

Beneath The Glamor

The Tragic Reality of Child Labor in India's Mica Mines



Figure 1. Makeup containing mica powder

Prepared for: Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, The Stop Child Labor Coalition, & the students of UCSB

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Date: June 9, 2023

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Satyarthi Foundation
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May 10th, 2023

Dear Trustees of the Satyarthi Foundation and Stop Child Labor Coalition,

I am writing to you on behalf of Beneath the Glamor, an organization dedicated to raising awareness about unethical mica mining. Our hope is that upon reviewing our proposal, you are spurred into action and will partner with us to combat the issues in the mines. Your involvement with the targeted area and issue, respectively, make us confident that you will resonate with the following proposal, aimed at terminating the use of child labor in the Bihar and Jharkhand mica mines.

The proposal was drafted and created by the following:

- Quincy Banbury: Problem/Analysis
- Hope Hoffmeister: Targeted Populations
- Isabel Fernald: Solutions
- Paige Wood: Partnerships

We trust that this proposal will motivate you to take on this challenge with us, as you will soon see the severity as well as egregious human rights violations that are present in mica mining. We look forward to the opportunity to further discuss the issue and possible solutions with you.

Sincerely,
Behind the Glamor

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Executive Summary

Mica is a shiny mineral that provides color to certain products. It is seen most commonly in makeup and cosmetics, and paint types, like for the exterior of a car. However, it is mined unethically. Small children end up working in the mines due to the small and narrow openings. Most mines are found in the states of India, Bihar and Jharkhand. The mines are unstable and prone to collapse. It puts the children at great risk and casualties are extremely common.

While the most sustainable solution would be to eliminate the use of mica powder or turn to the use of synthetic mica, unfortunately this would have devastating consequences on entire communities. Many of the mining towns' livelihoods rely on mica mines. Families know nothing but the mines, and do not have the resources to break the cycle of child labor. Our solution looks beyond just eliminating mica, but instead approaches the problem from a long term perspective through the Responsible Mica Initiative Approach and spreading awareness.

We are looking to partner with the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and the Stop Child Labor Coalition to tackle this problem, through both tangible actions and awareness. Through this report we also hope to make the issue of mica mines better known to the public, especially UCSB students.

Introduction

Project Description

This comprehensive report aims to shed light and discuss the dark realities surrounding the mica mining industry, notorious for its exploitation of child labor. Mica, the raw material commonly found in products such as cosmetics, paints, and electronics has long been associated with a lack of regulation and unethical practices. The unregulated nature of this mineral makes it a breeding ground for danger and exploitation.

Scope of the study

In the following sections, we will delve deeper into the issue, providing an in-depth analysis of the roots and causes of the problem, key players, global significance, and the current state of the industry. Further presenting demographic information and personal narratives that confronts the harsh realities faced by the children of the communities. Finally exploring possible partnerships, collaborative efforts, and ultimately laying the groundwork for solutions to the desired sustainable future. This report serves as a valuable resource for individuals, organizations, and governments committed to understanding and addressing the urgent problem of child labor within the mica mining industry.

Report Format

This report includes:

1. Problem analysis
2. Target Population
3. Partnerships
4. Solutions & Recommendations

Problem Analysis



Figure 2. Child Laborers in the Mica Mines

Mica Uses and Background

As a naturally occurring mineral, many modern industries have found uses for mica over the years. Its purpose is to provide shimmer and shine to a variety of different products, from

cosmetics to construction to automobiles. The large and diverse amount of sectors that use mica makes it widely utilized world wide (Lebsack, 2023).

On a more practical level, the fine nature of mica powder allows it to be evenly dispersed across surfaces, providing a highly desired shiny look while not creating unwanted texture. These properties make it a highly sought after material to use in cosmetics like eyeshadow, nail polish, and other beauty products that require a thin layer of shimmer. Additionally, only a small quantity of it is required to receive the intended effect, adding to its value in commercialized sectors (Davis, 2022).

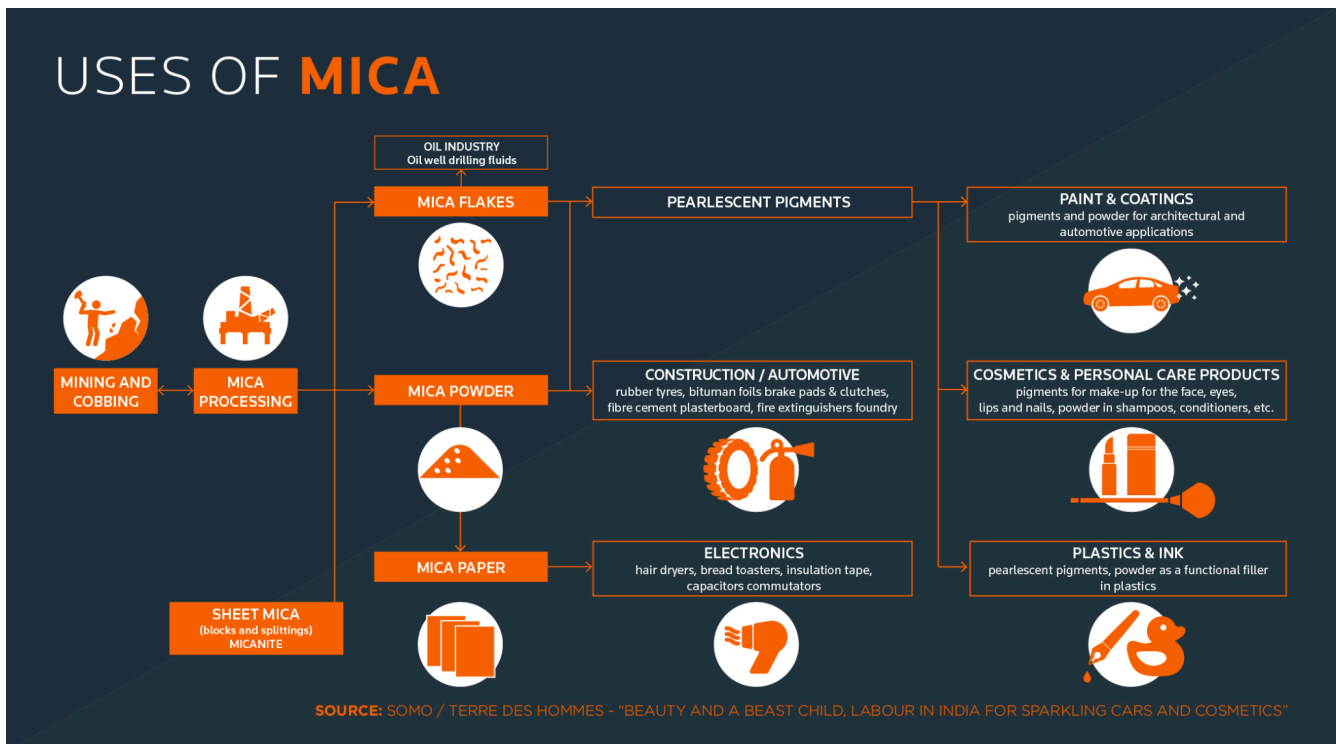


Figure 3. Diagram detailing mica uses.

Mining Mica

As is the case with many of the Earth’s natural resources, the mica mining industry has a controversial and rather horrifying secret. It is done exclusively by children. Mica grows naturally in specific areas of India, and has become the sole force holding up the economy for some villages in the Bihar and Jharkhand states (Rybarczyk, 2021).

However, the small spaces and narrow tunnels that make up the mines ensure that children are the real laborers of mica. Not only are the mines cramped, but they are also incredibly unstable (Lebsack, 2019).

Mine collapses cost hundreds of children’s lives each year, with even more going unreported or undocumented. In fact, when a mine collapse occurs, there is very little effort to perform search and rescue procedures, no matter how many children might still be in the tunnels. Sadly, that mine is just often shut down and operations are relocated to another spot, leaving the families of the child laborers with no closure or sense of security (Lebsack, 2019).

The families of the children who don’t return from the mines are sometimes compensated by the mine owners for their presumed loss with 30,000 rupees, which is equivalent to about 432 US dollars. Even the children that survive the industry suffer from health consequences for the rest of their lives, ranging from respiratory illness to serious infections due to the unsafe and

unregulated conditions (Rybarczyk, 2021). For their day's grueling work they are compensated with 50 rupees, which is equivalent to 70 cents USD. Contrastingly, the mica suppliers that export it internationally get over a thousand USD for just one kilogram of the product.



up to **20,000**

children are estimated to be working
in Jharkand and Bihar.

Figure 4. Child Mining Local Statistic

The Mica Supply Chain

Due to the illegality of most of the mica mines in India, traceability is incredibly difficult in this industry. As shown in Figure 7, experts have estimated that around seventy percent of the mica produced in India comes from mines that employ child labor (Bhalla, Nita, et al., 2016). This can only be an estimate due to the fact that the mica gets partially laundered to make it appear as though it comes from an ethical mine.

Larger resellers in India purchase the mineral from the child laborers for a fraction of the cost, and then drive the price up to the point where they resell it for one thousand US dollars per kilogram. This ensures that the origins of the mica can’t be traced, as well as allows the mica exporters to exploit the child workers. That then leads to further issues surrounding accountability.



70%

of **mica production** in India is
from **illegal mining**.

Figure 5. Illegal mica mining statistics.

Part of what makes ethical mica accountability such a prevalent issue is the lack of knowledge surrounding it. Despite being present in a number of products from lipstick to blush and even car paint to electrical wires, most people don't know what mica is- much less whether or not it is mined sustainably and ethically.

This is largely due to the fact that there is little to no accountability for anyone involved. Large name brand cosmetic companies such as L'Oreal and Maybelline claim that they get their mica from ethical mines in India, and that exploring alternate routes like synthetic mica would economically destabilize the regions that depend on the mica (Lebsack, 2019).

Unfortunately this is impossible to confirm or deny, as the so called 'ethical mines' in India often get their mica under the table from the child mines. Many of these large companies are benefiting from the child labor, but without the mechanisms and oversight in place to catch them, they do not get held accountable for their role in this horrifying industry (Rybarczyk, 2021).

Child Labor and Education

In addition to the already complicated and problematic working conditions of children in the mica mines, there is another unfortunate side effect of the exploitation. Due to the fact that children often start working in the mines as young as five years old, they never receive even a basic education (Bhalla, Nita, et al., 2016). In an area with such high poverty rates, spending time working in the mines is more valuable than going to school and getting an education. Even small amounts of money can help families while getting an education has much more delayed benefits that often aren't valued as highly as child labor.



Figure 6. Students in an urban Indian elementary school.

The lack of education in these communities can be attributed to a few factors, one being the lack of access to it. This issue isn't necessarily specific to regions with mica mines, but is problematic across India in general. While there has been a more recent effort to ensure access to elementary education across India, there is still a severe lack of access to quality education. Around 80 percent of the schools in rural India are in need of renovations, with an additional teacher shortage and limited access to supplies (Chowdhry, 2023).

An increased emphasis on education rather than work in the mines would help remedy some of these issues, as child laborers would be spending time in school and furthering their education. However this is a tall order in an area with such instability.

Economic Instability

As previously mentioned, the areas around mica mines face an additional issue in the form of their economic instability. Those regions in particular have become incredibly dependent on the mica mines as their source of economic stimulation, as it has become one of the only options for residents to make money.

Due to the deeply impoverished nature of these areas, just a parent or two working in the mines isn't enough to support the family. As shown in Figure 8, workers are severely underpaid compared to the local living wage (Responsible Mica Initiative, 2023).

Additionally, the dangers associated with mica mining means that even if both parents work full time in the mines, there is a high chance that one of them will suffer a serious injury in doing this, and will be unable to work. The poverty of the area is a considerable driving factor behind the child labor found in the mica mines.



Figure 7. Graphic showing local pay rates in Bihar and Jharkhand

The economic instability of the area poses a very large issue when it comes to shutting down child labor in the mines. The regions have become so dependent on that revenue, that simply closing down the mines or adding more oversight to the industry would not be the best option. While that would be helpful in terms of child labor issues, the lack of economic stimulation would likely destabilize the area to a point of even further poverty. The delicate and precarious nature of the economic situation in the regions is a problem that needs to be properly accounted for when searching for solutions.

Target Population



Figure 8. Map of India

Overview

The majority of Mica is mined in India and Madagascar. India has the largest population in the world according to the World Bank, United States Census Bureau with about 1.408 billion people. Within this population about 2 states actively partake in Mica Mining, Bihar and Jharkhand. In a report by Irene Schipper and Roberta Cowan from The Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, “it is estimated that 22,000 children work in mica mines in Jharkhand and Bihar, but as mines that employ children do not report it, giving the exact numbers is impossible.” As far as families that are connected to Mica Mining, there are many. Children starting at the age of 4 get recruited to join the workforce and help their families make a living. The majority of the mining workers are marginalized communities often belonging to lower castes and tribal groups. Often these groups have little or no education and are thrown into mining for the rest of their lives. This leads to a cycle of poverty and living conditions. They are deprived of healthcare and women and children suffer disproportionately from exploitation and

lack of opportunities. There is no set number of how many people work in the mines daily as illegal operations are secretive with the numbers but thousands are estimated. One woman named Sushila Devi Reuters interviewed explained her knowledge of Mica, “We don’t know what mica is, where it goes and what it is used for. All I know is that if I work hard and collect it, I will get some money,” she said, adding that she gathers around 10 kg of the mica daily which earns her 80 rupees (\$1) (Bhalla, 2016).



Figure 9. Son and father Mica Mining

Children are getting paid an average of 50 rupees which is 70 cents in US dollars. Meanwhile Mica is being sold in the U.S for thousands of dollars. None of these families know how little they are being paid for their labor as it’s all they know. The families are put through daily risks of their lives. There are many deaths per year, however many are covered up as mining companies send families hush money (\$1,500). Even survivors of these mines suffer the consequences such as bone breaks, scarring of the lungs, and sickness.

The Caste System

The Caste system has been around for thousands of years and is one of the ways Hindu’s divide themselves up. The Caste system has 5 different original Castes. The top being the Brahmins and the lowest level being the Dalits (outcasts). Castes have “dictated almost every aspect of Hindu religious and social life, with each group occupying a specific place in this complex hierarchy for over a century” (BBC News (2019). In rural communities and especially states such as Jharkhand and Bihar where there are many poor communities, a good amount of people fall into lower Castes as well. According to an article by Britannica, “Nearly two-fifths of the population of Jharkhand consists of various indigenous peoples classified as Scheduled Tribes, as well as members of the Scheduled Castes (formerly

Brahma and the origins of caste

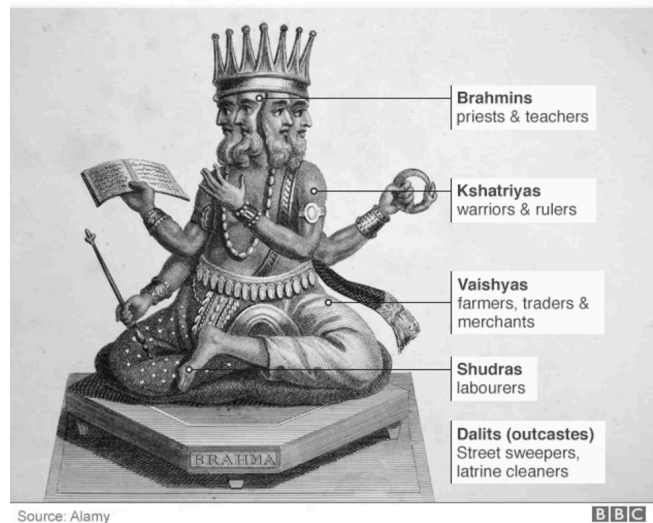


Figure 10 : The Caste System

as

called “untouchables”; groups that officially occupy a low position within the Indian caste hierarchy).”(Dutt, Noble, n.d)



Figure 11 - Two kids working

Environmental Concern

There are many concerns for the environment especially in today's day and age, global warming, gasoline powered cars, plastic consumption, however Mica Mining does pose a threat to our environment and especially the environment of the communities living in it. Mining is quite an invasive process that requires equipment and impact in the soil. According to Cecelia from the Sustainability Project, “The creation of open pits induces soil erosion, the formation of sinkholes, and could potentially contaminate surface water, groundwater, and soil.

The mining also leads to deforestation, with trees gradually cleared to develop more land for mining mica”(Cecelia, 2020). It is important that we mine Mica with sustainability in mind. It is also important for people to be aware of the current issues going on in India regarding the Mica Mining crisis.

Populations we want to reach

Many people don't know about Mica Mining, what it is, how it's mined, and what the implications are. People don't know that children as young as four years old are in the mines instead of in school. We want to reach NGOs that have the same tangible goals and awareness goals to end child labor and spread awareness of these issues to consumers like you and I.

Partnerships

Goals

It is difficult for us, as college students in California, thousands of miles away from the issue, to make real change or impacts. So, we are looking to partner with organizations we believe can help us achieve our goals and make real change. Through our partnerships we are looking to accomplish two main goals, a tangible goal and an awareness goal.

The tangible goal is concerned with making real, tangible change in the target communities. This would include the organization actually sending representatives into the towns and helping the children out of the mines and providing resources to further break the cycle of child labor. These representatives can also provide the children and their families with resources and educational tools so their life no longer has to depend on the mines. This is something we do not have the power or resources to do, so we are really looking to our partnered NGOs to assist us with this.

The second goal we have for our partnerships is the awareness goal. This goal is centered much more around simply spreading awareness of the issue and informing the public, specifically UCSB students. With this goal we help to inform people about what mica is, what products it's found in, and how using it can have detrimental effects. This will hopefully lead people to any of the following outcomes: contribute to the efforts of getting children out of the mines (for example, donating to a partnered organization), reduce their mica use, or hold the companies accountable that are contributing to the mica issue. This goal is easier for us to achieve on our own, however we still would like to be able to partner with organizations to help use their big platforms and well-respected names to spread the word. This issue will most likely be taken more seriously if it is coming from these organizations opposed to just us college students.

Partnership Criteria

In order to achieve these goals, we needed to partner with certain organizations who met some criteria. First, we looked for organizations that had their main focus, or a main focus as working towards ending child labor. This was extremely important as the main root of the issue we are trying to solve is child labor. An organization based around ending child labor would be vital to ensure we achieve our goals and work towards our solutions.

Second, we looked for organizations that have a history of mica mines. It would be very helpful to find organizations that have an awareness of the mica mining issue or have already done work surrounding it, as it means they already understand the importance of the issue. It also means that they would hopefully be open to continuing doing work, or doing more, in the target areas.

Lastly, we looked for organizations with solutions that aligned with ours. As you will read further in our report, our solutions go beyond just boycotting mica or even just rescuing the children from the mines. Our solutions look into the future and think more long term. We hope to provide the children and families of the mines with resources and educational tools. It was important to us to provide alternative solutions for these families, as many of their livelihoods depend on their mines. In order to do this we needed to find organizations that had a similar long term mindset and the tools to be able to carry out the solution.

Taking these three points of criteria into consideration, we landed on two organizations we feel can really help us reach our partnerships goals and overall solutions.

Partnership #1



Fig. 12 Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation Logo

The first organization we wish to partner with is the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF). Founded by Nobel Peace prize winner, Laureate Kalish Satyarthi, the foundation envisions a “world free of violence against children and work on an array of issues that affect vulnerable children and their families” (Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation, 2022). Since 2005, KSCF has been working in mining areas where children illegally work as laborers. They have freed 80,000 children from child labor across multiple industries and over 3,000 children were freed from mica mines specifically. They also take the extra step when rescuing the children, by not only getting the children out of the mines, but by also sending them to school to get an education. KSCF shares the same long term solution that we have.

Part of their global platform is also acting as a trustworthy bridge between various stakeholders, “Building on Mr. Satyarthi’s path breaking work of 40 years on promoting and protecting child rights, KSCF works in partnership with multi stakeholders both at the grassroots and global level, with governments, businesses, civil society, communities and children” (Kailash Satyarthi Children’s Foundation, 2022). This means they already have plenty of experience working with people outside their organization, so our partnership would be nothing new. They are a passionate, well established organization, with a background of partnerships, and that we feel could greatly help us work towards solving the problem of children in mica mines. They meet all our criteria and we would be lucky to have their help in our work to stop child labor in mica mines.

Partnership #2



Fig. 13 Stop Child Labor Coalition Logo

The second organization we would look to partner with is the Stop Child Labor Coalition. Formed in 1989, the coalition has a long and impressive history of helping children escape dangerous working conditions and the cycle of child labor. They strongly believe that “no child, regardless of race, sex, national, economic status, place of residence, or occupation, should be exploited” (Stop Child Labor Coalition, 2023). From testifying before state and federal legislatures and agencies on child labor, to creating and distributing educational and public awareness materials, they are involved in a range of activities to combat child labor. We wish to partner with them as they acknowledge the issue of mica mines and have solutions in which they wish to solve it.

They believe that boycotting products containing mica is not the right answer, but instead we must go to the children and parents in the communities of the mines. The families must be taught about the importance of education and provided with professional training and skills that allows them to find employment elsewhere. This demonstrates their long term solution mindset. The coalition puts the children as the first priority, opposed to trying to just stop the companies using mica powder. They are a very well respected organization with an impressive history that can help us achieve our goals.

Both these organizations would be extremely beneficial to partner with as they have great resources and are far reaching. They perfectly meet our intended criteria and have the resources to help us fight this terrible issue.

Solution

In 2016, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, a leading child rights organization published a landmark report titled “Beauty and the Beast: Child Labor in India for Sparkling Cars and Cosmetics” on child labor in India’s Mica sector. After the report gained recognition there was a significant increase in awareness of the devastating labor conditions. Following, In early 2017 the Responsible Mica Initiative was introduced. Responsible Mica Initiative (RMI) is a collaborative coalition for Action committed to achieving a responsible and sustainable mica supply chain in India, free of child labor.

While boycotting products containing mica powder or opting for synthetic alternatives may seem like a sustainable solution in theory, the reality is much more complicated. The mica industry is a vital source of income for thousands of families and a complete halt to its usage would result in dire consequences for entire communities. Such a drastic measure would lead to extreme poverty and hardship for the families that depend on the industry. Although there had been efforts to eliminate child labor and poor working conditions prior to RMI, the members of this organization recognized that a more holistic and collaborative approach was needed in order to address the underlying factors contributing to the use of child labor. Through goal-oriented programs and partnerships, RMI understands that achieving a sustainable mica supply chain requires a holistic approach that focuses on the following key components.

Primarily, RMI aims to map the source of mica in products to exporters and ensure that all members of the supply chain comply with workplace standards that are able to promote safe, healthy, and fair labor practices. Tracing back to where the mica was extracted and processed can help build transparency and accountability within the mica supply chain. As of now, there are zero to no companies that are transparent about their supply chains, making it impossible for consumers to identify which products are potentially linked to child labor in mica mining. For reference, The Leaping Bunny emblem is a certification program that verifies that no animal testing is used at any stage of a product's development, from ingredients to finished product. The emblem serves as a stamp of approval for cruelty-free products which has built trust between companies and consumers. Similar to the Leaping Bunny, mapping the source of mica can demonstrate a company's commitment to responsible and sustainable practices that respect human rights. Creating a similar emblem for ethically sourced mica will make it far less challenging for active consumers to make informed choices on which products they choose to support.



Figure 14: RMI Representative, Board of Directors

The second aspect of RMI's holistic approach involves empowering the communities that rely on mica mining for their livelihood. Poverty and lack of education are the two root causes of child labor. Empowering mica-dependent households signals alternative means of income and access to improved education and health care resources, as well as advocating for government social programs that can help support these communities. By empowering these communities and offering access to quality education for children, there is a sustainable future in sight. The final crucial aspect of the comprehensive approach involves advocating for legal frameworks in the mica sector. Given the prevalence of child labor and poor working conditions that have historically plagued the industry, engaging with policymakers and government officials to encourage effective implementation and enforcement of laws and regulations. Working closely with the local communities will ensure that these legal frameworks are properly adhered to. By prioritizing the protection of the worker's rights and the environment will pave the way to the most sustainable solution, from the mines to the products.

The issue of child labor in mica mining remains hidden from the eyes of many, including the individuals who unknowingly contribute to the problem with the use of everyday makeup products with brands such as L'oreal, Maybelline, and Estee Lauder. As a lack of transparency and limited media coverage makes it difficult to garner public support and drive meaningful change, the cycle of child labor persists. However, as students, we believe that we can play a significant role in raising awareness on this issue. With the use of strong social networks and a robust plan of action, collective measures can and will be inspired. We recognize the need to educate and inform our community about the ethical practices needed in order to support a better future for the victims of child labor.

Our first crucial step in combating the issue is raising awareness, and as students, we possess a unique ability to reach and influence peers. Students have an extensive network and the power to amplify a message far beyond any other means. Through conversations, presentations, and organized awareness campaigns on campus we can ensure that the issue of child labor in mica mining is no longer hidden or overlooked. These efforts will serve as a catalyst for change and help forge valuable partnerships with NGOs and like-minded individuals who share the commitment to addressing and solving this pressing issue.

One of our strategies includes creating and distributing visually appealing posters to capture attention and convey the key message. By leveraging powerful imagery, compelling facts, and striking statistics, these information aim to create an immediate emotional impact on students and peers. Strategic placement in high-traffic areas such as classrooms, common areas, and corridors will maximize the potential for exposure and engagement on campus. This strategy works to leave a lasting impression and inspire individuals to delve deeper into the issue. In addition to physical visibility, we recognize the importance of utilizing social media as a tool to ensure an extensive reach. Popular platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, FaceBook, etc, provide robust online communities that offer opportunities for our infographics and posters to flourish



Figure 15: Leaping Bunny Emblem

and continue engagement with a diverse range of individuals. By utilizing social media platforms, students can tap into existing communities that are receptive to social issues and allow for our message to go beyond the confines of our campus.

An additional strategy for working towards a solution is hosting panel discussions at UC Santa Barbara. These panels serve as an essential platform for knowledge sharing and critical thinking that will create deeper understanding and connections to the problem. By inviting experts, activists, and representatives from aspiring NGO partnerships, we create a space for meaningful conversations amongst our student community. Discussions aim to shed light on the complex dynamics and deep roots of the issue along with providing valuable perspectives on the efforts currently being made such as the RMI framework. These conversations are what help bridge the gap between theory and practice, further transforming abstract concepts into tangible realities that provoke new solutions. Moreover, networking opportunities are extended, and forming partnerships becomes obtainable.

With a powerful network of students at this campus, the peer-to-peer influence on and off social media can spark a collective consciousness on the issue that can further contribute to the ripple effect. Furthermore, as awareness spreads about the realities of child labor in mica mining so does the collective call for change. As the message further amplifies and unheard voices become louder, demanding accountability and justice for the mica communities because inescapable. The goal is to put the utmost pressure on companies, industries, and governments that will ultimately force a confrontation on the issue and ensure action to address it. As more individuals join the cause, their conscious choices as consumers, favoring brands that prioritize ethical sourcing and transparent practices, industries are compelled to listen. Consequently, policymakers are compelled to take notice and respond through petitions, and lobbying efforts. and shaping policies. This ripple effect led by students can drive systematic change and establish a more just and sustainable framework for the mica mining communities.

Appendix

“Responsible Mica Initiative Publishes Landmark Reports Defining Fair Mica Worker Incomes and Wages in India and Concluding Negligible Impact on Costs to Consumers.” *RESPONSIBLE MICA INITIATIVE*, 3 May 2023, responsible-mica-initiative.com/elementor-5903/.

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