



Globalisation and Child Labour - Some Thoughts

KEYWORDS

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INTRODUCTION

The process of international integration of economic activities through eralizing international trade has pushed more workers into the informal sector of both developing and developed countries. In the developing countries, more than in the developed countries, this has led to the economic exploitation of children in the production of goods both for the export and the domestic market. According to the ILO International Labour Organization (ILO), more children are possibly involved in the urban informal sector than in the agricultural sector, because of fast growing migration into the cities and the decentralization of production units.

One of the recent research shows that children are less likely to work in countries with more international trade. The negative association between trade and child labour holds even when considering only poor countries' trade with high-income countries. It also holds up for trade in unskilled-labour intensive products. Quite simply, child labour is less prevalent in countries that trade more because countries that trade more are richer, and children work less in richer countries. Yet, child involvement in the production of products for export is not evidence that the export opportunity causes children to work, (Eric Edmonds, July, 2007).

Some economists and social scientists perceive that globalization increases child labour and marshals several reasons for this. They argue that decentralized production process and intensified competition over wage costs leads to an increase in the number of employed children. Secondly, the weakening of trade unions has also result in failing of real wage of workers and the absence of alternative gainful employment children are pushed to the workplace at tender age. Some on the basis of cross-country empirical investigations argue that globalization does not necessarily increase child labour. Either it reduces or at best has no significant effect on child labour. This is so as globalization process increases the real wage rate of largely uneducated workforce relatively to the educated workers. The increase in real wages makes the poorer families less poor and enables them to finance the investment on education of their children and thereby complements the other ongoing effect, aimed at combating the problem of child labour. Thus for a developing country, with large uneducated force, trade expansion seems to help in reducing child labour. The last group of opinion makers takes an electric position by saying that the relationship between trade and child labour depends upon the type of activities in which a country specializes, and the macro economic policies it pursues.

Child Labour in Central Asia

Child labour is prevalent in almost all Central Asian States, but in different ways and to different degrees. Tajikistan uses child labour as a 'lifeline for their families' who are forced by extreme poverty to take their children out of school and put them to work on the family farm or marketplace. As is common in all Central Asian States, the Tajik government makes pronouncements against the practice, but does nearly nothing to curb its actual use. Tajikistan has a relatively young and rapidly growing population, with 48 percent fewer than 18 years of age. Most families in Tajikistan have many children.

The growing economic hardship has lead families to increasingly count on the income derived from children's informal work, mainly performed in the street after school hours. Children usually work in the market places, streets and other public places, which increases their vulnerability to prostitution and trafficking. According to unofficial estimates, 45-55 percent of children from the 10-14 age groups, especially from low income families are engaged in physical labour and this percent is increasing in Dushanbe and other large cities in Tajikistan. The research done by different agencies including Asian Development Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, etc. shows that children in terms of wages, work, working conditions, and health conditions are getting exploited immeasurably. According to the report, the Tajik legislation contains provisions on the minimum employment age, as well as the protection of children under 18 from labour conditions that might endanger their health, safety or morals, in line with the international legal standards. Nonetheless, in reality, there is a clear disparity between the law and the practice.

The Kazakh legislation contains provisions on the employment of minors, such as the age limit, safety measures and various safeguards, although many children work illegally, particularly in the rural areas. The types of labour performed by children include subsistence farming, work in private enterprises, family business and others. One of the main reasons of the employment of children is the low living standards of the population. The socio-demographical and economic situation in Kazakhstan is conducive to the use of cheap child labour, both during the agricultural season irrespective of the educational process and by family and criminal business. The analysis of the legal instruments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dealing with or relevant to child labour is showing that, irrespective of the magnitude of the problem and the significant number of both domestic and international legal provisions in force, children's rights (including labour ones) are not properly protected.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the use of child labour in Kyrgyzstan has become widespread, especially in the southern regions, where tobacco, rice and cotton are cultivated. Furthermore, the labour of children is traditionally used in irrigating, weeding and harvesting work. Almost all the children living in rural areas work on plantations and help their parents in performing all types of labour, including those that may pose health hazards. The use of children in markets has become frequent due to the emergence and growth of unregulated trading activity and markets. Children are involved in transporting (unloading) and sale of goods and luggage on the streets and in the markets, in addition to collecting bottles and aluminium. There are also children involved in tobacco growing work as house servants- they clean, wash, etc. They also gather firewood and work in gardens. Child labour in Kyrgyzstan is caused by general unemployment situation, easy handling of the children than adults, unaware about their rights, causing fewer problems, complaining less and more adaptability. They are also the easiest to sacrifice when difficulties arise. Child labour in Kyrgyzstan is largely the result of cultural, historical, social and economic conditions. Children have to work, along their parents and siblings, in order to contribute to their families' income, starting with the age of five.

An overview of the Turkmen legislation of labour rights of minors shows that the state is party to main international legal documents regulating this issue. Provisions on the labour, performed by minors are contained in Article 179 which stipulates 'persons 16 years of age and below are not allowed to enter a labour contract. Pupils including those from junior grades, have to work, throughout the cotton picking season in Turkmenistan. Child labour is used for weeding during summer holidays. Many families cannot provide for their children, due to lack of employment or wage arrears. Thus begging, prostitution and various crimes have become widespread among children, as a result of scant payment for their work, their parents poverty and lack of education.¹⁹ Due to stringent employment rules and regulations in Turkmenistan the problem of unemployment is expected to continue due to limited development of the private sector.

The use of child labour in Uzbekistan has largely stemmed from the difficulties of the post-Soviet transition period, which have been conducive to the use of children's labour. As a consequence of the deteriorating economic conditions, the traditionally large families have not been able to cover the education expenses of all children. The rising unemployment has reduced the levels of average income, especially in rural areas, where employment has large seasonal character. Poor and socially vulnerable families have not been able to maintain an appropriate quality of life.

Child Labour in the Cotton Industry of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan in 1991 emerged as a sovereign country after more than a century of Russian rule - first as part of the Russian empire and then as a component of the Soviet Union. Positioned on the ancient Great Silk Road between Europe and Asia, majestic cities - such as Bukhara and Samarkand, famed for their architectural opulence, once flourished as trade and cultural centers'. Uzbekistan is the most populous Central Asian country and has the largest armed forces. Uzbekistan is one of the world's biggest producers of cotton and is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas and gold. However, rigid political control is mirrored in the tightly centralized planning of the economy. Economic reform has been painfully slow and poverty and unemployment are widespread, According to ILO report children of school going age in Uzbekistan are working in different sectors of the economy. Large numbers of school age boys are working as potters. Young girls from the countryside are also sent to cities to work as domestic helpers as the money they earn is lifeline for their families.

In ail regions of Uzbekistan, government officials mobilize children in an attempt to ensure that state cotton quotas are met. Schools are closed down, and children as young as seven are sent to the fields to pick cotton by hand. Headmasters are given quotas which dictate how much each student is to harvest. And those who fail to meet their targets, or who pick a low quality crop, are reportedly punished with detentions and told that their grades will suffer. Children who run away from the cotton fields, or who refuse to take part, can face expulsion.

Statistics on children employed in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan are difficult to obtain, but the London-based rights

group Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) says around 200,000 children work in the major cotton-producing region Fergana." Fergana is one of the fertile regions in Uzbekistan and is about 420 km east of capital Tashkent. It is impossible to estimate the exact number of children forced to pick cotton. But tens of thousands are likely to be involved each year. According to UNICEF in 2000, an estimated 22.6 percent of Uzbek children aged between 5 and 14 worked at least part-time, primarily in cotton harvesting.

In Soviet times up to two thirds of Uzbekistan's cotton was harvested by machine. Nowadays this figure has dropped to just 10 percent. Instead, the majority of Uzbek cotton is gathered by hand, often by children. According to reports from nine of Uzbekistan's twelve territorial units, (Jizzakh, Fergana, Namangan, Syr Daria, Surkhandaria, Bukhara, Khorezm, Tashkent and Samarkand provinces) by the third week of September local governments and school administrators sent children as young as the seventh grade (ages 13-14), and in some cases as young as fifth grade (11 -12) out to the fields to pick cotton. By the end of September, pressure to bring in the harvest before rains led local officials to order the smallest school children, from First grade on, to labour on the harvest. In Fergana, schools are closed and children are sent out from September, though a week earlier forcing children to sign statements that they would remain in school after the end of semester. Experts suggested that the statements are intended to give local government officials plausible deniability if the children's presence in the fields was challenged.

In Namangan, human rights defenders observed children from several schools, some as young as eleven, picking cotton. Every day local government officials and bureaucrats from the local education department visit the fields to check up on the number of pupils out picking, and to make sure that harvest targets are being met. Similarly the Samarkand provincial government also sent its school children out to pick cotton in September. Children as young as 13 are forced from their classrooms, though high school, junior college as well as university students (ages sixteen and above) are also sent out to the fields for several weeks."

CONCLUSION

Children recruited to pick cotton in their vicinity are able to return home to meirjajfflies in the evenings. But older children and those conscripted to work in the more remote cotton farms are forced to sleep in makeshift dormitories on farms, or ironically, in classrooms, often with poor living conditions, at times drinking irrigation water and with insufficient or poor quality food. Some children recount living in barracks with no-electricity, windows or doors. After weeks of arduous work and poor accommodation children can be left exhausted and in poor health. Human Rights Organisations confirmed eight deaths of children working in the Samarkand region over a two year period.²³ Many more suffer with chronic diseases including intestinal infections, respiratory infections, meningitis and hepatitis. While it is certain that the Uzbek regime exploits children in forcing them to take part in the annual cotton harvest, it is less clear how much the children are paid. Some claim to receive-US \$5 for five days' work. Others report receiving just 15 US cents for the same period of labour.

REFERENCE

UNESCO, International standard classification of education (ISCED), Paris, 1997, which states that the customary or legal age of entrance to primary schooling is not younger than five years. | Note that child labour figured prominently on the agenda of the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), held at the end of 2008. The objective was to develop and adopt a set of global standards for child labour data collection and measurement, including agreed global statistical indicators on child labour and its worst forms. | ILO. 2004, Child Labour: A Textbook for University Students, Geneva; International Labour Office-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, pp 40-41 11 | Ibid. p. 41. |