

Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: The question of child labour and steps to eradicating it and protecting children's rights

Name: Ria Seth

Position: Head Chair, UNICEF

Introduction:

Child labour has been a prevalent problem in society for centuries, and remains a concern today. Child labour has expanded from the initial traditional setting of agriculture to large factories and production lines in urban areas. Children are seen by numerous businesses as cost-effective and profitable employees due to the potential to pay them less and manage them much more efficiently and effectively. The issue of child labour is only exacerbated by socioeconomic inequality and a lack of access to education. Especially in developing countries, children often need to work to help sustain their families, and the lack of educational background results in them turning to child labour. The impacts of child labour on the children themselves is devastating, stunting their physical, emotional, and intellectual growth.

The most extreme kinds of child labour entail the children being exploited and enslaved, isolated from their family, placed in environments with risk of hazards/illnesses, and ultimately being left to fend for themselves at very young ages. In 2020, it was estimated that 160 million children worldwide were involved in child labour, almost 1 in 10 globally. From this, approximately half work in hazardous environments in agricultural, mining, domestic labour, and other industries. These children work long and intense hours, exposed to chemicals and at high risk of developing major health concerns.

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Child Labour:** Defined as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development”.

2. **Exploitation:** Defined as “the action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work”.
3. **Hazardous Environment:** An environment in which the health of the people that live and work there is negatively affected.
4. **Mass Migration:** Defined as “the migration of large groups of people from one geographical area to another”.
5. **Socioeconomic:** Defined as “involving a combination of social and economic factors”.
6. **Sociocultural:** A term related to “social and cultural factors”. This could include common traditions, habits, patterns and beliefs.

Background Information

History of Child Labour

Child labour is a long-standing issue in human history. Throughout history, children have been exploited to varying degrees. The issue was especially widespread in impoverished areas and developing countries. Child labour was a component of economic life and industrial development in the 1800s. Children younger than 14 worked in agriculture, mines, factory jobs, and as street vendors. Children who came from low-income families were forced to work in hazardous conditions long shifts to be able to contribute to the source of income for their families.

Ethical Facets of Child Labour

From an ethical standpoint, child labour has several facets. During child labour, autonomy, justice, nonmaleficence, privacy, and beneficence are all threatened. Forced child labour is unethical as it violates children’s autonomy, and because parents typically manipulate the consent given by the child. Children are easy targets for these harsh working conditions, as they lack the ability to speak out against mistreatment and unethical job requirements. Child labour has long-term psychological and behavioral consequences. In terms of ethics, even if children don’t have the ability to make educated decisions, they are still considered individuals with autonomy that ought to be protected. The entry of children into unethical labour deprives them of access to education, which is a basic right that children ought to have.

Impacts of child labour on families

The children engaged in child labour and their families are the most immediately impacted stakeholders. As working children sacrifice any education and normal mental development when working in severe conditions, their intellectual development is stunted and they are prevented from acquiring any skills that may help them once they grow up. Their health is also put at risk with increased likelihood of developing conditions and illnesses. Psychological harm to these children have long-term consequences, with many children developing behavioural problems and mental illness later on. Despite some laws and measures on a global scale that targets the issue of child labour, ineffective enforcement has allowed child labour to still persist. Many countries actually have their own distinct rules and regulations about child labour, and the absence of international agreements makes the scope of work for children which classifies as child labour extremely ambiguous and harmful.

Current Situation

Influences on child labour

Cultural beliefs and child labour

Cultural views play a significant impact in promoting child labour. Some communities in developing countries believe that labour for children prompts character development and skill building in young children. In these households, children are often expected to follow their parent's views and start working very early on in their lives. Some cultural views also point to a gender divide in expectations for children. In some places around the world, parents still view the education for girls as less important than boys, pushing girls in child labour as domestic service providers. These sociocultural aspects can encourage discrimination, and the lack of income for families in developing countries can make it feel as if there's no alternative to child labour.

Religion and child labour

It is generally supported that the fundamental right to educate and raise children belongs to their parents. Parents typically try to act in the best interests of their children, driven to do so by intellectual advancement, social development, and occasionally spiritual sources. Parents frequently seek religious direction to help shape the development of their children, where hard work is an important religious virtue for many families. A study discovered that children from select religions were

much more likely to be working, due to the guidance that those select faiths provide regarding hard work as a way to connect with God.

Modern causes of child labour

Poverty

Poverty is without a doubt the most prominent force that propels children into the labour industry. When families are unable to cover basic necessities, they have no choice but to send their children to work and contribute to family income. Poverty is the main cause due to its link to other significant variables, like low literacy rates, lack of decent employment opportunities, and environmental disasters. Without addressing poverty as the root cause, it is improbable that child labour can ever be eradicated.

Lack of access to opportunities

Among the most essential components needed for children to avoid child labour is the availability and quality of education. Schooling is often not priced at a rate that rural families find affordable, therefore an obstacle in the ability for these families to send their children to school. Children who are working in hazardous conditions frequently lack the essential educational foundation that would allow them to learn skills and improve their prospects for a decent working life in the future. Without any safe work options, children and families are left with little choice but to engage in child labour. Lack of education also contributes to a limited understanding of child labour, indicating that families in traditional societies are often not willing to oppose social norms and expectations.

Conflicts and mass migration

The association between child labour and conflict is very strong. More than half of all individuals who have been displaced by war are accounted for by children. With an increase in economic recessions, reduced social support, and disruption in protection of children during times of war, conflict exposes children to child labour even more. Child labour is nearly twice as prevalent in conflict-ridden countries than elsewhere.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Africa

Child labour employs one fifth of all children in Africa, a proportion that is much higher than any other region globally. More children from Africa are in hazardous work than anywhere else in the world. Over 72 million African children are approximated to be in child labour and 31.5 million in hazardous work. Progress in Africa on the current status of child labour hasn't seen much improvement. It has gone up in Sub-Saharan Africa in the time period of 2012-2016, despite progress occurring elsewhere globally. Targeted policies implemented by the governments of different African nations haven't had the intended impact on combating child labour. It's likely that this was the result of broader economic and demographic trends working against government policies. The African region has also been relatively heavily affected by crises, heightening the presence of child labour. The agriculture industry in Africa accounts for over 80% of all the child labour in the continent, and is frequently conducted in hazardous environments. As of 2020, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Uganda are the 11 countries who have identified as Pathfinder Countries working towards target 8.7 of the SDGs.

South Asia

According to recent national surveys from seven South Asian nations, 30 million children are employed, and over 16 million are in child labour, with 50 million not in school. These statistics may even be higher; the data collected is limited by the fact that some of these countries don't classify some work as being child labour. Specifically, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal have child labour populations of 5.8 million, 5 million, 3.4 million, and 2 million respectively. India in particular, as the most populated country in this region, has 56% of its child workers employed in agriculture. They endure long hours in a dangerous and exploitative workplace, carrying heavy loads of produce in extreme heat and spraying toxic pesticides, violating their health rights. Migration, poverty, limited decent work options, and social norms all play a considerable role in the high proportion of child labour in South Asia. Furthermore, inequality based on ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and gender also has a significant impact of the likelihood of children in the region being exploited through child labour.

Turkey

Turkey has been successful in lowering the number of working children since the 1990s. However, an estimated 900,000 Turkish children are still engaged in child labour, with around 45% working in seasonal agriculture. According to the statistics, about half of these children don't go to school. With the Syrian conflict still persisting, a rising number of refugee children in Turkey are being forced to work as children. The Turkish government signed the Joint Declaration on the Elimination of Child Labour, designating 2018 as the Year of Child Labour Elimination. Furthermore, 355 labour inspectors, 81 regional directors, and 320 teachers received child labour training. The Integrated Model for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Seasonal Agriculture in Hazelnut Harvesting, which was extended through 2020, prevented 1,022 minors from working in hazelnut harvesting. Despite these measures, Turkish children are still subject to commercial sexual exploitation and recruitment by non-state armed groups. The prohibition on the coercive recruitment of children by non-state armed groups does not yet comply with international norms.

Myanmar

In Myanmar, around 1.1 million children aged 5 to 17 are employed in child labour. Domestic demand, familial poverty, Myanmar's school system, government restrictions, and filial piety all contribute to child labour. The minimum age for work in Myanmar is 14 for certain areas, although there is no minimum age for other sectors. According to the Myanmar Labour Force Survey 2015, 60.5 percent of child labourers work in agriculture, which has no minimum age for employment. The manufacturing sector is where the majority of child labour is found. The 2011 transition from a military-ruled to a democratic system aided the economy's rapid expansion. When consumers have more disposable income, the demand for services increases, increasing the derived demand for labour. On the other hand, the economic boom exacerbated the child labour dilemma by increasing the exploitation of inexpensive child labour to decrease costs. Food establishments, for example, are only required to pay kid workers \$0.3 per hour, compared to \$0.43 for adults. This makes children seem more desirable as labour for corporations in Myanmar.

International Labour Organisation

ILO's establishment of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1992 has been one of the organisation's major actions against child labour. The overall goal of IPEC is progressive elimination of child labour, which they aimed to reach by reinforcing nations' ability to manage the issue and advocating for a global approach to combat child labour. The IPEC operates in 88 countries, and is the world's largest scheme of this type, as well as ILO's largest single operational campaign. IPEC's partners have grown in number and diversity over time, now incorporating employers' and workers' organisations,

other international and government agencies, community organisations, NGOs, media, private businesses, parliamentarians, universities, religious groups, and children with their families. In addition to IPEC, ILO hosts a Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour every 4 years.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UNICEF works to address child labour, particularly by boosting the strength of the social service industry. Social workers play an important role in identifying, mitigating and managing circumstances that may lead to child labour. Through case management and protection services, such as identification, registration, and interim rehabilitation, and referral services, UNICEF aims to build and equip the workforce to have an effective response to possible child labour scenarios. Children who have been rescued from child labour should also be safely provided with schooling or training. UNICEF advocates for improved access to high-quality education and supplies exhaustive social services to keep children safe. To directly combat child labour, UNICEF collaborates with other UN partners and the European Union on projects that cover 13 countries globally. UNICEF also emphasises the significant of labour market laws and business practices in addressing the rights of children, by looking at the core factors that increase child labour and trying to create decent jobs for adults.

- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, (A/RES/44/25)
 - The most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. Has been effective in raising awareness about childrens' rights, but its effectiveness depends on the level of commitment and resources allocated by individual countries to implement its provisions
- Programme of Action for the Elimination of the Exploitation of Child Labour, 10 March 1993, (E/CN.4/RES/1993/79)
 - The Programme discusses policies and programs that would protect children from economic exploitation and hazardous work. Some progress has been made, but it is argued by some that it doesn't do enough in addressing the root causes of child labour
- International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour 2021, 25 July 2019, (A/RES/73/327)
 - The year had many objectives, including raising awareness, advocating for stronger legislation, and fostering collaboration. The effectiveness is dependent on the level of commitment and actions taken by governments,

organisations, and individuals, but ongoing efforts are still needed to ensure the effective implementation of policies and programs

Possible Solutions

In order to write strong resolutions, delegates are encouraged to identify the root causes of the issue (above in 'current situation') and form clauses which target these directly. Effective clauses are those that are detailed yet feasible, so delegates should consider the way different components of the issue may be targeted and how different actors may work together to solve this multifaceted problem. Possible solutions include the following:

Education for children is the clear alternative to child labour, as is expressed in international labour standards on the minimum age for employment. Bonded labour and child exploitation would become a lot less common with regular and sufficient school attendance. Up to the minimum age for employment, regulations should make schooling compulsory, as this could be extremely effective if properly enforced. But, with schooling expenses being high, another aspect of the issue that needs to be addressed is the common misconception of many parents in developing countries that putting their children to work is the better choice. To address this aspect, businesses of all sizes can raise awareness about the value of education as part of campaigns, contributing to eradicating this issue. Work also needs to be done to address the barriers that prevent children from pursuing education, such as distance, schooling costs, safety, gender-based discrimination to encourage parents to put their children in school. Lack of infrastructure, limited supply of teachers, and low quality education have made the schooling system part of the issue rather than the solution in the past. Investing in education and training for teachers, as well as adapting curriculums to relevant local standards can make education more appealing and affordable.

The role of the private sector also needs to be reinforced, with generation of more decent jobs for adults, and provision of greater opportunities for training to adolescents. The private sector can also provide employment insurance and a steady source of income. Businesses should search for multi-faceted solutions that involve many stakeholders, as partnerships between the public and private sector are critical in adopting effective solutions. In the example of legislation, governments can encourage voluntary measures, but companies must cooperate and integrate those regulations into their business practices. Companies that demonstrate dedication and participate in collaborative measurements with the government will experience long-term benefits for themselves, as well as economic growth for the entire economy. Business can examine their supplier chains to ensure they

are practicing ethical consumerism, encourage fair compensation for workers in their company and across the industry, as well as apply for certification that their products are not in any way involved with child labour.

Social protection measures must be provided by the government in order to reduce poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. These policies must incorporate expansion of child labour monitoring systems for better detection of unethical employment practices, as well as increasing access to healthcare, family allowances, old age/disability pensions, maternity benefits, and unemployment benefits. These are necessary measures alongside schooling, as just schooling can be insufficient. Children need rehabilitation after going through child labour before they can actually benefit from regular schooling, and occasionally legal aid and police protection too. Income generating programmes and training for parents in vulnerable areas of society can also be useful as they give parents a steady flow of income and reduce the expectation for children to work to contribute to the family income. Social protection also entails identification within schools of children who are most at risk of being forced into inhuman child labour, so that measures to help those families can be focused onto high-risk individuals.

The most critical thing for success in eradicating child labour will be coordination, as it will support a human-centered approach to a workforce free of child labour and forced labour. This coordination will necessitate policy coherence, among different industries and sectors of a nation. Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation can help integrate child labour abolition into existing international priorities. International cooperation can also help in coordinating national and global responses through a centralised framework, ending the commercial sexual exploitation and labour exploitation of children. Forced labour needs to be targeted in minority groups, migrant populations, indigenous and tribal groups, and other vulnerable groups. This deeply rooted issue can only be tackled through discussion on a global scale and adherence to agreed upon measures across nations.

Bibliography

Useful Links

- <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour>
- <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/2291-eliminating-child-labour-greater-engagement-and-collaboration-needed.html>
- <https://www.responsiblebusiness.com/news/africas-news/five-ways-we-can-help-to-eliminate-child-labour/>
- <https://www.salesforce.org/blog/6-steps-end-child-labour-globally/>

- <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20term%20%E2%80%9Cchild%20labour%E2%80%9D%20is,harmful%20to%20children%3B%20and%20For>

Works Cited

- <https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-labor>
- <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>
- <https://www.eclt.org/en/news/child-labour-causes>
- <https://bonyan.ngo/child-protection/child-labor/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198592/>
- <https://www.ilo.org/africa/areas-of-work/child-labour/lang--en/index.htm>
- <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-labour#:~:text=Child%20labour%20can%20result%20in,care%2C%20restricting%20their%20fundamental%20rights>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Labour_Organization
- <https://www.ucanews.com/news/no-way-out-for-south-asias-child-laborers/94892>
- <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-10-02/Understanding-the-complexities-of-child-labor-in-South-Asia-Ug6mSR9QDS/index.html>
- <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3814287?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header>
- https://www.ilo.org/moscow/areas-of-work/child-labour/WCMS_249007/lang--en/index.htm
- <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/2291-eliminating-child-labour-greater-engagement-and-collaboration-needed.html>
- <https://www.responsiblebusiness.com/news/africas-news/five-ways-we-can-help-to-eliminate-child-labour/>
- <https://www.salesforce.org/blog/6-steps-end-child-labour-globally/>