

## Understanding Child Labour in Economic Activities to Avoid Ecological Damages Through the Precautionary Principle Towards Sustainable Development Goals

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**Abstract:** Understanding child labour in relation to the economic activities is essential to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the precautionary principle. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) known as “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” which in line with the main concept of sustainable development. Under the main concept of sustainable development, the precautionary principle may provide answers for the child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, this study examines the understanding child labour in relation to the economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the precautionary principle. This study is also identifying the relation between the importance of understanding child labour in relation to the economic activities and for handling child labour issues to avoid ecological damages through the precautionary principle in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Key words:** Child labour, economic activities, precautionary principle, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), precautionary, child labour, ecological damages

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### INTRODUCTION

The involvement of children in economic activity is a phenomena in developing countries. This fact is a complicated problem to solve because in one hand the developing countries must spur the development of human resources but on the other hand children who should be attending school are forced to be involved in work because of the demands of family and eventually may caused ecological degradation (Menon and Rodgers, 2018).

Child labour has not received adequate attention proportionally and systematically by the government these days. The total number of child labour is expected to continue to increase (Larmar *et al.*, 2017), if the involvement of child labourers as pointed out by some circles, for example, due to economic pressure in highly consumptive societies over the past 10 years. There

are several factors behind why children should be involved in economic activity from early age, rather than learning and playing on their world as children. These factors seem to cause gaps in everyday life as well as may caused problems to the environment, since, the labourers are inexperience and lack of knowledge at the young age (Kildare and Middlemiss, 2017).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Child labour:** Referring to the definition of a child under Article 1 of the convention on the rights of the child, it is said that the child is any human being under the age of 18, except based on the applicable law of child that the adulthood is reached earlier. Nevertheless, Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges that the age limit of adulthood in the legal rules of a country may be different.

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Socio-economic activity that someone does by expecting the results to be utilized in fulfilling the needs of his life, commonly called work. A typical work is done by adults for many reasons, including reasons for psychology and psychical maturity (Menon and Rodgers, 2018). A child who has not reached the age of 18 years old who has involved in the socio-economic activities can be considered as "Child Labour". The International Labour Organization (ILO) that defines child labour as:

"Children who lost their childhood and future, prematurely leading adult lives, working long hours for low wages under conditions damaging to their health and their physical and mental development (ILO, 2002)"

These two definitions seem to emphasize the childhood aspect and the future in which children must develop, according to their natural processes without being burdened by things outside themselves.

ILO (2002) distinguishes the work activities of children, according to light work with hazardous work. Light work is a work that is not harmful to the health and growth of children does not disturb the school schedule and the working hours are not long. Hazardous work is work which by its nature or condition may harm the health, safety and moral of the child, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC, 2004).

Many assumptions underlied why child labour is a problem. Despite the assumption of psychology and psychical maturity, another assumption related to it is that a person's right (children) to participate in the phases of their life must be respected as well as the assumptions about their health that are feared to be disturbed. Another equally important assumption is that children are the generation of future expectations, so they should be well prepared by ILO (2002) and International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC, 2004).

**Policy aspects:** The problems of child labor will always persist because their existence is regenerative. Children at this time will grow into adulthood and at that time they are no longer child laborer that status will be replaced by the next generation of backgrounds of the same family matter. The root of this problem is not the children itself but their families are socially, culturally and economically classified as poor. Therefore, the policy aspect that handled this issue should be comprehensive. Some of the ideas that can be used as a basis for policy-making in handling issues of child labour, proposed by OECD. (2003) are: the view stated that education is the basic right of children.

Children will become workers (child labourers), if they are drop out of school. This thought viewed that the state is a community agent and is responsible in building the infrastructure needed to facilitate basic education. This flow of thought has a far-reaching perspective than the government's perspective on the dangers of child labor. The government in various normative formulations only indicate danger in terms of physical course, so that, children are prohibited to work on the type of work that is vulnerable because its dangerous. In fact, children have no opportunity to follow education, if they work because it is a fatal threat of danger. A view that focuses on the width of problems and the difficulties of government to build and to ensure access of education for all children. This view emphasizes a gradual and selective approach by giving priority to children working in high-risk jobs in order to be educated and skilled. Progression is desirable step by step towards more adequate improvement. The third view highlights the state that the state has failed in its duty to provide education and incentives to the poor and failed to create a conducive atmosphere for children to learn. This view suggests to give children the freedom of choice. At the same time, however, children should also be provided with great flexibility, providing qualify education and the freedom to choose to work. If children choose school while working, then a supportive atmosphere must be created for them (OECD., 2003).

The three ideas mentioned above shows different views but the substance remains the same that leads to the protection of work and coaching to the children, so that, they can still expect a better future. The indicators are the policy on ratifying conventions and attempts to mainstream the program for the elimination of child labour. Therefore, according the above-mentioned discussion, child labour in economic activities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the precautionary principle may provide answers to avoid ecological damages as well as promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) known as "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which parallel to the concept of sustainability which consist of 17 goals with 169 targets (UN., 2015). About 17 goals of the SDGs which cover on no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitary, clean energy, good jobs and economic growth, innovations and infrastructure, reduce inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible

consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace and justice as well as partnership for goals (UN., 2015).

The first goal of the SDGs which focusing on the matter to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. As for the second goal of the SDGs which highlighted to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The third goal of the SDGs, to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages the fourth goal of the SDGs, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The fifth goal of the SDGs, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The sixth goal of the SDGs, to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. The seventh goal of the SDGs, to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. The eighth goal of the SDGs, to promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. The ninth goal of the SDGs to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation (UN., 2015).

The tenth goal of the SDGs to reduce inequality within and among countries. The eleventh goal of the SDGs, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The twelfth goal of the SDGs, to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. The thirteenth goal of the SDGs, to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. The fourteenth goal of the SDGs, to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The fifteenth goal of the SDGs, to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. The sixteenth goal of the SDGs, to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The seventeenth goal of the SDGs, to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (UN, 2015).

Referring to all of 17 goals under the SDGs it is clearly that these goals are parallel to the concept of sustainability. Basically, the concept of sustainability concentrates ones on mankind rights and entitlements which include productive life and health as well as peace and justice.

**The concept of sustainable development:** The concept of sustainable development that has been defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. The above-mentioned concept highlights three major pillars, i.e., social, economic and environmental aspects. This concept of sustainable development has been highlighted in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro as the results, Agenda 21 and Rio Declaration has been established (Razman *et al.*, 2009a-c, 2010). According to Sands (1995), Agenda 21 emphasises the following matters which include sustainable development of human settlement, population, consumption pattern, poverty and human health. On the other hand, Mensah (1996) indicated that the Rio Declaration concentrates ones on mankind rights and entitlements which include productive life and health as well as peace and justice.

Basically, this concept of sustainable development has been a constituent in the international legal agenda since, early as 1893. Referring to the case of United States of America v Great Britain (1893) 1 Moore’s Int. Arb. Awards 755, well known as Pacific fur seals arbitration where in this case the United States of America has stated that a right to make sure the appropriate and lawful use of seals and to protect them for the benefit of human beings, from meaningless destruction as well as for peace and justice (Razman *et al.*, 2009a-c, 2010).

Sands (1995) underlined that this concept of sustainable development is perhaps the greatest current phrase of environmental policy with embedding the ingredients of peace and justice, commanding support and presented as a fundamental at the Rio Summit, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in year 1992 (Razman and Azlan 2009a-c).

According to, Article 33 of the Lome Convention (1989) states that in the framework of this convention, the protection and the enhancement of the environment and natural resources, the halting of deterioration of land and forests, the restoration of ecological balances, the preservation of natural resources and their rational exploitation as well as for achieving peace and justice are basic objectives that the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) states concerned shall strive to achieve with community support with a view to bring an immediate improvement in the living conditions of their populations and to safeguarding those of future generations (Sulaiman and Razman, 2010; Emrizal and Razman, 2010; Razman, 2015).

The above-mentioned Article 33 introduces into international legal framework the concept of sustainable development with one of the initiatives (Razman, 2014; Razman *et al.*, 2014, 2015) as being spelt out by individual country through her National Constitution which emphasised the individual rights and protections as well as for peace and justice. These protections consistent with the concept of sustainable development by applying several approaches which include the precautionary principle. Basically, the precautionary principle gives direction and assistance in the decision making based on the concept of sustainable development in order to avoid wrong doing as well as causing damages in nature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**The precautionary principle:** As mentioned above, the precautionary principle gives direction and assistance in the decision making based on the concept of sustainability in order to avoid wrong doing as well as causing damages in nature (Razman and Azlan 2009; Razman *et al.*, 2010; Sands, 2003). This principle derived from the traditional approach in dealing with decision making on environmental scenario or surrounding incident. According to the traditional approach where all parties concerned have been called and these parties created their institutions in order to adopt and apply decisions that are found upon “scientific evidences” or knowledge and information accessible at that particular occasion (Razman *et al.*, 2010; Sands, 1995, 2003). Basically, this traditional approach put forward that necessary actions shall only be taken where there are scientific findings that noteworthy that environmental scenario or surrounding incident will be damaged. Unfortunately in the absence of the scientific evidence, therefore, no action can be taken (Sulaiman and Razman 2010; Sands, 1995, 2003).

However, in middle 1980s where a change of the traditional approach has taken in place. New approach known as the precautionary principle had replaced the traditional approach (Sulaiman and Razman 2010, Sands, 1995, 2003). Based on the concept of sustainability, the precautionary principle allows taking action and making decision without the scientific evidence of damaging effects, since, the damage of the environment, economic as well as social aspects cannot be remedial or irreversible for a short period (Sulaiman and Razman 2010; Sands, 1995, 2003). According to Paragraph 7 of the bergen ministerial declaration on sustainable development, 1990 states that:

“In order to achieve sustainable development, policies must be based on precautionary principle. environmental measures must anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of environmental degradation. Where there are treats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation”

Moreover, the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in the year 1992 has adopted the precautionary principle. It is clearly that shown and highlighted in the Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration. The Principle 15 of Rio Declaration states that:

“Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent damages such as environmental degradation”

Meanwhile, the Preamble of the Biodiversity Convention, 1992 stated that:

“ Where there is a threat of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity, lack of full there is a scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to avoid or minimize such a threat”

Based on the above discussion, according to Paragraph 7 of the bergen ministerial declaration on sustainable development, 1990 states that inter alia, “where there are treats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation”. It is clearly that the above said provision tries to emphasize to adopt precautionary principle by using the words of “should not be”. On the other hand, the principle 15 of the rio declaration provides that inter alia “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”. This provision of the rio declaration has highlighted that the application of the precautionary principle as mandatory based on the words of “shall not be”.

Referring to all of the discussions above, on the precautionary principle based on the concept of

sustainability highlighted answers for handling the child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The precautionary principle promotes direction and assistance in the decision making, even though without the scientific evidence of damaging effects, since, the damage of the environment, economic as well as social aspects cannot be remedial or irreversible for a short period (Sulaiman and Razman, 2010; Sands, 1995, 2003). Therefore, in this manner, the precautionary principle may provide means to handle the child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages through the precautionary principle towards sustainable development goals:** The involvement of children in economic activity is a phenomena in developing countries. This fact is a complicated problem to solve because in one hand the developing countries must spur the development of human resources but on the other hand, children who should be attending school are forced to be involved in study because of the demands of family and eventually may caused ecological degradation (Menon and Rodgers, 2018), since, the labourers are inexperience and lack of knowledge at the young age (Kildare and Middlemiss, 2017). Thus, in this situation, the precautionary principle may provide means to handle the child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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## CONCLUSION

The involvement of children in economic activity is a phenomena in developing countries. This fact is a complicated problem to solve because in one hand the developing countries must spur the development of human resources but on the other hand children who should be attending school are forced to be involved in work because of the demands of family and eventually may caused ecological degradation (Menon and Rodgers 2018), since, the labourers are inexperience and lack of knowledge at the young age (Kildare and Middlemiss, 2017).

Hence, the precautionary principle gives direction and assistance in the decision making based on the concept of sustainable development in order to avoid wrong doing as well as causing damages in nature. The precautionary principle promotes direction and assistance in the decision making, even though without the scientific evidence of damaging effects, since, the damage of the environment, economic as well as social aspects cannot be remedial or irreversible for a short period (Sulaiman and Razman, 2010; Sands, 1995, 2003). Finally, in conclusion in order to handle the child labour in economic activities to avoid ecological damages for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the precautionary principle may provide answers to avoid damages in the social and ecological environment as well as promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

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