

Need for an educated young labour

*Child Labour
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A new educational programme is launched to address the problems of working children in the country

By Tayyaba J Khan

“Child labour is a forbidden crime in Muslim society and negligence towards it is termed as a crime of greater degree,” said Owais Ahmed Ghani, federal minister of labour as the chief guest of the launching ceremony of the education cum vocational training programme for working children and technical training programme for workers and their children, recently organised by the Skill Development Council (SDC) in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in Karachi.

Several other guests from business organisations, government agencies, ILO, prominent trade unionists including working children, were present on the occasion.

Syed Nazar Ali, chief executive SDC stressed on the necessity of education, and termed it as a constitutional right of every child by birth. SDC aims to facilitate working children with the vocational training programme, which could help them to be supportive of their family for a better living.

It is a great step which has been undertaken by Skill Development Council for enlightening the children who are deprived of their basic right of education and other diversions in life, which are essential for healthy living.

Illiteracy is widespread due to which unaccountable problems are generating in the country; child labour is one alarming menace, which is eventually the outcome of poverty and other related problems.

Ahsanulla Khan, chairman SDC, said on the occasion that this programme is purely focused to provide children with fun and compulsory formal education. A batch of 115 working children are being provided technical training in workshops and garage industries under the SDC programme. Ahsan gladly welcomed the consensus from people and those who want to render their help for the cause.

It was revealed that several NGOs in the beginning wanted to take up this project, but they withdrew after having known that the project does not involve finances.

Working children took pride in the fact that for the first time they were invited as prominent guests in a local hotel of the city. It was an unprecedented move, which is



hardly ever taken by any other organisation.

Abdullah Khadim, programme director, emphasised for an insightful view of the real problem and its understanding. “About 70% children in a population of 140m are labelled as street children,” he said. Children aged four to eighteen years are not studying. This number is growing by about 3m a year.

These children are doing petty jobs like selling newspaper, flowers or other paltry things on the street or sideways. Under such vulnerable conditions, they easily indulge in crimes, and are exposed to drug addictions. Sniffing of glue is a common practice among street children. They are fast becoming addicted to this habit due to its easy access in the market. Street children are also subjected to physical abuse. Young boys of nearly 4 to 18 years are engaged in paltry jobs. Those who do not find work get involved

in pick-pocketing and other corrupt practices, but those who have jobs are working in brutal and squalid conditions.

Girls are mostly working as domestic servants in houses. These working girls are often subjected to domestic violence, sexual abuse and mistreatment which remains unnoticed in our society.

Presumably in a period of 23 years this population will double.

Other speakers at the seminar also urged for general education and enabling skills. They stressed on providing these children with skills, which can ensure market employment.

They introduced a five-year course plan, which will be covered in two years, including teaching skill programme along with formal primary education.

An increasing rate of unemployment, decreasing wages and soaring prices have had a

devastating impact on low-income families. Life has become difficult for the common man to cope with the ever-increasing cost of basic necessities.

It is estimated that a high percentage of urban population in Karachi is concentrated in low-income areas, most of which have assumed the form of squatter settlements. A slum community has been defined as “a low income urban settlement found in unsanitary conditions, generally over crowded and characterised by makeshift dwellings”.

People are living below poverty line with large families. “We met the families of these working children; they want us to teach their children some skill which can help them to get relevant jobs,” Khadim said. Poverty will spread more when children are put to work, and the standard of living will decline.

He highlighted the role of communities, which can selflessly help them through their programme and remain supportive. However, he said, they require more space and teachers to meet further queries.

Speakers of the seminar said that we are proud in fulfilling the required goals without sufficient funds. Prof Shafi Malik said that setting up an organisation is not as difficult as to continue with it successfully. “We see the reflection of creative entrepreneurship in the work of Ahsanulla Khan,” he observed.

Enormous input and hard work has given this programme a definite shape. The speakers urged to put in their collective effort to eradicate child labour from the society, instead of blaming the government for lacking resources. Primarily, the danger of child labour is not taken seriously by the people. “Our educational training system needs to be reconstructed,” said Prof Shafi.

An amount of 16 crore has been given to the district for a formal literacy programme, said Nazar Hussain, secretary of education. He further briefed that three and a half crore rupees have been granted for the formal literacy programme in Sindh.

Working children who secured positions were awarded certificates under a three-month computer programme run by Skill Development Council. Qaseem Tariq, stood first; Faraz Yar Khan second; and Mansoor Ahmed Siddiqui secured third position, respectively.

Another speaker Kaniz Fatima present on the occasion appealed to the government to cut down the price hike in essential items. She also stressed for implementing one syllabus, which should be induced without any class differentiation that separates the lower class from the upper classes. Political commitment and will needs to be implemented for successful literacy programme.

Towards the end of the seminar, working children staged a theatrical play, which highlighted their plight of labour and abuse.