

Combating child labour in the agriculture sector: emerging scenario and policy challenges in Pakistan

Ever increasing incidence of poverty has brought many social evils with it especially in developing countries like Pakistan. One such evil is usage of children as labour. Having considered social and ethical norms, children should not be put into physical work in formal and informal sector but unfortunately it is a common practice in Pakistan. This becomes more common amongst those families which are living their lives under poverty line. This study was conducted to analyze background factors which pulled or pushed families to engage their children in work in the agriculture sector. Data were collected from 150 randomly selected families in Punjab province of Pakistan using comprehensive and pretested questionnaire through personal interviews. Key questions related to socio-economic background, working conditions, legal formalities, social safety nets and behavior of owners were asked. The analysis of the data revealed interesting facts. Most of the families which sent their children to work were living under poverty line and were illiterate. Average family size was 7 members with 4 children under age of 15 years. Most of the families belonged to tenant class which did not own their land so had to work as labour on the farms including their children. The social safety nets were not offered in any form to working children as they had to work for long hours and without any health, social and sexual protection. Most of the children reported social and sexual harassment by their senior workers and even owners. It was interesting to know that all the work by children was done in informal way without any legal contract and protection. Sometimes, they were offered some advance money before hiring but they could be fired without any prior notice and payment. Policy debate and work has been started to stop child labour in industry and brick kiln work but agriculture though the dominant profession is still ignored in this context. Almost no institution is working to eradicate child labour from agriculture sector and policy initiatives are also silent on this issue. Policy dialogue amongst parliamentarians is the need of the time which can sensitize this issue and can initiate some meaningful policy work. At the same time awareness about legal rights should be started to motivate families not to send their children under age for physical work. One nice initiative in this regard is the well appreciated step of Punjab government to abandon child labour from kiln industry and send them for education in schools. Such models should be enforced in agriculture sector to make this sector child labour free sector.

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