

Christian Club Inspires Hope in India's Slums

India is home to one of the largest illiterate populations in the world.

Nearly half of India's population—over 463 million—is under the age of 20, which means that these children will eventually be members of the world's largest democracy.

"The vast majority of those children are the poorest of the poor," Dave Stravers, with Grand Rapids, Mission India, says of these kids. "Their families earn less than \$ a day. Forty percent of them are malnourished."

As a result of the typical poverty, India also has the highest number of working children, a majority of whom live in villages and urban slums.

"This is systemic poverty," says Stravers. "It's also a very abusive social structure. Those in the higher castes look down on the lower castes and consider them to be less than human," which makes these children part of a vulnerable population. "Poor children, as well as their families, are considered commodities. That's why you have the trafficking."

The issue of human trafficking has gotten more attention as of late, according to Stravers. "There's actually a kind of movement starting in India to highlight the abuse of children." However, until there is a change from within, these kinds of grim conditions threaten to overwhelm people with hopelessness.

That's why Mission India has the Children's Bible Clubs (called "Child Development Clubs" in India). "We train workers from local Christian churches who want to minister to these poor people in villages and neighborhoods that usually don't

have a church," Stravers explains.

Under the loving attention of their volunteer teachers, the dreams of India's boys and girls are changing, and they are discovering joy in Jesus. "We find that a high majority not only pray to receive Christ and stop worshipping idols, but they actually testify to their parents. They're the best evangelists in the world, and literally thousands of their parents are coming to Christ each year."

India's Christians are eagerly waiting for the chance to introduce Children's Bible Clubs into their communities. "We have a formal training program for them," Stravers explains. "We provide them with lesson materials, with some games and sports equipment—everything that they would need to minister to 40 children in their community."

Children's Bible Clubs are introduced in a community through a 10-day program. In the clubs, children enjoy songs, skits and games, listen to Bible stories, memorize Scripture, discover a loving Savior, and learn to pray.

This introduction requires the involvement of someone who knows the community best—a local resident. "Our staff does not lead the Bible Clubs. They do not lead the witnessing. We are there to empower and provide resources to local Christian volunteer workers from all over India," Stravers says.