

Visit to Mumbai Mobile Creche on June 6, 2025

I visited Mumbai Mobile Creche on June 6, 2025. Ms. Frahinsa Rodrigues, CEO and Ms. Sheetal Yadav, Grants and Communications Officer, hosted my visit and accompanied me to a MMC Center at a construction site in Wadala, Mumbai. There we met with the children, teachers/caregivers, and the Education Officer, Ms. Prachi Chavan. Later we went to the MMC office in Colaba and met with Ms. Vrushali Naik, Senior Program Coordinator who works closely with the builders as well as with the program team. The report below (with pictures and videos) is based on my discussions with Ms. Rodrigues, Ms. Naik, Ms. Chavan, and Ms. Yadav as well as my observations during the visit.

1. Overview of Programs and Services

MMC operates educational and community support programs for children of migrant construction workers in Mumbai. Their services span early childhood care (creche), preschool education, after-school support, and skill-based learning opportunities. Each site typically includes a creche, a balwadi (preschool), and a small office. There are currently 18 centers at construction sites in various parts of Mumbai.

Centers operate full-day programs and provide a safe, stimulating environment for children. Most children are first-generation learners, and their parents are often daily wage laborers with limited education. In areas where the construction duration is longer (2 to 5 years), such as Navi Mumbai, the nonprofit is able to offer more stable and extended programs.

In addition to construction site centers, the nonprofit has started to engage with tribal and semi-urban communities, particularly those around brick kilns and quarries. These areas are home to highly vulnerable populations with minimal access to educational resources.

2. MMC Centers and Technology Use

Each MMC center has three rooms with children distributed by age groups (0-3, 3-6 and over 6). There is a teacher and teacher assistant in two of the three rooms and two caregivers in the room catering to the youngest children. Children in the age groups 0-3 were either in crèches or playing with blocks or basic toys. Children in the age group 3-6 were doing simple puzzles, coloring, playing with toys or number games. Children aged 6 and older were playing chess, writing, reading or playing a card game in small groups. They were all actively engaged and the pictures in the next pages will give you an idea. I spoke to several children, asked them questions in math, and observed their notebooks and a chess game. I also spoke to the teachers about the children's knowledge levels. The children are enthusiastic and engaged in what they were doing. I am not sure the children are at grade level but this is understandable given their background and the fact that the older ones go to a government school. Also, in most cases, both parents work at the construction site

and don't have time to help them with their schoolwork. But the teachers are trying to help them learn better during after school hours. In addition, MMC has deployed technology to help the children learn better on their own as discussed in the next section.

The children get breakfast, snacks and lunch during the day and also vitamin and calcium supplements. A doctor or nurse checks the children frequently, tracks their growth, etc.



Room with children aged 0-3



Room with children aged 3-6

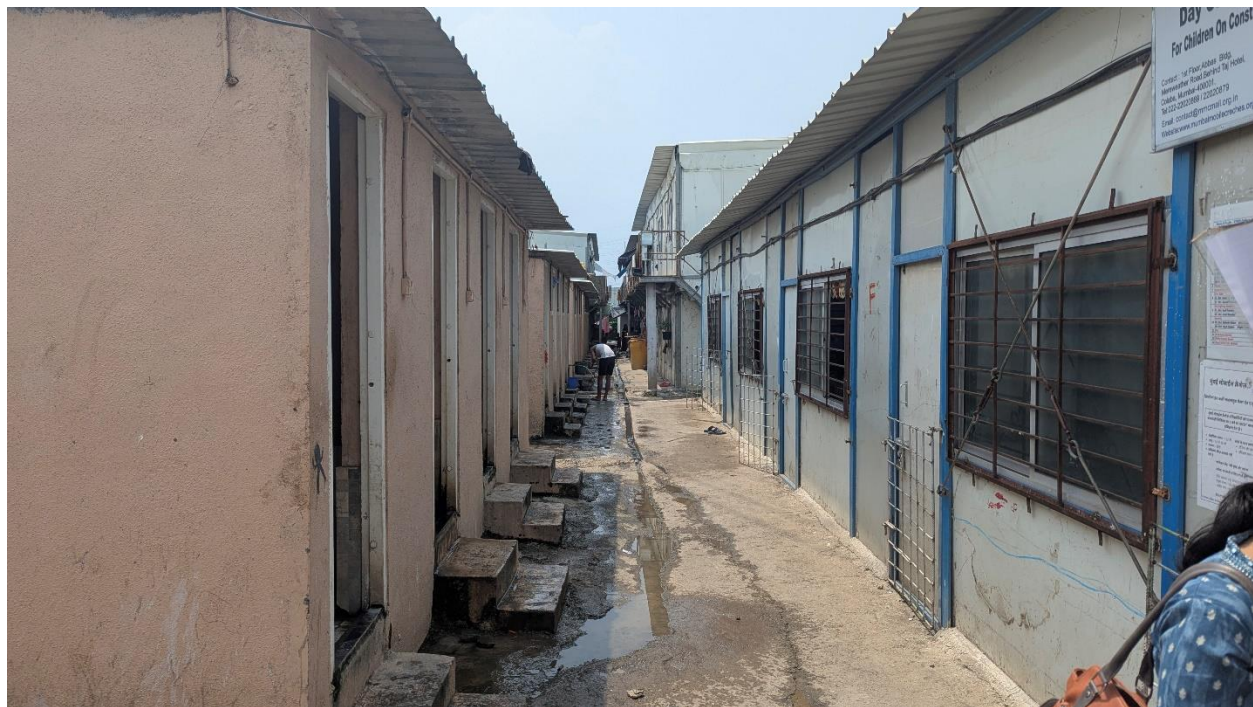


Room with children older than 6





With MMC staff, teachers and caregivers at site (Ms. Rodrigues, CEO is to my right)



Housing for worker families (single rooms on the right) and shared bathrooms (left) at site



Construction site

3. Technology use

The nonprofit integrates technology to support learning through tablet-based educational programs developed in collaboration with iDream. Of the 18 centers at construction sites, 12 centers have 10 tablets each equipped with content in Hindi, Marathi, and English. The subjects include math, science, and language learning, with videos, quizzes, and test-based assessments.

Children can choose their preferred language and subject. The software tracks their progress, highlights areas of weakness, and provides detailed learning data to staff. Upfront cost for 10 tablets is Rs. 200,000 and annual maintenance fees for each center's tablet setup is Rs. 90,000. They can be used offline as centers do not have internet (Wifi) access. Internet access tends to be inconsistent at these sites. There are ongoing efforts to enhance connectivity through mobile hotspots.

In addition to academic content, the nonprofit is exploring mental math through abacus training and has also introduced chess as a way to build critical thinking in some of the centers.

There is strong interest in expanding these interventions to more centers, including those serving brick kiln, quarry, and tribal communities.

3. Teacher Training and Staff Structure

The nonprofit employs 110 staff members, most of whom are field-based (teachers, caregivers, program coordinator/officers). There is one program coordinator for 4-5 construction sites (and centers) who works closely with each of the centers (builder's site manager at the sites) and the teachers/care-givers there.

They run an in-house, one-year teacher training program for new teachers called the Bal Palika Teacher Training Program, affiliated with SNTD University. Women from construction sites and slum communities are trained through a mix of theory and practical sessions. Trainees have at least finished high school. Some graduates of the program are absorbed into MMC, while others are connected to external job placements.

Training includes both academic instruction and hands-on practice at centers. Participants include not only local women but also those from marginalized or migrant backgrounds. Some youth from tribal or quarry-based regions have also completed this program and now serve as teachers in those areas.

Ongoing teacher development is conducted monthly, often through a cascading training model. Experienced teachers train a group, who then train others. Educational progress monitoring tools and thematic monthly curricula are used to assess children's growth.

Each education team is responsible for visiting 5–6 centers regularly to observe, support teachers, and track outcomes. The organization also runs a structured observation and mentoring program to ensure classroom quality.

4. Parental Engagement and Community Outreach

Engaging parents is challenging due to their long work hours and limited literacy. However, the nonprofit conducts monthly open days, awareness sessions, and cultural activities. For younger children (creche), picture books and storytelling methods are shared with parents to encourage interaction at home.

Parents often come from diverse linguistic and geographic backgrounds—many are migrants from other states such as Bihar and Odisha. Most are involved in daily-wage construction work and have little time or familiarity with formal education.

The nonprofit also helps community members obtain essential government entitlements such as registration under the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act. This includes helping them open bank accounts and apply for health, education, and safety benefits. However, many builders are reluctant to facilitate worker registration due to

liability concerns, such as mandatory provision of safety gear and daycare centers when more than 50 women are on site. Registration is resisted because it creates formal accountability and may increase costs for the builders. Despite these hurdles, the nonprofit successfully completed over 2,000 worker registrations in FY 2024–25.

5. Alumni and Long-Term Impact

The organization maintains an alumni group. Many alumni support events, with some returning as staff or volunteers. Notable outcomes include alumni becoming teachers, joining the police force, or working as site supervisors. Alumni also help the organization connect with new construction sites by informing them about active projects. There are plans to strengthen alumni engagement further, potentially using them as role models and informal community mobilizers.

6. Funding Landscape and Sustainability

The nonprofit currently receives most of its funding from domestic CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) grants, with additional funding coming from a few foundations and some foreign contributions. Azim Premji foundation has been supporting their work for some years and Reliance Foundation in the past. CSR and some foundation grants are mostly one-year commitments, with few exceptions. Moreover, CSR funding must be spent within the financial year, creating pressure for timely utilization. There are efforts to seek longer-term grants (e.g., 3- to 5-year support) to ensure stability.

Donations from builders cover around 20% of monthly center costs. Planning for each fiscal year begins early, and the team tracks which funders are likely to renew and identifies gaps that need to be filled. Outreach to new funders begins several months before the fiscal year ends.

The nonprofit cannot transfer CSR funds to a corpus, but some foundations allow corpus creation, which can support long-term sustainability. They are also exploring collaborations with other NGOs and government departments, including the Maharashtra Labor Welfare Board.

7. Changes in construction industry and future plans

There are some important changes taking place in the construction industry that impact MMC's work in a significant manner. Many large builders now employ only single men so

that they don't have to deal with issues such as providing the workers housing at the site, caring for their children, etc. For instance, Hiranandani is a large builder in Mumbai with whom MMC has worked in the past and they now only hire single men. Moreover, these men are not provided housing at the site. In turn, this implies that construction sites do not need creches and day care centers such as those provided by MMC.

MMC is trying to understand how to navigate this changing landscape. In recent years, they have started setting up centers at quarries and brick kiln sites where construction materials are prepared. Moreover, MMC is thinking about working in slum areas in Mumbai; families where both parents work have similar needs for creches and daycare for their children. But entering slum communities poses new logistical and operational challenges compared to construction sites. This is because at construction sites, the builder provides space, builds a center and provides utilities. This is not the case in slums, where MMC will have to provide these facilities. They would like to serve as a knowledge partner with other NGOs that already work in slums or with government agencies working with similar populations, including offering curriculum, training, and implementation guidance. The government has anganwadis for children aged 3 and over but do not provide any childcare for children below that age. MMC is one of the few organizations with expertise in working with children aged below 3.