Livelihood
The road to sustainable living

IJM
Photo Journal
International Justice Mission is a human rights organisation that secures justice for victims of bonded labour, sexual exploitation and other forms of violence.
Rescue is only the first step to freedom for bonded labourers. Though the walk in freedom can at first seem exciting, labourers soon find themselves faced with the inevitable question of how to support themselves in rural areas where livelihood options are hard to come by.

IJM helps victims tide over many initial difficulties by encouraging them to access government resources and welfare schemes. It also helps equip released labourers with livelihood skills and other sustainable opportunities. Economically empowered and self-reliant, survivors not only keep themselves and their families out of rebondage, they also demonstrate that with the right opportunities and skills, an entire generation can be changed!

This book captures stories of survivors, who, with support from IJM and its partners, have emerged and are still emerging as leaders, entrepreneurs and successful individuals.
Vasanthi and Sadaiyan were able to start a farm and now have a thriving business selling milk. Financially empowered, they are able to focus on their children’s education. Vasanthi is also raising awareness on the evils of bonded labour among her community by speaking publicly about her experiences as a bonded labourer.
Subramani had a cycle repair shop before he was lured into bondage. He spent twelve years working at a rice mill to repay a loan of Rs. 15,000. After his rescue, IJM’s rehabilitation programme helped Subramani regain the confidence he had lost during his years in bondage. With support from one of IJM’s partners, Subramani has now reopened his shop and is running it successfully.
When Murugan and Selvi took a loan to meet a medical emergency, little did they know what they had gotten themselves into. The physical and verbal abuse they faced had them contemplating suicide.

"After their unexpected rescue, Murugan and Selvi faced a host of domestic challenges, but their courage did not fail them," says Solomon, IJM social worker. "Today, they have a successful charcoal-making business that brings them about Rs. 500 – Rs. 600 per bag. Their story proves that very often all a struggling family needs is the right opportunity."
Rescued from a brick kiln after four years of hard labour, Shanmugam worked passionately to rebuild the lives of people around him. During IJM’s livelihood training programme, he learnt the art of making bamboo products. He soon pursued his dream of owning a business and began selling his bamboo articles. His grit, passion and perseverance was appreciated by community members who elected him as their representative. Furthermore, Subramani received an award from Thiru. Subramanian, Minister for Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, for emerging and excelling as a community leader and entrepreneur.
From a suppressed child labourer, Kumari transformed into a bold leader within her community! As an eight-year-old, Kumari was exploited for her unique embroidery skills. She worked at a sari embroidering unit for 12 hours every day to clear her father’s debts and it was ten years before she was rescued.

Today, Kumari has opened a petty shop and continues to practice embroidery through which she is able to support her family. She is also an inspiring leader who speaks against gender oppression and supports many women in her community.
Due to harsh conditions at the rice mill, Jeyamma’s husband abandoned her and left her to fend for their three daughters. After rescue, Jeyamma’s woes continued as she struggled to find a stable job and a safe place to settle down. With support from IJM and a partner NGO, Jeyamma built a hut at her village, where she opened up a petty shop. Today, her shop gives her a stable income and her youngest daughter goes to school.
Anand desired to be an entrepreneur. Four years of working at a tree cutting unit under harsh conditions did not curb his dream. Once rescued, he used his rehabilitation money to buy a bike that would help him travel long distances to earn and save for the future. Anand has now started a tree cutting business that employs other families from his community.
Rescued from a tree cutting unit, Kalpana became part of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which ensures that she receives daily wage labour opportunities for at least 100 days a year. “I knew however that to sustain my freedom and to be financially secure, I needed to equip myself with a skill,” she says. She enrolled herself into a tailoring class and today, eagerly waits for a tailoring machine to kick-start her tailoring business.
Mariammal discontinued her 10th standard and started working with her parents at a sugarcane unit. She put in 18-20 hours of hard labour each day until the day she was rescued. Once rescued, Mariammal took up a course with a community college that empowers the underprivileged through life skills training. Since she desired to acquire a livelihood skill, she now pursues a course in vocational nursing.
When Moorthi was rescued, he was a malnourished 17-year-old working at various places to pay off the loans his family had taken. His father had abandoned him while he was a small boy and his mother had committed suicide. After his rescue, Moorthi enrolled for a carpentry course.

“Moorthi has proved to be hardworking and skilled,” says Saral, an IJM social worker. “The sense of worth, confidence and independence that he has found in learning a skill is helping him tremendously in coping with his traumatic past.”
In their pursuit for a stable income, Kamatchi’s family was lured into bondage that trapped them for nearly ten years. After her rescue, Kamatchi enrolled for tailoring classes.

“During the course of the programme, I discovered that my real talent and love was for embroidering,” she says. “I am really looking forward to honing my skills in this area as I pursue this course.”
Freedom was not easy for Ashok and his family. His mother abandoned them and his father was working hard to earn for the family. Being the oldest child, Ashok looked after his three siblings. The youngest child was unwell and needed to undergo an operation. It was only after the operation that Ashok decided to acquire a skill that would help him in the future. He is currently learning carpentry at a training centre, run by an IJM partner.
In pursuit of sustainable livelihood skills, rescued bonded labourers are given the opportunity to learn the art of coaster-making. “With adequate marketing opportunities, the survivors will be able to gain good profit using this skill,” says Helen, a social worker from IJM. “Most of the survivors we trained showed amazing aptitude and creativity and have been able to create coasters of various patterns.”