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Research Paper

Problems of Child Labour In India Under Globlisation Era - Some Solutions

Economics

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is a complex problem basically rooted in poverty. The Government of India has formulated policies since the economic reforms of the early 1990s. Children under fourteen comprise 3.6 per cent of the total labour force in India. Nearly eighty-five per cent are engaged in the traditional agricultural sector, less than nine per cent in manufacturing, services and repairs and only about 0.8 per cent are in factories. The elimination of child labour is a priority and is being implemented at the grass roots level in India. A large number of non-governmental and voluntary organizations are involved in this process along with national and international organisations. This paper reviews the child labour situation in India and analyses the effect of globalisation on child labour.

INTRODUCTION

Global movement against child labour has emerged as an important international debate since the 1990s. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are more than 350 million children 'economically active' around the world. Discussion on child labour has been stimulated as a contemporary issue on globalisation and international labour standards.i Incidence of total child labour in India is around 10.4 million and has been declining in recent decades.ii There are enormous regional variations in its incidence and pace of decline.

The current wave of globalisation started after World War II, but accelerated since the 1980s in developed and some developing countries. Is there a direct link between globalisation and child labour. The literature on this issue cannot provide a definitive conclusion. Both the proponents and opponents of globalisation have explained the effect of globalisation on child labour with arguments. According to the proponents, the international free market will reduce the necessity of child labour with overall economic development through higher income and standard of living. According to the opponents, globalisation increases the opportunity of exploiting cheap labour particularly from poor countries. Countries like Vietnam, Thailand and Mexico have experienced a clear decline in child labour; while other countries like Bolivia and Zambia have witnessed a decline in schooling and a rise of child labour. Labour participation rates for children have declined significantly in different regions of the world. India is slightly above the world average in the case of the children participation rate.

Most of the theoretical literature on child labour (Basu and Van 1998, Basu 2002) focuses on poverty and credit constraints as the main causes of child labour. Other studies based on the impact of trade, technological changes and economic conditions and their effects on incidence of child labour.v In India, parental poverty and illiteracy; lack of awareness; social and economic circumstances; lack of access to basic and meaningful quality education; high rates of adult unemployment and underemployment; cultural values of the family and society are the major factors generating child labour. In this paper, we identify various background factors related with the persistence of child labour in India and their changes over the years. The paper is organised as follows. Section II deals with historical perspectives in the Indian context. Section III provides explanations of drivers of child labour and their changes due to globalisation. Levels and rates of change of child labour in Indian states are discussed in Section IV. The final section provides a status report on the initiatives undertaken at the national, state and international levels and their implications.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: THE CHILD LABOUR SITUATION IN INDIA

Child labour is a colossal problem in India and is deep rooted with poverty. Over 400 million people live below the poverty line and 90 per cent of its active population work in the informal sector. According to the 1991 census, there are 11.2 millionvi working children out of a total 210 million children aged 5-14 years. Amongst them, 9.8 million are classified as 'main' workersviiand 2.2 million as 'marginal' workers. vast disparities in literacy rates across gender since the 1950s. Overall the literacy rate has increased from 16 per cent to 65 per cent between 1951 and 2001. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of illiterates has, in absolute terms decreased by 31.9 million. The number of literates, on the other hand, has increased by 203.6 million

within 10 years. During this period, the female literacy rate has increased by 14.87 per cent as against 11.72 per cent in the case of males, hence reducing the gap between males and females to 21.7 per cent. The educational level of working children in rural and urban areas. In 1991, only 13.61 per cent of male child workers and 8.19 per cent of female child workers had primary level education. A Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) was produced by the Centre for Development Economics in the Delhi School of Economics along with other institutions. They conducted a survey in 188 randomly selected villages in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh enquiring about schooling facilities in late 1996. The PROBE team also interviewed 1,221 households. Sending children to school was found to be expensive for poor parents. Moreover, the quality of schooling in rural areas discourages parents from making such effort. Table 4 analyses the employment status of working children in different sectors both in rural and urban areas in 1993-94. Over 80 per cent boys and girls amongst working children are employed in the rural agricultural sector. More than 56 per cent of them are self- employed without any social protection. In urban areas, 82 per cent of children work in the non-agricultural sector such as manufacturing, mining, housing and are engaged in all sorts of industrial work. Child servitude is both a tradition and a status symbol in India, particularly involving girls. Child workers are mostly from deprived sections of society: with parents living in urban areas with high unemployment and underemployment, from poor or landless rural communities, minorities and immigrants.

Along with these factors, the existence of the caste system and sexual discrimination against girls - are also quite common to force children particularly girls to start working from an early age.

Child labour is most common in rural areas and mostly in the informal sector. Children often perform hazardous tasks. In the leather tanning industry, children are exposed to corrosive chemicals and bacterial contamination from hides. In the glass manufacturing industry of Firozabad, in northern India, children work under exploitative conditions in small workshops or private homes for low wages. Children weld the ends of glass bangle bracelets, sort bangles, engrave them on grinding wheels,

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and collect melted glass from boiling stations with iron rods. In the footwear industry of Agra, children work in small workshops and homes for up to 12 hours per day and are exposed to glue fumes and other chemicals.

SOLUTIONS

Child labour is used in the labour-intensive hand-knotted carpet industry in India, where children frequently work in a confined, area and often develop respiratory illnesses and spinal deformities from long hours crouched at the looms. In the stone quarries of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, children break stones into small pieces and carry explosives. Children also labour in brick-kiln operations and the construction industry. In the gemstone industry, children work in private homes or small workshops. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that at least 20,000 children are involved in processing diamonds by cutting and polishing the stones in hazardous conditions.

The sector-wise trends in index of child labour (using 1961=100) between the period 1971 and 2001. In rural areas, both male and female child labour have almost doubled in the manufacturing sector. Both in construction and transport storage and communications female child employment has increased significantly over the last four decades. In urban areas, both male and female child employment has increased in almost every industry. Only for transport storage and communication has female employment declined. Overall, female employment has increased both in rural and urban areas particularly in urban areas the index has doubled within this period.

DRIVERS OF CHILD LABOUR: CHANGES DUE TO GLOBALISATION

Following Chaudhri (1996), four major reinforcing factors are considered here which generate a '*vicious spiral*' resulting in a pervasive and high incidence of child labour in India.xi These are high fertility and infant mortality rates, high rates of illiteracy and non-participation in school education, outdated technology attempting to survive in the face of technical progress and globalisation, and inappropriate public policies dealing with social infrastructures. The child population within 0-14 years, as projected for 2001, accounts for 33.8 per cent of the total population, where 49.3 per cent are female children.xii Of this amount, 31.2 per cent of the total population is in the 0-14 age group. Birth and death rates in 2001 were 26.1 and 8.7 respectively per thousand. The infant mortality rate has declined sharply from 93 in 1988 to 70.8 in 1999. The gross enrolment ratio for primary and middle level has increased significantly. During the period from 1950-51 to 1999-2000, the number of primary schools has increased by more than three times from 210,000 in 1950/51 to 642,000 in 1999/2000 whereas the number of upper primary school (grades VI to VIII) has increased by about 15 times from 13,600 in 1950/51 to 198,000 in 1999/2000.

The parental decision to make a school-age child work depends on the costs and benefits of education. Developing countries like India can enjoy the benefits of globalisation in reducing child labour by spending more on education and public health. In the case of India, Swaminathan (1998) finds an increase in the numbers of working children due to recent economic growth in Gujarat, a fast growing state of India. Kambhampati and Rajan (2004) also establish that economic growth increases child labour using data from 15 Indian states with a bivariate probit model in analyzing the probability of work and schooling for boys and girls. In other studies Cigno et. al. (2002), a negative relation is found between economic development and the incidence of child labour. In summary, some of these major factors affecting child workers have improved significantly in India since recent years. There are regional disparities amongst various states and union territories. We discuss this in the next section.

CHILD LABOUR: SCENARIO IN DIFFERENT STATES

Information on child labour and schooling (1983-1999 for major states/union territories, UTs) is presented in Table 6. Hours for child workers have increased significantly for Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Manipur, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh. However, the rate of increase has also been very uneven. Between 1983 and 1999, the national average for working hours for children has almost doubled. Except for Arunachal Pradesh, hours of schooling out of total other activities have increased in all other states and UTs. Children in Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Pondicherry spend over 90 per cent of their total time in schools. Kerala has long pursued voluntaristic social policies, which have succeeded in reducing poverty and in allowing every child to benefit from a proper education.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Finally our major question is here: How is the Indian Government performing in combating the child labour problem in the era of globalisation? The answer is mixed. Challenges have been met in some areas like education, health and overall development of children in improving the situation since the early 1990s. India has not yet ratified ILO Conventions 138 and 182 on banning child labour and eliminating the worst forms of exploitation. A national law enacted in 1986 (The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act), introduced compulsory education for under 14s and prohibited child labour in dangerous sectors. xiv The Government prohibits forced and bonded child labour but not able to enforce this prohibition. The law prohibits the exploitation of children in the workplace. There is no overall minimum age for child labour. Work by children under 14 years of age was barred completely in "hazardous industries," which includes among other things, passenger, goods, and mail transport by railway. Child labour is prohibited in certain hazardous industries where there are specific age limits for specific jobs. In occupations and processes in which child labour is permitted, work by children is permissible up to maximum of 6 hours between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m., with 1 day's rest weekly. The enforcement of child labour laws is the responsibility of the state governments; however, enforcement is inadequate, especially in the informal sector in which most children are employed.

Recently, a Supreme Court decision increased penalties for employers of children in hazardous industries to $US 430 (20,000 Rs) per child employed and established a welfare fund for formerly employed children. The Government is required to find employment for an adult member of the child's family or pay $US 108 (5,000 Rs) to the family. According to the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) the authorities pursue thousands of cases every year against employers. The Supreme Court ruling also help the local government officials to be more aware of the prohibitions against child labour in hazardous industries. This in some cases helped improve cooperation between local officials and NGOs like SACCS that removed children from hazardous workplaces.

Over 80 per cent of child labour in India is found in occupational categories for which neither regulation nor prohibition is contemplated by the ILO and the Government of India. Policy-makers, if they are serious about reducing deprivation of children and child labour in India, they need to devote a substantial part of their efforts in this area to enforce the existing laws in reality. The Government participated in the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC). Approximately 145,000 children were removed from work and received education and stipends through IPEC programs since they began in the country in 1992. State government laws set minimum wages, hours of work, and safety and health standards. The Factories Act mandates an 8-hour workday, a 49-hour working week, and minimum working conditions. These standards were generally

enforced and accepted in the modern industrial sector; however, not observed in informal sector and in less economically stable industries.

In 1994, government created a National Authority for the Elimination of Child Labour (NAECL). The Ministry of Labour and Employment has been implementing the National Child Labour Policy (NCLP) through the National Child Labour Projects (NCLPs). Around 100 projects were launched under the NCLPs across the country during the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997/02). The government has committed to extend the coverage of the NCLPs to an additional 150 districts with a budgetary allocation to over Rs 6 billion during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2003/07). The ILO's IPEC programme along with the NCLPs scheme has started both integrated and state based approaches.xv The Integrated Area Specific Programme (IASP) started in 2000, looked at all interlinked issues that cause child labour at the district level. This has been completed. The state based programme covers a state as a whole. The Andhra Pradesh State Based Project (APSBP) is one example addressing the issue of child labour covering geographical boundary of the state with all sectors.xvi The United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) supported initiatives are also operating in different districts. A great number of Non Governmental Organisations (e.g. Action Aid India, Butterflies, CARE India, CINI ASHA, Prayas, World Vision India among others) both local and international also exist in assisting working children.

The process of monitoring and evaluating various schemes sometimes suffers from serious drawbacks. There is a lack of timely and effective feedback from high to lower levels, large amount of paperwork at all levels, and finally, the failure to establish a link between costs and benefits. The existing evaluation techniques used by the government to assess schemes like the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) are criticised and there is a need for independent agencies which can be more reliable in monitoring these schemes. During the period of the tenth five-year plan, the ICDS will be extended to 5652 projects covering 54.3 million children and 10.9 million mothers.

Strategies are being implemented to improve the child labour situation under the current five-year plan. Major schemes for educational improvement include the Universal Elementary Education (UEE)xvii, 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan', mid-day meals scheme, the schemes for female and under privileged child workers. Also various schemes, such as 'Operation Blackboard' scheme, establishment of Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) and Institutes of Advanced Studies in Education (IASEs) for pre-service and in-service training for secondary school teachers have been introduced to improve the quality of teachers. To improve the supply, quality and retention power of of education system, the authorities must act at central, state and district levels. More collaborative efforts with the private sector and expansion of the role of private initiatives will help in this respect.

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