the community-based activities such as education, it was confined to the non-economic areas and related to their main areas of typical gender-based responsibility-child care and education. Many women have seen the benefit of togetherness in these particular areas but are yet to see the advantage of credit and savings through these institutions. So far, despite better access to loan and savings, their bargaining power within the households and in the labour market remained the same. Most of the working women still operate at the lowest level of the occupational hierarchy, many of them working in insecure work situations, as homebased workers paid at piece-rate, lowest paid domestic workers, or anywhere as casual labourers.

An important finding of MAYA was that access to finance and loans can be a necessary but is by no means a sufficient tool for increased women's autonomy, as most of them remain invisible workers. Studies indicate that if women work within visible and formal institutions, through which they get a formal status and earn a regular income, their bargaining power within the household and the community and autonomy significantly increases<sup>7</sup>. MAYA therefore believes that the co-operative could provide such a formal structure and create an enabling environment for the women to gain more autonomy as women outside their house as well as more control over their finances - not only in terms of loans, but through access to regular income.

## **2 AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR**

Based on this understanding, MAYA has consolidated its work with self-help groups and cooperatives, vocational training and income-generation initiatives in its working areas (Bangalore urban and rural districts) to address learning and livelihood questions through an integrated approach- MAYA ORGANIC.

In the initial phase, MAYA has identified sectors that are representative of the activities of the women and men in MAYA's working area in and outside Bangalore.

- Garments work (*cutting, zariwork, sequin work, appliqué work, embroidery, etc*)
- Lac ware (*educational toys, utility products, etc*)
- Construction work (*masonry, electrical work, plumbing, etc*) including carpentry and metal fabrication (furniture, utility products, etc)

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<sup>7</sup> See Kabeer (2001) [www.](http://www.)



### 3 MAYA ORGANIC

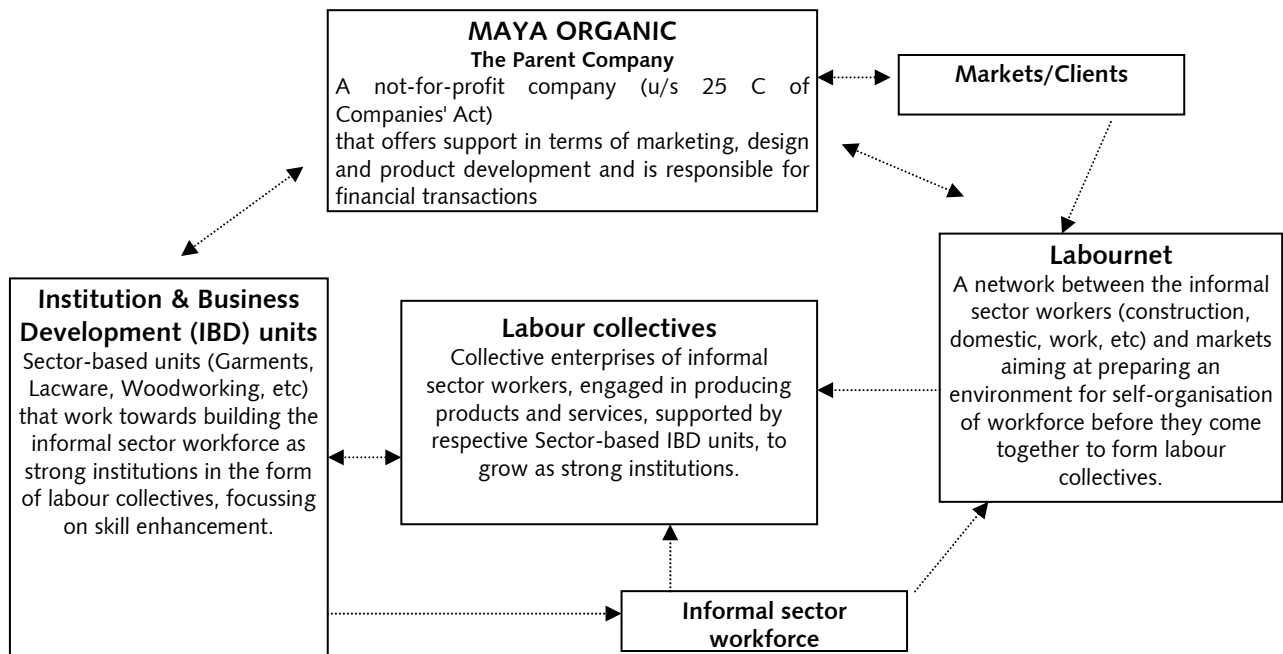
MAYA ORGANIC is an institutional model, which provides a formal structure to the informal sector workforce, taking advantage of the collectives' structure as non-hierarchical member-based organisations, while at the same time, presenting itself to the market as a brand for quality professional services and products. It is designed to be of mutual benefit to the informal sector workforce, as they organise themselves to share learning opportunities for new skills and capability development on one hand and common risks on the other.

This new institutional model that aims at poverty alleviation resulting in empowerment of the members through a learning approach, also enables people to expand their opportunities by accessing new networks within and outside the community, which includes interaction with new markets/clients. Such a learning process makes possible a visible and representative body for articulation within a new and more dynamic environment and supports them to go beyond their life-world which so far has limited their actions and perspectives. Another part of learning that ensures empowerment is a learning environment which is learner-centred and supported by a "facilitator", rather than a teacher-driven, curriculum based delivery of information. This supports the learners to become more self-directed about their learning and take control over their decisions. The facilitator together with the learners define learning outcomes that meet individual and collective learning needs, therefore enabling the process towards empowerment of the individual as well as the collective<sup>8</sup>.

#### STRUCTURE OF MAYA ORGANIC

MAYAORGANIC encourages different kinds of vital networking between the collectives and markets. In order to maintain the focus on institution development and skill enhancement while simultaneously being market-oriented, the initiative is structured as below:

*Graph 1: Structure of MAYA ORGANIC*



- **MAYA ORGANIC**

A parent not-for-profit company which primarily offers centralised support in terms of marketing, design and product development. Orders placed by clients for the products and services offered by the labour collectives would be routed through this parent company. The parent company MAYA ORGANIC

<sup>8</sup> See note on MAYA's learning model in section 4 of the dossier.



would facilitate inter-sectoral exchanges and address issues of fund raising, concept marketing, access to loans and banks, and processes of reflection and documentation across the sectors. It would also build partnerships with various stakeholders including the Government, private sector, other NGOs and community-based organisations. The parent company represents all the sector-specific companies to influence policy formulation for specific sectors and the informal sector as a whole.

- **Institution and Business Development (IBD) units**

These are sector-wise units (presently of Garments, Lac-ware and Woodworking) that facilitate institution development of the informal sector workforce in the form of labour collectives, with a strong emphasis on skill enhancement. These IBD units are responsible for developing the informal sector workforce as mature and competent collective enterprises, capable of partnering with the formal industry and markets. Executing orders, ensuring quality systems and products and facilitating a system of skills audit and enhancement would be an integral part of this process of institution and business development.

- **Labournet**

This is an interface between the markets and informal sector workers; particularly those from sectors such as construction, domestic work, etc, where the existing setup demands a period of preparation for self-organisation of the workforce, before they come together to form labour collectives. The network of the Labournet serves as a focal point of jobs for the workforce and offers the markets a single point source for access to labour. Its operationalisation will involve various stakeholders who have a direct relevance to the informal sector (workers, employers, end-customers, facilitators and institutions).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF LABOUR COLLECTIVES

### MEMBER BASED ORGANISATION

MAYA ORGANIC has incorporated the advantages of trade unions, traditional training institutions and has learnt from other forms of market interactions which influence the functioning of the labour market. The collective is a member-based organisation with a leadership with the mandate to ensure continuous learning, decent work conditions and equitable distribution of income. The representative leadership is elected by the members and has a planning and executive function, as determined by the members. The decision-making power rests entirely with the members.

However, the collective clearly distinguishes itself from a trade union through a proactive market approach which goes beyond petitioning to employers for workers' rights; but rather aims at mutual partnerships with the market. Being an institution that is structured to enable learning for its members, the collective takes responsibility for market changes through ensuring training and market-sensitive product development and services, while at the same time, negotiating for their fair pricing.

The distinctness of this approach from an entrepreneurial model cannot be overemphasised. It is held that entrepreneurship cannot be a model of scale to address the problems of the poor since not all individuals can become entrepreneurs nor can they access all the support structures and resources required to be a successful entrepreneur. Further, institutional support models either by NGOs or the Govt turn out to be, in the end, structures of dependence if the issue of ownership of the overall initiative is not addressed by design.

### FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME

It is in the nature of the collective to have a structure which ensures transparency. Such a mechanism also ensures that the income remaining after the payment of all other costs of production is redistributed among the members. This form of redistribution distinguishes itself from ongoing business practices, where a significant share of the profit goes into enterprises or to the middlemen. Members also decide on putting aside a share of their incomes to invest into social security, such as health, life insurance and certain forms of unemployment compensation. Both the aspects – regular income and social security - can stabilise spending patterns, as it becomes possible for the members to plan & structure their life more effectively. While earlier loans were taken as financial support during lean periods for food and medical expenses, regular income and social security also contribute to the possibility of saving so that people start investing into long-term assets. Such investments can



be related to children's education, durable goods or business related tools. This in turn will have a positive impact on the economic and social status of the collective's members and their families.

#### **LEARNING ORGANISATION**

In contrast to traditional training institutions, the collective goes beyond an instruction and curriculum-based learning approach to emphasise the necessity of flexible and market-oriented learning modules. The sector-based structures ensure continuous skill enhancement of members by matching market needs with member-defined learning outcomes. Appropriate resource persons/institutions are selected as facilitators of such a learning process. This is supported by mechanisms where the performance and learning levels of each of the members is continuously monitored and assessed. It enables the sector-based structures and the leadership of the collective to reflect on the individual learning requirements of members and encourages self-directed learning through more flexible and individualised training. *It is argued here that empowerment is a multidimensional phenomenon which only can be achieved through a continuous learning process, and then manifests in all the spheres where people interact; such as politics, at work and within the household.* The collective strongly encourages ongoing individual and collective learning which integrates attitudinal, technical skills and on-the-job learning for personal growth and community development. Literacy and numeracy skills as well as sensitisation on spending, lending, and gender issues within communities and households would also form a central part of the learning process. A documentation system which includes individual learning files, performance feedback, and collective's reflection on its own performance contributes to the learning process. This is supported by MAYA's own documentation on the collective's capacities with regard to problem solving, awareness, accountability and ownership which is reflected upon with the collective.

#### **FORMAL BODY**

A central characteristic of this model is the collective's ability to articulate and represent needs of its members as a formal and visible body to government and other formal institutions. Membership provides each individual with a formal identity through an identity card, a savings book, working file and a social security account. For the Govt and other institutions, the collective therefore has the potential to become a viable channel for financial and other resource allocations as it ensures a transparent and non-hierarchical structure and is a professionally managed organisation which is exclusively owned by the members.

#### **MECHANISMS FOR QUALITY PRODUCTS/SERVICES AND PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE**

As the collective is an enterprise owned by the members, it is in the collective's responsibility to ensure professional attitude and skills among the members and to define the rules of its functioning. An appropriate feedback system, which monitors market responses with regard to trends, the collectives' performance and the quality of products/services, is therefore a part of each collective. It comprises

- Clients & employers' feedback forms with regard to products/services in terms of design, reliability, and quality
- Assessment of members' satisfaction of work, which includes working conditions, timings, payment regularity,
- Performance assessment of members based on feedback from employers /clients
- Discussion on redefined learning needs and training outcomes for new areas of work & better performance.

Integral to the approach to ensure professionalisation, MAYA ORGANIC facilitates a **development standard** implying that it is not a 'top-down' externally imposed standard but rather evolved by the collectives themselves through a process that seeks to continuously improve labour standards and social protection, looking at developmental aspects beyond the workplace and towards the family and community. Such a development standard seeks to improve each collective from its current level, rather than attempting to achieve an absolute standard. Further, the efforts are towards continuous improvement rather than being restricted to merely achieving the desired compliance; for instance, the compliance goes beyond minimum wages, and the minimum level of protection set by legal provisions. In the event of collectives not complying with these standards despite the support offered, they are denied membership and related advantages of the network. These standards include a commitment for continuous learning & regular skills assessment, enrolment of their children to school (no child labour), working at a common workplace rather than home-based work, regular contribution to membership, contribution to social security, and percentage share of profit to collective.

It is argued here that a compliance code of this nature, which is decided by the members and includes a commitment for learning by them, can ensure good working conditions, equitable distribution of income, since



such a workforce gains significant bargaining power, on account of its professionalism. This has a direct bearing on making the product/service more competitive in the market.

This process is facilitated on the one hand by developing mechanisms within the collective and the clients towards ensuring fair practice and, on the other, by building and representing the brand in the market. Given that this compliance code goes beyond the current social accountability and fair practice codes designed by companies<sup>9</sup> or other standard institutions and that it is self-driven by the members, this offers a more reliable and powerful solution.

Though the labour collectives are central to the approach, it is important to understand that the collectives function only in relation to the markets and formal sector; unlike an entrepreneurial model where it may be possible to have a single collective running successfully. This is a macro model where the success and growth of the collectives is dependent on their networking and dynamic interaction with resource organisations, factories/industries, markets, academic institutions, financial institutions, individuals etc for mutual benefit, through a process of facilitation.

Success, in this context, is thus envisioned not just in terms of generation of income for the collectives but in the sharing of knowledge and competencies across the different stakeholders. This is seen as an effective process for infusing innovation and dynamism, generating newer avenues and facilitating development of the entire sector.

## **PROCESS TOWARDS FOSTERING EQUITY**

As mentioned earlier, though MAYA has a present understanding of the concept of empowerment, this will be further refined during the time of implementation. MAYA believes that poverty can only be overcome if interventions address the systemic causes to it. Similarly, empowerment needs to be viewed at different levels, as it affects communities, institutions and individuals. It is a process which needs to be embedded within an institution, encouraging the individuals and the collective, to reflect, strategise and act in a planned and systematic way. Through this process, which MAYA believes is a process towards self-directedness, possibilities for change become visible and life-situations become manageable.

At the institutional level, systems and mechanisms are in place, which encourage the collective to continuously learn and reflect on its strategy towards change and its impact. This includes various forms of documentation (on market trends, institutional functioning and learnings of collectives, training and assessment etc.), collective leadership (collective performance with regard to market interaction, institutional strength and member's participation etc.) and members (training files which include learning impact and personal performance which is based on feedback from clients etc.). Members realise that with the structure of a collective, they have the potential to bargain and become active agents within a highly competitive market. Members also understand that if they develop the capabilities to identify their problem within the collectives, articulate them and develop strategies to solve them, they will be able to overcome their personal limitations.

At the individual level, the member's experience from the collective on how decisions are made within a democratic structure on the basis of equity, but also their new status in the labour market as trained and professional workforce, gives them a new perspective to redefine their own role within the household and the community. Their learning acquired through training and the interaction within the collective encourages the members to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. The individuals also realise their responsibility and relevance as members for the functioning of the collective. At the same time, the structure ensures that members can suggest and initiate change. It is assumed that this personal learning translates into people's own belief that change becomes possible through their efforts.

As the members realise that change happens when they take ownership of the problems and strategies, they are able to relate it to developmental issues at the community level. Such issues could include area development

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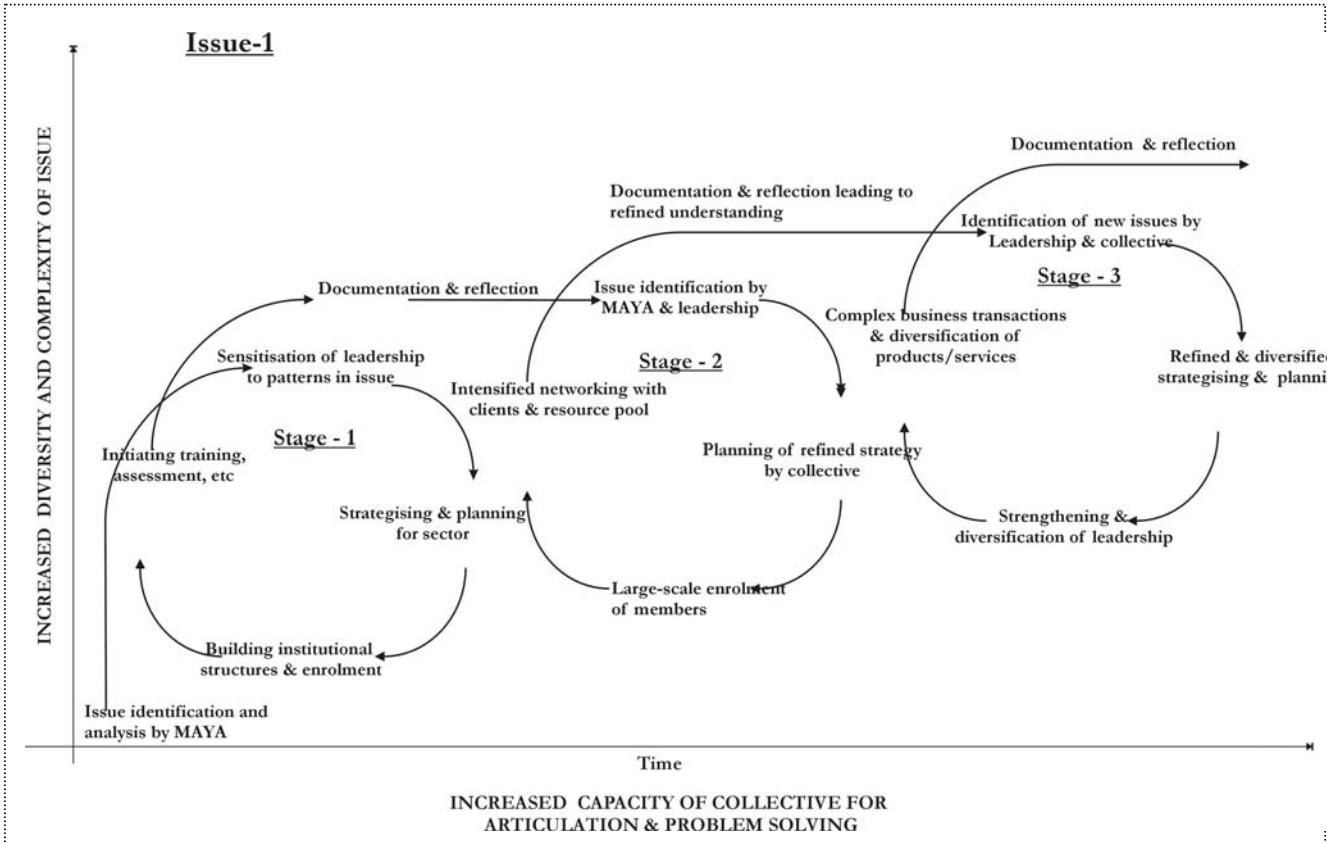
<sup>9</sup> See for instance, Global Compact Initiative, SA 8000, GAP, Clean clothes campaign, Nike, & other company-specific codes of conduct that promote decent working conditions provided by their sub-contractors as a marketing concept.

(water, sanitation, electricity, roads, etc), education, health and many others, all of which contribute to the welfare of the entire community.

For empowerment to manifest itself at these different discussed levels, we need to analyse the process of learning at these different levels in order to understand the potential of this intervention. Therefore, we discuss the implementation process of MAYA ORGANIC and the expected outcomes, which we believe will lead to empowerment at the different levels.

The following graph 2 visualises this process of learning, in detail.

**Graph 2: Process of learning within the collective**



**Process of implementation of MAYA ORGANIC**

**Stage 1**

During the period of institutionalisation of the collective, the leadership of the collective is supported to identify some of the core issues related to irregular income, low skills level and no bargaining power and analysing the typical patterns leading to people function within this particular situation. Then the leadership, and through them the members, are supported in recognising the need for skills up-gradation, professionalisation of the sector, placement and vocalising aspects related to quality of work. The leaders are then facilitated to evolve a strategy for the collective for improvement of the sector. This is followed by building institutional structures and enrolment of members into training, assessment, placement and linking the collective to the market. Ongoing documentation about the leadership’s and collective’s learning forms an important part of this period.

**Stage 2**

Following the first cycle of training and placement of members and the feedback received from clients, the leadership of the collective reflects and refines on the strategy decided upon to diversify its activities for the specific sector; in housekeeping, this could mean diversifying from basic cleaning services in individual households to either taking sub-contracts for overall maintenance of offices, apartment-blocks, hospitals, public-places etc or to more specialised activities such as cooking, childcare, etc. This has a bearing on redefining the learning needs and the training outcomes by the members. This period is also marked by large-scale enrolment



of new members into the collective. The collective begins to establish itself in the market through intensive networking with clients and the resource pool.

### Stage 3

The next step goes towards identification of new issues by the leadership and the members, which are related to diversification of the institution itself with regard to the leadership structure as well as developing social security systems and placing the employment questions in the context of livelihood issues, planning, investment etc. With increasing visibility of the collective in the market as a brand for quality products and services, the bargaining power of the members increases and translates into higher and more regular income. The collective thus, begins to address spending and lending patterns. With this increasing maturity of the institution, business transactions also become more complex and diversified, as the collective's capacities increases to take orders of different levels of complexity and quantity, therefore, higher value addition and hence more profit for the collective.

### Expected outcomes

- Shift towards articulation and problem-solving:  
One main outcome of the learning process at all levels is the shift from identification of problems towards articulation and problem solving. Under articulation, MAYA understands the capacity to identify, analyse and reflect on a problem, realise the often structural reason to it and being able to evolve strategies for change. As mentioned in the 3-stage model above, this process is initiated by MAYA who in turn sensitises the leadership on problems related to livelihood and employment. As the process of reflection is institutionalised through documentation and discussions, the leadership and later the collective itself, is not only able to identify issues but also articulate and evolve the appropriate strategies. This learning process also enables themselves to interact with formal institutions, such as the Govt, where required.
- Capability to address complex and long-term issues  
Another outcome of being able to redefine strategies is an increased capability to address more complex and long-term issues related to their livelihood and community development. The members begin to realise that structural inequalities and obstacles can be overcome through the collective. With regard to its market strategy, the continuous reflection with the resource pool and clients enables the collective to move from simple repetitive tasks to more complex undertakings in the area of products/services development as well as the management of the orders. In the case of production, this means a shift from simple execution of mass orders towards product design and marketing of final products. In the case of management, it would imply that the processing of complex orders can be managed more effectively.
- Ownership and sustainability  
While at the beginning MAYA will play an active role in facilitating the collective to identify needs and learning outcomes, the above-described model will ensure that the entire process is increasingly owned by the leadership and later by the members. Similarly, interaction with clients with regard to orders, feedback, contracts and payments will begin together with the parent company and sector-based structures but increasingly be left to the leaders and the collective. The election of the leadership is performance-based, ensuring accountability and a democratic structure. While MAYA ORGANIC will continue to represent the brand and network, the collective will be well-trained to increasingly evolve strategies for their sector. Members begin to realise the importance of their individual contribution and commitment for the overall development of the collective. Therefore, they begin to assume responsibility for their individual performance.

### **SUMMING UP**

MAYA's experience in working with communities to effectively eradicate child labour has led the organisation to consolidate its learning and understanding and redefine its strategy towards employment and livelihood related aspects for poverty alleviation. There is a need to understand the status where people live in, the various forms of deprivation they face, which are structural or systemic and therefore hardly to be overcome at an individual level. MAYA proposes an integrated approach which takes into account the structural causes to the problems of poverty, as it believes, change will otherwise be incidental for individuals, leaving out the larger part of the communities.



The model MAYA ORGANIC intends to facilitate a process that enables the working poor to overcome three main forms of deprivation faced by them: 1) lack of any forum of articulation due to lack of a formal structure through organisation, 2) income insecurity and 3) missing opportunities of learning and skills development; all of which result in low bargaining power.

A non-hierarchical institutional structure, the labour collectives, provides the visible and formal forum for articulation of the members, while institutionalised continuous learning mechanisms within the collectives ensure that capabilities for articulation and problem solving are developed and further refined. Such a structure therefore not only encourages learning with regard to technical skills, but through life skills, equips the members at an individual level as well as within a collective, to utilise their learning to take an active role in the shaping and structuring of their lives.

MAYA assumes that such a learning process within the collective and at the individual level- which encompasses learning and a reflection on the performance of the institution, the leadership and the workforce - creates an enabling environment for empowerment. As it was discussed, the collectives, as well as its members will increasingly realise that if problems are identified and understood in their complexity, articulation and problem solving becomes easier.

MAYA draws significantly from Freire's<sup>10</sup> discussion of empowerment, which he refers to as 'conscientisation'. Freire's argument is useful when he discusses the process towards critical self-reflection (conscientisation) through dialogue and praxis, which MAYA tries to encourage within the collective. He describes this process as a 3-step model, explaining the development process of a person from being helpless and not aware of the existing power relations (intransitive state), towards the state, where sensitization about the power structure exists (semi-transitive) towards the final state of critical transitive status, where people have the meaningful tools and the capacity to connect individual status quo and social systems and take action for change accordingly.

However, given the formal institutional framework that MAYA ORGANIC provides, it is envisaged that the process of empowerment (of the individual and collective) goes beyond political struggle, in Freire's sense. The MAYA ORGANIC model ensures the development of capabilities for self-directedness so that they are able to utilise rights and entitlements to take active ownership in their actions towards improvement of their livelihood.

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<sup>10</sup> In his book, the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (1972), Paulo Freire discusses the different stages of development of the so far disempowered towards conscientisation. Though MAYA's intervention is not explicitly a literacy intervention, it emphasizes that learning is context based and political, encouraging self-reflection and self-directedness; therefore drawing from this experience is useful .