

CHILD LABOR IN PAKISTAN: *Policy Analysis*

Abstract

In Pakistan, child labor is a serious human rights issue with millions of children working to support their families. These children are deprived of their basic right to education. In this context, this policy brief aims to highlight the seriousness of the child labor issue, showing its links to poverty, lack of access to education, and ineffective government laws and policies. Pakistan is an economically developing country where poverty and inflation are high, and these factors ultimately promote child labor. Therefore, this paper suggests various ways to resolve the issue of child labor with an integrated long-term approach based on community needs and requirements, including initiation of poverty eradication programs, provision of income generation opportunities to poor families, implementation of free primary and compulsory education, vocational training for children and awareness programs, as well as, enforcement of laws and policies by the state. Many of the reflections that laid the foundation of the present study for resolving child labor issues were based on five years of practical experience in the field of human rights, particularly focused on child protection, child labor, non-formal education, and creating livelihood opportunities for poor families in Pakistan. Subsequently, various policy alternatives were proposed and evaluated using Policy Delphi rankings and certain assessment criteria such as efficiency, liberty, acceptability, socio-political feasibility, economic feasibility and ease of implementation that could be effective in providing income generation opportunities to the families of child laborers, quality education to these children, and proper implementation of existing laws and policies related to child labor, child rights, and child education.

Key findings

The findings of the analysis highlighted certain major causes of increasing child labor in Pakistan including poverty and inflation due to which poor families are left with fewer employment options in Pakistan, non-availability and non-accessibility of schools for poor child laborers, lack of implementation of universal and compulsory primary education that further compels many parents to send their children to work, earn money, and learn new skills, and rapidly growing illiteracy and ignorance especially in the lower economic classes due to lack of resources. The study further proposed significant policy alternatives for restricting child labor and reforming the socio-economic status of poor children by promoting child rights and child education in Pakistan. These policy options included banning child labor entirely, poverty alleviation programs, vocational schooling programs, enforcing part-time education, and research and data collection. Since criteria-based assessment exposed certain trade-offs between different alternatives, the decision was made considering what society would value more and what would be administratively feasible for the government to do. According to the Policy Delphi results, the most desirable alternative was the imposition of part-time education on children. Although it ranked well on ensuring liberty and long-term effectiveness, the economic costs and difficulty in implementation would cause problems since this alternative would require time especially in case of setting up separate schools for the provision of such part-time education. On the contrary, the policy option of carrying out research and data collection was found as the easiest to implement but it would not be efficient in the short-run as it could not generate quick results. Therefore, it was ranked as the least desired alternative, although such research might not be as costly as the other alternatives and would help in drawing up future policy alternatives that could target the problem more effectively. However, the Pakistani society was found favoring quick results over calculated and well-researched alternatives that might take longer to implement and bring about results.

Implications

The study suggests that the action plan to reduce and prevent child labor must consider all aspects of education, from the government school system, non-formal and transitional programs to curriculum development, provision of materials and equipment, quality teachers and extracurricular activities. There should be a strong focus on non-formal education in rural and remote areas or in disadvantaged urban districts. Vocational training and skill education can also be essential components and strategies to reduce child labor. Besides all that, the public needs to be made aware of child labor, particularly its worst forms, and how child labor is harmful to the children as well as to the society. For this, awareness-raising activities including social mobilization, workshops, seminars, and trainings could be beneficial to inform communities and parents about the detrimental effects of child labor. Moreover, to encourage children and ensure their effective participation in decision-making, children's clubs could be formed promoting child rights, raising awareness and discouraging child labor in society. These clubs could be set up at the community, schools, district, provincial and national levels. In addition to that, the industrial areas in Pakistan such as Sialkot, Kasur and Hyderabad should be targeted and part-time education should be imposed upon all child laborers with careful monitoring of progress, especially in the first few years to ensure that the children are benefiting from the education. Through the imposition of part-time education, the child laborers will not only be able to support their families, but they will also be able to get educated, hence ensuring better prospects for them in the future. Similarly, it can lead to more children being streamlined into the education system in the long-run, ending the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Therefore, separate schools for child laborers should be set up in partnership with local and international NGOs so that the entire economic and administrative burden does not fall on the government, as well as to allow more innovation in ideas and better planning. However, in the short-term, government should set up temporary schools or space should be made in government schools for evening classes to cater to child laborers since separate schools serving this purpose can only be set up in the longer run. Furthermore, the government of Pakistan needs to revise its poverty eradication strategy and should include broader participation by the civil society and the private sector at all stages of policy process including formulation, implementation, and outcome-based monitoring. This strategy should recognize the multidimensional nature of poverty and the scope of actions needed to reduce poverty by controlling inflation and providing income generation opportunities to poor and vulnerable families. Similarly, the government of Pakistan could conduct a survey to identify the extent of the issue of child labor. The findings of the survey would be helpful in designing an action plan for combating child labor effectively. However, the engagement of civil society organizations and International Labor Organization (ILO) would be quite essential in this whole process to provide technical assistance to the government of Pakistan. The government also needs to increase the wages of labor class people according to the market rates. Moreover, providing microcredit or microfinance assistance to poor families without interest for business purposes would be another effective policy option to increase their income. Whereas, in order to resolve the issue of indebtedness and bonded child labor, the social protection system needs to be promoted. Similarly, the existing social protection programs by the government including Bait-ul-Mal and Zakat programs should be strengthened and promoted to give benefits to maximum number of poor families. In addition to that, allocation of special funds in terms of cash, alternate livelihood, a piece of land, and quality education to children along with scholarships, incentives to families, low-cost housing, vocational trainings and social security cards for the rehabilitation of bonded and child labor families could be another positive action for the protection and prevention of child labor. Since, the government of Pakistan has amended Employment of Children Act (ECA) 1991 to include child labor issues in informal sectors such as agriculture, livestock, and home, the government of Pakistan and law enforcement agencies should also make efforts to enforce all these laws in their true spirit by allocating sufficient funds and establishing an implementation infrastructure mechanism in the country. Additionally, in the long-term, more policies should be implemented and research should be carried out to monitor progress of the initial policy plans and their success rate.

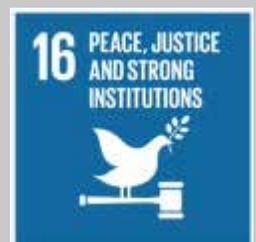
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SDGs



Keywords

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