



## Child labour as a challenge for urban sustainability: A case study of Azadpur mandi area, Delhi

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### Abstract

Millions of children worldwide are engaged in labour that is hindering their education, development and future livelihoods; many of them are involved in the worst forms of child labour that cause irreversible physical or psychological damage, or that even threaten their lives. This situation represents an intolerable violation of the rights of individual children, it perpetuates poverty and it compromises economic growth and equitable development. The effective abolition of child labour is an essential element of the urban sustainability. Children residing in informal, unplanned settlements in or near India's cities grow up in one of the most hazardous environments imaginable. Although food, services and infrastructure may be more available than is the case in rural areas, accessing them often requires cash payments that the poor cannot afford. Wealthier, more powerful groups tend to secure good quality health care, education and housing, leaving the poor and their children on the margins. India as a country is facing many of the problems and child labour is one of them. The paper attempts to understand the causes of child labour while carrying out case study of Azadpur Mandi area of Delhi. The study also tries to understand the impact of the child labour on working children and cities as a whole. The paper raises some important issues related to eradication of child labour and their overall impact on future sustainable cities of India.

**Keywords:** child labour, poverty, education, sustainability, Delhi

### 1. Introduction

Urban areas do not always provide the protective and caring environments essential for children to grow into emotionally and psychologically balanced adults. In cities, families as the primary institution responsible for children's physical and emotional wellbeing are faced with challenges unique to urban living. Poor parents or guardians normally need to spend extended periods of time away from home to make a living, often leaving young children in the care of elder siblings or unfamiliar neighbours who may not be able to provide the necessary supervision. When poverty, social exclusion and domestic conflicts make the urban nuclear family dysfunctional, children may be left to fend for themselves, or run away, migrate and turn to the streets.

It is perhaps not very surprising that there is not a single definition of Child labour because this term has been defined in various ways as per the agenda of the institutions-Corporate Sector, Government and NGOs. As a definition, we may say that "Those Children (in the range of 5 to 15 years old) who are doing labour, either paid or unpaid, and are kept working at any hour of the day within or outside the family. Child labour are found in mines, in factories making glass bangles, matches and fireworks, in commercial agriculture, in service sector as vendors, domestic workers, and collies. The list is endless, as are the hazards and consequences (Shirur *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[2, 9]</sup>. Child labour is simply the single most important source of child exploitations and child abuse in the world today. The overwhelming majority of working children are in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Child labour is recognized as a serious and enormously complex social Problem in India. It is an also subject matter of

violation of human rights. Working children are denied their right to survival and development, education, leisure and play, and adequate standard of living, opportunity for developing personality, talents, mental and physical abilities, and protection from abuse and neglect (Shirur *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[2, 9]</sup>.

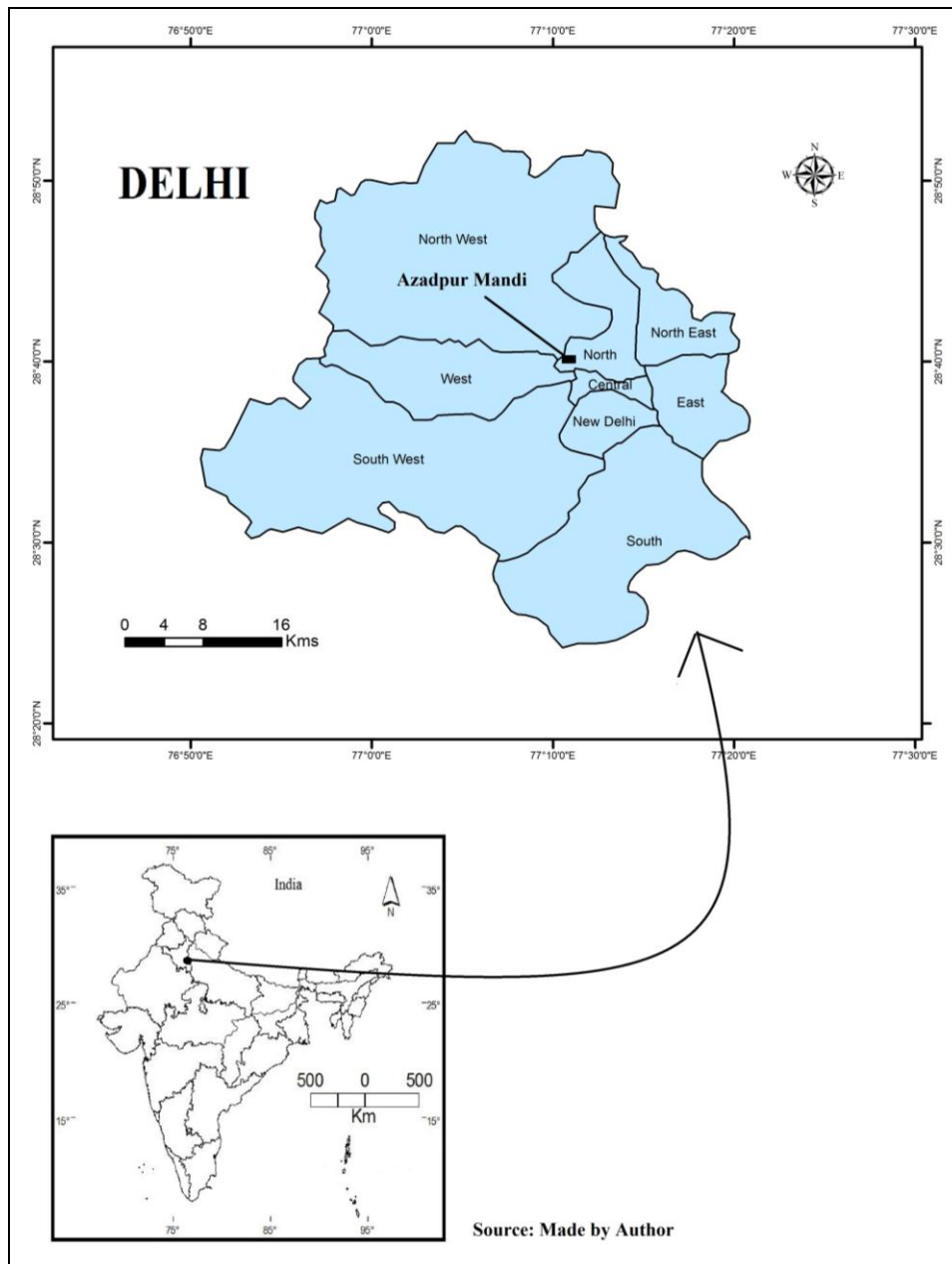
In a country like India, child labour is a very complex issue. A large number of the child workers are virtually confined in small rooms under inhuman conditions and in the most unhygienic surroundings. Most of these children come from extremely poor households. They are either school drop-outs or have not seen any school at all. They earn a very meager wage and work in most unsafe conditions. The hazardous conditions take their toll. Children suffer from lung diseases, tuberculosis, eye diseases, asthma, bronchitis and backaches (Ahuja 2009) <sup>[3, 7]</sup>. The child workers have no shelter, no food and no education. They run the risk of contracting various ailments and skin diseases. They are vulnerable to exploitation by almost anyone-the employer, the parents, the cops, and even the common man (Ahuja 2009) <sup>[3, 7]</sup>. Some people, who are in industries especially those who employ with these child labours, tend to justify it by arguing that they are merely helping the poor family by hiring their children (Shirur *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[2, 6]</sup>. The government believes that it is not easy to completely wipe out child labour. It, therefore, has only tried to improve their working conditions-reduce working hours, ensure minimum wages and provide facilities for health and education (Ahuja 2009) <sup>[3, 7]</sup>. The paper attempts to understand the causes of child labour while carrying out case study of Azadpur Mandi area of Delhi. The study also tries to understand the impact of the child labour on working children and cities as a whole. The paper raises some important issues

related to eradication of child labour and their overall impact on future sustainable cities of India.

**2. Study Area**

Azadpur mandi is Asia's largest wholesale market for fruits and vegetables. Every day thousands of trucks bring fresh produce to it from all over the country, and the annual arrivals amount to millions of tones (The Economic Times, 2013). Azadpur Mandi area presents a mix of Slum characteristics and refugee resettlement pattern. The colony was earlier meant for resettlement of the refugees from Pakistan and Punjab. There are 11 blocks in the colony with plotted housing scheme, which are interspersed with jhuggi-jhopri clusters. With the passage of time, many of these plots have been sold to migrant workers, mostly daily wagers or petty traders. The colony is overcrowded and the population density is quite high

where five to six people are living in one room of 10x12 ft size. The basic amenities are inadequate. There are common toilets for both males and females. This creates problem of availability and become unsafe for human habitation. In addition, overcrowded public utilities often face the problem of maintenance and sustenance of public utility. Most are just wide enough for a rickshaw to pass through. There are some small open spaces on the streets-usually at the end of culls-de-sac-but there are a few more formal community spaces, such as temple courtyards. Drainage is a problem. The site is relatively flat and is at the edge of a swamp. Many of the open drains are blocked. They are cleaned twice a week, but mostly remain full with household wastes. In some places streets have been paved with bricks, which have raised their level above the floor level of the houses, with obvious consequences during heavy rain.



**Fig 1:** Location Map of Delhi

### 3. Child Labour

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 defines a child as any person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age. Part II of the act prohibits children from working in any occupation listed in Part A of the Schedule, which include among others, domestic work, dhabas & hotels, catering at railway establishments, construction work on the railway or anywhere near the tracks, plastics factories and automobile garages. The act also prohibits children from working in places where certain processes are being undertaken, as listed in Part B of the Schedule, which include among others, beedi making, tanning, soap manufacture, brick kilns and roof tiles units. These provisions do not apply to a workshop where the occupier is working with the help of his family or in a government recognised or aided school.

According to International Labour Organization (ILO), the term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

#### 3.1 Types of Child Labour

There are broadly four types of child labour, first are those children who work in factories, workshops and mines. They are usually to be found in semi-urban and urban areas in both the unorganized and organized sectors. Second, are those children who are under bondage to their employers, whether in agriculture or industry. The third category of working children are the street children- those who live on and off the streets-and are to be found in the service sector of semi-urban and urban India. Children who work as part of family labour in all the contexts of agriculture, industry, home-based work, etc. belong to the fourth category. These are not exclusive categories; they are often combined in different ways (Burra, 1998) [4, 8].

#### 3.2 Causes of Child Labour

According to social scientists, the main cause of child labour is poverty (Ahuja, 2009) [3, 7], Child labour is the cumulative effect of a number of factors. That is why poverty is widely recognized as one of the main causes of child labour, since children are often required to make significant momentary or labour contributions to their families-contributions that may be critical for family survival. Poverty also hinders school attendance because of costs associated with schooling.-both direct costs as costs of books, uniform, etc., as well as opportunity costs such as lost income. Indeed, most of the child laborers belong to poor, landless and semi-landless families, whose income is otherwise, insufficient to keep the family alive. According to a study, 92 million out of 228 million of India's children are in the families below poverty line (Shirur *et al.*, 2007) [2, 6].

Absence of compulsory education is another major factor behind prevalence of the practice of engaging children to

work. Many children are forced to stay at home because their parents cannot afford the prescribed minima of uniform, books, stationary and so on. Besides, in the remote areas of the countryside, schooling facilities are scarce and inaccessible. Sometimes, even the poor parents want their children to work, as they perceive several advantages in child's taking up a job. They feel that the job disciplines them, terminates their dependency protects them against the infection of delinquent culture (Shirur *et al.*, 2007) [2, 6]. Unemployment is also a strong deterrent and disincentive to the weaker sections in putting their children to schools. Cityward migration is yet another factor. Most of the study tells that the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are the main victims of the child labour problem.

#### 3.3 Impact of Child Labour on Children

Children work in dangerously polluted factories whose brick walls are scarred with (black powder in smoke) and there is an oppressive smell in the air. They work near furnaces which burn at a temperature of 1400 degree centigrade. They handle dangerous chemicals like arsenic and potassium. They work in glass blowing units where the work exerts their lungs and creates diseases like tuberculosis (Ahuja, 2009) [3, 7]. The problem of child labour involves various far-reaching socio-economic consequences. It deprives the children of the opportunity for education, play and recreation, stunts their physical growth and their development for adult responsibilities. Child labour not only disfavors general physical growth, but also leads to defects and ailments. Different types of labour different kinds of ill effects.

A child labour, many a times, makes a job hazardous which is not so for adults. This includes occupations like domestic work, working in restaurants, where children are at mercy of employers and consequently in a hazardous situation. The employer often pushes children beyond their physical capacity. This exploitation also includes sexual abuse, which harms the psychological development of these children. When children labour, besides health, their education also suffers. The future of a working child is endangered as he/she cannot go to school, or is bound to leave school before time, or is unable to coordinate the two activities. In most cases a working child lacks fundamental general and professional knowledge, which is required for normal mental and intellectual development and to prosper in the social and occupational fields (Gerry *et al.*, 1981) [9].

#### 3.4 Child Labour in India

As per 2001 Population Census, children in the age group of 0-14 constituted about 360 million and accounted for 35.3 percent of total population. Children in the 5-14 ages up constituted about 251 million and accounted for 24.6 percent of the population. Though there is an increase in the absolute number of children, the proportion of children in the total population is declining between 1991 and 2001. By Census of India projections, the proportion of children (0 to 14) has further come down to 32.1 percent during 2006. Elementary school age children (5 to 14) in the total population constituted 241.7 million accounting for 21.7 percent of the total population (Census of India, 2001). A majority of the

working children are concentrated in the rural areas. About 60 per cent of them are below the age of 10 years. Business and trade absorb 23 per cent while work in household's covers 36 per cent. The number of children in urban areas who work in canteens and restaurants, or those engaged in picking rags and hawking goods, is vast but unrecorded (Ahuja, 2009)<sup>[3, 7]</sup>. According to Census of India, 2001, there were 12.26 million working children in the age group of 5-14 years as compared to 11.3 million in 1991 revealing an increasing trend in absolute numbers though the work participation rates of children (5-14) has come down from 5.4 percent during 1991 to 5 percent during 2001. The recent round of the National Sample Survey (NSSO) estimates suggests that the child labour in the country is around 8.9 million in 2004/2005 with a workforce participation rate of 3.4 per cent (NSSO, 2004/05).

The survey of the metropolitan and mega cities make shocking revelations. Mumbai has the largest number of child labourers. In Saharanpur, 10, 000 child workers are engaged in the wood carving industry, In Delhi, 60, 000 children work in dhabas, tea –stalls and restaurants on a daily wage. Most of the study tells that child labour is mostly seen in the states like Uttar Pradesh (4.48 crore), Bihar (3.36 crore), Madhya Pradesh (2.24 crore) and Maharashtra (2.14 crore). Because the highest number of persons are living below the poverty line in all these states (Ahuja, 2009)<sup>[3, 7]</sup>.

### 3.5 Child Labour in Delhi

Larger numbers of child labourers are found in Delhi. In the capital of India, almost 60, 000 children work in different-different areas like dhabas, tea-stalls, restaurants, small factories, Sabji Mandi and so on. Most of the children work on a low daily wages (Ahuja, 2009)<sup>[3, 7]</sup>. According to news published in Dainik Jagran newspaper, there are more than 10,000 child labourers in North Delhi. This is the highest number of populations among all districts of Delhi and this population constitutes almost 19.8 per cent of child labourers in Delhi. In the recently concluded Census of India (2001) the population of India has been recorded as 13.8 millions, registering a net increase of 4.36 million over the census of 1991. It is projected that if the present trend continues the population of Delhi will reach 22 million in 2021 and 30 million in 2051. This shows that population growth of Delhi is much higher than other metropolitan cities namely, Kolkata and Mumbai in the same period. 62% of the population growth of Delhi during the past decade was due to natural increase and 38% due to net in migration. The contribution of migration to population growth is significantly higher. Nearly two hundred thousand people are migrating every year in search of livelihood. It is also evident that this growth has been influenced by poverty-induced migration, from different parts of the country, particularly from the neighboring states (Census of India, 2001).

### 3.6 Links between Child Labour and Sustainability

According to Love not Labour Org Child labour links to all of the types of sustainability. Environmental sustainability is not destroying the nature around us and not digging up fossil fuels. Not cutting down trees, or polluting the air we breathe, by driving cars and releasing non-environmentally-friendly

gases. Some of the raw materials that are used for manufactured goods come from sources that use child labour in the process. Child labour is not environmentally sustainable, because these poor children aren't working for a good cause; many are digging for non-renewable products.

Economic sustainability is having a prosperous and fair economy, whilst being environmentally, socially and humanly sustainable at the same time. If child labour is banned, companies that use child labour might go redundant because of the loss of employment. Companies will then have to employ employees that they will have to pay properly. We, as humans need find another way of sustaining our resources so that child laborers don't have to work.

Human sustainability is being able to sustain a human's needs without destroying the world we live in. Also, making sure humans get treated fairly. If the world was humanly sustainable, there would be no poverty or world hunger etc. Children should not have to work when they are 5 years old. They should not have to get beaten for not working fast enough or for doing something wrong. Often victims of child labour or forced labor do not attend school. Attending school is of key importance - everyone needs proper education and a good life.

Social sustainability encompasses human rights, excessive labor etc. The world is not socially sustainable because there is a huge presence of war in many countries and many rules people find unfair, like how people have to work in unfair conditions. Some employers do not allow the child labourers to talk during work-time. In this case, the levels of social sustainability would be poor because it will not allow the children to bond through verbal communication. Child labour is not a form of sustainability because it is unfair on the children working, and it isn't right.

### 4. Database and Methodology

Qualitative data is collected from primary sources. Case study with the help of semi-structured interviews has been used as a method to fulfill the objectives. Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods. Researcher Robert K. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23).

There are many advantages of case study method. Case studies allow a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs. The data collected is normally a lot richer and of greater depth than can be found through other experimental designs. It tends to be conducted on rare cases where large samples of similar participants are not available. An example of this is the study

of Phineas Gage by Harlow, J.M. This example also connects with the point above with the depth of data obtained. Cases of brain damage are quite minimal and it is extremely rare to find people with the exact same parts of the brain affected. To be able to gain knowledge of brain functions the damage between people have to be exact to ensure you are testing the right thing, this can generally only be done through case studies. Within the case study, scientific experiments can be conducted. It can help experimenters adapt ideas and produce novel hypotheses which can be used for later testing.

There are also many disadvantages of case study method. One of the main criticisms is that the data collected cannot necessarily be generalized to the wider population. This leads to data being collected over longitudinal case studies not always being relevant or particularly useful. Some case studies are not scientific. Freud used case studies for many of his theories or studies. Such examples are that of Anna O and Little Hans. Both of these are not scientific nor are they able to be generalized. This can be attributed to them being case studies, but also Freudian theory in general. Case studies are generally on one person, but there also tends to only be one experimenter collecting the data. This can lead to bias in data collection, which can influence results more than in different designs. It is also very difficult to draw a definite cause/effect from case studies.

## 5. Result and Discussion

Azadpur mandi area is taken for case study to explore the present scenario of child labour. The occupational structure of child labour in this area is found to be quite diverse. Children work on there as labour, self-employment and helping in family business i.e. vegetable and fruit selling. Basically the population is involved in the informal sector for bare survival. A large number of them belong to categories such as driver, mechanic, safaiwala, brush maker, factory worker, rickshaw puller, construction worker, or house maid, mandi area-vegetable and fruit sellers. These kids are forced to work to help their poor families, but this robs them of their right to childhood and all its associated joys. Child labour also crushes their right to normal physical and mental development, to education and thus to a healthy, prosperous life. Children set foot for work early in the morning to pick up fruits and vegetables from the Malgadis, buy the fruit and vegetables and sell them later in the afternoon. Most families do business in garlic and ginger, so they make their children to snip the same into smaller parts, keeping them into dirty surroundings. Children from the age of 6 are made to do this brutal labour. Whole day labour and they even don't pay for it. Some children whose parents are dead or cannot work have no alternative but to work and accept the conditions of employer however bad they are. Here, most of the children work in between Rs 300 to Rs 500 a month; sometimes for no money at all as they are given food to survive.

Absence of compulsory education at the primary level, parental ignorance regarding the bad effects of child labour, the lack of implementation of child labour laws and penalties, non-availability and non-accessibility of schools, boring and unpractical school curriculum and cheap child labour are some other factors which lead to child labour. Illiterate and ignorant parents do not understand the need for proper physical,

cognitive and emotional development of their children. They are themselves uneducated, so they don't realize the importance of education for their children. Hardly 1 out of 10 percent has taken education beyond 8<sup>th</sup>. Most of the mothers are illiterate, doesn't even know how to read and write.

To fulfill the objectives, five respondents were chosen randomly for the interview process. First respondent was Shafaque. He is like many other domestic workers, who works in mandi area. He buys and sells tomatoes. His father lost his one hand while handling heavy sacks in mandi. His day starts at 4:00 Am, when he buys off tomatoes till 6:00am and then from 12:00 to 6:00 pm he sells those tomatoes off. Born to landless agricultural labourer, Mohammed Shafaque, he came to Delhi from Bihar at the age of 5 with his parents in search of livelihood. He has 5 brothers, 3 elder to him and other two younger. He with the help of his 2 elder brothers works everyday as they are the only source of income for the family. They manage to earn Rs 150 - Rs 200 every day.

He goes to study at an NGO, Deepalaya, for 2 hours in between and right now acquiring the education of 3<sup>rd</sup> level through OBE (open basic education), a project started by the same NGO. He is not able to attend the classes regularly due to busy working schedule. He pays the out of the little wages earned by him. He also dreams of going to school and quit his work. He says, "If my brothers are able to set up their work someday and condition of my family gets better, I would like to go to school and complete my studies like other children".

Second respondent was Raju. He works in a canteen as a waiter in Janakpuri area. He is 15 years old and doesn't get time to go to school. He has studied in school till 5<sup>th</sup> class and then got dropped out. Since then he is working to earn for living. He started with a job in clothes shop. His father got separated from the family when he was 12 years old. His mother does labour work in a factory. He says, "What should I do? It's necessary to work to support the family and to survive in this expensive world". He earns Rs 2000 monthly while his mother 2500. Other than his mother, he has two more siblings to support. He pays their fees so that they can go to school and complete their studies. In 2011, he decided to continue his studies further. At that time someone informed him about the OBE (open basic education) in Deepalaya NGO. So in August 2011 he decided to enroll in Deepalaya in 8<sup>th</sup> class. He says, "I want to pass at least 10<sup>th</sup> class to avail some opportunities otherwise I'll get stuck here forever." Today, though, he is happy, secure in the knowledge that he would not have to make do with water alone when he goes to bed after a grueling 12-hour work day at the canteen.

Third respondent was Pankaj. He is a migrant from Bihar. His family came to Delhi 3 years back to get his father treated as his father met with an accident. He now lives in Wazirpur industrial area. He works in a factory in Wazirpur so that he can take out money from his income to buy books and pay the fees for education. While living in Bihar he completed his education till 6<sup>th</sup> class. After coming to Delhi he enrolled himself in OBE in Deepalaya NGO In 8<sup>th</sup> class. His father is paralyzed and his mother also works in a factory and is able to earn Rs 3500 monthly and his income is Rs 1200 from which he pays the tuition fees. When asked the main reason of him working in factory, he replied by saying that his family couldn't afford him going to school, so what should he do. In

order to acquire some education, it has become necessary for him to do labour work. Out of Rs 1200 he spends Rs 1000 in tuition and the rest in household work or buying books.

Fourth respondent was Rani She works as a domestic help in eight households in the nearby kothis of Shalimar Bagh. She lives in the Jhuggis of Wazirpur with her family. During interview with Rani, she says my father left me. I do not know what the reason was. But I want to continue studies; does she want to learn craft, stitching or simply spend time with her friends? Rani further says that "I will also continue sweeping houses because I know I am not educated to do anything else. My life is very hectic that is why there is no time for friends in my life. This is my life, the struggle will continue, will there ever be an end?"

Last respondent was Ganeshi. He was born in Hardoi District of Uttar Pradesh. His age is 13 years. He could only study upto 5<sup>th</sup> class. His father is suffering from tuberculosis. He came to Delhi with his fellow villagers who were coming to Delhi for employment purpose. He once came to buy vegetables with one of the fellow villager for his retail shop in Azadpur mandi area. He saw some boys there who were selling vegetables on the footpath and then he started to work like them and selling vegetables on Thela. Now he earns 200-250 per day. He said that he wanted to study further but due to financial hardship it could not become possible.

## 6. Conclusion

This study clearly shows that child labour is a serious problem in our country. Urban sustainability cannot be possible without eradication of child labour. It is very clear by the Case study of Azadpur Mandi in Delhi but child domestic worker's contribution to the family is considerable. In some cases they support their family's single-handedly. Therefore, employment schemes for adults should be intensified and strictly carried out. Poor socio-economic parental background is one of the important cases for the rise in child domestic labour. Nearly two hundred thousand people are migrating to Delhi every year in search of livelihood. The city's huge informal sector provides cheap services and comfort to the rich and is a major source which has kept the society growing and going. Neither the slum areas act nor the city master plans have been properly implemented. The ability to claim and enjoy the rights of informed and responsible citizen rests squarely upon a child's access to a good basic education. The government should seriously consider the enactment of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill on compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years, removing education disparities and strengthening the quality of education. Public education programmes are the need of the hour, they have to bring about attitudinal change of parents, as well of employers. Convincing evidence on this issue is needed for persuasive campaign.

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