

## CHILD LABOUR IN ETHIOPIA-AN OVERVIEW

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### **Abstract:**

The problem of child labour has become an issue of great concern in recent times all over the world. The alarming growth of child labour, particularly in under developing countries, has attracted the attention of governments, national and international social organizations and social scientists. A global public awaking is being created today about the plight of child labour and the needed to eliminate it.

Millions of children all over the world today are working many in servitude and hazardous conditions. A large number of children of tender age are being exploited, and compelled to work for long hours for low wages and under conditions damaging to their health, and to their physical, social, psychological and mental development. Millions of children are thus being deprived of their healthy childhood.

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A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories  
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory @, U.S.A., Open J-Gate, India as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A.

**International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences**

<http://www.ijmra.us>

### **Child Labour: A Global Estimate:**

It is impossible to have an exact strength of the child labour in the world. There is quite conflicting estimates about child labour, not only at the national level but also at the global level, because child labourers are scattered widely in unorganized sectors and employers do not always provide accurate data on child labour in order to avoid legal problems. Moreover, age limits differ from activity to activity and from country to country. Many countries make a distinction between light and hazardous work, with the minimum age for the former generally being twelve, for the latter usually varying between sixteen and eighteen. Generally, almost all the countries accept that maximum age to recognize the young one, as 'children' is fifteen.

However, the global figure in relation to child labor around the global ILO disclosed its report entitled "The End of Child Labor: Within Reach, in the year 2006.

- 218 million children were involved in child labor the figure shows a decline from the 2004 report that disclosed 246 million were involved in child work.
- 126 million children were involved in the worst forms of child labor (including hazardous work, debt bondage, soldiering, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities) again the figure shows a decrease from the 179 million for the year 2004
- The report also discloses that about 122 million children in the age group of 5-14 are engaged working around the global.

### **Statistics on Child Labour-Ethiopia:**

Despite the limitation of obtaining reliable statistical data to establish the number of children who are in the labour force and exposed to child labour in Ethiopia, the National Child Labour Survey conducted in 2001 shows that the total number of children in the age group of 5-17 was 18,197,783. Out of this figure it was indicated that nearly 9,483,611 children had been involved in productive activities of the country in different sectors of the economy. The figure shows that nearly 52.1% of the total children population in the country is engaged in the active workforce.

### **Child Labour Situation in Ethiopia:**

Ethiopia is one of the countries with severe child labour problem. The problem is also mirrored by the fact that the school enrollment rate in the country is one of the lowest in the world. Almost all children, aged 4 to 15, in rural Ethiopian households at least one housework responsibility. Although there are many factors that cause child labours, the most pronounced reason in rural Ethiopia is poverty where the children are required to supplement family income. Parents who themselves never had an opportunity to get education, could not send their children to schools, being ignorant of the value of education themselves, parents were not in a position to provide guidance and encouragement for their children's education. This contributed to reinforcing the cycle of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and child labor. Children working in all most all sectors like agriculture, domestic service, home based work, street selling, begging, baking, carrying goods for people, shoe shining, lottery tickets selling in the streets, working as assistant (Woyala in local language) working in shops and factories, construction, sex industry etc., and they have deprived of their basic needs and exploited.

### **Child Rights in Ethiopia:**

Laws exist in the entire country to prevent the exploitation of the child. Various seminars are being held, resolutions passed and plans of action should be drawn up on the protection of children, yet not much could have been done about child protection and the problems grows out of proportion day by day. So, child laws have to be radically re-thought and re-written from the perspective of rights of the child, in terms of policy and accountability.

Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in its 36th Article provides the protection of child rights in the country. The full contents of the Article are as follows;

1. Every child has the right: (a) To life; (b) To a name and nationality; (c) To know and be cared for by his or her parents or legal guardians; (d) Not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being; (e) To be free of corporal punishment or cruel and inhuman treatment in schools and other institutions responsible for the care of children.



2. In all actions concerning children undertaken by public and private welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the primary consideration shall be the best interests of the child.
3. Juvenile offenders admitted to corrective or rehabilitative institutions, and juveniles who become wards of the State or who are placed in public or private orphanages, shall be kept separately from adults.
4. Children born out of wedlock shall have the same rights as children born of wedlock.
5. The State shall accord special protection to orphans and shall encourage the establishment of institutions which ensure and promote their adoption and advance their welfare, and education.

The Constitution of FDRE in its Article 36, Sub Article 1-d is very specific about the issue of child labour and the protection of children from labour exploitations. This sub-article is directly linked to the UNCRC.

### **Why Child Labour is preferred?**

- (a) They work for less remuneration than adult labourers.
- (b) They are more flexible mentally as well as physically and can be molded and pressurized easily into the exploitative tactics of the employers.
- (c) Child labour is not only very cheap to the employers, but also trouble-free since they can't organize agitations by themselves.
- (d) Children cannot demand any overtime, nor the medical and other similar benefits.
- (e) Employers prefer children more amenable to discipline and control.

### **Health Hazards:**

Labouring at an early age has many adverse consequences for children. The adverse consequences of children working in hazardous occupations are numerous. Firstly, it poses a challenge to the safety of the workers. Secondly, health hazards have more long-term implications in terms of making the person invalid for any work at early age. Various studies have shown in its severe form only after 2-3 years in terms of morbidity, fever, cold, cough, dysentery, body ache and weakness. T.B and other respiratory problems (Bimal, 2000).

The ILO Report of the Director General in the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference 1983 observed that the vulnerability of working children to health hazards is increased by the high incidence of malnutrition and under nourishment, in contrast to their increased requirement for energy utilization to perform heavy work activities. The incidence of communicable diseases is always higher among these children. Children come into close contact in work situation with infective cases of tuberculosis and other similar diseases serve malnutrition. Anemia, hard labour fatigue and inadequate sleep make them more susceptible to infectious diseases.

### **Conclusion:**

Children are the blooming flower of the garden of society and valuable assets of nation. They constitute a hidden source of potential development of a growing nation. Their welfare strength social and economic development. They need to be given social and economic protection if a country is to thrive and prosper in all spheres of human activity. Paradoxically, it is unfortunate to say that tragically most of the child life is lost due to poverty, destitution, malnutrition and poor and unhygienic conditions, largely in the rural sector compared to the urban counterpart.

Child labour is sad reality of our world. Where it is practical, it has to be eliminated. Inducing children to education is clearly the means to achieve this objective.

The problem of child labour should be looked upon as a national problem. To solve the problem, the cooperation of many, namely, parents, employees, governments, academicians, voluntary agencies, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, and the official machinery is essential.

Let us hope and work in the direction of giving to the children the due share which they are entitled to get constitutionally and morally.

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- Child Labour in Ethiopia with Special Focus on Child Prostitution; Save the Children Denmark Ethiopia; 2003, Addis Ababa. P.9.
- Negarit Gazeta is the national newspaper of the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on which proclamations and laws are officially declared. Laws and proclamations cannot be endorsed unless they are published in this newspaper.

