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NGO finds 48 bonded child workers in Harda

CONTRAST Govt survey says none anywhere in state

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BHOPAL: Even as the state labour department has claimed in a right to information (RTI) reply that there is not even a single case of bonded labour anywhere in the state, a Harda-based NGO has reported 48 bonded child labourers in merely eight villages of the district.

The NGO has shared its finding with the Harda district administration, but no action has been initiated yet. Meanwhile, the principal secretary of the labour department MK Varshneya, without even trying to verify the report of the NGO, has outright rejected its claims saying that such organisations brought out false reports.

In reply to RTI filed by Bhopal-based social activist Prashant Dubey, the state law department replied on September 10 that according to a state-wide survey carried out between June 5 and 15, 2014, not even a single bonded labourer was detected in the state. "Our surveys did not find anyone because the NGOs make false claims," the principal secretary said.

However during first week of September, the NGO Synergy Sansthan had held a meeting with district level child labour vigilance committee, where residents of the affected villages had reported presence of bonded child labourers. Vimal Jat of Synergy said the report of eight villages where 48 bonded child labourers had been detected was presented during the meeting before the officials.

The joint collector of Harda Anil Patwa, who is also chairman of the committee, conceded while speaking to HT that the issue of bonded child labourers in certain villages had been raised during the meeting, but said that for the lack of specific information, no action

CASE OF LAXMAN KORKU

The case of 14-year-old Laxman Korku, one of the child labourers detected by the Synergy Sansthan is typical. Youngest among five children of a very poor tribal family in village Ghodpol, Laxman's mother passed away when he was just two. His father and two sisters work as agriculture labourers, while Laxman and his two brothers work as bonded labourers. Laxman is responsible for taking care of cattle at the home of farmer Harinarayan Gurjar in village Pantalai, but is also asked to do certain domestic works. He works for almost ten hours and gets 40 kg of wheat per month as wages. If he has to take leave for even a single day, the wages are deducted, the NGO Synergy Sansthan has reported.

(Name of the child has been changed to protect his identity).



*Laxman Korku, the bonded child labourer from Harda.

WE WOULD INQUIRE: LABOUR MINISTER

The labour minister Antar Singh Arya, told HT that the matter was sensitive and he would get it inquired. When informed about the principal secretary's response, he said the issue should not at all be ignored.

OUR SURVEYS DID NOT FIND ANYONE BECAUSE THE NGOS MAKE FALSE CLAIMS

MK VARSHNEYA, principal secy, labour department

could be taken. "Let them submit the report to us and we would take action immediately," he said.

REPORT

The field level survey conducted by the Synergy Sansthan reported 94 children (below 14 years of age) in eight villages of Timarni and Harda block of the district to be

out of school and working. Of these, 48 children were found to be working as bonded labourers in the same or other villages and 45 of them belong to scheduled tribe communities. In case of 35 children, their parents had taken loan from the families where the children were working.

The survey reported that five of these children got average of ₹1,000 as monthly wages while the others got average of 32 kg of wheat as wages. They did not get any weekly off day and on average worked for over ten hours.

The villages include Pantalai, Nimyagaon, Jhadbida, Kasarni, Khamgaon, Barkhedi, Jhadna and Sindhkhecha.

