

Cividep India

Workers' Rights & Corporate Accountability

Cividep was formed in the year 2000. The organisation helps to educate workers about their rights and campaigns for corporate accountability. Our research has been in the electronics, garments, mining and banking sectors. Our workers' rights initiatives have been in the garments, electronics manufacturing and plantation sectors.

Cividep works to ensure that human rights abuses, environmental damage, corrupt practices and violation of worker's rights by companies are addressed. Our major aims are:

- To safeguard the rights of workers and communities in a rapidly globalizing world and to hold corporates accountable for their multifarious impacts on society.
- Help workers exercise freedom at work including freedom of association and right to collective bargaining.
- Ensure that companies respect human rights and conduct business in a socially responsible manner. With partners in India and abroad, we engage in educational, research, campaigning and advocacy activities to ensure responsible corporate behaviour.

Our projects in the electronics and garment sector have helped to raise awareness of workers on their rights and empowered them to claim their entitlements, helped communities and workers to address their grievances against multinational companies. Our research reports have helped civil society and workers' organisations to advocate on behalf of their constituencies. Recently Cividep has started to work on the coffee plantation sector in South India where we seek to improve socio-economic opportunities for tribal coffee-plantation workers and their families. Currently we are working in a few tribal villages to address community health issues. We train young tribal people to become health activists and spread awareness about common illnesses, nutrition, immunization and hygiene among their community.

In the electronics sector the major violations of labour laws found that also have serious impacts on the occupational health and safety of workers are:

- Exposure to toxic material and substances
- Denial of the right to unionise and collective bargaining

- Job insecurity due to the use of temporary labour with fixed term contracts
- Insufficient wages that barely cover living costs and do not allow workers to save for the future or support family
- No training in new skills or prospects of promotion

To address these problems Cividep is educating workers about their labour rights, studies their working and living conditions and in 2012 we have convened multi-stakeholder round table to discuss employment conditions with a broad range of stakeholders. The issue of health and safety was considered a priority by all stakeholders and would be the topic of the next meeting.

Particularly workers in a supplier to Nokia have complained about continuous noise of machines which has impaired the hearing ability of some of the workers. Workers also complain of backache due to continuous standing during an 8 hour shift.

Workers in the garment sector face similar problems although the frequency of verbal abuse and harassment is even higher there and continuous pressure to achieve unreasonably high production targets causes some of the workers to skip their lunch breaks or avoid using the toilet. This can have a serious impact on their health. Another problem is the lack of face masks to cover their mouth and nose from the fabric dust that develops during production. Consequences of inhaling the fabric dust constantly can be asthma or even Tuberculosis.

In field of corporate accountability we have co-published a guide for CSOs on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and also built CSOs capacity in India in using the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to address grievances.

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