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Assessing Child Domestic Labour in India

" Domestic child labour in India "

By Jyoti Rao

Child domestic labour (CDL) is culturally accepted and widely prevalent in India. The classification of CDL applies to children who are engaged to perform domestic tasks in the home of a third party or employer and not their family.

As defined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), 1999, where child domestic labour is exploitative and includes trafficking, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, or work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is hazardous and likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of the child, it constitutes a worst form of child labour.

Despite legislation, child labour continues to flourish in both rural and urban India. On October 16, 2006 two important notifications to the existing Child Labour Prohibition (And Regulation) Act 1986 came into effect. The notifications ban the employment of children below the age of 14 as domestic servants and in the hospitality trade such as in roadside dhabas, restaurants, hotels, motels and spas.

Two decades after a nationwide ban on child labour in hazardous industries was introduced, over 12 million Indian children, aged between 5 and 14, continue to work in dangerous occupations like construction, and the manufacture of beedis (an indigenous cigarette in which tobacco is rolled in a tendu leaf), bangles and fireworks.

Based on the 2001 census, 252,000 children are engaged in beedi manufacturing and 208,833 in the construction sector. An estimated 185,595 children are employed as domestic help and in dhabas (small roadside eateries); 49,893 children work in auto-repair workshops.

While child rights activists in India say the notifications are an important step in the battle to stop child labour, the major concern is that the government is still not doing enough to provide alternative options for families that depend on income from their children.

Besides, the ban does not address the reasons that compel children to work: poverty, family debts, marginalization, and migration of their parents.

NGOs are demanding that the ban be extended to include all children below the age of 18. It is estimated that 74 percent of child domestic workers in India are between the ages of 12 and 16.

There is also a need to change the mindsets of people who traditionally employ young children,

typically the middle-class and the affluent. The widely prevalent notion that it is actually benevolent to employ children in households and thereby provide them shelter, food and clothing.

The long-term harm done to them in terms of denying them opportunities to go to school and develop their own capabilities and eventually contribute as citizens is generally overlooked.

In actual fact, a majority of domestic working children work long hours for low wages and are exploited and abused physically and mentally.

According to a recent Ministry of Labour (<http://labour.nic.in/>) press release (09.05.07), 2,229 violations of the recent notification banning employment of children under 14 as domestic help and in hospitality sector were detected. 38,818 inspections were carried out by some State Governments from whom reports were received and 211 prosecutions were filed.

The Government of India has been implementing a successful programme, the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) since 1988 where in 7,328 special schools were opened for the children withdrawn from work.

The National Child Labour Project scheme is implemented in 250 districts of 20 states of the country. Under the Scheme, children withdrawn from work are provided education, nutrition, vocational training, stipend and health care etc. and are finally mainstreamed to regular education system.

The highest number of 1,651 schools opened so far under the National Child Labour Project Scheme State-wise is in Orissa followed by 1,347 in Uttar Pradesh and 1,126 in Andhra Pradesh. The project is targeted at children working in the unorganized sector such as construction sites, carpet weaving, brick-making and other labour-intensive industries.

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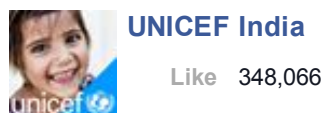
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