

Newsletter

WNCB and Child Rights &
Business Principles

RISING UNDERAGE MARRIAGES
COVID-19 takes its toll on the girl child

SCOPING STUDY ON
Work: No Child's Business



Editor's Message

Friends

The WNCB action pledge for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (IYECL) is:

"Through coordinated action, we empower communities to improve their livelihoods, and urge governments and companies to ensure fair supply chains".

A systematic scoping study on 'Alternative Livelihoods' brings forth immense possibilities towards working with communities, especially farm-based livelihoods in Bihar. Dr Arpita Mukherjee presents the summary of this study done by ICCo (In-country lead of WNCB Alliance in India) in this issue. The premise that safe, decent, durable and sustainable livelihoods for the communities (caregivers or parents) shall ensure that children are not pulled out of schools once enrolled is what the alliance is going to act upon the whole of this year. Of course, infrastructure and quality of education are equally important factors in keeping the child in school. Unfortunately, India's unprecedented reverse migration to the villages amidst COVID-19 has thrown newer and arduous challenges on all fronts- livelihoods, education, and well being of children; the child labour is further at risk.

Senior Journalist, Preeti Mehra, in the featured essay of this edition, describes with facts and figures how COVID-19 has "widened the inequity gap for marginalized households and given rise to large scale child labour and early marriages of children". An indefinite closure of schools has meant the closure of mid-day meals too; parents tend to normalize marrying off their adolescent daughters as this would mean not having to worry about 'feeding' and 'protecting' them anymore! But do underage marriages save the children, especially the girl child from labour? As Mehra opines, "(B)ut marriage often fails as a solution...typically, she moves from sharing household chores in her parental home to sexual exploitation, early motherhood, and expectations to serve her husband's entire family". Devoid of schooling, bereft of education, agency and therefore choices coupled with severely disabling eco-system this child bride is also child labour! In the 21st century, this is an extremely sad comment on the overall state of affairs.

RISING UNDERAGE MARRIAGES

COVID-19 takes its toll on the girl child

Preeti Mehra



Pandemic-related reportage of reverse migration and the impact of closed schools on India's child population has sporadically figured in mainstream media. But there are other dimensions to the issue that remain behind the opaque curtain of hunger, poverty, and joblessness among both the urban and rural poor.

The fact that COVID-19 has widened the inequity gap for marginalised households and given rise to large scale child labour and early marriages of girlchildren has not evoked sufficient concern. Nor has the alarming prognosis in a report by Save The Children that "half a million more girls are at risk of child marriage in the pandemic year, and the increase is set to reverse 25 years of progress, which saw child marriage rates decline." Other child-centric organisations have also confirmed this trend by having a few news reports from the ground.

In Solapur town, Maharashtra, child protection

officer Vijay Muttur, narrated a disturbing tale from the lockdown to the media. He told the independent American media organisation, NPR, of how his phone kept on ringing with desperate teenage girls under 18, social activists, village elders, and child-care workers calling in about cases of child marriages being forced upon girls who wanted to continue in school instead. Muttur also said that before the pandemic the cases of

By comparison, authorities halted 116 child marriages in the 12 months between April 2019 and March 2020



child marriage he encountered involved girls who were 16 or 17 years of age, but now he was seeing brides as young as 12.

The local government provided NPR data which showed that officials had stopped as many as 208 underage marriages in five months of the pandemic between April through August 2020. "By comparison, authorities halted 116 child marriages in the 12 months between April 2019 and March 2020," the report stated.

Tracking some ground-level evidence, Puja Marwaha, CEO of Child Rights and You (CRY) warns of children being further pushed into underage matrimony and forced labour as COVID-19 continues to persist. Though there is a scarcity of data from all states, she said that media reports showed that the Indian government had intervened to stop over 5,584 child marriages across the country during the lockdown.

In April last year Karnataka prevented 118 child marriages, Telangana's State Commission for Protection of Child Rights reported 204 cases in three months, Maharashtra reported 80 cases, while Andhra Pradesh said it had prevented 165 child marriages between March 25 and May 11, 2020. "Over 500 cases of child marriage were reported in West Bengal since mid-March last year when the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown

was imposed, where in most cases, underage girls were married off by families who lost their earnings due to the shutdown. Cumulatively in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu 53 cases of child marriages were reported," Marwaha revealed. But official statistics do not reveal the entire picture as a large number of cases go unreported or are not detected.

CRY has done its own intervention in some states. Its internal data suggests a similar trend in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. "In 14 districts of these three states, there have been 61 cases of child marriage reported, while our partner organisations on-ground have been able to prevent 43 of them. As we have experienced, while the local administration and police were busy in COVID duty, our partner NGOs provided community surveillance, especially during the auspicious Akshay Tritiya festival, when traditionally a huge number of child marriage cases happen," she said

But what is the correlation between COVID-19 and a significant increase in underage marriages?

Enquiry into why families are keen to marry off their underage daughters during the current pandemic pointed at specific triggers. The fact that schools have remained shut for many months in a row with online classes-- only accessible to those with a smartphone or a computer-- has driven a large number of young and adolescent girls out of the school system. A majority of them have been redeployed towards household chores and sibling care while their parents leave home in search of daily wages. Others joined the parents to help in executing work orders. Or, they have been married off.

With schools closed and mid-day meals not being provided to children of low-income families in most states, families are also under pressure to reduce the number of mouths to feed. Hence, marrying off a young teenager is often an option considered by parents. The logic is that she has to be married one day, so why not now. Also, since a restricted number of guests are allowed due to the pandemic, expenses would be less, and a quiet marriage would go unnoticed by the authorities.

numbers in India and worldwide were already quite high. It estimated that around 1.5 million underage girls in India and 12 million across the world get married every year. And though India accounted for one in three child marriages globally, it had used a combination of education, awareness, and cash transfer schemes to lead as a nation that was working to reduce underage matrimony.

In the past Indian state governments and the

Many parents have also cited the "security" of the girl child as a reason. Engaged at work all day, they are afraid that their adolescent girl could be a victim of sexual abuse when alone at home. Or else she may be lured into eloping with someone, leaving the family with a scandal to deal with.

But marriage often fails as a solution. Circumstantial evidence points to the fact that all too often underage marriage does not free the girl from child labour. Typically, she moves from sharing household chores in her parental home to sexual exploitation, early motherhood, and expectations to serve her husband's entire family.

Figures put out by the United Nations show that even before the pandemic child marriage



centre has enacted special financial incentive schemes for the girl child in order to improve her survival, reverse the distorted sex ratio in the country and discourage child marriages. A study undertaken in 2010-2011 for the Planning Commission by Dr T. V. Sekher of the International Institute for Population Sciences, concluded "that the promise of cash transfers provided a sense of security and instilled a sense of confidence in families to invest in their girls. Wherever benefits were availed, to a large extent, families ensured birth registration, immunization, school enrolment and delayed age of marriage of their daughters."

Bihar's scheme to provide cycles to young girls so that they could travel independently to school also had good outcomes. A research paper by the International Growth Centre in 2013 showed that besides increasing secondary school enrolment and reducing the gender gap, owning a cycle enhanced the sense of security in girls and

empowered them to carve a new role for themselves despite overpowering patriarchal social norms.

However, the pandemic and other cultural impositions in recent years have in many ways reversed the progress story. Though there have been interventions by administrations and civil society including counselling, follow-ups on high-risk cases and engaging directly with young adolescents and parents, it is clearly not

enough. Sudarshan Suchi, CEO of Save The Children outlines three interventions that have worked for them: "ensuring that the family has access to food, income and social protection; supporting children to continue their learning in a way that is most feasible for them and providing timely access to right information along with a support system if any member of a family is affected by COVID-19."

The one lesson from the pandemic is that there can be no let-up in awareness programmes and welfare schemes for low-income families. Child helplines have to be proactive and child protection officers more vigilant. The government's current Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign must be bolstered. Crucially, the cycle of unemployment, child labour and child marriage needs to be addressed before a substantive change can be affected.



Preeti Mehra is a senior journalist based in New Delhi who writes on development, gender and environmental issues.



SCOPING STUDY ON WORK: NO CHILD'S BUSINESS

A Situation Analysis of Child Labour in India: Rajasthan, Delhi and Bihar & Alternative Livelihood Options

Dr Arpita Mukherjee

The issue of child labour has gained policy traction across the world and its elimination is a priority under the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To support the elimination of child labour by 2025, three alliance partners, namely the Stop Child Labour Coalition, UNICEF Netherlands and Save the Children have designed the programme, 'Work: No Child's Business' (WNCB), in 2019. This programme aims to free children and youth from child labour so that they can enjoy their rights to quality education and future (decent) work. India as one of the partner countries under the programme, concentrates on the natural stone sector in Rajasthan, the garment sector in Delhi NCR and the sending economy in Bihar for more focused interventions.

This scoping study builds upon the existing work and aims to (a) gain insights into the root causes and severity of child labour/labour rights violations in the three identified states (b) examine the access to and quality of schooling and vocational training (c) examine the adoption of due diligence policies and regulations by companies in the supply chain in line with the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and OECD Due Diligence Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct (d) analyse the existing regulations and the gaps in regulation, training and other stakeholder activities and (e) present strategies to address the gaps and improve access to decent work and alternative livelihood options in selected districts in the three identified states.

The study is based on secondary data, information analysis and a survey of 622 stakeholders including guardians/parents of child labour, teachers,



policymakers, labour contractors, representatives from non-government organisations (NGOs), companies and vocational training institutes. The reports use a supply chain-based approach, wherein the presence

of child labour across the supply chain is mapped in the garment and sandstone sector, b) an area-based approach to document the district-specific issues that lead to child labour and assess the efficacy of existing institutions to promote education and vocational training, and availability of alternative livelihood opportunities in the identified districts. Stratified random sampling techniques and face-to-face interviews based on semi-structured questionnaires were used for the collection of data.

Key Findings of the Survey



a Causes of Child Labour:

The survey found that the root causes of child labour are poverty, lack of access to land and assets, and limited upward mobility due to lack of social, educational, and economic opportunities. Child labour is mostly among backward social groups, where parents are engaged in the informal sector with no job security and worker protection

mechanisms. These parents/guardians have low educational attainment, usually receive payments in cash, have no formal written contracts and hail from families where the head of the household is mostly an unskilled or semi-skilled casual labourer. Children have to work in both paid or non-paid jobs to supplement the family income and/or support their parent/guardians at work.

b Regulation and its implementation vary:

While both the central and state governments have introduced laws to eliminate child labour, the implementation varies across states and even districts. Hence, state governments should implement and monitor the regulations and work towards addressing gaps, if any, in partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders.

c Companies should adopt the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, and OECD due diligence guidelines for responsible business conduct:

The survey showed that the companies sourcing from India are wanting with regards to supply chains to ensure sustainable business practices. The companies have to establish full supply chain traceability through the use of technology. Companies and brands have to work with their suppliers and NGOs to address the issue of child labour and ensure decent work with regular payments to the parents/guardians. Contracts should be written down, and wages need to be digitalised. NGOs and companies can support all households to open bank accounts/Jan Dhan accounts. Brands along with their suppliers need to jointly invest in creating systems in factories for better working conditions that promote health, safety and the well-being of workers. Companies need to provide accidental insurance, sick leaves and casual leaves, group health insurance, etc. NGOs can also create awareness amongst workers by developing training manuals, communication and supporting material on worker's rights and responsibilities, minimum wages, and health & safety standards.

d Schools need to focus on weaker students and reasons for dropout:

While attendance in schools has increased there are still many incidents of students dropping out of school. The reasons for such dropouts must be identified and addressed. Demand-side factors such as the inability of children to cope with school education, uninteresting school pedagogy and inability to balance work and education have emerged as predominant reasons for children to drop out in states such as Delhi and Rajasthan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools are closed, and online teaching has increased the digital divide for poor children and surged the dropout rates. Further, academically weak children need support to continue their education. Targets must be set to ensure that children below the age of 18 years (or until Class 12) must have formal education.

e Need for customised vocational training programmes:

There is a need for vocational training and skill development for children, especially for those who are above the age of 15 years and have dropped out of school, which is missing at

present. The survey found that the eligibility requirements of existing training courses do not match with the education, ability to pay and/or the age group of 15-18 years. There should be targeted skilling programmes for this group to enable them to transit to decent work. There is a need for funds for training programmes given that the ability to pay the trainees is limited.

f Link skills with job requirements:

It is important to link skill sets with employer's requirements by developing special bridge courses and training packages. The survey found that no vocational training institute had a placement guarantee, and even when students were placed, the level of income was low, or the job opportunity was not available locally. Strategic partnerships can be built with academic institutions to improve the curriculum and training courses, identify and tap into existing opportunities for career advancement and mentorship. Companies can sign a memorandum of understanding (MoUs) with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to provide job opportunities for students enrolled in specified courses in the vocational training institutes. There can be a digital platform wherein companies, which need skills, can be on board along with training organisations, who are offering training in that area. It will help companies to directly employ the trainees who are looking for a job. Further, there is a need to 'engender' technical courses. For those workers whose jobs have been impacted by the pandemic, e-skilling initiatives can be undertaken. In some cases (for example, in the sandstone sector), skilling within the occupation can help to increase income. Thus, the focus should be to move semi-skilled/unskilled workers into the category of skilled workers.

This study has proposed various alternative livelihoods option at the district level for individuals with different skill levels and aspirations. The study has also identified the need for entrepreneurship training programmes at the village/district level. The formation of cooperatives and farmer producers' organisations can help to increase income. Innovative programmes like eco-tourism in villages and cottage industries can also help to increase income. These can be linked with existing government policies like "district as export hubs". The government needs to scale up incubation and acceleration support programmes for the development of business skills, mentorship support, support for brand building and access to market opportunities. There is also a need for financial inclusion of small and medium-sized businesses.

Dr. Arpita Mukherjee is a Professor at ICRIER. She has over 25 years of experience in policy-oriented research, working closely with the government in India and policymakers in the European Commission, US, ASEAN and in East Asian countries. Dr Mukherjee holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Portsmouth, UK.



WNCB and Child Rights & Business Principles

Pranjal Saxena



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n internet search may explain the concept of 'Child Labour' quite succinctly but, barely covers enough active ground on Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate child labour while preserving the Child Rights and Business Principles.

At ICCSPL, periodical discussions to create safe, creative and enabling spaces for strategically effective resolution has led to initiating meaningful discussions with brands and their manufacturers.

Emphasis is being laid on the requirement to build local capacity, by training people on the ground (in communities, informal levels, local actors) in the factories and within brands at the same time avoiding rigorous labour of those classes, esp. involving children.

Due to COVID-19's implications, the overall stress on the socio-economic classes at large has caused the lower strata to be naturally and forcefully willing to take up labour of all kinds - which also, in turn, involves the children as earning members. Reverse migration of workers during last year's lockdown has resulted in deeper voids of both skilled and unskilled masses; therefore, weakening norms and practices that avoid the supply chain's child labour restrictions since monitoring

has become difficult. In turn, it has also caused a challenging environment for positive worker engagement.

Similarly, the unorganised sector (homeworkers, illegal factories, etc.) is mostly where child labour exists. Sector social protection of these unorganised groups is certainly a solution that could help in eliminating child

labour. Hence, we need to bring the local businesses on the table as well so that we could look at holistic solutions (such as mapping where child labour exists, what drives child labour in the informal sector, incentivising responsible behaviour, etc.).

This can further be achieved by supporting the manufacturers through their parent brands in capacities of working capital and additional resources to tackle the seclusion of child labour.

On average, there is 30 to 40 per cent improvement potential inside every factory so it needs to be seen how can that be channelized to reduce the burden on workers livelihood. Such maximisation at the local levels can lead to the immense expansion of local labour and even growth of local markets. Needless to mention, the most important tool arises from an ever-increasing necessity to encourage social awareness and the negative impact of child labour on our society. It does indeed take a society to raise and protect a child.

We need to look at child labour not in isolation but along with other human rights as well. Only then we can enable sustainable change on the ground.

After all, as rightly said, "Children are everybody's business!"

“Children are everybody's business!”

Striving to reverse the ravages of COVID-19

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t the onset of 2021-the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (IYECL), the world was battling to thrive in a new normal ascribed by the ravaging times of COVID-19. The WNCB India alliance, too, strived to accelerate the pace of progress reversed by the pandemic and arduously resumed its fight towards eliminating child labour.

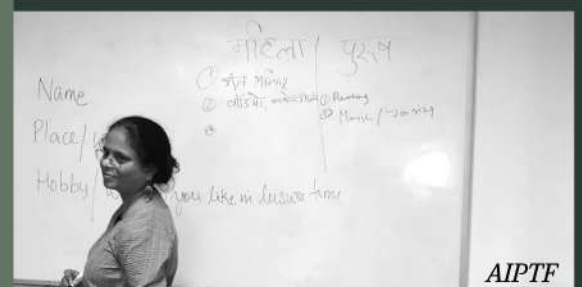
The first quarter of the year kickstarted with the observance of three important days carrying paramount weight at the international and national fronts in the domain of development-- National Girl Child Day (January 24), The International Day

of Education (January 25), and The International Women's Day (March 8). WNCB, along with its partners, commemorated the days with commitment and hope while ascertaining a safe space for the children and the community at large.

Marking National Girl Child Day with a hint of innovation

In the spirit of celebrating the National Girl Child Day with a hint of innovation, the WNCB partner **Manjari** in Rajasthan inaugurated the WNCB Cricket Tournament 2021 in Budhpura. Organized by the youth clubs, the tournament aimed at providing an opportunity to the young talent of the mining community through sports. It was, indeed, a level-playing-field initiative that witnessed the participation of girls in sports, breaking the shackles of gender stereotypes and gender bias.

With a clear emphasis on addressing unfitting issues, **Fakirana Sisters Society (FSS)** brought to light the pivotal issue of Child Marriage by factually underlining that "Girls often get married



because of the pressure from parents, relatives, and due to poverty coupled with lack of opportunities and alternatives. Additionally, with the advent of COVID-19, 10 million more girls were put at risk of becoming child brides". In the light of the same, they renounced their support to make young girls and women the torch-bearers of change for themselves and raised awareness against the growing menace of child marriage and child labour.

Advocating the rights of the girl child, **Save The Children** launched an inspiring campaign encouraging the viewers towards taking a pledge to **#AllyUpForHer**. Using a thought-provoking video to address an important question, "What happens when each one of us takes a stand for the sake of girls and their safety", SAVE attempted to build a society that upholds the virtues of fairness and equality, while empowering the girl child and instilling a sense of responsibility for creating change in one and all.

Further, **ICCo** India took a creative spin on the eventful quarter and conducted the second and

the third 'Capacity Building and Digital Inclusion Workshop' for building aspirations of the children and enabling them to express their world of thoughts through the medium of photography and videography.

Spotlighting the International Day of Education

"Schools and teachers play a critical role in promoting gender equality. It is only when education challenges the structures that maintain gender inequality at the

learning spaces, that the transformative potential of education is harnessed." In view of the same, the **All India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF)**, trained 32 Union leaders and teachers to identify and address gender stereotypes in and through education. The premise of the training was based on the observation that the lack of awareness among teachers, the inadequacy of the teachers' training and education, and the teaching material reinforcing stereotypes used in classrooms inhibits students - particularly girls - from fully participating in the classroom which further affects their academic performance and acts as critical determinants in making them a school-going student or a dropout.

Amplifying the importance of education and the potential it holds in changing the lives of the young minds in Kalyanpur village Muzaffarpur district, WNCB partner **Navjagriti** conducted a training on life skills for adolescent girls and boys. With the closing of schools drawing children back into the vicious circle of child labor and poverty,





ICCo



Children will no longer use brooms



Yes! I want to study and become successful!

the training was a tool of encouragement to motivate them to return to the ideal place where they truly belong--schools.

Supply-chain sustainability

Seeping further into the furrows of gender discrimination, WNCB partner **ARAVALI** together with ARISA, Manjari, SFNS, Makrana Marble Workers Union, and Daang Vikas Sansthan, developed a new framework to identify and understand workplace discrimination in the natural stone supply chain. The framework was designed to enable the assessors and the assesses to design and bring their own Corrective Action Plan (CAP) based on the results of the internal assessment to eliminate any potential workplace discrimination.

Upholding the ideals of securing child rights and ensuring responsible business, **ICCo India** in collaboration with Global Compact Network - India brought various businesses, brands, and companies together on a common platform as a clarion to step up the due diligence of the garment supply chain in the light of child labour, both at the level of brands and manufacturers, urging them to conduct a systematic review and initiate a social dialogue

around the same.

Inspiring the International Women's Day

To celebrate International Women's Day with unmatched zeal and zest, the WNCB partners conducted a plethora of activities, both virtually and on the ground, uplifting the flag of equality one notch higher this time. WNCB partner, **MV Foundation** in Bihar organized rallies, public meetings and debates to sensitize people on matters of gender equity, women rights, education, gender discrimination,

etc., and witnessed participation from all social strata including elected representatives, education officers, officials from the police department, teachers, students, civil society representatives, ASHA workers and Anganwadi teachers. **Navjagriti** and **Fakirana Sisters Society** organized 'Mahila Mela She Pradarshini' for the women of the blocks. **ICCo** took to the digital space and launched a digital campaign **#CatalystForChange** showcasing the power and strength that rested with women in changing the narrative around gender and society through the medium of 3 videos--scripted, performed and shot by young changemakers--the children. Through the channels of creativity in the form of nukkad natak and newsrooms, the videos raised awareness about the growing menace of child marriage, child labour and girl child education, highlighting the role of women and girls as torch-bearers of change, lifting their spirits for seeking gender equality and inspiring them to express their thoughts for creating a gender-equal world for one and all.



Month of Solidarity and Networking

May brings focus on those in labour work. The pandemic has led to job loss and wage cuts of the large workforce and migrants in particular. Their impoverishment has impacted the nutrition and education of children and needs to be rectified.

About the Alliance:

Work: No Child's Business aims to contribute towards the concentrated global efforts in ending all forms of child labour by 2025. The WNCB alliance, envisions a world where children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work, thereby contributing to SDG 8.7 in six countries- Côte d'Ivoire, Jordan, Mali, Uganda, Viet Nam, and India.

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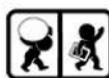
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