

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Topic 1: Child Labor

Child labor is a prevalent and pervasive issue in Southeast Asia, where most countries have a significant percentage of children employed in their workforce. These percentages range from 4% in Indonesia to 45% in Cambodia. This practice is observed in a range of trades, from the textile and carpet industry to mining and manufacturing. The work done by children is dangerous, even for adults, and children may suffer short and long-term health effects from the labor in which they engage. Additionally, children in these countries face an almost mutually exclusive decision between engaging in employment, which yields immediate payment in the form of wages (however low they may be), and furthering their education. Given these damaging effects of child labor, all of the countries in the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have ratified the agreements reached under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby accepting the legal terms of obligation associated with using child labor. However, some member countries have not ratified International Labor Organization (ILO) terms for child labor, which may result from countries' recognition of the practice and their reluctance to completely abandon it.

While a ban on child labor and all goods produced by child workers seems like a moral and ethical solution, the issue is complex and is influenced by many social and economic factors. Families are driven by economic necessity to send children to work. Greater underlying issues of poverty and hunger play a considerable causative role in child labor. Additionally, child labor has been in practice for so long, that many of the economies of the Southeast Asian countries, as well as other trading nations, depend on child labor. It is arguable that market forces necessitate child labor. However, market forces hardly serve as a moral justification for this practice.

In fact, the health, safety, and educational repercussions for children far outweigh the economic need for child labor. Children are exposed to pesticides and dangerous chemicals. Furthermore, young workers are more likely to have serious injuries and accidents in these jobs. While no one should arguably have to undertake these dangers in employment, children are robbed of the potential for healthy and happy adulthoods by indirectly being coerced by financial pressures to work in these settings. In addition to the potential for serious health problems, child laborers are often forced to choose between joining the workforce and pursuing education. Because poverty forces children to meet their basic human needs immediately rather than consider the long-term investment in their education and future, children who are poor are likely to join the workforce.

Thus, ASEAN must consider the best way to address the issue of child labor without belittling larger socioeconomic disparities and questions of poverty.

Questions:

1. Given that socioeconomic conditions and poverty often drive the practice of child labor, how can ASEAN alleviate some of these coercive pressures, thereby reducing the need for children to work?
2. In what ways can ASEAN discourage companies and trades from employing children, or conversely, how can ASEAN incentivize responsible labor practices?

3. Given that child labor will probably continue to exist despite international agreements and legislation, how can ASEAN design programs and regulations that limit the amount of danger to which children are exposed?

Resources:

1. Child Labor: Global Solutions:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/01908/800/globalsolutions.htm>

A website detailing possible solutions to child labor.

2. Childinfo: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women:

http://www.childinfo.org/labour_countrydata.php

Data and statistics on child labor for each country.

3. Child Labor Public Education Project: Health Issues:

http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/health_issues.html

A list of health effects that child workers often experience as a result of labor.

4. Convention on the Rights of the Child: http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_understanding.html

Website for Convention on Rights of the Child – details agreements.

5. International Labor Organization: Child Labor:

http://www.ilo.org/global/Themes/Child_Labour/lang--en/index.htm

Overview of child labor and ILO policies.

6. International Labor Organization: Child Labour and Responses in South Asia:

<http://www.ilo.int/legacy/english/regions/asro/newdelhi/ipecc/responses/index.htm>

Information and statistics on child labor practices in parts of the region.

7. New York Times: Child Labor:

http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/subjects/c/child_labor/index.html

Database of articles/editorials regarding child labor.

8. One World Child Labour Guide: <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/childlabour>

Explores the topic of child labor to bridge the gap between rich and poor nations.

9. The State of the World's Children: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc97/report/>

A report detailing some progress in protecting children's rights, but condemning exploitative labor practices.

10. Understanding Children's Work: An Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project on Child Labour: <http://www.ucw-project.org/>

A research project sponsored jointly by the ILO, UNICEF, and World Bank.

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Topic 2: Educational Standards and Accessibility

Education is a vital component in the development of a country, and is often considered a fundamental human right. A strong and accessible education system is necessary for a country to maximize its economic and developmental potential. Vocational training, literacy, and the availability of higher education resources all help enhance productivity and sustainable development. Unfortunately, education in Southeast Asia is hardly equally accessible. Educational disparities between public and private sectors, rural and urban settings, and poorer and richer provinces make educational systems inconsistently implemented and limited in their capacity to help the population as a whole.

In addition to the educational disparities, poverty often causes individuals to forsake education. Either they cannot afford schooling or they must earn wages. Poverty generally makes the provision of educational facilities and resources extremely limited. Furthermore, it drives children to take up employment, often contributing to child labor.

Fortunately, many Southeast Asian nations recognize the shortcomings of their education systems, and are eager to identify and rectify some of the issues hindering the implementation of education improvements in their respective countries. For example, Brunei Darussalam and Lao People's Democratic Republic have policies to cover a minimum of 12 years of education for every child. Indonesia has a national education system, to which every person, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic background, has access. Cambodia goes further and promotes quality improvement in education, ensuring every individual has the same educational opportunities.

While these initiatives are very commendable and insightful in their recognition of tangible educational reform, many countries in Southeast Asia still suffer from poor quality education. Therefore, it seems reasonable to encourage a defined and enforceable education system in Southeast Asia.

Questions:

1. Since educational objectives might vary from region to region, what types of curricular standards can be set for all nations?
2. What kinds of programs can be created to increase accessibility to basic and higher education?
3. What kinds of facilities and resources need to be obtained in order to implement better education in poorer regions, and how can these needs be met?

Resources:

1. Challenges in Education in Southeast Asia:

<http://www.seameo.org/vl/library/DLWelcome/Publications/paper/india04.htm>

Report by SEAMEO with in-depth review of educational policies in other countries, child labor problems, and other educational issues in Southeast Asia.

2. Educational Reforms and Challenges in Southeast Asia:

<http://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/ejswp/0152.html>

Excellent article about general issues facing education in Southeast Asia with specific studies of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

3. Higher Education in South-East Asia:

http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/27/f5/e6.pdf

Case studies of higher education opportunities in 8 Southeast Asian nations.

4. The Official Website of Association of Southeast Asian Nations:

<http://www.aseansec.org/index2008.html>

ASEAN's official website includes many articles, information, and agreements regarding education.

5. National Master: Education Statistics:

<http://www.nationmaster.com/cat/Education-education>

Statistics in all areas of education categorized by country.

6. Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Website: <http://www.seameo.org/>

SEAMO's official website. Good resource for the organization and its objectives.

7. The Worldwide Plight of Public Schools: <http://www.schoolchoices.org/roo/internat.htm>

Overview of difficulties facing public schools around the world. Look specifically at Japan, for more Southeast Asian dimension, but the problems faced in most parts of the country are comparable to those faced in Southeast Asia.

8. UNESCO Higher Education: <http://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/>

Information about higher education as given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

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Topic 3: Regional Security and Stability

Security, border disputes, and terrorism have always plagued Southeast Asian nations, leading to violence, death, and political instability. These issues are generally caused by two groups: the politically disenfranchised and terrorists (and at times, these two groups may even overlap).

Southeast Asia often deals with issues of political minorities and as a result, regional security and safety becomes compromised. For example, the long-standing dispute between Tibet and China has had serious and dangerous repercussions for civilians. During the course of its history, Tibet had been an independent country, but is now controlled by the People's Republic of China. However, there is no way to recognize the sovereignty of Tibet, as Tibetans are a political minority in China. Furthermore, recognizing Tibet would threaten China's own national sovereignty. In fact, China contends that backing Tibet actually destabilizes authority and political order in China. The death toll of Tibetans is over 1 million and is even considered genocide. Because Tibetans are politically disenfranchised, they are at the mercy of the Chinese government without any representation. Therefore, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations must examine how political minorities can have representation or sovereignty in a way that does not result in violence and brutality.

While all political voices must be accommodated, other minority groups have less political agendas and only concern themselves with instilling fear in civilians. Nations such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia recently have faced terrorist attacks, creating havoc, panic, and fear. In November 2008, terrorists attacked Mumbai, India. These attacks not only resulted in mass casualties, but also financial repercussions, as the city is also a major financial capital in this area of the world. The attacks were coordinated in Pakistan by a Pakistan-based militant terrorist organization. Such acts of terrorism cause great instability in countries, and they strain international relationships that are already precarious at best. Since identifying and preventing causative elements of terrorism are next to impossible (terrorism is not caused by poverty or political disenfranchisement), ASEAN must look at how to improve security in travel, responses to terrorist attacks, and recovery programs in the event of such attacks.

These issues all contribute to the general instability and lack of security in the entire region. As Southeast Asia is a relatively interconnected region, achieving stability even between two nations or between two groups greatly affects the political health of all nations.

Questions:

1. How can minority political voices be accommodated in ways that do not require violence or terrorism?
2. How can political sovereignty of regions that are not necessarily countries be recognized in a way that does not infringe on national sovereignty but also allows minority groups to be heard?
3. What measures can ASEAN take to discourage terrorism and violence?

Resources:

- 1. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation: Counter Terrorism:**
http://203.127.220.112/apec/apec_groups/som_committee_on_economic/som_special_task_groups/counter_terrorism.html
Some of the measures taken by APEC to counter terrorism – good ideas for resolutions.
- 2. Asia's War on Terrorism:** http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/malay_terror/
Interesting Time articles about terrorism in the region.
- 3. 'India's Security Problems are graver than America's in relation to jihadi terrorism.'**
<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/indias-security-problems-are-graver-than-americas-in-relation-to-jihadi-terrorism/573089/0>
Explains terrorist threat in India and conflict with Pakistan.
- 4. South Asia Terrorism Review:** <http://www.satp.org/>
Good resource for South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) – all news briefs about Terrorism.
- 5. Conflict between China and Tibet:**
http://www.xomba.com/the_conflict_between_china_and_tibet
This article explains the conflict between Tibet and China.
- 6. Terrorism and Regional Security in Asia: Redefining Regional Order:**
http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:Cerf3VZ8YecJ:wwwarc.murdoch.edu.au/wp/wp113.pdf+security+in+asia&hl=en&gl=us&sig=AHIEtbRGaLrJ_-QitlgkR6GUmTclCMge-w
This link is a 16 page writing by author Amitav Acharya of the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University stating what terrorism threatens the region faces.
- 7. Terrorism in Southeast Asia:** <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/FAD/sea.htm>
An overview of terrorist activity and different groups in Southeast Asia, published by the Australian government.
- 8. Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Threat and Response:**
http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=res&cd=2&ved=0CCAQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hudson.org%2Ffiles%2Fpdf_upload%2FterrorismPDF.pdf&ei=Y7XkS7qoE4K8lQfV_MT5Cg&usg=AFQjCNHNGcJ2m0xvaMdairOKkdtDIbuYvQ&sig2=9licGPEwL6rqIeqpX8wvLw
A paper with information on Al-Qaeda and the climate of terrorism in the region
- 9. US-ASEAN: Defense & Security Update**
<http://www.usasean.org/DefSec/22210.htm>
This resource gives some of the details behind the increase in defensive spending in Southeast Asia.