

WCRP



CHILDREN FOR HIRE

a portrait of child labor in Mon areas



A REPORT BY

WOMAN AND CHILD RIGHTS PROJECT
NOVEMBER 2013

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The Woman and Child Rights Project

WCRP promotes and protects the rights of women and children in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). WCRP believes that through documentation, advocacy, capacity building, campaigning, community training, workshops, and education, change can be realized.

WCRP's objectives fall under two primary categories:

- To monitor the woman and child rights situation in Mon areas and the southern part of Burma by collecting information about their real situations in reference to the CEDAW and CRC Conventions and distributing this information to our local, international and national networks.
- To empower and educate women and children in the Mon community by providing information on their rights according to CEDAW and CRC and encourage them to participate in the struggle for the protection of their own rights.

Map

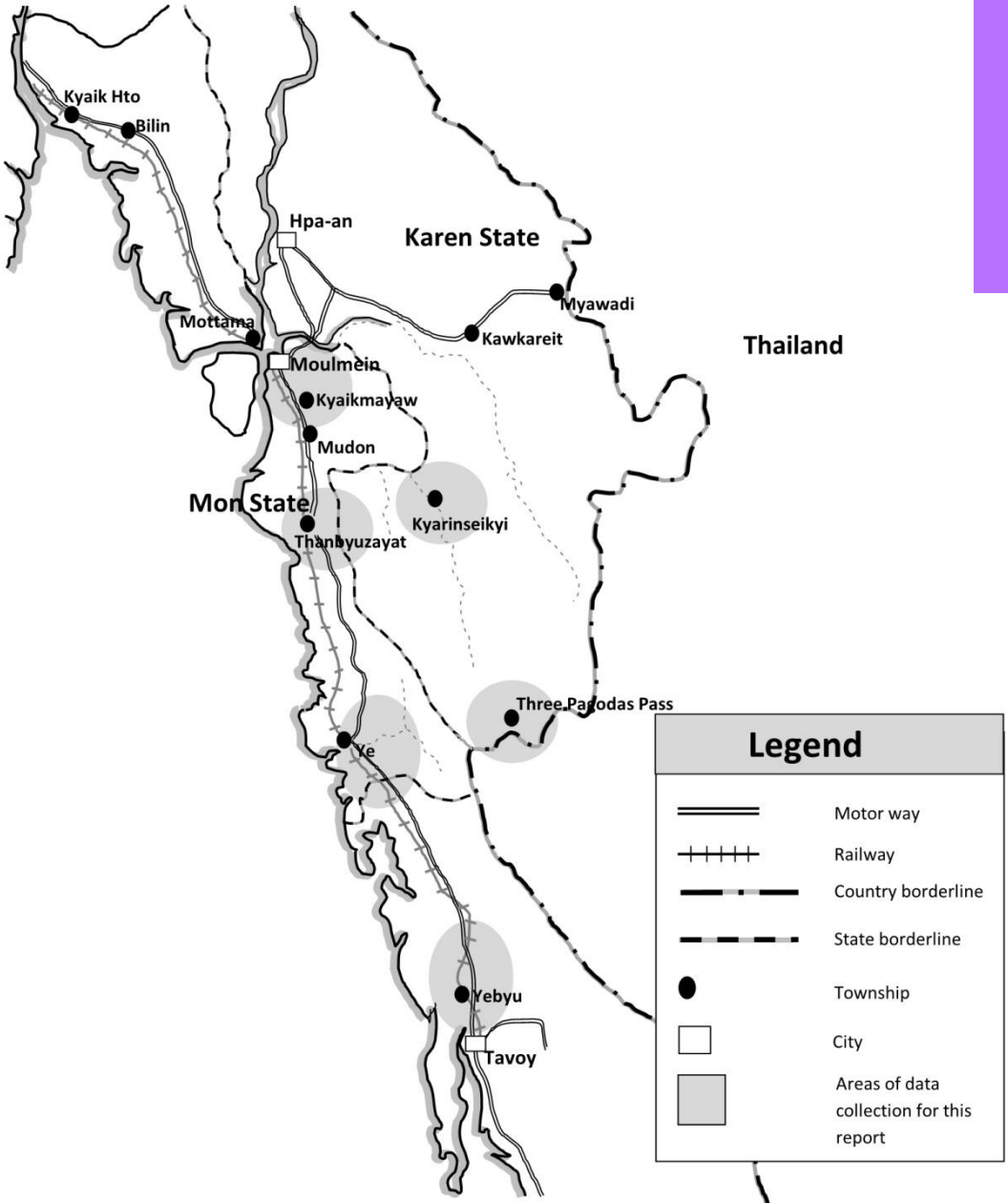


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"What's done to the children is done to society."

-- Gautama Siddhartha

I. Executive Summary

The growing domestic and international attention being paid to child labor in Burma, also known as Myanmar, signals a vital step in the country's reform and development process. The advent of new funding to research the scope of the problem, proposed amendments to labor laws, and popularized documentaries exposing the lives of working children have indicated fresh interest in revealing and reducing the incidence of child labor.

However, the catalyst for this report was sparked by observations that these proliferating activities and discussions are often largely restricted to urban areas, particularly regarding the well-known prevalence of Burma's "teashop boys." While urban forms of child labor warrant immediate and effective interventions, the ambiguity that shrouds less visible forms of the practice, especially occurring in rural ethnic villages and communities tucked against the country's vast borderline, necessitates targeted illumination. During several interviews conducted for this report, civil society members and child protection officers described child labor in Burma as vastly under-researched, and said that accurate data from the country's peripheral areas is almost nonexistent.

Almost half of the occurrences of child labor documented for this report were found in agricultural practices, primarily on rubber plantations and betel nut farms. An equivalent number of children interviewed were working in furniture factories, waiting tables or washing dishes in small restaurants, or searching garbage for recyclables to redeem. Others still were engaged as day laborers, piecing together daily wages by clearing



weeds on plantations, gathering grasses to make brooms, or working as cowhands or woodcutters.

Income scarcity and food insecurity were central themes collected in many family narratives, but were also often rooted in other fundamental social issues. Poverty was not necessarily the sole cause of child labor, but rather the two were jointly symptomatic of poor access to education and healthcare, landlessness, migration, and the effects of decades of armed conflict and human rights abuses. Children, and particularly young girls, were also subject to social and gender norms that contributed to their entry into the workforce. The reduced likelihood that working children will complete their education and the increased risks associated with labor performed during children's early developmental stages were found to feed directly back into these same family burdens that led to child labor.

In short, the many interconnecting social issues, economic and labor policies, and community histories surrounding child labor in rural areas are beyond the scope of this report to fully catalogue or evaluate. Instead, the research presented herein telescopes in on a very small but highly underreported area of child labor, and aims to amplify the voices and cast a light on the experiences of rural working children in Mon areas.



II. Methodology

The Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) has been documenting human rights violations against women and children in Mon State and southern Burma since its inception 13 years ago. In addition to new materials and interview transcripts, “Children for Hire” uses information and images drawn from WCRP’s previous reports, online articles, and extensive photo database.

For this report, five WCRP field researchers collected data throughout October and until publication in November 2013. Interviews were conducted with 45 children (under 18 years of age) and 22 community members, parents, teachers, child protection officers, and civil society and parliamentary members. Internal conversations and preliminary research revealed some of the most common forms of child labor in rural Mon areas to be found on rubber plantations, betel nut farms, in wooden furniture factories, shops and small restaurants, and fishing boats. Informal accounts also surfaced of children working in rice fields and brick-making factories, but the brief data collection period did not allow for further investigation and such cases are not represented herein. Early raw data led to questionnaires created and adapted for field reporters and WCRP staff who conducted interviews and follow-up discussions in-person when possible as well as by phone or email.



Although the report's target areas largely comprised rural communities, some interviews were held in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, to highlight more urban forms of child labor. However, most of the 67 cases were gathered in villages in Ye Township, Yebyu Township, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mudon Township, Tenasserim Region, Tavoy District, New Mon State Party (NMSP)-administered areas, and in Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai-Burma border. As reflected in the report title, most communities visited are predominantly home to ethnically Mon people, but interviews were also conducted with a number of ethnic Burman and a few Tavoyan children.

The names of all children interviewed have been changed to aliases in the report to protect their identities. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, many community members requested that their real names be left out of the final research product. Only certain members of Mon civil society groups and one Mon Member of Parliament agreed to allow their names to appear.



III. Background

Child labor is a complex phenomenon rooted in various overlapping socio-economic factors and traversing a maze of interconnected structural problems. Grappling with the scope of the problem alone is a colossal undertaking, as new estimates indicate that although the numbers have decreased from previous years, 168 million children worldwide are still involved in child labor, or almost 11 percent of the entire child population.¹ Children in hazardous work account for 85 million of that total, and the largest absolute number of child laborers on the globe is found in the Asia Pacific region.²

In Burma, children often grow up without access to some of the most basic needs for human life, and the situation for children in rural or border areas is even more precarious. Importantly, it is the void created by the absence of these fundamental rights – food, physical security, shelter, and basic healthcare – that often creates the conditions for child labor to become embedded in the lives of Burma’s families.

Several community members interviewed for this report described child labor as a “tradition” in Burma, having assumed a highly visible place among accepted labor practices and social norms. Few could tackle questions about whether its incidence had grown or diminished over their

¹ “Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012,” International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.

²



lifetimes, but most were certain that it had simply “always been there.” The leader of one civil society group said he had fond childhood memories of assisting his family with chores and household duties before or after school, but now lamented that years of economic decline, joblessness, and political instability had transformed the role of today’s child from a helpful participant in domestic activities to a mainstay of the family income.

These depictions contrast sharply with how the government historically portrayed the problem within its borders. According to one child protection officer interviewed, it has only been a year since child rights practitioners in Burma could openly use the term “child labor,” previously being required to say “working children” to win government receptiveness. In Burma’s National Strategic Plan of Action For Children (2006 – 2015) the report states, “The issue of working children and street children is not common in Myanmar compared to other developing countries.”



Despite some gains, child labor remains a part of daily life and a pillar of economic activity in Burma. According to a situation analysis published by UNICEF in 2012, “Children in Myanmar are to study hard and/or work hard (including domestic chores). Attitudes towards children make little allowance for the need for play and recreation. There is



widespread acceptance of working children and little evidence of children's participation in decisions affecting them.”³



In a country undergoing an ambitious reform process and seeking rapid, widespread economic growth, it would be wrong to assume that no child can appropriately contribute to the workforce in healthful ways. Poverty is an enormous problem, and young people's participation in activities that improve their families' financial wellbeing should not be categorically demonized. A new UNICEF report on social investment released in August

detailed that while the UN estimates 25 percent of Burma's roughly 60 million people to live below the poverty line of USD 1.12 per day, applying the higher poverty measure of 2.25 per day prescribed by the World Bank would elevate that number to a stunning 85 percent of the population.⁴

The urgent need for sustainable economic development and job creation that can be widely enjoyed by the country's millions of poor is well-documented elsewhere and needs little introduction here. It is only worthwhile to note that 12 (or 27 percent) of the children interviewed self-identified as “poor” and all but three described situations of financial

³ Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF, July 2012, p. xiv.

⁴ From Natural Resources to Human Capital: Practical, feasible, immediate resourcing solutions for Myanmar's children, UNICEF and Consultant Jared Bissinger, August 2013.



hardship or food insecurity. For these reasons, it is critical to differentiate between work that is exploitative or damaging to children's development and that which is acceptable and even beneficial for their growth. The latter category, called "light work" by the ILO, is defined as work which is (a) not likely to be harmful to the child's health or development, and (b) not going to jeopardize the child's attendance at school, participation in vocational programs or capacity to benefit from the instruction they received."⁵

Achieving economic stability for struggling families is imperative to improving overall wellbeing and access to services, achieving Burma's reform and peacebuilding goals, and ensuring that, in the face of new foreign investment and large-scale development projects, child labor is mitigated and not multiplied.



⁵ ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973.

Key ILO Definitions⁶	
Permissible light work	Any non-hazardous work by children (12 to 14 years) of less than 14 hours per week. Two hours per day, on either school days or holidays, is the maximum for light work from the age of 12 years.
Children in employment	Children engaged in any economic activity for at least one hour during the reference period. Economic activity includes work in both formal and informal economies; inside and outside family settings; work for pay or profit, or as a domestic worker outside the child's own household for an employer (with or without pay).
Children in child labor	A subset of children in employment. They include those in the worst forms of child labor and children in employment below the minimum age.
Hazardous work by children	Any activity or occupation that has or leads to adverse effects on the child's safety, health and moral development. In general, hazardous work may include night work and long hours of work; exposure to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces; work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; and work in an unhealthy environment which may expose children to, for example, hazardous substances, processes, temperatures, or noise levels, that damage health.

⁶ "Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012," International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.



A. Existing laws and evolving policies

In a speech given on May Day this year, President Thein Sein reconfirmed his administration's commitment to ratifying ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Encouragingly, a few days before the publication of this report, a workshop was being held in Nay Pyi Taw for government and civil society stakeholders to gain a better understanding about the convention's ratification process and subsequent legal implications. On November 14, the Government of Myanmar agreed⁷ to cooperate with the ILO to conduct the first comprehensive National Labor Force Survey (LFS) since 1990, partly to identify the prevalence of child labor in the country. New domestic and international funding has been earmarked for child labor research, and some urban dwellers in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State, have reported seeing less children working in teashops due to growing condemnation of the practice.

While there is mounting action and awareness surrounding child labor, for the time being laws and legal enforcement remain inadequate. A handful of post-independence laws govern most regulations on child labor in Burma, and although different sectors have varying prescriptions about the minimum age for workers, most permit the employment of children who have reached 13 years of age. The 1951 Factories Act and the 1951 Oilfields (Workers and Welfare) Act define a "child" as a person who is not yet 15, but distinguish a separate category for "adolescents:" workers who are at least 15 years old but younger than 18. The creation of this subcategory that hovers between child and adult prevents a substantial

⁷ Press release, ILO, November 14, 2013.



demographic of young workers from enjoying protections typically granted to their age group.

According to the Factories and Oilfields Acts (in fact, the only two laws that currently limit working hours for children), a “certificate of fitness” provided by a physician authorizes 15 to 17-year-olds to perform adult duties and work adult hours, and permits children between 13 and 15 to work up to four hours a day. Notably, not a single child interviewed for this report had heard of this certificate or encountered an employer who requested it, and many children described being allowed to do the same jobs as adults, although for significantly less pay.

Such cumbersome age classifications not only fail to meet international standards, they do not conform to the country’s own Child Law enacted in 1993. After becoming a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council legislated The Child Law to implement rights laid out in the CRC. In contrast to the 1951 Acts detailed above, The Child Law defines 15-year-olds as children. What is more, other laws in Burma *do* classify a “child” as a person less than 18 years of age.⁸

"State Parties recognize the rights of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."
– Article 32 of the CRC

While recent news suggests that amendments to minimum ages and wages for workers and the definition of a “child” are being packaged for Parliament, the fact that existing provisions were wholly absent from narratives gathered for this report

⁸ The Myanmar Contract Act, Guardians and Wards Act, and the Majority Act.



indicates that reform must extend beyond mere legal language to include enforcement and awareness campaigns.

Other legal provisions that are particularly relevant to the types of child labor encountered in rural Mon areas include:

- Section 75 of the 1951 Factories Act requires that children under 13 work in a factory for no more than four hours a day and only between 6am and 6pm. The “weekly holiday” is set as Sunday, and children (under 15) are not to carry heavy loads or work on equipment in motion. Children working in furniture factories near the Thai-Burma border reported regularly working seven-day work weeks, often staying until after 6pm, and operating table saws or belt sanders.
- The 1951 Leave and Holidays Act stipulates that workers who have reached 15 years of age are entitled to 10 days paid leave each year, while children under fifteen are entitled to 14 days paid leave, and all are eligible for 30 days of medical leave with pay. Neither children nor adults reported receiving paid leaves.
- According to the 1951 Shops and Establishment Act, “No child who has not completed his thirteenth year shall be allowed to work in a shop, commercial establishment, or establishment of public entertainment.” The law does not provide maximum working hours for children, but does limit all shop workers, child or otherwise, to 8-hour days unless working overtime, for which workers are to receive double their regular hourly salary. Children working in corner stores, teashops, beer gardens, and massage parlors described typically working from the establishment’s opening to close, with one 13-year-old explaining that he worked from 7am to 12am and a 15-year-old saying his work hours were 5am to 10pm. Overtime pay was never mentioned except by one factory worker in Three Pagodas Pass who earns 15 baht (USD 0.50) for each additional hour, regardless of his regular salary.



Several cases collected during field research revealed such inconsistencies along with frequent labor exploitation. Mg Ar Kar is an 11-year-old boy who works in a furniture factory cutting and sanding wood with a small table saw and belt sander. His workday in the border town of Three Pagodas Pass starts at 7am and he typically finishes around 5pm. He said he works roughly 10-hour days, seven days per week.

“If I didn’t work one day, I wouldn’t eat that day, so there are no holidays for me,” Mg Ar Kar said. “I have to work because my family would not have enough food without my income. I would like to join school like the other children. I want to play like them.”

He added that adults in the factory make twice as much as he does, although they cut larger pieces of wood and use larger machinery. One Three Pagodas Pass furniture factory owner explained, “This job is dangerous for children because if they aren’t careful they can cut a finger on accident,” but went on to say that children earn less because the pay scale was determined by how hard employees can work, and that naturally “the adults work harder.”

While strong child labor laws and meaningful enforcement of their provisions are critical, closer inspection of the myriad structural issues linked to child labor reveals a number of areas for improvement and intervention. Working children are rarely just victims of exploitative labor practices; instead, their lives are shaped by various political, social, and economic shortcomings, many of which (like universal education and poverty reduction) are reflected in Burma’s commitments to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Reform is underway, and it cannot come soon enough.



B. By the numbers

A promising global trend was heralded in September when the ILO estimated that the rate of 5–17 year-olds engaged in child labor had decreased worldwide, from 13.6 percent in 2008 to 10.6 percent in 2012. Over that same four-year period, the number of children involved in the worst forms of child labor also fell, from 115 million to 85 million, and the largest absolute reduction in child labor “by far” was recorded in the Asia Pacific region, from 114 million to 78 million.⁹

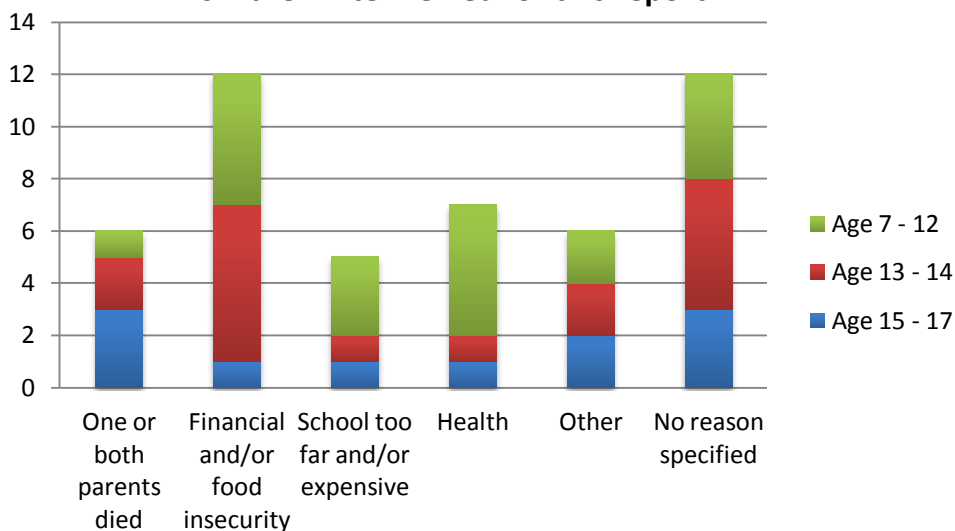
As for Burma, the 2014 Child Labour Index released a few months ago by the U.K.-based risk analysis firm Maplecroft reflected the country’s continuing challenges. Although Burma moved up from its previous place on the Index as the worst global performer on child labor, it remained seventh out of 197 countries ranked and was positioned behind countries like Pakistan and North Korea. In addition, Australia’s Walk Free Foundation estimated in its first annual Global Slavery Index this year that 360,000 to 400,000 people in Burma are held in some form of bondage, and listed Burma along with nine other countries as accounting for 76 percent of the estimated 29.8 million people in modern slavery worldwide.

The following charts and tables highlight current trends and contrast global child labor figures against data collected for this report.

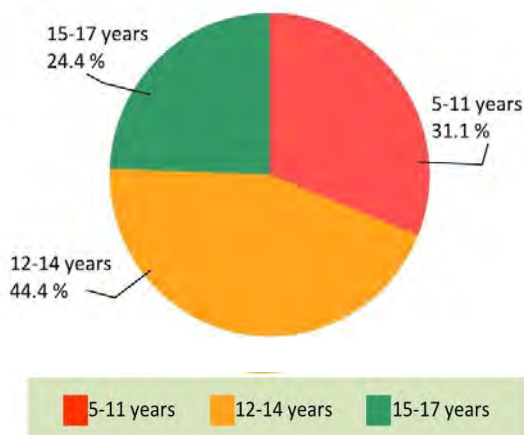
⁹ “Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012,” International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.



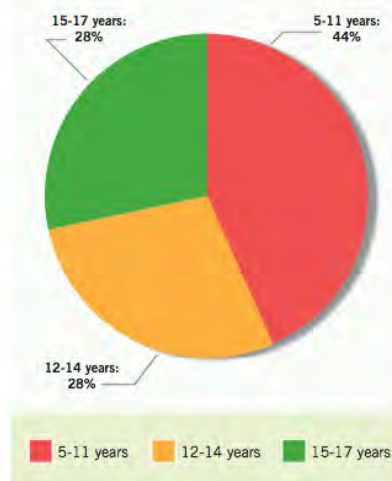
Reasons for entering the workforce given by children interviewed for this report



Child labor distribution by age group, based on data collection in Mon areas



Worldwide child labor distribution by age group, provided by the ILO^a



^a "Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012," International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.

**Lists of goods made with child labor
and/or forced labor in Burma and Mon areas ^b**

No	Industry	With child labor	With Forced Labor	Found in Mon areas
1	Bamboo	✓	✓	✓
2	Beans	✓	✓	✓
3	Bricks	✓	✓	✓
4	Jade	✓	✓	
5	Palm Thatch		✓	✓
6	Physic Nuts Castor Beans		✓	
7	Rice	✓	✓	✓
8	Rubber	✓	✓	✓
9	Rubies	✓	✓	
10	Sesame		✓	✓
11	Shrimp		✓	✓
12	Sugar cane	✓	✓	
13	Sunflowers		✓	✓
14	Teak	✓	✓	

**Number of children in child labor and hazardous work globally
(assuming pace of progress during 2008-2012 for 2016-2020 levels)^c**



^b “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor,” US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2013.

^c “Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012,” International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.

C. Types of child labor in rural Mon areas

The slender strip of coastal land comprising Mon State in southern Burma is neatly pressed between the Andaman Sea and Karen State, with a narrow, bottommost boundary that curves against Tenasserim Region and the western border of Thailand. Although rice farmers still bend over paddy fields in the central flatlands and fishermen operate traditional lift nets from the shores of the Zami River, much of the landscape is now dominated by rubber plantations. Towering rubber trees gracefully line the highways and footpaths that snake across Mon State, and as a major driver of numerous rural economies, the rubber industry unsurprisingly assumes a large role in the local incidence of child labor.

Agricultural activities represented almost half of the child labor cases encountered in Mon areas. This fact reflects economic activities in the country as a whole, considering that over half the working population in Burma is employed in agriculture.¹⁰ In addition to conducting interviews with 19 children who work on rubber



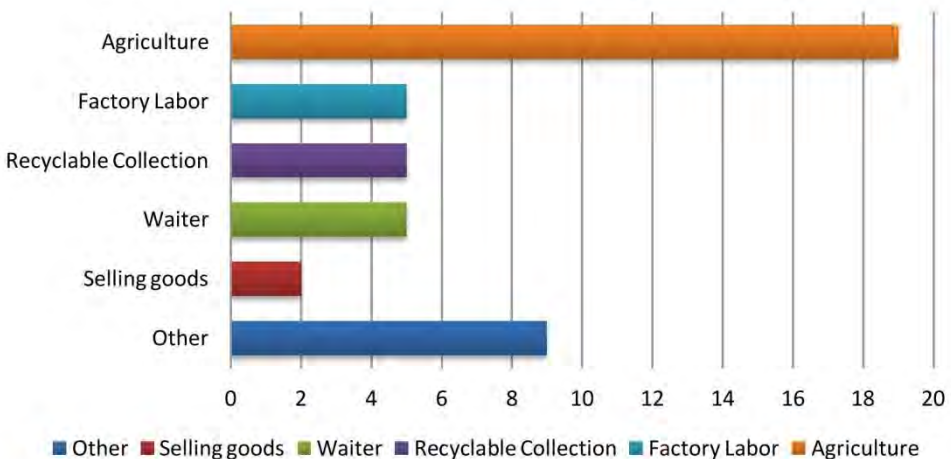
¹⁰ Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF, July 2012, 8.



plantations or betel nut farms, field researchers met with five children who wait tables or wash dishes in small restaurants, five working in factories near the border, and five who search garbage cans and trash trucks for recyclables. Two children reported selling goods like cigarettes, fried shrimp, or betel nut while another two performed whatever day labor was available at the time (grass collection for broom making or searching the forest for bamboo shoots to sell). The remaining seven children were engaged as goat or cowhands, roofers, woodcutters, or fishermen. One, a 9-year-old boy, works as a beggar alongside his mother on the streets of the state capital.

Children working in agriculture or other traditional means of employment like fishing or tending cattle often followed their primary caretakers (usually parents, siblings, or grandparents) into the families' customary means of livelihood. By contrast, underage workers in factories and restaurants reported being recruited for the jobs from their villages, sometimes by a relative, but typically by brokers or the employers themselves.

Child Labor in Mon Areas by Industry



Working on a rubber plantation**--Taken from interviews with villagers in rubber producing areas**

"Rubber plantation work is very hard and can have serious effects on people's health. Workers go to bed at 8pm and wake up at 2am [or earlier] because that's when the trees produce the most latex [rubber sap]. This strange schedule links [the industry] to drug use because people take [methamphetamine] or other pills to stay awake at those hours. They work until 8am collecting latex and then mix the liquid with [formic] acid to prevent it from solidifying. This acid has a very strong, bad smell. The workers then pour the liquid into forms that are rolled flat, which takes another three or four hours until noon or 1pm. The workers eat lunch, sleep, wake up to have dinner and then sleep again. Women [rubber plantation workers] have to work twice as hard because, while the men sleep, the women cook and care for the children. This exhausting [workload] causes a lot of health problems for women.

"In addition to tapping the rubber, workers clear bushes and grasses from the plantation floor to keep the area safe from snakes, protect the trees from forest fire, and plant crops like pineapples between the trees. Fertilizer has to be spread two or three times per year, and the trees are sometimes sprayed with pesticide, so workers are exposed to many different chemicals.

"Children working on rubber plantations typically carry the buckets of collected rubber latex, clean the buckets or coconut cups that catch the latex, and clean out the metal gutters [that channel the latex] on every tree. Most plantations have at least 500 trees, and some are as large as 3,000 trees. For children whose parents work on other people's plantations and don't own land, there is very little chance for them to go to school, and it would be impossible for them to work and go to school anyway because they would be too tired.

"Children [and adult] rubber plantation workers commonly come across hazards and can injure themselves in different ways: from the sharp knives used for tapping the trees, snake bites, exposure to pesticides, mosquitoes carrying dengue or malaria, or falling branches."

In an interview conducted for this report, Nai Aue Mon, the Documentation Coordinator for the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, conveyed his concerns about the negative consequences inherent in child labor and the obstacles it creates to the country's overall development.

“I don't think these [rural working children] can be human resources for the country. It is too far to imagine them moving from this current situation to a higher level. Even children in urban areas have a hard time escaping their situations, how can [rural] children share in the country's development? How can the country grow when people are being left out of the system entirely? These children have no choice, no chance to be creative. Maybe they learn how to fish but it's the old traditional way of fishing, it's been the same for 500 years so it's not improving their lives. This is a national loss. For the Karen, it's a Karen national loss. For the Mon, it's a Mon national loss. The government should fix this because it's an issue that affects all of Burma, and [otherwise] there will be a big gap in knowledge and expertise for the next generation.”



IV. Triggers for Child Labor in Rural Areas

The exact push factors that lead to a case of child labor are often as unique, dynamic, and complex as the children themselves. Each family unit, or lack thereof, represents a distinct history, pattern of decision-making, and set of experiences that influence and shape children's lives. In several cases collected for this report, the attempt to identify the precise triggers that generated instances of child labor proved complicated due to the many intersecting problems a single family may face.

For example, a child might self-identify as poor, indicating that income insecurity pushed her to work, but also explains that her father, the previous breadwinner, is sick and cannot access treatment because of high transportation costs to the hospital located 50 kilometers away. Some children trace the origin of their hardship to the death of a parent or the loss of family property to land confiscation or armed conflict, but also describe rampant joblessness and low wages in their new communities of residence. One 12-year-old girl from Ye Township said she started working after completing primary school because her family could not afford to send her to the nearest middle school in a distant village, suggesting insufficient financial means and a failure of the education system's reach. But she also described how the family was particularly hard hit after her father's leg was injured by a landmine, leaving him unable to return to work. In this case, poor medical care and the vestiges of decades of civil war also play a role.



In the border town of Three Pagodas Pass, Mg Tin Hla works as a manual labourer in a small-scale wooden furniture factory. He works from 9am to 5pm everyday, including weekends, and gets paid about 160 baht (USD 5.30) per day. Children in the factory perform various types of tasks, including cutting wood with industrial-sized table saws, assembling chairs or tables, sanding lumber, or painting the finished products. He dropped out of school three years ago when he was in Grade 6 because his father died and his family needed him to fill the sudden gap in income. His mother then had a stroke, although she can still wash customers' laundry for close to 50 baht (USD 1.60) per day. Mg Tin Hla, at the age of 14, has become the primary breadwinner for his mother and six siblings.

Located to the southwest of Mg Tin Hla's crowded home on the border is the village of Panga in Thanbyuzayat Township where 14-year-old rubber plantation worker Ma Phyu lives. She also quit school in Grade 6 after receiving news that her mother and father who were migrant workers in Thailand had died, abruptly leaving her parentless and cutting her off from the income they had sent back to the village. She moved in to the home of her 60-year-old grandmother, along with her younger brother who is currently enrolled in fourth grade. Ma Phyu wakes up at 4am everyday to collect latex from rubber trees until around 10am, when she goes home to cook for the family and care for her little brother. She said she would like to continue her education but for now is focused on keeping her family fed and covering her brother's school costs with the 30,000 kyat (USD 30) she makes each month.

For families like Mg Tin Hla's and Ma Phyu's, the implementation of at least one of a host of different interventions could make a difference. Improved access to better healthcare could reduce mortality rates and allow sick family members to go back to work, freeing children from having to stay home to provide care. Greater job opportunities under less



exploitative conditions and for higher wages could boost families' economic wellbeing. And more middle and high schools in rural areas, school buses that transport rural students free of charge, or financial assistance for families undergoing some form of distress could prevent schooling from slipping so quickly out of reach.

While rural children and their families are much more than a homogenous group about whom broad conclusions can be made, the life stories collected for this report shared certain commonalities that clearly indicated a series of useful pathways to pursue with programs and assistance targeting reductions in child labor.



A. Education and healthcare

Interviewees frequently described limited access to education and healthcare as central reasons why children entered the workforce. The sectors share similar profiles because users continue to portray the quality and quantity of services as well below satisfactory. Despite free and compulsory primary education being officially introduced in 2011 and national expenditures in health and education more than tripling over the past three years, many people in rural areas still reported burdensome costs, poor access, and inadequate outcomes associated with schools, medical clinics, and hospitals. According to UNICEF, “Approximately 87 percent of the overall expenditure on healthcare [in Burma] is incurred by consumers in out-of-pocket expenses – the highest in the region.”¹¹

The weight of inadequate healthcare falls heavily on children because adult caretakers get sick or die, and ailing younger siblings or older relatives may require care while parents are away at work. This loops back into educational outcomes for children as well, because they are asked or expected to forfeit schooling to help with family duties. Since there are no comprehensive health and safety standards for working children beyond general measures laid out in the 1993 Child Law, risks and stresses on physical development often caused by child labor can increase the families’ health burdens in unforeseen ways. Six children interviewed for this report identified the death of one or both parents as the catalyst for their income insecurity, while two others attributed their requisite employment to health issues in the family.

¹¹ Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF, July 2012, xvi.



Mg Mg, a 13-year-old from Own Pin Kwyin village in Yebyu Township, explained that after his parents divorced, he moved in with his mother and 60-year-old stepfather, who is ill with a chronic disease that Mg Mg could not name. His step-father also has a 30-year-old son with polio who requires daily care. Mg Mg said that he and his mother work very hard to support the family.

“I have been working since I was 11 years old. At that time I worked on a rubber plantation [clearing weeds and shrubs]. Right now I work as a bus attendant carrying baggage for the passengers. Sometimes I have to carry heavy things that are bigger than my own body.”

The likelihood that Mg Mg may get injured on the job or eventually require health treatment himself for prolonged physical stresses on his young body portends that the family may remain unable to break with its cycle of illness and poverty.

“...Children and women in [rural] areas and those from poorer families tend to have substantially worse health and survival outcomes. The private sector provides the majority of health care services, particularly for the poor; however, users are vulnerable to financial exploitation and low-quality



(sometimes even harmful) treatment.¹²

According to Mi Seik Kamar, the director of the organization Border Health Initiative that provides health services on the Thai-Burma border, “Many jobs children work are very difficult and affect their physical development. Some jobs are strenuous like rubber plantation work or searching for bamboo shoots in the forest, while other jobs require children to carry heavy loads. These activities cause children to lack adequate sleep and rest, and income insecurity can cause depression among children or create long-term problems for their self-esteem.”

Yin Ye village in southern Ye Township is home to more than 200 families that cultivate betel nut farms or fish off the nearby coast. While the older generations still adhere to traditional means of income, residents reported that most young people have migrated to pursue work in Thailand or



Malaysia. According to locals, after the New Mon State Party signed a ceasefire with the government in 1995, young people were steadily driven away by forced labor and years of human rights violations committed against villagers by the military. It is here that 13-year-old Ma Pan Nu now lives with her widowed mother and two brothers. At her mother’s request, she quit school in Grade 8 to work on a betel nut farm.

¹² Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF, July 2012, xvi.



Ma Pan Nu described how she became depressed soon after leaving school. She told her friends that she wanted to continue her education, but did not dare tell her mother because she knew the family was facing hard times. Not long after she started working she began to have epileptic seizures, and since May of this year has been unable to work or leave the house. Now, she finds it difficult to talk or move her limbs and requires almost fulltime care from her mother. There is a small clinic in the village where Ma Pan Nu was diagnosed with cerebral malaria and Tuberculosis, but the nearest hospital is more than 50 kilometers away and her family cannot afford the transportation fees. She said she still hopes to return to school one day.

One Yin Ye resident explained that villagers were reluctant to travel to the urban hospitals because, in addition to high prices, rural people often felt they were being treated poorly by hospital staff.

“If we go to [the] Moulmein [hospital] we have to bring around 100,000 kyat [USD 100] to cover travel costs, medicine, and testing. At the Ye Township hospital, the doctors do not treat the patients very kindly and speak to them harshly. Doctors treat people differently based on their [perceived] economic status and are rude to people who look poor or who are from rural areas. We can get free TB [Tuberculosis] medicine in the Ye hospital but the nurse who administers the medicine there is very rude. Plus, even though they say it’s free to get TB medicine, there is a collection box on the counter and we are expected to donate as much money as we can. It is difficult for people who are poor.”

Rural families with minimal access to decent healthcare or insufficient incomes to cover the cost of treatment remain trapped in patterns of poverty of insecurity that produce favorable conditions for



child labor. Adult family members become unable to regularly engage with the workforce or lose months of savings to a single serious illness, and children are forced to supplement the family income at the expense of their own health, development, and, more often than not, education.

Decades of military dictatorship and civil war wreaked havoc on the education system in Burma, but major transformative milestones have begun to be reached. At the onset of 2012, the Burmese government inaugurated its Quality Basic Education Program (2012-2015) in cooperation with development agencies to address several key areas of education policy and reform, followed by the Ministry of Education officially launching a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) in October that year, the first of its kind since 1993.¹³ Promisingly, the rhetoric surrounding changes to the education system has included

considerations of formal and non-formal learning environments, unique needs in rural areas, and the inclusion of ethnic, “mother-tongue” languages in school curriculums. Discussions have also reportedly explored improving the rate of students matriculating in secondary school, extending primary and secondary schooling



¹³ “Comprehensive Education Sector Review in Myanmar Sets the Path for Improving Quality of Education,” UNICEF, 8 November 2012.



from 11 to 12 years, and training teachers in more child-centered approaches.

However, while policy reform takes shape and begins to clamor down the pipeline, students in rural areas continue to wait for visible changes to their educational experiences. Similar to descriptions of people's disappointing interactions with the health sector, rural residents repeatedly illustrated that the main obstacles to pursuing education were access, cost, and quality. Five children interviewed, ranging from 10 to 17 years of age, identified the distance to or cost of middle and high schools as the driving force behind their (or their families') decision to quit school and start working.

A young health worker from Kyouk Ka Din village in Yebyu Township said, "There is no high school [in our village]. After students finish primary school they have to travel to other villages to continue with middle school or high school. Some students don't want to continue studying and just drop out. After that they migrate to Thailand and work in a factory, shop, or rubber plantation, and mostly they are around 12 or 13 years old when they leave."

Mi Win Mon is a 14-year-old from Karen State who now lives near the Thai-Burma border. She said, "In our village, there is a primary school but after that we have to go to Three Pagodas Pass for middle and high school. If we don't own a motorbike we have to travel by moto-taxis that cost 50 baht (USD 1.30) per day, so we can't go if we can't afford that amount. Children of most poor families can't continue to study after primary school because of the traveling costs, so they just drop out.

"Even though I want to continue school my mother can't support us all," continued Mi Win Mon, referring to her three sisters. "My [older sister and I] had to quit school and find



jobs to earn more income for our family. I want my two younger sisters to be doctors. I don't want them to work like my older sister and me. But we are not sure when they finish primary school whether my mother will be able to afford their education in Three Pagodas Pass. In my future, I don't want to work on other people's farms anymore. I want to have my own business and live with my family without worrying about our daily expenses or my younger sisters' school costs. If I had the chance, I [would] continue my education until I graduated."

Mi Aye, a 15-year-old who lives with her grandparents and works on a rubber plantation in the same village as Mi Win Mon, expressed a similar wish. "If I had the chance I would want to continue school. When I see my classmates studying and happy in the school I feel sad and I want to join them."



However, only nine out of the 45 children interviewed for this report echoed the sentiment that, if given the opportunity, they would return to school. The reasons for these numerous reservations toward formal education covered a wide spectrum, from not wanting to return to the classroom for fear of

being placed with younger students or having fallen far behind their peers, to complete dismissal of the importance of education in their lives. One



17-year-old rubber plantation worker said she quit school and would not return after being regularly beaten by her teacher.

In addition to frustrations expressed about access and cost, a recurring theme shared by children and parents highlighted that, for them, schooling is not prioritized because it does not improve opportunities for employment. Families struggling with food insecurity and income shortages, and even some that had achieved relative financial stability, saw this limitation as a mortal blow to the value of education. Commitment among rural villagers to ushering children toward high school graduation was dramatically low, and undoubtedly a critical part of education reform will need to tackle this widely held belief rooted in decades of experiences with poor teaching methods, ineffectual skill development in classrooms, and joblessness among high school and university graduates.

One member of a civil society organization described an encounter he had with a father and son while traveling by boat last month from Kyainsekkyi in Karen State to Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai-Burma border. The waterway lies along the Zami River and is the primary route for migrants and merchants journeying to and from Burma's eastern border during the rainy season.

"The 14-year-old [son] was driving the boat while the boat owner [his father] collected fares from the passengers. The owner said he had seen many people [on his boat] making their way to Thailand and noticed that some were educated people who were migrating just like everybody else. So how could he believe education was the answer for his son? In the boat was a [passenger] originally from Bago Township who had worked as a money counter for the central bank in Nay Pyi Taw. [The passenger] was an educated person who



had an economics degree, but he said he had left his job and had a good broker who would find him a job Thailand so he could save money and eventually go back to school. The boat owner pointed at the [traveller] and said he sees that kind of passenger everyday, some who can even speak English, and they are all leaving the country. To him, education clearly couldn't improve children's lives or help them find jobs."

Ma Kyi, a 32-year-old teacher from Palain Japan on the Thai-Burma border, shared her opinion about parents' responsibility to promote learning outcomes.

"Most children in Palain Japan village attend school, but they are not educated. They have to help out with household chores and take care of their siblings after school, so they have no time to study. Some children can't study [at night] because they don't have candles for light. And since most parents are uneducated, they don't know how to encourage their children to study. Some parents even come pick up their children from school to take them to work. Parents force [children] to work, and because the parents tell them that there is not enough money without [all family members] earning an income, the children worry and just work."

Mi Win Kar, a 17-year-old in Kaw Zar village in Ye Township, passed Grade 8 this year but explained that she will not be able to graduate from high school.

"I [would] have to go Aung Din village to continue to Grade 9, but this is difficult because my parents are poor. We could afford Grade 9 but then the cost for Grade 10 is two or three times more expensive. Where can I get this money? Others can continue their studies because they have a brother, sister



or father working in Thailand or Malaysia. If we had the opportunity to continue our studies in Kaw Zar village, this would not only be cheaper but would mean fewer problems for us. Now most students here finish school in Grade 8, after completing middle school. If there was English class, Mon culture class, or vocational training in this school, students like us could learn skills that help us earn a living. Otherwise, as things are, we have to stop.”

Education policies and reform must deliver clear evidence of better learning outcomes and linkages to economic growth that welcome families back to the education system. Supplementing formal schooling with support for non-formal learning environments, including improvements to centers of ethnic, monastic, and vocational education, can also steer current dismay toward future degrees.

Mi Sar Dar, the director of the Mon National Education Committee, said her organization is looking into a variety of interventions targeting poor families.

“I see child labor as one of the highest risks to our children. They are working so they don’t attend school, and their jobs are difficult, dangerous, and dirty. These [working] children are from poor families that struggle for food. We want to provide education to community children who are facing problems with poverty, and want to [implement] non-formal education programs targeting children involved in child labor. Although these children are struggling for their food, they should still be able to access education.”



B. Landlessness, conflict, and migration

Since 1995, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland has documented the confiscation of more than 23,000 acres of plantations, vacant or virgin land, farms, and residences perpetrated against Mon communities by military battalions and investment companies. These seizures, which only reflect confirmed cases and not the thousands of additional acres awaiting official verification, were attended by massive human rights violations that triggered an enormous, protracted exodus out of rural villages in southern Burma. The ceasefire agreement signed by the New Mon State Party, the predominant Mon ethnic armed group, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council in 1995 initiated a period of severe abuses and the continuation of the military's notorious "four cuts" campaign. Before that year there were three Burmese Army battalions stationed around NMSP-controlled areas, and by 2000 there were more than 20.

The physical insecurity created by this militarization and land confiscation laid the foundation for parents who lost primary sources of income to turn to younger family members for added support. In addition to armed conflict, the years after the first ceasefire saw a vast increase to displacement produced by massive development projects. Now, much of the gunfire is confined to brief flare-ups between Mon breakaway groups and local militia groups, but the impact of ongoing and new large-scale development projects has retained its stamp on local livelihoods. Plans for heavy cement production in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, and the Italian-Thai Development Company's Dawei Deep Sea Port Development Project in Tenasserim Region have displaced families and fuelled



continuing migration to Thailand and other nearby countries. Not only is land lost, but the ability to perform traditional income generation methods that were directly tied to land creates situations in which families are struggling to make ends meet.

“Sometimes it breaks my heart when I travel to the Dawei Deep Sea Port area because it was said there would be a lot job creation for locals, but we see that even the people operating the tractors are Thai,” said Nai Aue Mon from HURFOM. “The locals are just digging dirt and transporting it, working under very hard conditions when the sun is very hot, and most of them used to be palm oil or rubber plantation owners before they lost their land [to the development project]. Now they perform basic labor for low salaries.”

A 45-year-old farm owner in Pop Htaw village said that since losing her former property, she depends on money coming from family members working in Thailand to afford school costs for her children. “Every parent faces difficulties in supporting their children to attend Grades 9 and 10. My farm is new because my old farm was taken by the Burmese soldiers. In the past the village did not have good security, so young people couldn’t stay here. There is still some taxation and use of porters, but it’s done voluntarily and not by force like before.”

While only two children interviewed for this report explicitly named the loss of family lands as the cause of their entry into the workforce, many others described the difficulty of establishing financial security without owning land or the effects that extensive labor migration has had on communities. Migration is a major contributor to a number of social burdens in Mon areas because family support systems are pulled apart, migrant workers are at risk of exploitation or human trafficking, and



children are either taken out of school to come along or left in the home to care for younger siblings or older relatives. However, with limited job options in rural villages and the nearby border representing a golden opportunity for poor families, migrant work remains the job of choice among many communities in Mon areas.

“I passed Grade 3 when I was 10 years old, but in 1998 my family faced financial hardship and I had to drop out of school,” said a young man who recounted his experiences with underage employment. “I worked [day labor] jobs for around two years before my mother told me to migrate to Thailand. I didn’t want to migrate but my mother said that even if I graduated [from high school] I wouldn’t get a good job, and if I worked I would earn a good salary. She said that there are a lot of people who don’t finish school but they go to another country and become rich. Here, when most boys turn 15 or 16, they migrate to Thailand.”

Cross-border migration patterns that evacuated younger generations from rural villages prompted another phenomenon of internal migration, particularly from areas in Upper Burma where news of hundreds of jobs abandoned by locals drew newcomers to Mon State.

Mon Member of Parliament Mi Myint Than recalled her observations of migration before she entered the public sphere, estimating that around 70 percent of the working children in Mon State came from the Irrawaddy Region.

“In Mon State we have both internal and international migration that is linked to child labor. When I worked as a teacher, I saw children from the Irrawaddy Region come to Mon State to work, while at the same time Mon children



migrated to Thailand to work on rubber plantations or fishing boats.”

Ma Su War, an 11-year-old from Upper Burma, moved with her father to Yebyu Township after her mother died in Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The father and daughter do not own land but were given a small place to live on the rubber plantation where they work. The plantation owner pays them one large sack of rice per month, although they said they can sometimes supplement their income by picking up additional day labor on neighboring farms. The two frequently experience income gaps that Ma Su War explained result in meals of plain rice without curry.



C. Gender inequality and social norms

Along with the fundamental human rights issues and socio-economic indicators laid out above, a powerful but less tangible trigger for child labor began to take shape in several collected testimonies. It became clear that another crucial element influencing child labor is rooted in the community perceptions and social norms regarding women and children themselves.

The narratives told by working girl children were often distinct from those of the boys' because they alluded to larger workloads and acute exhaustion produced by the double burden of employment duties and household maintenance. One 15-year-old who weaves nipa palm leaves together to make thatched roofs described her regimented schedule. "After I finish cooking [for the family] in the morning, I go to my auntie's house to make thatch pieces for roofs. When I finish at 4pm, I go back to cook again."

Frequent family expectations that girl children cook, clean, and care for siblings while still going to work also contribute to why girls are less likely to escape these domestic patterns because they are seen as more "useful" to keep at home than male children. One mother in a small village in Yebyu Township said, "My daughter already passed Grade 10 but I didn't allow her to attend university because I worried she wouldn't study and would spend the money [for school] with her friends. I can't take care of her or live with her if she goes to the university, and I worried that before she could finish university she would end up married, so I forbade her to go. Even if she did finish she wouldn't get a job, and since she needs to cook for the family it is better for her to just stay home."



According to the ILO's "Marking progress against child labor" report released this year, "While girls accounted for 46.2 percent of all child laborers in 2000 they accounted for only 40.6 per cent in 2012. But it should be noted that these figures might underestimate girls' involvement in child labor relative to that of boys as they do not reflect involvement in household chores, particularly hazardous chores, a dimension of child labor that is not included in the global estimates. Other information available to the ILO indicates that girls may also be more present in less visible and therefore under-reported forms of child labor such as domestic work in private households."¹⁴

However, a resident of Three Pagodas Pass asserted that, in his experience, "About 75 percent of employees [in factories] are female and 25 percent are male." He went on to add that young girls who are expected to support their families are placed in particularly hazardous situations because "they want to send as much money home as possible and can end up working as sex workers at night. Some women leave the factory at 9pm and then start their second job."

On top of family duties, typically lower wages for equal work to men, and high risk of labor exploitation, rural women also face increased health burdens due to their exhausting schedules, low access to healthcare during pregnancy and birth, and threat of sexual harassment or rape.

Mi Chit is a 16-year-old from Jokaproud village in the New Mon State Party-controlled area. The girl's mother died during an abortion when Mi Chit was 10 years old and although she believes her father is alive, she does not know where he is. Even as a child she never attended

¹⁴ "Marking progress against child labour: Global estimates and trends 2000 – 2012," International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013.



school, instead working in various types of day labor to contribute to her grandmother's income. At the beginning of 2013, Mi Chit was raped by one of her grandmother's relatives. The man's identity was well known, but the incident was never reported to police or pursued among family members. Soon after, Mi Chit discovered she was pregnant and an eager neighbor decided to help her avoid the shame of unwed pregnancy by arranging a hasty marriage to a man that lived nearby. One month after the wedding her husband was enraged to learn that she was four months pregnant. He left suddenly and has not since returned, and Mi Chit now lives back with her grandmother and her one-month old baby.



V. Effects on Child Development

It appears that “many working children are unpaid family helpers. Even where the tasks undertaken by children are not dangerous, work is damaging in that it prevents them from going to school or engaging in recreation and play, and places them under stress.”¹⁵

One of the most devastating consequences of child labor is the effects it has on a young person’s development. Children who are not given space to play, learn, be with peers in their own age group, or get sufficient sleep at night are at risk of physical and mental impediments to normal, healthy growth. Unfortunately, these activities are largely absent from the lives of working children.

Ko Tin Htoo Lwin is a 15-year-old boy who works at a water bottling plant in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. “I have to work the whole day,” he said. “My duty is to carry water and go with the water truck [on deliveries]. I have a grandmother and I send my salary to her. I am happy with my job but I get very tired from carrying water. I have no parents so I have to make my own income.”

Another 15-year-old boy also living in the capital said simply, “I have to start work at 5am and wash vegetables until the restaurant closes at 10pm. After I finish my duties I take a shower and go to bed around 12am.”

¹⁵ Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF, July 2012, xx.



The impacts of shouldering heavy loads onto a child's growing frame or the minimal sleep allowed by long hours on the job can likely have lasting consequences for their long-term health and wellbeing that may contribute to future health burdens or job insecurity . As outlined above, cycles of poverty that include hard labor, poor access to affordable healthcare, and minimal education are difficult to break.

“Many of the jobs children are doing are robotic, where the person does the same thing again and again. In developed countries they use robots to do work like this. How can a child's mind and skill level improve? There is creativity, no critical thinking, and no skill development for his future. Examples are everywhere, like on a rubber plantation where workers cut out the same shape from sheets of rubber for shoe making, over and over, all day. But these people have no choice, they don't have options to get other kinds of jobs. Children working in these jobs are held back from improving the quality of our people – every person has a brain and thoughts and if we could train them better all people would be able to grow. Skilled jobs don't always require [formal] education, for example working as a mechanic or electrician, and the people just need [vocational] training. Children can make their own decisions and be creative in a way that is not linked with education, but with a profession. Then, if they could also access the education system, they could apply that education to their jobs.”

Not only are adult duties hard on a young body, but an adult sense of responsibility to provide for the family pushed children into a state of suspended childhood. Mg Htoo, a 15-year-old boy who works on a rubber plantation in Yaw Thit village described his family situation and work schedule as starting to take its toll.



“I have two younger brothers and one younger sister. My family is really poor and I dropped out of school when I was in Grade 2. None of [my] siblings goes to school because we have no money to support them. My uncle and I work on a rubber plantation, but my brothers and sisters are still too young and can’t help us yet.

“I have to work from around 11pm and until around 11am. I don’t have enough time to take a rest or sleep. My mother sometimes goes into the forest to find bamboo shoots to sell in the market, but my father doesn’t work and just drinks alcohol. He’s drunk all the time.”

Children are not little adults^d

- ▶ Children have thinner skin, so toxics are more easily absorbed.
- ▶ Children breathe faster and more deeply, so can inhale more airborne pathogens and dusts.
- ▶ Children dehydrate more easily due to their larger skin surface and because of their faster breathing.
- ▶ Children absorb and retain heavy metals (lead, mercury) in the brain more easily.
- ▶ Children’s endocrine system (which plays a key role in growth and development) can be disrupted by chemicals.
- ▶ Children’s enzyme systems are still developing so are less able to detoxify hazardous substances.
- ▶ Children use more energy when growing and so are at higher risk from metabolized toxins.
- ▶ Children require more sleep for proper development.
- ▶ Children’s less-developed thermoregulatory systems make them more sensitive to heat and cold.

^d Children in hazardous work: What we know, What we need to do, “International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), ILO, 2011.

VI. Recommendations

For the President Thein Sein government

- Create a single, nationwide, uniform legal definition of a “child” as being under 18 years of age.
- Strengthen legal frameworks with substantive child protections that go beyond general provisions in the 1993 Child Law and reflect commitments made since the 1991 ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Continue progress and open collaboration with domestic and international partners toward the ratification of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.
- Improve upon positive steps toward free, universal, and compulsory education by overseeing and ensuring enforcement of new education policies, with particular attention to ethnic and rural areas that have yet to wholly experience these changes.
- Increase resources for the Department of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement to improve the range and quality of child protection policies.
- Counterbalance the high dropout rate among students with support for non-formal education, extra-curricular activities, and vocational development schemes.
- Develop strategies to link educational outcomes to employment opportunities.
- The provision of financial safety nets for families and children that are struggling with school costs and income security.
- Full support for ethnic schools that is equivalent to government school funding, especially in areas where ethnic schools are filling a gap in the government education system’s reach.



CHILDREN FOR HIRE: a portrait of child labor in Mon areas

- Build on previous increases to funding for social services by significantly boosting expenditure on health and education in the 2013/2014 national budget.
- Create safe and welcoming spaces for children to access recreation to conform with Burma's 1993 Child Law.
- Increase collaboration and cooperation with local civil society groups and international agencies working toward reductions in child labor.
- Increase and accelerate progress on the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers from the Burmese military.
- Continue work toward monitoring mechanisms and inspections that identify child labor and abusive labor practices.

For non-state armed groups

- Improve on commitments made at the signing of Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for the protection of children from armed conflict by acknowledging and working to reduce other forms of child labor in administrative areas.
- For the New Mon State Party, utilize this report as baseline data about the prevalence of child labor, particularly in agricultural practices, in NMSP-administered areas.
- Ensure the safety and protection of migrating children passing through non-state armed groups' checkpoints and border crossings.
- Support ethnic schools with programs to curb child trafficking, implement child labor awareness campaigns, and develop strategies to reduce the high dropout rate at ethnic schools.
- Allow education and health agencies working to identify and decrease the incidence of child labor to access and serve populations in administrative areas.



For civil society organizations and Mon communities

- Increase dedication to and innovation in programs for child protection and reducing child labor. Currently, many civil society groups are working on community development, constitutional reform, and peace building processes that would benefit from targeted child labor reduction strategies.
- Institute awareness campaigns and undertake community-based efforts to communicate the physical and developmental risks inherent in child labor.
- Address social norms and attitudes that tolerate child labor and encourage children to enter the workforce in unhealthy ways.
- Engage with local government to create safe spaces and environments for children to enjoy recreational activities, non-formal education, and vocational training.

For donor agencies

- Increase support for child protection programs and recognize that other funding objectives, like support for peace building and rule of law, are tied to improved social outcomes that link directly to triggers and consequences of child labor.
- Recent reductions to funding for ethnic education centers increase pressure on ethnic families who shoulder the added cost burden on their children's education. Increase funding for ethnic schools to prevent education from becoming more unaffordable to poor families and feeding into rural prevalence of child labor.



For foreign investors

- Adhere to strict labor standards and monitoring policies that ensure development projects, business ventures, and corporate collaborations are free from the use of child labor.



CHILDREN FOR HIRE

a portrait of child labor in Mon areas



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