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## Research on Deprived Children and Education

The drive for universal (primary) education (UPE) has gained momentum during the last decade. Various initiatives and declarations (for example the Dakar Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals) have stressed the importance of achieving universal primary education (UPE). The millennium goals, which were agreed on in 2000, have set 2015 as the year in which universal education and gender equality in this respect are to be achieved.

Progress is undeniable but at the same time, as it again has been stressed in the Global Monitoring Report 2005, targets are not going to be achieved in many countries.

Non-enrolment and drop-out particularly affect the children of the poor people. Special efforts should be directed at the geographically isolated and ethnically marginalized children, child labourers in particular. Various forms of deprivation and the compulsion to work and to fight for one's survival continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 300 million.

Which strategies are to be deployed in order to include these children in the educational system? Not enough is known of how to reach and involve this particular group of children. Unless this group is reached, this particular target of the MDG (UPE) will surely not be met (see G.K. Lieten, 2004, the status report written for the expert meeting in The Hague, September 2004).

Currently, education is at the centre of international aid policy attention, but the trend is clearly to focus on providing quality education rather than on UPE. The policy focus of the World Bank, of many western governments and basically also of the Millennium Goals initiative has shifted to a concern for quality.

UPE (universal primary education) is occasionally referred to as Useless Primary Education, for good reasons. At all tiers of the educational framework, from the government department down to the teachers and the classrooms, professionalism, commitment and concern need to be upgraded so as to guarantee that the extension of primary (and secondary) education produce knowledgeable, reflective and concerned citizens. The massive expansion of education, it is argued, has led to a dilution of school effectiveness and an erosion of standards with derisory learning outcomes.

The concern for quality is valid in view of the observable failures in the public school system, which often attends to the poorest and most deprived children. But the concept of quality itself is relative: education in poor neighbourhoods and distant villages will generally not reach the same standards as one finds in well-to-do urban areas. That could possibly not be a reason for not sending children to school and allowing them to rather learn life skills while working.

For these children, the fact of attending school in itself has many advantages which go beyond the debate of quality and beyond the debate of economic rewards. The assumed irrelevance and bad quality of education disregards many functions which education

has. Schools are the only institutions that deal exclusively with children, that keep children away from work and that monitor their development in various ways. Malnourishment, physical abuse and diseases can possibly be detected within the school system, and can then be remedied through a targeted approach (school meals, for example).

All the arguments given in favour of the necessity and importance of universal education are also laid out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC states the child's right to free primary education (article 28) and stresses the importance of this right 'on the basis of equal opportunity'. Article 29 of the same convention stipulates the fundamental aims of education: the development of the child's personalities and abilities, the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship amongst all people.

### **Proposal**

A shift of the research interest from the reasons for the enrolment deficit to the question of quality therefore should be restrained until UPE has not been achieved and until not enough is known as to why children are not in school.

Various theories and assumptions as to why many children do not enrol or drop-out are afloat. The analysis is usually based on household surveys from which one draws variables that help to explain family preferences.<sup>1</sup>

What, however, is generally missing is a concrete child-based empirical documentation why non-schooling and illiteracy continue. Such research, focussing on the life world of the children and their parents, is being proposed for the countries and regions where such problems of educational failure are still manifest.

In this context, there are various issues which are important for child-centred development aid organizations to have more information on. Basically, there are 2 major questions, and 2 positions.

- ✓ One position states that children do not go to school because of socio-economic and cultural reasons.
- ✓ The other position states that marginalized children do not go to school because the mainstream schools offer an alien culture and thus are not attractive for these children.

As in many explanations for social deficiencies, agency and structure play a role.

The agency argument assumes that it is the parents (and to a degree the children) who are putting their priorities wrongly. They are said to still be steeped in a culture of poverty, without an interest in education, and with an eye on direct economic returns from their children. The task therefore is the intervention by activists and the extension of programs to sensitize these people about their rights so that they, as right holders, would start demanding their rightful place in school.

The structuralist argument assumes that the social, economic and political environment is insensitive to the rights of the children of the poor people. Even if governments had

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Gordon Betcherman et al.: Child Labor, Education and Children's Rights. World Bank Social Protection Unit Discussion Paper 412, 2004; A. Admassie: Child Labour and Schooling in the Context of a Subsistence Rural economy: Can they be compatible, International Journal of Educational development, 23, 2003, pp. 167-85; Hideao Akabayashi and Georges Psaracharopoulos: The Trade-off between Child Labour and Human Capital Formation. A Tanzanian Case Study, The Journal of Development Studies, 35, No 5, 1999, pp. 120-40. Even Kevin Watkins (The Oxfam Education Report, 2000) is based on aggregative and comparative data from which the activities and reflections of the particular agents is missing.

the resources, they would applied them in a wasteful way, and the abysmally low quality of education, if available and accessible, would be a hindrance to mass education.

Structures are difficult to change in the short run. The availability of good and committed teachers and the supply of cheap and invigorating teaching materials is not something that can be overcome within one season. Neither will parents and children overnight be able to solve the issues related to poverty so that the focus of children can be directed at education rather than at work.

However, it would be too simplistic to suggest that structural constraints are determining or that one structural or cultural cause carries the main brunt for non-enrolment. Some of the scant anthropological research that has come up recently (e.g. Nieuwenhuizen 2003 in Bangalore; van Woensel 2004 in Kolkata) suggests that there is ample agency: the most deprived children and their parents know the meaning and advantages of going to school, and make efforts to access the formal and informal schools, but they deal with the many structural factors in diverse ways.

### **Research Questions**

Why is it the case that still many children do not go to school: if given a chance would they? One shall have to go into sectors where many children, for different reasons, have never gone to school, or have dropped out (e.g. poor slum areas, street children, remote districts, child labour prone districts), and assess the reasons why they are not going to school. In respect of the respective positions (structural and cultural), the following questions remain insufficiently answered:

- ✓ Are the reasons economic or cultural or, even more important from an interventionist point of view, do they have to do with the relevance and quality of education?
- ✓ What happens if schools are made available and are accessible and if marginalized children can thus participate without financial or social constraints? What happens when children from a poor and illiterate background go to these schools? What vision do the children carry along and how does this affects them in their commitment to enter school and to stay there? The impact can be studied at two levels. One the one hand, there will be the effects of absorbing a new culture which imposes itself as superior and alien and thus may disorient the child. The alien cultural environment may have the net effect that children (and parents) feel alienated and drop out. On the other hand there will be the impact of new knowledge and new values entering the minds of the pupils and thus help to mainstream the child in society. Children (and parents) may appreciate this as the avenue for them to later participate in the social, economic life of society on a more equal footing. But they also may feel alienated by the modernizing school system. It is important to find out which of these two considerations are dominant.
- ✓ What is the effect on school participation of the unequal conditions: less parental support, less peer support and more involvement in work, longer distances, language deficiency, etc.? What happens if these children partake in an educational environment where other children enjoy leisure, learning time and knowledgeable parental support. Does that make a difference?
- ✓ Is the school environment a beacon of safety, confidence, self-esteem and joy or is it rather a compound that instills dreariness and may cause mental and physical harm and a feeling of inadequacy.
- ✓ Are the children and the parents free and autonomous agents? Are the power-holders in the village (class-related, ethnic, gender) possibly a major hindrance in the sense that the message is carried across, normatively and even explicitly, that the particular group of children ought not go to school.

- ✓ Is the economic contribution of the child or the household work indispensable and does it exclude education?

These questions need to be posed with an open mind. Normative views on these issues are many, but an in-depth knowledge requires that the preconceived ideas are kept at bay.

### **Methodology**

Many studies have been done on a number of these issues. These studies usually have been from a macro-perspective looking at the variables inducing education or child labour and from the perspective of the providers of education looking at the efficiency of output.<sup>2</sup>

IREWOC intends to do it differently and get the direct insights from below. Some similar studies have been conducted within specific countries.<sup>3</sup> The information, however, is to be extended so as to have a more varied and comparative policy value. Through detailed fieldwork in the communities, the views and opinions of the children and their parents will be documented and will serve as important handles for policy.

Research with children requires specific skills because children are extra vulnerable to power parameters and need to be protected from possible harmful consequences. Also, children in interaction with (fairly unknown) adults may not be opening up sufficiently. The integrity, moral values and safety of the child must never be compromised.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, there is an urgent need for children to be heard and if this is done with the necessary respect for what each child thinks and says and with a sensitivity to the context, a close and beneficial rapport may be established.

The basic attitude is that the researcher avoids prejudicial behaviour. Other considerations such as informed consent, the right to privacy, the right to remain silent, the right to information about the research, etc. are important as guiding principles but trust, commitment, affinity and affection need to underlie the basic attitude of the researcher: guidelines on how to deal with children have to be internalized and have to be applied as contingent ethics.

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<sup>2</sup> Georges Psacharopoulos. (1997). 'Child Labour versus Educational Attainment: Some Evidence from Latin America'. *Journal of Population Economics*, Vol. 10, Part 4: 377-386; Michael Ravallion and Q. Wodon (2000): Does Child Labour Displace Schooling? Evidence on Behavioural Responses to an Enrollment Subsidy. *The Economic Journal*, Vol.110, NO 462, pp. 158-175(18); Ranjan Ray ( 2002):The Determinants of Child Labour and Child Schooling in Ghana. *Journal of African Economies*, Vol. 11, NO 4, pp. 561-590(30); Ranjan Ray (2000). 'Child Labor, Child Schooling and Their Interaction with Adult Labor: Empirical Evidence from Peru and Pakistan.' *The World Bank Economic Review*, volume 14, nr. 2, pp. 347-367; Myron Weiner (1991). *The Child and the State in India: Child Labour and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Lant Pritchett (2004). *Towards A New Consensus for Addressing the Global Challenge of the Lack of Education*. Harvard University: Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper; Unesco (2004). *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2004*. ([www.unesco.org/ education/efa-report/2004-pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa-report/2004-pdf)); Kevin Watkins (2000). *The Oxfam Education Report*. Oxford: Oxfam Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Salazar and Walter Alarcon, eds. (1998). *Child Work and Education. Five case studies from Latin America*. Florence: Unicef; Neela Kabeer et al. (2003). *Needs Versus Rights?* Delhi: Sage Publications.

<sup>4</sup> Pia Christensen and Allison James (Eds.). 2000. *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. New York: Falmer Press; Elizabeth Graue and Daniel Walsh (eds.). 1998. *Studying Children in Context: Theories, Methods, and Ethics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; A.B.Smith, N.J. Taylor, and M. Gollop (Eds.). 2000. *Children's Voices: Research, Policy and Practice*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education; R.M. Holmes (1998). *Fieldwork with Children*. London: Sage Publications; Caspar Edmonds (2003). *Ethical Considerations When Conducting Research on Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Nepal*. Geneva: ILO, IPEC.

Such research methodology requires the researcher to stay with the communities for many weeks and to bring into the open how the marginalized children view their conditions and their work and how they appreciate education (see for example the studies by Marten van den Berge, Afke de Groot, Ingrid Bosman and Lieten et al.).<sup>5</sup> Prior to the research, the Irewoc research staff shall develop a field work scenario for the range of questions to be asked and the methods to be used.

## **Countries**

The research programme should ideally be located in different regions on the three continents. In each continent, it is proposed to select two countries, and within each country to have two rural areas and one city slum area (or three rural areas if urbanization has not progressed significantly) with reasonably high numbers of deprived children and child labourers.

For the sake of comparison, it would be interesting to include areas with government schools, applying a standard teaching format, and (in)formal schools run by civil society organizations.

IREWOC would prefer the study to be located in countries where it has established partnership structures and has done research projects before:

- Peru or Bolivia be among the choices in Latin America,
- Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, (Northern) Ghana and Tanzania in Africa,
- Pakistan and Nepal or Bangladesh in Asia.

In each country, three different locations will be selected for an intensive study.

## **Output**

The study will have various end products.

On the one hand, there will be country reports which then will be synthesized into an overall report. That publication will be a useful tool for a wide ranging discussion.

Various shorter summaries will be put out, many of which through various websites on internet.

The study will also be used to develop policy briefings which will be the basis for discussions by representatives from child-centred organisations at workshop on the subject.

## **Management of the project**

Professor G.K. Lieten, IREWOC director, will be in charge of the project management and will guide the research staff and supervise the output.

## **Time frame:**

18 months

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<sup>5</sup> Marten van den Berge: Agency Report on Bolivia. Amsterdam: IREWOC; Ingrid Bosman: Education, Work and Nowhere Children in Andhra Pradesh, India Amsterdam, Irewoc, mimeo (also MA dissertation, University of Amsterdam); Afke De Groot: Absent Without Notice. Children and Education in Rural Rajasthan, India. Amsterdam, Irewoc, mimeo (also MA dissertation, University of Amsterdam); Kristoffel Lieten: Education and Children in Difficult Circumstances. Status Report for the Expert Meeting, Den Haag, 30 September 2004; G.K. Lieten, A. Karan and A. Satpathy: Children, School and Work. Glimpses from India (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005).

# IREWOC

The Amsterdam Foundation for *International Research on the Exploitation of Working Children* (IREWOC) was established in 1992 by professor Jaap Doek and professor Sjeff Teuns in order to generate more research on child labour, and to raise awareness and to stimulate action around this complex issue. The mission statement of IREWOC is that more public attention would require more rather than less research on the broad field that national and international (government and non-government) agencies aim to address. In order to monitor and understand child labour situations, and in order to develop best practices, it is necessary to look at the wider context of the living conditions of children and their families. The focus is on the situation of children living in adverse conditions and on their active interaction with those conditions.

Director: Professor Dr G.K. Lieten, Professor Child Labour Studies at the University of Amsterdam and at the International Institute of Social History.

Board: Jan Breman, Barbara Witteman, Frits Brok, Stan Meuwese and Sharon Detrick.

Advisory Board: Jaap Doek, Lex Heerma van Voss, Annemiek Richters, Paul van der Heijden, Jan Pronk, Frans Röselaars.

## Some Publications.

- ✓ Child Labour and Child Health, edited by Frans de Waal et al. Amsterdam: Spinhuis 1998.
- ✓ Child Labour. Policy Perspectives. Edited by G.K. Lieten and Ben White. Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2001. (Also in Spanish: Trabajo Infantil. Políticas y Opciones, 2002).
- ✓ Small Hands in South Asia. Child Labour in Perspective. Edited by G.K. Lieten, Ravi Srivastava and Sukhdao Thorat. New Delhi: Manohar, 2004.
- ✓ Working Children around the World. Child Rights and Child Reality. Edited by G.K. Lieten. New Delhi: IHD, 2004 (also in Spanish, 2005).
- ✓ Kinderarbeid. Prangende Vragen en Contouren voor Onderzoek. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers (Professorial lecture, also in English and Spanish).
- ✓ The Child Labour Problem. Issues and Solutions. Edited by G.K. Lieten. Geneva: DCI, Child Rights Monitor (also in Spanish and in Portuguese).
- ✓ Children, School and Work. Glimpses from India. G.K. Lieten, A. Karan and A. Satpathy. New Delhi: IHD, 2005.

The ongoing research work includes:

- ✓ Children as Agents in Development in Vietnam, India, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Bolivia and Nicaragua;
- ✓ The Nowhere Children: a study of daily practice and hidden concerns, a study of education and child labour in 3 states in India
- ✓ Child Labour Unions in Peru, Bolivia. Brazil, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Rwanda and India.
- ✓ Child Migration and Trafficking in Burkina Faso
- ✓ The long-term health effects of child labour through a longitudinal study in selected countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- ✓ Child deprivation and education, project concept

IREWOC in early 2006 will start the Journal of Child Labour Studies and an electronically accessible archive of child labour and child rights documents.