

Mumbai Mobile Creche Update (12/12/13)

MMC continues its routine operations of running day care centers at construction sites. In the past few years, they have increased the number of centers from about 22-24 to 26-30 centers. Centers are opened and closed every year as the construction sites of a builder move. For example, in 2012-13, 9 centers were closed and 10 centers opened. This activity continues as usual and MMC remains the only organization in Mumbai that works at construction sites. They served around 4600 children in 2012-13. They have deepened programs at existing centers. They provide increased nutrition and have beefed up education materials to some extent but a lot more needs to be done. They have started a library program for older children. They continue to help older children (6 and up) of construction workers to transition to the municipal or corporation schools. MMC works with the builders to provide some transportation for the children as the schools may be far away from construction sites in some instances. Also, MMC teachers help students with their homework when they return to the construction site. Finally, MMC teachers and coordinators speak to parents every month to make sure their younger children are coming to their centers, older children are attending school and to assess progress as well as understand their needs.

While there are NGOs opening every week and they work in various sectors including slums, none of them want to work at construction sites despite significant need in this sector. In fact, almost all the NGOs in Mumbai do not work with children ages 0-3. They typically work with school going children or sometime ages 3-6. So, MMC fills an important and overlooked need in the market. This is because of some of the unique challenges in serving construction sites and young children as well. Builders are normally not receptive to having NGOs at their sites because they worry that NGOs are activist and may highlight the poor working conditions at such sites. So, they typically do not even allow NGOs on their sites and MMC has to beg and plead to set up a center.

An important trend in the past few years in the construction industry in Mumbai is the limited availability of sites for large buildings. Increasingly, construction sites are smaller and so there are fewer children at each site that need care. MMC's centers typically cater to 30-40 children. But the smaller sites have only about 10-12 children and the builders are also smaller and do not typically want to provide a permanent site and the corresponding facilities for MMC to operate a daycare. Sometimes, the smaller construction sites are adjacent to each other and MMC could provide care to about 30 children if they could combine them but builders do not allow children from competitor's construction sites to be provided care in their sites. In response, MMC has started experimenting this year with two alternative approaches.

First, in Aug 2013, MMC started a Mobile Bus program. With the help of a corporate sponsor, they purchased one bus and retrofitted it to provide care to 10-12 children in the bus itself. MMC has its own teacher in the bus but it also seeks out women/mothers at the construction site who could be trained to provide care to the children. The bus typically goes to two sites (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) per day for 5 days. On the sixth day, it acts as a medical facility and goes to many construction sites where they do not have any centers and provides medical care with the help of a doctor and nurse. The Mobile bus is an experiment and if it is successful, MMC hopes to expand it next

year if they can get more corporate sponsors to purchase a bus for them (each bus costs about 16-20 lakhs).

The second approach MMC is exploring is to start what they call “facilitator centers”. Such centers are not run by the builder (not MMC) but MMC i.e. acts as a facilitator. The advantage of this model is that MMC does not have to pay the teachers and does not incur expenses associated with nutrition, teaching materials, etc. Instead, the builder sets up the center and incurs all these costs and MMC only provides guidance in setting up the center, training the teacher, acquiring educational materials, guidance in nutrition, etc. This is an attractive model in two respects. First, MMC does not need significant funds to implement this and can provide such services at many sites. Also, MMC has the experience and knowledge to provide such training and guidance. Second, the builders have a greater sense of ownership when they run the centers and incur the costs. The challenge of course has been to convince builders to adopt this model. Only one builder so far has agreed to this approach and is implementing it.

MMC has done quite well so far in fund-raising to support its projects. It gets funds from various individuals and corporations in India (primarily Mumbai) and gets funds from a variety of organizations and individuals in Europe (Germany, Ireland and UK in particular). But they do not get substantial funds from US. One of the good things about them is that their funding sources are highly diversified and they are not very dependent on one source for funds. In the financial year 2014-15 (starting April 1, 2014) and going forward, they are anticipating that they may have a shortfall in funding for a few reasons. First, their costs go up when their sites are smaller and more fragmented and they have to negotiate with and convince more builders to share some of the costs. Second, if they want to expand the mobile bus program, this will require significantly higher funds. Third, they want to increase the salaries of their staff to keep up with inflation. For example, their program coordinators who often have 20-30 years’ experience get only around Rs. 12000 per month. Fourth, their office infrastructure including IT systems are dated and need to be updated. So, they anticipate that their budget will increase by around 20-25% and will have to get funds to support this increased expenditure. Their increased funding need is of the order of \$100,000 (their 2013-14 annual budget is about \$500,000).

Vrishali Pispati, CEO of MMC, requested me to explore funding opportunities in the US outside of Child Vikaas as I told her that CVI is not in a position to provide that level of funding. CVI is not a large organization and I told her that we can at most provide them with about \$12000-\$15000 per year. In the past, we have sent them about \$7500 per year on average.