

Outside Sialkot



Child Labour in the Sporting Goods Industry
by
the Global March Against Child Labour
(based on the investigation led by Philippe Roy,
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On the eve of the kick-off for the 2002 World Cup, an investigation was conducted around Sialkot, the city that produces the largest number of inflatable footballs in Pakistan and in the world, to examine the existence of child labour in the sporting goods industry. The investigation was led by the International Media Coordinator of the Global March Against Child Labour. The Global March has been leading the World Cup Campaign 2002 since 31 May 2001. The initial findings of this report were presented during the campaign along with two other reports pointing to the existence of child labour in India and unfair working conditions for adults both in China and India.

BACKGROUND

In Pakistan, 40.5% of the country's 145 million people are less than 14 years old and well over 3 million of them are believed to be involved in child labour. Children are involved in various types of work including carpet weaving, sporting goods production, street vending, and domestic child labour. The existence of child labour in Pakistan's football stitching industry received international attention in the mid-90's when activist groups and the media reported that there was extensive use of child labour in the sporting goods industry.

A large number of the children involved in football stitching were working in Sialkot, as 98% of the country's 3,559 sporting goods producers are located in the city and its neighbouring localities. The sporting goods industry represents 30% of Sialkot's exports. It exports not only low-cost promotional and toy balls but also balls for official matches.

The negative publicity about child labour in 1997 was re-enforced by reports from respected international organisations such as the ILO which estimated the total number of child labourers to be between 5,000 to 7,000 children. The Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) then came together with the ILO, UNICEF, local civil society organisations, industry partners, and other players to set up the Sialkot Project to monitor and eliminate child labour in the sporting goods industry in Sialkot.

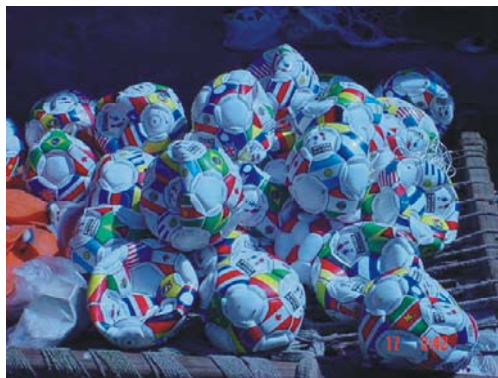
Under the Sialkot Project, sporting goods manufacturers voluntarily register for external monitoring. So far, more than 90% of the manufacturers based in and around Sialkot have joined the program. The Sialkot Project also includes child labour awareness programs implemented with the assistance of local NGOs and universal education programs by UNICEF and the Government of Punjab. They have also adopted social

protection programs, which promote community development and ensure the sustainability of the Sialkot Project for a child labour-free Sialkot. Five years since its establishment, the Sialkot Project has achieved a high level of success in terms of removing children from work and ensuring non-formal education for them. In total, 185 non-formal schools have been built and over 6,000 children have been admitted to these schools. President Clinton's address at the International Labour Conference in June 1999 highlighted the success of the Sialkot Project and thanked the ILO for "achieving a true breakthrough for the children of the world".

Despite this success, child stitching is still present in Pakistan, particularly beyond the confines of Sialkot. Our investigation started in the villages surrounding Sialkot. Informal talks about the nature of the industry eventually led us to villages miles away from Sialkot. We found children stitching cheap promotional balls and toy balls for the national market as well as balls bearing logos of large sporting goods companies for export purposes, well outside of the Sialkot monitoring system.

Though Sialkot has always been the centre of football production, some stitchers have migrated outside of Sialkot to continue their trade and some even claim to have migrated to escape the monitoring system of Sialkot. This migration highlights one of the major faults of the Sialkot Project - its geographical limitation. Though some stitching centres immediately outside of Sialkot are also monitored, the majority of production outside of Sialkot, including the stitching highlighted in our investigation, remains outside any independent monitoring system. A significant number of suppliers on the lower end of the market operate outside Sialkot.

Another limitation of the Sialkot Project is that it only monitors the use of child labour, even though almost all codes of conduct and other labour standards set by the sporting goods manufacturers are based on either ILO core labour standards or the Code of Conduct of the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry. The link between poor working conditions - such as the lack of security, low wages, and limited freedom of association - and the incidence of child labour is not reflected in the design of the Sialkot Project.



The investigative trips took place in March and May 2002. The investigation was not conducted in the city of Sialkot in order not to raise suspicions about our investigation and thus affect the results. Talking with local partner NGOs working in the field of child labour, we learned of several places where child labour was being used for football stitching.

The football stitching observed was done at home. Most of the children interviewed during the investigation still attended school for half days, and completed their work before and after school. These were not the typical sweatshop conditions as the children usually worked alongside their families at their own pace.

The investigation met some challenges in getting complete access to children working in households or in stitching centres. During visits to Rotigna, we were forbidden from taking any photos of the children and adults stitching footballs. In Nandyack, we were only shown men at work although some women and young girls could be seen stitching footballs through the cracks of doors.

Tehsil Deska (Sub-District of Sialkot)

Akbal, Deska, Gujranwala, Rampur and Taliwala in the Tehsil Deska sub-district of Sialkot were among the first villages visited. The economy of these villages is based mainly on agriculture. To supplement their income, about 25% of households are actively involved in football stitching, while the rest are involved in carpet weaving and the manufacture of surgical instruments. The women and children were seen to be the ones who carry the burden of income supplementation.

The villages are under close inspection by the middlemen and not by official ILO monitors. These middlemen were more concerned about their workers being discovered than with guaranteeing the rights of their workers, including a proper work environment and pay.

One 14 year-old boy, Nasser, was taken away from his Coca Cola ball when we found him working in the house. There were also a number of other adults present who had been stitching footballs since they were young children. Mohamed Imran Ijaz, who was working in a dark room of one of the houses in Ikkal, is 22 years old and has been stitching for 10 years; Mohamed Sarvar is 26 years old and has been stitching for 14 years; and, Mohammed Zafar is 24 years old and has been stitching for 15 years. On that day they were stitching no name footballs which they claimed were provided by SAGA Sports.

Gujranwala, Tehsil Deska

At a house we visited in Gujranwala, three children worked together, while their mother minded the store downstairs. One child (8 years old) was stitching an ACME World Cup 2002 promotional ball. The two younger sisters were on the roof, punching holes into the ball pieces to be stitched by their sister.



8 years old child



Two sisters making needle holes on panels

Two other girls were stitching ACME promotional balls. They were stitching in a room no bigger than a closet, in almost complete darkness. As if the labour conditions were not bad enough, the girls were only 11 and 13 years old.



Even though the people in Deska, a smaller town in the same district, were extremely cautious about outsiders seeing children working, they allowed the investigator to see the balls they were stitching. One stitcher actually gave the investigator an adidas FIFA 2002 World Cup ball. It was alleged by a WFSGI spokesman, without inspection, that this adidas ball is fake.

In order to confirm if the ball was genuine, we cut it open to check for a tracking number. Printed on the inside we found the number “K5S 003994”, as shown in the photographs below. We checked with the IPEC Sialkot Office, which is responsible for the monitoring system in Sialkot, but they said these numbers are not kept with their office but with adidas and only with adidas.



Essentially what we found was that a ball bearing the adidas logo was manufactured well outside the monitored zone.

Ali Abad, Sangla District

In Ali Abad, the visits were met with much resistance. Many had concerns that our report on the existence of child labour will cause them to lose their jobs. Apparently, this village and its environs used to be the scene of much carpet production. Eventually a few NGOs got involved and protested against the use of child labour in the carpet industry. Child labour was eliminated in those villages but no alternative sources of income or provisions for education were put into place.

A 14-year-old boy told us that he and his family had relocated from the city of Sialkot to continue in the football stitching industry. All his friends, ranging from 12 to 16, are involved in the stitching of footballs in neighbouring villages.

Sangla Hill, Sangla District

Sangla Hill is the centre of the Sangla District. This small city of approximately 50,000 people thrives with the only open markets for miles around. The train station that connects the city with the rest of the world is the downtown area where hundreds of shops are open to sell footballs, jewellery and fabrics. The other villages of the region are little more than gatherings of mud houses. Only a few brick houses stand on the outskirts of the villages, where the richer landlords live.

In Sangla Hill, the team visited the house of one of the middlemen in that district. He proudly showed us that all his children were involved in football stitching. The eldest, at 18, was the master stitcher and the teacher of the younger ones. The following pictures were taken in his house.



Salim, 14 years old



The Coca Cola promotional ball



Nahim, 9; Salim, 14; Fasel, 16



Balal, 11 years old



Nadim, 12 years old



Fasel, 16 years old



Small hands holding needles

Nandychack, Sangla District

In Nandichack children would stop by one of the stitching centres and stitch one or two footballs and then leave at their leisure. The stitching centres were not sweatshops since the children seemed to complete the work at their own free will. However, the situation in the houses might be different.

In Nandychack, stitchers are paid Rs. 20 per ball, and stitch 5 to 7 balls a day, working for SAGA Sports in Sialkot. Female stitchers get less per ball as they are usually based in their home. Home workers are paid at a lower rate.

The companies they were stitching for had warned that its stitchers should not allow their pictures to be taken. The investigator did, however, get a chance to see the balls, which bore the name of Kombi. Kombi is a company that has not joined the ILO-IPEC project, once again raising the question of the need for greater coverage. It seems that some companies are more willing to cover up their poor labour practices than fix them. It needs to be made less easy and advantageous to do this.

Rotigna, Sangla District

The lengths that companies are willing to go to protect their access to cheap labour was illustrated by the drama that unfolded upon the second visit to Rotigna. By the time the investigator arrived, children had already been evacuated from the stitching centre. Moreover, the children all denied that they had ever worked at the stitching centre. There was a screaming match between the translator cum guide and the adult stitchers. The adult stitchers even threatened to pull a gun. The adults were protecting their bread and butter. They are still paid very low wages and want the extra income that children's labour provides.



We also found a Christian house, however, that was stitching Batam balls decorated with the American flag. Iqbal Masi, 16, and Russian Masi, 12, are both trained by Javed Masi, their father. They said that they stitch balls which are sent by SAGA Sports in Sialkot.

CONCLUSIONS

Though the investigation was done on a small scale pinpointing a few villages outside of Sialkot, one thing is very clear - child labour still does exist in the sporting goods industry in Pakistan. Some of the manufacturers have been producing promotional and toy balls in the areas covered by this investigation and they continue to be out of the sight of any independent monitoring system. One recent report done by Martin Kunz of Fair Trade Solutions confirms that “the main remaining problems are ... with the no name, cheap end of the market, which provides promotional and toy balls.” Wages for adult workers are also lower outside of Sialkot providing a reason for more children to take up football stitching in order to make up the difference.

The manufacturers still using child labour and not paying fair wages seem to be well aware that it has a negative impact to their reputation. There has been much resistance to our investigation. Some stitchers have told us that they have been warned by middlemen to hide children if a foreigner shows up asking about child labour. Instead of finding a solution for removing children from work, they are willing to go to any length to hide them so they can keep paying low wages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish a transparent, industry-wide monitoring system**

A monitoring system with a geographical limitation can only be effective in the short-term, giving intensive attention to the elimination of child labour. However, it is defenceless against obstacles such as the migration of workers and the relocation of production sites. Even though the Sialkot Project has achieved an impressive 95% of manufacturers voluntarily participating in the project, we have found that there are still children being used for football stitching well outside the project area. As it has been pointed out by the ILO Sialkot office as well as Pakistan's industry representatives, that they have been aware that there is production outside of Sialkot, which has existed for years, then why are not children outside of Sialkot given the same opportunities as children in Sialkot? Following the success of the Sialkot Project, an expansion of the monitoring system to cover the whole of the industry from supplier to middleman and producer seems logical.

- **Establish a monitoring system addressing all labour standards**

The elimination of child labour cannot be achieved without providing adult workers fair wages. According to our research in India and other studies, many children start working alongside their parents to make up for low wages paid by contractors. Even if the children work casually before or after they attend school, it has been observed that many eventually end up dropping out of school for full-time work. Almost all codes of conduct of the industry or sporting goods companies focus more widely on labour rights. No code of conduct has singled out the elimination of child labour and ignored providing other labour rights, including the rights of workers to fair wages, the freedom of association,

health provisions, and other labour rights based on ILO standards. The existing monitoring system in the sporting goods industry fails to track these rights.

- **Raise awareness about the negative effects of child labour and the importance of education**

The community needs to be more aware of the deleterious effects of child labour. A project-based approach to remove children from work can only achieve so much without building a broad base of support and understanding of the community that children should not be working and must be in school. One local teacher, Mohammed Zafar, in the Tehsil Deska sub-district of Sialkot justified the working hours of the children found stitching in his education centre, by declaring that “they're not working, they're in their learning period.” In his centres, children spend their days stitching footballs. He is unaware of the cycle of poverty he is continuing.

- **Promote free, compulsory, quality education for all**

Education is one of the keys to ending child labour. An approach to set up interim non-formal education centres has a limitation in its sustainability. An end of funding could mean the end of the opportunity for children to receive education. Children should be encouraged to enter mainstream education, and the responsible authority must be ready to provide this opportunity. Initiatives already underway in Sialkot involving UNICEF and the Government of Punjab to promote free, quality basic education are steps in the right direction. We suggest that these initiatives be combined with efforts to ensure the quality of education through teachers' training, vocational training for older students and other provisions to encourage children to enroll in and avoid dropping out of school.

Note : All photos have been taken by Philippe Roy and are available at <http://www.globalmarch.org/world-cup-campaign/>

