Child Labor Case Study Readings

1. Bangladesh: Garment Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

A brief UNICEF discussion of this case provides more background on how this agreement came about the link between this agreement and proposed sanctions against Bangladesh garment exporters. The perspective of Bangladesh garment workers and human rights activists can also be quite enlightening. A must read for anti-sweatshop and child labor activists is Bangladeshi economist Naila Kabeer’s book, *The Power to Choose: Garment Workers in London and Dhaka*. Of particular interest is Kabeer’s chapter 11 “Weak winners, powerful losers: the politics of protectionism.” which provides thorough review of the Harkin-BGMEA-UNICEF incident, both from the point of view of women and girls in Bangladesh and from the perspective of U.S. activist groups such as UNITE and the National Labor Committee.

Excerpt from U.S. DOL, ILAB Chapter 5

In July 1995, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers’ Association (BGMEA), the ILO, and UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at eliminating child labor in the garment industry. The MOU provided that all children working in the garment sector should be removed from factories and enrolled in schools, but that children should not be removed from work until an appropriate school program was in place. It prohibited factories from hiring new underage workers or retaining children once school facilities were available. The MOU established processes for verification and monitoring of employment at garment factories, referral of underage workers to NGO-run schools, and monthly income maintenance stipends of 300 taka (US$ 6.88) for children attending school. The signatories agreed to jointly fund these activities and manage the implementation of the MOU through a steering committee.

The MOU partners established a monitoring program under the direction of the ILO to implement the MOU. To identify the incidence of child labor at BGMEA factories, monitoring teams—made up of ILO, BGMEA, and Government of Bangladesh representatives—visit registered factories in designated zones one to three times per month and interview workers.

Over time, the MOU’s monitoring system has helped to reduce significantly the number of child workers in BGMEA factories. A 1995 survey identified 10,546 children working in 891 BGMEA factories, or about 43 percent of BGMEA’s 2,152 factories. By 1996, the share of BGMEA factories employing children had fallen to 32% and by 1997, the percentage had fallen to 13 percent. Figures for January to May 1998 indicate that only eight percent of BGMEA factories still employ child workers. The absolute number of children found at factories has also declined. Whereas early monitoring identified several hundred children per month, in April 1998, fewer than 100 child workers were found working in BGMEA factories, and in October 1998, only 35 children were found.

The MOU parties have established 353 schools, operated by two NGOs, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Gano Shahajiya Sangstha (GSS). Children attend these schools for three hours a day and for a period of two years at BRAC schools and three years at GSS schools. The schools, run in consultation with the Bangladesh government, served a total of 9,710 children through the end of 1997. In 1998, the number of children enrolled in the schools decreased significantly, as over 60 percent of the children originally enrolled turned 14 years of age, the legal age for factory employment (see Appendix D). To adjust for this decline, the program has consolidated numerous centers. On April 30, 1998, there were 232 schools in operation under the MOU, with a total enrollment of 4,307 students. In the future, the MOU parties are considering additional activities to alleviate the poverty of families with working children. Among the recommendations being considered by the steering committee are projects focusing on food supplementation, vocational training, skill training, microcredit facilities, and health care facilities.

More on BGMEA from the ILO: *The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers’ Association (BGMEA) – ILO IPEC case studies* It was an unprecedented call for help. On October 1994, some 53 children in the Bangladesh garment industry appealed directly to the ILO and to UNICEF. The threat of an American boycott of goods from factories employing children had resulted in mass dismissals. In less than one year this call for help led to one of the most innovative ILO-IPEC projects – the phasing out of all child labor in an industry which accounts for two thirds of Bangladesh’s total earnings. Such an ambitious project could hardly have been set in motion without the active support of the Bangladesh Government and the garment manufacturers themselves. Many manufacturers and employers in the garment industry wanted to rid themselves of
child workers as soon as possible to avoid the threat of a potentially ruinous boycott. Ironically, they had to be convinced by ILO-IPEC that no under-age child workers were to be taken away from work until appropriate education programs and other rehabilitation measures were in place.

- **The first time that an entire industry enters into an agreement to make their workplaces free of child labor and to keep them child labor free;**
- Over 8,000 children withdrawn from 800 factories and placed in schools;
- **Systems of internal and external monitoring and verification have been developed and tested;**
- **Surprise monitoring indicates a positive trend:** In 1995, the pre-monitoring survey found 43 per cent factories employing children; In early 1997, surprise monitoring found only 12 per cent of the now more than 1,300 factories employing children.

On 4 July 1995, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association (BGMEA), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNICEF and the ILO, aimed at the elimination of child labor in the garment industry. This was, and is, an historic agreement, because it marks the first time that an entire industry has cooperated so closely to phase out child labor while ensuring that credible alternatives are provided. Under the MOU, the three parties agreed to: conduct a survey to determine the number of children under 14 working in the garment industry; devise and implement a verification and monitoring system for the garment industry; set up education programs for the children removed from work in the garment industry; provide compensation to the former child workers and their families for part loss in income; raise public awareness on child labor and the importance of education.

As its contribution to this effort, ILO-IPEC developed and implemented an experimental monitoring and verification system to remove child workers under the age of 14 from garment factories and to prevent other children from entering employment in garment factories. After conducting a survey to identify the children working in the garment industry, more than 8,000 children under the age of 14 years of age have been successfully withdrawn from 800 garment factories and enrolled in special education programs.

Twenty eight child labor monitors were carefully selected and trained for the regular inspection of factory sites in Dhaka and Chittagong, and for monitoring the school attendance of the children. In the event of any infractions, violating manufacturers face a penalty of either a fine of US $1,000, or, in the case of a repeat violation, a temporary withdrawal of the manufacturers' export license.

Close collaboration has been successfully forged between the ILO, the BGMEA, and the Government of Bangladesh. The BGMEA model is an example of how employers and UN organizations have been able to work together to phase out child labor in the industrial sector, and has demonstrated clearly how child labor can be phased out from the industry and the children placed in education programs.

*The case studies below were originally prepared by the U.S. DOL after the Harken Bill controversy in Congress*

**Brazil: Goat-to-School Program**

There are numerous health and safety risks involved in cutting and processing sisal, and resulting injuries can be debilitating. In one sisal-producing municipality in the Brazilian state of Bahia, a local union initiated a program to reduce the number of children working in the local sisal industry. In 1996, the Union of Rural Workers of Retirolândia (Bahia), set up a pilot project to benefit working children and their families. The union provided goats to families who agreed to send their children to school instead of to work and instructed the families on the breeding of livestock. As part of the arrangement, parents agreed to use milk from the goats to feed their children. Parents also agreed to repay to the union as many goats as were originally given to them, thereby enabling the program to assist additional families.

Initially, more than 60 goats were distributed to about 30 families. As a result, more than 100 children were removed from hazardous work and instead attended school.2 Initially financed by IPEC, the program is now self-sustaining, and the number
of families it serves continues to increase. The project has raised awareness of the hazards of child labor and the importance of education. It has also been active in coordinating efforts among teachers and other education professionals to improve the municipality's educational infrastructure.

3. **Mexico: Program for Gradual Reduction of Child Labor** in Agriculture in Sinaloa

Children working as agricultural day laborers on commercial fruit and vegetable farms in Mexico are subject to hazardous conditions. In recent years, media coverage and campaigns by North American vegetable growers have focused particular attention on the alleged use of child labor by growers of fruits and vegetables in Mexico's northeastern state of Sinaloa. To confront the child labor situation, the Confederation of Agricultural Associations of the State of Sinaloa (CAADES), in cooperation with the federal, state, and local governments, initiated a program in 1997-1998 to phase out child labor over a three-year period. In its first year, 46 of CAADES's 50 members, representing 122 farms, participated in the program. The program offers monthly compensatory food packages worth 300 pesos (US$ 30.00) to families who remove their children from work and send them to school, an amount equal to roughly 30 percent of an adult's monthly salary. The Sinaloa State Government's System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) covers 70 percent of the cost of the food packages, and growers provide the remaining 30 percent. In some cases, growers also contribute to the construction and furnishing of classrooms on their farms. The Department of Education provides teachers and school materials.

During its first year, the program targeted child workers up to 10 years of age and included the participation of almost 2,000 children. While the majority of the children were between the ages of six and 10, another seven percent were between the ages of 11 and 14. Teachers were responsible for taking attendance to ensure that participating children were not working. Each child who completed 120 days of schooling received a certificate from the Ministry of Education. By the end of the 1999-2000 season, the program will broaden its target group to include children up to the age of 14.

4. **Nepal: Programs for Bonded Children** In Nepal, several programs aim to rehabilitate rural children working under bonded conditions. The Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), which has received ILO/IPEC funding, provides educational opportunities to bonded children. INSEC provides children with nine months of nonformal education, focusing on basic language and arithmetic skills, and then seeks to integrate these children into formal primary education. Through these activities, INSEC has enrolled over 1,000 children in Nepalese schools. Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), another NGO receiving ILO/IPEC support, also provides nonformal education to bonded children, enabling many to be admitted to government schools. In addition, RRN provides vocational orientation and skills training to older children and their parents.

5. **Pakistan: Project to Eliminate Child Labor from the Soccer** (return to case study list)

In February 1997, the Pakistani soccer ball industry, the ILO, and UNICEF reached an agreement to remove children from the production of soccer balls, provide them with educational opportunities, and create internal and external monitoring systems for the soccer ball industry. Over 50 Pakistani soccer ball manufacturers and U.S. importers have signed the agreement, known as the Partners' Agreement to Eliminate Child Labor in the Soccer Ball Industry in Sialkot, Pakistan. This agreement is closely modeled on the Memorandum of Understanding, described above, between Bangladeshi garment manufacturers, the ILO, and UNICEF that aims to phase out employment of children in garment factories, place them in schools, and create a monitoring and verification program to ensure success.

The project has two programs--one focusing on prevention and monitoring and the other on social protection. The prevention and monitoring program aims to help manufacturers and assemblers identify and remove children under 14 years of age from soccer ball stitching centers by formally registering all stitchers, stitching centers, and stitching contractors. It also aims to shift production from homes to stitching centers, where child labor violations can be monitored more systematically and effectively. Under the Agreement, manufacturers create their own internal registration and monitoring system that is supplemented by an independent monitoring group, charged with monitoring violations of the partnership agreement.

The social protection program aims to rehabilitate child laborers, particularly those affected by the prevention and monitoring program, by providing more relevant and hence more valuable education, as well as in-kind assistance. As of October 1998, about 5,400 children and their families were benefiting from the social protection program through 154 village education and action (VEA) centers. The VEA centers are charged with providing nonformal education to children removed from work in the soccer industry. They facilitate the enrollment of younger siblings in primary education, set up parent "action committees" to encourage parental participation in the program, establish income generation activities and
other in-kind support, conduct awareness-raising campaigns in communities, and, whenever possible, mainstream children under 12 years old into the formal school system.

Prior to joining the ILO/IPEC Social Protection Program, about half of the children served had been stitching soccer balls full-time. As indicated by ILO data collected for the period from October 1997 to October 1998, an average of 50 percent of the participating manufacturers' production capacity has been shifted to monitored stitching centers. In addition, 80 small village-based stitching centers for women are now in operation.

The Sialkot project has had a positive impact across the border in India and in other industries in Pakistan. Soccer ball manufacturers in India, under the auspices of the Indian Sportsgoods Manufacturers and Exporters Association, have developed plans for a similar project to phase out employment of children in soccer ball stitching and ensure their attendance in school. Under the proposed plan, a new foundation, funded by exporter contributions, would promote education and ensure that underage children who are employed stitching balls are replaced by older siblings or parents.

On October 22, 1998, the ILO and the Pakistani Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association signed an agreement to phase children under 14 out of the carpet industry, provide educational opportunities, and establish a compliance monitoring system. This landmark agreement flows from the model of the soccer ball agreement in Sialkot.