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Internationally Applied Mechanisms for Regulation of Child Labour

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Abstract : The issue of child labour continues to be a global challenge that undermines children's rights, education, and well-being. This paper reviews internationally applied mechanisms for regulating child labour by examining policies and practices adopted by countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, the Philippines, Brazil, and India. Each case reflects distinct historical, economic, and socio-political contexts that have shaped their approaches to child labour regulation. In developed nations like the UK and the US, legislative frameworks such as the Factory and Workshop Act of 1878 and the Keating-Owen Act of 1916 marked early milestones in abolishing child labour through education and legal reform. Developing nations such as the Philippines, Brazil, and India, on the other hand, face persistent challenges linked to poverty, lack of education, and social inequality. These nations have implemented multi-sectoral strategies involving international collaborations, community participation, and educational initiatives to curb child labour. Despite varying progress, the collective international effort underscores the importance of legislative enforcement, awareness, and socio-economic empowerment in achieving sustainable elimination of child labour. The study highlights that only through integrated approaches addressing poverty, education, and human rights can meaningful progress be achieved in eradicating child exploitation globally.

Keywords: Child Labour, United Kingdom, US, India, Regulation, Rights.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour remains one of the most persistent social and economic problems confronting nations across the globe. Despite international conventions and national legislations designed to protect children, millions of minors continue to be deprived of their childhood, education, and basic rights by being pushed into exploitative work environments. The roots of child labour are deeply embedded in poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and social inequality, making it a complex issue that transcends borders and cultures. Over the decades, various countries have adopted diverse mechanisms—legal, educational, and institutional—to address this concern. International organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF have played a significant role in establishing global standards and frameworks for the prevention and eradication of child labour. However, the pace and effectiveness of

implementation vary widely among nations due to differing socio-economic conditions. This paper attempts to review and compare internationally applied mechanisms for regulating child labour, highlighting the progress, challenges, and lessons learned from the experiences of countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, the Philippines, Brazil, and India. By examining these varied approaches, the study seeks to emphasise the importance of coordinated international efforts, community participation, and education-oriented reforms in ensuring the protection and holistic development of every child.

Regulation of Child Labour in the UK

According to the modernisation model, child labour was unheard of during the pre-industrial era. This is because child labour became widespread during the industrial revolution, which started in the late 18th century and extended into the early 19th century. Before the industrial revolution, there was a prevalent practice of employing children in labour-intensive jobs. Reformers decided to call for an end to child labour as a result of the worrying increase in the number of children working in the workforce, as well as the dreadful working conditions. This reforming mindset had spread across the country by the time the 1830s rolled around, which resulted in a new concept of childhood as well as the right to experience and enjoy it. A significant factor that led to the decline of child labour was the prevalence of this attitude, which appeared after the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a reduction in the amount of child employment that occurred as a result of the incorporation of child rights into work legislation. Throughout England and Wales, there has been a consistent decline in the number of young people who are active in seeking employment. There were instances when the pace of degeneration was both irregular and painfully slow. During the decades starting in 1871 and ending in 1881, the most significant decline in the number of children who were employed was seen. [1]

The Factory and Workshops law of 1878 made it illegal to employ children under the age of ten and demanded that children up to the age of ten attend school. [2] This is an essential point to bring up since it is crucial to observe that this legislation was passed. To a considerable extent, the decrease in the number of children working in England may be attributed to this law. Moreover, the Education Act of 1880 [3] mandated that children must attend school until they reached the age of ten, with the exception of children between the ages of ten and thirteen,

who were allowed to drop out of school after they had mastered the fundamentals of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Regulation of U.S.-Based Child Labour

There are many different cultures in which it is considered common for younger members of the society to assist with domestic duties, learn a trade as apprentices, or participate in occupations that are seen to be less hazardous. When the United States was still in the pre-industrial age, this was the situation. Many people came to the realisation that child labour was a social problem that needed to be eradicated from society as a result of the advent of industry and wage employment practices. In reaction to the disastrous impacts of child labour, a few of states enacted laws specifically outlawing the practice. Additionally, other governments progressively enacted legislation that established minimum employment age restrictions. However, none of these measures were ever actually implemented. As a result, federal law was required, but the first drafts of such legislation did not become available until the early 20th century. The Federal Children's Bureau was a pivotal institution in the history of the United States of America. It was established in 1912 with the purpose of collecting statistics on child labour and serving as a repository for such data. The information that the Bureau acquired on working conditions throughout the nation was very helpful to parliamentarians, despite the fact that the Bureau did not have the capacity to govern things.

In accordance with the Keating-Owen Federal Child Labour Act [4] which was passed by Congress two years later, the minimum age required to join certain occupations was set at fourteen years old. However, in the case of Hammer v. Dagenhart, [5] which took place in 1918, the Supreme Court decided that the Act in question violated the Constitution, which resulted in the Act's invalidation. [6]

Child Labour Prevention in the Philippines

One of the most significant causes in the Philippines is to educate children about the rights that they are entitled to have. A study was conducted, and the results showed that youngsters between the ages of nine and seventeen are aware of their rights and are aware that they have such rights. [7] In this context, it is important to note that the Philippine Department of Labour and Employment, which is in charge of the National Child Labour Committee, recently held a number of consultation and evaluation workshops. These workshops were attended by a variety

of government and non-government organisations that are concerned with putting an end to child labour in the country. The programs that were listed above received financial support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The most significant accomplishments of the Philippines are bringing the problem of child labour to the attention of the general public and establishing broad coalitions that span a variety of businesses. As a consequence of this, it has improved its services, increased the amount of research it does on child labour, built the capabilities of children, families, and communities, and monitored workplaces to ensure that everyone was safe. [8] The President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines urged the government to redirect funds that were intended for contraceptives to programs that would control and reduce the high incidence of child labour in the Philippines. This recommendation was based on the findings of the 2011 Survey on Children in the Philippines, which was carried out by the National Statistics Office in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation and the United States Department of Labour (USDOL). In the Philippines, there are roughly 29 million children between the ages of 5 and 17, and the study indicated that around 5.5 million of those children were working. Of those children, approximately 3 million were engaged in hazardous enterprises. [9]

The year 2015 was a pivotal year for the Philippines in their efforts to eliminate the most atrocious forms of child labour. This was a year that marked a significant progress. A number of government agencies came together to sign a cooperative agreement on the Rescue and Rehabilitation of Abused Domestic Workers. This was done in order to follow the established pattern for interagency cooperation on measures to rescue and assist domestic workers, particularly young labourers.

Control of Child Labour in Brazil

Even after the children's rights paradigm emerged in the 1980s, Brazil continued to openly support the use of children as workers. Because its focus was on preparing students for the workforce, "education for work" programs failed to provide the desired outcomes. In contrast, previous nonprofit social initiatives that used the term "education through work" relied on paid employment to teach participants new skills. The curriculum focused on challenging the status quo of production and developing critical relationships with capital. Acquiring the necessary scientific and technical knowledge about the products they made, as well as the ability to

participate in determining the final destination of profits generated by capital and labour, were among the skills that trainees were taught. Innovative approaches include enlisting the help of families and schools to transport children away from harmful environments, implementing socio-educational programs to keep kids in school, organising working teens to fight child labour, including social clauses in business and labour contracts, and identifying businesses that do not exploit or employ children, but instead provide them with professional training in the trades they have chosen. Beginning with its 1991–1994, Brazil-wide effort to make the abolition of child exploitation and the protection of working adolescents a priority, the country's commitment to ending child labour is plain to see. On the other hand, school funding, media mobilisation, children's engagement, and product labelling are the four most inventive ways that Brazil uses to end child employment. Agencia de Noticias dos Direitos da Infancia (ANDI; News Agency for Children's Rights) and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) fighting to end child labour have done commendable work in elevating the issue's profile in the media and shifting public opinion away from viewing it as a moral good and towards it as a grave human rights violation.

When investigative reporting started to investigate the exploitation of child labour at the end of the production chain, focussing on who exactly benefits from child labour, this media's work helped bring about a public perception shift regarding child labour, which led to the eradication of child labour in the 1990s. When it comes to spreading information on child labour, ANDI is free to do so since it is not a government body. After school, some Brazilian service providers (both public and private) use PETI [10] programs to end child labour. In the process of learning about many topics, kids also get insight into the effects of societal ills like child labour. Among them, social label comes third. This serves as a verification mechanism for uniformity. The granting of such labels is contingent upon firms meeting certain criteria, such as not employing minors, not using child labour, and committing a percentage of sales proceeds to help children and adolescents. Financial aid for higher education. A kind of school funding, the Families funding is an essential part of PETI. [11] Poor families first received these payments just as a bare minimum in cash assistance to help them get by. However, since the 1990s, these funds have been used to keep kids in school and prevent them from being sold or used as child labourers. In addition to all of these measures, the Ministry of Education has introduced a number of policies aimed at retaining students and improving their academic performance. The initiative is hailed by UNICEF as a huge success for getting families to focus more on their

children's academic achievement, even if it may not reach the working youngsters. Also, it helps bring down the rates of school dropouts and absenteeism among students. [12]

Brazil is also notable for its rapidly growing global influence and robust economy, which ranks first in Latin America. The country's agricultural, mining, industrial, and service industries are particularly noteworthy. The global market went through two quarters of recession beginning in September 2008, after reaching record expansion in 2007 and 2008. But it bounced back quickly from the crisis and is now a major trading partner for many wealthy nations; all the while, it has been heavily covered in the media. There is a real possibility that Brazil may be under more pressure to improve its record on child labour due to its rising reputation. It is worth mentioning that Brazil has been making strides in reducing poverty, the clear source of child employment, and the number of working youngsters has been decreasing in recent years [13]

Management of Child Labour in India's Situation

Children in India's pre-industrial agricultural society often helped out their parents and other family members on the farm. They studied the customary family vocations and, under the watchful eye of their elders, carried out the tasks that were given to them. The workplace was defined by personal, informal relationships rather than a master-servant dynamic; it was only an extension of the home. Industrialisation and urbanisation, however, altered this situation so that children were compelled to work for pay in a formal master-servant relationship, which included the handling of potentially hazardous machinery. Consequently, child protection became a major concern in India and across the world. [14]

In modern times, child work has become widespread in India. Oldest of all is the use of children as carpet cleaners. In the horrible carpet industry in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, children labour in overcrowded sheds with little room to walk about. There are a lot of industries that use children as workers, such as the match and fire work industry in Sivakasi, the glass bangle industry in Firozabad, the zari making industry in Lucknow, the precious stone polishing industry in Jaipur, the lock industries in Aligarh, and the slate industry in Markapur, Andhra Pradesh. [15]

Putting all of this aside, children also labour in unregulated, unseen industries that aren't part of the official child labour statistics, leaving us to rely on educated guesses as to how many

children are really engaged in this practice. Outside of school, many kids work as street sellers, potters, shoe shine boys, scavengers, sweepers, etc. [16]

The following is an incomplete list of things that might be included: children living on the streets, asking for money, selling items, smoking beedies, sitting on corners, and fighting. These are common in cities. Children often end up living on the streets as a result of being neglected or forced out of their homes as a result of extreme poverty or financial difficulties caused by big families. To get by, these kids have to undertake odd tasks like rag picking. They are vulnerable, living on the streets, and frequently in the hands of street gangs that use them for their own illicit ends. [17]

There are many factors contributing to this dismal image, but extreme poverty and lack of education rank high. These kids' parents are so desperately destitute that they sell them for a pitiful amount. If the Indian government is serious about ending child labour, it must address the underlying socioeconomic factors that force children to work. There are a lot of reasons why child labour is still prevalent in India, including outdated views on women's roles in the workforce, the belief held by some parents that sending their children to school would be a waste of time, and issues stemming from caste, religion, and socioeconomic status. The legislative process in India will not be sufficient to resolve all of these issues. There is no silver bullet when it comes to child work laws; the Child work (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 is only one piece of legislation. Also, there are a number of holes in it that cause problems.

There are still many loopholes in the laws that protect children from working as labourers, and even if those loopholes are filled, the problem will persist until rehabilitation and enforcement are adequately addressed.

Child labour can only be ended by tackling its underlying causes, which include inadequate education policy, a shortage of schools, poverty, marginalisation, migration, and so on. By addressing the underlying causes of child work in India via socioeconomic educational initiatives, we may finally put an end to this catastrophe. [18] Article 39(f) [19] of the Constitution mandates the protection of children from exploitation and moral and material abandonment, and Article 39(e) [20] of the Constitution imposes the same obligation on the state to ensure that children are not employed in professions that are not appropriate for their age and physical abilities. In 1974, [21] India's National Policy for Children came into effect in response to the aforementioned constitutional provision. To achieve the goals outlined in the

prefatory introduction—namely, to safeguard children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to strengthen family bonds—the Government of India intends to implement the policies outlined in the National Policy.

Orphans and disadvantaged children are properly prioritised in the Policy's maintenance, education, and training programs. In addition, the document highlights the importance of non-profits in children's health, education, leisure, and social welfare services, and it calls on the state to support and empower these groups. [22]

In addition to these measures, the Ministry of Labour established the National Authority for the Elimination of Child Labour [23] (NAECL) to rescue children from dangerous jobs and train them in alternative educational programs. The Ministry of employment has joined forces with the most influential arm of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), to achieve its aim of ending child employment. The Ministry also makes sure that the International Labour Organization's Conventions on the Rights of the Child are properly applied when it comes to regulations involving children who work. [24]

CONCLUSION

The global experience demonstrates that the elimination of child labour is not merely a legislative concern but a multidimensional socio-economic and moral imperative. While developed countries have largely succeeded in eradicating child labour through strict laws and compulsory education systems, developing nations continue to grapple with entrenched poverty, illiteracy, and weak enforcement mechanisms. The cases of the Philippines, Brazil, and India reveal that community-based initiatives, education-linked welfare programs, and international cooperation play pivotal roles in tackling the root causes of child labour. Brazil’s conditional cash transfer schemes, the Philippines’ awareness campaigns, and India’s National Policy for Children and rehabilitation programs exemplify promising interventions. Nevertheless, legislation alone is insufficient without sustained monitoring, rehabilitation, and educational reform. The study concludes that an integrated approach combining policy enforcement, economic support to families, and global collaboration is essential to end child labour. Only when societies collectively uphold the principle that every child has the right to education, dignity, and protection will the global vision of a child-labour-free world become a reality.

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