

Child Labor in under-developed country Pakistan

'Child Labor' has been a key concern for the whole world specifically in the last couple of centuries. Child labor is usually associated with the underdeveloped countries where basic needs and rights of people are not secured either by law or by aggregated will of the society or both ("Child Labor," 2008). According to International Labor Organization, child labor is defined as: "

when a child is working during early age

he overworks or gives over time to Labor

he works due to the psychologically, socially, and materialistic pressure

he becomes ready to Labor on a very low pay" Arshad (n.d.).

Some governments develop laws against child labor under the pressure of international organizations such as 'International Labor Organization ILO' or 'UNICEF' but seldom act upon those laws due to several reasons (VOA, 2010). So it can be inferred that child labor is not only an issue of internal politics and sociology of a country but is more often an external correlation factor and therefore decision makers can be local and international to a problem related to child labor in any country. This paper discusses the 'ever controversial' problem of child labor in Pakistan which is an underdeveloped or under development country. The government of Pakistan has taken decisions and made laws in the country but situation is not yet under control Arshad (n.d.). External decision makers and bodies have also showed concerns and taken stern conditions against the problem on numerous occasions (VOA, 2010). The problem is that the problem of child labor in Pakistan is somewhat uncontrollable due to several reasons that are mentioned later. Here are some facts related to the problem stated above.

There are about 40 million children in Pakistan in the age group 5-14 and it is estimated that almost 4 million of them are in child labor working in different industries including stone crushing, carpet weaving, hand-made garments, coal industry, packaging, sports industry, textile industry, cement industry, agriculture, construction etc. (Arshad, n.d.: Iqbal, 2009). Article 11 of the constitution forbids all kinds of slavery, forced labor and child labor in addition to the employment act of 1991, the bonded labor system act 1992 and the prevention and control of human trafficking ordinance 2002. Pakistan is also a signatory of a number of child labor prevention laws and conventions by ILO ("National Legislation," 2009). There have been a number of incidents in which bans have been imposed on Pakistan by international organizations and countries such as the famous FIFA ban on Pakistan's football industry. Pakistan has made primary education compulsory for all children and education is free till primary standards yet children do not go to schools (Arshad, n.d.).

The concerning question is what makes this problem 'wicked'? The socio-economic conditions are much worse than anyone's imaginations as there is lack of basic economic structure that may promise the children a good future. If they drop out of work, what will they do? They will not have access to education and probably will delve into some negative activities (Arshad, n.d.). Country's population is also growing and hence when individual families will have children, they will see more ways of income through them (Hyat, 2010). So it is a vicious circle solution to which is quite complex and long-term instead of short term.

(b) Stakeholders

Children of Pakistan who are in the child labor industry and their lives, future, career and health are at stake with child labor depending upon the nature of work they do. Government of Pakistan and sub-departments such as federal ministry of labor and provincial labor and manpower departments are straight-forward stakeholders to the problem. International Labor Organization (ILO) which is assumed to be world's savior from child labor is also an important stakeholder because world sees towards this organization for all problems related to child labor. And more explicitly the ILO's program on elimination on child labor (IPEC) is also a stakeholder because the organization through this program works with the Pakistan government to eliminate the problem ("National Legislation," 2009). Other NGOs (non government organizations) working in the country who receive funds from all over the world to work on the problem may also have the share in stake. The companies, corporations and businesses that employ child labor are also important stakeholders to the problem.

(c) Alternates

As described earlier, in the context of an underdeveloped and poor country like Pakistan, the condition of child labor can not be controlled by just banning child labor because then it may have other adverse effects such as indulging in criminal activities, adding to the socio-economic burdens, etc. There is never going to be a one stop solution for this problem. There have to be alternate plans to combat all other symptoms and issues. For example, organizations such as ILO and UNICEF that thrive against child labor should also push the Pakistani governments and institutes to work on the education of children because that is the only firm step towards the abolishment of child labor in the country. But that will also not work alone (getting more wicked here). The economic conditions of poor families have to be supported and anchored with financial support. It is not surprising that the children in a country like Pakistan may not have good opportunities at their disposal like the children in developed and western countries and the world needs to be sympathetic to them in this regard.

(d) Decisions: Circumstantial Analysis

As I mentioned earlier, stopping child labor in Pakistan can be positive and negative at the same time. If these children are withdrawn from labor then they will have nothing to

do because most of them would have reached the ages 13-14 who can not go to school after that and probably will not get any benefit from the government too. Children who are younger i.e. 5-10 years old can still go to school after being withdrawn. However government of Pakistan needs to take confident steps to support them and I believe that the world would be willing to help them here too. Some reflections on the decisions taken in this regard are discussed in this part.

Scenario I

Regarding international pressure or from external stakeholders, US government passed an amendment to defense bill that bans imports on goods produced by children (partially or wholly) from Pakistan (MacFadedde, 2009). As described earlier, external stakeholders can take indirect decisions for child labor and it is an example of that and a welcomed decision. Pakistan was a key supplier of footballs in world cup events to FIFA but because of child labor in the country, FIFA banned to buy footballs from Pakistan in 2006 (Arshad, n.d.). This decision also shows how influences can be made on the country. Sialkot chamber of commerce banned any kind of child labor from the soccer industry following the pressures. It is expected that carpet manufacturers and exporters unions will also follow the suit (Iqbal, 2009). It is stated "They are contributing financially to the program for elimination of child labor and rehabilitation of children through informal education and training. In addition, Employers Federation of Pakistan, Site Association, Karachi and Skill Development Councils are also very active."(Iqbal, 2009).

Scenario II

Secondly, a national NGO, child care foundation, have been established which is responsible for monitoring the elimination, rehabilitation and prevention of child labor in exportable items (11). Although it is a good step, yet it should not only be in the exportable items but in every sect of life and specifically domestic child labor.

Scenario III

Finally, as far as the government actions with respect to public policy and public administration are concerned, Pakistani government is developing child welfare foundations and funds to support the children in labor financially and bring them back to the civilized mainstream (Iqbal, 2009). Pakistan bait-ul-maal has established three dozen centers across the country for elimination of child labor (Iqbal, 2009).

II. Ethical Theories and Child Labor

a) Foundational Construct of Ethical Theories

Some ethical theories are explained in this part of the paper that may reflect their importance on child labor (discussed later in the part).

Consequential Theories

Consequential theories are key concepts in normative ethics that deal with the morality of actions based on their right or wrong consequences. If an action gets a positive consequence for the population then the action must be adapted (Login, 2008). There are further concepts in consequential theories that are utilitarianism, altruism and egoism. Utilitarianism suggests that an action is morally right if it brings positive and right results for everyone (Login, 2008). The altruism theory suggests that an action is morally correct if it benefits everyone except the one performing the action (Login, 2008). Egoism theory suggests that action is right if it brings good results only to the person or party performing the actions (Login, 2008). So we have to analyze situations and actions based on their results according to the consequential approach to ethics.

Deontological Theories

Deontological theory or the duty theory suggests that an action or decision is right if it conforms to the duties of the person/group performing the action or making the decision (MacFadden, 1998). So the focus should be on developing the duties and codes of conduct for the bodies so that their actions are inherently and morally right without analyzing the consequences further (MacFadden, 1998). On the other hand, if the action is not morally right but it conforms to the duty codes, then the action has to be taken.

Cultural and Social Relativism

Some ethical theories can be based on the culture and society in which they are applied. This means that cultural and social norms can influence the theories ("Cultural relativism," n.d.). This raises a need to understand the culture and society and develop the code of ethics that do not contradict the customs in that culture. For instance, child labor was part of a culture in America a couple of centuries ago which changed gradually and then transformed into law. It is best stated as "Cultural relativism does not lead to a universal sense of "right" conduct. What is "right" is governed by the national culture to which the decision maker belongs. As business becomes more international, conflictive cultural norms and laws become problematic in trying to act "ethically" ("Cultural relativism," n.d.).

Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics

Responsibility of the corporate sector is not much different than of the governments and other stakeholders. There are two types of companies/corporations operating in a country i.e. domestic companies and multinationals. Corporate social responsibility refers to the concept of taking care of social and ethical norms while doing business and child labor is and should be a key concern for both domestic and multinationals (Kolk&Tuldar, 2004). Companies should develop business codes in which child labor should be prohibited not only within the company but also with its partners

(Kolk&Tuldar, 2002). For example, if a company comes to know that its suppliers employ child labor, it should stop working with that supplier (Kolk&Tuldar, 2002). Governments can also force regulations and ethics on companies to adapt to them and strive to eliminate child labor.

b) Child Labor and Ethical Theories

This part of the paper depicts the relationships and applications of ethical theories with/on child labor i.e. the problem under consideration.

Child Labor and Utilitarianism

According to utilitarianism, child labor is a morally wrong action/concept, because it only brings negative consequences to the masses/objects/victims i.e. children in this case. Child labor destroys the lives of children because they can potentially do much better if they are given proper education and opportunities for the same. It also affects the physical and mental health of children depending on the circumstances and industries in which they work. In short, child labor affects not only children's present but also could-be bright future. It is this theory that has developed global recognition of child-labor damages and a buildup of pressure on the government of Pakistan and in return the government has taken good steps to show early signs of following the suit. Results of which would be better if not best i.e. children will not work and government will pay and work for their welfare.

Child Labor and Altruism

Although the industries and businesses benefit from low-cost child labor in countries like Pakistan, yet it cannot be supported on any grounds. According to the theory of altruism, the decision has to be taken against it as it will bring good consequences for the children although it may bring bad financial results for the companies and businesses employing child labor. In the current example of Pakistan, companies relied heavily on child labor for certain industries such as soccer industry as described earlier. But steps have been taken that have eliminated partially if not wholly, child labor from the industry based on the positive consequences of the action on children while the industry suffered in the short run by being deprived of the 'skilled' workforce.

Child Labor and Deontology

Child labor according to the theory of deontology or theory of duty is wrong, both morally and legally because no imaginable code of duty can ever allow child labor because of its morally wrong consequences and it will be the clear negation and violation of natural norms. In Pakistan, several laws and conventions mentioned earlier prohibit the companies (public and private), according to deontology, to employ children in their work forces but still child labor forms huge part of Pakistan's natural work force (reasons are described earlier). In other words, duties for companies and across the

board should be directed in a way that will automatically discourage and eliminate child labor.

Child Labor and Corporate Social Responsibility

The theory and practice of corporate social responsibility is directly related to child labor. In a country like Pakistan where corporations formally and informally employ children in their work force need to develop codes of corporate social responsibility and business ethics because eliminating the problem of child labor can not be done by the government and NGOs alone. The steps have to be taken at grass root level and every building block of society should work on the same thoughts and frameworks.

III. Analysis of Various Issues in the Problem

Child labor in an underdevelopment country like Pakistan is a complex ethical dilemma and a lot more wicked than it apparently seems to be. There are several branches of economics, socio-economics, culture and morality attached to the issue and is beyond the scope of this paper. This part of the report discusses the issues at stake. However, considering the nature and discussion of the problem, I have categorized the issues in three broad categories that are described in this section. The study and analysis of these three categories will help the decision maker to move in the right direction.

Child Labor in Its Essence

Despite of all the associated paradigms and branches mentioned above, child labor in its essence is a serious ethical, moral and social issue which is against the natural laws. When children, who should be in school, go to work at a younger age, they are putting their lives, health and futures at stake and this phenomenon can develop into a culture as we see in the case of Pakistan. I have also discussed earlier in this report that withdrawing children of certain age from child labor may even create more problems for the country because at that age they will not be able to go to school or there might not be appropriate special schools for these late comers in Pakistan. Also the political instability of the country may become their nightmare as they could easily be exploited by the situation. Therefore the issue is very serious, very complex and very challenging in the current situation in Pakistan.

Global Perspective

There is a global phenomenon attached to child labor. If Pakistani businesses employ children to make products and then export to the world and especially western world, the issues will be raised because of the sensitivity of the issue. International governments will try their best to impose limited sanctions on the government to complete their suit against child labor. It is the same case with Pakistan. There have been several occasions in which pressure has been built on Pakistani government to take strong actions against child labor and this pressure has brought some positive

changes in the form of legislations, social and corporate awareness and sense of responsibility on part of the government institutions of Pakistan. For instance, the incidences of US government banning Pakistani imports that have contributions from the children and FIFA banning Pakistani soccer-balls are good examples.

Legislations versus Implementation

Another issue at stake is that although Pakistani government has developed legislations, institutions and codes of conduct for child labor on international and domestic pressure, yet the implementation on ground is not concrete as the evidence shown earlier suggests that nearly 4 million children are still in the work force. The problem with this is the absence of society-wide adaptation of the ethical and moral codes of conduct and specifically in the corporate or business sector that employ children despite of all the pressure and laws.

IV Course of Action

The problem has been defined, explained and related issues and factors have been narrated earlier in this report. This section declares a course of action for the problem on ethical grounds.

Basis

Child labor is wrong ethically, morally and legally, as explained earlier. Several ethical theories can be applied to negate child labor such as utilitarianism, altruism, duty theory and corporate social responsibility. Therefore we can infer that ethics and ethical theories provide a sound basis for actions against child labor. As far as the problem is concerned i.e. child labor in Pakistan is concerned, the solution is not simple and its no one stop shopping at all. The course of action for possible eradication of child labor from the Pakistani society is described in the following steps.

The Course

Pressure Build Up

International players, governments and organizations need to put more pressure on Pakistani government to do more against child labor. Only then it will be possible to do something pragmatically. International business community that does trade with Pakistan in several sectors must stand up and raise their concerns about child labor in Pakistan. A global campaign can be run for the issue. We have seen it happening for so many other countries like China, Africa and India. On the other hand, global NGOs and economic development institutions should work on providing funds for the noble cause if Pakistani government can not. We have seen it happening for many poor countries.

Implement the legislations

All the legislations and conventions are in place for proper action. However, the government of Pakistan has worked on institutions to monitor the progress but they are not the authority to govern and implement these legislations. Keen judicial measurements should be devised to step up the progress against the problem.

Taking Corporate Social Responsibility Along

Corporate social responsibility should be a key tool for Pakistan because if corporations and businesses understand their responsibility, it will be much easier for the government to do a better job to eliminate child labor. Education plan, formal or informal, for business owners, multinationals and private companies should be devised and executed immediately.

Regular Audit and Monitoring

There should be regular audit and monitoring of companies, rural factories and shops to detect and eliminate child labor. This can be done by domestic setups or by inviting foreign watch-dogs to do the job. This will build an immense pressure on the employers of children and will make them abandon this unethical habit.

Support to withdrawn children

There should be a mechanism of adapting the schools and welfare programs by domestic and international organizations that would support the children withdrawn from child labor in Pakistan.

Other side of the story

As described earlier, child labor in Pakistan is not a stand alone issue. It entails poverty, unemployment and population as major shareholding factors. A holistic approach needs to be initiated in order to curb the evils of child labor by working on these parameters. Again, there is no short-term solution for the eradication of child labor from Pakistan because of a mesh of complexities associated with it but they have to start from somewhere and it is the right place to begin with!