

IREWOC Research Capacity Training Workshop in Dhaka

March 2009

Results from the SIMPOC-supported Bangladesh National Child Labour Survey indicate that 13.4 per cent (4.7 million) of all children ages 5-14 work; this is 18.5 per cent (3.4 million) of boys and 7.8 per cent (1.3 million) of girls in this age group.

About 7.3 per cent (2.6 million) of children in the above age group participate in the labour force and do not attend school.



In Bangladesh, with a child population of around 40 million, child labour is visibly present in everyday life. In many sectors, unlike in the garment industry where fairly effective reforms have taken place, child labour is conspicuous by its visibility, for example in Dhaka. Many of the children are not just engaged in light work and earn an income. They appear to be doing heavy and dirty work for the entire day and earning a paltry income. More information is urgently needed on the reasons why child labour exists on such a wide scale, on the mechanisms and power relations involved, on the working circumstances, on the horrific levels of exploitation.

IREWOC sees advantages in training local researchers and NGO staff with better research instruments to study the various aspects of child labour. With that purpose, Professor Kristoffel Lieten has developed a unique workshop module 'Child Labour Research Capacity Training'. With the support of Plan Bangladesh a 9-day workshop was held in Dhaka from 14 to 22 March 2009. It was attended by 12 participants, mainly from the research departments of NGOs such as Plan and Save the Children.

The workshop, after introducing key concepts underlying the child labour problem, such as child rights, participation, work and labour, elaborated on the IREWOC approach to doing research. In the process, the participants got to know about participative qualitative measures, confidence building measures, empathy, dissecting lies, deepening the understanding through time-consuming patience, listening and observing, cross-checking and recurrent visits. For 3 days, the participants went into the field (railway station, busy markets, car repair shops, restaurants, street sellers, domestic labourers, etc.) and each day came back with new insights based on the application of the downside-up methodology.



In that short period, with a sample of only 2 or 3 children per participant, they came home with horrific stories about 11-year-old boys working publicly in restaurants for 16 hours a day at a payment of ten euro and with insights in the way the so-called self-employed boys selling chocolate or soft drinks in railway stations are in fact being tightly controlled by an adult master. In addition, many of the children were found to be bonded. The participants, all working within committed child-centered organizations, were perplexed by what they came to know, thanks to the qualitative methods explained and put into practice during the workshop.





It was hard work, but the assessment by the individual participants is a good indication of the importance of the research methodology developed by IREWOC:

We were told not to stay on the beaten track; this gave a new dimension to my thinking. At the surface, we see things, but after long probing we get a different in-depth picture. It is not easy to do, but it is the only way of getting the real story. By bridging to the child and establishing confidentiality, a new world went open to me. I now know that we have to ask different questions and we have to ask them differently. The destitute child, for its own survival, tells so many lies. Meeting him in private brought out so much hopelessness and anger which he would never say in public. I worked within my frame of mind; now I know that the child labourer has his own frame of mind. I shall now look at the research reports coming to my office with different eyes. When we go and do evaluation or assessments, the field has usually been organized for us; now we had to plough into the rough field. Roaming around for hours observing the child has made me see things in a different way. For years, I have worked with street children; now I have learned about their actual life. Nobody has ever before shown me how to go into a deeper understanding of the child.

Plans are underway to involve the participants in a research program in which the worst sectors with high child labour incidence will be studied qualitatively.

The research capacity training workshops help to strengthen the research capacity on child rights issues in developing countries. In July, a similar workshop will be held in Addis Ababa.