

Executive Summary

A Survey of Child Labourer's Households in Rural Communities: Decision-making, awareness and attitudes on children's participation in the labour market

This survey explains how children in rural village participate in the labour market by emphasizing the household's situations, perceptions and attitudes toward the whole process.

The sample of child labour households are from villages of high and low incidence of child labour including villages in Burirum, Srisaket, Chiangrai and Pattani from three regions in Thailand. The total number of households is 536 from 41 villages in 14 tambons. Households are selected on the basis of their experience in having children (below 18) going out to work in the past five years (1988-1992).

As the number of selected households is the total of those sending children to work in one village, it directly reflects the extent of child labour incidence in the village. The average figure of households having children going out to work is shown in the following table.

	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Average</i>
• province	Burirum	Pattani	all survey-areas
• % child labour households in survey-areas between 1988-92	22.6	4.2	9.8
• average no. of child labourer 15-18 years in one village in 1992-93	26	8	15.8
• average no. of child labourer below 15 years in one village in 1992-93	8.6	0.8	2.9

The number of children going out to work as shown above could be modified further to estimate the number of child labourer from rural areas in general. Three scenarios, that is high, low, average incidence, could be useful to classify problem areas.

In the area where Child labour migration is high, adult migration is also high. So, in the migration prone area it is likely that adults and children share household economic responsibility. Yet, the pattern of child labour migration is independent from that of adults. Bangkok is the important labour market for children while adults' is more diverse including other provinces or even within the same locality. Children use other social network to enter labour market, including relatives, neighbours and friends, more than their immediate family.

Besides looking like an average household in rural areas, child labour households are composed of mixed economic status. Only 30 per cent evaluate themselves as being poor, and not all the so-called "poor" are under extreme pressure.

Indicators of households being in some kinds of difficulty are as follow:

- self-evaluating as being poor
- having more than one child going out to work
- being in debt for household expenditure purpose
- inability to pay back loan on time
- depending on child's remittance to pay back the loan
- children in the household not interested in education

Households do not necessarily occupy all the above characteristics. The overall proportion of those who are in such situations are not large. Of all the total number of child labour households, around 25% have some difficulties as indicated.

Despite a different degree of difficulty facing each household, the majority of households still have similar attitudes regarding children's education and work. Three following observations on attitudes are important because it leads to a choice for a child to work to some extent: (a) *attitude toward children's higher education is not as high as it should be* (b) *parents do not necessarily expect their children to carry on farming* (c) *households found more positive aspects of children going out to work, not only for the sake of the parents but also for the children themselves.*

However, negatives attitudes regarding children going out to work are noteworthy, in that, it reflects the parents' concerns which can be beneficial to campaign against child labour. Parents are fully aware of a separated family situation, generation and attitude gaps between parents and their working children, interrupted family socialization, and even minor problem of caring responsibility for aging members in the family. However, the negative aspects are not coming out so strong because the nature of those concerns are not yet explicit.

Child labour households receive information mostly from informal sources, i.e., their social networks. Information sought by the households are more on opportunities to work, and social networks are the most convenient source. Awareness on problems of child labour is very low and mostly informed by mass media. Parents are more interested in opportunity to work than problems that children might face. They believe children might have some problems but that has to be transcended. Their concern is not much with working conditions but with how children living their lives away from home.

Although in a broader picture, it might seem that there is a pattern of child labour migration from rural to urban area, in the level of family decision, there is no clear plan and preparation. The households have not checked information and have no way of equipping their children before leaving home. Official sources of information and services seem to be missing from their awareness. Social networks seem to be both source of information for job opportunity and social security for the working children. Decisions are mostly based on the degree of confidence on their networks.

In general, working in a big city seem to be a pattern of how children in some rural areas want to leave their lives, but within a family there is no clear pattern as to when, where, how and what child should go out to work. It is very much circumstantial and depends on the reliability of their existing social networks. Child determination is also important for a family either in decision to work or to go to school. However, the underlining assumption is to compromise with household needs and a child's personal preference; and, decision took place when the connection to get a job is available.

It is already in the general perception that children should leave home only when they are mature enough. By saying this, most of them mean after finishing

school, getting citizen identification card, or become 18 years old. As a precaution, parents believed the best way, if a child is to leave home for work, is to *let them go only with relatives; make sure that children can communicate with their relatives and home on a regular basis, children better not leave home at a young age.*

Child labour households depend on themselves and social networks in most occasions. There is no mechanism of prevention and protection available at the local level. However, people do not override the role of *local leaders* as well as *the police* if problem should arise. Local school teachers are some what missing from their perception.

The results of the survey implies that a programme on child labour elimination might work against poverty in general but specifically not necessarily focusing on the poor. The meaning of poverty become even more relative and the target group of campaign and services provision can be diverse.

A village might not be an suitable sized of a campaign unit since the number of child labour household is too small, but it can be an excellent data collection and monitoring unit. Local leaders although not taking any initiative roles are still knowledgable about the situation of child migration within the community.

It is also important to note that people are tolerant to problems. So, they do not pay an adequate attention to information regarding problems but more so on opportunities and alternatives which is unfortunately missing.

Programmes on child labour should seek to incorporate or be aware of social networking which is not utilized by action programmes. As well, local mechanism is missing and it could be formed with a collaboration of local leaders, child labour households themselves, local officials and perhaps ex-child labour, instead of not being selective at all. How to proceed with an establishment of local mechanism is an important and a delicate issue. To avoid imposition of projects and coercive participation, a feasibility study could be conducted, and following up with an exchange among people.

It seems that preventive measures by means of information distribution and elementary school extension to nine years are not so effective to stop child migrant workers. Programmes should be re-oriented toward more proactive approach. People are open to a more compromise alternative, i.e., work and education, apprenticeship, or summer jobs, etc.

This survey focuses only on child labour households. It is not an indepth study although it might have already included qualitative data. It is interesting to find how other households in the same community manage through difficulties without having a child to work when they are not mature enough. The collective view of all villagers about this problem should be investigated which can be a part of a feasibility study to promote community participation. For an academic interest on child development, retrospective life stories of child labourer until becoming an adult could be a learning experiences which can contribute to various aspects regarding children in the rural areas.