



BEYOND AWARENESS: A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY-LED  
ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS ON CHILD LABOUR IN PAKISTAN'S  
BRICK KILN SECTOR, 2007-2024

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**Abstract**

*Pakistan's brick kiln sector remains a persistent site of child and bonded labour in South Asia, with an estimated one-third of its four-million-strong workforce being children. Despite sustained civil society advocacy and communication campaigns between 2007 and 2024, child labour prevalence has shown minimal measurable reduction. No prior study has systematically evaluated the comparative effectiveness of communication models in this sector across a longitudinal timeframe.*

*This article maps and categorises civil society-led advocacy and communication campaigns targeting child labour in Pakistan's brick kiln sector from 2007 to 2024, evaluates documented policy and practice outcomes, and identifies communication model characteristics most strongly associated with measurable impact. A qualitative secondary analysis was conducted through systematic document review of ILO and USDOL evaluations, NGO reports, legislation, and case studies, analysed using thematic analysis, a comparative framework of communication models (SBCC and Rights-Based Approach), and a political economy lens.*

*Results show that campaigns predominantly used information-dissemination models generating outputs but limited sustained practice change. Participatory and rights-based approaches showed stronger outcomes, though sector-specific evidence remains thin. Across all models, the political economy of the kiln industry, particularly the peshgi bonded debt system, kiln owner political organisation, and weak provincial enforcement, functioned as a binding ceiling on effectiveness.*

*Civil society advocacy achieved legislative reform, including the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act 2016, but structural enforcement failures render this progress flawed. Communication-only interventions cannot overcome structural constraints. Future programming must integrate rights-based communication with economic alternatives, legal empowerment, and sustained enforcement action directed at state duty-bearers.*

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Brick Kiln Sector, Advocacy Campaigns, Social, Behaviour Change Communication, Pakistan

**Classification:** Development Studies / Child Rights / Social and Behaviour Change Communication

**1. Introduction**

**1.1 Background**

Child labour remains one of the most entrenched violations of children's rights in South Asia, sustained by intersecting structures of poverty, bonded debt and institutional enforcement failures. Globally, an estimated 138 million children between ages of five and seventeen were engaged in child labour in 2024, of



whom approximately 54 million were performing hazardous work that was likely to damage their health, safety, or development (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). The Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, which committed the international community to eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2025, has been formally missed, and current rates of progress would need to accelerate eleven-fold to achieve elimination by 2030 (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). Within this global landscape, Pakistan represents one of the most acute national cases: the country's Labour Force Survey for 2017–18 recorded 13.7 per cent of children aged ten to seventeen as engaged in child labour, with 5.4 per cent involved in hazardous forms (ILO, 2021), and an estimated 26 million children remain out of school as of 2024 (USDOL, 2025).

Pakistan's brick kiln sector occupies a particularly significant position within this landscape. Employing an estimated four million workers, kilns represent one of the largest informal industrial sectors in the country, concentrated in the Punjab and Sindh provinces and dependent on a seasonal, piece-rate labour model structured around the peshgi system, monetary advances extended to workers that, by design and practice, generate inter-generational debt bondage (Kara, 2012; ILO, 2020a). Approximately one-third of Pakistan's brick kiln workforce consists of children (USDOL, 2023), and the sector has been classified as hazardous under both international standards and provincial legislation. Religious and caste minorities are disproportionately represented among kiln families, with estimates suggesting they constitute over 50 per cent of the workforce in Punjab and Sindh (UNHRC, 2025). The Pakistan Brick Kiln Owners' Association exercises political influence that has demonstrably shaped the design of regulatory frameworks, as evidenced by the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act 2016 capping rather than abolishing the peshgi advance system (Government of Pakistan, 2016; Ahmed, 2024).

### ***1.2 Statement of the Problem***

Against this backdrop, international bodies, government agencies and civil society organisations substantially invested in advocacy and communication campaigns aimed at reducing child labour in Pakistan's brick kiln sector since early 2000s. These campaigns ranged from Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material distribution and school enrolment drives to rights-based legal advocacy, community mobilisation, and integrated social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) programmes. Yet, the paradox that defines this field remains stark. Decades of campaign activity have produced a recognisable body of legislative reform, including the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1992, the Punjab Brick Kilns Act 2016, and the National Labour Protection Framework 2018, alongside minimal measurable reduction in brick kiln child labour prevalence. The USDOL's annual assessments have assigned a consistent rating of moderate advancement across successive years (USDOL, 2019; 2023; 2025), obscuring the persistent gap between policy and enforcement reality. A 2025 submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council characterised implementation of Pakistan's existing bonded labour laws as non-existent (UNHRC, 2025). Three decades after their enactment. There is no published study that has applied formal communication theory frameworks to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of communication models deployed specifically in the brick kiln sector across a longitudinal timeframe, leaving programme designers without an evidence-informed basis for intervention design.

### ***1.3 Significance of the Topic***

The significance of this analysis encompasses three registers. For affected communities, the stakes are immediate. Children who work in brick kilns experience hazardous physical conditions, are denied access to education, and are born into bonded debt structures that constrain entire families across generations (Abbas, 2017; Pellenq et al., 2022). For practitioners and civil society organisations, absence of a comparative evidence base means that communication campaign designs are often replicated without evaluative scrutiny, continuing use of approaches whose limitations are well documented in analogous development communication contexts (Waisbord, 2001; ILO, 2015). For scholarship, the sector represents an undertheorised test case for SBCC frameworks in complex political economy environments. Pakistan's international obligations further sharpen the policy relevance. As a signatory to ILO Conventions 138 and 182, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the SDG framework, country's labour standards compliance directly affects trade preference decisions and donor funding cycles (Ali et al., 2025).



#### **1.4 Research Objective**

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate, through systematic qualitative secondary analysis, the extent to which civil society-led advocacy and communication campaigns have influenced policy reform and practice change on child labour in Pakistan's brick kiln sector between 2007 and 2024, and to identify which communication models have demonstrated the greatest documented impact.

#### **1.5 Aim of the Study**

The article aims to layout a conceptual framework identifying communication model characteristics, including theoretical grounding, stakeholder engagement strategy and structural integration, most strongly associated with measurable impact in the brick kiln child labour context, with direct utility for future programme design in Pakistan.

#### **1.6 Contribution and Scope of the Study**

This article makes two complementary contributions. It theoretically applies and extends SBCC and Rights-Based Approach (RBA) frameworks to a sectoral child labour context, generating a comparative evaluation architecture beyond descriptive campaign reporting. And it practically provides evidence-based informed guidance for donor agencies, provincial governments and civil society organisations. The study's scope is bounded geographically to Pakistan's brick kiln sector with primary reference to Punjab and Sindh; temporally to 2007–2024; and methodologically to qualitative secondary analysis of institutional, grey, and published academic sources. Primary fieldwork is not undertaken.

#### **1.7 Organisation of the Study**

Section 2 reviews theoretical and empirical literature, develops conceptual framework, and articulates propositional hypotheses. Section 3 details research methodology. Section 4 presents findings and discussion organised around three hypotheses. Section 5 presents conclusions, recommendations, and directions for future research.

### **2. Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Theoretical Literature**

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) theory and the Rights-Based Approach (RBA) are theoretical frameworks that complementarily anchor this study's evaluative architecture. Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory established that behaviour change operates through observation, self-efficacy, and social reinforcement. It does not occur merely through information exposure with direct implications for campaigns that treat knowledge transfer as sufficient for practice change. Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations framework demonstrated that new behaviours spread via opinion leaders and interpersonal networks rather than mass media uniformity. McLeroy et al.'s (1988) social ecological model (SEM) consolidated these insights into a multi-level framework identifying five nested spheres of influence, intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy, arguing that effective interventions must address multiple levels simultaneously. Waisbord's (2001) genealogy of development communication synthesised these traditions into a categorical distinction between the dominant paradigm, which diagnoses underdevelopment as an information deficit and prescribes persuasive mass communication, and the participatory paradigm, which identifies power inequality as the root problem and prescribes community co-production. Subsequent consolidation by Storey and Figueroa (2012), Greiner (2020), and UNICEF's (2018) C4D guidance has established social norms change, participatory co-design, and multi-level targeting as the field's best-practice standard.

The RBA provides the normative complement. Theis (2004) articulates the RBA's central reorientation: development subjects are rights-holders with claims against identifiable duty-bearers whose obligations are grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and ILO Conventions 138 and 182. The RBA distinction between rights-framing and welfare-framing is consequential: campaigns that position child labour as a social problem requiring community awareness generate sympathy responses, while campaigns framing it as a rights violation requiring state accountability generate demands for enforcement. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) excellence theory reinforce this at the communication design level: two-way symmetric communication, genuine dialogue with duty-bearer audiences, is most likely to produce durable institutional outcomes.



## 2.2 Empirical Literature

Empirical literature clusters into four thematic strands. The first documents the structural features of the sector: the peshgi bonded debt system as the operational mechanism of exploitation (Ercelawn & Nauman, 2001; Iqbal, 2004; Khan & Shahzadi, 2021), the inter-generational character of bondage (Kara, 2012; PILER, 2007b), and hazardous health consequences for working children (Abbas, 2017; Pellenq et al., 2022). This literature establishes that brick kiln child labour is structurally embedded in a debt economy, not primarily a cultural practice or informational failure, with direct implications for any communication intervention that does not engage the economic mechanism of bondage. The second strand analyses Pakistan's legislative and policy architecture (Government of Pakistan, 2016; Jahan & Rashid, 2020; Ahmed, 2024), consistently identifying the gap between statutory provision and enforcement capacity as the field's defining challenge. Shah et al. (2020) provides the most precise and specific quantitative contribution through a study of 300 children across sixty Peshawar kilns in which advance money demonstrated a highly significant association with bonded child labour ( $p=0.000$ ) while general financial problems did not, isolating the peshgi mechanism rather than poverty per se as the binding driver.

Intervention programme reviews constitute the third strand. The ILO's (2015) South Asia good practices synthesis concludes that awareness campaigns without complementary economic support have shown limited impact on prevalence. This is corroborated by Jahan and Rashid (2020) and Munir and Mangi (2007), who both find that enforcement and economic alternatives are necessary complements to communication. PILER's (2007b) action research, the most independently rigorous evaluation in the corpus, documents the joint NGO-judiciary model as the most effective bonded labour release mechanism while simultaneously revealing that released workers returned to kilns without rehabilitation. The fourth strand addresses Pakistan's communication landscape. Yusuf and Schoemaker (2013) document radio as the most trusted rural channel. Whereas, Tull (2017) finds community-based interpersonal communication outperforms mass media alone in conservative Muslim settings.

## 2.3 Research Gap

The literature exhibits three systematic limitations this article addresses. First, no prior study has applied formal SBCC or RBA frameworks to the systematic evaluation of campaigns specifically in Pakistan's brick kiln sector, studies describe what campaigns did, but not why designs succeeded or failed relative to theoretical criteria. Second, the available literature is sector-fragmented and cross-sectional, lacking the longitudinal, sector-specific synthesis a seventeen-year window enables. Third, the empirical record is dominated by funder-commissioned evaluations and self-reports, producing a systematic bias toward output-level documentation that obscures outcome and impact evidence. This article addresses all three gaps through systematic qualitative secondary analysis, a communication model comparative framework, and explicit critical engagement with evaluation quality.

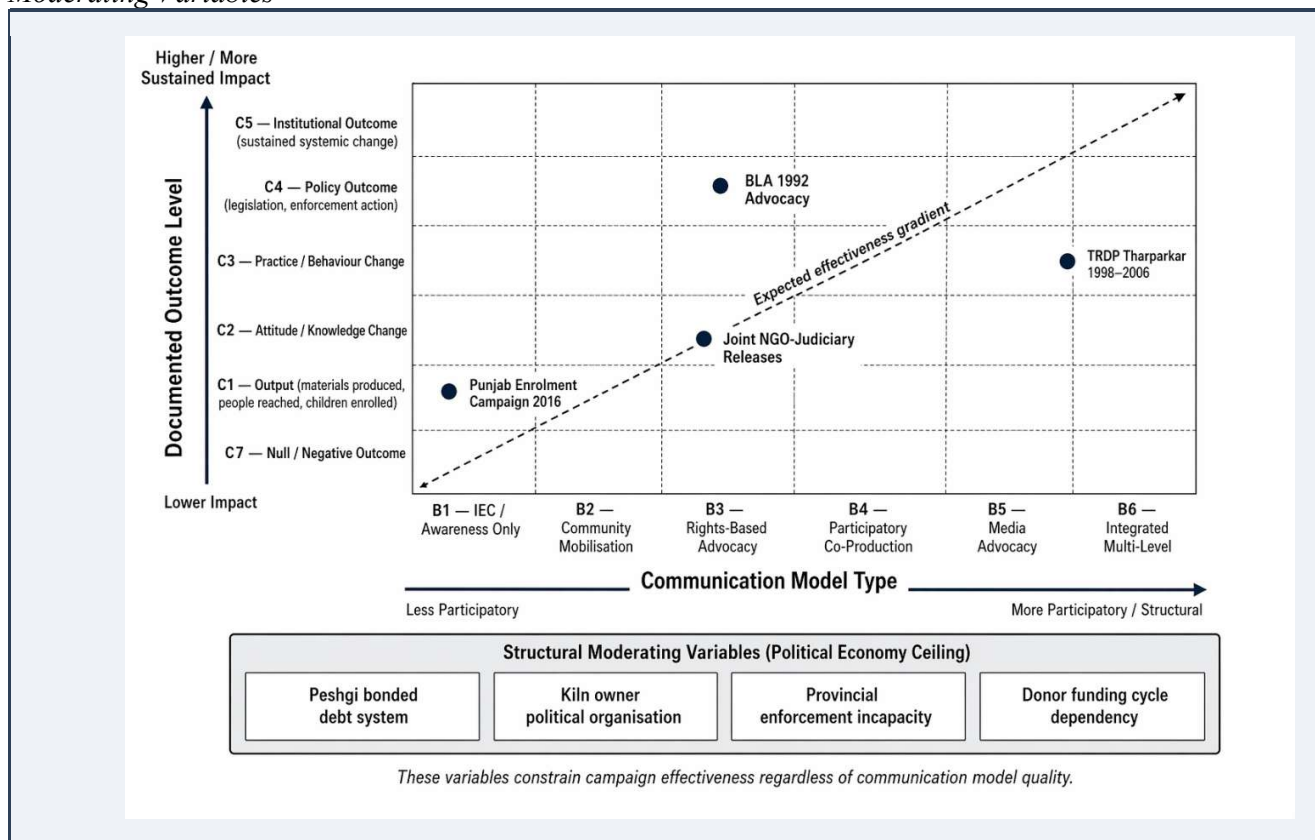
## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

The article's evaluative architecture integrates SBCC theory and the RBA into a two-axis analytical model (see Figure 1). The horizontal axis maps communication model type from IEC-only (B1) through community mobilisation (B2), rights-based advocacy (B3), participatory co-production (B4), media advocacy (B5), and integrated multi-level approaches (B6). The vertical axis maps documented outcome from output (C1) through attitude change (C2), practice change (C3), policy outcomes (C4), and institutional outcomes (C5), to null outcomes (C7). Three layers of moderating variables, the peshgi bonded debt system, kiln owner associational power, and provincial enforcement capacity, set the structural ceiling on what any communication intervention can achieve (Ercelawn & Nauman, 2001; Kara, 2012; Awan, 2023), anchored in the SBCC framework (Bandura, 2001; McLeroy et al., 1988), Rights-Based Approach (Theis, 2004), and political economy analysis (Iqbal, 2004).



**Figure 1**

*Two-Axis Conceptual Framework: Communication Model Type and Outcome Level With Mediating and Moderating Variables*



### 2.5 Hypotheses Development

Three propositional hypotheses derive from the theoretical and empirical convergence above. H1 holds that campaigns have predominantly employed awareness-raising models that, while generating short-term outputs, have demonstrated limited capacity to produce sustained practice change without complementary structural and economic interventions, grounded in SBCC theory (McLeroy et al., 1988; World Bank, 2015) and South Asia empirical evidence (ILO, 2015; Jahan & Rashid, 2020). H2 holds that rights-based and participatory campaigns have demonstrated comparatively stronger documented outcomes, derived from the participatory paradigm (Waisbord, 2001; Theis, 2004), UNICEF's C4D evidence (UNICEF, 2020a), and the TRDP integrated model contrast with IEC-dominant enrolment drives (PILER, 2007b). H3 holds that the peshgi system, kiln owner political organisation, and enforcement incapacity have significantly mediated campaign effectiveness regardless of communication design quality, grounded in structural bonded labour analysis (Kara, 2012; Ercelawn & Nauman, 2001), the quantitative peshgi evidence (Shah et al., 2020), and SEM's structural engagement requirement (McLeroy et al., 1988; Basu & Tzannatos, 2003).

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Study Area

This study examined civil society-led advocacy and communication campaigns targeting child labour in Pakistan's brick kiln sector, with primary geographic reference to Punjab and Sindh provinces, which concentrate the majority of documented kiln clusters and the largest share of the available literature. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces appear as secondary reference points. The study area is defined by the documentary evidence base rather than physical fieldwork, acknowledged as a deliberate delimitation rather than a limitation.



### **3.2 Data Collection Techniques**

The data was collected through systematic document review, a standard instrument for qualitative secondary analysis of institutional and published sources (Bowen, 2009a). A purposive sampling protocol was applied to a corpus of approximately 95 accepted sources drawn from five categories including peer-reviewed journal articles; ILO, USDOL, and UNICEF institutional reports and programme evaluations; Pakistani government legislative texts, policy documents, and official statistics; NGO and civil society evaluation reports; and working papers and grey literature from PILER, HRCP, and Anti-Slavery International. These sources were selected against explicit inclusion criteria, relevance to child labour, bonded labour, communication campaigns, or the brick kiln sector in Pakistan; production between 1989 and 2025 with post-2007 sources prioritised with availability in English.

### **3.3 Duration of the Study**

The chronological scope encompassed campaign documentation, programme evaluations, and policy developments from 2007 to 2024, spanning three discernible phases of civil society engagement. Sources predating 2007 were included for essential legislative, theoretical, or historical context. Document retrieval and analysis were conducted between 2025 and 2026.

### **3.4 Theoretical Model**

The theoretical framework integrated SBCC theory and the RBA as complementary evaluative lenses. SBCC, drawing on Bandura (2001), McLeroy et al. (1988), Rogers (2003), UNICEF (2018), and Waisbord (2001), provided criteria for assessing communication model design adequacy. Whether campaigns targeted multiple ecological levels, engaged communities as active participants, and articulated an explicit theory of change. The RBA, grounded in Theis (2004) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), provided criteria for advocacy orientation. Whether campaigns engaged duty-bearers, framed child labour as a rights violation, and positioned affected workers as rights-holders rather than beneficiaries. Political economy analysis, drawing on Ercelawn and Nauman (2001), Kara (2012), and Iqbal (2004), provided the moderating lens for structural constraints.

### **3.5 Empirical Model**

The analytical process followed a three-tier qualitative framework. Primary analysis employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) across six phases including familiarisation, initial coding, candidate theme development, theme review, theme definition and cross-document synthesis. The coding framework comprised six categories including campaign identification; communication model type (B1–B6); documented outcome level (C1–C7); evaluation quality; political economy factors; and RBA indicators. Secondary analysis applied communication model's comparative analysis, positioning each campaign against the two-axis model to enable cross-campaign comparison. Tertiary analysis applied the political economy lens to structural moderating variables. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, negative case analysis, and a comprehensive document registry audit trail consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) qualitative trustworthiness criteria. The author's 18 years of practitioner experience in Pakistan's child labour and bonded labour programming sector constitutes a positionality that informed critical source reading while all analytical claims remained grounded exclusively in citable secondary evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bowen, 2009a).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Campaign Landscape and Communication Models Deployed**

Systematic document review identified thirteen discrete campaigns or programme interventions operating in or directly adjacent to Pakistan's brick kiln child labour context between 2007 and 2024 (see Table 1). The corpus of approximately 95 sources was dominated by institutional reports from ILO and USDOL, with independent evaluations, produced by parties without financial relationships to implementing organisations, numbering fewer than ten across the full corpus.



**Table 1**

*Campaign Inventory Matrix: Campaigns and Programmes Addressing Child Labour in Pakistan's Brick Kiln Sector, 2007–2024*

<b>Campaign / Programme</b>	<b>Implementing Org.</b>	<b>Funder</b>	<b>Province(s)</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Documented Outcome &amp; Quality</b>
ILO-IPEC Time-Bound Programme	ILO-IPEC / GoP	USDOL / ILO	Multi-province (kilns excluded)	2003–08	B6	C1 outputs in targeted sectors; C6 no kiln outcomes. D2
BLLF Apna Schools Programme	BLLF	Int'l civil society	Punjab	~1990s–2000s	B2/B4	C1 schools; C2 awareness; C7 collapsed post-split. D3
Joint NGO-Judiciary Bonded Labour Release	HRCP; PILER; JPC; Bhatta Mazdoor Union	Anti-Slavery Int'l; ILO	Punjab; Sindh	1980s–2007	B3	C1 8,530 released (5,166 via joint model); C7 regression without rehab. D1
CACL II, EU/ILO	ILO-IPEC Pakistan	EU / ILO-IPEC	Multi-province	2008–13	B6	C1 withdrawals; C3 pilots; C4 NTBP; C5 DVCs. D2
Punjab Enrolment Campaign 2015	Punjab Labour Dept.	Govt. Punjab	Punjab	2015	B1	C7 null, no impact on bonded CL (Shah et al., 2020). D3
Punjab Enrolment Campaign 2016	Punjab Labour + Education Depts.	Govt. Punjab	Punjab	2016	B1	C1 80,000 enrolled; C7 not sustained post-stipend. D2/D3
Punjab Brick Kiln Inspections	Punjab Labour Dept.	Govt. Punjab	Punjab	2016–present	B7	C4 8,580 inspections (2023); 771 violations; C7 brickmaking not hazardous. D2
EBLIK / EBLIK-4D	ILO / Italian AICS	AICS	Punjab (4 districts)	~2016–22	B6/B3	C1 CNICs; NFE; C3 reduced vulnerability; C5 state linkage. D2/D3
ILO Capacity Building, State Functionaries	ILO Pakistan	ILO	National	Pre-2008	B3	C1 officials trained; C5 institutional; C4 BLA knowledge. D2
Civil Society Advocacy, BLA 1992 Implementation	BLLF; PILER; HRCP; ILO	Multiple	National	1992–present	B3/B2/B5	C4 Act passed 1992; C7 23 cases in 12 years; Rs 6,100 fines. D1
TRDP Child Rights Protection Project	TRDP	DFID	Sindh, Tharparkar	1998–2006	B6/B4	C3 82% enrolment; 3,441 phased out; 85% households off contractor credit. D3/D4
UNICEF Pakistan C4D Programme	UNICEF Pakistan	UNICEF	National	2014–22	B2/B5/B6	C2/C3 health domains; C5 govt capacity; C7 insufficient in CL domain. D1/D2
AAWAZ Voice & Accountability	Civil society consortium	DFID UK	National	~2013–18	B3/B2/B6	C4 civil society–govt dialogue; C5 networks; C2 rights awareness. D1

*Note. Model codes: B1 = IEC/awareness; B2 = community mobilisation; B3 = rights-based advocacy; B4 = participatory co-production; B6 = integrated multi-level; B7 = enforcement only. Outcome codes: C1*

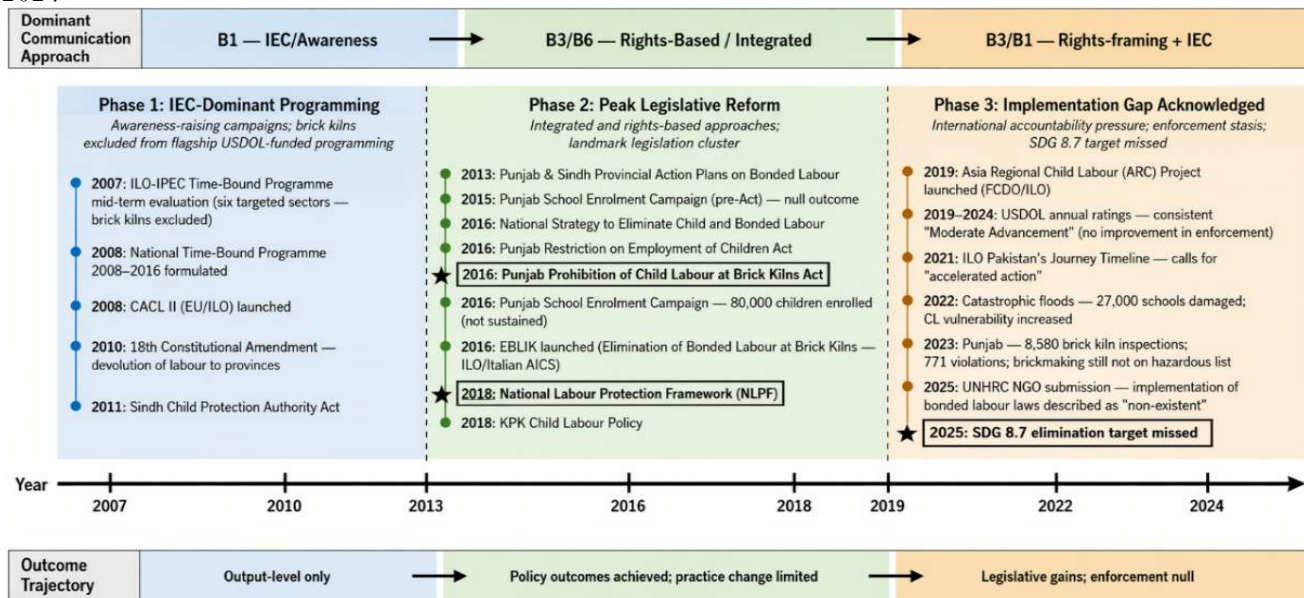


= output; C2 = attitude change; C3 = practice change; C4 = policy outcome; C5 = institutional outcome; C6 = no brick kiln outcomes; C7 = null/negative. Evaluation quality: D1 = independent; D2 = funder-commissioned; D3 = self-report; D4 = baseline/endline.

The campaign landscape is most productively understood through a three-phase periodisation anchored in the ILO's (2021) policy milestones documentation (see Figure 2). Phase 1 (2007–2012) was characterised by IEC-dominant programming, with the USDOL-funded Time-Bound Programme (ILO, 2007a) targeting six hazardous industries while excluding kilns from its coverage. Phase 2 (2013–2018) produced the study period's most significant legislative cluster: the National Strategy to Eliminate Child and Bonded Labour (2016), the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act (2016), and the National Labour Protection Framework (2018). Phase 3 (2019–2024) was defined by an acknowledged gap between legislative achievement and enforcement reality, with the ILO (2021) calling for accelerated action and the ILO and UNICEF (2025) confirming the 2025 SDG 8.7 deadline has been missed.

**Figure 2**

*Three-Phase Periodisation of Civil Society Communication Campaigns, Pakistan Brick Kiln Sector, 2007–2024*



Coding analysis across the thirteen campaigns (see Table 1) revealed a distinct concentration of B1-coded approaches, awareness raising, material distribution, and school enrolment drives, particularly in Phase 1 and government-led interventions throughout the period. Five campaigns were coded B1. Three were coded B6 (integrated multi-level), including TRDP Child Rights Protection Project, EBLIK/EBLIK-4D, and CACL II. Two were coded primarily B3 (rights-based advocacy) including joint NGO-judiciary bonded labour release operations and sustained civil society campaign for BLA 1992 implementation. B1-dominant campaigns consistently generated C1 outputs, materials produced, people reached, children enrolled, but rarely produced evidence of C2 attitude change, C3 practice change, or C5 institutional outcomes. The Punjab 2016 enrolment campaign enrolled 80,000 children within months, but no sustained retention was documented following stipend discontinuation (ILO, 2020a). C7 null outcomes appeared with greater frequency than any outcome level other than C1.

#### 4.2 Inferential Analysis: Structural Patterns

During the analysis, three structural patterns emerge. First, a persistent awareness-action gap characterises IEC-dominant campaigns. Output-level success consistently fails to translate into sustained practice change across different implementing organisations, funding sources, and provincial contexts,



indicating a design feature of the communication model rather than individual programme failures. Second, structural integration, combining communication components with economic alternatives, legal identity tools, or enforcement mechanisms which consistently improved outcome profiles regardless of what structural element was added. Third, campaigns that engaged state duty-bearers, courts, labour departments, provincial authorities, as accountability targets produced stronger policy-level outcomes than campaigns directed exclusively at community audiences.

#### 4.3 Results of Hypothesis Testing

**H1, IEC dominant models are limited in sustained impact:** Supported with qualification. The documentary evidence confirms that awareness-raising campaigns have constituted the dominant mode across the study period and consistently produced output-level achievement without sustained practice change. The Punjab 2016 enrolment campaign (ILO, 2020a), Shah et al.'s (2020) finding of null impact from the 2015 drive, and the ILO's (2015) South Asia synthesis, all support this hypothesis. The qualification is that IEC components within integrated programmes contribute meaningfully when combined with structural elements so the hypothesis applies to IEC-only designs and not to IEC as one component among several.

**H2, Participatory and rights-based models comparatively stronger:** Supported with qualification. The TRDP Tharparkar intervention, combining Para Development Committees, micro-credit replacing contractor debt, and rights-based framing, produced the strongest documented outcome profile in the corpus: 3,441 children phased out of full-time labour, 82 per cent school enrolment, and measurable reduction in contractor debt dependency (PILER, 2007b). The joint NGO-judiciary operations produced 5,166 confirmed releases, the highest numerically documented outcome in the corpus (PILER, 2007b). The qualification is that the strongest evidence derives from the carpet weaving sector, where peshgi operates through merchant advance rather than kiln-owner advance, limiting direct transferability, and that participatory models are comparatively under-evaluated in brick kiln contexts specifically.

**H3, Political economy as binding ceiling:** Strongly supported. The BLA 1992 trajectory is the central evidentiary anchor: sustained advocacy achieved legislative reform, yet only 23 cases were filed under the Act in twelve years, with total fines of Rs 6,100 collected (PILER, 2007b). By 2025, UNHRC documentation characterised implementation as non-existent (UNHRC, 2025). Quantitative specification, advance money significantly associated with bonded child labour at  $p=0.000$ , isolates the peshgi mechanism rather than generalised poverty as the binding driver (Shah et al., 2020). Enforcement capacity assessment confirms the structural character of the ceiling; inspectorates lack transport to reach remote kilns, District Vigilance Committees are inactive, and police corruption diverts cases before prosecution (Awan, 2023).

#### 4.4 Empirical Estimation: Quantitative Evidence Profile

The available quantitative evidence provides a coherent profile (see Table 2). The Punjab 2016 enrolment campaign enrolled 80,000 children. This is the largest single documented output for any kiln-specific campaign in the corpus (ILO, 2020a). The TRDP model achieved 82 per cent school enrolment and phased out 3,441 children over eight years (PILER, 2007b). The joint NGO-judiciary operations released 8,530 confirmed bonded labourers, of whom 5,166 were freed through the combined mechanism (PILER, 2007b). Against these outputs, enforcement data reveals a structural null: 23 prosecutions under BLA 1992 across twelve years (PILER, 2007b), 771 violations documented in Punjab in 2023 yielding 34 arrests (USDOL, 2023), meanwhile brickmaking remains absent from hazardous work schedules as of 2024 (USDOL, 2025).

**Table 2**

*Comparative Outcome Evidence: Campaign, Communication Model, Documented Output and Outcome, and Evaluation Quality*

Campaign	Model	Documented Output (C1)	Documented Outcome	Eval.
Punjab Enrolment 2016	B1	80,000 enrolled; PSA stipends	C7, Not sustained: stipend failures; children left post-discontinuation	D2/D3
Punjab Enrolment 2015	B1	School enrolment drive	C7, No impact on bonded CL (Shah et al., 2020)	D3



Campaign	Model	Documented Output (C1)	Documented Outcome	Eval.
TRDP CRPP 1998–2006	B6/B4	3,441 children phased out; 50 NFE schools	C3, 82% enrolment; hours halved; 85% off contractor credit	D3/D4
Joint NGO- Judiciary Release	B3	8,530 documented releases	C1/C7, 5,166 freed; workers returned without rehabilitation	D1/D4
EBLIK / EBLIK- 4D	B6	CNICs obtained; NFE; micro-credit	C3, Reduced peshgi vulnerability; state welfare access	D2/D3
BLA 1992 Advocacy	B3	Act passed; campaigns 30+ years	C4 legislation; C7, 23 prosecutions in 12 years; Rs 6,100 fines; peshgi continues 2025	D1
Punjab Kiln Inspections	B7	8,580 inspections 2023; 771 violations	C7, Brickmaking not hazardous; violations recur; police corruption	D2
ILO-IPEC TBP 2003–08	B6	Children withdrawn; NFE enrolled	C3 Sialkot; C6 no brick kiln outcomes	D2
CACL II 2008–13	B6	Withdrawals; OSH studies; DVCs	C3 pilots; C4 NTBP; C5 DVCs	D2
UNICEF C4D 2014–22	B2/B6	COMNet 4,905 staff; KABP baseline	C2/C3 health; C7 insufficient in CL domain (CPE finding)	D1

*Note. Model type and outcome codes as per Table 1. Evaluation quality: D1 = independent; D2 = funder-commissioned; D3 = self-report; D4 = baseline/endline design.*

#### 4.5 Discussion and Analysis

The central finding, that civil society campaigns achieved legislative reform while structural enforcement failures rendered that reform largely inoperative, is consistent with but advances beyond the existing literature. The ILO's (2015) South Asia good practices review identified economic complementarity as a necessary condition for campaign effectiveness without specifying the political economy mechanism that prevents it from being achieved. This article locates that mechanism precisely. Kiln owner associational power shaped legislative design (peshgi capped not abolished; brickmaking being absent from hazardous lists), while enforcement infrastructure is structurally incapable of implementing existing law. The analysis of the 2016 Act design gaps corroborates this (Ahmed, 2024), as does the enforcement capacity assessment (Awan, 2023).

This finding partially contradicts the field's dominant narrative of incremental progress. USDOL's consistent moderate advancement designation implies a linear improvement trajectory. The evidence reviewed here suggests instead a phase structure in which legislative achievements have accumulated without enforcement translation. This is consistent with what Basu and Tzannatos (2003) describe as a bad equilibrium. Campaigns operating where the returns to child labour remain high and enforcement costs remain low cannot alter the structural incentives sustaining bonded child labour, regardless of communication quality.

The TRDP's success derived not from participatory communication design per se but from the economic mechanism it embedded alongside communication: micro-credit replacing contractor debt directly weakened the peshgi-equivalent structure (PILER, 2007b). Participation functions as an enabling condition for structural change, communities engaged as actors rather than audiences are more likely to use structural tools effectively, but the structural tools must be present. For communication theory, this analysis argues for political economy assessment as a standard pre-design step: the communication model should be calibrated not only to the community but to the enforcement environment within which it operates. For donors and civil society organisations, campaigns structured around awareness raising will continue to generate the awareness-action gap documented here unless paired with economic alternatives to peshgi debt and sustained advocacy directed at enforcement institution capacity.



## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Major Findings

This study produced five principal findings. First, campaigns were predominantly structured around IEC/awareness models that generated measurable outputs without sustained practice change. Second, participatory and rights-based approaches (RBA) demonstrated comparatively stronger outcomes, with most effective interventions combining communication with direct economic alternatives to the peshgi advance system. Third, the political economy of the brick kiln industry functioned as a binding ceiling on campaign effectiveness regardless of model quality, anchored by the thirty-year null enforcement record of the BLA 1992. Fourth, the 2016–2018 legislative cluster demonstrates that advocacy can achieve legislative reform; the failure point is enforcement, not legislation. Fifth, the evidentiary record is systematically biased toward output documentation, limiting the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn.

### 5.2 Conclusion

This study establishes that the persistent gap between campaign investment and child labour outcomes in Pakistan's brick kiln sector is not primarily a communication design failure but a structural enforcement failure, sustained by the political economy of an industry whose owners exercise sufficient political influence to shape the legislation designed to regulate them. Civil society campaigns have done what communication can do: they have raised awareness, mobilised communities, and achieved legislative milestones. What they have not done, and what communication alone structurally cannot do, is compel enforcement against a well-organised, politically connected employer class operating in an institutional environment of under-resourced inspectorates, inactive vigilance committees, and documented police corruption. Campaigns designed without accounting for these structural conditions will continue to generate the awareness-action gap documented across the study period.

### 5.3 Recommendations

**For provincial governments (Punjab and Sindh):** Add brickmaking explicitly to provincial hazardous occupations schedules. Activate and resource District Vigilance Committees with transport, staffing, and reporting requirements, and publish quarterly enforcement data publicly.

**For civil society organisations and NGOs:** Reorient design away from standalone IEC campaigns toward integrated models combining communication with at least one structural component, micro-credit or savings mechanisms to replace peshgi dependency, CNIC acquisition drives, or legal aid access. Build independent outcome-level evaluation into every programme budget.

**For ILO, USDOL, and bilateral donors:** Require grant proposals to demonstrate engagement with the peshgi economic mechanism and include an independent evaluation design with outcome-level measurement. Extend funding cycles beyond the two-to-three year horizon insufficient for generational bonded labour change.

**For researchers:** Commission independent, sector-specific evaluations of named brick kiln communication campaigns using control or comparison group designs. The field lacks a single independent outcome evaluation of a named campaign in this sector.

### 5.4 Limitations

This study is limited by the systematic bias in the source corpus toward funder-commissioned and self-reported evaluations, which may overstate outputs and understate null outcomes. The geographic coverage is disproportionately concentrated in Punjab, with Sindh, KPK, and Balochistan substantially underrepresented. Worker and community perspectives on campaign effectiveness are absent from peer-reviewed sources, meaning the analysis reflects institutional framings rather than the views of the communities campaigns were designed to serve.

### 5.5 Delimitations

This study deliberately excluded primary fieldwork to enable a longitudinal sweep across the full 2007–2024 period. Comparative sector analysis, carpet weaving, coal mining, and agricultural bonded labour, is excluded except where it directly illuminates brick kiln communication dynamics. State-led enforcement programmes without a communication design component fall outside the analytical scope.



### 5.6 Future Research Recommendations

Future research should prioritise, first, a primary qualitative study collecting kiln worker and affected family perspectives on the credibility and utility of civil society communication campaigns, the missing community voice in this review. Second, a comparative study adapting the TRDP integrated model specifically to the brick kiln sector, using peshgi replacement as the key design variable, would directly address the strongest evidentiary gap. Third, evaluation of digital and social media communication in Phase 3 (2019–2024) brick kiln programming represents an emerging priority for which no outcome evidence currently exists.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

### Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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