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Q9

Case study. Rampura, a remote district inhabited by a tribal population, is marked by extreme backwardness and abject poverty. Agriculture is the mainstay of the local population, though it is primarily subsistence due to the very small land holdings. There is insignificant industrial or mining activity. Even the targeted welfare programs have inadequately benefited the tribal population. In this restrictive scenario, the youth has begun to migrate to other states to supplement the family income. Plight of minor girls is that their parents are persuaded by labour contractors to send them to work in the Bt Cotton farms of a nearby state. The soft fingers of the minor girls are well suited for plucking the cotton. The inadequate living and working conditions in these farms have caused serious health issues for the minor girls. NGOs in the districts of domicile and the cotton farms appear to be compromised and have not effectively espoused the twin issues of child labour and development of the area. You are appointed as the District Collector of Rampura. Identify the ethical issues involved. Which specific steps will you initiate to ameliorate the conditions of minor girls of your district and to improve the over-all economic scenario in the district?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- **Rampura:** remote tribal district, subsistence agriculture, weak welfare delivery, youth migration. Labour contractors persuade parents to send minor girls to Bt cotton farms in a nearby State because of 'soft fingers.' Farms have caused serious health harm. NGOs in both places appear compromised
- You are District Collector of Rampura. Identify ethical issues. Specific steps to help the minor girls and to improve the district's economic scenario

Revision summary

Ethical issues are child labour, fake parental consent, trafficking-like movement, failed welfare and captured NGOs.

Do not go slow because NGOs are compromised.

Enforce CLPRA, joint rescue, CWC, school and prosecution of contractors.

Use MGNREGA, FRA, health and residential school so parents are not forced to send girls.

Treat adult migration as a livelihood to civilise, and child cotton work as a crime to stop.

Introduction

A child's hand is not a farm tool. Compromised NGOs are a fact to work around, not a reason to go slow. The Collector's ethic is the Child and Adolescent Labour law, rescue, school, prosecution of contractors, and livelihoods so that hunger cannot sell a daughter.

Body

Stakeholders

- Minor girls already in the cotton fields, and those being packed this season.
- Parents under debt and persuasion, and the boys who migrate.
- Labour contractors, farm owners in the nearby State, and the receiving district's officers.
- Tribal community, gram sabhas, honest teachers and ASHA workers.
- Compromised NGOs, and any remaining honest civil-society workers.
- The receiving State, police, labour department, and courts.

Ethical issues

- **Child labour as a rights violation, not a cultural footnote:** soft fingers are an economic argument for a crime under the **Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986** as amended in 2016.
- **Best interests of the girl:** health damage, missed school, sexual risk on the farm, and a childhood converted into a contractor's margin.
- Consent of parents is not free consent when it is hunger plus a tout. Poverty explains; it does not authorise.
- **Inter-State trafficking pattern:** movement of minors for exploitation engages the Immoral Traffic and trafficking provisions where facts fit, not only a "labour dispute."
- **Failure of targeted welfare:** schemes that do not reach tribals are an ethical failure of the State that then blames the parent.
- **Compromised NGOs:** a conflict of interest and a possible cover for contractors. The State must not outsource its duty to a captured "civil society," and must not use their failure as an alibi for inaction.
- **Tribal dignity:** enforcement that treats every parent as a criminal, without FRA, MGNREGA and school, will look like a raid on a people rather than a rescue of children.
- **Gender:** it is girls who are sold as dexterity. That is patriarchy plus poverty.

Steps for the minor girls - do not go slow

- Map, with school registers, ASHA lists and night meetings in hamlets, every missing girl of school age this season. Do not wait for an NGO press note.
- **Coordinate with the Collector and labour/police of the cotton district:** joint raids, **Child Welfare Committees**, medical examination, and return with dignity, not a photo of chained parents.
- **Enforce CLPRA:** prosecute contractors and, where knowledge is proved, farm principals. Use the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 if debt bondage is present.

- **Immediate rehab:** bridge schools, stipend, nutrition, counselling, and a tracked enrolment that a tout cannot erase.
- POSCO where sexual offence facts exist; do not fold those into a compoundable "labour settlement."
- Warn and record parents; prosecute the adult who knowingly repeats the sending. The first response to a hungry first-time parent is restoration and livelihood, not only jail - but the contractor is not a hungry parent.
- **If NGOs are compromised:** stop granting them a gatekeeper role on rescue lists; file for FCRA/inspection where the law fits; still use honest local teachers, women's SHGs and gram sabhas. Do not freeze action because the usual interlocutor is dirty.

Steps for the district economy

- MGNREGA as a real, timely wage in the lean season so the contractor's advance is not the only cash.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006** titles, MSP for minor forest produce, and procurement that actually pays.
- **Agriculture:** irrigation where the rocky plot allows, a crop that is not only subsistence, and no romantic ban on all migration - only a ban on child migration for cotton.
- Skill and ITI for youth above 18, and a migration-support cell for adults (identity, wage, helpline) so the family does not need a girl's fingers.
- Health and residential schooling (Eklavya, KGBV) so the girl is physically in a safe school when the contractor arrives.
- **Convergence:** District Mineral Foundation if any, SCA to TSS / tribal sub-plan, and a public dashboard of missing children that the compromised NGO cannot edit.

Stance

- The law is already there. The ethical failure would be a slow file because "NGOs have not espoused" the issue. Espousal is the Collector's job.

Flow diagram

Minor girls to cotton -> Rescue with receiving district
 Rescue with receiving district -> CLPRA prosecute contractors
 Rescue with receiving district -> School health CWC
 Poverty -> MGNREGA FRA skills
 Compromised NGOs -> Bypass do not freeze
 Bypass do not freeze -> Rescue with receiving district

Conclusion

Minor girls in Bt cotton are a crime against childhood, explained by hunger and a captured civil society. Rescue, CLPRA prosecution, school and health first; MGNREGA, FRA and adult livelihoods so the tout has nothing to sell. Do not wait on compromised NGOs.

Facts & figures

Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986

As amended in 2016, prohibits employment of children below 14 in all occupations and of adolescents in hazardous work; cotton-farm plucking of minors is not a grey area.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

Child Welfare Committees, restoration and rehabilitation of children in need of care and protection.

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, 2005

A statutory employment floor in a subsistence tribal district; delayed wages recreate the contractor's market.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

Community and individual forest rights as a livelihood alternative to selling a child's labour.

National Child Labour Project / PENCIL

Union architecture for rescue and special training centres; use it, do not wait for an NGO to bless the list.

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