

## CHILD LABOUR

Children are the greatest gift to humanity and Childhood is an important and impressionable stage of human development as it holds the potential to the future development of any society. Children who are brought up in an environment, which is conducive to their intellectual, physical and social health, grow up to be responsible and productive members of society. Every nation links its future with the present status of its children. By performing work when they are too young for the task, children unduly reduce their present welfare or their future income earning capabilities, either by shrinking their future external choice sets or by reducing their own future individual productive capabilities. Under extreme economic distress, children are forced to forego educational opportunities and take up jobs which are mostly exploitative as they are usually underpaid and engaged in hazardous conditions.

Parents decide to send their child for engaging in a job as a desperate measure due to poor economic conditions. It is, therefore, no wonder that the poor households predominantly send their children to work in early ages of their life. One of the disconcerting aspects of child labour is that children are sent to work at the expense of education. There is a strong effect of child labour on school attendance rates and the length of a child's work day is negatively associated with his or her capacity to attend school. Child labour restricts the right of children to access and benefit from education and denies the fundamental opportunity to attend school. Child labour, thus, prejudices children's education and adversely affects their health and safety



An Estimate of 246 million children is engaged in child labour. A large percentage of these children work in hazardous conditions including working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere, but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, labouring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations. The vast majority of working children work in the agriculture sector. Millions of girls work as domestic servants and unpaid household help and are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Millions of others work under horrific circumstances. They may be are trafficked forced into debt bondage or other forms of slavery, forced into prostitution or pornography or recruited as child soldiers in armed conflict.

Laws that prohibit child labour needs to be in place. And even more importantly, they need to be rigorously enforced. Governments and others need to know how many children are working in the various forms of labour. They also need information on the gender, age and ethnicity of the children to understand what made them vulnerable in the first place and to devise effective

responses. Children need to be removed immediately from the worst forms of child labour and provided with care and education. If children are going to be provided with real alternatives to hazardous labour, it is essential to make them active partners in identifying these alternatives.