

# CHILD LABOR<sup>26728</sup>

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## **Why an Occasional Note?**

This is the second in a series of *Occasional Notes on Child Labor* in the South Asia Region and the first publication of the South Asia Regional Child Labor Team in Bangladesh. The India team published the first occasional note. The objective of the *Note* is to disseminate updated information amongst colleagues concerned with issues related to child labor. It is hoped that you will find this note both an informative and an enjoyable read.

The second *Occasional Note on Child Labor* contains an update to the Situation of Working Children in Bangladesh from 1998 as well as news on a new book that is being published on child labor. We are also highlighting an innovative and successful NGO initiative called UCEP which, we felt, would be of interest to anyone involved in poverty alleviation around the world. And lastly, we bring to you a new Convention from the ILO, C182 Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 and, contextualize hazardous child work in Bangladesh.

## **Working Children, An Update**

Bangladesh has a sizable child labor force that accounts for approximately 5 percent of the world's working child population (between the ages of 5 and 14). In Bangladesh, they constitute 18 percent of the total number of children in that age group and 12 percent of the total labor force. Of the 6.3 million working children, 17 percent live in urban areas while the remaining 83 percent live in rural areas. Many of the urban child workers live in slums under very unhygienic conditions and are engaged in hazardous jobs. On average, urban working children put in nearly 40 hours of labor per week, and earn less than \$10 per month. Most of the urban working children are from families who migrated to the cities in search of a better life. Rural working children put in about 25 hours of work per week to earn less than \$8 per month. The predominantly informal nature of their employment gives them a ubiquitous quality, more so in the rural areas where many children work with their parents in agricultural activities. Rural child workers also collect fodder and firewood, twigs and branches to sell and consume, catch fish and fish fries. There are many who work on boats in Meghna and Padma rivers, setting and pulling nets, rowing, pulling boats against the wind, mending nets and carrying heavy loads. Along the banks of Meghna and its tributaries, thousands of the children of both sexes trap shrimp fries for a living. These children are engaged in work full time for this and other reasons and do not go to school.

The child labor problem in Bangladesh is not simply a challenge of getting working children back to school. It is a challenge of getting them out of abysmal poverty. According to the 1996 Labor Force Survey, out of the 6.3 million working children, 4.2 million were engaged in work because of their parent's economic crisis.

## **A PHOTO BOOK ON CHILDREN'S WORK**

The child labor team in Bangladesh is currently finishing up the last touches to a photo book on working children. Breaking the Cycle: Working Children in Bangladesh, catalogues various forms of work that children are engaged in and the interventions available in Bangladesh that provide working children their right to basic education. The book is a joint production by the Government of Bangladesh's (GoB) Primary Mass Education Division (PMED) and the World Bank's Regional Team on Child Labor. The idea evolved as a "feel good" tool through which to open up a dialogue with the GoB on child labor and the Bank's interest in the sub sector. It is hoped that the book will also bring to light the plight of working children as well as draw attention to the fact that both public and private sectors in Bangladesh are trying to address this issue by targeting working children and innovative programs that could break the cycle of poverty for them and their families. The next challenge will be the effective dissemination of the book and its message to policy makers, NGOs and civil society globally to raise awareness and ultimately abolish child labor.

## THE UCEP STORY

*“To be a leading human resource development organization in providing cost effective non formal education, marketable skills training and employment promotion for urban poor working and distressed children and adolescents in Bangladesh”.*

--UCEP Vision Statement

There has recently been a mounting consensus amongst policy makers and civil society alike, on the need to abolish child labor in Bangladesh. Under the aegis of the Media Group of Child's Rights, a roundtable on child rights was held on December 11, 1999 in Dhaka. Senior leaders attended the roundtable from both the parties in power and the opposition, senior government officials, UNICEF and ILO representatives, and civil society representatives. They all agreed that measures are needed to uplift the condition of children by abolishing child labor.

The goal, which echoes the ILO's new Convention (1999) discussed briefly below, is to eradicate the worst forms of child labor in Bangladesh by 2005 and raise the socioeconomic conditions of these disadvantaged children to a level which enables them to contribute to national development efforts with enhanced capacity and dignity. It was agreed that what working children need is access to cost effective basic education, marketable skills training and employment promotion. The national consensus goes hand in hand with what the Under-privileged Children's Education Program (UCEP) has been providing working children and their families for the past decade.

UCEP was established in 1972, and has been touted as an exemplary model of a vocational training education program. Even in a country riddled with innovative NGO programs, UCEP stands out for its uniqueness. UCEP's singular characteristic is that its education and vocational training program provides general education for hard to reach urban working children as well as gives them the opportunity to gain skills that will in turn assist them in obtaining employment in the formal sector and thus improve their lives and socio-economic conditions. It is a program that strives to not only fulfill a child's right to education but also a child's right to a better life. What is unique about UCEP is that it allows disadvantaged children and their families to break out of the cycle of poverty—a key to sustainable development and a major theme in the Bangladesh Country Team's work in the mitigation of child labor.

The program's target population consists of children that are engaged as domestic servants, factory workers, shop assistants, firewood collectors, porters and day laborers. The UCEP program shares features similar to other NGO education models where the curriculum is compressed, teaching pedagogy is interactive and participatory and class timings are flexible according to working children's schedules. The uniqueness of UCEP is that after completing a Grade VIII level competency in four years, students can take an exam to qualify for the vocational training or para trade levels of the program.

To ensure proper utilization of the skills produced, UCEP has a job placement cell which, makes sure that every one of their graduates are employed. In fact, it was found during the Education Sector Review that the Bank undertook in Bangladesh last year that UCEP graduates are highly desirable in almost every industry, from automobiles to garment to leather. Key to the program's success in job placement is that it strives hard to guarantee that the services it provides are relevant and meet the needs of its beneficiaries. The high quality and relevance of UCEP's skill training program is illustrated by the 100% success in job placement of the program's technical school graduates. Moreover, tracer studies indicate that many UCEP graduates are currently employed in multinationals and large national enterprises at positions that are relevant to their education and skill. One of the factors in the high rate of job placement is UCEP's collaboration with industry and other organizations in the country.

A question remains about the sustainability of UCEP and the possibility of its expansion or even, replication to serve the roughly 6 million children who are working without the benefit of

education in Bangladesh. The program, as most vocational education programs go, is an expensive one. The annual cost for the general education program per student is US\$49 and vocational education is US\$381.

The Bangladesh Education Team is working with government and civil society to take UCEP's example to scale and help fulfill the emerging national consensus to mitigate child labor in Bangladesh.

### **A New Convention from the ILO**

The ILO has recently adopted the Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1999. The new Convention complements the Recommendation concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973, which has till now been the major instrument used to tackle the child labor problem. Reflecting a long history of child labor and attempts to eliminate it, the latest Convention reflects various resolutions and other conventions adopted by the ILO and UN, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998).

This Convention is unique in that for the first time, the significance of the lack of education and poverty are recognized as root causes of child labor. The Convention states, "considering that the effective elimination of the worst forms of child labor requires immediate and comprehensive action, taking into account the importance of free basic education and the need to remove the children concerned from all such work and to provide for their rehabilitation and social integration while addressing the needs of their families...Recognizing that child labor is to a great extent caused by poverty and that the long-term solution lies in sustained economic growth leading to social progress, in particular poverty alleviation and universal education."

The Convention outlines hazardous child labor as:

- ◆ Slavery or practices similar to slavery such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory recruitment of children in armed conflict.
- ◆ Prostitution, pornography, or pornographic performances.
- ◆ Illicit activities such as trafficking of drugs.
- ◆ Work which, by nature or circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

The Convention assigns the direct responsibility in the hands of governments to take effective and time bound measures that would provide direct assistance for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labor and for their rehabilitation and social integration; ensure access to free basic education, and, wherever possible and appropriate, vocational training. The Convention also states that children at special risk must be reached out to and that the vulnerability of girl children has to be taken into account. It is stressed that members "shall take appropriate steps to assist one another in giving effect to the provision of this Convention through enhanced international cooperation and/or assistance including support for social and economic development, poverty alleviation and universal education".

## **Placing Hazardous Forms of Child Labor in the Context of Bangladesh**

Except light work, all types of child labor usually interrupt children's schooling, socialization, mental and physical development to some extent. While this interruption harms a child's future well being, there is a need to distinguish between work that is more harmful than others. The economic activities of children that are seriously detrimental to their health, physical and mental development and endanger their overall safety are treated as hazardous child labor by the ILO. A 1996 ILO study on hazardous forms of child labor identified 47 types of economic activities in Bangladesh which are hazardous for children. Among the 1060 children surveyed, over 90 %, mostly males, are engaged in hazardous forms of labor. The harmful impact of different offending agents on the working children is compounded by a number of interactive factors. The major determinants of harmful impact are the total period of exposure; nature of the harmful elements, how closely the child is exposed to the offending agents; daily hours and time of work; age, physical maturity, nutrition, and the overall living conditions.

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