



Forum: Third General Assembly

Topic: Safeguarding the Rights of Children and Preventing Child
Labor in South Asia

Zaid Tantash / Nabeel Anz / Jana Kawalit

Introduction

Child labor is a significant issue that deprives children of their rights, and very little intervention is taking place to mitigate child labor, specifically in south Asian countries. Much of the normalization of child labor in the region dates back to the colonial era, when British rule in South Asia relied on cheap labor in agriculture, mining, and textiles. These systems continued after independence, particularly in informal sectors where labor laws were rarely enforced. There are many apparent reasons as to why children are forced into the workplace at such young ages, the most notable being the extreme rates of poverty in countries such as Nepal, Pakistan, and India. In these contexts, families often depend on the additional income children bring, even if it is small, in order to afford daily necessities like food and shelter. Minimal government intervention also plays a role in the constant increase of child labor in South Asia, as labor laws aren't cemented and enforced correctly. In many areas, child labor laws either exclude informal sectors or have loopholes, such as allowing children to work in family businesses or traditional crafts, which are often abused. Furthermore, many children lack birth registration, making it difficult to prove their age and easier for employers to exploit them without consequence. This issue doesn't only effect many bright futures for millions of children, but it also doesn't help with addressing poverty and inadequate education, therefore worsening the state of countries in south Asia. Child labor prevents children from attending school consistently, resulting in limited literacy and employability in adulthood, and continuing the cycle of poverty across generations. Despite powerful efforts such as the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is minimal implementation in south asia, therefore resulting in minimal progress. If child labor is to be eliminated, it requires tackling not only weak laws and enforcement but also the deeper causes of poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education in the region.

Definition of Key Terms

Child labor:

Child labor refers to work that deprives children of many of their rights, while also exhausting them physically and mentally, with little to no compensation at all. This term is the focus point of the topic since it's the problem at hand, and all solutions will be made in order to prevent child labor. For example, in countries such as Nepal, children are forced to work, therefore exploiting them and interfering with their rights.

Access to education and poverty:

Access to education is the ability of children to attend school and receive quality instructions, without any barriers that stop them from benefiting from learning. It highlights how children are more likely to thrive in a better environment where they could develop skills and hobbies instead of being placed in the workplace against their will at a young age. An example to show contrast between a country with high access to education and a country with low access to education is South Korea and Pakistan. Only 2% of South Korea's population had no access to education, whereas a staggering 38% of Pakistan's population had no access to education. South Korea's economy is excelling, whereas Pakistan's economy is suffering. This shows how deprivation of simple resources can alter the futures of many children.

Poverty is a condition where basic needs such as food, shelter, education and healthcare can not be met. Many families in South Asian countries experience poverty, and some resort to sending their children to work in sweatshops, agriculture, and domestic work. In countries like Bangladesh where close to 20% of the population is living in extreme/relative poverty, many children are forced to work 45+ hours weekly to meet simple needs, which is sometimes not enough. Access to education falls under the umbrella of poverty, since people who suffer from poverty would rather send their children to work for a source of income, instead of trying to build them their own future in a school.

Labor Law Enforcement (LLE):

Labor Law Enforcement is the application of laws which regulate working conditions, age limits, and weaker protections. Weak enforcement can result in more exploitative child labor without being checked. Therefore, strengthening laws and increasing surveillance in these areas can prevent children being forced to work against their will. A country with strong LLE is Norway, this is because it has robust legislation, effective institutions, and a culture of social partnership. Whereas a country in South Asia like Bangladesh has weak LLE, because of the inadequate enforcement, a lack of worker protections, and the influence of powerful multinational corporations. This term directly relates to how child labor can be minimized in South Asia, and can be a possible solution for this problem.

International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions:

The General Conference of the International Labor Organization has set many legally

binding treaties over the years, which promote equality in workplaces all across the globe. The two most important conventions which relate to the topic are conventions 138 and 182, 138 discusses the minimum age for employment, although its different across countries, the minimum age shouldn't be below 16 years. Convention 182 discusses the worst forms of child labor, which focuses on the elimination and prohibition of the worst forms of child labor. However, despite the fact that these bound treaties are set in stone, many communities don't abide by the strict instructions that the ILO has placed, and continue to exploit children for resources and income, specifically in South Asian countries.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

CSR is a company's obligation to conduct business in a way that is fair for workers, consumers, and communities. CSR ensures that child labor is not used in any shape or form in supply chains, therefore going beyond profits to consider its broader impact on society. If this management is incorporated into all countries in South Asia, then there will be more transparency and ethical sourcing, resulting in less exploitation of children.

General Overview

The topic at hand undertones issues relating to the rights of children, as well as the repercussions and outcomes of child labor. The topic primarily targets regions in South Asia, which are more prone to child exploitation and lack of children's rights. The issue has always been a long-standing global obstacle that has become increasingly more present and dangerous as time passed. Exploitation of labor structures was, and still is a driving factor that effects child labor, dating back to the colonial era, where systems of indentured labor and unfree employment were used as mechanisms to keep children working in fields with little to no reward. Despite the end of formal colonization, these systems have endured, especially in rural areas and informal economies, where weak enforcement allows them to persist. Historically, during British colonial rule in countries like India and Bangladesh, children were used widely in tea plantations, textile mills, and mining industries due to their ability to perform tedious tasks for extremely low wages .As mentioned previously, this issue also stems from inadequate education and high rates of poverty, which is becoming increasingly more unsustainable during modern times. Today, over 160 million children worldwide are engaged in child labor, with approximately 48 million in South Asia alone, according to ILO estimates. Many work in

hazardous sectors such as brick kilns, agriculture, carpet weaving, and domestic work, where they are exposed to chemicals, heavy lifting, and unsafe environments. Countries in South Asia are receiving aid through the implementation of global efforts from the UN and the ILO, which are unfortunately still not enough to alleviate child labor in these areas. Furthermore, cultural and social norms in South Asia often normalize child work, viewing it as vocational training or necessary for family survival, which complicates enforcement and prevention efforts. But in order to fully understand the severity of child labor in South Asia, it's necessary to look through a lens which highlights three important, interconnected factors, which are: Education Access and Poverty, Weak Legal Enforcement and Frameworks, and Corporate Accountability and Ethical Supply Chains, as these three dimensions directly impact the continuation of child labor, and tackling them effectively is essential to meeting SDG Target 8.7, which aims to end child labor in all forms by 2025.

Subtopic 1: Education Access and Poverty

Poverty is widely regarded as the main reason for child labor in South Asia, as most families cannot afford basic necessities, they often rely on sending their children to work for survival. Similarly, access to education also plays a big role in determining the future for children in these areas, and in marginalized and rural areas, education isn't a common resource that children have access to. This makes it very difficult for children to break out of this malicious cycle. This subtopic explores how poverty and poor education systems intersect to trap children in such labor. Under colonial rule, access to education was deliberately restricted, which still underlines how underinvestment from such a long time ago can still significantly impact accessibility in modern times. Additionally, colonial policies such as the British Bantu Education Act model prioritized low-skilled education to maintain labor hierarchies, setting a precedent for today's underfunded rural schools. As of recent, governments in South Asia have prioritized education, but investment remained low. South Asia itself still has a high number of out-of-school children, with an estimated 31.8 million, including 8.2 million at the primary level and 23.6 million at the secondary level. Girls are disproportionately affected due to cultural taboos, early marriage, and lack of sanitary facilities in schools, limiting their enrollment and retention. This directly relates to how children are deprived of their simple rights, and are required to work in low quality, physically demanding jobs that threaten future and regional progress. Low access to education in South Asia also stems from poverty, since no access to resources makes families more vulnerable, ultimately becoming more desperate for a source of income, therefore relying on their children's labor. The opportunity cost of schooling is often too high for families, especially when children's wages, even if minimal, contribute significantly to household survival. Although, a well-known remedy for low access to education, and the cultural taboos against girls' education, is Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs). They essentially provide financial aid to South Asian families who meet certain conditions, and have also shown success in increasing enrollment and retention rates, specifically for girls. For example, The Waseela-e-Taleem initiative under the Ehsaas program provides cash transfers to families whose children are enrolled in school, with a focus on girls' education. Overall, tackling poverty and education simultaneously is essential to breaking the self-perpetuating cycle of child labor in the region.

Subtopic 2: Weak Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

While most South Asian countries have signed international treaties protecting children (such as the ILO conventions), enforcement at a national level remains inadequate. In informal economies, children work manual labor which falls out of legal regulation. There are many attributes in a country's governing system that contribute to the impunity surrounding child labor, with one of the most important being weak labor inspection. As inspectors of labor in countries such as Nepal, India, and Bangladesh are often poorly equipped and commonly vulnerable to bribery, which diminishes chances of inspection being done correctly and justly. Therefore, minimal action would be taken to prevent child labor. Additionally, South Asia has one of the lowest ratios of labor inspectors per workforce size globally, making routine monitoring near impossible in remote and informal sectors. Additionally, low birth registration plays a big role in allowing exploitation, since sources can't accurately determine a child's age. This all dates back to the colonial era where child workers were rarely protected, and labor was incentivized through land taxes and work quotas. The colonial legacy of prioritizing economic output over welfare created legal systems that overlooked child rights, an issue that persists today in weak enforcement cultures. Despite the evolution post-independence, there are various loopholes that still find a way to bring out corruption in deals and transactions between child laborers. Also, in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, outdated labor laws still co-exist with current ones, which makes it increasingly difficult and confusing to follow legal frameworks. For example, Pakistan's Employment of Children Act 1991 has overlapping and sometimes contradictory clauses with newer provincial laws, creating confusion among employers and enforcement bodies. However, taking action involves supporting stronger legal enforcement, with complete surveillance and cooperation with global sectors to ensure children their rights. Helping government agencies with enhancing technology allows for less loopholes to occur, therefore strengthening frameworks and cementing enforcements. Implementing digital child labor databases, mandatory birth registration, and increased inspector training with anti-corruption measures are potential solutions to address enforcement challenges effectively.

Subtopic 3: Corporate Accountability and Ethical Supply Chains

One of the less visible but highly important causes of child labor in South Asia is the role of large international companies, especially those that rely on supply chains in countries like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Many of these companies use products and materials from fields that require manual labor in South Asia, but the supply chains are often long and complicated. For many different reasons, children happen to be involved, working in dangerous or unfair conditions. Although companies often claim they don't know about this, subcontractors seem to suggest otherwise. A lack of supply chain transparency allows companies to benefit from low prices while distancing themselves from unethical practices occurring at the bottom tiers. This is where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) comes in. CSR is the idea that businesses should act ethically and not just follow the law, but also think about how their actions affect people and

communities. If a company benefits from cheap labor in South Asia, it also has a duty to make sure that children are not being exploited along the way. However, voluntary CSR efforts alone are often insufficient, as companies may prioritize profits over rigorous monitoring and change. To make sure companies take that responsibility seriously, some countries and organizations are pushing for something called Human Rights Due Diligence. This means companies must carefully check their supply chains, identify any human rights risks (like child labor), and take real steps to prevent or fix them. This could include hiring third-party inspectors, using international certifications like Fair Trade, or publicly reporting where their materials come from. Mandatory due diligence laws, such as those proposed by the European Union, would legally require companies to trace and eliminate child labor from their entire supply chains, ensuring accountability through fines or trade restrictions.

Major Parties Involved

India

India is one of the countries with the most child laborers in the world, making it an extremely important stakeholder in this issue. Children are usually employed in manual labor (e.g. Mining, textiles, agriculture), particularly in informal sectors. Although India has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and ratified ILO convention 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labor), implementation is still very weak in most areas.

India itself recognizes child labor as a serious issue and has introduced laws such as the Child Labor Prohibition and Regulation Act, which was established in 2016 to ban children who are under 14 from working in most sectors, which is arguably still too young. However, the law allows children under 14 to work at family enterprises and traditional crafts, which creates legal loopholes. India has prioritized domestic responsibility despite international cooperation. It's also supported UN resolutions on the topic but often balances them with economic priorities.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the world's main garments exporters, and many child labor violations occur in this sector. Although the formal garment sector has taken steps to solve the issue, and has made noticeable progress, informal subcontractors, agriculture, and domestic work still involve widespread child labor.

Bangladesh has taken significant steps to solve child labor, as their plan is to end child labor in the country by 2025 in line with SDG target 8.7 and has created a National Child Labor Elimination Policy. Despite their efforts, enforcements still remain weak due to resource constraints. Bangladesh heavily supports solving this issue but often asks for development aid and technical assistance in return for more well-structured enforcement.

Nepal

Similar to India, Nepal has a large number of children working in brick kilns, agriculture, and domestic work. Widespread poverty and weak governance in the country has played a major effect in worsening child labor in previous years.

Similar to Bangladesh, Nepal has endorsed ILO conventions regarding child labor and children's rights, and also developing a Master Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor (2018-2028). Like all countries in South Asia, Nepal is willing to solve the issue, but has weak implementation. It often supports international resolutions but focuses on community-based solutions and poverty reduction as the root approach.

Pakistan

Child labor in Pakistan is also common in various sectors (domestic work, agriculture, informal manufacturing). Pakistan is also under increasing international scrutiny over labor rights, especially through trade deals such as the GSP+ status with the EU.

Pakistan's complex federal system forbids it to support children's rights rigorously, where labor enforcement is often left to provincial governments. It has passed laws like the Employment for Children Act but faces criticism for poor enforcement and data transparency. Despite Pakistan being open to international cooperation, it's sensitive to pressure that threatens its export economy.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
2001/03/22	Bangladesh ratifies ILO convention 182 (worst forms of child labor), committing to eliminate hazardous labor.
2002/06/12	World day against child labor, which was established by the UN and the ILO. It focuses on raising global awareness and encouraging action.
2010/03	Bangladesh launches its National Child Labor Elimination Policy, made to withdraw children from hazardous work situations, through education and social awareness.
2016/07/29	India enacts the Child and Adolescent Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, banning child labor under 14 in all work and restricting adolescent labor.
2025/06/11	Gujarat State, India reports rescuing 616 child laborers in five years after enforcement of the act in 2016, filing over 700 criminal cases.

Attempts to solve the issue

Resolution on the World Fit for Children, 3 May 2002 (A/RES/S-27/2)

This resolution was adopted during the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children, urging all member states to eliminate the worst forms of child labor as a matter of urgency, protect children from economic exploitation, and ensure access to free and compulsory primary education. It also called for targeted interventions to address poverty, gender inequality, and other root causes preventing children from attending school. The resolution helped make child labor a priority in

international development agendas, emphasizing education and rehabilitation as core solutions. However, its effectiveness has been limited in South Asia due to persistent poverty, weak legal enforcement, and underfunded programs that fail to fully reach rural and marginalized communities.

Resolution A/RES/73/327 – International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, 2021, 18 July 2019

This resolution declared 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, urging member states to accelerate efforts to achieve SDG Target 8.7, which aims to end all forms of child labor by 2025. It called for strengthened international cooperation, improved data collection, and integration of child labor eradication strategies into national policies and development frameworks. The resolution raised global awareness, leading to advocacy campaigns and new partnerships in countries including India and Bangladesh. However, while awareness increased, actual reductions in child labor remained slow, and the COVID-19 pandemic further reversed progress by pushing more children into work due to economic hardship.

Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999/06/17 (ILO Convention No. 182)

Adopted by the International Labor Organization, this convention commits ratifying countries to immediately eliminate the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, trafficking, forced labor, child soldiering, prostitution, pornography, and hazardous work harmful to health, safety, or morals. All South Asian countries have ratified the convention, making it one of the fastest-ratified treaties in ILO history. It has driven legal reforms and national action plans in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal to align local laws with international standards. However, its effectiveness remains limited by poor enforcement, lack of labor inspections, and continued informal sector exploitation, resulting in uneven progress across the region.

Possible Solutions

Solution 1 & 2:

The solution aims to address child labor by making it easier for families to send their children to school. This can be done by having governments and international partners provide conditional cash transfers to families with children (especially girls) which are in poverty. They receive small, necessary payments only if their child attends school frequently. Pairing the promise with free daily meals and professional staff increases attendance and improves learning. This solution is viable because it addresses poverty and education access simultaneously. For example, in India, the Midday Meal Scheme was implemented and has shown strong results.

To enhance the educational experience for all children in South Asian countries, NGOs or public-private partnerships can deploy mobile classrooms or digital education vans in rural or underdeveloped areas where formal schools are inaccessible. This solution is viable because it reaches remote and under-served communities without needing permanent infrastructure.

Solution 3 & 4:

This solutions purpose is to ensure no exploitation of child labor in South Asian regions, through the help of the development of technology and experienced professionals that inspect systems and illegal employment. They can develop and maintain centralized child labor tracking systems, and ensure digital birth registration for every child. This allows labor laws to be enforced correctly by using concrete evidence. This solution is effective because it closes the identity gap, therefore reducing exploitation, especially in informal sectors. The procedure for the solution can be taken care of by the UN or an international organization such as UNICEF and tech-based organizations.

Solution 5 & 6:

The solution for mandatory human rights due diligence laws suggests that national and international laws need to be passed which require companies to map, audit and report on their entire supply chains. Non-compliance will result in financial penalties or loss of market access. This solution is very strong because it puts legal pressure on companies and corporations that have subcontractors, therefore stopping the cycle step by step.

The next solution is slightly more advanced, and requires companies to use blockchain technology to create temper-proof records of every step of the supply chain, to ensure that there are no exploits or subcontractors. This allows governments and NGOs to ensure that good are child-labor free. It promotes traceability and consumer confidence and has already been piloted in multiple industries, showing noticeable success.

Guiding Questions

1. How are children's rights violated in South Asian countries affected by child labor?
2. How does poverty and lack of access to education contribute to child labor in South Asia?
3. How does weak legal protection and enforcement result in unmonitored child labor in South Asian countries?
4. What is (delegates country's) stance on child labor, both domestically and internationally?
5. How can corporate accountability be improved to prevent child labor in supply chains linked to South Asia?
6. Has (delegates country) ratified international treaties such as UN convention on the Rights of the Child, or ILO conventions No. 138 and 182?
7. What measures has (delegates country) taken to support child labor prevention or children's education abroad, specifically in South Asia?
8. How can (delegates country) support stronger enforcement of child protection laws in South Asia?
9. What are the main sectors in South Asia where child labor is more prevalent, and why?
10. How effective have past solutions such as the UN and ILOs conventions been in South Asia?
11. What are the challenges of enforcing child labor laws in rural and informal economies in South Asia?
12. How can countries in South Asia with weak implementation receive aid to reduce child labor?

Appendix

- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
- https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/child-labour/WCMS_300805/lang--en/index.htm
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- <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/child-labour-south-asia>

- <https://www.fairtrade.net/issue/child-labour>
- https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/SDG-SDG-8-7-Child-Labour-Labour-Force-Participation.csv
- <https://labour.gov.in/childlabour/about-child-labour>
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Contact Information

President: Zaid Tantash

Zaid_tantash@abs.edu.jo

+96279007000

Chair: Nabeel Anz

Nabeel_anz@abs.edu.jo

+962797671717

Chair: Jana Kwalit

Jana_kwalit@abs.edu.jo

+962772198479