

**GLOBALISATION - WILL OUR CHILDREN PAY THE PRICE?**

**By Paro Chaujar**

This paper attempts to analyse the impact of globalisation on children and their rights, using the example of India. The adult world finds it extremely hard to comprehend that little children could in any way be affected by macro decisions and policies made in national, international closed-door meetings. Not only do children experience discrimination on account of their gender, caste, race, ethnicity and class, just as adults do; they experience a distinctive marginalisation on account of being “children”. The paper intends to highlight some of the consequences in the hope that it will stir a larger debate and strengthen the commitment towards ensuring children’s rights in the era of globalisation.

Experiences from across the world show that children are among the most at risk when local economies are opened up to global market forces without making adequate investments and safeguards especially for the poor and marginalised. The experiences are most traumatic in countries which opened markets in a situation where its children were in any case susceptible. World Bank reports analysing the effects in Mexico and Thailand of the financial crisis due to exposure to global markets, found that children were withdrawn from school, entered hazardous jobs and prostitution rings and suffered from development damage due to malnutrition. We have every reason to believe that the effects in India are quite similar, given the already vulnerable situation of children in the country.

### **Children In India**

About 60 million Indian children under the age of 6 exist below the poverty line and every second child in the country is malnourished.<sup>1</sup> Almost 2 million children in India die every year before reaching their first birthday. One in 11 dies before their fifth birthday. 7 to 8 hundred thousand children die every year from easily preventable diseases like diarrhoea. Children of 100 million families live without water at home; children in 150 million live in households without electricity; less than half of India’s children between the age 6 and 14 go to school and a little over one-third of all children who enroll in grade one reach grade eight<sup>2</sup>.

### **How Have India’s Children Been Affected By Globalisation?**

During the early 90’s, the Indian government accepted conditions set by the World Bank and its affiliates and adopted a set of economic reforms. Policies of liberalisation and privatisation were adopted as part of these reforms.

These reforms have affected India’s children at two levels:

- 1) at the level of the impact of the reforms on livelihood and food security of the poor, especially rural agrarian communities. Heightened livelihood insecurity and cuts in food

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<sup>1</sup> Hard Facts, Mobile Creches

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.peoplesmarch.com/publications/globalisation/chapter15.htm>

subsidies have forced many children out of school and into work to augment family income.

- 2) at the level of the impact of reforms on government spending on social sectors such as health and education. Commercialisation of health and education and decreased state investment in improving access and quality of these services has further deprived large numbers of marginalised children of the opportunity to improve their education and health status.

### Impact On Livelihoods

- The last decade has registered the lowest rural employment growth rate since Independence and the overall employment growth in the 90's was about two-thirds to half of what it was in the 80's.<sup>3</sup>
- The last decade has witnessed the lowest growth rate in agriculture, which is the primary source of livelihood for over 60% of the Indian population. Government investment in agriculture declined from 11.6% of GDP in the 80's to 9.1% in the 90's.
- The period has also witnessed shifts in controls over land: consolidation of landholdings of small farmers by big farmers or corporations. In many cases large corporations (both Indian and MNC) have subcontracted such consolidation for production of cash crops.
- Higher costs of agricultural inputs like fertilisers, pesticides and seeds are making it virtually impossible for small farmers to survive. Farmers everywhere are being paid a fraction of what they received a decade ago. The results have been decreased net income of rural agrarian households and thus lower purchasing capacity.

Experiences from rural communities where CRY and its partners are working to ensure child rights have shown:

1. In Keelapavoor block, district Thirunelveli in the state of Tamil Nadu, at least 23% of the small and marginal farmers were disposed of their land and rendered landless as a result of decline of prices for farm products.
2. Govt. policies favoring Indian Made Foreign Liquor destabilized subsistence livelihood of palmyrah workers. Large number of women engaged in toddy based processing activities shifted to home-based beedi (tobacco) - rolling which offered cash availability. The production system in beedi industry is highly contractualised and wages are based on piece rate. This system encouraged withdrawal of children from schools and their engagement in beedi rolling, to augment family income.
3. Consolidation of tribal land and forest by the rich and the government dispossessed tribals of their traditional livelihood opportunities in five districts of Jharkhand and the urban tribal belt of Mumbai in Maharashtra. Indebtedness, bondage and distress migration have increased. Tribal girl children from Jharkhand are now working as domestic workers and child trafficking in the region is on the rise.
4. Non implementation of the Land Ceiling Act in Ahmednagar district of Uttar Pradesh, and increasing consolidation of land by local upper caste and erstwhile feudal lords has left large number of dalit agricultural farmers landless. Reduction in agricultural subsidies and increased dependency on local moneylenders has made heightened livelihood insecurity.

### Impact On Food Security

<sup>3</sup> Jayati Ghosh (2001): Rural Employment In The 1990s, People's Democracy Vol. XXV, No. 30.

- Increase in food prices in the 90's, affected peoples' ability to purchase their basic food requirement. Foodgrains availability per head in the country has hit an all-time low of only 152 kg in the year 2001, nearly 23-kg lower than in the early nineties.<sup>4</sup>
- Hunger-related deaths resurfaced in a big way in the 90's for the first time since Independence. A large number of farmers are reported to have committed suicides in Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra.<sup>5</sup>
- Large numbers of poor people have been dispossessed of their entitlement to food subsidies under the Public Distribution System, which has undergone significant changes under conditions put forth by the World Bank. The PDS is now available only to the "poorest of the poor", the definition and selection procedure having been designed so as to leave out large numbers of poor people.<sup>6</sup>
- For the first time since Independence, the Indian government is faced with an embarrassing paradox of starvation deaths while there is an unprecedented surplus of foodgrains (close to 60 million tons).

**Grassroots experiences:**

60% of the beedi rolling families from in Keelapavoor block, district Thirunelveli in the state of Tamil Nadu, were disintitiled from new Public Distribution System.

**Decreased Spending In Social Sector And Increased Privatisation**

An analysis of the social sector spending during the 90's by the government of India reveals that not much priority has been accorded to it. Not only was the social sector spending in the decade lower than that of the 80's, it is lower than other developing countries (notably East Asian) and also the international standards developed by UNDP. The performance of state governments in terms of expenditure on social sector is worse than that of the Centre, even though the states have the larger responsibility. In India, for every \$1 spent on the social sector, \$170 is spent on defense and debt servicing!<sup>7</sup>

**Decrease in Social Sector Spending:**

- The share of social sector expenditure as a proportion of national income during the 90s was lower than that of the 80s<sup>1</sup>.
- The overall public expenditure on education dropped from a peak of 4.4% of the national income in 1989 to 2.75% in 1998-1999.<sup>1</sup>
- Public financing of health care declined from 1.25% of national income in 1993-1994 to 0.9% in 1999-2000<sup>1</sup>

◆ **Education**

<sup>4</sup> Utsa Patnaik: Food Stocks and Hunger in India, Policy Watch, Macroscan, Aug 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Vandana Shiva, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Categorisation of poorest of the poor is based on a low income level indicator. The poverty line for rural India was around Rs 300 per person per month in 1998-99 – less than a quarter of the commonly used international poverty line of one dollar a day. In 1996-97, when targeting was introduced, 37 per cent of the rural population and 32 per cent of the urban population was termed BPL. Surveys of nutritional outcomes however indicate that around 50% of the population is undernourished, 56 per cent are unable to meet their minimum daily energy requirements and 74 per cent are unable to meet their minimum daily protein requirements (Madhura Swaminathan: PDS: A Demolition Job, Macro Scan 2003.)

<sup>7</sup> Business India; March 20, 2000

- By the government's own admission, 80 million children, that is 40% in the age group 6-14 years are out of school<sup>8</sup>. Most of these children are first generation learners, whose parents have never been to school and come from the economically and socially marginalised communities. Several studies have indicated that even as parents and children do aspire for education, the reasons for children being out of school are to do with the poor access and quality of education imparted at government schools<sup>9</sup>. As for those children who do make it to schools, their retention record is abysmal with little over one-third of them completing elementary education.
- While there seems an apparent increase in central government allocation towards the end of 90's it is still not adequate for providing quality education to the nearly hundred million out of school children. While numerous commissions set up by the Parliament and central government have recommended a minimum of 6% of GDP allocation to education, the current allocation at 4.02% leaves a large gap.
- Even so, the increase in the government investment in education is not going towards improving access and quality of education to *all* children. Instead, it is siphoned to expanding substandard education to the most inaccessible and marginalised areas. The recent programming on education indicates a backing off from the commitment to providing good quality education to every child. Through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), under qualified and underpaid "para teachers" will impart education to several million first generation learners. Segregated from the mainstream education system, these children will

In early 2002 Education Minister for Delhi announced that schools which did not perform well at Class X and XII levels would be privatised. Schools targeted for privatisation were primarily located in slum clusters, resettlement colonies and other areas where millions of the city's poor live and where land prices are escalating.

Shift in trend towards private schools: Experiences from CRY project areas:

- In Akbarpur block in Ambedkar Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh while in the 80s there were 40 teachers over 1200 children enrolled in 8 government schools, now there are 15 teachers for 3000 children enrolled in 13 government schools. In addition, in this area of about 43 villages while there was not a single private school in the 80s, there are now as many as 15 private schools. Yet almost half the children in school going age group are out of school. Clearly, deteriorating quality of education in government schools and fee-charging private schools are marginalising children from poor dalit agricultural families.
- In the Keelapavoor block, district Thirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, where at least 800 children are engaged in beedi rolling, school fees in government aided schools increased by more than 100 times over the 90s. There has been reduction in distribution of free educational material and scholarships have been drastically reduced. Private schools in the region charge a minimum of Rs. 5,000/- per annum.

<sup>8</sup> PLANNING COMMISSION GOVERNMENT OF INDIA APPROACH PAPER TO THE TENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (2002-2007) New Delhi(1st September, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Public Report on basic Education, OUP, 1997, New Delhi.

be handicapped in competing with those educated in formal schools and will find it impossible to break the poverty cycle in which their families have been trapped for generations.

- Not only has there been a spurt in the number of private schools across the country, erstwhile government schools are being closed down. Reports from across the country point to a trend of government schools in crowded urban areas being closed down many times in the guise of non-performance rather than improving the quality of education imparted in them.. Government schools on prime urban property being closed and sold to commercial complexes has been reported from Ahmedabad in 1998 and in 1999 thirty schools in Indore were closed down<sup>10</sup>.
- Several studies have shown that the introduction of fees (whether formal or informal) can make the difference between a child's attendance at school or her removal from the education system. Families make significant sacrifices in order to keep children at school, but poor households in particular are often forced to withdraw at least some of their children in the face of costs they cannot meet.

#### ◆ Health

- Large numbers of children in India continue to live a life constantly threatened by malnourishment, disease and death. There is nothing in our policies, especially health policies, which assures a commitment to facing this threat. Instead of upping the investments in health and making health services far more accessible to the poor, the state is not only withdrawing from providing health services to the poor, it is encouraging the commercialisation of health care services.
- India has one of the most privatised health systems in the world that has effectively denied the poor access to even basic health care. About three-fourths of spending on health is made by households and only one-fourth by the government. In over 40% of hospitalisation episodes, the costs are met by sale of assets or taking loans.
- While the central government allocations to the health sector have remained stagnant during the 90's, the state

**Stagnant and deteriorating public health system and burgeoning private health clinics:**

- Government hospitals remain inaccessible to large number of tribal communities in Mumbai City alone. The nearest government hospital remains at 10 kilometers distance while private clinics have moved from a distance of 10 kilometers in the 80s to 5 kilometers closer to the tribal hamlets in the current period.
- 8 of the 10 health sub-centres covering 43 villages in Akbarpur block of Uttar Pradesh have been closed down in the decade of the 90s.
- Traditional tribal medicine and health practices replaced with costly medicines and private health clinics. Household expenditure on health increased manifold.

<sup>10</sup> Anil Sadgopal in Children in Globalising India: Challenging our Conscience, Haq 2002.



government allocation declined from 7.0% to 5.5%. The central budget is highly dependent on external aid for meeting the health needs of children. While in 1991-92 this dependence was about 50%, in 1998 it had gone up to 79%.

### **What Are The Implications And Consequences?**

If economic and social policies continue to ignore the differential impact of globalisation on large number of poor people, chances are that the regional disparities and gap between the rich and the poor will continue to increase. While a small number will be better educated and enabled to seize the opportunities offered by globalization, a large number of marginalised children will continue to be denied basic education of decent quality. This will not only considerably hamper the economic, social and political progress of the country but also significantly limit the extent to which children from disadvantaged communities could make the most of opportunities for self advancement and realising their basic rights.

Adult unemployment is directly proportional to employment of children. Given that the Indian economy has experienced its lowest growth in employment especially in the rural agrarian sector, it is no surprise that contrary to government claims<sup>11</sup>, in the post globalisation era, more and more children are working, very often at the cost of their education and well being.

It is clear that in times of declining employment opportunities among communities that are agrarian or unskilled, the opportunity cost for educating children will be very high for families. Under such circumstances, providing substandard education to out of school children or leaving the task of their education to private schools will threaten their chances of realising the right to education. Given the large number of Indian children that are out of school and the fact that during the period of globalisation there have been high pressures on household livelihood security, how many of India's children will be able to access private schools?

In a country where about 60% of the population depends on agriculture and related sectors for livelihood, sound and sustainable economic growth must necessarily involve the rural sector. Access to land through land redistribution to the vast majority of landless rural population will provide a sustainable source of income and will go a long way in ensuring their right to food and shelter. Subsistence and sustainable agricultural production and market access must be promoted.

On the one hand large sections of the population are denied adequate nutrition, clean drinking water and sanitation, basic education, good quality housing and a healthy local environment, which are all prerequisites for health. On the other hand, we have a highly inequitable health system which denies quality health care to all those who cannot afford it. Given such a picture, how many of our malnourished and sick children can hope to get appropriate health care?

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<sup>11</sup> Census 2001, government of India shows a decline in total child work force in the country.



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Child Relief and You at the World Social Forum, Mumbai, India

January 18, 2004

The state needs to reexamine its role in society. Given the high levels of poverty, sharp inequalities of income as well as high regional disparities, reliance on private investments in preference to public financing of education, health and nutrition would tend to accentuate the existing inequalities and thereby the extent of overall social attainment. The government needs to take an active role to ensure access and equity in basic services such as health and education. Appropriate legislations, policies and programmes need to be enacted and implemented that ensure employment, food and nutrition security to vulnerable communities. Such communities must be identified carefully and with the objective of including as many and not as few.

### CRY at the World Social Forum

Child Relief and You (CRY) is an Indian non-government organisation working towards establishing child rights in India. CRY believes that permanent improvement in the lives of underprivileged children can be brought about if one addresses the root causes that place children in exploitative situations and lead to the violation of their rights. The macro issues such as livelihood options, unemployment, drought, displacement, migration, etc. need to be linked to micro issues like lack of education facilities, inadequate health services, child labour, child marriage, child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Community mobilisation, organisation and empowerment is intrinsic to CRY's philosophy that people can and must shape their own reality and hold the state accountable. Across the 171 projects spread over India that CRY partners we have seen success in transforming the lives of children and enabling communities to take responsibility for their situation. People centered movements are beginning to influence government policy and action.

CRY together with four partner grassroots organisations from the states of Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh presented grassroots experiences of impacts of globalisation and the strategies adopted by NGOs in combating these, at the World Social Forum in Mumbai.

Grassroots experiences show that social transformation is critical for ensuring rights of all children. Right to information to people, their awareness, conscientisation and organisation for collective action is important for influencing governance and policies. Holding the state accountable for realisation of basic rights, including rights of children is necessary. The experience of partners has demonstrated how collective action by empowered communities has been effective in preventing displacement and dispossession of poor communities from their land, in forcing state to enact meaningful legislation to protect rights and dignity of workers and for activating dysfunctional government school system.

It is also recognised that while interventions at the micro level are effective and critical, strong alliances are required at the macro level to influence and impact national and international decision making. Domestic and international governments and institutions must be held accountable for the impact of their policy decisions on large numbers of vulnerable Indian children. Aid conditions must not be used to induce governments to privatise basic services such as health, education and water. State investments are a must for ensuring accessible and quality services to all children.



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*Ms. Paro Chaujar was part of CRY's Policy and Research team that presented this paper at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004.*