

## **The Nowhere Children: A Study of Daily Practice and Hidden Concerns**

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Deprived children, whether employed as child labour or the uncounted 'no-where children' have become a major focus of attention in policy-oriented social science research in India.

With vast numbers of children still denied the benefits of schooling and a normal childhood, it becomes socially imperative to seek new ways of approach, perhaps looking at the issue from the angle of the children themselves. Why do children not go to school? Are they kept out of the system against their will or are they themselves not motivated enough to consider schooling? Discussions on how to solve the sensitive issue of child labour as well as the dramatic issue of the 'nowhere children' could then take place with more insight into actual processes and the resulting causes and consequences.

### **Research Questions**

The proposed research seeks to provide a realistic picture of:

- the work they do or do not do and its impact on schooling
- the impact of non-schooling on involvement in work
- the impact of variables like parental characteristics, educational infrastructure, beneficiary programmes, etc. on enrolment and retention.

Apart from attempting to resolve these basic issues, the study will also seek to answer the following research questions:

- How to bring the remaining children to school?
- Are existing interventions effective?
- What is the perception of the children themselves?
- How do teachers' perceptions vary from those of parents?
- How to deal with existing gender disparities in access to schooling?
- What is the role of civil society in bringing children to school?

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology would be based on a time-use survey of children in the school going age group. The target group would be the 'nowhere' children. The basic time-use study would be supplemented by additional information on availability of schooling facilities, quality of education provided, choice of schooling, effective functioning of schools, parental background in terms of social and economic factors and other relevant characteristics. It is also proposed to conduct a household survey to provide a detailed background for the child respondents.

A special focus on 'nowhere children' will help in delineating child work in terms of various categories such as unpaid economic activity and unpaid non-activity within the home.

The study will focus on the rural areas with a small sample from urban areas for comparative purposes. It will be carried out in four states with high proportions of either

child labour or 'nowhere' children. Two districts will be selected from each state. Within each district, six villages will be selected, three from each of two blocks. On an average, about 30 households per village would be sampled. A total of about 1800 households are envisaged for the household survey. Apart from a household survey to provide background characteristics, at least two children, on an average, from each household will be selected for detailed time-use studies. Preference will be given to selecting one child of each sex, where possible, so that gender contrasts may be brought out. The total number of time-use respondents would thus be about 3,600.

On the basis of the findings, a selection will be made of respondents to be studied in more detail with anthropological methods. We expect to study around 200 children from different strata of society in the original sample and their parents (as well as the local functionaries and teachers), and investigate the following concerns:

- the individual views on school and the economic contribution of children

- the individual views on childhood

- the collective views on the state of development and the state of education

Emphasis will be laid on participative debates and discussions on the major issues with District Officials, local NGOs, panchayat representatives and the village community as a whole. This part of the research will involve young trainees (on field work) of Dutch universities.

## **Usefulness of expected results**

As is usual with research studies, the findings of the project will be disseminated to other research groups, both in the country and outside, the academic community in general and policy makers. Further, the data base generated from the study would also be made available to other users to encourage more in depth analysis of aspects not touched upon in our own research. This apart, the findings of the proposed research study would be directly relevant to three major user groups:

- Government, International Agencies and NGOs working for the elimination of child labour.

- Agencies and Institutions focused on the universalisation of primary education, and

- Agencies involved in welfare-oriented programmes with a child-focus such as nutrition, health care and immunisation.

## **Finances**

The programme has been financed by the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development.