

SAVING CHILDHOODS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Children - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

On World Day Against Child Labour (June 12) in 2017, India ratified two core conventions of the International Labour Organization on child labour. It now has to double its efforts to ensure that the benefit of those conventions reach the most vulnerable children.

Although comprehensive data on child labour are not available for India, as per the 2011 Census, in the age group 5-14 years, 10.1 million of 259.6 million constituted working children. Even though there was a decline in the number of working children to 3.9% in 2011 from 5% in 2001, the decline rate is grossly insufficient to meet target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is to end child labour in all forms by 2025. India therefore needs to embark on new and innovative approaches in its fight against child labour.

The ratification of the core conventions on child labour gives rise to a range of priorities such as strengthening policy and legislative enforcement, and building the capacities of government, workers' and employers' organisations as well as other partners at national, State and community levels. It is worthy of mention that India had taken important steps to eliminate child labour even before ratifying these conventions. In addition, there are a few more important steps that the country can take in this direction.

India should invest in enhancing its body of knowledge on child labour, emphasising quantitative information. While there are many common factors across the spectrum, each sector and each demographical segment will have its own set of factors and drivers that push children into the labour market. These have to be addressed. Such factors and drivers can only be identified and analysed through proper research, surveys and assessments.

Eliminating child labour is firmly placed within Goal 8 of the SDGs. A stronger nexus between the discourse on SDGs and the discourse on eliminating child labour can take the advantage of complementarities and synergies of a wide range of actors engaged in both areas of work.

The growing interest of the private sector is a great opportunity that has to be further utilised, particularly to leverage key influencers in domestic and multinational supply chains. It is also a matter of competitive advantage for multi-nationals to ensure that child labour is effectively eliminated in their supply chains. A sector-wide culture of child labour-free businesses has to be nurtured.

As the world of work is transforming and new actors are emerging, one cannot underestimate the importance of creating a sound and vibrant platform to bring together these actors. The fight against child labour is not just the responsibility of one, it is the responsibility of all.

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