

Coproduction: A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR WORKING CHILDREN
Nepal, March 2000
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Music

Voice Clips: Nepali, Voice over English

girl: "I would like to go to school, but I can't go because I have to look after my brothers and sisters all day.."

boy: "At the carpet factory we work from 5 in the morning till 11 at night, every day."

girl: "The man who took me there said I would earn good money in a textile factory. I didn't know he would take me to a brothel."

Music fade under

A Brighter Future for Working Children. A Coproduction by Radio Nepal and Radio Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcasting station.

Music fade out

Voice Clip SANI (nepali with English Voice over)

"I used to wash dishes and clothes, but my employer always beat me with sticks, pulled my hair and then I cried and ran away after some months."

13 year old Sani lives in a children's shelter in Kathmandu. She comes from a village nearby. But she doesn't want to go back home to her parents. They sent her to work as a domestic help in the city. Like Sani, many children in Nepal have to work. The country has one of the highest numbers of child workers in the world. The International Labour Organisation, ILO, estimates that up to 2.6 million children under the age of 14 are working full time. Including the part time workers, more than 5 million or half of all children in Nepal are involved in the labour force.

Boys and girls, sometimes as young as six or seven are smashing stones in construction sites, they work long hours in the fields, as domestic servants, in restaurants or carpet factories, and thousands are forced into prostitution every year. There is nothing unusual about child work in Nepal.

Voxpop:(Nepali with English voice overs)

(Woman) "I had to work when I was a child. I had to stay in our shop all day."/

(Man)" when Children work instead of going to school, they won't be able to do anything good in the future."

(Woman:)"Why should they eat when they don't work. Work is necessary. A person cannot become a person without work. "

(Man) "Parents send their children to work to earn more money so that they and their families can survive. that's why children have to work.."

There is nothing wrong with a child helping the family. But in many cases, children are being exploited. Many are working 12, 14 or even more hours every day, earning less than 300 rupees or 5 US dollars a month. Often, they don't get any money, but only food and a place to sleep in return for their work. Many are kept like slaves, in almost inhuman living conditions. But lack of time to play and no chance for education is a severe problem for children's physical and mental development, says Carolyn Bekker, a child labour expert from UNICEF:

Voice clip Carolyn Bekker (English)

If you look at a child that is doing repetitively the same work over and over again, like knotting a carpet, or washing dishes, or clothes, or packing cookies or making cigarettes, I mean what challenge is here for a child, what kind of opportunity to learn has a child here. / But it is the right of the child to get his livelihood, it is the right of the child to get education. I do understand that when there is poverty, there is a need that children will give a helping hand to the family. But that doesn't mean it needs to be deprived from education."

Nepal ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1990, which states that children should be protected from hazardous work and ought to be given the chance for a healthy development. In addition, the Nepali Children's Act was passed in 1992, prohibiting children under the age of 14 from working. Yet so far, the laws remain mere theory. NGO's accuse the government of lack of commitment. But Dev Ratna Tamrakar from the Ministry of Labour thinks it is the Government's task alone to put the law into practice.

Voice clip (Nepali with Engl. Voice over)

"..The implementation of the children's rights act cannot be done by the government alone, all citizens as well and NGO's and international organisations and the general public have to work for it as well. The root cause of Child Labour is poverty, so unless the socio-economic situation improves, it is difficult to abolish child labour."

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than half of the population living below the poverty line, surviving on less than a dollar a day. Since parents don't find well-paid jobs, they send their children to work. But blaming everything on poverty is a lame excuse for not making real changes, says Sumnima Tuladhar from the children's NGO CWIN.

Clip Sumnima Tuladhar (English)

"they say we are a poor country, so we cannot really take responsibility of liberating all children from worst forms of child labour or we are not really able to work towards a better life for children. but they're blaming it on poverty, it is getting away from the problem / people in general, they really, do not get any opportunity to develop themselves, they are not even aware that they have to have some kind of education or they have to have a good life, and people in the power are afraid that if people will know about their rights, they will revolt."

One of the goals of CWIN is to create awareness among working children about their basic rights. But advocates of children's rights like Sumnima Tuladhar are

aware that the total eradication of child labour will not be possible in the near future.

Voice Clip Sumnima T.(English)

"We are working towards the elimination of worst forms of child labour. Like children under the age of ten should not be employed in any set up(..) any work force, children should not be exploited sexually, or in work that is physically, psychologically harmful. But the total elimination in a country like Nepal is a dream."

CWIN and other national and international Organisations like UNICEF are currently focusing on improving the situation of working children, trying to give them access to at least some kind of basic school education or vocational training.

Unicef for example offers basic literacy classes for children in the carpet industry and wants to include construction workers as well. However, only a minority of children benefit from such programmes so far.

Yet raising public awareness about the issue of child labour is showing at least some results. Reports on the children working behind the looms of carpet factories in dire conditions have led to the reduction of child labour in this sector. Many customers abroad now demand carpets with the "rugmark" label that is only given to carpets produced by adult workers. But there are only two government inspectors monitoring child labour in Nepal. And they are not checking small factories with less than 10 workers. Sumnima Tuladhar again:

Voice Clip Sumnima T.(English)

"Because of the rugmark and the inspections team set up by the ministry of labour you will not see children working in big factories or in the front, but there are still many children who are working under ground. Some factories, which are very small in set up, and which have only few looms, in a home, which could be in anybody's home, and there you could find 100 percent child labour still, and we are still rescuing many children from carpet factories."

SFX: Carpet Factory

Even though children are still working in carpet factories, their fate has at least become an issue, while other forms of child labour remain mostly invisible. Domestic servants are a good example. Most middle class and lower middle class families in Nepal have young domestic servants, also called Kanshis or kanshas. They are often the first to rise in the morning to prepare breakfast, and the last to go to bed at night, but most of them don't receive any money. Yet poor families are happy that their child can work as a domestic servant, often hoping he or she will get some kind of education in return for cooking, cleaning and other work. In fact, only about one quarter of domestic servants really go to school. A project coordinated by the German Organisation for Technical Development, GTZ, is now trying to raise awareness among employers. Free basic literacy classes have been designed for working children. One of those schools is located in Chabahil, a middle class locality of Kathmandu. For two

hours a day, the children are taught basic literacy and calculating skills over the course of 9 months.

sound from school *"Kha, ka, ga ..."*

About 20 boys and girls between 6 and 14 are repeating the alphabet this morning. One of them is Rachana Budhakhoti, an 11-year-old girl with a shy smile.

voice clip girl. (Nepali, English Voice Over) (evtl use boy as example here...)
"Actually I don't like to work. I like going to school. I'd rather be at home in my village and study there. What I'd really like to be is a doctor."

The quality of education here is not great. Some of the children fall asleep during classes because they've worked till late. But learning how to read and write is a start for Rachana. If she is lucky, her employer might enroll her at a regular school after she has completed her class. Though some employers feel that paying the stationery for a basic course is already a big favour for their servants, others are indeed providing regular education for their kanshis and kanshas. In any case, the children are dependent on their employer's good will.

CWIN has started a hotline where people can report maltreatment of child labourers, and the German Organisation for Technical Cooperation GTZ is currently building up a lawyer's network to provide legal aid to working children. But most domestic servants don't complain. Many are not even aware that they should get properly paid for their work. And most think that they are better off than they were at home in their villages, where they may have to work even harder than in the city.

12 year old Kali Sherpa lives in Marming, a village in the mountains of Sindupalchok about 100 kilometers northeast of Kathmandu. She gets up before sunrise and works all day:

Voice Clip (Nepali with English Voice over)

I would like to go to school, but I don't have time. I have to work, take the buffalo to graze, collect fodder early in the morning, I have to carry water home and cook food and look after the little children.

Most Nepali children work in agriculture. 80 percent of the population live in rural areas, often in remote villages without commodities like electricity or clean water. Many children from the villages dream about an easier - and more exciting - life in Kathmandu. Promises of contractors offering well paid jobs in the cities often lure them into exploitation. That's why it's crucial to prevent them from migrating before they have attained at least some kind of education, says Charlotte Addy from GTZ.

Voice Clip Charlotte Addy, English:

"Children who migrate to the city at an early age, since they have no education and not learned any skills, they don't have any chances for the future. They end up as coolis here in the city, the best they could do is as carpet workers, but they

never have a chance to educate their own children later on, so they remain in the vicious circle, poverty, child labour, poverty, child labour."

Community involvement and activation is one of the key strategies of a project launched by GTZ and the Nepali government to improve the situation of working children. Vocational training like needlework, carpet weaving or stitching is offered to improve the skills of working children in villages like Marming. To make the village more attractive, a youth and community center was started that also organises village festivals.

sounds from womens' group dancing in fade under

And the newly founded women's groups not only practise traditional dances, they also take up community issues like raising awareness about the importance of education for children, including girls. Charlotte Addy again:

Voice Clip Addy (English)

"It has turned out that the women are now the agents of change in the village and one very interesting result was that the increase in school enrollment was really measurable, in some schools about 70 percent."

So far, the GTZ project reaches only a few villages. But many other organisations in Nepal are promoting the importance of education as well, through Radio and TV programmes, street theatres and other forms of communication. The number of girls attending school has been increasing in the past few years, but many parents still think that girls don't need any formal education since they'll be married off early anyway. Caste discrimination makes the situation worse. Girl children work twice as much as boys and are mainly seen as labourers of little worth for the family. That attitude makes girls especially vulnerable to what probably is the worst form of child labour: girl trafficking. About 5000-7000 girls are being trafficked to brothels in India every year. Often, the girls are approached by acquaintances who promise them good jobs in Kathmandu or India. Bishnu was twelve when she left her village. She thought she would be taken to a garment factory in Bombay:

Voice Clip Bishnu (Nepali with English Voice Over)

"When I saw where they had brought me, I said, let me go back, call the people who took me here to take me back. But they had already left, and one of the other girls told me that they had sold me, that they were pimps and that they had brought many other girls before me. That's how I found out I was in a brothel."

There are no exact figures, but it is estimated that up to 200,000 Nepali girls and women are working in Indian brothels. They not only face the trauma of a destroyed childhood, but also the curses of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, in addition to the stigma of having worked in the sex trade.

Counselling and some vocational training can help the girls after their return. But the diseases and the traumas stay with them, and it is worst for those who

were trafficked at a very early age. Customers pay more for younger girls, and the demand is increasing, says Anuradha Koirala from the organisation MAITI Nepal that helps trafficked girls.

VOICE CLIP Anu Radha Koirala (English)

We have very young girls, 13, 14 who are dying of hepatitis, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, who are coming back from India, they are also telling us that Indians have a myth saying that if they have sexual relation with a child, who is six to nine, they will be cured of HIV/AIDS. so that is why now, the child from the age of 6, 7, nine, 10, they get more money and they are trafficked more.

The open border to India makes it easy for traffickers, and the few criminals who get caught rarely serve more than a short prison sentence. Therefore it's especially important to prevent the girls from falling prey to false promises before they get trafficked, says Anuradha Koirala.

In the future, raising awareness about gender discrimination and providing school education and vocational training to both boys and girls will be key factors in trying to improve the lives of working children in Nepal. The legal provision to eliminate child labour is in place, but as long as the economic situation of their parents is not changed, many children will have to continue working. Yet there are signs of hope. More and more Nepalis are getting aware of the fact that children have rights that should be respected, and that they deserve a brighter future. Sumnama T. from CWIN again:

Voice Clip CWIN (English)

"At least people are getting more concerned, they are more concerned about issues like child labour or sexual exploitation. Earlier, to talk about issues like sexual exploitation was taboo. Still so much has to be done, it seems sometime really frustrating, but we still have to work"

So far, the various programmes targeting working children are only reaching a minority. But thanks to these programmes, at least some of the child workers will be able to make their own choices later on. An ancient Sanskrit proverb says:

Clip - SANSKRIT QUOTE (Sanskrit with English voice over)

"Parents who do not educate their children are condemnable like enemies, An uneducated person is like a crane amidst a flock of ducks."

All children deserve at least a chance. After all, they are the future.

"Voxpop -

girl: I want to become a nun

boy: I want to be an engineer

girl: I want to be a manager

girl: I want to be a teacher

boy: I want to be a social worker

girl: I really like to play!

Children singing Nepali Song: "The Hand which can work can also hold pen..."

You have been listening to: A Brighter Future for Working Children, a coproduction of RNE and RDW, Germany's international broadcasting station. The programme was written and compiled by Shradha Shah and Anke Rasper. Sound Engineer: Sudeep Thakur.

Music up and out