

# Child rights and child labour

## A global neglect

Children News 30.4.02



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**C**hild is a potential man and has all the qualities of developing, flowering and fructifying. Physically he is a man in miniature, mentally he is inquisitive and receptive, morally he knows how to respect his elders and obey the parents; and spiritually he is elevated enough because of his innocence which is untarnished. Man can become the "Captain of his soul and master of destiny" only if he has been properly trained, tamed, guided and allowed to develop.

In the global perspective during the last 15 years, states have focused their attention in eradication of poverty and the promotion of gender equality, peace, sustainable development and securing rights of children.

concern against this issue with increased momentum, its eradication calls for an integrated and co-ordinated action. As such, there is a dire necessity to create internationally an environment that should serve as a helpful pressure though co-operative relationship between industrialized countries and the developing nations by means of financial assistance for the uplift of the poor societies and combating the problems like high population growth, illiteracy, economic recessions and unemployment, etc, instead of developing a climate to aggravate these problems.

Opinions on the conception of child labour are divided and distorted amongst various countries depending on the stages of their development. The developing countries, including Pakistan and other South Asian countries, view it essentially as a projectionist

education and become active in the labour market. Child labour is always a cheap labour. That is the attraction. Children are targeted for non-skilled, labour intensive work. Employers have no fear of children, docile and easily controlled, demanding no rights of organizing. Child employment creates a climate encouraging employed of under employed parents to get support from their children.

At the movement, Pakistan is faced with the problem of about 3.3 million children engaged in various forms of labour. 73 per cent of the workers (2.4 million) are boys and 27 per cent (900,000) girls. About 2.1 million are in the 10-14 years age group. The rest are up between five and nine years old. About 2.9 million children work in rural and 400,000 in the urban areas. The concentration of child labour in rural areas is thus more than seven times that in the urban areas. The labour

basis, and special protection to the most vulnerable groups of child labour. The long term strategies include universalization of primary education, implementation of the law, empowerment of families, poverty alleviation and expansion of social security net. Education and skill development, institutional capacity building and strengthening of inspection services are some of the medium term strategies. The government is also drawing up a youth apprenticeship scheme. The scheme aims at opening workshops for the education and vocational training of the children in the 12-18 years age group. The existing educational institutions will also be utilized for the purpose in coordination with Allama Iqbal Open University, schools and vocational training centres. The scheme will have two elements: (1) training in different trades; and (2) informal and formal

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States nascent articulation can be seen more effectively in protecting global child rights and enforcement mechanism for early end of child labour. But still no region of the world is completely free from children labour and it has taken the shape of a global challenge today.

Though mostly prevalent in the under-developed regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America, child labour also exists in rich industrialized countries. According to the ILO, more than 95 percent of all child workers live in developing countries. In some regions, as many as 25 per cent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 are estimated to be working. Although authentic figures are difficult to get, available information reveals that certain countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Italy and Portugal have comparatively higher rates of economic activity amongst children. These children are working generally in a seasonal job activities, street trades, small workshops are in a home setting, as well as in a agriculture farms.

Asia accounts for more than 50 per cent of the world's child labourers who constitute as much as 17 per cent of the overall Child force in some countries. In the Philippines, 4.5 million children work legally and illegally in factories, farms and household. Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand also are noted for their child labour problems. Observers claim that as many as 2 million children under the age of 14 are working half-to-full time in Indonesia, mostly in family-run businesses in the informal sector and in agriculture. One-fourth of all the World's child labourers are found in India alone. Other countries in southern Asia like Nepal and Bangladesh are also rife with child labour problem.

Pakistan in this global scenario is not an exception. As the entire world is voicing

concerns about the problems like high population growth illiteracy, economic recessions and unemployment, etc, instead of developing a climate to aggravate these problems.

Opinions on the conception of child labour are divided and distorted amongst various countries depending on the stages of their development. The developing countries, including Pakistan and other South Asian countries, view it essentially as a projectionist ploy. The developed countries project child labour and the conditions of their work and remuneration as a fundamental question of human rights. They view conditions of work for child labour as harsh, exploitative and hazardous. A number of work places are seen as exposing children to undesirable environments: smoking, drug-addiction, crimes and other immoral pursuits.

Condition of child labour are defined by ILO as working:-

- a. too young;
- b. for long hours, in some cases 12 to 16 hours a day;
- c. under physical, social and psychological strain and stress;
- d. on the streets in healthy and dangerous condition; and
- e. for very little pay.

Child labour is a product of various factors:-

- a). unemployment, under-employment and poverty;
- b). unsatisfactory availability of educational institutions and poor quality of education;
- c). indifferent attitude of parents and society;
- d). absence of any formal, social security mechanism; and
- e). sub-optimal policy formulation and implementation.

Child labour is also seen as contributing towards the perpetuation of poverty levels by reducing the overall work opportunities available to adults. By accepting lower wages, child labour forces even adults to accept lower competitive wages. Lower wages accepted by adults force other family members including children, to become active in the labour market and seek any work opportunity irrespective of wages and conditions of work. This vicious circle has to be broken somewhere. In the case of death or major sickness of any adult working member of a family, Children have no other choice but to forgo their

education, Pakistan is faced with the problem of about 3.3 million children engaged in various forms of labour. 73 per cent of the workers (2.4 million) are boys and 27 per cent (900,000) girls. About 2.1 million are in the 10-14 years age group. The rest are up between five and nine years old. About 2.9 million children work in rural and 400,000 in the urban areas. The concentration of child labour in rural areas is thus more than seven times that in the urban areas. The labour force participation rate of children is 10.3 per cent in rural areas and 3.25 per cent in the urban areas. About 60 per cent (1.94 million) of the child labour is found in the Punjab, followed by the NWFP which has 1.06 million young workers, Sindh which has 298,000 and Balochistan which has 14,000. 71 per cent of the 3.3 million children are engaged in elementary occupations relating to agriculture, sales and services, mining, construction, manufacturing and transport sectors.

Crafts and related trade activities are the next major occupation, employing about 19 per cent working children. About 67 per cent of the employed children are in agriculture sector and by 11 per cent in the manufacturing sector. Other sectors having a significant share of child labour are wholesale and retail trade, community, social and domestic service (9 per cent), transport 8 per cent, and storage and communication 4 per cent. About 46 per cent of the children have to work more than 35 hours a week, 13 per cent work even more than 56 hours a week. 7 per cent of the working children suffered from frequent illness and injuries, 28 per cent occasionally and 33 per cent rarely. Male children were more prone to injuries than the female. About 70 per cent of the children work as unpaid family helpers, followed by employees 23 per cent, and self-employed 7 per cent. The male children more educated than the female.

To combat the child labour problem, the present government has framed a national policy and approved an action plan which provides a number of short and long term strategies. The short term strategies include raising awareness, development and determination of necessary information, community mobilization, situation analysis, establishment in monitoring, and evaluation systems, withdrawal of children from exploitative labour on priority

services are some of the medium term strategies. The government is also drawing up a youth apprenticeship scheme. The schemes aims at opening workshops for the education and vocational training of the children in the 12-18 years age group. The existing educational institutions will also be utilized for the purpose in coordination with Allama Iqbal Open University, schools and vocational training centres. The scheme will have two elements: (1) training in different trades; and (ii) informal and formal education. Children in the selected age group will receive pre-vocational training and informal education compatible with the regular school system. Those completing pre-vocational training and informal education may have the option either to join general education at the secondary level or to seek technical education.


The scheme for 14-18 years age group will provide for career planning through on-job training. The services of teachers and college students will be acquired on part time basis for information education. This will also provide monetary incentives.

Government has clearly shown its commitment to eliminate child labour by the year 2010 and the federal cabinet has approved an ordinance for this purpose. About 25,000 children have been saved throughout the country from various forms of labour under a child labor elimination action plan. A national policy and action plan for the elimination of child labour was framed by the task force on child labor which was approved by the Federal Cabinet in May, 2000. The plan aimed at immediate withdrawal of children from worst forms of labour, progressive elimination of child labour from all economic sectors, prevailing entry of under aged children into the labour market through universalization of primary education and family empowerment and rehabilitation of working children through non formal education, pre vocational and skill development. The plan had set a time frame for carrying out certain short term and long term activities. These activities were to be carried out by the provincial labour departments in collaboration with the education, social welfare and local government department. A fund for education of working children and rehabilitation of free bonded labourer has been constituted with an initial



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extent without any kind of discrimination. The government has taken a number of initiatives for ensuring protection of rights of the child. The priority has duly been reflected in the current three year public sector Development Programme and ten year perspective plan conversing various crucial areas of concerned. It is essential investment for the future wherein we as a nation, contribute to the development of our greatest resources Our children. Government has expressed its determination, hope and sincere commitment for the children of Pakistan and the world. Pakistan reiterated its firm commitment for ensuring survival, protection and development of our own children. Child oriented facilities are being provided in the country. First time in Pakistan an In N Out land centre has been established in Lahore. That centre will provide facilities of daisy roots, creches, active birthday parties, jungle gym for children trampoline, wall climbing balancing beams, wendy house, jungle gym for the more adventures, swimming pool, bouncy castles, sail boat and much more. The main purpose of such an institution is to provide the children with opportunities to use their skills and improvise their abilities by themselves. The creche is from age of three months to five years and the activity centre is upto 12 years. It is purely a private venture.

amount of Rs 100 million. The federal government has set up a national steering committee for consultation on the nature and scope of the activities to be undertaken, select action programme proposals, provide information and justification for the biennial programme and budget of the IPEC and established procedures for the review of the on going programme with IPEC. The federal government had decided to establish 17 centres for child labour eradication in the country out of which 6 centres would be established in different areas of Punjab.

The Punjab government has also been invoking various labour laws like Factories Act, shops and Establishment Ordinance and Employment of children Act relating to child labour. Under the factories act about 65000 inspections were carried out, about 2800 people prosecuted and 1800 convicted and a fine of about Rs 500000 was imposed from January 1999 to May, 2001. Under the shop and Establishment Ordinance about 68000 inspection were carried out,

Punjab government is engaged in enacting laws for the safeguard rights of children. In this regard, recently an Nazim Insaf Ordinance 2000 for minor children has been approved by governor Punjab Khalid Maqbool in the month of February 2002. Under this ordinance a child is a person who is less than age of 18 years. Awarding of death sentence to minor child less than the age of 18 years has been prohibited. The same child could not be retained in police station under any circumstances. A minor child less than age of 15 years could not be arrested under the criminal ordinance 1898 of Prohibitive Custody Ordinance. Separate courts for children will be set up under the ordinance. Any child who is involved in any offence has a right to obtain legal assistance on government expenses. A minor child could not be forced to do labour during his imprisonment in Borstal. He could not be remain in shackles and fetters and no corporal punishment could be given to him during police

different areas of Punjab.

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Present government is pursuing a policy for the protection of rights of children in accordance with Islamic injunctions, also enshrined in the constitution. Government wishes to create a congenial environment where every child has the opportunity to grow, develop and enrich his evolving capacities to the fullest possible

circumstances. A minor child less than age of 15 years could not be arrested under the criminal ordinance 1898 of Prohibitive Custody Ordinance. Separate courts for children will be set up under the ordinance. Any child who is involved in any offence has a right to obtain legal assistance on government expenses. A minor child could not be forced to do labour during his imprisonment in Borstal. He could not be remain in shackles and fetters and no corporal punishment could be given to him during police custody. Under the leadership of Governor Punjab Khalid Maqbool, Punjab government wants to establish special schools and parks for special children in all the district of the province so that they could make best use of their capabilities for their personal improvement and national development. The government appreciates any humanitain and progressive society values endeavour on priority basis for the welfare and betterment of the less fortunate persons. Government will provide every possible help to philanthropists. Moreover the Punjab government will create that environment which promotes recreational and entertainment activities for the special children. Special Olympics will be held for special children. Education and technical training facilities will be made available in the special school by government special financial assistance will be extended from the Bait ul Maal for the education of the these children. Punjab government has approved for establishment of special fund which would provide monitory help to instiptions looking after the education and welfare of special children.

Undoubtedly, government has successfully completed its mission for combating child labour problems in the country within short span of two and half years but still few children work on land and water, in homes, on the streets, underground and in sweat shops. Cruelly is the very present reality, illiteracy is a legacy and poverty is the future of these children. Million will never see their adult years. Yet, forced oppressive abusive and hazards child employment thrives, and the silence continues, How long will it go on is any body's guess.