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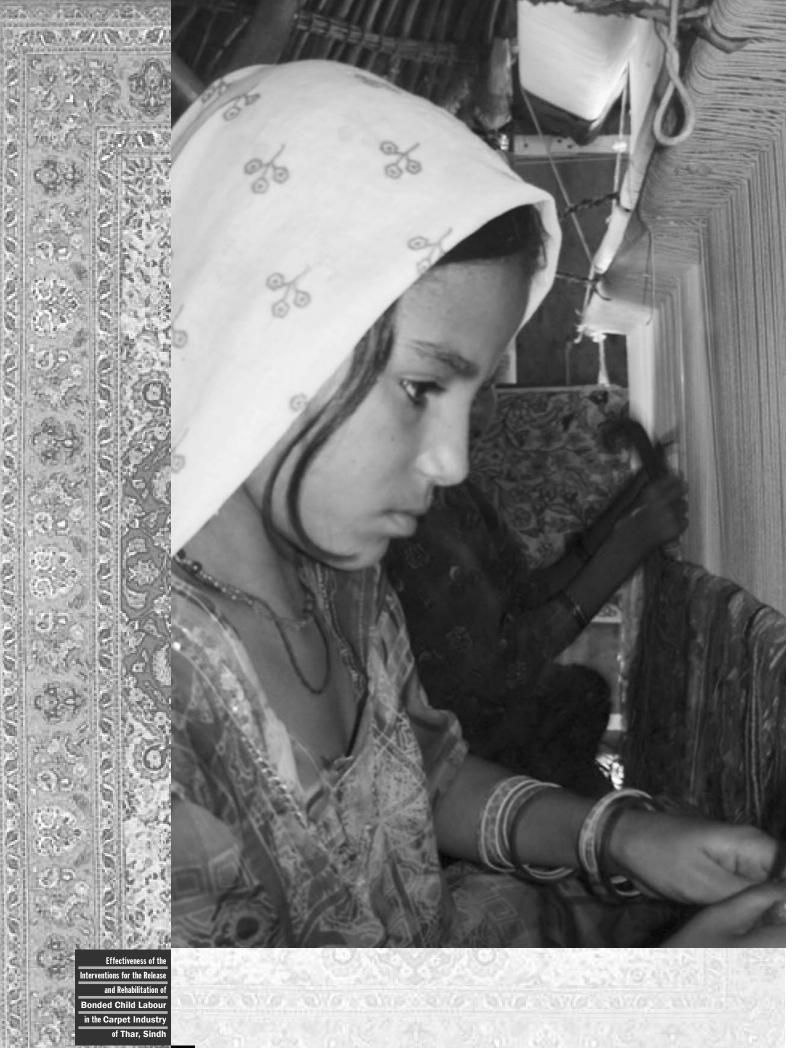
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Bonded Child Labour in the Carpet Industry of Thar, Sindh

Preface

A number of studies on the issue of bonded labour have been conducted in Pakistan as well as in other South Asian countries in the past several years. These studies have confirmed the widespread prevalence of bonded and forced labour including bonded child labour in India, Pakistan and Nepal.

Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and Center for Education and Communication (CEC), Delhi in collaboration with Anti-Slavery International (ASI), UK, initiated a four-year action research programme to assess the effectiveness of intervention in bonded labour.

The research project, which ended on 31st December 2007, included one-year pilot phase and three years action research. It was a South Asian project involving three countries and provided opportunity to researchers from these countries to meet annually on the occasion of regional consultation and also interact through electronic communication.

In Pakistan, PILER conducted three studies analyzing bonded labour interventions in brick kiln, agriculture and carpet sectors. Advocacy and lobbying aimed at ending bonded labour has been integral part of the project through out these years.

This study focuses on Thardeep Rural Development Programme's (TRDP) intervention to release and rehabilitate children in carpet weaving looms in district Tharparkar.

PILER acknowledges the positive response of TRDP in opening up its project for analysis.

We also acknowledge the financial and technical support of Novib and Trocaire through Anti Slavery International in conducting and publishing this study.

We hope that this document provides some useful insights for all those who work on the issue of bonded labour and want to bring an end to this form of extreme exploitation of labour.

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Effectiveness of the Interventions for the Release and Rehabilitation of Bonded Child Labour in the Carpet Industry

of Thar, Sindh

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1. The Study

1.1 Introduction

This study was a part of the Anti-Slavery International (ASI) four-year regional project undertaken in India, Nepal and Pakistan to analyze the effectiveness of the past and current interventions for the release and rehabilitation of bonded labour in the three countries and to propose actions for preventing bonded labour through local, national and regional collaboration.

The project was implemented through the joint collaboration of General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) Nepal, Center for Education and Communication (CEC) India, and Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER). The project began in January 2004 and wound up in December 2007.

A component of the Pakistan project was to evaluate the interventions to eliminate bonded child labour in carpet industry in Thar District, Sindh. The study focused on, and evaluated the Thardeep Rural Development Project's (TRDP's) interventions made through its Child Rights Protection Project (CRPP) to address the issue of bonded child labour in the carpet industry in the area.

1.2 Objectives

The study aimed to assess the extent of bonded child labour in the carpet industry of Thar and evaluate socio-economic conditions of the families who are pushed in to bonded child labour. The main objective was to review the impact of interventions undertaken by the TRDP to eliminate bonded child labour in the district. The study developed recommendations to eliminate child labour in the carpet industry of Thar district.

1.3 Methodology

- Literature review of official reports, research/project documents and media reports on child labour and bonded child labour provided a context.
- TRDP field units at Mithi, Diplo and Chachari were visited.
- The review of TRDP's programme documents (baseline surveys, project reports, evaluations) and interviews with key project personnel provided the background (see list in Annexure) of the TRDP interventions in bonded child labour.
- In-depth, one-to-one qualitative interviews with child workers, parents, contractors and businessmen were carried out in the towns and surrounding

villages of the three TRDP field units at Mithi, Diplo and Chachro. Five child workers and their parents were interviewed separately in each field unit. A total of 15 child workers, 15 parents and 8 contractors were interviewed. The interviews, facilitated by the TRDP's project personnel, were used as major tool to access first-hand information and insights into the impact of the TRDP's interventions.

Interviews with a select number of stakeholders-local government officials, politicians, educationists, activists- well-versed with the issues in the district were also conducted.



2. Child Labour in Pakistan: Overview

2.1 Definition of Child

There is no standard definition of a child in Pakistan. The Majority Act 1875 defines child as a person who is under 18 years of age, while national labour laws fix the minimum age of employment at 14 years. The voting age is 18 years and the national identity card is also issued at this age. Family laws stipulate 16 years as age of marriage for a girl and 18 years for a boy. Under Sharia, maturity is attained on reaching puberty, and this definition applies in criminal matters covered under the Hudood Ordinance 1979. The Juvenile Justice System Ordinance 2000 sets the definition of a child at 18 years of age, raising it from 15 and 16 years in the provincial laws. However, the age of criminal responsibility remains seven years.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Minimum Age Convention has set 15 years as minimum age for employment. It allows light work at 13 years and bans hazardous work until 18. Only 49 countries have ratified the Convention. Pakistan ratified this Convention on 7 July 2006.

2.2 Magnitude of Child Labour

Child labour has shown an increasing trend in Pakistan in the last decade. The total number of children aged 10-14 years engaged in productive activities has risen from 2.12 million in 1996-97 to 3.06 million in 2005-06¹. Labour force participation rate in the age group 10-14 has also jumped during this period from 12.8 percent to 15.2 percent². The increase in child labour is linked to informalisation and the expanding low-paid, unprotected, home-based work that does not generate decent income and compel adults to supplement the household income through child labour. Another key factor related to child labour is lack of schooling. Over 6.4 million children are reported to be out of school in Pakistan³.

According to an official estimate, the North West Frontier Province had one million child workers in 2006. In a study undertaken in late 2005 by the Society for Empowering Human Resource in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden, child labour was found in Balochistan coal mines. In another survey about 10,000 children were found working in automobile garages in Faisalabad⁴. The base line surveys conducted in 2003 under the ILO-IPEC Time-bound Programme to eliminate child labour in hazardous industries estimated that around 5,000 children were engaged in Kasur tanneries, 9,500 were labouring in the glass bangle units in Hyderabad, 5000 were making surgical instruments in Sialkot and 500 children were working in the coal mines of Chirat and Chakwal.

The first National Survey of Child Labor was conducted in 1996 by the Federal Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with ILO and it revealed that 8.3 per cent, or 3.3 million, children are economically active. Child labour was found to be more prevalent in rural areas: 8 times greater than in urban areas. Of these working children 73 per cent were boys and 27 per cent girls. Despite demands from human rights groups, researchers and academicians, the second national survey to determine the current extent of child labour has not been undertaken as yet.

In January 2002, ILO-IPEC announced to undertake a new national survey in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and the Federal Burearu of Statistics. Till todate, the survey has not materialized.

2.3 Labour in Carpet Industry

The workforce that helped generated US\$-199.8 million through exports in 2005-066-despite the slump in industry- comprises most vulnerable, marginalized and dispersed population working at homes/weaving centers or sheds in villages in rural areas, low-income communities in urban centers in the provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan and in refugee settlements in the North West Frontier Province. The weavers are land-less people with little or no education and no opportunity or access to any other skills. Majority of the weavers took to weaving as the only option for livelihood when driven to extreme circumstances, as with sections of population in Thar District that suffered loss of cattle in the recurring droughts and Afghan migrants in NWFP (after political upheavals in Afghanistan).



Bonded Child Labour in the Carpet Industry of Thar, Sindh

2.4 Child Labour in Carpet Industry

The rapid assessment study undertaken by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with ILO in 2004 on the bonded labour in carpet industry revealed that 40 per cent of the workforce engaged in carpet weaving were children under 15 years of age. An earlier survey of child labour in carpet weaving in Punjab province had indicated 80 per cent of the workforce as children under 15.7 A study on health and nutritional status of working children in carpet weaving industry, brick kilns and garages indicated high incidence of hands and fingertips injuries among child weavers.8 The National child Labour Survey 1996 had indicated that the carpet weaving had the highest incident of illness and injuries for children.

A child labour survey conducted in 2001 in the carpet industry in Punjab estimated 107,065 child weavers active in the carpet industry in the Punjab. Another study on occupational safety and health in the carpet industry was conducted by the Center for the Improvement of Working Conditions & Environment, Punjab Labour Department.

The baseline survey on child labour in the carpet industry in Sindh carried out by the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS), indicated over 25,752 carpet weaving households in the Sindh province with an estimated 33,735 carpet weaving children (71 per cent below 14 years of age and 29 per cent between 14-18 years of age).

Phase I of the ILO-ILPEC Carpet Project is continuing in 2007. The project is encouraging contactors/weavers to adopt measures to improve working conditions for the weavers and replace the traditional looms with newly developed ergonomic looms.¹⁰

2.5 Bonded Child Labour

Children under bondage are defined as children working against debt taken by their family members, or working under social obligation (eg caste, ethnic or religious practices etc.) without their consent and under conditions that restrain their freedom, increase their vulnerability to physical and other forms of abuse, and deprive them of their basic rights.

The bonded labour system consists of giving advances or peshgi to a person. Till the advance remains outstanding, the worker is bound to the creditor/employer. In case of sickness or death, the family of the bonded individual is responsible for the debt. The debt often passes down from generation to generation. In the case of children, the peshgi is paid to a parent or guardian, who then provides the child to pay off the debt through labour. In many cases, bonded children are delivered—usually by the parents or the guardians of the child—in repayment of a loan or other favours given in advance, real or imaginary.

2.6 Child Labour and National Legislation

Article 11 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan forbids slavery and states that no law shall permit or facilitate its introduction into Pakistan in any form. Article 11 (2) prohibits all forms of forced labour and traffic in human beings. Article 11 (3) prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment. Also, Article 37 stipulates that it is the responsibility of the state to "make provision for securing just and human conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in occupations unsuited to their age and sex".

There exist several legislative pieces that prohibit employment of children in different occupations:

The Mines Act 1923 enacted by the British forbade a child below the age of 12 years in mines below ground. The minimum age was raised to 15 years in 1935. The Mines (Amendment) Act 1973 prohibits young persons from working in any part, either below or above ground, of the mines.

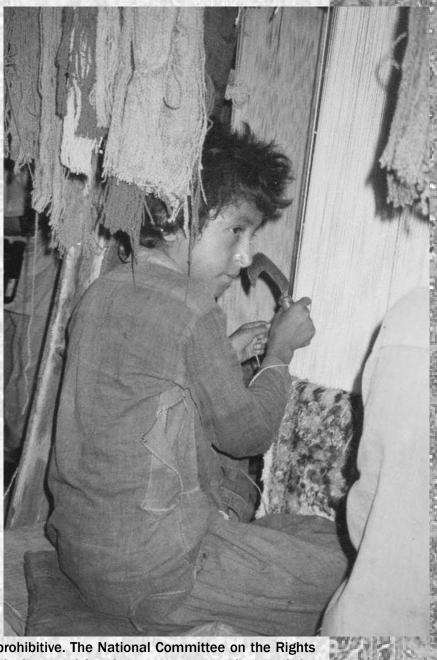
The Factories Act 1934 in its section 50 stipulates that no child below 14 years of age shall be allowed to work in the factory. The Road Transport Workers **Ordinance** 1961 prohibits employment of children below the age of 18 in this sector. Section 20 of the West Pakistan Shops and **Establishments** Ordinance 1969, amended in 1977, prohibits employment of a child under 14 in any establishment listed therein.

The first piece of legislation exclusively formulated on child labour is the Employment of Children Act 1991. The Act is cri-

tiqued as more regulatory than prohibitive. The National Committee on the Rights of the Child was set up under this Act to advise the government and expand the schedule of occupations restricted for child work if and when required. Initially 29 occupations were declared hazardous for children. The list was expanded in December 2006 to 39 occupations. The civil society is advocating to further expand the list, i.e. include child domestic labour in the list of hazardous occupations.

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1992, abolishes the bonded labor system with immediate effect and declares all bonded labour free and discharged from any obligation to render any bonded labor, or any form of forced labor, or payment of debts. The Act prohibits any person from extracting labour under forced conditions from anyone.

The Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance 2002 applies to all children aged less than 18 years and makes punishable the acts of recruiting, buying or selling a person, with or without consent, by use of coercion, abduction, or by giving payment or share for such person's transportation for exploitative entertainment.



2.7 Implementation of National Laws

Enforcement of labour laws in Pakistan is very weak and is hampered by contradictory rules and regulations and increasingly repressive trend in labour legislation. Though labour inspectors are empowered to carry out regular visits to all employment places covered under the Employment of Children Act 1991 to check compliance, the Punjab Industrial Policy 2003 and Labour Inspection Policy 2006 have practically abolished physical inspection. Hence to date, the Act remains essentially unimplemented. Lack of coordination between different administrative and legislative bodies is another reason. A National Committee on the Rights of the Child has been established within the federal government specifically to monitor enforcement and protection issues related to child workers but it does not function as envisaged.

2.8 International Covenants and Conventions Ratified by Pakistan

Pakistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990. The CRC is a comprehensive instrument comprising 54 articles and two optional protocols that cover the full range of human rights of person below the age of 18 years. Pakistan has also signed the CRC Optional Protocols relating to Children in Armed Conflict and Sale of Children, Child Prostitution of Child Pornography. Pakistan has, thus, committed itself to protecting and ensuring children's rights and has agreed to hold itself accountable for this commitment before the international community. Pakistan sent its first CRC report to the UN in 2000. This Convention is the only international human rights treaty that expressly gives NGOs a role in monitoring its implementation under its Article 45a.

Pakistan has ratified the related ILO Conventions. The ILO 1930 Forced Labour Convention (No.29) and the ILO 1957 Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No.105) were ratified after long gaps in 1957 and 1960 respectively and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act was promulgated after more than three decades in 1992. The ILO Minimum Age Convention (No.138) 1973 was ratified after 36 years-in 2006. The ILO 1999 Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No.82) was ratified in 2001.

The ILO conventions and international covenants are not legally binding on the ratifying country but indicate a government's commitment to formulate new laws or bring exiting laws in conformity with the standards spelled out, and to follow the committed reporting and complaint mechanisms. The international standards can only be used to put moral pressure on the government to formulate policies and legislation and implement the same.

2.9 State's Policy, Plans and Mechanisms

National Policy and Plan of Action for Combating Child Labour

(NPPA-CCL) was formulated in 2000 to initiate phased elimination of child labour and eradicate the worst forms of child labour. The NPPA-CCL has been criticized for being centralized, poorly-funded, over ambitious and for achieving little till to date. The Plan was reviewed in 2007 and the report is still due.

Education For All-National Plan of Action 2001-2015

Lack of access to education is linked to poverty and child labour. Provision of universal education has the potential of reducing child labour. The Education for All envisaged education to at least half of the relevant age group, raising the net par-



ticipation rate from existing 25 per cent to 50 per cent 2015 and the literacy rate from 49 per cent to 86 per cent during the period. Facts and figures on the ground, however, indicate that the government would not be able to achieve its target. Unless schooling is made compulsory by national law and conscious measures are taken to improve minimum adult wages, child labour is likely to persist.

National Commission of Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD)

Established in 1980, the NCCWD working under the Ministry of Social Welfare is responsible for implementing the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Pakistan submitted its first report to the UN in 1993. The UN Committee criticized the report for lack of concrete measures to ensure compliance with the CRC and called for standard report by 1996. Pakistan finally submitted the second report in 2003 when an alternative report on the state of Pakistan's children was also submitted by the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC). The third report was so much delayed that the UN advised Pakistan to submit its third and fourth reports as a consolidated report by December 11, 2007, the due date for submission of the fourth report.

The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) initiated the Project on Rehabilitation of Child Labour, aimed at the withdrawal of children from hazardous employment and the development of linkages between community health services and recreational packages.

National Steering Committee on Child Labour

The National Steering Committee on Child Labour was created in 1994 to act as a multi-ministries (social welfare, education, health, planning, finance) and multi-stakeholders' (employers, civil society) forum to plan/review/monitor policies and projects on child labour. Unfortunately few meetings have been held since its inception and the Committee has little to its credit.

2.10 State-ILO Initiatives for Combating Child Labour

The partnership between the Ministry of Labour and the ILO-IPEC began in 1994 focusing at awareness raising and strengthening of institutions. The National Time-Bound Programme was initiated in 2002 in tandem with Education For All. The time-Bound Programme to intervene in the Worst Forms of Child Labour began in 2003 in six sectors-surgical instrument (Sialkot), glass bangles (Hyderabad), rag picking (Rawalpindi), coal mines (Shangla and Chakwal) and deep sea fishing (Gwadar). First, the baseline surveys and occupational health and safety studies in the six sectors were done followed by withdrawal and rehabilitation programme. In 2004 the project was extended for another five years until December 31, 2009.

2.11 Civil Society Interventions

Different citizen sector organizations are engaged with child rights issue in the themes they focused on, i.e. education, health, labour, human rights. Many work in partnership with international agencies, i.e. Save the Children Fund, UNICEF, ILO. The ILO-IPEC projects to address child labour in hazardous occupations are being implemented by some of the local NGOs and support organizations, i.e. Sudhaar, Bunyad, TRDP. Of the few that focus exclusively on child rights, SPARC stands out. Currently under its project on bonded labour in Sanghar, Mithi, Umerkot, Hyderabad and Muzzafargarh, SPARC has facilitated formation of Child Rights Committees in the project districts.



3. The Field

3.1 Tharparkar District: An Overview

Classified as one of the high deprivation districts¹¹, Tharparkar lies in arid zone in Sindh with an estimated one million population spread over four talukas–Mithi, Chachro, Nagarparkar and Diplo. The harsh geography and recurring droughts make sustainable livelihood a difficult option for the people who depend mainly on rainfed subsistence farming and livestock for survival. During dry seasons vulnerable families migrate to irrigated plains in search of livelihood and eke a living either as casual, daily wage workers at the farms, brick kilns or construction sites.



An estimated 75 per cent of the rural population survives barely at the threshold or below poverty line.¹² A majority has no option but to take loans from money lenders on high interest rates and get mired in to the vicious cycle of debt and poverty. Rich in minerals, with large coal fields, the district is poor in infrastructure and educational and health facilities. Hindus, including scheduled castes, comprises 40.58 per cent of the population in the district.¹³ A large proportion of Hindus are scheduled or low caste Menghwars, Kohlis and Bheels. There are various Zaat affiliations among Muslims. Caste-based discrimination is one of the major social issue in the area.

3.2 Carpet Weaving in Thar

Carpet weaving craft was introduced in Tharparker district in the late 1950s by the government to augment meager livelihood options through small enterprises. Carpet weaving was chosen as raw material could be drawn from the family's live-



stock-goat or camel skin. Access to small weaving units was facilitated by the Sindh Small Industries Corporation. The opportunity was instead grabbed by traders, money-lenders and middlemen who took control over the trade, wiping out the small units owned by individual families and replacing them with a largely indebted work force. Today the carpet weavers work at very low wages for wholesale merchants and exporters who provide weavers with raw material and design and sell hand-woven rugs and carpets in national and international market at a high margin of profit.

According to a TRDP baseline survey conducted in 2003, 98 percent of the weavers' households in the area had taken debts of varying amount. In 63 per cent of the cases, the contractor himself gave the loan to the household making the family members more vulnerable to exploitation.

3.3 Thar Rural Development Programme (TRDP): Brief Introduction

TRDP interventions began in 1987 as a Save the Children Fund relief project in response to drought and famine in Tharparkar. Successful relief work was followed by transformation of the project, in 1993, in to a holistic local programme mobilizing the communities for sustainable development. TRDP was registered in 1998 as an autonomous organization. Currently, it is one of major rural support programmes in the country with an outreach in five districts. TRDP has mobilized more than 200,000 community members through facilitating 10,000 grass-roots organizations. Its programmes range from micro credit and enterprise development, community physical infrastructure, natural resource management to education, health and child labour.¹⁵

3.4 TRDP's Interventions through Child Rights Protection Project

The intervention in child labour in the carpet industry was among the earliest initiatives undertaken by TRDP as soon as it started work as a local NGO in 1998. DFID-funded Protecting the Livelihoods of Working Children Project was launched in November 1998 after a baseline survey was completed. The pilot project phase (Nov. 1998-2001) accessed 467 families in 45 villages and brought out 1,107 children out of full time (9-10 hours) work, reduced their working time to 3 hours and got them enrolled in primary schools.¹⁶

TRDP's interventions in bonded child labour adopted a rights-based approach focusing on three crucial factors impacting the lives of child-weavers: community consciousness, livelihood, education and the attitudes of larger society. The tools used by TRDP included social mobilization (to raise awareness and facilitate collective mechanisms), micro credit and marketing support (to enhance the household income), education support (to provide quality education) and advocacy (to garner wider support and replication).

The success of the pilot phase was followed by a five-year Child Rights Protection Project (2003-06). The project aimed to safeguard 4000 children from exploitative, hazardous labour in carpet weaving and facilitate access of 100 per cent children to quality education. The holistic approach included provision of micro credit to the families to facilitate sustainable livelihood, improvement of education facilities and mobilizing the community to monitor child labour.¹⁷ By June 2006, 3,441 children were phased out from full-time carpet weaving and of them 82 per cent were enrolled in schools.¹⁸ The work hours were significantly reduced from more than 8 hours at the start of the project to four hours daily in 2006.



4. Assessment of TRDP Interventions in (Bonded) Child Labour

It is important to note that none of the TRDP official reports, documents and publications on interventions against child labour mentions the word 'bonded'. The documents acknowledge the abusive character of debt the weaver takes from contractor-moneylender and the bondage that occurs thereof, resulting in recurring debts and the vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation of children in the household. However, the child labour in the carpet industry in Thar is not categorized as 'bonded child labour' by TRDP.



There seem to be two reasons for this difference in discourse and perspective. Firstly, the nature of 'bonded' child labour in carpet industry in Thar is different from debt bondage that children suffer in other sectors, particularly in agriculture, brick kilns and mines. A crucial difference is that the majority of children in Thar work inside their own houses. In 2003 survey, 98 per cent of the looms were reported to be installed inside the weaver's house, whether it was traditional conical thatched-room chouphra or semipucca structure. Even if children are 'bonded' to work, they are surrounded by their own kith and kinparents, siblings, cousins-unsupervised by the contractor-moneylender who just come to pick up the finished products compared to children in agricultural fields, brick kilns or mines where they work along with other adult workers and are supervised by generally abusive personnel.

Secondly, it is the difference in strategy to tackle child labour, a issue deeply embedded in the

political economy and geography of the arid zone of Thar. In view of many constraints, the TRDP has opted for a strategy to protect children from exploitative conditions, phasing them out gradually from carpet weaving and inducting them in to school and normal life to the extent possible. Hence, none of the TRDP documents claims to achieve 'elimination or eradication' of child labour. This is based on TRDP's understanding that unless change is initiated at many fronts-social, economic, political-child labour would persist.

Thirdly, it is the peculiar context in which TRDP is situated and operate therein, that compels it to be cautious in its approach. TRDP is located in the district with a high

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percentage of Hindu community which is in minority in Pakistan. Also, the Hindu community itself is grappling with the issue of caste. The contractor-moneylender and trader community is traditionally upper caste while the carpet weavers belong to low or scheduled caste-Bheel, Menghwar. Thus, the TRDP's restrained terminology and discourse.

The present analysis of interventions against child labour was done against the TRDP baseline survey conducted in 2003. According to the TRDP baseline survey, 98 per cent of the carpet weavers' families were indebted. Many families had taken multiple loans and half of them had taken loan for subsistence, that is, to buy food on-day-to day basis because their earnings from carpet weaving were too low. A significant number, 63 per cent, had borrowed from contractors. The debt had compelled many families to put children in to carpet weaving and 47 per cent children were labouring on the looms for an average of around 8 hours daily. A higher number of children, 65 per cent, were not attending school.

Nonetheless, wherever s/he works, child-weaver is denied his/her childhood and rights to schooling, play, and normal social interaction. Occupational hazards of sitting for long hours on the loom impact adversely on child's physical health and emotional well being. The majority of child-weavers was found to be malnourished and complained of general physical weakness in the baseline survey. Hand injury, weak eyesight and body-ache were reported by many.

Also, terms and conditions of the contractor-money lenders are exploitative, the interest rate is higher and documentation of transaction non-existent or often manipulated or forged by the money-lender. At times contractor provide loan in kind, i.e. food grains which can be difficult to convert in to precise cash value.

The PILER assessment of the current situation, based on qualitative, in-depth interviews with select number of 15 child-weavers, 15 parents, 8 carpet business owners, one manage and other stakeholders, is as follows:

4.1 Working Conditions of Child Weavers

Children were being paid Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 on daily wages. Working time ranged from two to eights hours, averaging around five hours. Children had to work initially as apprentice and its duration varies from one month to 20 months, depending on the skills-acquiring ability of the child. During the apprenticeship, the children do not get any remuneration. Mostly the parents collected wages from the contractors on behalf of their children and gave a rupee or two to the child as daily pocket money. Only a few children of advance age were getting the wages directly from contractors and sharing it with parents.

Working area was found to be small, varying between 15 sq. ft. to about 100 sq. ft. In most of cases children were found working in congested area or roughly made *chaunra* with inadequate lighting and ventilation. Safe drinking water was not available in many places and very few work areas had toilet facility.

Only a few children reported being scolded by contractors while at work. Many children said they were often beaten by their elder brothers at work. These were the children who work at home. Physical abuse (by family members) was mostly reported in Chachro and Dilpo. Mithi had least incidences of beating of child workers.

The children reported buying supari or toffees with the pocket money they get from



4.2

their earnings by the parents. Mostly they chew supari and a few children smoke cigarettes or eat pan and gutka. Half of the children interviewed were found fit. The remaining complained of backache and body ache. A few reported weak eyesight and cough. Most of the children reported intake of two meals—breakfast of bread and red chillies or bread with tea at breakfast and bread and vegetables/lentils at supper. Children were generally undernourished, particularly the girls.

4.2 Impact of TRDP Micro-Credit and Marketing Support

Micro credit and marketing support to the indebted weavers' families have played a major role in loosening the grip of contractor-moneylender. TRDP's own assessment in 2006 indicates that now 85 per cent of the households take loans from TRDP instead of contractor-moneylender; 90 per cent of the households now own their own looms and the annual household income has increased more than two-fold. The improvement in economic condition of the household has impacted positively on children.

The present assessment indicates the following:

Families in Debt

The majority of the families visited for this evaluation reported to be in debt. However several have benefited from TRDP interest-free loans to pay off the exploitative loans from contractors money-lenders.

Many indebted families were found to be taking loans from the contractors since the last many years: the period ranged from one year to 19 years in one case. This indicates that several families are indebted with recurring loans for a long time and have not yet been able to repay their debt fully.

Though a TRDP evaluation in 2006 indicates that majority of weavers now take loans from TRDP, and the influence of the contractor-moneylenders has decreased considerably, the present assessment suggests a significant number of families are still taking loans from moneylender-contractor. Many families were found to be availing loans from both-moneylender-contractor and the TRDP.

The minimum loans ranged from Rs. 5,000 to Rs.10,000 and maximum from Rs. 50,000 to Rs.100,000. The current indebtedness of the families varied from Rs.1,000 to Rs.100,000. There were wide variations in the extent of the family indebtedness. The contractors were charging yearly compound interest rate at 10 per cent and bound the families to sell the carpets on pre-contracted (low) prices.

Impact on indebted households

TRDP has also provided the weavers with micro credit on soft terms and conditions to buy looms or livestock and build their meager resources of livelihood. TRDP previously did not purchase carpets from the loanees. It lately began to buy the carpets from them on relatively higher price, thus benefiting the weavers. TRDP then market these carpets through its outlets in Mithi, Islamkot and Karachi. The families who have taken loans from TRDP are free to sell their products either to TRDP or in the open market. This option has given confidence to the weavers, beside monetary benefits. It is gradually exposing them to the market and making them learn about market dynamics and acquire negotiation skills.

A very important change noticed in the weavers' families relate to the fact that the majority is no longer taking loans for daily subsistence as they were doing before the



onset of the project. The families, instead, cited social needs (i.e marriage ceremony, funeral) as the driving reason for loan taking. A significant number of the families took loans from TRDP to repay their exploitative debts to the contractor-moneylender. Overall it appeared that the project has weakened the contractor-moneylenders' control over weavers' household.

The weakened bond between the weaver and the contract-moneylender and the enhanced income of the family has brought about positive change for child-weavers in the households. Parents have taken children off the looms and almost half of children encountered now attend school.

4.3 Impact of Education Support

TRDP's intervention in education has proved to be the other major pillar of the programme, unless educational facilities are made accessible the weavers' children would not have benefited from enhanced income of the household alone. TRDP established 50 non-formal education schools, 15 chouphras to support schools, 7 libraries or learning resource centre and trained 350 government primary school teachers. TDRP also linked up non-formal schools with government schools for smooth transition of children to mainstream education system.

The TRDP 2006 evaluation indicated 82 per cent children were enrolled in schools. However, all of them work for four hours after they return from school as the fami-

lies consider it normal and suitable for children to learn the craft and earn as well. Also, 32 per cent of the children were not attending school but work for full 8 hours on the loom.

In the present assessment, about half of the interviewed children reported attending schools while the remaining said they were not attending school because they were working on looms. More children were attending school in Mithi (district head-quarter and the largest town) than in Deeplo or Chachro.

The majority of children found carpet weaving difficult and preferred to go to school. Children who worked full time on looms shared their desire to run away from carpet weaving. Reportedly some children in Deeplo and Chachro did try to run away in the past and were brought back from Hyderabad and other cities.

4.4 Impact of Social Mobilization

TRDP's social mobilization component—a built-in feature and the foundation stone of all its projects-is based on the premises that unless the communities are aware of the need for change, strive through collective decision to bring about change and own the process leading towards it, sustainable development is not possible. To get the ball rolling, TRDP facilitates community organization in the shape of Para Development Committees (PDCs). All change-oriented activities are then undertaken collectively by PDCs and these include micro credit and enterprise development, community infrastructure, natural resource management and education and health initiatives. In addition to adult groups or PDC, children's groups or organizations have also been facilitated by the TRDP.

The TRDP 2006 evaluation had noted that under the Child Rights Protection Project, interventions were carried out through the involvement of 319 existing and newly formed PDCs in the project area. During the project period 225 Children's Organizations (COs) were formed and strengthened.

According to the present assessment the COs provided a forum to the phased out children to get together for social interaction, play and study. This facilitated their integration in to as normal a childhood state as possible in still struggling weavers' households where now they could go to school full time, that is up to 12:30 or 1 pm and work on looms part time in the evening, or whenever they feel like it.

The COs meetings mostly on weekly basis, discuss their issues, organise study circles and cultural programs with the support of TRDP. The COs' members come around study circles to share both social and educational issues as experienced and articulated by children.

The COs has great potential to benefit children in their personality development and mental and emotional growth but it seems TRDP has still a long way to go. Membership of the COs is limited and fewer working children are members of their respective COs.

5. Issues/Gaps in the Project

Health (general and occupational)

An important element missing from TRDP particular intervention in child labour is health. Though TRDP has a health component in its overall programme activities,



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there is a gap in the Child Rights Protection Project regarding health needs of the phased out children and of those still working on the looms. It was not clear if the TRDP did address the issue of occupational health and safety for children weavers. The TRDP 2003 base line did document the health problems of children workers but the annual reports of the project did not mention the status of health of child weavers.

Domestic Work

Phased out children seem to be more engaged in domestic work. Though in a rural milieu it seems to be unavoidable and the families tend to burden children with many light tasks, there is a need to educate the parents to maintain a balanced routine for children, allowing them time and space to play or simply to lounge around.

Vicious Cycle?

It came out in discussions with stakeholders that some of the families phased out from child labour were assuming the role of petty contractors themselves. As they gradually make profit, get loans on interest from TRDP and buy looms, they need cheap labour. Such families are reportedly involving children of the neighborhood in to wage labour at the looms. This practice also reportedly lead to increasing induction of females and girls in to carpet weaving as male children are phased out from the looms and enrolled in schools.

Revengeful Contractors

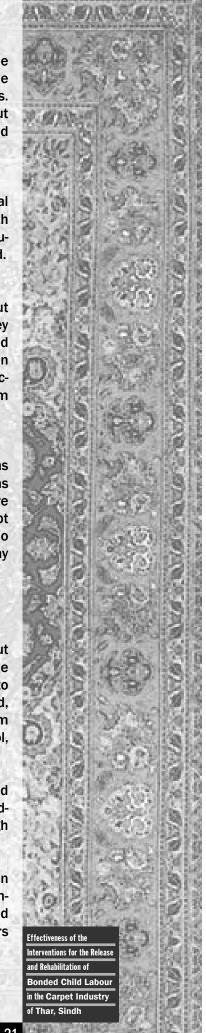
Many stakeholder shared their experience of contractors becoming revengeful as they are increasingly loosing their grip on weavers' households no more taking loans from them and neither selling carpets to them at cheap rates. The contractors are reportedly trying to re-capture the lost clientele and re-trap the weavers in to debt bondage. A couple of families, it is learnt, were re-engaged by the contractors who use them against TRDP as well. Also, it was shared by some stakeholders that many contractors are lobbying with influential political persons against TRDP.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Over all the TRDP project, with its holistic approach has succeeded in phasing out children who were working on carpet looms for longer hours mainly because the households were not able to pay off the loan taken by the contractors and had to put children to labour to survive. Control of contractor/moneylenders has weakened, many children are attending school though still working for a few hours on the loom and children are being re-integrated into normal childhood status-learning at school, playing, interacting with other children.

This has been achieved by a three-pronged strategy-providing soft loans to indebted families to pay off exploitative debts taken from contractor-money-lenders, providing access to schooling to child weavers and involving the communities through organized groups (adults and children in separate groups).

However, there still remain a number of children toiling for eight hours or more on the looms and deprived of schooling. There is a need to extend the project for a minimum of five years so that in the first place hundred per cent children are phased out from full time carpet weaving and in the second place children up to 14 years are phased out totally from part time wage labour on the looms.



Recommendations

- The CRPP is working with 1,700 out of 2,100 weaver families. There is a need to benefit all weaver families. This could be done if the project is extended for next five years;
- Yearly assessment of CRPP is needed to address the bottlenecks on time;
- Focused health intervention needs to be a built-in component of the project to provide free health services to phased out and those still engaged in carpet making. Occupational health and safety procedures be adopted and children/families be educated to prevent problems as backache body ache, weak eyesight;
- The phased out families should be monitored carefully and intervention be made if they are found to hire child labour;
- Families should be sensitized against overburdening phased-out children with domestic work;
- Community education and sensitization on child labour, health and safety, education and child development should be incorporated in the project.
- Multi-stake holders forum be instituted and regular consultations organized between, local elite, local bodies officials, political parties representatives, carpet traders-contractors and the weavers to sort out issues arising out of changing power dynamics.

Notes

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