

# Unit 7

## *Are Children on Family Farm Child Labours ?*

- KANHAIYA B. MATHEMA \*

### ABSTRACT

*In order to get children involved in farm or any other labour, it is very important to understand the perceptions of their parents. Meanwhile, consideration should be given to the length of their involvement in such works since it restricts children from their schooling heavily drawing upon their future. Such work impairs the development and well-being of children. This article tries to expose the perceptions of parents about their children working in family farms. In addition, it touches upon the prevalence of child labour in different parts of the world.*

### INTRODUCTION

The economy of Nepal has undergone a structural change over the decades. The share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has decreased from 60 per cent two decades ago to less than 38 percent presently. Yet agriculture is the main source of income and employment of more than 90 percent of population. Most of the economic activities are confined to agriculture sector where the upcoming financial institutions are attracted to lure the agriculturists and those who are underprivileged by way of advancing loans in the form of micro-finance for agricultural and non-agricultural related activities. The Agricultural Development Bank since its inception is involved in such activities with a view to uplifting the economic status of small farmers in Nepal. There are 3,364,139 land holdings of which 26,700 are holdings without land (NPC, 2001-02). The average size of land comes to 0.8 hectare mostly cultivated by the small farmers who are basically covered by the system of micro credit in the country.

Agricultural households comprise 78 percent of the total households in the country. Out of the total agricultural households, less than 10 percent is in the Mountains and the remaining 10 percent almost equally fall in the Hills and Terai (CBS, 2004:3).

\* Kanhaiya B. Mathema, Ph. D., Professor of Economics, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

According to the same source, the average size of agricultural land-area in the country is uneconomic for cultivation. Dwelling upon the work of Zepeda and Kim (2006), this article tries to expose the perceptions of parents about their children working in family farms. In addition, it touches upon the prevalence of child labour in different parts of the world.

Child labour whether in the farm or in any other sectors is simply the most severe form of child exploitation and child abuse in the world today. In any society, working children, as a socio-economic group, happens to be the most disadvantaged of all since "they are forced to work for a living, sacrificing their childhood as well as their future for bare survival of self and family" (Masum, 1999). Today, as

individual well being increasingly depends on literacy, numeric and intellectual competence, a child working in fact is denied of the future.

## **CHILDREN ON FARM WORK IN NEPAL**

Farming in Nepal is uncommercialized to a greater extent. It is least diversified and is characterized by small farms where family labour is a norm. To be precise, agricultural practices are performed mostly by family labour aided by *perma* labours as in the Mustang region in the northwest of Nepal (Tripathi, 2001). Agricultural production is based on traditional system. Farming itself is a culture and at the same time, a profession. By the same token, children live and play at the farmyards. These children supplement to their parents' farm work since there are no regulations for children's work on their farms though the ongoing Labour Act, 1992 prohibits child labour in the country. About 80 percent of children aged 10 to 14 are associated with the farm work in one way or other in Nepal (CBS, 2004:55). However, they are unpaid workers who enjoy to accompanying their parents on the farm. Household children's participation on family farm is not considered as a form of child labour. (CWIN-Child Welfare In Nepal, 2006) citing ILO-IPEC (1996) reports that of all children aged 5 to 14 or 41.7 per cent (2.6 million) regularly work in the farm. According one study, a 14 year old girl living in rural Nepal spends 19 hours working in agriculture for her family and 9 hours helping her family with household works. An array of activities ranging from gathering firewood and collecting water occupies rest of her time (Edmonds, 2002:1). Of all working children, 55 percent are girls. Of the economically active children, 94.7 percent (1.58 million) are involved in agriculture. Of working children in Nepal, 64 percent go to school, 36 percent do not go to school. 26 percent of male children do not go to school; 49 percent of female children do not attend school. Child labour and education are intimately intertwined. Though of course, the two are not always at odds with one another—children may be able to do both, or may in fact work so that the household can afford to send them to school.

About 1.4 million children (83 percent economically active) work at least 14 hours per day. As expected, more girl child works on farm than the boys do. The ratio is Agriculture is consistently one of the top three most dangerous industries in the United States. Children working in agriculture are not immune to the dangers. Children account for about 20 percent of all farm fatalities each year. Children working in agriculture constitute about eight percent of working children, but comprise 40 percent of child work-related fatalities. Current U.S. law allows children to work as young as 10 years old in commercial agriculture, while they are prohibited from working in nearly all other industries (with only a few exceptions like delivering newspapers). Therefore, while a 12-year-old would be prohibited from working in retail or restaurants, that same child could legally work in agriculture, one of the nation's most dangerous industries.

A recent rapid assessment by the ILO (2002), has found that child labour is "common" in Zanzibar, with prostitution, fisheries and seaweed farming among the "most hazardous" sectors in which children are involved. It is prevalent in almost all countries in the world.

Children between the ages of six and 14 were found to be involved in the preparation of seeds, planting, harvesting and drying processes on seaweed farms on the east coast of Unguja (the main island of Zanzibar, often referred to as simply Zanzibar), where working environments were reported to be "dangerous". The report also found evidence of child labour on clove plantations in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous island chain within Tanzania. According to the report, the main causes of child labour are poverty, irresponsible parents, family breakdown, lack of alternatives for children after they have completed their formal education and children's desire to be financially independent from their parents. It

is a serious concern for the government and it will continue if measures to reduce it are not taken. Child labour is detrimental to normal development of children.

Majorities of the working children in Kenya are in the agricultural and related activities such as lantation. Children constitute between 20 and 30 percent of the casual labour force in all types of plantation farming (ILO, 2002). The phenomenon of child labour in commercial agriculture in Kenya is tied to a myriad of factors including poverty, inaccessibility and high cost of education. Historical factors such as colonialism, cultural attitudes, lack of policies and poor performance as well as low awareness on child rights. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in Kenya by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the accompanying policies of cost sharing policies in use of social services including education has become increasingly difficult for the poor to access basic services.

### **WHY DO CHILDREN WORK ON FARM?**

Parents' perceptions greatly influence their children's participation in the labour force. The education system of the country in general does not provide poor, disadvantaged children with any immediate prospects of better jobs or higher levels of income. The curriculum, followed in schools, is hardly perceived to be capable of meeting the practical needs of poor families. Naturally, poor parents fail to appreciate the long-term value of education, and instead opt for the short-term economic gains of child labour. In many cases, the male children of the household are expected to help the father in the field and the female children the mother with the household work. Moreover, parents consider their children's employment in certain occupations like in the engineering workshop as a rare opportunity to learn employable skills. To them, it is an alternative education with much more practical value (Hossain, 2001). Parents have their best interest in mind while taking their children to their farm. Children work on family farm either to supplement parental labor or to allow one or both parents to work off-farm that would ensure financial gain to the parents. Their work eases out the problematic hired labor in the farm. Parents have high expectation from the working children contributing to the economic success of the family. They also believe that children's work is valuable to develop their skills, resilience, and help them to be more successful in their later life.

Moreover, farm work teaches children valuable skills, work ethics, and teamwork. In addition, it provides opportunity to be with their family and put them in close contact with them, which improves the family communication and relationship. Non-farm life does not permit this kind of closeness. It is enjoyable to have everybody there and everyday to work together and then when there is free time they can do things together. Parents learn about your kids when they are with them (Hossain, 2001). The skill that they learn in the farm would be useful to them in their later life, especially in the workplace (Goodnow and Warton, 1991 cited in Zepeda and Kim, 2006). Farm work teaches them self-respect and self-confidence and thus they learn to take care of themselves. In this way, it puts them out of trouble (Greenberger and Stienberg,1986 cited in Zepeda and Kim, 2006). Simillarly, it avoids parasitic tendency on the part of the children.

### **CONSEQUENCES**

Early involvement of children in work leads to serious health and developmental consequences. Working children suffer significant growth deficits as compared with school children. They grow up shorter and lighter, and their body size continues to be smaller even in adulthood. Many of them work under conditions that leave them alarmingly vulnerable to chemical and biological hazards. Child workers tend to develop muscular, chest and abdominal pain, headaches, dizziness, respiratory infections, diarrhea and worm infection. Poor working conditions make them more susceptible than their adult colleagues to

infectious diseases, injuries and other workplace-related ailments. Many even experience amputations or loss of body parts. Moreover, children in certain occupations experience particular types of abuse. Child domestic workers are often found to be victims of verbal and sexual abuse, beating or punishment by starvation. Children, engaged in scavenging, rag-picking or marginal economic activities in the streets, are exposed to drugs, violence, and criminal activities, physical and sexual abuse in many parts of the country.

Children working in commercial agriculture are often subjected to a number of hazards. These include long working hours, extreme weather conditions, injuries from tools and equipment falls and carrying heavy loads. They are also subjected to dangers of insect and snakebites, handling of agrochemical products as well as coming in contact with chemical residue in soil or in the plants. Besides being denied the opportunity to grow up as children and attending school, studies have shown that children working in commercial agriculture are at risk of infections, injuries and other forms of exploitation including poor pay and sexual exploitation. 18.9 percent of children interviewed reported falling sick or getting injured in their place of work while 79.2 percent of the children reported low pay, 14.6 percent tiring or hard work while 2.9 percent long working hours.

The inability of families to send children has complicated efforts aimed at combating child labour because besides tending to create a vicious cycle of poverty, it pushes children into hazardous work situations. Currently, 17.4 percent of all children aged between 5-17 years old are working according to CBS of Kenya. This number represents 14.4 percent of the total labour force in Kenya. Most of the working children (43.6 percent) are aged between 10-14 years followed by the age group of 15-17 years at 30.1 percent of all working children. Children are mainly found to work in agricultural, domestic, mining and quarrying, logging, building and construction, tourism, entertainment and informal sectors of the economy.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

However, it does propose a series of measures that would go some way towards tackling the problem. These included a sensitisation process for all stakeholders about the impact of child labour; measures to withdraw children from child labour while providing alternative income sources; formulation of by laws restricting child labour. There is also a particular need for an advocacy campaign to curb such labour but the young also need to learn that child labour puts overwhelming demand on children for cheap labour, which is driven by some form of economic concern. Thus, entire relying on their work is to be avoided to ensure children's education. If not, it exacerbates the reliance on child labor that would in one way or other strains on farm family fertility leading to a serious threat to current and potential food production in the country.

The ILO has suggested that additional studies should take place to explore the nature, cope and impact of child labour in clove plantations, the hotel and tourism sector, and in prostitution during the irrespective peak seasons. It also proposed that grass-roots communities be empowered to monitor levels of child labour, and that the ILO, together with the social partners, explore the possibility of including an element that will cushion household incomes in their efforts to combat child labour.

## **CONCLUSION**

Agriculture is consistently one of the most dangerous industries involving child labour. It is simply the most severe form of labour. In any society, working children, as socio-economic group, happens to be the most disadvantaged of all labours. They are forced to work for a living, sacrificing their childhood as well as their future for bare survival of self and family. Today, as individual well being increasingly depends on

literacy and intellectual competence, a working child is in fact denied his/her future. Child labour is the destruction of children's potentials. It degrades their schooling and robs them of opportunities in the future.

In order to get children involved in farm work or any other works, it is important to understand the perceptions of their parents. Participation of children in any work denies them from schooling and impairs their development and wellbeing. Meanwhile, consideration should be given to the length of their involvement in such works since it restricts children from their schooling heavily drawing upon their future. Such work impairs the development and wellbeing of children.

## REFERENCE:

DeBarr, K. A., D. O. Ritzel, W. R. Wright, and M. J. Kittleson (1986). "Friends and Family: Implications for Youth Tractor Safety", **Journal of Safety Research**, 29 (2): 87-95.

Economic Survey of Nepal (various issues), MOF, Government of Nepal.

Edmond, Eric V. (2002). "Globalization and the Economics of Child Labour" in **Neue Zürcher Zeitung**, Germany.

Goodnow, J. J. and P. M. Warton (1991). The Social Bases of Social Cognition: Interacting about Work and Their Implications" **Merrill-Palme**, quarterly 37(1): 27-58.

Greenberger, E. and L. Steinberg (1986). **When Teenagers work: The Physiological and Social Costs of Adolescent Employment**, New York Basic Books, New York.

Hossain, Mohammad Zulfiquer (2001). Bangladesh Human Rights Network, Bangladesh.

ILO (2002). **TANZANIA: Child Labour Common in Zanzibar**, ILO, New York

Lyde Zepeda and Jong Soog Kim (2006). "Farm Parents'Views on their Children's Labor on Family Farms: A Focus Group Study of Wisconsin Dairy Peasants", **Agriculture and Human Values**, 23: 109 –21.

National Consumers League (2005). **Child Labor in U.S. Commercial Agriculture: Consumers' Perspectives and Objections**, National Consumers League, USA.

Tripathi, M. P. (2001). " Agricultural System in Fragile Environment of Mustang, Nepal " in **Environment and Agriculture Biodiversity, Agriculture and Pollution in South Asia** edited by P. K. Jha, S.R. Baral, S. B. Karmacharya, H. D. Lekhak, P.

Lacoul and C. B. Baniya, Ecological Society (ECOS) Nepal.