

Bonded Labour Practice in Nepal: Understanding the Life-worlds of *Haliya* Child Labourers

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Abstract

Nepal is suspected to have up to 3 million agricultural bonded labourers under the so-called *haliya* and *kamaiya* systems. The former affects people belonging to various castes and ethnolinguistic groups across Nepal, but it is particularly concentrated in the far-western hill districts. The latter almost exclusively refers to a section of ethnic Tharu population, living in the Naya Muluk districts of the southwestern Tarai. In both practices, the bonded contract is normally a voluntary agreement, but when people fail to pay the amounts borrowed for their family sustenance, then, it can force them into generational bonded labour. After years of pressure from advocacy groups, the Government of Nepal banned the *kamaiya* system in 2000, and the *haliya* in 2008, though without conducting any detailed studies or preparing long-term rehabilitation policies. Recent reports suggest that the use of bonded labour continues, and that the criminalization of *haliya* and *kamaiya* practices have transformed in such a way that children are increasingly taking an adult role as agricultural labourers to support their families. Using various qualitative data collection techniques, this fieldwork-based research focuses on people affected by the *haliya* practice in Baitadi district to explore motives and rationale for entering into bonded labour, and the ways in which they understand it and its significance in the context of their lives. Besides presenting a detailed analysis of thus far under-researched bonded labour issue, this research is expected to help the Government of Nepal and other NGOs, including the ILO, planning to undertake rehabilitation programmes.