

## **Child Labour and Role of NGO's - An Analytical Study**

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### **Abstract**

*Child labour poses a serious threat to a developing economy like India for it hampers the growth and development of a nation. The child labours in India are hired on minimal wage and forced to work in inhuman conditions with long working hours. Though government of India has taken major initiatives to eradicate the child labour in the form of various legislations and punishments for the offenders, the Non-Government organizations have also played a pivotal role in curbing the curse of Child labour. The paper highlights the current scenario of child labour in India and the contribution of NGO's in fighting the evil of child labour.*

**Keywords:** *Child Labour, UNICEF, Poverty, Laws, NGO's; International Labor Organization (ILO)*

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## **Introduction**

When children work in a place that harms or exploits them in any manner namely physical, mental or moral exploitation or creating a roadblock for proper education, it is termed as “Child Labour”. In order to understand child labour, we first need to understand the definition of a child. According to the International conventions, generally humans aged 18 and under are defined as children. The definition differs with individual governments basis the different ages or other criteria or cultures, hence a “child” is not necessarily delineated by a fixed age. Social scientists point out that children’s abilities and maturities vary so much that defining a child’s maturity by calendar age can be misleading. As per the estimates by International Labour Organisation, “246 million child workers aged 5 and 17 were involved in child Labour, of which 171 million were involved in work that by its nature is hazardous to their safety, physical or mental health, and moral development. Moreover, some 8.4 million children were engaged in so-called ‘unconditional’ worst forms of child Labour, which include forced and bonded Labour, the use of children in armed conflict, trafficking in children and commercial sexual exploitation.” As per an estimate, around 61 percent of child labours are found in Asia; the given estimation for the presence of child labourers in other continents goes as, 32 percent in Africa, 7 percent in Latin America, 1 percent in US, Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations. In Asia, around 22 percent of the workforce is children while the same percentage in Latin America stands as 17 percent.

Child Labor refers to the work that is done by children under the age of 15 which restricts or damages a child’s physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual growth. It is not new for economies to use the productive labor of children. The history of capitalism is replete with such instances, especially in phases of rapid industrialization. Dickensian stories of cheap child labor being exploited by rapacious early capitalists were some of the cultural staples of the Industrial Revolution in England. More recently, child labor has been widely associated with poverty and seen as a sign of backwardness. Yet it is remarkably persistent and remains widespread in much of the developing world, including in the booming parts of the world economy.

## ***Hypothesis***

Though India is one of the largest democratic countries in the world and has declared the right to education as a fundamental right in the constitution, but nonetheless the country faces a huge problem of child labor. Though the major cause of child labor in India is, like in many other countries, poverty, other causes include

overpopulation, illiteracy, and lack of awareness. Despite of several attempts by the government to eradicate child labour, the role of NGO's is noteworthy which needs to be analyzed and evaluated.

***Tools and Methodology***

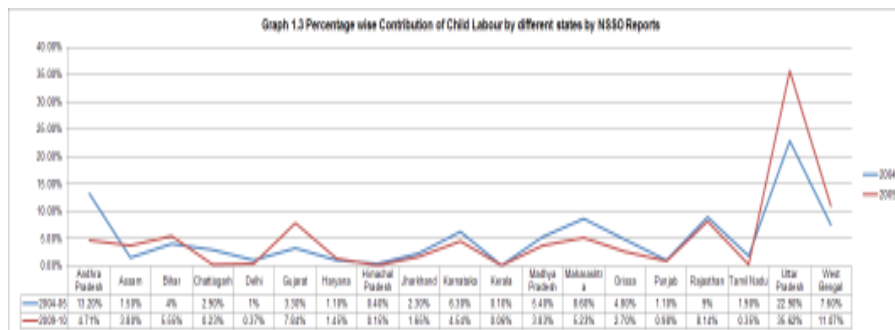
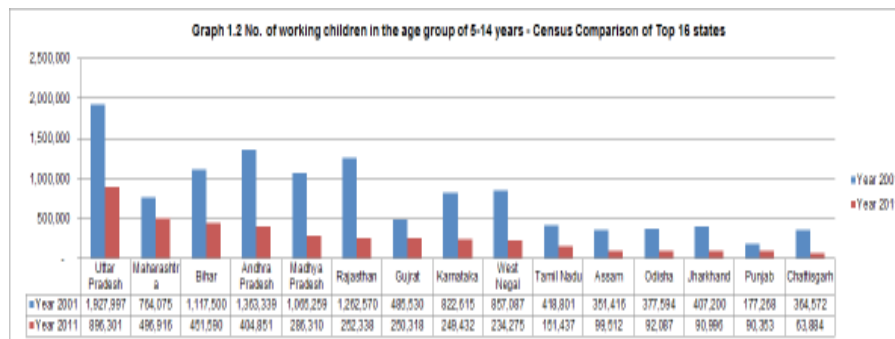
This paper is strictly descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the state of Child Labour in India and the role of NGO's in preventing the same. The data used in it is from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

***Review of Literature***

A 2003 survey by the International Labor Organization suggested that there are 246 million child laborers (aged 14 years or less) in the world, and that as many as 180 million of them are engaged in hazardous activities that put them at direct physical risk. While this may be an overestimate, it should not be completely dismissed either. Within this, it is generally accepted that India has the largest number of child laborers in the world. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that there are more than 35 million such children, accounting for 14 per cent of the children in the 5-14 age group. Other unofficial estimates are much higher, ranging between 60 and 125 million child laborers. Meanwhile, the Census data for 2011 suggest a much lower incidence, with 4.35 million child labourers identified, which would be less than 5 per cent of the relevant age group. This represents a declining incidence compared with the 1991 figure of 6.4 per cent of the children between 5 and 14 years.



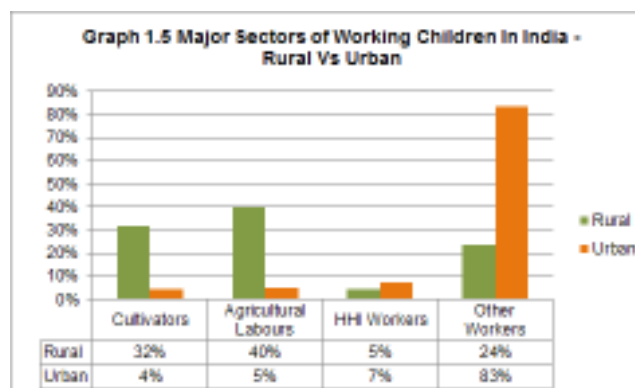
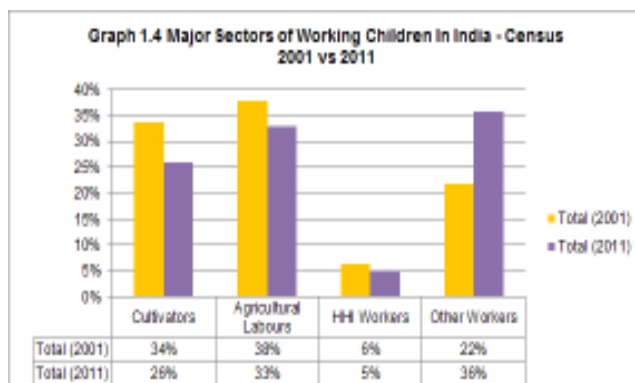
Certain noteworthy facts regarding Child labor include that it has been found decreasing at an abysmal rate of 2.2% per year from 2001 to 2011;80% of working children are based in rural areas and three out of four of these children work in agriculture, as cultivators or in household industries, most of which are home-based employments; More than half of the 5.5 million working children in India are concentrated in five states—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra; Adolescents doing hazardous work form 20.7% of those employed in this age group, while almost 25% of adults work in hazardous conditions; Adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age doing hazardous work form 62.8% of the overall child labour population.; Nearly 10% of adolescents working in hazardous conditions are working in family enterprises; 56% of the working adolescents are no longer studying and 70% of those in hazardous conditions are not studying; More boys (38.7 million) than girls (8.8 million) are involved in hazardous work. While the incidence of hazardous work among adolescents is highest in Nicaragua, the number of adolescents in hazardous work is greatest in India (2.4 million).



There is of course a lot of debate about these figures. Because so much of child labor is in informal activities, and is anyway a shadowy thing that very few

parents or employers want to admit to allowing, there is no way of being sure of the accuracy of any calculations. The larger estimates (which are typically derived by looking at the number of children who are out of school and who are therefore assumed to be working) give a picture of an enormous national sweatshop, with production growth based on the exploitation of children. But there are reasons to be skeptical about the much larger estimates, even though it is certainly the case that those children who have never attended school or have dropped out of school are far more likely to be drawn into the work force.

In actual fact, export industries account for a very small proportion of the child labor in India, and the worst conditions are not to be found there but in other activities. In any case, urban child labor is by all accounts a very small proportion of the total, well below 10 per cent. According to both official data and most studies, nearly half the child labor in India is involved in agriculture. Most of the rest is involved in informal and service sector activities or in small home-based or cottage enterprises.



### ***Factors behind Existing Child Labor***

International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggests poverty is the greatest single cause behind child labour. For impoverished households, income from a child's work is usually crucial for his or her own survival or for that of the household. Income from working children, even if small, may be between 25 to 40% of the household income. Poverty being the foremost factor behind existing child labor, and the conditions of children working at inappropriate jobs under inappropriate conditions; there are other contributing factors as well.

According to the *"Roots of Child Labor"* in UNICEF's 1997 State of the World's Children Report — *"Children are employed because they are easier to exploit"*. From the report it is also evident that international economic trends have also increased child labor in poor countries. *"During the 1980s, in many developing countries, government indebtedness, unwise internal economic policies and recession resulted in economic crisis. Structural adjustment programs in many countries accentuated cuts in social spending that have hit the poor disproportionately.* "In addition to, the report also throws light on the status of the child laborers and the economic disparity that still exists." *These children come from minority groups or populations that have long suffered discrimination. In northern Europe, for example, child laborers are likely to be African or Turkish; in Argentina, many are Bolivian or Paraguayan; in Thailand, many are from Myanmar.* "An increasingly consumer oriented culture, spurring the desire and expectation for consumer goods, can also lead children into work and away from school.

Poverty is a huge problem especially in developing countries where parents are unable to generate income due to the lack of employment opportunities or education. Children can be found employed in mines or hawking in the streets to earn money that is used to provide basic necessities such as food and clothing for the family. Children may also be employed in factories to generate income for the family instead of attending school. Such a practice is a common phenomenon in poverty-stricken regions with large factories set up by international companies. Apart from this, Low aspiration by parents and children is a major cause of child labour because in such a situation, being employed in a local factory, or selling grocery in the streets is the normal way of life. Children are mostly unskilled and provide a cheap source of labour, making them an attractive option for many greedy employers. Child labour, by virtue of being cheap, increases the margin of profits for such entrepreneurs whose only objective is profit maximization even if it comes at the expense of ethics

and good business practices. Summarizing the causes of Child Labour are listed as under:

- Poverty
- Family expectations and traditions
- Child abuse
- Lack of good schools and day care
- Lack of other services as health care
- Public opinion that downplays the risk of early work for children
- Uncaring attitudes of employers
- Limited choice for women

#### ***Child labor Policies in India***

There are specific clauses in the draft of Indian constitution dated 26th January 1950, about the child labor policy in India. These are conveyed through different articles in the Fundamental rights and the Directive Principles of the State Policy. They lay down four specific policy rules regarding child labor which are as follows:

- 1) (Article 14) No child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.
- 2) (Article 39-E) The state shall direct its policy towards securing that the health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their strength.
- 3) (Article 39-f) Children shall be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth shall be protected against moral and material abandonment.
- 4) (Article 45 ) The state shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Government of India framed “The Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986” which aimed at

- Banning the employment of children
- Laying down procedures to decide modification to the schedule of banned occupation or processes
- Regulating the conditions of work of children in employment where they are not prohibited from working

Apart from CLPRA various other acts which aim at eliminating child labor are:

- 1) Employment of Children(Amendment) Act 1951
- 2) The Mines Act 1952
- 3) The Factories (Amendment) Act 1954
- 4) The Merchant Shipping Act 1958
- 5) The Motor Transport Workers Act 1961
- 6) The Apprentices Act 1961
- 7) The Beedi and Cigar Workers Act 1966
- 8) Employment of Children (Amendment) Act 1978

### ***Role of NGO in preventing Child labor***

The problem of child labor in India is so huge that it demands support and contribution from every part of society to completely eradicate this problem. In recent times, government has taken some concrete steps for improving the situations of child laborers. Providing free education, encouraging parents to send their kids to schools with awareness campaigns and allocation of funds towards child health and development etc are some of the steps taken by the state. Among the UN organizations, UNICEF has remained instrumental in initiating several steps against child labor. UNICEF has been well supported by civil society organizations and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Several renowned and committed NGOs are working to improve the situation in this field. These NGOs, both local and international, focus on different problems concerning child labor.

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who have been successful in making people's participation in education and training by the use of their skills, overcoming behaviour and cultural resistance of communities may be preferably involved in tackling the problem of child labour. This is suggested because, paradoxically, although the Government adopts the techniques used by the NGOs, the process often tends to get bureaucratized leading to ineffective implementation. Many NGOs have the reputation of being able to get closer to communities. They also have the experience in running special schools with certain advantages over governmental agencies like having a more committed work force, flexibility in operation, thorough knowledge and expertise and the preparedness to work with target groups in far flung locations. The Basic strategies implied by NGO's to curb Child Labour include; Mobilization and awareness creation; Provision of education; Provision of pre-school education; Facilitating child participation; Developing income compensatory strategies; Assuring work and income security for parents; Facilitating intra household adjustments; Social labeling; Advocacy for institutional and legal



reform

Global March movement began with a worldwide march when thousands of people marched together to jointly put forth the message against child labour. The march, which started on January 17, 1998, touched every corner of the globe before culminating in Geneva, built immense awareness and led to high level of participation from the masses. The World Confederation of Teachers (WCT) is an ILO partner, active worldwide in the field of education and, more specifically, in the role of education against child labour. The International Youth Foundation provides a coordinating and leadership role in realizing successful outcomes for Global Partnership for Youth Development's goals and objectives which involves working on different projects primarily focusing on youths' capacity building and overall development in various parts of the world. Free the Children is an international network of children helping children at a local, national and international level through representation, leadership and action. The majority of NGOs use a combination of strategies in their efforts to eliminate child labor. On the other hand, many have a distinct philosophy, and consequently, a clear entry point and area of emphasis. For example, Sankalp—an NGO working with the tribal in the mining belt of Shankargarh—aims to secure the income and employments of parents as a prior condition to eliminating child labor. Another example is of the MV Foundation, an NGO which denies the importance of poverty as the prime motivating factor, and focuses on changing the deep seated mindsets and attitudes about child labor and education in the entire community in the villages of Andhra Pradesh.

Save the Children supports projects that raise family income so that children are not forced to work. Where children do work, it tries to protect them from exploitation and find ways they can combine work with education. It is also involved in improving local education so it provides children with relevant skills to break out of poverty. The Child Workers in Asia was established in 1985 as a support group for child workers in Asia, and the NGO are working with them. From a small group of five organizations, it now brings together over 50 groups/organizations working on child labour in 14 countries. It facilitates sharing of expertise and experiences between NGOs and strengthens their collaboration to jointly respond to the exploitation of working children in the region for the last fifteen years. The main objectives of The South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude are the identification of the children, conducting raids, rescue operations, filing cases in courts, awareness building among parents and society, rehabilitation and follow ups. After release immediate shelter is provided, approaching the concerned department for the necessary action for Legal Aid, Education, Restoration of childhood, Psychological help and bringing the child to

the mainstream of life. It is working in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Punjab, Haryana and Delhi in following industries: Carpet, Brick kiln, Glass Industry, Sports, Saree, Beedi, Stone Quarries, Domestic Child Labour and Firecrackers.

The local NGOs can play more significant and effective role in combating child labour problem because of their proximity to the victims and better understanding of the social milieu in which child labour exist. Moreover there is better acceptance of local social workers in the local community which can have apprehension regarding outsiders.

However, there has been a flood of NGOs in recent years. All sort of NGOs have mushroomed in every nook and comer of the country. Therefore it has become very difficult to sort out genuine from spurious ones. Nevertheless, the role played by various good NGOs cannot be undermined because of this reason. The service being rendered by these NGOS should be appreciated and their activities relating to child labour relief and rehabilitation must be actively supported both by the central and state government through financial assistance in the form of projects.

### ***Conclusion***

After going through the whole case study of prevailing child labor conditions and the factors influencing them; we can easily conclude that this issue needs to be dealt both at macro and micro level. Whatever steps taken in this regard would contribute only lesser to it when compared to the adversities this issue brings with itself.

Major factors that can help reduce the problem to the verge of its extinction include; Increased family income; Education—that helps children learn skills that will help them earn a living; Social Services—that help children and family survive crises, such as disease, or loss of home and shelter; Family control of fertility—so that families are not burdened by children.

A child being the father of a man and ultimately of a nation; needs to be taken great care of and given prioritized importance in case the nation wants to develop and set an example. The efforts of NGOs with theirs specialized and focused philosophies should be guided and made strict under the government formulated norms just to ensure that when on one side, the effective measures are taken, on the other side to prove its effectiveness there are laws safeguarding the interests of the exploited. Greater social awareness with the involvement of NGOs, better low cost job - orientated education and encouraging more women joining the work force besides empowerment of women would go a long way in elimination of child labour. Mass

literacy programmes should be evolved to campaign against the social segment called child labour. NGOs and community organizations have wide-ranging experience working with social needs and developing community resources. Not only eradicating poverty should be the goal rather, bringing awareness should also be of the prime concern.

Being a socio-economic issue, the problem of child labour must be tackled by promoting the growth opportunities for children. The public awareness against this social evil is very important. And the coordinated efforts of government NGOs, employers, trade unions and parents can be helpful for gradual elimination of child labour. All the above mentioned steps, if taken, in a coordinated manner such that each one complements the other; the childhood of almost each and every child would be the most exorbitant phase of the life-like of all of us seated over here and were lucky enough to have a pretty liberalized and loving childhood days.

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