

Tracing the root cause

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With a government that is at best ambivalent about social issues and an industrial sector resistant to workplace reform, the task of abolishing child labour has fallen to the human-rights community. But in a country where corruption is pervasive and education scarce, social activists are everyone's natural enemy. The ruling class despises them for assaulting its profitable traditions. The lower castes suspect them of ulterior motives. (Labourers are forever asking activists, "Why would an educated man trouble himself with the poor?") Consequently, activists are frequent targets of slander, police harassment, and lawsuits. They are beaten just as frequently, and on occasion they are killed.

Child labour has been a matter of international concern for many years, and many remedial measures have been debated as well.

Child labour is both consequence and a cause of poverty. Thus, strategies for poverty reduction and elimination need to address this problem. Use of child labour slows down the economic growth and social development and it constitutes a severe violation of basic human rights.

By Azmat Rasul

Investment in the physical, mental spiritual moral and social development of children is an ethical, social and economic imperative for all societies. The convention on the 'Rights of the Child' constitutes the legal framework for the promotion and the protection of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all children in an integrated manner. This means that all children without exception, must be ensured survival personal and social development and physical, psychological and moral integrity, and that special protection measures must be taken for those in especially difficult circumstances.

Child labour is both consequence and a cause of poverty. This, strategies for poverty reduction and elimination need to address this problem. Use of child labour slows down the economic growth and social development and it constitutes a server violation of basic human rights. The interconnection between child labour and the social conditions of the child and his or her family should be at the centre of sustainable social development policies.

The initiative, which invites interested developed and developing countries to allocate, on average, 20 of ODA and national budget, respectively to basic social programmes including basic education and primary health care can effectively contribute to the struggle against child labour. There is evidence that investment in the human capital from early child hood e.g. education and health provides a society with a great potential for economic and social development.

Child workers especially girls are at the high risk because child labour jeopardizes the child's health safety and education and physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development girls are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of child labour and

require special attention.

Effective action against child labour requires practical commitment and the creation of a broad coalition that includes both government and all sectors of society and adequate resource. The obligation to develop and implement policies legislation strategies and measures for the elimination of child labour, rests with the governments.

Good governance can maximize the potential for equitable and sustainable economic growth as a strategy to counter child labour. Preventive measures should be recognised as the most cost effective means to eliminate child labour.

Education — particularly basic education is one of the principal means of preventing and eliminating child labour. Children outside the school system are prone to various forms of exploitation, particularly to economic exploitation such as child labour. Child workers or potential child workers and the flow of children into work can be stemmed by establishing a system of accessible, relevant, quality universal, compulsory basic education free for all.

Cooperation at international level may contribute to standard setting to overall poverty reduction, to better assessment of the impact of measures against child labour on the children and their families and in the framework of regional and international cooperation and to promoting commitments with the aim of eliminating child labour.

Developed countries should strive for the fulfilment of the agreed United Nation target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for overall official development assistance (ODA) as soon as possible and to a more effective use of existing resources in close cooperation with developing countries.

The main goal is the effective elimination of child labour. The objective should be to protect the child from economic

exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Priority should be given to the immediate removal of children from the most intolerable (extreme) forms of child labour and to the physical and psychological rehabilitations of children involved. In line with such measures, adequate alternative to these children and their families must be provided.

Different countries should progressively move towards the elimination of all child labour for children of school age (age depending on legislation in each country), to include any activity that interferes with children's development and their education.

Pakistan must ensure that social and economic policies to combat poverty focussing on the needs of families and the community in their productive and caring activities, especially by implementing measures to provide the families of child workers with sustainable employment and income opportunities. It should design or accelerate implementation of existing National Plan of Action for the Child, as defined in the final document from the World Summit for Children including strategies which integrate at long, medium and short term social political and economic measures for the elimination of child labour and ensure the necessary resource allocation for their sustainable implementation.

We further have to improve national system for collection of gender disaggregated information, starting with birth, civil land death registration and comprising the scale distribution and characteristics of child labour and related socio-economic data, including work carried out by the very young children and work within the informal sector, inter alia through national censuses and household surveys, and develop the collection of statistical documentation on the progress made in accordance with appropriate indicators.