Panel on Social norms governing child labor and trafficking

Key Points for the Consultation organized by NIRDPR and UNICEF Hyderabad on Social Norms Enabled Transformation

12 – 13 May 2016, Hotel Mercure, Hyderabad

Basavaraju R
Executive Director, Grassroots Research And Advocacy Movement, Mysuru
basavaraju@graam.org.in

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they can grow up in peace." – Kofi Annan

The problem of child labour, as we all know is due to multifaceted reasons. The reasons are pertaining to social, economical, political, behavioural, and more importantly apathetical, and the list goes on. But, according to me it is the problem due to our sheer negligence, lack of committed action and a political will. While the country is busy in thinking about technological and economical advancement, when we are ready to lend our PSLV to other countries, what else can be the reason other than apathy that has made this inhuman practice to be the discussion point in a forums like this? Unfortunately we are failing to understand child labour as a development problem. It is not a problem of the children, not even about their future, but it is about the future of the country, the human capital that we are proud of claiming as ‘demographic dividend’ in the international platforms.

While pointing my finger about the systemic and political reasons, I will have to accept the unfortunate social (ub) norms that is perpetually watering to keep the issue green. As a person from the grassroots organization, I think I should share some of my experiences and confusion whether it is social or economical norm.

Before that let us take stock of some statistics related to our performance in eliminating child labour system

- As per the 2013 Findings on the Worst form of Child Labor Report released on the 07th October 2014 by Department of Labour of the United States of America, India has just made a moderate advancement in an effort to eliminate worst forms of child labour. India is the nation having highest number of children in the world. 17% of the world’s children are in India, i.e. every sixth child of the world belongs to India.
- Data from the Government’s 2009–2010 National Sample Survey indicate that four-fifths of child workers reside in rural areas. Children who belong to scheduled castes or tribes are also more likely than other children to be engaged in child labor. Children engage in the manufacturing of goods, many in the informal economy and increasingly in home-based production.
- As per the World Child Labour report released in 2010 at Hague, the progress the India in eradication of child labour between 2004 and 2008 is just 03%. Although there is a decrease about 10% in the age group of 05 to 14, there is an increase of 20% in the age group of 15 to 17.

basavaraju@graam.org.in
Some of the reasons for child labour are:

i. Lack of uniform definition, both in defining children as well as child labour (Siddiqi and Patrinos, n.d.).

ii. Traditionally, poverty is thought to be the sole cause of child labor, Rena (2009). There are many other causes besides poverty alone. Parental pressures also lead many children to work (Siddiqi and Patrinos) to counter income fluctuations (Grootaert and Patrinos, 1999). There are many ‘traditional’ factors, which prevent children from entering school and lead to child labor such as gender, social class separation, child specialization. There is also rapid rural-to-urban migration which has also been a causal factor for child labor in the recent days.

iii. Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act is “silent” on children working in the agricultural sector and does not regulate instances if children are attached to their working parents.

iv. Even if children have access to school, there is no guarantee that it will be responsive to their needs and would be able to accommodate them in proper sense.

Social Norms or Social Apathy?

“A social norm is the accepted behavior that an individual is expected to conform to in a particular group, community, or culture. These norms often serve a useful purpose and create the foundation of correct behaviors”. But, the norms we are discussing here are creating an foundation for incorrect behaviour / practice.

Some of the Social Norms that affects rights of the children causing child labour and trafficking:

- Case of a King of bird Village in Mysore district
- Girl children should not go to the school after attaining puberty – A case of Chamarajanagar
- Case of children belong to minority community in urban area
- Myth of nimble finger and tender age
- The practice of Devadasi
- First girl child to the god

Other Social / Economical Reasons:

- Passive acceptance by the public:
- Cultural practice and accepted norm (home based/handy crafts/artisans:
- Children can go back to school later once they’ earned a bit of money
- Child labour is necessary otherwise children are going to survive extreme poverty.
- Worked as a child – child labour doesn’t harm.
- The work that child labourers do isn’t very hard so it’s okay:
Suggested programmatic interventions to change or promote the norm/s and system:

- Need to shift the approach from IEC to SBCC to create awareness in the community affected by child labour
- Address the social norms and attitudes of the people. **Ensure 4 As: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adoptability to children out of work and in school**
- Effective political mobilisation and systemic action to address the social norms that accept child labour. Stringent enforcement of the legislation and rule of law.
- Child centric approach to family centric approach in the interventions planned by Govt and CSOs
- Popularise the ethical consumerism: You are buying things that are made ethically by companies that act ethically (Child labour free product/service). Industries to ensure no child labour in their entire supply chain.
- Declaring child labour and child exploitation as national shame and strengthen the child labour law
- Accept uniform definition of children instead of giving scope for confusion amongst enforcement agencies
- Convergence of child protection schemes and key agencies (DCPU / NCLP / SCLP / JJB / CWC) in a district
- Ensuring Child Budget Monitoring Unit at the state level to ensure proper and complete utilization of the budget allotted