

## **Give Girls a Chance - End Child Labour**

To mark the World Day against Child Labour  
on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009, at New Delhi, NCPRC

### **Devaki Jain**

I applaud the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and ILO and UNICEF for providing an opportunity to illuminate the labouring girl child, the economics of this phenomena ... I noticed in the ILO paper they have mentioned household work, which is a very particular aspect of a girl child's life amongst the dispossessed, the poor - and called it **labour**. This is an important underline.

Many years ago , in 1976 / 77 to be precise, we at ISST undertook a time use study in 6 backward villages in Rajasthan and West Bengal , of time spent over all of nearly 24 hrs -by men women and children in land less households, seeing land less ness as the poorest. And here is a day in the life of Naini, 11yrs old of Etranpura Rajasthan mirrored in the day in the life of Khayrum 12 yrs old in Kuita West Bengal.

It is almost as if they were in an office or regular work and in the same place, so similar is their day rising at 6 in the morning, Naini makes cowdung cakes for an hour, then fetch water, then cleans the courtyard, then at 7.30 she sieves the atta, lights the fire and assists mother to prepare rotis. So does Khayrum 6am! Then cleans utensils, then goes with her mother to work in the field about 3 km away, then home to cook lunch, cutting vegetables, after the meal washes utensils goes again to the well to fill another pitcher of water, then again in the field cutting grass for the cattle.

At 4 pm takes the cakes, fires the oven and cooks daliya then sweeps the house for the second time, and sits for a while with her brother who goes to school then serves dinner which her mother has cooked and then cleans the utensils goes to bed at 8.30 pm. 14 and a half hours The brothers plays marbles and gilli thandu after school.

**There were loud protests from the statistical organizations when we said they must lower the age at which they count a person as worker from 18 to 12, denying such realities...but then they did lower the age classes to 14? Saying it is against the law – but we were fighting to make visible the reality in the ground.**

How do we stop Naini and Khayrum from being this child worker in her home? We just have to substitute her with civic amenities and here is a suggestion for all of us to put into the budget and the 100 days for transformation promise by the government.

**High quality universally located crèches, piped water to the homes, may be even access to cooked food, like the soup kitchens. OR a community facility for making atta and garam rotis , with the crèche and the anganwadi, toilets and washing areas, all in a circle where women can get it all done as a community centre and even take turns, while the little girls go to school. Ela Bhatt and I even designed one such facility centre, in the 70's for the JJ colonies and had submitted it to the Delhi government at that time.**

We can still do that. **That is infrastructure for these little girls and it can be designed as part of the big stimulus for infrastructure which often becomes roads and airports and railway stations and power grids etc.**

At another time I was commissioned by the NHRC, to visit Magadi a place in Karnataka known for silk reeling, as they were using child labour. Sure enough young girls and boys were sitting packed next to each other, reeling. Visiting the households of the children, we heard poignant stories both parents had no work. One girl's parents had received 5000 rupees for bonding the child to the firm, and this had already gone to pay dowry for her elder sister's marriage. Next they want a housing loan in return for another daughter. There was fear that the girls were getting pregnant due to the proximity with boys and the ANM reported many abortions for girls of 12 13 , and also quite a few fell into the well out of shame and no one reported .

So we suggested that unless the adults - father and mother had work with minimum wage, children would be put to work, when children's hands are preferred...and indeed the NREGA is a way out of this impasse. We also suggested that it is important to improve the technology to move it from children's hands requirements to adults hands, but low cost as these small factories cannot afford the modern technologies and yet one does not want to replace them with spinning mills, as the dispersed small factory has a place in evening out economy in India

The crisis has again assaulted the girl child, and moved her into a labourer. Reports by SEWA show that rag pickers, waste pickers income has dropped by more than 50 % so they are taking their girls to pick waste to compensate

for the low rate by increasing volume. Here I think is a really important message to the budget a scheme which encourages waste utilization recycling in small spaces, a good credit plus technology scheme, even out right grant scheme so the waste can be recycled in local areas to keep demand up. With India's skills in S & T innovation we can use it for brickets, found..., power generations, handicrafts and so many other...

### **3 Schemes:**

1. a community facility for making atta and garam rotis , with the crèche and the anganwadi , toilets and washing areas, all in a circle where women can get it all done as a community centre and even take turns, while the little girls go to school.
2. to improve the technology to move it from children's hands requirements to adults hands, but low cost as these small factories cannot afford the modern technologies and yet one does not want to replace them with spinning mills, as the dispersed small factory has a place in evening out economy in India
3. a scheme which encourages waste utilization recycling in small spaces, a good credit plus technology scheme, even out right grant scheme so the waste can be recycled in local areas to keep demand up. With India's skills in S & T innovation we can use it for brickets, foundries, power generations, handicrafts and so many other products.

## Prices of Waste Received by waste collectors in Ahmedabad<sup>1</sup>

Items	Price in Rs/kilo April 2008	Price in Rs/kilo Jan 2009	% decrease
Waste Steel	6	3	50%
Steel Sheets	10	5	50%
Plastic bags	8	5	37.5%
Newspaper	8	4	50%
Hard Plastic	15	7	53%
Soft Plastic	10	4	60%
Dry Bones	4	2	50%
Waste hair	1000	300	67%

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<sup>1</sup> SEWA survey