

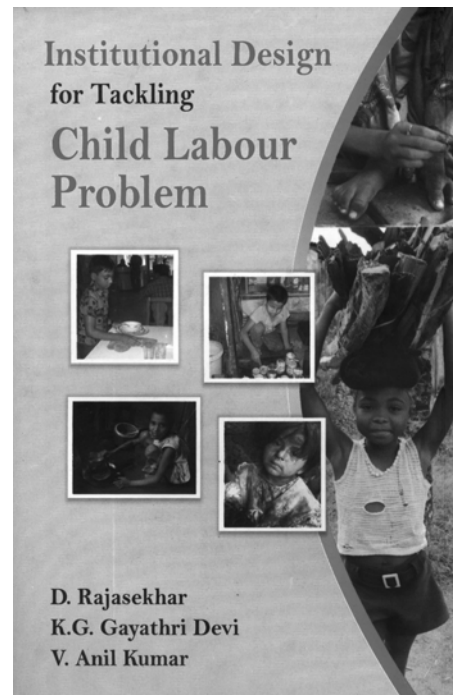
Challenging Task of Tackling Child Labour Problem

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Institutional Design for Tackling Child Labour Problem:
D. Rajasekar, K.G. Gayathri Devi V. & Anil Kumar:
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The Constitution of India, the supreme law of the land, prohibits in no uncertain terms child labour below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment. This becomes abundantly clear if we read Article 24 of this supreme law which also envisioned that India shall, by 1960, provide infrastructure and resources for free and compulsory education to all children falling in the age group of 6-14 years. Since ours is a federal form of government, both the central governments and state governments could legislate for tackling the problem of child labour. There are legislations to prevent child labour in various ways. India formulated a National Policy on Child Labour in 1987 which seeks to adopt a gradual and sequential approach to rehabilitate children working in hazardous occupations. The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) was in continuation of the major goal of 1987 Policy. Despite these efforts, child labour continues to drag the attention of leading social scientists in some states including Karnataka.

The book under review is the outcome of a research project completed by three scholars at the Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore on the State Child Labour Project (SCLP) in Karnataka. The research aptitude of D. Rajasekar as also his strong commitment to every academic programme chosen by him needs hardly any elaboration. In his endeavor of tremendous social importance he was ably assisted by Gayathri Devi and Anil Kumar. For providing a lucid exposition of the various facets of SCLP, all the three authors of the book deserve appreciation.



The book consists of six chapters in which the causes of child labour that are deep rooted and its intimidating consequences are discussed. Wherever required the scenario in Karnataka is profitably compared with the National scenario. Chapter I spells out the objectives of the study, need for the study and the methodology pursued in the study. For the purpose of the field work Davanagere, Bellary and Kolar were chosen by them as these are still characterized by a relatively high incidence of child labour. There was no a meager desk bound research because the study team visited the bridge schools where children had been admitted. The representatives of line departments and community based organizations were interviewed. Had the study team interviewed some representatives of the people at the village level having direct contact with the problem of investigation, some more insights could be obtained by them particularly in verifying the reliability of the official viewpoints.

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Chapter II highlights the magnitude and dimensions of child labour in Karnataka. It is gratifying to note that Karnataka has been experiencing a considerable decline in the number of child labourers in the recent years (p.8). Instructive data on the distribution of child labourers across districts in 1991 is presented in Table 2.5. There is an important observation that the districts where child labour is prevalent in a higher degree are also those which are relatively backward (p.11). There is a meaningful comparison of the conditions prevailing in 1999-2000 and 2004-05 in respect of Hindu and Muslim communities. In 2004-05 there was not even a single female child labourer among all the religious communities while the picture was contrary in 1999-2000. The authors have rightly pointed out that detailed studies are needed to find out the reasons for this (p.16). The data presented in Table 2.9 on Sectors of Child Labour in Karnataka and India is not convincing. In fact the data could be elaborated further to distinguish the pictures available in Karnataka from those found in India. The repetition of figures for females in Karnataka and India may have to be taken as the result of oversight or typographical error in the absence of vivid exposition of as many as 23 sectors of work (p.27) with the source of data and the year of the data presented. This part of the book demands a relook.

The programme of SCLP and its key components are ably discussed in Chapter III. The NGOs are the main part of implementation of SCLP (p.44). After delineating the modus operandi of different components of SCLP in Kolar, Davanagere and Bellary districts, a seminal and apt observation is made which is directly related to the institutional design for tackling child labour problem. To quote, "A pro-active district administration and labour department with the help of dynamic NGOs can make a great deal of difference to the situation and can make the programmes successful" (p.49). The limited funding support to NGOs has reduced their ability to help children after they have been mainstreamed. In other words, this is a gap in the design of the SCLP itself.

Chapter IV constitutes the most important part of the book. The issues such as rehabilitation of child labourers, mainstreaming of children, the role of government and line departments and the governmental institutions working at the taluk level in the implementation of SCLP are discussed. What is disheartening to know was that the government did not give a clear cut definition of child labour to both officials and NGOs. With the unwanted presence of definitional ambiguity, it is not surprising if they could not carry out their tasks with efficiency. There should be enhanced effort on the part of the government and the NGOs to improve public education and broader public action for the success of SCLP (p.86).

Chapter V is devoted to rehabilitation and mainstreaming of child labourers not surprisingly, poverty emerged as the main reason for child labour (p.104). The last Chapter (6th Chapter) contains summary, conclusion and ways forward. The SCLP is more progressive than the NCLP as the former envisages residential bridge schools while the latter provides only the day schools (p.106). The institutional design in SCLP for realizing the project objective is discussed. The project outcomes are appropriately summed up. There are as many as 12 policy suggestions. The convergence of resources is suggested in some specific areas including the operation of SHGs and the design of SGSY programmes. Panchayats and Municipalities have great potential in providing an institutional design for tackling child labour problem which remains in spite of constitutional safeguards and legislative supports.

No doubt the book is lucidly written and temperately and gravely organized. It is an important addition to the literature on the subject of child labour. As the book has a focus and a clear direction, its limitations hardly matter. Worth mentioning is the policy significance of the book.
