Thesis Rural Development Sociology

Speaking of Child Labour and Education

Linking the rights-based approach to local NGOs and former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu

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Preface

This thesis marks the end of my MSc International Development Studies at Wageningen University. After the BSc International Development Studies at the same university, I pursued my specialization Sociology of Rural Development within the MSc track. Therein, the thematic fields of the Rural Development Sociology Group have especially caught my interest. The social practices of local actors in deconstructing and reconstructing their everyday realities, especially within the context of larger global developments, should be mentioned here. The processes of change and 'development' as a plethora of ongoing negotiated processes taking place at multiple levels and from multiple dimensions have also been inspirational.

My interest in local actors in relation to larger frameworks and development policy have been combined in this thesis. This thesis also has an indirect focus on *children*, a thematic field that has unfortunately received little attention in the International Development Studies MSc courses in Wageningen. I seem to have unconsciously made up for this absence through indirectly focusing on children in this thesis, as well as in my BSc thesis. The position and roles of children, the impacts of the outside world on them, and their ways of coping with their realities are issues that have guided my interest the past few years.

The topic of child labour caught my attention during the BSc programme. I cannot recall the exact reason why. In general, the struggles of children and how they cope with these have always triggered my interest. The opportunity to work with the Rural Education and Development Society in Tamil Nadu (South India) opened up avenues for me to conduct a research in this direction. With a focus on *former* child labourers this study tries to clarify how these individuals, in retrospect, speak of child labour and education. The latter also with regard to a vocational skills training followed at the Rural Education and Development Society upon withdrawal from agricultural child labour. Little is known about the influences of such education and of child labour itself on such individuals. Local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tamil Nadu have also been interviewed in order to get a better idea of how they speak of child labour and education and how and why they use rights-based approaches to child labour. This was sought in order to find out more, with a critical eye, about the meaning and uses of universal human child rights frameworks that are not only applied by large international organizations and institutions but also by these local organizations. The applicability of a rights-based approach is in this research, furthermore, linked to the everyday reality of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu. All of this with the aim of finding out more about what the meaning and uses of the rights-based approach to child labour are for local actors. I am interested in how universal rights-based approaches to child labour are adopted and practiced by local NGOs and whether such approaches relate at all to whom they intend to benefit.

This MSc thesis shall hopefully be an interesting read for all those who have affinity with issues of 'development'; children; (child) labour; education; local NGOs' practice; and those with an interest in the applicability and meaning of international human rights within local contexts.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to those women who have shared the stories of their past and current lives with me. Their enthousiasm and tears have inspired me. This research could not have taken place without these brave individuals, I thank them for participating in this study. A special thanks to Senthura Devi and Saghayam for taking me into their homes. I would also like to thank – in India – the Centre for Child Rights and Development, the Human Education and Action for Liberation Movement, the Holistic Approach for People's Empowerment, the Society for Integrated Social Upliftment, and the Rural Education and Development Society for their willingness to participate in this study. These local non-governmental organizations have been ever so helpful in showing me around, giving me insight into their work, and sharing their thoughts with me. Their willingness to participate in this study is very much appreciated.

I am especially grateful to Rachel and Alexander at the Rural Education and Development Society for giving me the opportunity to conduct this MSc research at their office in Kootturavupatty. I thank them also for providing me an extremely comfortable stay. In particular I would like to thank Alexander for his guiding comments and his services as translator for this research. I am especially greatful to Murugan, Nithya, and Monisha at the Rural Education and Development Society. Together with Rachel and Alexander they have not only contributed to the technicalities needed to conduct this research, they have also cared for me personally and been my *friend*. The conversations, moments of laughter, and their friendship shall forever stay with me. I thank the entire staff of the Rural Education and Development Society for their guidance, care, and hospitality; I thank them for a remarkably impressive experience altogether.

The acknowledgements would further be incomplete without a special word of thanks to my supervisor Pieter de Vries at the Rural Development Sociology Group of Wageningen University. His support and guidance have both puzzled, inspired, and eased my mind throughout my research and thesis writing. I thank him for his patience, his supervision, and his critical eye on all matters.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends. Their interest and inexhaustible support have been wonderful and have kept me going. Conducting the research for this thesis and writing the thesis itself have been an incredible journey; both personally and academically. The quote below is from one of Shakespeare's most famous works and captures well the learning experiences I have undergone. It might very well also apply to the past and current lifeworlds of the former girl child labourers of this study.

Come what come may, Time and the hour runs through the roughest day
William Shakespeare, Macbeth

Executive Summary

It is safe to say that child labour has not been an uncommon practice throughout time in many parts of the world. While condemned by the international arena today, child labour has not yet been eradicated. The causes of child labour and its consequences are heavily intertwined; the poverty-child labour cycle does injustice to the wider scale of factors that push and pull a child into a situation of labour (note: child labour differs from child *work*). Education is an important player within child labour dynamics (the two are said to have an inverse relationship) and is also regarded to be the key to break the poverty-child labour cycle.

This study looks at child labour in the South Indian rural context, to be specific – in the Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. It focuses on girl child labour in the agriculture sector, but from a retrospective angle. *Former* girl child labourers speak of child labour and of education in relation to child labour in this study. Their experiences, views, valuations, and desires are analyzed in order to find out whether and how these relate to universalistic rights-based approaches to child labour often used by local NGOs.

Local NGOs in Tamil Nadu are the second focus of this study and have been consulted in order to find out more about the approaches they use to deal with child labour issues. This study looks at how these organizations speak of child labour and of education in relation to child labour. Also at what activities they operate with regard to child labour. This study attempts to find out whether, how, and why their mode of operation relates to universalistic rights-based approaches to child labour.

The above described foci should lead to more knowledge about particular matters that have until this day been left relatively untouched. We do not know a lot yet about these issues, which is a major deficit because such understanding could have more fruitful implications for practices that better suit desired change within particular societies. This study directs itself at how local actors see and utilize a rights-based approach to child labour. The meaning and uses it has to them; therefore also focusing on the general applicability of such universal approaches based on an international human rights rationale. This study looks at the meaning of a human (child) rights perspective within the context of everyday realities. Thereby linking the rights-based approach to local NGOs' and to former girl child labourers' perspectives about child labour, education, and (universal) child rights. The two main research questions being 1- *Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations?* and 2- *How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour?*

This study has looked at education in the sense of formal schooling and in the sense of a vocational skills training programme followed at the Rural Education and Development Society (REDS)

by the former girl child labourers of this study upon withdrawal from agricultural child labour. With regard to formal schooling we can conclude that problems in the Indian education system as well as in schools themselves lead to (a high incidence of) drop-outs. This besides the income deficiency within households that makes it impossible for children to continue with school because of the costs that accompany going to school and because the child's labour contribution (in cash or kind) is needed at home.

The women of this study generally attribute their past situation of child labour to poverty; it was part of a family strategy to survive. This while the local NGOs mentioned problems related to education and schools as the primary cause of child labour in Tamil Nadu. The majority of former girl child labourers of this study experienced child labour in a negative sense and education in a positive sense; the latter both in terms of formal schooling (especially those not failing in school) and in terms of the vocational skills training programme followed at REDS. Their valuations of child labour and education are directly based on these past experiences. The women, in retrospect, prioritize completing formal schooling. They, today, still feel inferior and have deep regrets about not completing formal schooling and having to drop out (in most of the cases because school was unaffordable and the children had to work in order to help the family survive). A vocational skills training is valued very positively as well, but by most women as the *second* best alternative to completing school or as an additional form of education. The skills training has had a positive influence on the former girl child labourers of this study. Directly in the sense of (marginal) income earning possibilities and indirectly in the sense of increased self-worth and self-confidence. They feel better placed in their communities and feel they are leading a more dignified life because they have learned something and can practice a skill in order to generate some income. This also makes them feel more independent and financially secure.

While the former girl child labourers speak of child labour and education mainly in terms of a language of hardships, struggles, poverty, and coping – in terms of their own past experiences and in terms of *reality* – the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study use more of a rights language when they speak of child labour and education in relation to this. These organizations have internalized and operate, to different extents, a rights-based approach to child labour. They do so because they genuinely agree with universal child rights. The NGOs of this study are mainly concerned with education activities to tackle child labour; either in a curative sense (former child labourers are rehabilitated) or in a preventive sense (e.g. preventing drop-outs who are prone to become child labourers). Besides these interventions that focus mainly on rights-holders, the local NGOs are to different degrees also concerned with education and child labour activities that focus on duty bearers; mainly on Government. The rights-holders interventions focusing more on awareness raising, campaigning, and advocacy (next to their direct education programmes) while the duty-bearers interventions are especially directed on these three things *plus* lobbying. They are aimed at changing or introducing new, firmer Government legislation (in tune with international child rights) on child labour and education that is correctly implemented and enforced. Local NGOs seem to be becoming less of grassroots liberation-oriented movements (if they ever were in the first place); they are more concerned with softer approaches focused mainly at education rather than at direct pro-active

intervention in child labour situations. The latter is suspected to lie beyond the capacity of these NGOs; focusing on the right to education (and on *rights* that deal with child labour) becomes more practical then, it seems.

The language used by both sets of local actors in this study to speak of child labour and education differs. The rights language has little meaning for former girl child labourers, as they speak in terms of their past experiences; a reality composed mainly of hardships and physical (the hot sun especially) and mental pains. The latter still, to this day, especially in the sense of not having been able to complete school. Local NGOs should not, through their rights-based approaches and focus on rights, take disregard of these realities because they probably withhold the most important clues as to whether and what sort of change is desired with regard to child labour and education in particular contexts. The rights-based approach has little meaning and uses in this sense. It *does* have meaning and uses for those it intends to benefit (at least in this study) in the sense that the former girl child labourers seem to embrace universal child rights concerning child labour and education. Their own notions of what rights children should have are surprisingly very much in line with these universal rights; the women leaning less towards relativistic stances than relativists would argue. The universality of universal (child) rights is perhaps more evident than argued by relativists. Rights-based approaches then have meaning and uses for those they intend to benefit in the sense of being avenues for change, for emancipation; for liberating their society and its future children from the same hardships they have themselves faced because of child labour. The goal in first instance not being 'the best interest of the child' or conforming to the ideology of child rights, but preventing future children from the hardships and deprivations (especially with regard to education) – and also the consequences of these – they have themselves faced.

For local NGOs the rights-based approach has greater meaning and uses. They have internalized and institutionalized, to different extents and in slightly different ways (i.e. focus of activities), a rights-based discourse. It gives their work a moral base from which they give meaning to their work and from which they can depart, so to speak. Moreover, such a discourse gives them powerful tools or means (rights) to carry out activities with regard to child labour. These tools can focus on rights-holders as well as duty bearers. In general a rights-based approach seems to lead more to activities concerned with awareness raising, campaigning, networking, advocacy, and lobbying on different levels rather than to direct field based interventions. Even though field based interventions are still present in many of the organizations' activities in the form of education activities; they already seem to have disappeared (at least in the selection of NGOs in this study) in the form of direct child labour activities (e.g. those of releasing or 'rescuing' children from situations of child labour: generally spoken of as a 'risky business').

List of abbreviations and acronyms

CACL	Campaign Against Child Labour
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCRD	Centre for Child Rights and Development
CRPFs	Child Rights Protection Forums
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HEAL-M	Human Education and Action for Liberation Movement
HOPE	Holistic Approach for People's Empowerment
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-IPEC	International Labour Organization-International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour
INR	Indian Rupee
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MVF	Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
NCLP	National Child Labour Project
NCPCR	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RBA	Rights-Based Approach
REDS	Rural Education and Development Society
SHG	Self Help Group
SISU	Society for Integrated Social Upliftment
UN	United Nations
(UN) CRC	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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1 Introduction

PROLOGUE

You might see her in the fields, working alongside someone that could be her mother. You might see her there working in a larger group of girls. You might see her walk by, herding goats to greener pastures that seem not to exist in a place this arid. You might see her caring for her younger brothers and sisters. You might see her but you are likely not to. You know she is there, you hear about her on the radio, you see billboards about her out on the highway, but you do not see her. You can only wonder where she is while you speak with women who have faced a similar fate when they were young.

Senthura Devi is a thirty-five year old mother of two and is happily married in the name of love and not dowry to the father of her children, Murugan. She now lives in a village named Keelavaniangudi, near the capital of Sivagangai District (Tamil Nadu). Her husband's family lives in the same village but they do not live jointly. Though her current life is happy and she has no big problems, her life has not always been this way. At the age of five Senthura Devi started to help out on her parents plot of land and she occasionally went for wage labour on other people's land in order to earn for her parents. Disaster struck when she was ten; both parents died due to disease, the one shortly after the other. Senthura Devi and her two older sisters had to fend for themselves from this moment onwards, they had no relatives nearby that could care for them.

Senthura Devi had always combined school with labour, but this became difficult soon after she was orphaned. The need for more income became urgent for the sisters' survival; school had to be compromised to ensure this and so Senthura Devi dropped out. She was also fed up with school, ever since her parents' death it became more and more difficult to buy the necessary pens and notebooks for her classes. Teachers scolded her for not having the appropriate materials despite knowing about her difficult financial position as an orphan. Thinking away these difficulties, Senthura Devi remembers that she used to love going to school. Learning things and being with friends was something she used to enjoy.

Working as a full-time wage labourer as a child (from her tenth to eighteenth year of age) was not easy. Senthura Devi's days were busy - the hours long, the conditions difficult, and the employer's rules strict. Weeding and harvesting was done mainly, approximately eight hours a day with a break of just half an hour. Domestic chores would also wait at home, the sisters were running a household as well. Senthura Devi looks back on this period in her life as painful, she recalls people in her village looked down on her and her sisters because they wore old clothes and were unable to lead a 'normal life'. The labour itself was also painful, but it had to be done. It was part of a direct survival strategy, she says they had no other options at the time.

At the age of nineteen, one of Senthura Devi's co-workers at her wage labour site informed her about a skills training at a local non-governmental organization nearby. The Rural Education and Development Society (REDS) provided a residential skills training free of costs. Moreover, it provided a training that would relieve Senthura Devi from her suffering in agricultural wage labour. It would also provide her with new income generation possibilities for her further life. And so, Senthura Devi withdrew from wage labour after having been involved in child labour for a total of thirteen years.

At REDS Senthura Devi enjoyed the daily life with the other girls while her confidence was growing stronger and stronger. She was learning a skill, something that could provide her income in the future. Furthermore, something that would prevent her from having to earn a living through agricultural (wage) labour. By all means, this is something she wanted to avoid. Senthura Devi never worked in agriculture again.

After her skills training, Senthura Devi proved an excellent tailor. This main skill learned in the NGO's programme has provided her income ever since. Senthura Devi has been self-employed from her home for many years now. Though her husband's salary provides their main income, she is able to contribute additional income to the household. Her simple sewing machine that has one stitch mode and is driven by foot stands in a corner of the roofed front porch of their house. It is from here that she tailors on order and teaches several women tailoring. Senthura Devi has noticed a decrease in orders due to rising competition; there is a surplus of tailors in her village. Even though teaching more women how to tailor is paradoxical in this situation (they will be tomorrow's competition), it makes up for lost income (because of less orders) and therefore offers Senthura Devi income on the short-term. Her tailoring skill has given Senthura Devi confidence, pride, and a feeling of independence knowing that she can provide for herself. She feels well placed, recognized, and respected in her village today.

These are feelings that she did not have during the hardships of survival after her parents died; when she was a full-time wage labourer. Senthura Devi reflects back on her time as a child labourer more and more often these days. She is happy it is over, and that she has a totally different life now. Her past has made her determined to prevent her children from a similar fate, and so she sees to it that they go to school and do their best. Homework is very important and their education should never be compromised. Her children have to do little at home, they spend their free time studying and playing. Minor errands and a little help here and there is all they contribute.

Today Senthura Devi's days are filled with chores typical for a housewife; fetching water, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children. She starts her day at 4:30 am and uses the second half of the morning to teach her two students tailoring. Next to this income generation, she will work on any tailoring orders she has before her children come home from school at the end of the afternoon. This time is also used to visit neighbors and relatives (or they visit her) or to run errands. After supervising the children in their play and homework, Senthura Devi serves dinner around 20:30. Soon after this the family goes to sleep.

Senthura Devi is happy with the current household income, it covers their living costs and her children are able to go to school. She does foresee a problem for her children's further education after they finish high school. This is something they might not be able to afford at that time. Even though Senthura Devi is content and happy with her current situation, also financially, she wishes they could save enough money for her son's heart surgery in a private clinic. He has been on a Government hospital waiting list for approximately ten years while the clock keeps ticking.

For every case such as Senthura Devi's there are many, many more in South India's state of Tamil Nadu. Despite each story being different in its own way, the stories withhold similar elements. The prologue written above describes one amongst many stories of child labour and education. Despite her sad past, Senthura Devi's further experiences in life have been quite positive and she has been happy. The latter is something that cannot be said for many other women in Tamil Nadu; their current lives are often shaped by an unhappy marriage.

This thesis shall attempt to give a voice to women similar to Senthura Devi, to former girl child labourers. In this thesis *they* shall speak of child labour and education. Furthermore, this thesis shall also cover the ways in which local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Tamil Nadu deal with child labour. A human (child's) rights perspective has been taken up in this study, the rights-based approach and its universalistic modus operandi (also being widely adopted by local NGOs) shall be dealt with. We look at the ways in which such an approach is internalized and practiced by local NGOs, and whether this relates to what women such as Senthura Devi have to say about child labour, education, and universal children's rights.

Senthura Devi's past situation, her past lifeworld and experiences as a child labourer are not uncommon within the rural Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. In fact, it would be safe to say that throughout history child labour has been a common practice in *many* parts of the world. With the changes in working conditions that came during the Industrial Revolution, the advent of workers' and children's rights, and the advent of universal schooling, public concern about child labour (in Europe) grew. Though widely condemned by the international arena today, roughly 200 million children (between five and fourteen years) are still engaged in child labour activities worldwide according to the International Labour Organization (ILO, Homepage). They often do work that is damaging to their mental, physical, and emotional development while they are wholly or partly deprived of education. Education is internationally recognized as an important key to development.

When dissecting the number of child labourers to those children in especially hazardous occupations, the figures become even more appalling. Ten years ago, in 1999, the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention estimated that 80 million five to fourteen year olds worldwide worked in the worst forms of child labour, the majority in agricultural activities under hazardous circumstances (ILO Convention No. 182, 1999). Hence, the international outrage to especially hazardous forms of child labour and the agenda setting for the total abolition of child labour worldwide. This abolitionist movement is juxtaposed by a movement arguing for the regulation of child labour and working conditions of children, arguing that the child is a social actor and his/her wish and right to work should be respected.

There has been an increasing recognition of- and growing concern for the vulnerability of the girl child in relation to labour. Tackling the worst forms of child labour currently includes a special focus on the exploitation of girls, something that can also be seen in the focus of this year's (2009) World Day Against Child Labour theme, namely *Girls and Child Labour*. An estimated 100 million girls worldwide are involved in child labour, it is often argued that they face extra risks (when compared to boys) and are especially vulnerable to worst forms of child labour (World Day Against Child Labour 2009, ILO-IPEC). This year the ILO makes an urgent call for particular attention to girls in the diverse policy responses to child labour. In order to provide options for girls to gain decent work as adults and thus tackle girl child labour in general, the ILO stresses the importance of greater attention to the education and skills training needs of adolescent girls.

This MSc research falls directly in line with the above described needs of focus, focusing on girl child labour as well as education in the form of a vocational skills training (for those individuals withdrawn from labour). All this from the perspective of former girl child labourers themselves. These women are now adults and have at some point in their lives been able to put down their work as a child labourer in order to join a vocational skills training programme at REDS in the Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. We shall look at whether their interpretations and experiences relate to the universalistic notions of a rights-based approach to child labour, as widely adopted by local NGOs dealing with child labour. This study shall also look more closely at these NGOs and their (motivation for certain) activities. All in all, this thesis links the rights-based approach (to child labour) to local NGOs and former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu, South India.

Despite not being taken up as a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) by the United Nations (UN), child labour is seen as being directly linked to two of them. The urgency and relevance of research on this topic is thus justified. The inter-linkage of poverty and the perpetuation of child labour is widely recognized. If MDG 1 *the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger* is to be achieved by 2015, it is argued that child labour needs to be eliminated (Policy Note: Child Labour, Education and MDGs). Furthermore, MDG 2 *achieving universal primary education* can only be achieved if children are able (free from labour) to actually attend school. MDG 5 *promoting gender equality and empowering women* is linked to this in that it targets to eliminate gender disparity in education. What becomes clear is the international focus on education as a key to break the poverty-child labour cycle.

This MSc research is relevant as it shall fall directly within these foci, but departing from how those having been directly involved speak of child labour and education *and* how local NGOs deal with the issue. Accordingly it also directly touches upon ILO's most recent focus themes for the World Day Against Child Labour: *The Elimination of Child Labour in Agriculture* (2007), *Education: the Right Response to Child Labour* (2008), and *Girls and Child Labour* (2009). Agriculture is considered one of the most dangerous occupations to work in due to the high risk of accidents and ill health; girls are widely recognized as an extremely vulnerable group of child labourers; and qualitative education (also vocational skills training) is believed to be a major remedy to child labour. In situations of poverty, education is often sacrificed as children need to assist in household survival by means of engaging in child labour. The girl child is often disadvantaged even more (World Day Against Child Labour 2008, ILO-IPEC), as the choice of sending either a boy or a girl to school does not stand in her favour.

As the introduction to the thesis, the purpose of the current chapter is to clarify the need and also the aims of this research and to present the reader with its main research questions. The reader shall also learn more about the limits of this thesis and its conceptual definitions. The further outline of this thesis - its structure - shall be explained at the end of this chapter. The prologue and abovementioned information on child labour serve to give a taste of what this thesis shall cover and of what direction it is headed in. The forthcoming should clarify more of its intentions and approach.

1.1 Problem statement

The girl child is increasingly recognized as especially vulnerable when it comes to child labour. This is also the case in India, where many local NGOs have a special focus towards girls and especially towards the so-called rehabilitation of girls from child labour and their reintegration into a more 'normal' exploitation-free life. Most intervention programmes are directed to education (especially schooling) and vocational skills trainings, as these are often seen as the medium to break those cycles leading to child labour. The programmes are designed to give the girl child or now adolescent new opportunities in life and a sense of worth in society.

Child labour as well as its suggested solutions and subsequent programmes (by NGOs, also local Tamil Nadu ones) directed to benefit former child labourers often seem to be conceptualized from a rights-based approach. This approach is dominated by a doctrine of universalistic standards and

rights that 'should' pertain to every human being in the world. Laid down mainly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further documents such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), these standards and rights are initially constituted from a 'western' perspective while they are intended to apply to human beings across every state and nation.

When it comes to speaking of child labour and education, but also *acting* upon the prior, there are several problems. The first is that we know too little about how those formerly involved in agricultural child labour speak of it. We need to know more about the dynamics and valuation of child labour from those who have directly experienced it. Their retrospective outlook on the issue is to add perspective to the outlooks we find in studies that focus on *current* child labourers. What can listening to their experiences and views tell us about possible future prevention or solutions regarding child labour?

At the moment there is too little documentation of how the girl child *herself* actually experiences child labour as well as education (both formal schooling and vocational skills trainings). There is also a deficit in knowledge when it comes to how the girl child views, values, and thinks about the above – also in terms of the international rights pertaining to these issues. The knowledge gained from such reflections is expected to be highly relevant to design future (inter)national laws and regulations as well as programme interventions in order to attend to the issue of girl child labour and benefit child labourers in the broadest sense. The aforementioned is a problem because speaking of child labour, of girl child labour in the agriculture sector without speaking *to* girl child labourers can leave a great gap in the reflection of reality if not skew that information. It is time we really listen before forming our own conceptualizations and valuations of the many complexities related to child labour, and especially of the best solutions needed to tackle the issue and fulfil the needs and desires of these girl child labourers. Their accounts of- and experiences with education (e.g. dropping out), with child labour, and with vocational skills training programmes (upon withdrawal from child labour) will provide insights into problems truly faced and about possible solutions that might be needed. Their stories serve as a lens to look at how child labour and all related issues are experienced and how those involved actually *think* about it. In the end, if practiced on a wider scale, such insights would be of great value to all parties involved with (especially those condemning) child labour.

Taking the abovementioned into account, it should be stressed that these valuations and experiences of girl child labourers are - in this thesis - not directly derived from present girl child labourers but from *former* ones. The same deficit in knowledge holds for them, but maybe even more so than for present child labourers. Speaking directly to those having been involved in labour as a child should provide valuable information. We need to know more about how she has experienced child labour, how she has experienced education (both before dropping out and in terms of a vocational skills training programme), and about the views she holds towards child labour and education. This information is gained by talking to adults reflecting on their past. A past that is tainted by having been a child labourer in agriculture. We cannot speak of child labour without speaking *to* those having been directly involved. This is, as mentioned earlier, a major problem. There is too little documentation on this and therefore it has also not been properly taken into account. It is time we listen to persons like

Senthura Devi. They can tell us more about what is going and why. They can tell us more about the effects of certain things and what *they* find important.

This leads to a second problem that can be identified; there is little knowledge on whether these experiences, views, valuations, and desires – with regard to child labour – relate to what is being said and done by local NGOs. Especially taking in mind the universalistic rights-based approach to child labour from which these NGOs often operate. An approach used widely in interventions on child labourers' behalf, but which includes – yet – little of *their* views and conceptualizations of problems and possible solutions. We know little about how former girl child labourers view universal rights of the child and whether they embrace or resist them. We know little, taking into consideration what former child labourers (engaged in the agriculture sector) say, about what the meaning and uses of rights-based approaches (by local NGOs) are for them.

The above leads to another set of problems when specifically looking at local NGOs themselves. We know little about whether and *why* local NGOs in the field take up a rights-based approach and *how* they interpret the universalistic rights of children. Little is known about how local NGOs dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education and in what ways their mode of operation (their activities) relates to a universalistic rights-based approach to child labour. We know that many of these NGOs use such an approach, many of them each in different ways. We need to identify, however, what exactly their motivation is for using such approaches and also the different ways in which they are applied by them. There is a lack of knowledge when it comes to how local Tamil Nadu NGOs receive universal rights of the child and whether they do not feel that these are too western (or better said Eurocentric) and therefore unrepresentative of their local context. The abovementioned could tell us more about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour, this from the angle of NGOs. Such information could help trigger more critical thinking about the universality of human (in this case child) rights and perhaps open new avenues of dealing with child labour issues across the world.

1.2 Research questions

This research has been based upon two main research questions which are in turn each composed of several sub-questions. This thesis shall try to answer, as accurately as possible, all these research questions. The questions are related to the theoretical framework of this research (see chapter three). This framework is mainly based on a human or better said *child* rights perspective to child labour, this opposed to the many other perspectives (e.g. legal, social, cultural) to child labour. The human rights perspective becomes particularly apparent in the rights-based approaches to child labour of many both international as well as local NGOs. They base their work on the standards and rights enshrined in important UN conventions that serve to protect children and ensure them basic entitlements in life. These rights are framed mainly from 'western' points of reference and ideologies, their universality often criticized for not being able to take account of more relativistic conceptualizations.

Now back to the actual research questions. Keeping the problem statement in mind leads to the research questions displayed underneath. The first set is applicable to Senthura Devi and other former girl child labourers; looking at their experiences with- and views towards child labour and education. The second set is applicable to local NGOs (such as REDS) that serve to *help* individuals currently experiencing (or prone to experience) child labour, like Senthura Devi did when she was young. These NGOs' activities are often largely attuned to international or universal child rights, making the approach of these NGO's rights-*based*. Taking such approaches into account, this research aims to answer the following sets of questions. The first in chapter five and the second in chapter six.

1.2.1 First main research question

Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations?

Sub-questions

1) What are the experiences of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training)?
2) How do former girl child labourers value child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training) and how have they been influenced by both?
3) What notions do former girl child labourers have about the rights of children and what are their interpretations of- and views towards universal rights of the child? Do they resist them for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks *or* do they embrace them as an avenue for emancipation?
4) What do former girl child labourers' interpretations, accounts, valuations, and desires tell us about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour, this especially in the face of this approach being universalistic? Do former girl child labourers *use* a rights-based way of thinking about child labour and education?

1.2.2 Second main research question

How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour?

Sub-questions

1) How do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations speak of child labour and of education in relation to child labour?
2) What activities do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations operate with regard to child labour and are these operated (and in what ways) from a rights-based perspective?

3) How have universal rights of the child been received by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations and do they not feel these are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality? How has the rights-based approach been received and adopted by local non-governmental organizations?
4) What does the motivation and application of a rights-based approach by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations tell us about the meaning and uses of this approach to child labour? How has such an approach shaped their ways of thinking, their institutional practices, and their modes of operation?

1.3 Research aims

The hereby following shall highlight the main aims and objectives of this thesis and formulate its final goals. It shall also take into account the main limits of this research. As may have become clear from the reading thus far, this thesis shall primarily take up a human (child) rights perspective to child labour, also looking at the meaning and uses of the rights-based approach to child labour – as adopted by many local NGOs in Tamil Nadu dealing with child labour – for both local NGOs as well as for those people they try to protect (i.e. child labourers). This has been done through extensive conversations with such NGOs and with former girl child labourers who have themselves in their past, when they were still child labourers, also come into contact with an NGO programme that served to withdraw them from labour and provide them with other alternatives in life.

1.3.1 Aims & objectives

With regard to the problem statement and main research questions, one of the aims of this MSc research is to come to more insights concerning girl child labour and its dynamics, as well as getting to know more about how former girl child labourers (in agriculture) experienced child labour and education. This education in the sense of both formal schooling (which they quit in order to work on a more full time basis) and a vocational skills training programme. This thesis also aims to get to know more about the views, valuations, and desires they hold towards both, especially in *retrospect*. The aim is to listen to what former girl child labourers have to say about child labour and education. This shall be embedded within the contemporary debates, approaches to-, and thoughts about (girl) child labour and education.

With respect to what has been said above, another important aim is to find out whether and how rights-based approaches to child labour - as often used by local NGOs - relate to how former girl child labourers speak of child labour and education. Whether they embrace or resist such approaches that operate from universal rights of the child. This research aims to find out what the meaning and uses of rights-based approaches (by local NGOs) are for those they intend to benefit.

The above aims have been related to the first main research question of this thesis. An important aim related to the second main research question is to come to terms with whether, how, and why local NGOs take up rights-based approaches to child labour. Also with how they interpret and apply universal rights of the child and whether they do not feel that these rights are too 'western' and

unrepresentative of their local context. This research attempts to find out more about what the motivation is for local NGOs to use a rights-based approach and how they apply such an approach to tackle child labour. This could tell us more about the meanings and uses a rights-based approach to child labour has for local NGOs.

The aims mentioned above are attained mainly through extensive conversations and interviews with former girl child labourers, supplemented by interviews held with local NGOs (their representatives) involved with child labour issues. The objectives are specified, for the NGOs, to: getting to know more about the views and beliefs they hold about child labour; about their activities with regard to the issue; about their motivation and application to use a rights-based approach; and about their interpretation of child rights. For the former girl child labourers the objectives include talking about their experiences with child labour and motives for engaging in such labour; whether and why they dropped out of school; what the impact of child labour has been; what their lifeworlds looked like as a child labourer; what their experiences with a vocational skills training upon withdrawal from agricultural labour were; what impact the training has had; what their current life worlds look like, whether they are still agricultural labourers; how they now value child labour and education; the rights of children; possible avenues of improvement to combat child labour (what NGOs should do); and about what their expectations, desires, hopes, and dreams are for their future.

1.3.2 Final goals

The desired result or final goal of this thesis is that its insights serve as input for further policy-oriented research, eventually hopefully leading to more adequate interventions for (girl) child labourers. The results of this study should help trigger more critical thinking about the universality of human (in this case child) rights and the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour. The results shall perhaps open new avenues of dealing with child labour issues across the world. Within these lines the main goal is not to come up with direct recommendations, however. This research shall merely be an entry point for further research; it should be explicitly mentioned that this research has not been conducted with the aim of coming up with recommendations.

This research is by nature qualitative; its goal is to come up with a descriptive, explorative, and furthermore - interpretative study. Its goal is to provide insights and not to quantify certain variables with respect to child labour. It shall therefore have no statistical relevance. Nevertheless, this should not be a reason to denounce the quality and truth of certain context specific results.

The participation of those directly involved with the issues at hand will hopefully promote further research and future intervention that is context appropriate and takes into account the representations of those directly involved. This is another goal of this research: promoting participation in policy-oriented research of those directly involved. Former girl child labourers in the agricultural sector will expectedly have their own experiences and views of the problems encountered. These are regarded to be useful contributions to future policy on child labour. In the case of this research *former* child labourers provide these representations which are believed to be valuable due to their reflective character. Their views and experiences need to be considered and should have an impact on decision-

making about them. Such context-specific retrospective reflection is very important. This next to crucial research that must be conducted on representations of *current* child labourers.

1.3.3 Limits of the thesis

This research looks at women who have been engaged in the agriculture sector as child labourers in their past, but who have been able to withdraw from this labour (at least temporarily) to follow a vocational skills training when they were still relatively young. Their views and experiences towards child labour and education are expected to differ from former child labourers' who have never followed any training or education after their period as a child labourer. The way they speak about (agricultural) child labour and education is also expected to differ from how child labourers who have been engaged in other sectors of child labour or who have followed other types of vocational skills training programmes speak of the two.

This thesis limits itself to a small group of women and is therefore not statistically representative. It limits itself to a group of women from one particular area, who have all been engaged in *agricultural* child labour. In rural Sivagangai District this form of child labour has (and still is) the most common one. It limits itself to *former* child labourers and not current ones for varying reasons (see chapter four), and it therefore captures retrospective views and valuations of child labour and education. This is believed to be an innovative aspect of this research and therefore also a strength. Despite research on current child labourers, that on former ones has not been written about too much in the academic literature. This research has also been limited to a group of women who have all followed the *same* vocational skills training programme at the *same* NGO.

With respect to the NGOs studied, this thesis limits itself to not more than six NGOs. Five (technically speaking only four) in Tamil Nadu. Even though these NGOs are located throughout the Tamil Nadu state, the extent of diversity amongst these particular NGOs is not expected to be truly reflective of the diversity in approaches to child labour among all NGOs in Tamil Nadu. The validity of this study when it comes to general conclusions about local Tamil Nadu NGOs, is therefore not guaranteed. Any conclusions are only valid for those local NGOs studied for this research, with a *possibility* of holding relevance for further NGOs in Tamil Nadu that deal with child labour. This is recognized as a major limit to this thesis.

Furthermore, this thesis limits itself to a human, child rights perspective to child labour. To a rights-based approach to child labour and education. In its focus it takes little account of social, cultural, or economic perspectives to child labour.

It is recognized that child labour issues need to be studied from a variety of angles and positions, thematically (e.g. poverty, labour market conditions, justice) but also with respect to the subjects (e.g. child labourers, former child labourers, child workers, former child workers, NGOs, employers, school children who do not work as a child labourer, Government officials, etc.) interviewed about the topic. Limits are an integral part of any research, however, and choices have to be made. The scope of an MSc research such as this one can only go so far. This does not take away the fact

that important things can be said within the limits of such a study. To a certain extent the data of this thesis carries its worth.

1.4 Conceptual definitions

For the further reading of this thesis it might be useful to keep the following working definitions in mind. Some of these concepts shall receive further attention in the upcoming chapters in order to clarify their ambiguity. The first two are defined in line with United Nations' definitions.

Child Any person under the age of eighteen years.

Youth Any person between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years.

Lifeworlds The lived realm (social, political, cultural, and economic) of an individual, including his/her living conditions, employment status, experiences in life, means of getting by, and his/her attitudes and interpretations of what is going on in the world around them – also with regard to their future.

Accounts Individuals' descriptions and explanations of certain specific situations or phenomena.

Experiences The way certain events or series of events (or activities) are participated in- or lived through by an individual, as described and explained by that individual.

Views: The way individuals see or look at certain matters and how they consider or regard those matters; their feelings, opinions, attitudes, and interpretations of certain matters in the world around them.

Valuations Used interchangeably with 'value(s)'. An estimate of the worth, importance, or usefulness of something.

Desires The wishes or longings of individuals, their hopes and their dreams - especially in relation to the future but also in relation to certain matters going on in the world around them.

Child labour Any work carried out by a child that is either exploitative, hazardous, harmful (mentally, socially, spiritually, physically, morally) or interferes with their education (in particular compulsory schooling); and therefore is very likely to damage several if not all facets of their development.

Child work Any work carried out by a child that is not child labour; it is not exploitative, hazardous, or harmful and does not interfere with their education. It is therefore unlikely to damage any aspect of the child's development.

Education All types of learning for children and youth; ranging from formal and non-formal education (schooling) to bridge courses and (vocational) skills trainings. In this thesis the term in general covers all these forms, but is always specified within certain contexts to the particular type of education in question.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

This chapter has clarified the main intentions of this thesis. After a prologue, the problem statement and need for this research were described. We then reviewed the two main research questions and both the aims and the limits of this thesis. A few working definitions have also been described for clarification purposes.

Before dealing with the research findings, this thesis shall first have a closer look at child labour and education in relation to this. Chapter two serves this purpose, it shall provide the reader with background information necessary for a better understanding of the further thesis.

In chapter three the theoretical framework of this study shall be explained, taking up the debate between universalism and relativism when it comes to universal (child) rights and to implementing a rights-based approach.

Chapter four shall describe the methods and techniques used to obtain the data for this thesis. It shall also look at the research setting, the research base, and the vocational skills training that was followed by the former girl child labourers of this study. Not the limits of this research, but its *limitations* shall also be brought to light.

Chapter five then finally deals with the research findings. It looks at how the group of former girl child labourers of this study, speak of child labour and education. The chapter shall come up with answers to the first main research question of this thesis by looking closely at each of its sub-questions.

Chapter six does something similar, but for the second main research question of this thesis and *its* sub-questions. The chapter looks at how local Tamil Nadu NGOs dealing with child labour speak of- as well as act upon child labour.

The conclusion is formulated in the last chapter of this thesis. It shall review and summarize the main findings of this study and discuss the answers to the research questions. It shall conclude whether the aims of this thesis have been achieved and to what extent the problems described in the problem statement have been solved. Any general recommendations or those specifically with regard to future research, shall also be presented.

The Appendices include extra information. The first includes the semi-structured questionnaire used for the former girl child labourers, the second that for the local NGOs. Appendix three and four are the two case studies conducted for this research. The reader is strongly recommended to read these (one is on Senthura Devi) for a better, more complete impression of a large part of the data. Appendix five includes the results of a focus group discussion, and Appendix six ends with some photographs.

2 Background information

The previous chapter has introduced the intentions of this thesis as well as some background information on the topic of child labour. This chapter aims to elaborate on the background information. After reading chapter two the reader should have a better understanding of the topic of child labour and education in relation to this, especially with regard to the Indian context. We will start off by clarifying the definition of child labour as used in this research, which simultaneously includes looking at constructions of childhood as well as child work. We continue with information on child labour in India. The country's child labour laws shall be reviewed, as will its situation with respect to education. Before reviewing the role of Government, but even more so that of Indian NGOs with regard to child labour, this thesis shall outline some of the main causes and consequences of child labour. The poverty-child labour cycle will receive due attention here, as will the role of education. The latter widely applied by NGOs in their drive to eradicate child labour.

2.1 Defining child labour

It is not easy to come to terms with the exact meaning of child labour. The term is ambiguous and interpreted differently by many persons. The term is related to many other constructions such as that of what a 'child' and 'childhood' is, as well as what the difference between 'labour' and 'work' is. Underneath we shall continue with an explanation of the conceptual definition of child labour as utilized in this thesis (see chapter 1.4 also). Some ideas about child work and childhood shall also be reviewed.

2.1.1 Child labour

This study makes uses definitions of child labour that are based on international regulations and standards, such as those of the United Nations. In doing so, such generally accepted meanings of the are not argued to be its *only* definition. For throughout time, child labour has been part of everyday life for many societies across the world. The definition underneath is based on the premises of this type of labour being harmful to a child and therefore not in line with international human (child) rights. Child labour can also be defined from those standpoints departing from its social and cultural aspects, which would in turn expectedly lead to different interpretations of the term.

A child, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is any person under the age of eighteen. This age definition has also been applied in this study. The main international actors involved with the elimination of child labour are the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank (Ravinder,2006). Article 32 of the UN CRC (1989) states that:

1- States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.
2- States Parties shall take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the present article. To this end, and having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments, States Parties shall in particular:
(a) Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment;
(b) Provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment;
(c) Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article.

UNICEF's definition of child labour is in line with the above Article and is widely adhered to within the international arena: child labour is (see box 2.1) "work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of a child and on the type of work" (UNICEF, Homepage). Such work is considered harmful to the child and deprives the child of education; thus the international cry for its abolition. UNICEF's classification of child labour according to age in relation to the minimum number of exceeded hours only specifies to two broad categories of work: economic and domestic. Types of work such as that in agriculture on a family's own plot of land are not specified. Under all circumstances we must recognize that unpaid work by children does in no means have to be less atrocious than remunerated work. We see here that definitions and classifications of child labour are broad, and in any case difficult to make so that they apply to all children in every part of the world.

Box 2.1: UNICEF's classification of child labour

5 – 11 years	At least 1 hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week
12 – 14 years	At least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week
14 – 17 years	At least 43 hours of economic work or domestic work per week

Nevertheless, a classification such as UNICEF's above, serves to distinguish between child labour and child work, to determine when child labour interferes with a child's education and when it is harmful to a child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. Hence, it disturbs the full development of their potential. Fact is, however, that lines are difficult to draw and that there are many grey areas within these definitions. Therefore the above classification can only be adopted as a general guideline, while allowing room for deviation. Article 32 states that children should be protected from economic exploitation, but who and what exactly defines certain work as exploitative?. It also states that children need to be protected from work that is likely to be hazardous. It is, however, not at all clear which types of work exactly are hazardous and what in particular makes certain work 'hazardous' (Combating the worst forms of child labour,2005). Working long hours under horrifying conditions in production industries is easier to label as hazardous than certain types of activities in the agricultural sector, for example. The previously said is another grey area within the definition of child labour. Indian law works with a list of hazardous occupations in order to eliminate

child labour, however in order to eradicate the wider spectrum of child labour the Government's National Plan of Action for Children (2005) claims the list needs to be expanded.

The International Labour Organization, a specialized agency of the UN, is responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards. ILO Convention No.182 (1999) focuses on the urgency to eradicate the worst forms of child labour and on the long term to eliminate all forms of child labour. This Convention on the worst forms of child labour uses the term child to refer to all persons under the age of 18. Their term 'worst forms of child labour' is comprised - as stated in Article 3 - of slavery (also debt bondage), prostitution, illicit activities (e.g. related to drug trafficking etc.), and hazardous work.

ILO Recommendation No.190 (ILO-IPEC) on this last worst form of child labour clarifies what these hazardous types of work are:

> (a) work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;
> (b) work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces;
> (c) work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools, or which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads;
> (d) work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels, or vibrations damaging to their health;
> (e) work under particularly difficult conditions such as work for long hours or during the night or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer.

Critique of the ILO's worst forms of child labour and its characterization of 'hazardous' work includes the fact that it pays little attention to the psychological or mental harm child labour can do; it focuses too much on physical hazards only (Saith,2009).

ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work (1973) states that the minimum age for employment shall not be less than fifteen years, and shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and that "the minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than eighteen years". As can be seen, there is much room for national laws or regulations to permit employment in specific situations, thus room to deviate from the prescribed rules in the Convention. We also see this in Article 7 of Convention 138:

> 1. National laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age on light work which is
> (a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development; and
> (b) not such as to prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation or training programmes approved by the competent authority or their capacity to benefit from the instruction received.

Ultimate age-boundaries tied to work under ILO Convention 138 state that children under the age of twelve years should not work at *all* and those between thirteen and fifteen years of age should only be permitted to engage in light work, as described (in vague terms) under Article 7 (Combating the worst forms of child labour, 2005). Fifteen (generally the age for finishing compulsory schooling) is then the basic minimum age for work.

The definition of child labour, besides the many forms of still hidden and unreported child labour, is a factor that makes it difficult to come up with actual concrete data on the number of children involved. Lieten (in The Causes for Child Labour in India) has described how this definitional deception leads to a reconstruction of reality and argues for a broadening of the definition of child labour (e.g. one who is deprived of education and of childhood) in order to come up with more accurate data on the number of children that are engaged. This, however, leads to discussions of what exactly educational deprivation and childhood are composed of and according to whose (Eurocentric?) norms they are constructed.

This research uses a definition of child labour that is primarily based on the aforementioned. Child labour is not easy to define and many elements in its definition also remain ambiguous and rather vague. Child labour is labour by a child (under eighteen years of age) that exceeds UNICEF's classification of work exceeding a minimum number of hours in relation to the age of a child. It is any work carried out by a child that is either exploitative, hazardous, harmful (mentally, socially, spiritually, physically, morally) or interferes with their education (in particular compulsory schooling); and therefore is very likely to damage several if not all facets of their development.

In general, one can say that child labour is mainly defined as any type of work that harms children's well-being, that interferes with their education, that hinders (their) development, and that therefore jeopardizes future livelihoods. Child labourers often have little if no opportunity to gain education (either school or skills training), which is internationally regarded as a crucial factor to help end the perpetuation of child labour within society. The child labour problem should be understood in terms of the abuse of children in work and not merely in terms of their *involvement* in work (Lieten, The Causes for Child Labour in India). Child labour should therefore definitely not be mistaken with child work which includes – lets take the agriculture sector – activities in agriculture that are not harmful to the child and which do not qualify as child labour.

2.1.2 What about child work?

Defining child labour comes down to 1- what is the age of a child and 2- what is labour and what is work in relation to a child performing it. As has become clear, a child according to international conventions has generally become accepted as an individual under the age of eighteen. According to Indian law, however, a child is an individual under the age of fourteen years only. Age constructions of what a child is are social constructions and therefore differ in different parts of the world. Where the technical age of a child might be related to the actual age in years or the bio-physical characteristics (e.g. a girl's first menstruation can mark her transition from child to adult), the practical age of a child is also often given due weight. This includes more social or cultural constructions, a girl getting

married can for example be the mark that ends her life as a child. If married at a young age such as nine years old, however, there is little argument that a child has reached emotional maturity which often separates adults from children (however, this might be a very Eurocentric notion as well). In India, NGOs determined to eradicate child labour often view a child as a person under the age of eighteen. This differs from (expectedly a minority of) NGOs wishing to eradicate child labour but allow for child work; they will be inclined to drop the age of a child.

The above leads us to the question of what 'labour' actually is and how it differs from 'work'. Child labour has a negative connotation, it is usually work done under abominable, exploitative, hazardous, and harmful conditions. It can be either paid or unpaid. It deprives the child of the right to education and is seen as detrimental to the child's overall development. Child work is work carried out under moderate conditions that do not interfere with a child's education, and are not exploitative, hazardous, or harmful to the child. It can include light work activities that contribute to the household or light work to earn some extra cash. Some NGOs and child workers (or labourers) argue that some children actually wish to maintain their work, albeit under better working conditions and pay. Children might feel it right that they also carry responsibility to contribute to the welfare and well-being of the household. Work can be a form of social participation giving children greater weight in the world of adults (Liebel,2004). Manfred Liebel (2004) has given great consideration to these types of views, illuminating not the harm child work can have, but how it can actually benefit children. He has endeavored to come to an understanding of the meanings that work has for children, to how they value it. He seems to concentrate primarily on work that is not very harmful or hazardous, thus his term child work seems to indicate a strong departure from child *labour*.

Child work is not hazardous, nor is it detrimental to the child. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) mentions that "age-appropriate tasks that do not present hazards and do not interfere with a child's schooling and right to leisure can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment. Indeed, many types of contributions to the household's livelihoods can be positive for children, providing them with practical and social skills for work as adults. Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and work skills are attributes often found in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work" (Child Labour in Agriculture, FAO & ILO). Some forms of work are considered beneficial to the child and are seen as a part of their socialization (and education) into adult life and as empowering because children are able to contribute to household survival (Wazir,2002). Of course, this is very value-dependent; for how can we measure whether certain work is beneficial - and on what terms (physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, socially, culturally).

Drawing the line between child labour and child work is not easy in practice. For who decides what forms of work are beneficial or hazardous, and what exactly is understood as hazardous or harmful? What some might find acceptable can deviate from what others would find detrimental; again social and cultural constructions and different recognitions of what is in the best interest of the child are at play. Child work could be the next step to child labour, condoning it is by some seen as a signal in the wrong direction. Besides, monitoring whether all those children engaged in light child work are not exploited or deprived of education and other things that could add value to their lives is not an

easy task. One can imagine that the many grey areas of child work and child labour make it difficult for NGOs in favour of decent child work to draw their lines.

Promoting youth employment

There is an international condemnation of child labour up to the age of eighteen, while there is also an international promotion of youth (persons between 15 and 24 years) employment. This seems paradoxical, one would expect that policy oriented towards the two would clinch somewhere. In essence they seem to work from totally opposite ideologies. However, we must not mistake work with *labour* for youth (including children between 15 and 18 years). It is argued that decent work for youth can prevent child labour. This especially by ensuring that the category of youth between fifteen and eighteen years, is not involved in hazardous work but instead in work that is appropriate for their age. The conditions for this type of youth employment are in fact taken up in ILO Convention No.138; the age for admission to employment should not be less than fifteen years or not less than the minimum age of completion of compulsory schooling (fourteen in India).

What it comes down to is a strict definition of child labour concerning its exploitative, hazardous, and harmful conditions and the condemning thereof up to the age of eighteen years and a flexible stance towards allowing work (note, not *labour*) - under strict conditions - especially of children above the age of fifteen years. According to ILO, an estimated 52 million children or youth between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years are globally involved in worst forms of child labour, many of which in the agriculture sector. Promoting decent youth employment as an alternative to child labour for such categories, it is argued, could help bring down these figures (Youth Employment, FAO & ILO). Research has shown that groups of children across the world actually demand their right to work (not to *labour*), that is work under conditions that are more favourable for the child and that put an end to exploitation.

Children who want to work

Children have the right to express their views and their opinions should be taken into account, they have the freedom to express themselves (UN CRC, Articles 12 and 13). Wazir (2002) notes that participation can be extended to also mean that children have the right to decide whether they want to work or go to school. Even though children are more and more recognized as individual social actors, the right of a child to participate in the decision whether or not to engage in work (or labour) remains disputed.

There are situations where children actually want to work under certain conditions. It is here that the recognition of increased participation of children in deciding their own lives and future seems relevant. There are organizations that recognize this right and act on behalf of it; not supporting an outright ban of child labour or child work or even the implementation of compulsory education in the first place. However, there are also situations where children are known to have little decision-making power in their choice of engaging in work (and especially in *labour*). Hence, the issue of agency that child labourers have can be disputed and is certainly context-specific. Where in the case of child labour

and an absence of active agency the abolitionist approach to child labour seems appropriate; in the case of child work – as being non-hazardous, non-harmful, and non-exploitative – we should perhaps be more lenient with regard to a child's right to work. A more regulative approach to child labour and work could be taken up, an approach that attributes more active agency to the child, also in his or her decision making:

"With the possible exception of extreme cases of forced or bonded labour, children are not simply passive victims, physically and psychologically 'damaged' by their work. They are social actors, trying to make sense of their physical and social world, negotiate with parents and peers, employers and customers, and make the best of the oppressive and difficult circumstances in which they find themselves. They shape their working life as well as being shaped by it. Their work is part of their activity and (to greater or lesser degree) it may become part of their identity" (Woodhead,1999: 29)

Problems with such regulative approaches are, however, that the line between labour and work is difficult to draw. In fact neither one of the approaches (abolitionist or regulative) seems adequate for dealing with both categories of working children. In his book on cross-cultural perspectives on working children, Liebel (2004) makes a case for the category of children who work but are not child labourers. He is a proponent then of not taking the child out of work, but instead taking the *hazard* out of work. He has a regulative approach to child labour (*work*, actually). This thesis is hesitant to take up such ideas, even though Liebel's well-grounded research preceding such ideas is recognized. The blurriness about child labour and child work, maybe even their interconnectedness (situations of child work possibly easily leading to those of child labour), will probably make Liebel's ideals difficult to clearly apply in practice. Nevertheless, Liebel remains strong in giving a voice to working children, to listening what they say and arguing for *their* influence on decisions and policy that concern them.

This research recognizes that 1- children *can* have agency but that this is very, very likely to be extremely constricted by other forces or actors and 2- that children do have a right to be heard and thus participate by giving their views, experiences, and opinions about matters that affect them. It is strongly felt, however, that we need to protect children who find themselves in vulnerable situations – situations they might have learned to cope with and come to accept, taking hazards and harm for granted (using their agency to *cope* and to make choices that are under constrained situations their 'best' ones) – but still situations that are not directly in their best interest (maybe from a Eurocentric, protectionist view). This particularly so in the case of children below the compulsory age of education and in the case of children below the age of eighteen who find themselves in exploitative, hazardous, and/or harmful occupations. This research departs from the belief that the power of children to shape their working (or labouring) lives is constricted by the extent to which they are themselves in fact shaped *by* this working (or labouring) life. Agency is used to *cope* and position oneself in a particular situation which is restrictive in its own ways. Conscious choices are made (by the child or parents), but in response to desperate circumstances. Debra Satz (2003) argues that children cannot be attributed unrestricted agency; especially in the case of young children parents are said to be the primary decision-makers for children.

2.1.3 Childhood

Notions of what a child is are often related to what childhood is actually comprised of. Again, this is highly defined by cultural and social values. The globalized Eurocentric childhood standard (which is a construct stemming from 15th to 18th century Europe), though widely recognized, might remain inapplicable to child-raising systems in certain parts of the world:

"While in many Western cultures, childhood is perceived as a time for schooling and play, in other communities children are prepared for adulthood through work activities" (The impact of discrimination on working children, 2002)

In different parts of the world, in different societies and cultures, children have different *functions.* Therefore there are different constructions of what childhood is. The more Eurocentric ideas of childhood are based on the individual, on the child, while many non-Eurocentric ideas of childhood are related to the function and roles of the child within the family or community. These ideas of childhood are not based primarily on the individual but on the *group* and the role a child should play herein during childhood. It would be safe to say that childhood is not something natural, rather - it is something culturally defined and created (Nandy,1992 in Hecht,1998).

The UN CRC emphasizes in Article 31 "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). These components are generally acknowledged to be included in (at least, Eurocentric notions of) childhood. Childhood has been given self-evident characteristics, it is the enjoyment of a child's rights by a child and the living of particular experiences that would broadly include safety, happiness, protection, and freedom from suffering and pain. The Constitution of India, in Article 39, states that childhood (and youth) should be protected against exploitation and moral and material abandonment, that "children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity" (The Constitution of India,2007).

In his study of street children in urban Northeast Brazil, Hecht (1998) comes to make a difference between a rich nurtur*ed* childhood and a poor nurtur*ing* childhood. These two terms finely grasp the possible main difference between having a childhood and not having one:

"Whereas nurtured children are loved by virtue of <u>being</u> children, the love received by nurturing children is to a great extent a function of what they <u>do</u>"

Hecht (1998) summarizes the two views of childhood as 1- an unchanging, universal social order experienced in a similar fashion by children around the world and over time and 2- a social anthropological recognition (amongst others) of childhood as socially constructed and variable according to the context in which it is lived. He also warns about how labeling children as either having a childhood or being deprived of it (also often spoken about in the case of child labour) can reduce children to victims.

It is important to realize that most official international as well as national policies aimed at children are based on universalized notions and models of childhood. This is a major critique of those not in support of the abolitionist approach to child labour; according to them childhood is not similar in all parts of the world and there should be more leniency with regard to work performed by children. That this can in fact be a *part* of childhood. The divide between child labour and child work is very important here; amidst all universalistic notions and interpretations related to them – also those on childhood – more relativistic stances must also be considered.

2.2 India and child labour

The following shall first describe what the Indian law says with regard to child labour and then it shall look at the current general situation in India. This also includes information on education (mostly formal schooling) in relation to child labour. There shall be no elaborate focus on the current situation concerning the Indian law on child labour. Such law is in development; it is not static but in motion. This especially under the critique of being too restrictive in its implementation and too lenient in its enforcement.

2.2.1 The law

The definition of child labour by Indian law can best be derived from the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) where a child is a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age. Those children older than fourteen are therefore, by law, not seen as child labourers and thus not protected. The Child Labour Act calls for a prohibition of employment of children in certain hazardous occupations and regulates, in a very general way, the working conditions for children in unprohibited occupations. The Act has established punishments for any employers offending the law; fines run from 10.000 to 20.000 INR (about 150-300 Euro) and imprisonment ranges from three to twelve months.

The Constitution of India further states in Article 24 that "no child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment" (The Constitution of India,2007). There is little specification when it comes to defining child labour; many hazardous forms of child labour have been overlooked in the past. Domestic labour (outside of the home) as well as labour in hotels and restaurants/eateries has only been identified as child labour by law since 2006 (India: Child Labour Law Welcomed,2006), for example. The abovementioned Article 24 and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act are the most significant legislative measures India has regarding child labour. Further, Article 39 of the Constitution describes that the State shall direct its policies towards securing that the tender age of children is not abused, that they should not be forced by economic necessity to enter avocations that are not suited to their age and strength (The Constitution of India,2007).

Besides the narrow age definition of child labour, Indian Government employs the term mainly to refer to children engaged in hazardous work. Those not undertaking hazardous work (as classified

by a list of hazardous occupations by Government) are classified as doing child *work* (Abolition of Child Labour in India, NCPCR). Thus, the Government's definition of child labour remains ambiguous; excluding unpaid work, work within family enterprises, and seasonal agricultural work (Roschanski,2007). The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act does not prohibit the work of children in the agricultural sector and hardly regulates its conditions (Sinha,2007). Agriculture (accounting for the highest incidence of child labour in India) is not classified as a hazardous occupation. The agriculture sector is extremely diverse, making clear-cut regulations seems too difficult – unless – Government recognizes *all* forms of agricultural child labour as hazardous (if not physically, then emotionally, mentally, or socially) and bans it completely. Another major loophole of the Child Labour Act of 1986 is that it does not ban or regulate child labour within one's own family setting, even if these areas of occupations themselves have been prohibited by the Act.

The exclusion of a large category of children (those between fourteen and eighteen years of age and those in non-hazardous work) obviously has major implications. Furthermore, India has still yet to ratify ILO Convention No. 182 and 138. The UN CRC has been ratified but is said to lack proper implementation and enforcement.

2.2.2 The situation

India has a vast history of child labour; it is claimed to hold the largest child labour force in the world. According to Save the Children India (Homepage), the official Indian statistics come up with an estimate of 13 million child labourers. However, unofficial figures - especially when taking into account the number of children not in school - are said to vary between 60 and 100 million. These alarming figures stand in stark contrast to the economic growth and development spurt India has undergone in recent years.

Child labourers are often exploited economically, mentally, and physically (also sexually) as they work in unhealthy and unsafe conditions where they are forced to work long hours, are often underfed, underpaid, and unable to enjoy schooling or rest. In India child labourers are primarily engaged in agriculture and related rural activities where they often work under hazardous conditions handling and inhaling toxic chemicals (e.g. pesticides), carrying heavy weight loads, handling heavy machinery, working the land with sore hands, and so forth. Besides agriculture, other major employment sectors for children include construction, (domestic) housework, and the service sector (e.g. street vendors). Of the latter, child prostitution is probably the most abominable example. Broadly speaking, in India as well as worldwide, the largest sector in which child labour takes place is agriculture (The End of Child Labour,2006). More than half of all child labourers worldwide are engaged in this sector and in India it takes up approximately 70% of the estimated child labourers (India's new ban on child labour,2006).

In India bonded labour, bonded *child* labour as well, is prevalent especially in the rural agriculture sector. This age old practice, especially supported through caste systems (but also through socio-economic conditions, cultural factors, and poverty), encourages the exploitation of labourers as their labour is used to pay for held debts with a loaner (Child Labour, Homepage). Children's labour is

also known to be used to pay off these debts, they are either burdened with the debts that run down through generations or come to serve as bonded labourers without prior longstanding debts with a certain loaner. The excruciating position of bonded labourers is often marked by a continuous debt burden that prevents them from ever being freed. Bonded labour, also known as debt bondage, is typically characterized by long-term relationships between employers and employees. Bonded labour is often a form of *forced* labour; there is a compulsion to servitude due to held debt (Finn). The number of bonded child labourers in India runs in the tens if not hundreds of thousands (there are even estimates that run into the millions), a 2007 report speaks of more than 400.000 bonded children involved in the hybrid cottonseed cultivation alone (Venkateswarlu,2007). Bonded labour is typically prevalent in rural areas where agriculture relies on contracted (especially migrant) labour. Together with child labour and bonded migrant labour, agricultural debt bondage falls under the definition of forced labour as enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Finn).

The number of girl children involved in child labour in India is difficult to estimate, mostly because they are often engaged in more hidden forms of labour (putting them at even more risk) which are not taken up in estimates. The National Sample Survey estimates of 2004-05 estimated there were about 5.6 million children engaged in the agricultural sector in India, of which 2.75 million were girls (Sinha,2007). Agriculture is a largely unregulated sector with respect to labour, especially child labour. Child labour is often hidden in this sector; where it might be easy to find on large commercial farms, it is more difficult to track when it takes place, for example, on smallholder farms which in turn produce for larger commercial farms. The inability (of e.g. Government) to completely regulate this sector makes it an excellent place to employ a child for a (if any) meagre wage.

There are many different types of child labour in the agriculture sector; ranging from work for multinational hybrid cottonseed producers to work on family farmland (agricultural practices such as cultivating, harvesting, weeding, and animal husbandry). Some obviously easier to track down for purposes of (inter)national law enforcement than others. Child labour can be part of family labour (in- or outside the home) or it can be more individual (outside of family labour), it can be paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time, it can be performed on a regular or casual basis, it can be migrant labour, it can take place in the formal or informal sector, it can be invisible, legal, or illegal labour, it can be bonded labour. Child labour can be many things. With respect to child labour as part of a collective family strategy for income generation it is important to realize that "exploitation outside the world economy, within the realm of the family, is equally if not more likely than in the formal sector" (Gamlin and Pastor,2009)

According to Gayathri and Chaudhri (2002), Tamil Nadu is one of the leading states in India when it comes to substantially reducing the incidence of child labour, however it is also still one of the states with the highest number of child labourers (despite its overall economic development) according to Lieten (2002). He also mentions that statistical research has established correlations between the incidence of child labour and factors such as poverty, education, and especially literacy rates. The latter two being an inverse relationship; where there are lower rates of education and/or literacy, there is a higher incidence of child labour. It is due to such inverse relationships that many NGOs and

academics argue to broaden the definition of child labour to include all children deprived of their right to education.

When it comes to girl participation in Tamil Nadu's labour force, this group exceeds boys in marginal work and in main work (in which boys usually predominate). According to Rustagi (2002), in Tamil Nadu - amongst other states in India - the number of girls exceeds that of boys when considering their engagement as main workers in agricultural labour activities and involvement in household agricultural activities. Also when considering the involvement in household manufacturing activities, girls in Tamil Nadu form the majority.

With regard to child labour, gender discrimination of girls is a big issue in Tamil Nadu. Certain forms of work (especially within the household sphere) are allocated to girls, this often next to other forms of economic activity outside (or within) the household. This double burden – besides from the physical strain and related danger – can make the opportunity for them to go to school especially difficult. Overall, boys are usually given preference over girls when it comes to choosing which child to send to school. Girls can also face discrimination within schools; the urgency of adequate and safe schooling with respect to this issue would probably be a great stimulant to decrease the numbers of girl drop-outs and increase overall school enrolment. Gender discrimination is present in education, but also in the forms of employment engaged in and in the wages received for labour. When it comes to rehabilitating and reintegrating former girl child labourers, one can correctly wonder whether this is even possible within an environment that discriminates and thus not fully integrates girls in the first place (The impact of discrimination on working children,2002). As Goonesekere (2006) states, "families, communities and nations that endorse discrimination and violence against girls perpetuate discrimination and violence against women". In Tamil Nadu girls often face discrimination even before their birth. Female foeticide and infanticide, supported through new technological developments, are not uncommon practices in this Indian State.

Education

Girl drop-outs (usually already in primary education) are a major problem as dropping out usually signals a child's life of labour. In India even though 61.1 million girls are in primary school (2004-2005 figures), 7.5 million primary school aged girl children are actually not in school (Right to Education and Total Abolition of Child Labour, NCPCR). This for reasons that can be combined, but often come down to 1- the push or pull into child labour and 2- poor quality and/or lack of access to education and even discrimination in schools. School drop-outs are alarmingly common in India's education system. Finding reliable statistics on this proves to remain difficult, however.

Official estimates in 2001 indicated there were 13 million child labourers aged five to fourteen years in India. Note that this does not include child labourers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years. However, 85 million children were not in school (Right to Education and Total Abolition of Child Labour, NCPCR). The gap is made up of 'nowhere children' who are neither counted as child labourers (in 'hazardous' occupations), nor are they enrolled in schools. According to Chaudhri and Wilson (2000) many rural girls in India fall within this category. They are likely to work in sectors and

occupations not recognized as hazardous by Government. Being enrolled in good, safe primary full-time education is considered very important for girl children if child labour is to be eradicated. However, going to school can also add to a girl's burden (the triple burden) if she is not liberated from chores and tasks within the household and if she is still engaged in (full- or part-time) child labour.

Education, in particular the full-time enrolment of children in primary education, is widely accepted as the preventive key to stop or at least reduce child labour. However, for those children who withdraw from child labour, there are other needs education-wise. Where picking up education where one left it behind is possible in some cases, other former child labourers need other entries. Important here are the so-called bridge courses that help a left-behind child catch up in schooling and then enrol in (formal or non-formal) education that is appropriate to their age and level. Another major important form of education is skills training or vocational skills training, preparing former child labourers for a future vocation or form of employment. This is particularly relevant for older child labourers; providing them a skill that helps them escape from child labour, gives them more and *alternative* opportunities in life, and prepares them for the future (legal) labour market. It is believed there is an intrinsic positive side to education; it helps individuals take control of their lives (Saith,2009) even if it is unable to directly lead to employment. Being educated and literate can be a boost to one's self-esteem.

The UN CRC deals with a child's right to education in Article 28: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular make primary education compulsory and available free to all (…) and take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates" (Convention on the Rights of the Child,1989). Having ratified the CRC, India has incorporated the ideas of this Article into their Constitution. The fundamental right to education is included in the Constitution of India under Article 21A: "the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State, may, by law determine" (The Constitution of India,2007). As modified per December 2007 the Constitution states under Article 45 that "the State shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". From the literature it appears that controlling and regulating the system of compulsory education is currently still difficult in India, meaning that by 2017 Article 45 is likely not to be fully implemented. To this day the education system is still inadequate, especially in the sense of being unable to curb school drop-outs (vulnerable to becoming child labourers) effectively.

2.3 Causes and consequences of child labour

The following shall briefly go over some of the primary causes and consequences of child labour, shedding light on the renown poverty-child labour cycle. The widely acclaimed important role of education as a remedy to (help) eliminate child labour shall also be reviewed.

2.3.1 Causes and consequences

The causes and consequences of child labour are not easy to discern, there are many of both and the two are recognized to be heavily intertwined. Causes of child labour are those factors that pull (e.g. labour market forces and conditions, employers preferring children as they are a cheap form of labour and are less able to organize themselves against exploitation, children's suitable height for particular activities or their nimble fingers for precise work) and push the child into labour. Above all the main push factors generally include poverty (poor and marginalized families or underprivileged sections of society; an absence of parents/care takers or single-headed households, etc.), education systems that cease to function according to adequate standards (lack of schools, lack of access to schools, quality of schooling, absence of teachers, lack of safety especially for girls in schools, irrelevant and unattractive school curricula, inflexibility in the school system, etc.), and parental illiteracy.

Often the link between proper education and future sustenance of livelihoods is absent, where especially poor children might complete formal education and subsequently still have little access to employment. In situations where (especially poor) education is believed to hold little advantage over employment and its immediate returns to the household, the choice is an easy one. In times of income fluctuations or shortfall child labour can occur (children who were *in* school are pulled out) to broaden the household income (Ravinder,2006). Beliefs of parents and children about the *use* of education can fall short and they might believe that a lack of schooling does no harm. According to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), however, there is a growing recognition of parents that schooling can provide their children with opportunities to escape poverty (Raghuram and Jain,2008). And so, there is also a demand of parents for qualitative education for their children.

Important causes for child labour, further mentioned by the Tamil Nadu State Child Labour Rehabilitation cum Welfare Society (Homepage) include the tradition of making children learn the family skills, an absence of universal compulsory education, social apathy and tolerance of child labour, ignorance of parents about adverse consequences of child labour, and the ineffective enforcement of legal provisions concerning child labour.

The consequences of child labour are forces that usually directly lead back to a situation of poverty and child labour. Among them the State Child Labour Rehabilitation cum Welfare Society notes a stunted growth of future generations, the inability to harness human resources and to contribute to- or benefit from development, the inter-generational continuance of child labour, frustration and feelings of inferiority among citizens, adult unemployment, the depreciation of wages, the persistence of child labour and economic inequality, child abuse and exploitation, illness (also mental) and early morbidity of citizens (exposure to harsh labour circumstances as a child can also have grave consequences for adult health), malnourishment, illiteracy, wasted human talents and skills, and a perpetuation of ill treatment and vulnerability to ill treatment and discrimination. Child labour can seriously affect a child an negatively affect his or her future development. The ultimate consequence can be a culture of silence where child labourers are so battered by their experiences and accustomed to exploitation that in their future they might show little resistance to exploitation of any kind.

Having read some of the severe consequences of child labour, the motivation for it seems absurd. It might be culturally or socially normal for a child to work as in many societies children have

always worked (albeit, maybe not under extreme forms of exploitation). It might be a balance of weighing the (immediate) costs and benefits of both child labour and education, especially if the latter is poor in quality. Overall, child labour is mainly explained – still – in terms of structural poverty. Poverty-stricken families often rely on the roles performed by children in order to meet immediate needs for survival (Ansell,2005). In the case of bonded labour, there is often little- if no choice for children to be engaged in labour.

The agency of children and their parents with respect to decisions of whether or not to let a child engage in child labour seems restricted by – amongst others – their position (especially as poor or marginalized persons) in society.

2.3.2 The poverty-child labour cycle

As might have become clear from the aforementioned, structural poverty and child labour seem inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Child labour perpetuates poverty (through adult unemployment and a depreciation of wages, for example) and poverty often leads to child labour (there being an immediate need for income). This cycle is referred to as the poverty-child labour cycle. It must be stressed that this thesis departs from the view that poverty is not solely to blame for child labour. There are many more factors that add weight to elements of this cycle or that – altogether – come up with additional elements to the cycle. Take, for example, the lack of accessible, qualitative, equitable, safe education. This is a factor linked to causing child labour, but it is also linked to poverty in the sense that better or safer education (in private schools, for example) cannot be financially accommodated for. What this thesis argues, is merely that there is more complexity to child labour than grasped in the poverty-child labour cycle.

According to Wazir (2002), the traditional view of poverty being the cause for child labour and low school enrolment is slowly starting to be challenged as social and cultural factors are given more weight. Such beliefs also lead to different approaches to child labour. The Andhra-Pradesh based Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) denies poverty to be the main cause of child labour. Their primary focus therefore is not to eradicate poverty, but instead to focus on the values and norms that condone child labour and non-enrolment of children in schools. The success of this Foundation lies in changing mindsets and attitudes about child labour and education within communities.

Poverty often leads to (and is caused by) vulnerability, social exclusion, discrimination, and non-access to equal treatment and services (e.g. education and health); alas poverty perpetuates poverty. Discrimination can be age discrimination (where young children are considered adequate for particular employment because of their physical and/or mental properties), gender discrimination, social discrimination, discrimination because of one's poverty, and so forth. The discrimination of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is also present in India. The majority of bonded (child) labourers face this discrimination as they are at the bottom of the social order or caste hierarchy (The impact of discrimination on working children,2002).

2.3.3 Elimination through education

Education is widely argued to be the key to break the poverty-child labour cycle and thus decrease the incidence of both child labour and poverty. Especially adequately accessible, safe, equitable, and qualitative formal compulsory (primary) education, and for those children withdrawn from child labour - bridge courses and (vocational) skills trainings. A lack of education is widely seen as a direct manifestation of poverty, so is child labour. These two factors also directly *contribute*, in turn, to perpetuate poverty. We have reviewed, above, the intricate linkages of child labour and education- also with regard to poverty.

There is a tremendous focus on education as the solution par excellence to eliminate child labour, it is the bull's-eye of many national and international programmes, initiatives, and regulations. It feeds the call for social justice, for equality, for a world without exploitative, harmful child labour, and moreover- for a world no longer poverty-ridden. The initially Eurocentric norm that children should go to school and not to work, especially not in any form of hazardous/harmful labour, also seems widespread in India. Many local organizations and NGOs in India seem to believe that child labour does not allow for a full participatory role in society. The above is an interesting general movement, for have Eurocentric ideas (dating from post-Victorian times) trickled down or are they genuinely recognized by parties in India as well?

Ravinder (2006) states that the introduction of compulsory schooling would lead to a 70% decline in the number of child labourers. It is not clear, however, whether this percentage is based on compulsory primary *and* secondary education (up to the age of eighteen). Nevertheless, the percentage is high and supports international calls (such as UNICEF's) for universal compulsory education with a human rights rationale. Such calls and programmes deriving from them do include a more holistic approach as well, enhancing the awareness and need for collective action to protect and promote the rights of the child. It is argued that education is also the key to access these other rights.

Education, however, besides needing to be accessible, safe, equitable, and of adequate quality also needs to be flexible (Saith,2009). Especially in rural areas the enrollment in education is expected to be higher if schooling (times, holidays) are in line with agricultural seasons; thus combining education with rural labour (and not excluding one from the other). It is widely believed that attending school can reduce the hours of labour for a child, however – if unlucky – it can also add to the burden of a child when it must combine education with labour. The discrimination (by classmates or teachers) of child labourers in education (discrimination of society is known to sometimes be reflected in schools) because they are either a girl, a part-time child labourer, lag behind education-wise, are poor, migrant, etc. (The impact of discrimination on working children,2002) needs to be tackled if these individuals should be (convinced) to be and especially *stay* enrolled. Therefore education as a solution to child labour must not only be accessible, qualitative, and flexible but it must also be a safe environment, free of discrimination.

Further consideration for the education of former girl child labourers includes whether it is such a good idea to have separate girl programmes. One could argue that the gender specification in aid programmes might add to further gender discrimination. The separation of former girl child labourers from girls who have not been a child labourer in aid programmes might also add to discrimination

(where those non-former girl child labourers are excluded, which could lead to forms of jealousy and discrimination). The rehabilitation and reintegration component is also one of getting accustomed to not being a child labourer, one could propose that if former child labourers are not secluded as such this could support their reintegration.

Reviewing the literature, one can conclude that most of the proposed and practiced remedies to child labour (inter)nationally include education. However, there are more holistic approaches that also include solutions with regard to the labour market, laws and regulations with regard to international trade and production overseas, freeing bonded (child) labourers by paying off their debt with a loaner, advocacy and awareness raising, creating employment opportunities, securing income and employment of parents, and so on. There is recognition of the fact that since child labour is such a complex issue, its solutions need to be comprehensive and include economic, social, and cultural factors. There is quite a lot going on, on multiple fronts, but it remains appropriate to say that education is quite dominant when it comes to solutions being implemented and suggested to (at least minimize) child labour. Education is furthermore acknowledged to help foresee in individual development as well as development of society as a whole.

We have not discussed the role of education in the sense of awareness raising and sensitization yet. Prabhakar and Bhanawat (2004) say that the television programmes, serials, and documentaries - on the rights of women, the girl child, the consumer, the denial of rights to the weaker section of society, on laws related to dowry, on the right to education, and so forth – are great contributors to creating awareness about human rights among the Indian masses. Pictures and reports on human rights violations and cartoons in (news)papers are also said to create more awareness. Making people aware, educating them about their rights and certain harms through these media is believed to be fruitful. An old Indian saying goes:

"If you're planning for a year, plant rice. If you're planning for ten years, plant mangoes. But if you're planning for a hundred years, educate your children" (Prabhakar & Bhanawat,2004: 94)

The role of education, especially the lack of it, in perpetuating the poverty-child labour cycle has widely been recognized. Thus, education and the promotion of it (be it qualitative, accessible, and safe especially for a girl child) is seen as one of the keys to disrupt this cycle according to large organizations. Among documents of ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC), one can find titles such as *Combating Child Labour through Education*, and *Child Labour and Education: Evidence from SIMPOC surveys* in which a definite negative correlation is found between school incidence and child labour, and that a child's work day is also negatively associated with the capacity to attend school, etc. Different types or forms of education are widely practiced and advocated by NGOs as a measure to either prevent children from engaging in child labour or to rehabilitate former child labourers. Adequate education could perhaps be regarded as the main implemented response to child labour, child labour often also being defined in terms of a deprivation of (the right to) education. One could argue, however, that education is part of the solution and not the solution itself.

When it comes to the poverty-child labour cycle and education, one could argue that education is not the only remedy to poverty (and therefore – in turn – a remedy to the perpetuation of child labour). Poverty does not disappear when the child is in school. The issues here are so complex and multi-faceted that a single-angled solution is inadequate. Child labour is the product (and an ingredient to-) of several factors or processes, therefore one-sided solutions cannot suffice to eradicate it. According to ILO-IPEC, however, education remains a vital step to obtaining decent work and a livelihood in the future. IPEC states that research has proven that when it comes to educating girls, this is one of the most effective ways of tackling poverty and child labour:

"Educated girls are more likely to have better income as adults, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and to have decision making power within the household. They are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, helping to avoid future child labour" (World Day Against Child Labour 2009, ILO-IPEC)

If education does not directly lead to ending poverty and child labour, it will no doubt provide opportunities that can help lift those involved *out* of poverty and child labour. Here lies the essence of many education related activities of NGOs that deal with child labour issues. They emphasize the social norm of acceptability with regard to education, the right to education, and especially the benefits of education. Education is not only learning your ABC's or basic arithmetic. Instead, school is a place for developing an array of qualities and characteristics that make up a persona; there is a general assumption that schooling will benefit children's long-term prospects. The importance of education further does not only lie in the interest of the individual or household, but in society as a whole: "education can transform societies, social returns sweeping out private ones" (Saith,2009).

2.4 Non-governmental organizations

Many NGOs dealing with child labour issues take up education (in different forms) in their programmes directed at curbing, if not eradicating, child labour. The above reading has already described the popularity of such an approach which is very much based on the universal right of a child to education. Below we shall have a brief look at the role of NGOs in India with regard to child labour. Before doing so, however, we will review the main action at Government level.

2.4.1 Government action

In India national actions with regard to child labour work mainly from the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) as also discussed in chapter 2.2.1. Generally concluding from the literature, it is safe to say that the existing laws banning child labour and enforcing compulsory primary education in India need more effective implementation and enforcement. It is also argued, that on the whole, more adequate and effective legal provisions need to be made. These need to take a firmer stand on child labour issues, taking up a more inclusive definition of child labour in order to do away with the current restrictive focus. Many NGOs in India are involved with such issues, trying to drive forward

such change in Government legislation, through – for example – the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL).

With the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act (2005), which was set up to protect the rights of children in the country as enshrined in the UN CRC, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was installed by Government in India. It is a Government commission but holds a position as an independent entity within the Government. It can only make recommendations and can make no final decisions and implement them. The NCPCR is to protect, promote, and defend the rights of children by making sure that the laws, policies, programmes, and administrative mechanisms are coherent with the child rights perspective as laid down in the Constitution of India and the UN CRC (NCPCR, Homepage). The Commission sees to it that Government uses a rights-based perspective in its policies concerning children. The NCPCR strives to guarantee the protection of all children from 0 to 18 years of age (not only those under the age of fourteen), so also those engaged in child labour that is not prohibited under the Child Labour Act of 1986. They are very much concerned about the exclusion of children who do not fall within the prescribed categories utilized by Government. The NCPCR urges for a more inclusive definition of child labour that is determined in relation to a child's access to full-time formal schooling. It should also include *all* children in the workforce, whether the work they do is paid or unpaid, part of family labour or for an outside employer. They argue for amendment of the Child Labour Act (1986); that it should take regard of the above child labour definitions and not allow for the regulation of children's work (instead this should be *prohibited*). Furthermore, the Act should be amended to prohibit children to work in any of those occupations typified as non-hazardous (e.g. agricultural labour) by Government. Children should be in school and not in work according to the NCPCR, and therefore their right to education must be guaranteed until they complete secondary school education. The lack of education is considered to be the most important non-economic factor (besides poverty) that causes child labour, according to the NCPCR. It plays a significant causal role in sustaining child labour and the vicious cycle of poverty.

Tamil Nadu Government has recently come up with the State Action Plan for Eradication of Child Labour which includes raising awareness (also a preventive measure for child labour), stimulating education, the enforcement of child labour laws, the identification of child labour occupations, and rescue and rehabilitation of children in hazardous occupations (Elimination of Child Labour in Tamil Nadu,2008-2009). The State Child Labour Rehabilitation cum Welfare Society is responsible for the implementation of this State Action Plan; it monitors and tracks the activities related to its implementation (Homepage).

Besides many NGO initiatives dealing with child labour prevention and elimination, the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) – managed by the Ministry of Labour – is the largest intervention within this field in India. It was launched in 1987 and was active in 250 districts (in 21 different states) by 2005 (Developing a tracking system, UNICEF-India). Unfortunately, however, the reach of the NCLP seems restricted because it only targets children below the age of fourteen and those engaged in hazardous (as enlisted by Government) occupations. The Project aims to withdraw children fitting this criteria from labour and mainstreaming them into the formal schooling system. This is often done

through bridge courses; temporary schooling that fits the needs of former child labourers to educate them sufficiently so that they can be enrolled in formal education (again). Within the State of Tamil Nadu, the NCLP functions in twelve districts - Sivagangai is not one of them (State Child Labour Rehabilitation cum Welfare Society, Homepage).

2.4.2 The NGOs

Wazir (2002), in the Indian Journal of Labour Economics, gives an elaborate and strong overview of the recent (past decade) role of NGOs in India with regard to child labour. This information has been directly extracted in the hereby following.

Despite the increasing attention of NGOs towards child labour, they have not been able to generate its wide-scale reduction and must operate within the (often constraining) Indian legal and institutional frameworks that are in place. NGOs often rely on international NGOs for funding (which is usually temporary and not long-term), thus often their child labour and education projects also need to coincide with these donors' (also in the case of national NGO or Government donors) interests, beliefs, categorizations, and strategies: "differences in emphasis and philosophy of donor agencies will be mirrored in the work of NGOs and will determine the outcome and impact of their programmes" (Wazir,2002).

While most NGOs – national and international – work from an absolute condemnation of child labour, there are also NGOs that condemn exploitative, hazardous, and harmful work but allow for child work that is not considered harmful. The right to work is recognized by a minority of Indian NGOs dealing with the issue, according to Wazir (2002). It is also linked to academics supporting the right of the child to participation and active decision-making in his or her choice to work or not. When it comes to local NGOs, just like academics, they can differ on many fronts when interpreting and acting upon child labour issues.

Wazir takes note of the primary strategies (which do not all support each other) used by NGOs, namely: mobilizing (creating involvement) and creating awareness among children, parents, and communities about child labour and education; providing education (formal, non-formal, bridge course, or vocational); providing early childhood care (to relieve older siblings to care for younger children) and pre-school education to facilitate entry of children into primary school; facilitating child participation; developing income compensatory strategies (compensation for withdrawing a child from labour and enrolling him/her in school or supplementary income schemes that encourage enrolment in schools by paying for fees that come with education, e.g. free meals at school, free uniforms, etc.); assuring work and income security for parents; facilitating intra-household adjustments (building on the resilience of poor families, e.g. labour diversification and consumption/expenditure switching); social labeling (sensitizing consumers to child labour and labeling particular products as 'child labour free'); and advocacy for legal and institutional reform. From an economic view, Saith (2009) signals that in child labour pockets or districts in India, child labour can be replaced with adult labour (these pockets are often areas with a high degree of adult male unemployment) and this would reduce profits initially made by employing children with only 3 to 4%.

NGOs in India are different in their approaches to child labour, as can be seen from the above strategies. An NGO might choose for one or two of the above strategies as they do not have the capacity (also financially) to take up holistic approaches that tackle child labour on several fronts. Wazir (2002) points to the fact that NGOs often fail to address the diverse causes of child labour in a holistic manner. A local NGO can only do so much, however. Their piecemeal approach is said to restrict them in their field of practice, their philosophy, and also in terms of their target group, all in all: their reach. Furthermore, it is argued that a restrictive focus on only one category of child labourers "leaves open the possibility of replacing these children by others who are waiting in reserve to fill these positions" (Wazir,2002). Banning child labour in certain occupations can lead to a situation where children are driven to employment in other occupations that can be more hidden, hazardous, and harmful. Another major critique Wazir brings up is competition between NGOs (despite some collaboration) and their lack of unity. Considering that child labour is such a complex issue and has many related debates that are interpreted differently per person, organization, or part of the world makes this point of critique difficult to overcome. There is not one stance towards child labour or education, different parties are influenced differently. If all concerns and conceptualizations *were* headed in the same direction, solutions would have undoubtedly been a lot easier to implement.

Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF)

The MVF, a non-governmental organization based in Andhra Pradesh, is one of the leading forward-looking and most successful actors in India when it comes to acting upon child labour. Its work has disseminated to other states within India, but also abroad. This Foundation, along with other Indian NGOs and academics (worldwide) dealing with the topic of child labour and education, urgently calls for free compulsory primary (and secondary) education that is easily accessible and adequate in terms of quality. The out of school children in India need to also be drawn back into the education system and their retention in schools needs to be ensured. The MVF considers a lack of education, as opposed to poverty, as the main cause of child labour.

The Foundation works with hard-line non-negotiable principles including that all children must attend full-time formal day school; a child out of school is a child labourer; all child work is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child; there must be a total abolition of child labour; any child work is also child labour; and they condemn any justifications for the perpetuation of child labour. The Foundation has unleashed a firm stance on issues related to child labour and has made way for a pro-active discourse to eliminate it, mainly through education. Involving stakeholders at all imaginary levels, from the community level to Government to get children out of labour and into school. It is considered quite successful within its field of operation due to these factors and might be a prototype suitable for replication in certain suitable local contexts.

Since its formation in 1991 the MVF has succeeded to make 1500 of the 6000 approached villages in Andhra Pradesh child labour *free*. Meaning that within these villages all children go to school and are no longer engaged in any form of child labour! They work on two fronts: 1- getting children enrolled in school and 2- retaining children in school and out of child labour situations. Their strategy is

based mainly on supporting bridge courses (often residential) for former child labourers so that they can subsequently be enrolled in the formal Government school system. Their work with Government then lies, amongst others, in ensuring that this school system is adequate quality-wise.

Getting child labourers into schools is achieved by changing mindsets within child labour communities about child labour and education; that education is *not* difficult to arrange and that it is also for the poor (many poor believe education is only for the upper classes of society). Wazir (2009) argues that in poor rural areas of India people are not so familiar with the system of education and arranging labour for their child is then easier and more familiar. They have little experience with education and how it is arranged. The MVF works, amongst other methods, with a youth force of volunteers that go from door to door in villages to inform and convince parents of the importance of education for their child. The extraordinary thing is that resistance to these views often does not last too long and that parents – with a little help – are happy to have their children enrolled. Communities play an extremely important role in supporting the education of children who are without parents or have parents unable to work, as well as in pressurizing land lords to release bonded child labourers. Programmes of the MVF further target *all* children within villages, not only child labourers.

The Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL)

The CACL is a nationwide network in India that is committed to totally eradicate child labour in all its thirty-one districts. This is done through opinion-building, mass public awareness programmes, investigating cases of child abuse or exploitation, legal intervention, research, networking, advocacy, and lobbying. The Campaign strives to make the State accountable with regard to the implementation of child rights and make sure that adequate legislation – which is tune with the UN CRC – is enforced (CACL, Homepage). They recognize the vulnerability of girls and are keen to protect this group of children. The CACL members have different backgrounds, many are NGOs working for child development, especially those working for the promotion and protection of child rights and concerned with eliminating child labour and promoting education.

In their aim to restore the rights of children, the CACL states that a child is any person under the age of eighteen years and that he or she should not be employed in any factory, workshop, household, or in agricultural farm activities and allied occupations. They urge for amendment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) to prohibit all forms of child work or labour (also those non-hazardous and within the family) up to the age of eighteen. In the backdrop of an education system that fails to prevent school drop-outs, the CACL also strives to ensure that all children in India (up to the age of eighteen) enjoy free, compulsory, qualitative, and equitable education up to the 12th standard as a matter of right. Any child out of school is vulnerable to be(come) a child labourer; therefore education should play a big role in curbing child labour and in "children prematurely leading adult lives" (CACL, Homepage).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have become better acquainted with some important background information which should help our further understanding of this thesis. The definition of child labour used in this thesis derives from international standards and regulations; it is labour performed by a child (under eighteen years) that exceeds UNICEF's classification of work exceeding a minimum number of hours in relation to the age of a child. It is any work carried out by a child that is either exploitative, hazardous, harmful (mentally, socially, spiritually, physically, morally) or interferes with their education (in particular compulsory schooling); and therefore is very likely to damage several if not all facets of their development.

The difficulties of coming to terms with a differentiation between child labour and work has also been reviewed, together with how these two different concepts are utilized by parties arguing for either a regulative approach or an abolitionist approach to child labour. Childhood has been discussed because it is the conceptualization of what childhood should be comprised of that decides whether child labour can be a part of it. This is different the world over; childhood remains a social (culturally-specific) construct. We should realize that most international standards and regulations aimed at children work from universalized notions of what childhood is or should be.

In India child labour is and has been pervasive throughout history, especially amongst the rural population. This chapter has looked at the situation of child labour as well as education (in relation to child labour). It has also come to terms with the main Indian legislation directed at child labour; in particular the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986. What comes to light is that this law is criticized (especially by NGOs) for being too restrictive (a narrow age and occupation categorization that determines child labour) in its implementation. Moreover, its enforcement is believed to fall short. This goes hand in hand with a poor effective implementation and enforcement of national legislation that should ensure free compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen. Hence, shortcomings in the education system lead to a numerable amount of school drop-outs who are in turn potential child labourers.

The main causes and consequences of child labour have been illuminated; with special consideration of the poverty-child labour cycle. We have come to learn that this thesis does not depart from the view that child labour is only caused by poverty. Many factors are at play, they add up and simultaneously lead to situations of child labour. The role of education (a lack of it) as a major factor causing child labour (and poverty) has been described. It has also become clear that education (be it safe, accessible, qualitative, and equitable) is a dominant solution or approach to tackle child labour. In terms of the poverty-child labour cycle, education is seen as the key to break it. Education is believed to decrease child labour incidence, which in turn decreases poverty on the long-term. Education also decreases poverty (on the long term) directly, which in turn pushes less children into labour.

The role of NGOs in India with regard to child labour has been partially described in this chapter. In general they usually operate a piecemeal approach to child labour and are criticized for not taking more holistic approaches. Even though some NGOs have a more holistic approach than others, this is believed to be difficult due to (financial) capacity constraints that local NGOs face. The

successful approach of the MVF in Andhra Pradesh has been reviewed, as has the nationwide CACL. Government action with regard to child labour has also been reviewed and in general it is safe to conclude that this action is largely lacking. Existing laws banning child labour and enforcing compulsory primary education are said to need more effective implementation and enforcement. Moreover, they are said to need amendment in order to take up a more inclusive definition of child labour and prohibition thereof. The NCPCR, an independent entity, is within Government perhaps most active with regard to child labour issues. Their power, however, is limited and they can only make recommendations to Government. Nevertheless, we have seen that this Commission holds a firm stance towards child labour and education (rights) and what should be done. Their protective viewpoints firmly departing from the standards and definitions applied by Government itself.

The following chapter shall come to terms with the theoretical framework of this research. It will build upon some of the universal rights that have appeared in this chapter and will place them within a larger framework. In doing so it will explain the human (child) rights perspective taken up in this thesis and the rights-based approach (of NGOs) to child labour (and education in relation to this). This chapter has come across the issue of relativism and universalism; with regard to childhood but also with regard to differentiating child labour with child work. Concerning the latter, regulative approaches (to child work) would argue for relativism. This while abolitionists (who argue for an abolition of both labour and work because the one is prone to lead to the other) would argue for more universalistic notions that do away with both child labour *and* child work. The next chapter shall clarify more about the debate between universalism and relativism which is inherently linked to human rights.

3 Theoretical framework

Having reviewed some important general background information, the current chapter proceeds with the theoretical framework of this research. It shall deal with the theoretical underpinning of the main research questions of this thesis: 1- *Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations?* and 2- *How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour?*

The rights-based approach to child labour, based on a (human) child rights perspective, shall form the frame of this research. International and national organizations, programmes, and interventions aimed at child labour often use child rights as a normative base. Human rights, in specific - children's rights - are more often than not used as a guiding framework in decision-making and agenda setting. Within the international arena, but also among local NGOs in India, child labour is frequently spoken of with reference to the rights of children. This rights-based approach is a discourse or philosophy utilized by NGOs and others to mainstream programmes according to the language of universal human rights. This to give their work a theoretical, practical, ideological, and/or moral base. It is presumably also a discourse or philosophy that carries a meaning for those whom it targets; in this study former girl child labourers. How might these individuals be moved by the rather abstract notions of rights?

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with the theoretical concepts and with the overall theoretical foundation of this thesis. It should clarify and establish an analytical framework that is relevant to the research problem described in chapter one. We start with the human rights perspective to child labour; including an explanation of what it is and some of its history. Some background information on two important human rights instruments to child labour shall also be discussed. The human rights perspective is the foundation of the rights-based approach to child labour which is in turn the key theoretical element of this study. This approach shall receive due attention, also reviewing some of the main international child rights provisions to child labour. Some of the strengths and weaknesses of the rights-based approach shall also be brought to light, this with inclusion of the inherent debate between the universalism and (cultural) relativism of human rights.

3.1 A human rights perspective to child labour

A human rights perspective, or better said a (human) *child* rights perspective to child labour has been taken up in this thesis. In attempting to find answers to the research questions, this study is especially

concerned with universal child rights related to child labour. Being primarily concerned with a human rights perspective to child labour, this thesis does not take disregard of the existence of various other – amongst them social, cultural, and economic – perspectives to child labour. Child labour is not a discrete problem, there are broader economic, political, social, and cultural settings at play with regard to the topic. Unfortunately, the scope of this study cannot take up all of these settings; the departure from a human rights perspective has been made as it seems a predominant base for (inter)national discussions and interventions (especially of NGOs) concerning child labour and education.

Underneath we look at what the human rights perspective to child labour is. This in order to enhance our understanding of how it relates to the rights-based approach to child labour. The latter is the main theoretical concept utilized in this study, its foundations being human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) will be discussed as they are the main cornerstones of the (human) child rights perspective- and the rights-based approach to child labour.

3.1.1 Human rights perspective

As can be read in the term itself, the human rights perspective to child labour is based on the values and standards of human rights. These rights have been laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and related United Nations' human rights treaties. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an especially important one of these. According to UNICEF, child labour can be seen "in its broadest and most damaging sense as a human rights violation on many different levels" (Beyond Child Labour, 2001).

All human beings, all children as well, in accordance with Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1848) are born free and equal in dignity and respect. Where child labour can demean a child's dignity and worth, Pawar (2007) argues that the human rights perspective "provides moral and ethical strength to attack child labour", especially its worst forms. Article 26 of the Declaration, on the right to education, is an important one of these universal human rights when it comes to child labour. We have discussed the intertwined relationship of child labour and education in the background information. With that information in mind, such a (human) right to education is believed to help reduce the incidence of child labour. Article 26 states (in its main lines) that 1- everyone has the right to education. That it shall be free (at least in the elementary and fundamental stages) and that elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education should also be made generally available and higher education should be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. The Article states that 2- education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The human rights perspective includes those rights tracing back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention No.138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work, and ILO Convention No.182 on the worst forms of child labour (Pawar,2007). The contents of these latter two conventions as well as the CRC have already been reviewed in chapter two. The current chapter will look further into the rights of the CRC that take up

important positions within a rights-based approach to child labour. A human rights perspective to child labour assesses children's work according to its harmful effects on a child's development (Haider,2008). In doing so, it works especially from those principles enshrined in the UN CRC and how they are violated. The best interest of the child and the protection of his or her rights are what constitute the ideology of such a human rights perspective to child labour.

For a rights-based approach to child labour the human rights perspective is crucial; the rights-based approach works from such a perspective. The academic literature seems divided over the different categorizations of perspectives to child labour, including – amongst others – social, cultural, economic, global, human rights and legal perspectives. The difference between a legal and a human rights perspective to child labour is not easy to grasp as the latter involves much of the prior. A human rights perspective builds upon the premise that children's rights are to be protected. Legislation (the legal perspective to child labour) comes to form part and parcel of protecting children's rights through laws banning child labour and guaranteeing free compulsory education (up to a certain age). Child labour legislation stems from 19th century Europe as a response to children's participation in the factories of the Industrial Revolution. A human rights perspective to child labour seems to capture more of those areas left out of child labour legislation; it describes the rights a child should enjoy and not *only* the rules of conduct that should apply to children. It is a perspective built on those human rights found in the Declaration of 1948 and beyond, and is therefore a relatively new perspective to child labour. NGOs concerned with 'development', today, often operate from such a human rights rationale in their perseverance to promote justice and equality to all across the world.

3.1.2 Background information on human rights instruments

The following shall focus on some background information on the main instruments of an international human rights perspective to child labour, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both instruments have been brought to life by the United Nations. It is important to look at the human rights framework in a more general sense in order to understand more of international child rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th, 1948. This against the backdrop of World War II and its atrocities. In the course of time the human rights in the Declaration have been further outlined in several conventions. Regarding child rights this has been done in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Declaration was the first international recognition of a set of universal human rights standards applicable to all of mankind. This does not take away the fact that human rights have been discussed and philosophized about, even been present to some extent in certain parts of the world, long before this official international recognition. The English 17th century philosopher John Locke, for example, gave considerable attention to the universal natural (moral) rights (to life, liberty, and property) with which a person enters society by virtue of 'nature' (Wikipedia). This natural law, in turn,

goes back centuries and is based mainly on the idea that people, as creatures of nature and God, have certain inherent rights. These natural laws were to include more and more the rights of individuals with the onset of the idea of individualism in 17th century Europe. The developments described above have played a major role in the subsequent 20th (and 21st) century thinking and recognition of human rights. This thesis shall not elaborate further on the complete history of human rights and their development. One does, however, need to be aware of the fact that the recognition of human rights evolved centuries before the Declaration was drawn out and adopted.

Human rights are those moral rights essential to living, the "basic standards without which people cannot survive and develop in dignity" (UNICEF, Homepage). These rights are believed to be universal and therefore applicable to all human persons in the world; all human beings are to be treated equally and with dignity. The Declaration itself is not legally binding, the United Nations has adopted treaties which are the legally binding international human rights instruments, including specific obligations. They can hold governments accountable for the protection and realization of their citizens' human rights. The six main human rights treaties departing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Declaration and accompanying treaties come down to an obligation of both individuals and governments to protect and promote human rights. The implementation and enforcement of treaties is monitored by specialized UN committees, but they have little power (legislatively) to uphold human rights. Here we come to the dilemma of whether international human rights should be controlled by the state or by an international body. Of whether the sovereignty of the state should make room for an international overarching body when it comes to implementing and enforcing human rights. This is a hotly debated dilemma that pushes human rights from a moral duty of states to a legal duty, even if these rights are not fully in line with national rights and law.

Human rights are characterized by their inalienability; all humans are inherently born with them. Even if these rights are denied (or not protected, for example by a government), they are still rights that all people *have* by their virtue of being part of the human race. Human rights are furthermore indivisible and interdependent. They are all equally important and they are interrelated; none of these rights stands alone because enjoying one right depends on whether other rights are effectuated (UNICEF, Homepage). With respect to the first mentioned, the global community based on human rights that the UN has aspired to create (Messer,1993) might not be compatible within the reality of cultural relativism. The question of whether human rights *can* be universal at all is very much alive. Cultures and societies across the world vary and thus the human rights – as drafted initially by western countries in the Universal Declaration of Human rights – might not apply there in the same manner as they do in western cultures and societies. The question of whether human rights are based primarily on western ideologies and what should constitute basic human rights arises. Are there

universal values that apply to all of mankind in a similar way? The above has been largely represented in the debate between universalism and relativism (see chapter 3.3).

Related to the abovementioned 'western' aspect of universal human rights is that they generally apply to the individual (Baehr,1989). Individual human rights are articulated particularly in the Declaration, which is in itself western or Eurocentric as many cultures across the world work more from the position of the community or the group and *not* the individual.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

In order to understand international child rights, the human rights framework has been reviewed shortly. All human rights obviously apply to children as well as they are inherently born with them. The CRC came about in relation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, bringing together children's human rights that appear in other international human rights instruments. This because children were believed to need special, extra protection through certain rights that recognize this and also because the United Nations wanted the world to realize that children have human rights too (UNICEF, Homepage). Several UN Declarations (which were not legally binding) on the Rights of the Child preceded the CRC. Even though a draft for the Convention was proposed in 1978, it was only adopted by the General Assembly in 1989.

Many international as well as local institutions and organizations take regard of the provisions and standards of the CRC in their work. This is internationally the most widely recognized set of universal child rights. Its fifty-four articles and two Optional Protocols are the universal standards and obligations, especially of governments, to protect children. The CRC is legally binding; national governments that ratify it are to protect and ensure children's rights, they are obliged to implement the principle of the best (as understood by the Convention) interest of the child in all their policies. Of course, the basic standards in this Convention also need to be respected and adhered to by all individuals in society. The CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty today, Somalia and the United States are the only countries who have not ratified (only signed) it (UNICEF, Homepage).

UNICEF argues that the CRC "offers a vision of the child as an individual *and* as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development" (UNICEF, Homepage). In effect, the specified rights of a child are all *human* rights. This attributes to them the same characteristics but also deficits and dilemma's that apply to human rights in general. Critique on the CRC is that its gender neutrality takes insufficient account of the special protection that girls need through specific child rights.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is concerned with monitoring the implementation of the Convention (and its Optional Protocols) by the governments that have ratified the CRC. It does this by reviewing reports of governments on the situation of children in their country as well as what their government has done to realize child rights (as laid down in the CRC). NGOs are also seen by UNICEF as contributors to monitoring the implementation of the CRC by governments (Homepage). In certain countries, NGOs play a larger role in this monitoring, also jointly *with* the government, than in others. Many NGOs, international as well as national and local ones, also play a major role in bringing about

the CRC *themselves*. They operate particular activities that, to varying extents, work from- and argue *for* these universal child rights. They work from a rights-based approach that stems from viewing particular issues in society from a human rights perspective.

3.2 The rights-based approach to child labour

A rights-based approach (RBA) to child labour stems from viewing particular issues (such as child labour) from a human (child) rights perspective. It defines the problem of child labour and its solutions in terms of a human rights rationale. The RBA to child labour is a practical tool that is utilized to realize the rights of children and to protect children's best interests, mainly according to the provisions of the CRC. But also according to those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Labour Organization's Conventions No.138 and No.182. Many NGOs, also local ones in Tamil Nadu, dealing with child labour issues use a rights-based approach in their activities; they have a human (child) rights perspective to child labour. This has been a premise or fundamental assumption of this research. Reynolds *et al* (2006: 291) also argue that "large development agencies, grassroot children's rights groups, international organizations and local governments make use of children's rights to support their claims".

The hereby following shall clarify more about what the RBA is, after that the important rights of the child – as especially enshrined in the CRC – of this RBA to child labour shall be illuminated.

3.2.1 What is it?

The United Nations has been concerned with explicit human rights for quite some time. It is only in the late nineties of the previous century, however, that there was a call to mainstream these rights into *all* work of the UN. This after it became apparent that several UN agencies (of which UNICEF was a pioneer), but also international NGOs and other actors involved with development work were adopting human rights in their operations (UN AIDS, 2004). The (human) rights-based approach to development has been widely applied ever since. In 2003 the UN launched an official Common Understanding of the human rights-based approach (Waldorf,2007). Clearly embracing it, this Understanding clarifies the approach and especially its application to development programmes.

This thesis will not provide a thorough overview of exactly how and when the rights-based approach came into existence and how it has evolved. It is important to realize that the approach is still relatively fresh and based on the principles of universal human rights. The rights-based approach has been, and still is, widely applied by many NGOs. This, however, does not mean that it is an infallible tool. Nor does it mean that its rationale has remained unquestioned. More exposure to- and experience with the approach – by different actors – has heated up discussions about its ideologies, its strengths, and its weaknesses. These will be brought to light in section 3.3.

There is not one uniform rights-based approach, also not to child labour. Instead we deal with rights-based approach*es*. We can only go so far here to identify the common attributes of a RBA; this

research does not have the goal of identifying different types of human rights-based approaches. Implementation of the rights-based approach differs per organization, where one might focus on duty bearers another might focus on rights-holders, for example. The RBA is given its own meaning within each and every different context within which it is used. Nevertheless, all rights-based approaches have a common set of principles. In general these approaches integrate "the norms, principles, standards and goals of the international human rights system into the plans and processes of development" (Kirkemann Boesen and Martin,2007: 9). In specific each NGO using a RBA does so to a different extent and focuses on particular rights and activities (targeted at particular actors). The RBA is directed to promoting and protecting – in a non-discriminative manner – human rights in order to safeguard justice, equality, and dignity for every human being. This from the belief of the inalienability, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights. The RBA aims to promote the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

Human rights are the fundamental ingredient to RBAs. The approaches tend to work from situations in which human rights are denied or violated, or need to be protected from entering the prior two states. Major elements of the RBA relate to the holders of rights and their duty bearers. Kirkemann Boesen and Martin (2007) define a rights-holder as someone who is entitled to rights, is entitled to claim these rights, is entitled to hold duty-bearers accountable, and who has the responsibility to respect the rights of others. A duty bearer, then, is (obliged) to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of these rights-holders. To respect meaning not interfering with a person's enjoyment of the right; to protect meaning the prevention of human rights' violations and denial; and to fulfill meaning pro-active undertakings to make the enjoyment of rights possible (UNFPA, Homepage). The RBA strengthens and encourages rights-holders (i.e. all humans) to claim their rights and it strengthens and encourages duty bearers' capacities to meet their obligations towards rights-holders (Kirkemann Boesen and Martin,2007). Moreover, it holds duty bearers accountable to meet their obligations. The RBA is a participatory approach in that it involves the participation of rights-holders in claiming their rights and holding duty bearers accountable.

Governments are one of the most important duty bearers when it comes to human rights; they are to integrate the standards (in accordance with ratification of important international human rights treaties) into their laws and policy and make sure that their citizens are able to enjoy their innate human rights and are protected from violation or denial of these rights. In the case of duty bearers being unable to meet these obligations, a RBA is directed at *enabling* them to do so. Governments are termed legal duty bearers by Kirkemann Boesen and Martin (2007), while individuals (institutions, companies, etc.) who are rights-holders themselves are referred to as *moral* duty bearers; they are to respect others' rights: "the greater the power, the larger the obligation to fulfill and especially to respect and protect the human rights of others" (Kirkemann Boesen and Martin,2007: 12).

3.2.2 A rights-based approach to child labour

The human rights-based approach to fighting child labour comes to be a child rights-based approach. For the sake of convenience, often only the term rights-based approach has been used in this thesis. Within the context of this study the term refers directly to the human rights of children. In specific, those of child labourers.

The RBA to child labour is defined mainly in terms of the UN CRC (ratified by India in 1992) and ILO Conventions No.182 and No.138, but of course many of the general human rights described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also apply. Underneath the rights of the CRC (1989) that especially apply to child labourers shall be brought forward. These rights are cornerstones in the theoretical framework of this thesis, their realization is specifically encouraged by the rights-based approaches of local Tamil Nadu NGOs dealing with child labour. The different child rights in the CRC are indivisible and interdependent and the majority are related to the effects of work on children. Think of those rights on education, protection, exploitation, health, nutrition, leisure, play, social security, economic well-being, and the responsibilities of parents (Beyond Child Labour, 2001).

The guiding principles, or general requirements for all other rights, of the CRC are found in Articles 1,2,3,6, and 12. They are important to review and come down to the following:

Article 1	A child is a person under the age of 18 years.
Article 2	The principles or rights in the CRC apply to all children on the basis of non-discrimination.
Article 3	The best interest of the child is the primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.
Article 6	State Parties recognize the child has an inherent right to life and should ensure the health and development of the child.
Article 12	Those children capable of forming their own views (given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child) should be ensured with the right to express freely those views in all matters that affect them, and their opinions should be taken into account when adults make decisions that affect them.

Article 12 and 13 of the CRC belong to its set of participation rights. Amongst these types of rights we also find the responsibility of governments to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of children (Article 4); the right of children to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14); and the right of children to have access to mass media and information (Article 17). Next to Article 12, Article 13 is a major participation right recognized – in this thesis – as important in a RBA to child labour:

Article 13	Children have the right to freedom of expression (as long as the information is not damaging to them or others), which includes the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

Children are entitled to have a say in those matters that affect them either socially, economically, religiously, culturally, and politically. There is a considerable movement of academics (for instance Liebel and Woodhead) and NGOs emphasizing greater regard for the rights of working children to participate and to be consulted in research, policy, and intervention that affects them directly.

In the RBA to child labour protection rights are important. They include (UNICEF, Homepage) children's right to be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and cruelty. The most important right in the face of this thesis is defined in Article 32 (also described in chapter two). Next to Article 4, the following protection rights are important in this study:

Article 32	Children have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and performing work that is hazardous, that interferes with education, and that is harmful to their physical health and mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.
Article 36	Children should be protected by States Parties from any activity that could harm their welfare.
Article 39	Children who have been neglected, exploited, abused, or who have faced any other form of inhuman or degrading treatment should receive help to recover physically and psychologically and reintegrate into society; the health, self-respect, and dignity of the child should be restored.

Survival and development rights of the CRC are also important in the RBA to child labour. They are the basic rights to life (Article 6), survival, and development of one's full potential (UNICEF, Homepage). They include Article 24 on the right to good quality health care, safe drinking water, nutritious food and Article 27 on the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. Some of the particular survival and development rights prominent in this study are listed underneath:

Article 18	Parents (or legal guardians) are responsible for bringing up their children and they should consider what is best for the child. Governments are to respect this responsibility of parents and should not take it away; they should provide appropriate assistance to parents in their child rearing responsibilities.
Article 28	States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular make primary education compulsory and available free to all; encourage the availability and accessibility of secondary education (general and vocational) to every child; make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity; make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to children; and take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. Discipline in schools should also be administered with respect of the child's human dignity.
Article 29	Education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. It should also

	encourage children to respect others – also their cultures and human rights – and their responsibility to protect the environment.
Article 31	States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, and to engage in recreational activities and in cultural life and the arts.
Article 42	States Parties should make the principles and provisions of the CRC widely known to adults and children, this by appropriate and active means.

When applying a RBA to child labour, the rights-holders are children themselves; either those in child labour, child work, or those prone to enter such categories (e.g. school drop-outs). The duty bearers are primarily the States Parties; the governments that have ratified the CRC and need to fulfill their obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill its provisions. Even though all child rights in the Convention are important in this regard, the Articles described above find special importance when it comes to the application of a RBA to child labour. They have a more direct link to the problem (in terms of human rights violations and denial) of child labour. We must also not forget that the principles of the Universal Declaration, ILO Convention No.138 and No.182 are also important when it comes to applying a RBA to child labour. Duty bearers are also to comply with *these* standards and provisions. Besides States Parties, further major duty bearers of children's rights – especially in relation to child labour – are parents (or legal guardians), school teachers, and employers.

3.3 Strengths and weaknesses

The rights-based approach as a way to do development is not void of criticism. Much of its argued weaknesses relate to a critique on the nature of universal human rights; whether there can be such rights – in the first place – in the face of cultural relativistic notions of human rights. The following shall review some of the strengths and weaknesses of the human rights-based approach. These obviously also hold for a (human) child rights-based approach to child labour. The debate between universalism and relativism when it comes to international human rights, shall receive due attention.

3.3.1 Strengths

The RBA is said to bring more objectivity to development work due to its direct reference to legal, normative frameworks (Fastenopfer, 2006). This can also have a conflict-reducing effect. It is important here to realize that much of the strengths of a RBA can also form its weaknesses. The reference to legal, normative frameworks based on international human rights can also lead to more conflict and subjectivity, taking disregard of context-specificity and local notions of human rights.

Continuing with the strengths of the RBA we see that the approach is believed to bring development closer to the people it targets (Fastenopfer, 2006) because the approach is initialized from *their* rights and involves their participation in claiming their rights. Those previously unaware of their rights and related enjoyments due to a lack of information are informed and encouraged to act upon their rights. The RBA is also able to hold duty bearers directly accountable for any malfunctioning

when it comes to the effectuation of their obligations. These two characteristics of the approach are a strength as they give responsibility to the direct stakeholders of human rights to actively take part in the realization of these rights. The ability of rights-holders to claim their rights might, however, be restricted. In such circumstances a RBA encourages to strengthen rights-holders to claim their rights. Where duty bearers are unable to meet their obligations, a RBA also aims to strengthen their capacities to meet such obligations in the future.

Another major strength of the RBA is its function as a practical tool for doing development work. It gives NGOs as well as donor organizations both a tool and a justification for doing their work. Whether this justification deserves the credit it is often attributed remains disputable. Nevertheless, an additional strength (if there is agreement on the universal human rights) of the RBA is that it can use universal human rights not only to do practical work but also to further spread the human rights-based ideology of development (if this is a positive development at all). Advocacy and lobbying becomes easier in the face of using a strong set of human rights. With this the RBA is an instrument that tackles or at least pressurizes to tackle problems at their core. The approach offers tools that stimulate not only curative solutions to problems, but also preventive ones. In a wider sense, the RBA to child labour not only aims to cure the violation and denial of child labourers' child rights, it also aims to prevent such abuse and neglect of rights in the first place.

The strengths of the RBA lie mainly in its adherence to basic human rights, to the minimum standards and rights that all of mankind should be able to enjoy. Any deviation from such rights is considered to be a grave violation and it is this injustice that proponents of a rights-based approach fight against. The RBA aims to bring justice to the people, but then again what is justice in the first place and according to whose standards? The strength of the RBA remains, also within the context of such questions, to set minimum standards from which action can be undertaken. Without any standards, however basic or minimal, it would be difficult to work towards anything. It is not necessarily universal human rights that can only provide such minimum standards, for interpretations or notions of what human rights should be are (often) already in place within specific cultural contexts. This outside the international human rights framework.

3.3.2 Weaknesses

We have come to see that some of the strengths of the RBA can include inherent weaknesses. Despite its weaknesses we can also say with certainty that the RBA is still, today, widely implemented to promote development and further the realization of the rights of *all* human beings. The enjoyment of individual rights remains, from the human rights ideology at least, a crucial component of one's existence.

The weaknesses of the RBA are mainly those in line with the weaknesses of human rights in general. These are criticized to be vague in their formulation, leaving RBAs without a blueprint for the interpretation and implementation of these rights (Fastenopfer, 2006). The vagueness of human rights (including their cultural insensitivity), and therefore also of the rights-based approach, is criticized for leaving the approach with operational challenges (Katsui,2008). The above, however, can also be

considered a strength for there is – for example – more country-specific, culture-sensitive, room for human rights interpretation and implementation.

Another weakness or point of criticism is related to the fact that the rights attributed to all humans by this approach might not all be *positively* received by rights-holders. Fastenopfer (2006) explains this in terms of the human rights-based approach and its legal systems possibly being experienced as a tool of repression (of a ruling class), or as contradicting with traditional communal rights. Rights-holders would, in such cases, not desire to claim their universally recognized 'rights'. In general international human rights can conflict with local communal rights, but also with national rights of particular nation states. In such cases the sovereignty of the nation state, the largest duty bearer of human rights, is likely not to be made subservient to the international moral of human rights. The implementation and enforcement of universal human rights remains difficult if not institutionally unrealizable. This also comes to constitute a significant weakness of the RBA.

The abovementioned leads to the question of whether human rights are applicable to all of mankind; ideologically they are, and (probably) with the best intentions, but in reality it appears that people across the world differ. Their notions of human rights, then, might not at all be in line with constructions that have been coughed up in international human rights agreements. A major critique of the RBA is its encouragement and propagation of universalistic human rights. This especially from the standpoint of cultural relativists, who point to diversity and the impossibility of complete universality in the world. According to them there are too many cultural differences to make room for one common understanding of rights. Even though human rights concepts are regarded not to be applicable to western countries only, "it is feared that human rights discourse is not as effective elsewhere (…) due to its origin in the West" (Kennedy,2004: 18, Uvin,2004: 17 in Katsui,2008: 8). With respect to child labour, Haider (2008: 49) says that "the Convention on the Rights of the Child seeks to introduce uniform standards throughout the world for working children". Implying that due to the absence of a common understanding for such uniform standards for working children around the world, such standards will not work. Haider points to the need for relativistic stances towards working children because there is a weakness in the origin (and therefore applicability) of human rights and RBAs.

With regard to children, universal rights are claimed to be based on models of childhood that are western or Eurocentric. Therefore, they are likely not to apply to the social constructions of childhood in other parts of the world. This is another point taken up by cultural relativists. According to Gamlin and Pastor (2009) childhood, in 'western' terms, is based on the individual and therefore prioritizes individual needs. They issue a warning with regard to the individualistic aspect of universal child rights; what is in the best interest of the child could be detrimental to the best interest of the family (survival). Therefore they state that "interventions to reduce child labour are more likely to be successful if they are locally driven, supported by legislation, and based on theoretical understandings of childhood that reflect the realities and needs of the children, families, and communities whose lives they aim to improve". The more universal RBA looks mainly at the individual, which is in itself very Eurocentric. Cultural relativism illustrates that many people in other cultures do not think in lines of the individual but in lines of the group, the family, the social, and the culture.

One could state that the RBA mainly views child labourers as victims whose rights are deprived. Viewing children as victims does not always do justice to the reality of their existence and situation. Victimizing children can be considered a weakness of RBAs to child labour. Anthropology has long recognized that children are not passive but active recipients of their rights. They can actually position themselves with regard to- and act upon their rights. Though this thesis recognizes the aforementioned, the power of children to act upon their rights (if they are aware of these rights in the first place) is believed to be heavily restricted. Their agency as an individual actor, their "capacity to process social experiences and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion" (Long and Long,1992: 22) is believed to be extremely limited. Their choices, knowledge, and capabilities probably heavily constrained by multiple forces.

Another major weakness of the RBA relates to its goals. The relatively recent upsurge in focus on RBAs could endanger its end goal of justice. This because the incredible focus on human rights as the means by which to reach justice and do development work tends to transform these very means into end goals themselves, thereby - in fact - compromising the end goal of justice. In this way human rights practice is unlikely to provide fully for the needs of the poor and to improve their situation. The means become the end and consequentially lead to little more than just that. Something we must be wary of.

3.3.3 The debate between universalism and relativism

The weaknesses of the rights-based approachlargely relate to the controversy of whether human rights *can* be universal at all. Whether they do justice to the different cultural notions of rights, and with respect to children – whether they do justice to the different notions as to what childhood should be composed of. Such debates come together under the general heading of the debate between the universalism and (cultural) relativism of human rights. A debate widely fed by anthropologists since the onset of the wide scale application of universal rights within different arena's, particularly in development practice. This debate is intricately linked to a RBA (to child labour) due to the nature – a universal human rights rationale – of this approach. The universalism/relativism debate holds virtues that either strengthen or weaken the justification of applying RBAs, this depending on the stance one takes to human rights. There are many types or gradations of universalism and relativism, ranging from radical to more softer ones on each side of the continuum. With regard to child labour, the abolitionist movement is dominated by universalism while the more regulative movements operate from the standpoint of relativism.

The debate between universalism and relativism is something contemporary human rights anthropologists have moved beyond. The debate has reached a deadlock and has become largely unproductive; anthropologists are now concerned with finding new ways to deal with human rights. They are not so much concerned with the debate itself anymore, but with the uses, meanings, and relationships of rights in particular local contexts (Speed,2006). This study also focuses on the uses and meanings of rights in particular contexts, but in a limited way. It also does not explicitly move beyond the universalism vs. relativism debate of human rights, instead it takes such meanings of

rights into account. In this way child rights on child labour issues are brought into the debate between universalism and relativism. For the most part it must be realized that contemporary human rights anthropologists' agenda setting finds itself well beyond the theoretical scope of this MSc thesis.

Universalism attributes general minimum rights to every human being, something which is disputed, for can these standards actually apply to every human being? Are they not based too much on Eurocentric notions of what should and should not be part of these rights? Universalists would argue yes to the prior and no to the latter. They believe all humans have an innate set of rights which are undiscardable. These rights can only be denied or violated. Universalists fight against this; they wish to restore the human rights of human beings from the belief of a universal applicability of these rights. This despite the existence of differing (also throughout time) norms and values across the world. Universalism is a point of departure for the RBA, it is central to the human rights tradition that has evolved especially after World War II and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Relativists argue that norms and values differ per place, peoples, and time and are therefore not universal. They see no grounds for an international human rights regime based on a common value system. Cross-cultural intervention is at odds with relativism while inaction is considered immoral by abstract universalism (Nieuwenhuys,2008); the friction between the two should be clear by now. Cliteur (1997) describes how cultural relativism implies that within a framework of cultural diversity it is forbidden to judge other cultures according to the measures (of right and wrong) of our own culture. Cultural relativism perceives all cultures as equal in worth, they all carry their own quality and truths. Therefore there is no belief in universal ethical truths; the western-influenced universal human rights are considered unrepresentative of the wider range of relativistic (cultural) interpretations of what rights human beings should enjoy and be entitled to. With regard to children the notions of childhood are culturally defined. A consequence, within the lines of such relativistic thinking, is that universal child rights cannot apply to children who belong to 'other' cultures which do not share the universal vision of childhood established by a 'western' cultural context.

Relativism denies the (possibility of the) existence of universal norms and embraces pluralism and diversity of cultures. The diversity of different cultural interpretations of human rights, however, might be less than the relativists proclaim (Cliteur,1997). This implies cultural diversity when it comes to the *specificity* of human rights, but a commonality when it comes to the minimum shared acceptance of these rights or their foundations. Despite the fact that international human rights instruments are often criticized for taking disregard of local contexts, it should be acknowledged that from the basic provisions from which these instruments operate, there is often a call for implementation (through national laws and regulations) that should conform to local realities and limitations – a sort of relativism within universalism. This 'vagueness' of human rights and their disability (and that of the RBA) to offer a blueprint for the interpretation and implementation of human rights has been recognized as a weakness of the RBA, while it seems something relativists would typically embrace.

Nieuwenhuys (2008) describes how, according to cultural relativism, it is impossible to assess child rights (globally) using universal standards. This is argued to be harmful as it could "stifle other

cultures and instill in those who belong to them a sense of inferiority for failing to live up to standards set by outsiders who happen to be more powerful" (Nieuwenhuys,2008: 5). Reynolds *et al* (2006) also contend – from a relativistic stance – the radical view that human rights are constructs of cultural imperialism. A hegemonic agenda being served by, amongst others, a universal human rights regime that limits culture in (international) human rights law. Such views from the side of relativists are extremely radical and therefore not shared by all relativists.

A major counterargument to cultural relativism is that it could make us insensitive to critically observe cultural practices that are based on the norms and values of a culture (Cliteur,1997). Cultural practices such as female gender-mutilation or child labour – condemned by international (human) child rights provisions – then risk becoming perfectly acceptable in the name of accepting other cultures. This while they are (at least from a Eurocentric point of view) detrimental to the child. These are difficult issues and "the challenge is to identify commonalities and structure interpretations so that essential human rights are universally respected" (Messer,1993: 227).

Moreover, international legislation should be designed so that it meets local needs and is reflective of the diverse interests of those in the local context. With regard to universal child rights there is a need for "a constructive dialogue on the issue of childhood and children's rights that does not fall into the twin of relativism and universalism, that does not ignore the heterogeneity of children's lives or obscure the commonality of ways in which economic and political forces in an increasingly unstable and polarized world have affected the lives and experiences of these children" (Fernando,2001: 20). Moving beyond- and departing from the debate between universalism and relativism while taking the best of both 'worlds' seems more urgent than ever to assist (where necessary) the world's children in the endeavor to their happiness and desired ways of life, taking local contexts, culture, and their futures into account. Critical assessments of RBAs and the meaning and uses of human rights within local contexts might be useful points of departure that head in such directions. This study does exactly so; looking at the perspectives of former girl child labourers and local Tamil Nadu NGOs, we come to an understanding of how the RBA is seen by local actors.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce and clarify the theoretical foundations of this study. The first section explained the human rights perspective to child labour which has been adopted as a theoretical base for this research. It is a base for the rights-based approach to child labour. The human child rights perspective to child labour assesses children's work according to its harmful effects on a child's development. It does this by tracing back the rights to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention No.138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work, and ILO Convention No.182 on the worst forms of child labour.

The second section of the chapter looked specifically at the RBA to child labour. This approach defines the problem of child labour and its solutions in terms of a human rights rationale. The approach is widely utilized – by international as well as national and local NGOs, also in India – to realize the

rights of children and to protect their best interests. A fundamental premise of this thesis is that many NGOs dealing with child labour use a RBA in their activities, they also operate a human child rights perspective to child labour. Section 3.2 has elaborated on some of the most important provisions – applied to child labour from a rights-based approach – of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is important to realize that there is not one uniform RBA (to child labour), instead there are different types of approach*es* each working from a common ground but filling in their approach according to their own judgment and prioritization.

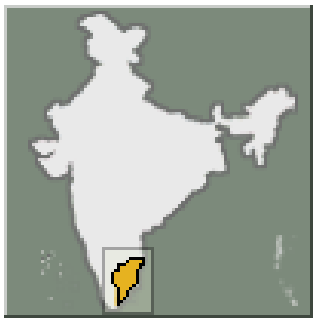
The last part of the chapter reviewed some of the strengths and weaknesses of the RBAs. These are especially expressed in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of human (child) rights in general; the RBA building on- and working *from* these rights. Many of its strengths and weaknesses are interchangeable, depending from what standpoint one looks at human rights. In this regard the debate between universalistic and (cultural) relativistic viewpoints of human rights has been elicited. With the anthropology of human rights currently moving beyond this stale twofold, this thesis fits within the lines of current focus on the uses and meanings of (child) rights in particular local contexts.

The following chapter continues with the methods and techniques adopted in this study. After this the research findings will be discussed in two successive chapters in which the theoretical framework and its concepts shall become functional in an attempt to find answers to the main research questions of this thesis.

4 Methods and techniques

The previous chapters have provided an introduction to this thesis as well as detailed background information on the topic of child labour and education in relation to this. The chapter prior to the current one has discussed the theoretical framework of this research. With all of the above having been given due attention, the hereby following chapter serves to clarify what has been done to obtain the necessary data for this study. It starts off with an outline of the research setting and the main target population. Having familiarized the reader with this important information, the chapter continues with an introduction of the different research methods and techniques used and an explanation of their application and different facets. The main limitations of this research are also discussed.

4.1 Research setting



The research for this thesis was located in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu which is India's eleventh largest state area-wise and seventh largest state population-wise. In terms of overall development it is one of the foremost of the twenty-eight Indian states (Wikipedia). Tamil Nadu's coastline in the east borders the Bay of Bengal, while at the most southern tip of South India (and Tamil Nadu) – Kanyakumari – the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal come together. Tamil Nadu is bordered by the territory of Puducherry (Pondicherry) in the east, and by the states of Kerala in the southwest, Karnataka in the northwest, and Andhra Pradesh in the north. Its capital is Chennai (formerly known as Madras). Tamil Nadu is historically the homeland of Indian Tamils, Tamil is also the main spoken language.

Next to being a highly industrialized state, Tamil Nadu is also one of India's leading producers of agricultural products (Wikipedia). However, agriculture depends heavily on monsoon rains and is thus very prone to droughts. With exception of the mountainous regions of Tamil Nadu, the climate is for the most part extremely hot and dry in this state. Especially the arid (south) central parts of Tamil Nadu receive little rain. In those rural parts of the state where agriculture is becoming more and more difficult to practice due to climatic conditions, poor soil quality, and a lack of water, there is an immense exodus of young men who go to places such as Dubai to work as (unskilled) migrant labourers, mainly in construction. There are limited alternative employment opportunities in the area for those who can no longer make a living through agriculture, thus there is a great push (and pull) to go abroad where the salary is higher than anywhere near home. The above described situation of migrant labour obviously has repercussions for the families left behind. This situation lends itself for extremely interesting and important future research.

Data collection took place mainly in Sivagangai District (see Figure 1), near its capital Sivaganga city in a village named Kootturavupatty. The main group of respondents, former girl child labourers, are from nearby villages within the Sivagangai District. The interviews with NGOs took place in different places within the Tamil Nadu state; in Chennai (north-east), in Sivagangai District, in Thoothukkudi District, and in Kanyakumari District (southern Tamil Nadu). One of the interviews took place in Pondicherry (about 150km south of Chennai, located along the East coast) which is technically speaking not part of Tamil Nadu. It is a Union Territory of India (shaded black in Figure 1); a former French colony.

Figure 1: Map of Tamil Nadu

4.1.1 The Sivagangai District

Sivagangai District has a population of approximately 1.150.753 (in 2002), the rural population amounting to 826.427. The district is urbanized for about 28% and has a literacy rate of about 52% (Wikipedia). The majority of the population is Hindu. The people in Sivagangai District mainly depend on agriculture for a living despite the arid ground and scarce water availability. They mainly grow paddy, sugarcane, groundnuts, pulses, millets, cereals, chilli's, turmeric, and tamarind. There is also dairy development in the region (milk is sold to larger milk corporations and chilling plants). Besides from poultry, the main livestock found in the area are cattle, (water)buffalo, and goats.

Sivagangai is for the most part a rural agricultural district. The majority of families in this part of Tamil Nadu practice agriculture as a means of living. Some might have their own piece of land, others might lease a piece of land, and still others might work for wages on other peoples' land. The type of labour taken up by children in this area is mostly within family-based agriculture, and so within

the family setting. The labour contribution by girls mainly includes manual labour on family farmland and herding livestock. Besides this agricultural labour, girls often make a contribution to domestic work (e.g. cooking, fetching water, washing vessels, taking care of younger siblings) within the home. This adds to their burden and leaves them with little or no time that could serve other needs they might have. For a landholding family that cannot employ others for their labour, the (free) labour contribution of their children is often crucial for sowing, weeding, and harvesting. Besides family-based agriculture (unpaid), girls are also often involved in wage labour. This primarily occurs if their labour is not needed at home and if there is a direct income need. These girls are often from landless families and work on farms within or outside their village for wages. Besides this labour, they usually still contribute to domestic work at home as well. Leading a life of double burdens, sometimes with education even triple 'burdens'.

4.1.2 The research base

The base for the two month field study of this thesis was in Kootturavupatty with a local NGO named the Rural Education and Development Society (REDS). This is the location from where the research was mainly conducted and it is also the place that provided (my) accommodation in a guestroom, meals, and so much more. The large REDS compound is made up mainly of offices, (sleeping) quarters for staff, and a hostel for school-going children. These buildings find themselves amidst a large area of land that is difficult to cultivate and largely made up of mango trees (leased to people from nearby villages).

REDS is mainly concerned, at the moment, with organizing their Kanyakumari programmes and running a residential hostel (at the Kootturavupatty compound) for 'scavenger' children and children with parents in brick kiln labour (high risk of debt bondage for the children). REDS' activities shall be taken up in chapter six, as it is also one of the NGOs interviewed for this thesis. REDS itself forms a major component of this study due to the fact that the main group of respondents followed a vocational skills training here upon withdrawal from child labour in agriculture. More of this training programme and REDS shall become clear in the further reading.

Staying with a local NGO at its base, so close to the (mainly) residential staff, also gave the opportunity to learn about the functioning (especially the everyday struggles) of such an NGO. It also provided a closer look at how a residential hostel for children is run. This next to the opportunity of spending time with these children before- and after school time. The REDS staff in Kootturavupatty - at the time - was made up of a gardener, a seventeen year old domestic help (Monisha), a warden for the children (Monisha's mother), an older cook (for the hostel) and her husband, Murugan the driver (and so much more), Nithya - a staff member, Rachel the REDS secretary, and Alexander the REDS chairman. All but the gardener, Murugan, and Alexander are residential. Rachel sleeps here throughout most of the year as she is responsible for running the hostel. Alexander (who lives in Madurai) and Murugan occasionally sleep at REDS for convenience or safety purposes. Living so close together with these individuals has been an experience in itself; it has given friendship and the opportunity for interesting conversation and mutual learning.

4.2 Target population

The main target group for this research, besides from the local NGOs, were former girl child labourers in Sivagangai District. The forthcoming has a closer look at this target population. It does not look into the target group of NGOs that were interviewed for this field study because this will receive attention in chapter 4.3.2.

Individuals of the main target group of this research grew up in Sivagangai District, were engaged in the agriculture sector as child labourers, and now still live in the same district. They have at a certain point in their child labouring life withdrawn from labour to enrol in a residential vocational skills training programme at REDS. Skills trainings serve to rehabilitate child labourers and are a form of education often offered to child labourers who are too old and/or lack too much basic education in order to be taken up in regular primary/secondary education or to participate in a bridge course. REDS offered their vocational skills training programme to a total of approximately 900 girls. They were for the most part agricultural child labourers, however some participated in the programme (after dropping out of school) in order to prevent becoming engaged in child labour. Chapter 4.2.4 shall clarify things about the REDS training.

A large part of the group of respondents were above the Indian minimum age for employment when they engaged in child labour (some of them started before the minimum age). When referring to them as former child labourers, it is important to know that their categorization as such is made according to international definitions and norms on child labour. For if abiding to the Indian definition of child labour, these girls would not fall into the category. This research targets former girl child labourers in order to find out what their experiences and views are towards child labour, formal education (as in going to school), and education in the sense of a vocational skills training. The respondents are currently no longer a child, this research target group is mainly made up of adult women but also of youths (as in 18 to 24 years old).

4.2.1 Former child labourers

The reasons for choosing former girl child labourers instead of current ones as subjects for this study were carefully considered. Interviewing child labourers would definitely be something spectacular, and definitely something necessary. However, it also comes with great difficulties. The first is that interviewing children differs from interviewing adults, the researcher needs to be familiarised with interview methods and techniques for children. Once acquainted with these techniques, doing the research does not have to be something very difficult to do. However, applying the above methods and techniques with the presence of a translator, adds difficulty. This because the whole situation is rather complex and in need of close supervision and constant reflection, something which is expected to be less easy with a translator. Gaining the trust of children was also foreseen to be very difficult with the distance created due to a language barrier. The researcher would do best to learn the language of his or her child respondents fluently in order to carry out such a successful field study.

Another consideration for selecting former child labourers instead of current ones was the fact that child labourers are not easy to find and once they *are* found, they are not easy to sit down with

for long periods of time (especially with those in wage labour). The last factor that withheld me from selecting children as my target group was the ethical consideration (in combination with a personal lack of experience with regard to this). It was feared I could do them more harm than good with my presence and my MSc research. I would not be able to offer them direct improvement of their situation while I would demand from them to think about their dire situation and comment on it. This seemed too confronting.

For all the abovementioned reasons it was decided to focus on *former* girl child labourers. They would also be able to comment and share their experiences about withdrawal from child labour and the personal effects of a vocational skills training programme. Considering their age and maturity, they were expected to talk more openly and be better able to reflect on their experiences than children. Their retrospective views on child labour and education are also considered to be of high value, also in the face of future research.

4.2.2 'Agricultural' child labourers

This research specifies the sample group to those girls who have been engaged in the *agricultural* sector. This sector remains the largest sector when it comes to child labour, in India and worldwide. Agriculture might sound idyllic but the truth seems far from so. Furthermore, it is a rather unregulated and extremely diverse sector which often includes worst forms of child labour, especially hazardous work.

Specifying to this sector serves the purpose of providing more information about girls who have actually been a child labourer in this 'hidden' sector and casting more light on the diversity of experiences that girl children have (had) and how these now former child labourers view child labour in agriculture. The size of the sector and its capability to swallow up and hide so many child labourers is disgustingly fascinating. Agriculture is furthermore the most prominent work activity in Sivagangai District, so the most likely sector child labourers were and are engaged in here. The research could have focused on another region and another type of child labour, but then the choice would also have had to be made about setting *current* child labourers as my target group.

4.2.3 Girl child labourers

The choice to focus on female instead of male child labour was made first and foremost because child labour in the agriculture sector in India is something girls are more involved in than boys. The REDS vocational skills training had also focused on girl child labourers only. Because this programme is a major component of this, (respondents have participated in this training) the focus of this study is also directed at *girl* child labour.

The gendered choice for this target group is also girls engaged in agricultural work are known to be particularly disadvantaged as they often face double if not triple burdens. Often they need to undertake household chores at home, and if they are lucky (or not!) go to school: combining this with work can be a heavy load. The focus is on these girls who have fought for survival and been through

so much. As (young) women they can teach us a lot about the complexities of child labour and its implemented remedies. Their experiences and views, their accounts of their past – but also of their future – their hopes, dreams, and their expectations can provide us with crucial information that might help spare future generations from the same (note: if negatively experienced) fate.

4.2.4 The REDS vocational skills training programme

The group of respondents of this study have all followed a residential vocational skills training programme at the Rural Education and Development Society in Kootturavupatty, Sivagangai District. They participated in this programme at some point in their young lives after withdrawing from child labour in the agriculture sector.

REDS no longer runs the programme due to a difficulty in acquiring funds for residential programmes from external donors and a shortage of personal funds to support such a programme. Most of the funding for the programme came – in the past – from the Indian Government and from external international donors. Box 4.1 underneath gives an impression of the estimated costs of the residential training programme at that time.

Box 4.1: Costs of skills training programme for 10 trainees per month

Boarding & Lodging	10.000/- INR
Medicine	600/- INR
Instructors' salary	2.500/- INR
Wardens' salary	1.500/- INR
Raw materials & maintenance of machines	5.000/- INR
TOTAL	**19.600/- INR**

REDS considers this programme to be one of the most successful ones in their history of development work and would like to restart it if they have enough funds in the future. However, they would choose another focus as to what vocation to teach because the market demands have changed. They would not focus on tailoring because the demand for tailors is declining in the area (due to industrially-made cheap clothing as well as a saturation of tailors in the market). Alternatives could include teaching skills for making products that can be sold to (mainly Indian) tourists in the region. These would be made mainly from banana fiber and palm leaf and could be sold to middle-men who would then sell the tourist products further down the market chain (in Sivagangai District itself there are little tourists).

At the time this vocational skills training was set up by REDS, tailoring was chosen as the main skill for the girls due to the demand factor. Even the poor needed new clothes now and then and during festival times there was always a demand for new clothing. Tailoring was also something that could be done from the home and could therefore be combined with other obligations (e.g. child care, domestic work, agricultural work). One sari blouse delivered (and still does) approximately the same amount of money as a day's wage in agricultural labour. Even if there would be no demand for *new*

clothes there would also always be demand for repairs. REDS operated the programme from early 1987 to early 2006.

The education of girls was given priority to that over boys because their position was, also at that time, believed to be most exploited due to superstitious beliefs and culture. The girl child labourers, from nearby villages in Sivagangai District, who attended the training happened to be mainly from the agriculture sector. REDS focused on girls because they were believed to be the most vulnerable group of child labourers. Furthermore, women empowerment - one of REDS' ideologies - was kept in mind.

Enrolment

The girl child labourers that were enrolled in the skills training programme were in most cases child labourers (also drop-outs), but in some cases drop-outs and not (yet) child labourers. Being mainstreamed or taken up in a bridge course somewhere else was not advisable for these individuals; they were too far behind and too old to follow a bridge course and be mainstreamed into formal education. Any individuals that were suitable for a bridge course were forwarded by REDS to other NGOs that provided these courses.

The participants came from difficult (financial) family situations. The programme was to find an alternative for child labourers and those who had missed out on education. The girls who joined the training were not 'rescued' from child labour situations by REDS. They would get to know about the programme somehow and would apply for participation. Registration fees were 150 INR (about 2,40 Euro), which is not a lot of money compared to the costs of the training per girl. Parents had to pay the amount in order to attach some value or conscience to the programme, for the further part it was free.

Criteria for enrolment in the vocational skills training programme were mainly the family's economic situation and mainly due to that reason parents' inability to prevent their child from engaging in agricultural family or wage labour. The worst off - orphans, disabled, extremely poor, and the destitute - were given preference. The girls had to have minimally attained 5th standard in school and were generally aged fourteen years and over. The REDS secretary (Rachel) regularly organized a two hour orientation for the girls and their parents about the programme in order to inform them about the rules and regulations (which were quite strict). She would also have conversations with each girl and her parents in order to analyze the family situation and pick out the most desperate girls for each batch. The residential training was a six month programme, starting each year in February and August. Each year had two batches of approximately twenty-five girls each.

REDS believes that most parents that brought their daughter to REDS were happy about it because the training was free of charge, they did not have expenses for the girls at home; their child was going to learn a skill that could contribute to the family income afterwards; and because the status of the girls would go up if they were further educated.

The programme

The main skill learned was tailoring, this was also the skill that could make the most money self-employment wise later. Other skills were also taught in order to slightly expand the possibilities of the girls in their future. These included bag making (plastic, wire, palm leaf, banana fiber), mat weaving, plastic wire ornament making, and hand embroidery. More general skills taught in the programme were life skills, obedience, responsibility, cooking, organization, cleaning, personal hygiene (menstruation), and later sensitization to HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. Some of these general skills were taught occasionally during evening sessions but mostly they were brought in an informal way by the Rachel (REDS secretary and head of the programme at the time). The general skills were learned throughout the course of the day and during all activities. Rachel served as a surrogate mother for the girls and provided them counseling where necessary.

The girls had a full day programme for six days of the week (see box 4.2) in order to get through the skills training curriculum. Any free time (usually Sundays) could be used for games and sports activities. Sunday was also the only visiting day for parents. They had a visitor's pass in order to avoid visits from boys who could cause trouble (e.g. convince girls to drop out of the programme). This was also the reason that REDS staff read all letters from outside to the girls. Sunday evenings would occasionally be used to watch social awareness films. The only further free time during the six months would be for family functions, festival days, or other holidays. In these cases the girls would go home.

Box 4.2: A typical day's programme

Before 07:30	Cooking and bathing
07:30-09:00	Prayer, breakfast, washing up, etc.
09:00-12:30	**Class** (with small break). Half of the girls would do tailoring/embroidery, the other half the other skills (groups changed every week) and swap in afternoon
12:30-14:00	Lunch
14:00-16:00	**Class** (with small break). Half of the girls would do tailoring/embroidery, the other half the other skills (groups changed every week)
16:00-18:00	Cooking work and garden work for some of the girls
18:00-20:00	Free time and time to study
20:00-21:00	Dinner and free time until bedtime at 21:00.

At REDS the twenty-five girls were divided into four groups for the chores that had to be done: 1- cooking/washing vessels group, 2- cleaning the inside and outside vicinities group, 3- water fetching for all vicinities group, and 4- care group (for the ill people and daily other requirements). The latter was the organizing group also, one girl from this group was appointed as the group leader every fifteen days. The chore groups would alternate through time.

There was one tailoring & embroidery teacher and one teacher for the other skills. The teachers would work with a syllabus and precise weekly planning. Tailoring took up most time; it was the main skill the girls learnt (together with hand embroidery). The remaining time was divided over the other skills. During the last week of every month there was a small written exam about tailoring, while at the end of every week there was a small quiz to get the girls accustomed to the exam at the end of the month. These small tests taught them how to cope with time pressure and taking exams. At the end of the course there would be a final exam (preceded by two revision exams) composed of

making a sari blouse in one hour: 15 minutes to cut the fabric and then 45 minutes to do the tailoring. The girls would learn many types of sari blouse models during the course as well as different types of other basic clothing models (skirts for girls, short trousers for boys, etc.). They also had to learn to maintenain the sewing machine. All other skills taught, besides for mat weaving, had no final examination.

After completing the six month training there would be a function (ceremony) where certificates (not diploma's) were distributed in the presence of local authorities. There would also be a prize for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd best student in tailoring and mat weaving. After completion of the training, possibilities were sought for each student as to how she could acquire a sewing machine. Usually through a Government subsidy scheme or a loan from a bank. REDS assisted the girls to apply for these schemes or to get a loan. This in order to help them set up their own (mostly home-based) income generation effort. At a certain point in time REDS was also able to arrange tailoring orders (Government school uniforms) for girls who had just finished. Rachel, the REDS secretary, has to this day kept close contact with most of the girls and many of them still consult her for advice.

4.3 Methods and techniques

Having looked into the vocational skills training programme, the main target population, and the research setting for this research, we have now finally come to the actual methods and techniques used to obtain data. These are as follows: semi-structured interviews with the direct target population of respondents and with local NGOs in the field; two case studies; and a focus group discussion. The latter two were directed at the former girl child labourers of this study. Besides interviews, participant observation has been an important method – particularly with respect to the case studies – to gather information. All of the above methods have been selected and used for the primary data collection of this explorative, interpretative, and descriptive research. They are in general also the most common research methods of the social sciences. Secondary data collection has been conducted through an extensive literature study. This research has no statistical value, it is in no means a quantitative research.

The interviews with the target population were conducted with the help of a translator. Where it was agreed upon beforehand with REDS to find a translator to accommodate this research, this turned out to be difficult. The NGO is situated in an extremely rural region of Tamil Nadu, with little possibilities of finding a translator or arranging for a translator from the nearest large city (Madurai, at about a one hour drive). Alexander (chairman of REDS and main contact for setting up this research), a fluent English speaker, offered to do the translation during the interviews with the former girl child labourers and during the focus group discussion. Unfortunately for the case studies his function as a translator was difficult to arrange (see 4.3.4). Two major factors that must be taken into consideration with regard to this translator is that 1- he is a man and not a woman, which has expectedly influenced the respondents in their answering and 2- he is a leading REDS staff member, making any discussion with the respondents about the REDS skills training likely to be biased.

The following shall give an explanation of each of the methods used for the primary data collection of this study. It shall take consideration of sampling techniques and of their procedure and process. Any difficulties or limitations experienced shall be incorporated.

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews with former girl child labourers

A substantial amount of information has already been introduced about this group of respondents (chapter 4.2). REDS, through the secretary Rachel, has kept in touch with many of the girls who followed the vocational skills training programme. Their whereabouts and mobile phone numbers are known. Other former participants of the training could be traced through addresses (often of their parents) and telephone numbers left behind by the girls upon completion of the training. Sometimes these addresses led to a dead end, where not only the girl (now woman) had moved (usually to her husband's village), but so had her parents. Because REDS has so many former course participants, the pool of respondents to choose from for this research was large. It was possible to contact sufficient respondents that matched the criteria of subjects for this research.

Sampling

The selection of respondents was not carried out according to official sampling. This study carries no statistical, quantitative value. The criteria used to select respondents is summarized in box 4.3. Those who could be traced, were willing to participate in the research and had the time and possibilities to do so, were interviewed. Snowball sampling occurred where one respondent convinced other women to participate in this research.

The REDS staff put great effort into locating respondents and getting in touch with them. It is something the NGO actively took on as a task, feeling it would be too difficult for me to get in touch with the girls and to arrange interviews. First and foremost because of the fact that I do not speak Tamil, which made the task practically impossible. But, second also because most of the women know Rachel well and trust her. Their husbands or families also trust Rachel and were therefore thought to be more open and willing to allow their wife or daughter to come to REDS for an interview. The staff at REDS tracked down (mainly by phone but sometimes by visiting) former participants of their skills training programme who met the criteria for the respondents. They explained there was a foreign student at REDS interested in their past as a child labourer and in their REDS vocational skills training experience.

Box 4.3: Selection criteria for respondents

- A balance in respondents from different nearby villages, not all from one village
- Respondents are from nearby villages within 50km from Kootturavupatty (research base at REDS) otherwise the travel is too much of an obstacle for them to come and a risk for no shows
- Respondents that are in different age groups and are in different phases of life (married, children, etc)
- Respondents who were child labourers around the age of 10-14 years
- Respondents from different six month batches of the REDS training; variation in time of following the skills training (from late 1980s to early 2000s)

From the aforementioned it becomes clear that my position as a researcher was not anonymous, which could have influenced the (objectivity of) answers provided by respondents. However, the exact purpose and details of the research were only explained to each respondent *after* each interview. This because telling them about it beforehand could have led to more biased answers. Doing the research anonymously could have been done, but the circumstances would have been extremely difficult.

Procedure & process

Interviewing this main target group was done with the help of a detailed semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix I) that was prepared in the proposal writing phase of this research. After carrying out two pilots in India, the questionnaire was slightly adjusted. In total twenty-one extensive semi-structured interviews were held, each taking about two to three hours to complete.

The interviews took up less time than expected because travel to the respondents was unnecessary. Instead the respondents came to the REDS office in Kootturavupatty for the interviews (see Appendix VI). This was advised by the REDS staff for two reasons: 1- if I would go into the villages to interview respondents at home I would immediately be identified by the village community as a foreign NGO representative (particularly arriving together in the presence of Alexander from REDS) and would face many questions and expectations in relation to that and 2- the interviewing situation would attract so many curious people with questions of their own that it would be very difficult to have a conversation with the respondent. The respondent could also feel heavily constrained to answer certain questions due to the presence of family members, neighbours, and people from her village. Because of these reasons it was decided to conduct the interviews at REDS. Transport fees (usually by bus) and a lunch were provided and the women seemed happy to share their stories (something some of them actually mentioned) with me. Some women came with their children who would be entertained by REDS staff during the interview. Other women were dropped and picked up by their husband or father. Luckily they did not demand to be present at the interview itself. There was one respondent who we visited at her home because she had passed the due-date for delivering her first child. This provided an opportunity to test the difficulties of interviewing in the field itself. It proved quite difficult because her family joined to observe the interview and she might have given desirable answers because of that. Because it was already getting dark we were not immediately noticed by others in the village. We did rush the interview in order to avoid catching too much attention.

Having Alexander as a translator turned out positive, the women seemed to trust him and freely opened up about more private issues s. However, the fact that he is a man and a leading REDS figure is likely to have influenced their answers. Nevertheless, the women also took the opportunity to share village matters about, for example, orphaned children with him. In three occasions a respondent asked for his advice on such matters. The interviews were quite intensive to conduct; the questionnaire was long and the answers often required further explanation. For Alexander, who had to translate all dialogue, two interviews a day sometimes seemed tiring. At moments his patience was a

little low and at other moments he was distracted by phone calls as he was doing the translating under his regular work time. Despite this, Alexander was a pleasant translator to work with and was able to give the interviews a relaxed feel (through jokes and reminiscing). He was also an important informant, sheding light on certain matters respondents had shared, and so forth.

The respondents usually used their emotions when answering questions. They would raise their voice, use facial expressions, and hand gestures. Tears were also not uncommon. The questions obviously required the women to reopen doors of their past (but also of their present) that they had closed. This was usually handled by reminding them they did not have to feel obliged to answer certain questions and that if they wanted we could end the interview at any time. None of the women agreed to this, instead they would take a minute or two to control their emotions and then would try again to explain what they started with. The story that followed was always sad and illustrated the hardships they had faced as a child or the struggles they currently face (mainly marriage-related problems). Often Rachel (REDS secretary) would come in and talk to the respondent for a while. She knew about these women's problems and could comfort them. The older women were the most emotional and inclined to cry (perhaps because they have experienced more trouble in their lives than the younger respondents), the younger girls tended to laugh and giggle a bit more – especially when they did not understand exactly what was asked. The older respondents were in general the ones who were more talkative, better able to express themselves, and more opinionated.

Sometimes there would be a minor misunderstanding during the interviews, but this could always be corrected in time. It was often necessary to be suggestive and leading in the questioning when respondents did not understand what was meant with certain questions or when their answers remained superficial. After the first few interviews the shortcomings of the questionnaire could be recognized and following interviews were carried out with that in mind. Questions were redirected and rephrased if necessary in order to let the respondents explain exactly what they meant with certain things they said. This was especially necessary with respondents (especially younger ones) who were very short and little elaborative in their answering. However, sometimes further questioning did not lead to further talking. The overlap in the semi-structured questionnaire was useful in the sense of allowing an opportunity to cross-check earlier answers and clarify contradicting ones. There was enough room in the questionnaire for elaboration and deviation, or to jump criss-cross between its different elements.

Three respondents never showed up, but replacements were found on the same day. For the further part all interviewees showed up on time, which is something worth noting! The no shows had their reasons, for example a father who had to be taken to hospital or a cow that had to be milked in order to deliver the milk to the corporation on time.

What was missed most during the interviews was closer contact with the respondents. I missed being able to ask things myself and am also aware that I must have missed out on important information due to the need of a translator. The replies of respondents, due to translations, are likely to have lost the originality of the initial answers of the respondents. Most of the respondents looked directly at Alexander when they answered questions, because he was the one translating. A few looked

directly at me while they answered my questions in Tamil. While I did not understand, this was special and I could only imagine how interesting such an interview would be if I could speak directly with the respondents myself. In general the women had little questions for me at the end of the interview, some asked about my country, my family, and the purpose of this study. Many respondents asked whether I was going to continue the training (assuming I was an NGO representative). Unfortunately not. This belief could have made the women give desirable answers about the positive aspects of the REDS training, however.

4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews with local NGOs

Next to the former girl child labourers, local NGOs were important respondents. Working directly for the interests of child labourers, these NGOs can provide extremely valuable information (especially experiences) with regard to the topic. Their application of- and motivation for using a rights-based approach are interesting in the quest to find out more about the meaning and uses of such an approach to child labour.

Sampling

Through Alexander, a key informant for this research, I came into contact with a variety of local NGOs somehow involved with child labour elimination activities. Alexander is a well-known and respected figure in Tamil Nadu's field of development work. He has a wide network of many NGO representatives most excited and willing to participate in this research. It must be noted that the NGOs interviewed for this study are all from within Alexander's network and therefore the data could hold certain biases or in any case, a lesser sense of objectivity. I was able to meet with a total of five of these NGOs (including REDS), dispersed across the Tamil Nadu state. With a sixth NGO (the MVF) in the state of Andhra Pradesh there has been email contact about this research and their participation. They looked at the NGO questionnaire and managed to send several documents in order to answer most of the questions. They were, however, not personally visited and did not respond (through email) to additional questions.

No special sampling was conducted to select the NGOs. A selection of about five was made looking at their field of operation with regard to child labour, their location, and their availability time-wise for a visit (with interview). The NGOs represented in this study do not reflect the existence of the greater spectrum of NGO types acting upon child labour and their (different) activities. This cannot be stressed often enough, and one must be cautioned throughout reading this thesis, that the data obtained from these NGOs is not the only thing happening and going on in the field. The rights-based approach as used by these NGOs might differ substantially from how it is internalized and applied by other NGOs in Tamil Nadu or India. There is no validation for certain general truths, the data obtained from NGO interviews in this research is merely explorative. It only holds conclusions that are restricted to the selected NGOs of this study.

Procedure & process

Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix II) with local Tamil Nadu NGOs that are involved with child labour (eradication) took place at their field offices. The questionnaire was adjusted a few times before it could be used and proved of little use during the interviews. These turned out to be more informal conversations about the topic and the NGOs' field of operation. The semi-structured questionnaire was used as a lead to not forget some of the most important points of discussion.

The majority of the conversations took place with the director of the organization, sometimes with additional staff members present as well. Most NGO visits consisted of an interview of about two to three hours and then a field visit to some of their currently running programmes. What became clear in these conversations is that NGO directors are very keen to boast about individual competencies and achievements.

All NGOs visited were enthusiastic to share their experiences and thoughts about child labour (and education) and the (im)possibilities of ending it. Their beliefs about the complex dynamics of child labour and education have also been interesting to talk about. Speaking with these local NGOs about the rights-based approach to child labour and whether, why, and how they use it led to interesting conversations. Often question were bounced back in a rhetorical sense.

The conversations with local NGO staff were conducted without a translator as those spoken with had an average level of English. Despite this, it was sometimes difficult to understand them because of their pronunciation. Another problem that occasionally occurred was their inability to comprehend certain questions. Maybe because they were not framed in a simple way (language-wise), but even with multiple rephrasings, some questions remained difficult to answer for some of the directors. It seemed in many cases that they did not understand the academic grounds from which some of the questions stem. When clarifying and explaining what was meant with a certain question the answer would usually be one of confirmation (e.g. that they agreed) without further explanation. At times it seems that certain NGO staff are only repeating important messages of anti-child labour campaigning documents, without being very able to word their exact or further motives for particular action.

Luckily the reading material provided by the majority of the NGOs made up for lacking clarity during the interview. Some conversations were rather uneasy due to the fact that the spokespersons would be interrupted by office staff and phone calls. For the most part, however, talking with these NGO representatives proved very interesting. This especially in combination with visiting some of their projects. It was positive to be notified that my conversation with one of the NGO directors motivated him to initiate new research into the exact reasons for the malfunctioning of local Governmental institutions that should protect children from labour and ensure their education.

4.3.3 Focus group discussion

It was early in the stage of interviewing the former girl child labourers that the idea of a focus group discussion grew and became more interesting. Particularly because the group structure would allow a more open sphere to talk. It also seemed an opportunity to get more insight into particular matters,

and also altogether a nice occasion where past friends could be reunited. Even though the discussion was initially not carried out for the purpose of new primary data collection, its results can be used and its effects are hopefully carried back into the community by the participants.

By word of mouth invitations were spread, initially to the respondents of the semi-structured interviews, with the request for them to spread the word. Approximately twenty printed invitations were also sent to women who were not easy to reach in another way. The invitations stated that REDS was organizing a get-together including reflection on the vocational skills training and on participants' past- and current lives. In this way parents, family, and husbands would be more inclined to allow (some of) the women to come. A motivational factor for them to come was also seeing old friends over a free meal. Transport for the participants was covered as well.

Sampling

There was no particular sampling for participants of the focus group discussion. The target was to get as many women as possible (40 to 60 individuals) to join. The women had to have been agriculture child labourers in their past and had to have followed the vocational skills training at REDS; these were the only criteria.

Procedure & process

Topic points for the discussion were arranged by taking major components of the thesis proposal: thoughts on child labour and education, experiences as a child labourer with child labour and with education, and current life worlds. Each topic had several questions that were answered as a group (see Appendix V). Everybody was free to speak and answer questions at any time. What we saw was that the most outspoken personalities (probably) sat at the front of the room while those a bit more shy sat in the back. These women would also talk a bit more amongst themselves during the discussion; old friends were reunited and this obviously stimulated some talk!

The focus group discussion took place at the REDS office in Kootturavupatty. The number of participants amounted to twenty-eight (see Appendix VI), some of them came with their children (unable to find anyone at home to look after them while they were out) and some of them with one of their parents. This last because people in the village could otherwise 'speak' if they saw the women going out alone. More than half of the personally interviewed respondents showed up, which in a way might illustrate their willingness to contribute to the research and their interest to hear more or share more about their experiences and the topic of child labour and education (formal schooling before child labour and a vocational skills training after child labour).

The discussion was set in a large room with chairs arranged in rows and a table at the front for Alexander (translating) and myself. In general speaking in a group seemed to encourage participants to speak. Examples and anger were shared, the room filled with each voice telling her story. We worked also by way of raising hands in order to encourage anonymity. This certainly helped to get some information. Questions regarding current problems, especially those related to spouses, did not

ignite too much response. The women seemed hesitant to open up about this. Nevertheless, a few of the women were open about it.

Most of the women were extremely happy to have come to the discussion, and not only because they saw some of their old friends. I was told that the questions were confrontational and very applicable to their situation. That many questions also had a hidden message stressing some child rights, especially the importance of education and the problems child labour can cause in later life. I was told that I had given participants more awareness, especially about the importance of education for *their* children, but also about (inter)national rights concerning education and child labour.

Despite the positive results described above, we must be cautioned for the social desirable answering of participants within the group discussion setting. In a group they might be more encouraged to give answers that seem desirable, this in order to get more recognition maybe from the other participants. Certain issues were also difficult to talk about, especially current problems related to marriage or spouses. This might have been difficult to discuss in this group due to the fact that most of the women know each other somehow, or are even related in a (distant) way. They might have wanted to keep such problems or issues hidden from the other women in order to avoid future conflict at home. While certain things remained easier to talk about in a group, others were easier to talk about in the personal interviews.

4.3.4 Case studies

The participant-orientated case study was intended to enrich this research with more in-depth information and insights. As the tool par excellence of ethnographic research it goes hand in hand with participant observation. The combination of conversation as well as observation provided greater understanding of the lives of individuals, the issues and motives in place, the views, experiences, and dynamics at play. However, the conversation aspect was extremely limited due to the absence of a translator, my extremely limited knowledge of Tamil, and limited knowledge of English by those 'studied'. Nevertheless, through some basic Tamil words and through some children or migrant labourers who knew a little more English, some matters could be asked.

The former girl child labourers were open to share their lives and stories with me, however, this was difficult due to the language barrier and it came down mainly to intensive participant observation and simple questions to find out more about their current lives and worries. The case studies (Appendix III & IV) served to provide a better understanding of how former girl child labourers speak of child labour, education, and their rights. Also more about their specific experiences in life. However, such complex conversations could not take place due to circumstances. This is unfortunate, but it must be realized that setbacks are an intricate component of doing research and finding means to go about them are perhaps more important than the setbacks themselves. This study ceases to be ethnographic in nature, largely due to language-related obstacles.

Sampling

No official sampling was conducted to pick out the respondents for the case studies. During the course of the individual interviews certain women stood out and seemed interesting for a case study. A selection was made of approximately seven of the most interesting and diverse cases, taking into account a possible variety age-wise, whether the location of their homes was relatively nearby the REDS base (for my transport), whether their work as a child could be classified as child labour, whether they dropped out of school in order to engage in child labour, and also taking into account their past and present lives, a variety in their current employment activities, and their openness and willingness to talk. It soon became clear that the most interesting individuals were also the most difficult to spend time with for the purpose of a case study. This due to their personal circumstances and the factors or family relations that made them such interesting cases in the first place.

Two respondents were selected for a case study, to whichever extent one can speak of a real case study here due to the absence of a translator and therefore lacking depth. Senthura Devi, orphaned as a child and currently a proud mother who happens to be the wife of the REDS driver, Murugan, is one of the case studies for this research. Her story should have become clear in the introduction of this thesis, but it will also resurface fragmentally in the research findings. Appendix III gives a complete overview of Senthura Devi. Saghayam is the other individual selected for the case studies. She is in her thirties, childless, and married to a migrant labourer. She spends most days of the year without him; tailoring and making jasmine strings of flower buds. To get a better overview of the two stories, it is strongly recommended to read Appendix III & IV. These cases serve to give a more complete overview of the lifeworlds (past and present) as well as of the experiences of former girl child labourers with respect to child labour and education.

Apart from personal circumstances that made it difficult for Alexander to translate during the case studies, taking a translator to the home of those selected for the case studies seemed too much. This for several reasons: 1- having a man come to the women's house could be misinterpreted by the village community, 2- having one of REDS leading figures come to their house would probably influence the women's usual daily routine even more so than only my presence, devising all means to make him comfortable and provide good hospitality, 3- having a translator present would disrupt my natural relationship with the women, and the trust and fun we shared. These disadvantages weighed out the advantage of having Alex with me as a translator. This is regrettable, however, choices and compromises had to be made at the time to at least find a way to try and do a case study. Good case studies, in my opinion, can only be done by the researcher alone, without possible inhibition due to the presence of a translator. Learning the local language is thus a must for doing such research.

Only two of the seven possible respondents for a case study were selected because of the impossibilities to spend a few days with most of the respondents. The individuals for the case studies also had to understand my position and intentions of the research and be able to bring this out clearly towards any villagers who would want or expect more from me. Saghayam and Senthura Devi also fitted this criteria. They are women who have been more closely involved with REDS and who better understand the purposes of this research and therefore my visit. They were also very keen to receive

me in their homes. Besides this, my presence could not bring them in jeopardy. This could have been the case if I were to have visited respondents who had problems at home (e.g. with her family-in-law or her husband).

Procedure & process

Two case studies were comprised of spending two following days at the women's homes. At a later stage I also spent one night with one of the respondents and her family as they had become close friends. A major restriction for the case studies is the short period of time spent with the individuals. Especially because these days were probably not reflective of what their usual daily lives are like; effort and time was spent to take good care of me.

The days spent with the women for the case studies would last from about 10:00 to 18:00. There would be a lot of participant observation, sometimes some basic conversation, and sometimes a little more conversation with the help of someone who knew a little more English. Days were spent sitting, visiting relatives and neighbours or other villagers, walking around the village area, eating, sharing photos, and trying to share our lives with each other (see Appendix III & IV).

4.4 Limitations

The main limitations for this research and thesis are made up of those related to language. Not speaking the local language (Tamil) had repercussions for the data collection. Carrying out interviews with a translator had limitations in the sense that I lost an extent of control over my research. Trust in the translator's translations and accurate rephrasing of questions and answers was necessary. Though this trust was there and my translator was also fully involved with my research and its intentions, I could obviously never be sure what the exact nature of the translations were. These could therefore have been interpreted slightly differently than initially intended by the respondent or myself.

This is a limitation for the research data. Not being able to communicate directly yourself often requires more patience as well as an acceptance of the situation. This was difficult in situations where I wanted to take a more active stance in the interview or where I wanted to comfort or widen the trust of respondents. Leading your own interview and building up a relationship with the respondent becomes more difficult and also affects the results. Language has been a barrier to take control over my own interviews and to ask exactly what I wanted to know, to take my own time (especially with respondents that were less talkative), and to have more friendly contact with the respondents. The translator must have had an influence on the manner in which the respondents answered questions (answering according to what they thought the researcher and translator wanted to hear); especially since the translator is a man and a leading REDS figure. This has expectedly led to biased answers. The language barrier has also been the first and foremost limitation of the case studies. These were difficult to carry out without a translator, but would have also been difficult to carry out *with* a translator present at the women's home. For such reasons it was difficult to give a more ethnographic shape to this study.

It was expected that respondents of the semi-structured questionnaire might not trust me and find it difficult to talk about the issues presented to them. Despite many extremely difficult experiences and problematic situations, however, the respondents always remained determined to finish the interview and tell their story. The interviews did prove to re-open parts of their lives they had psychologically closed. It might have been a limitation that the interviews of the main target group population for this research were not held at their homes, but at the research base of the REDS office in Kootturavupatty.

At the onset of gathering data there was insecurity about whether the research might be too broad in its focus. This has not proven to be so. I had intended to have a target group of younger women, but having older women as respondents has not come to form a limitation. It was possible to find sufficient former girl child labourers as well as local NGOs for the primary data collection. A limitation with regard to the local NGOs is that often they seemed more concerned with their own proliferation than with the topic of this research. Some of them also seemed to have limited in-depth knowledge and ideas or opinions about child labour issues. Their practical knowledge and experience, however, *was* more elaborate and grounded.

With regard to local NGOs dealing with child labour a major limitation of this study is that it only represents five of these NGOs and in no way captures the great diversity of local NGOs (dealing with child labour) that is assumed to exist. It captures but a small part of the spectrum, a small part of how a rights-based approach is internalized and acted upon by an NGO dealing with child labour issues.

A thesis should not be untouched by some sense of self-reflexivity. Throughout conducting this study I have tried to critically reflect on my position as a researcher, my interviewing skills, and on the results of the data collection itself. I am aware that my inability to often communicate directly, let alone – fluently – with the direct target group formed a barrier between these individuals and myself. This despite the fact that they seemed fond of me. I missed the more personal contact and a more relaxed atmosphere of interviewing, winning trust, and having better control over the interview (for example, asking what exactly seemed necessary and taking enough time to do so).

I was often mistaken for being attached to an external foreign donor agency, especially by the women whom I interviewed. My position not as such, but as a student interested in their past and present lives for the purpose of a research was sometimes difficult to explain. They wondered whether I would come with a solution to their problems with my research findings. Of course I could not guarantee this, but I explained that I hoped my findings would contribute to more awareness in academic fields of interest. All knowledge is disseminated and hopefully leads to more awareness, also for future activities with regard to these (or similarly positioned) women.

Perhaps respondents (the women) also saw me too much as part of REDS because that is where my research base was, where the interviews were conducted, and where I was accommodated and had close contact with REDS staff. This could have made respondents apprehensive to share negative aspects, for example, about the REDS vocational skills training with me.

4.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to come to terms with what has been done in this study in order to obtain the necessary data for this thesis. We first looked at the research setting in Sivagangai District, an extremely arid area largely made up of a rural population involved in the agricultural sector. We saw that children, as part of the family, easily become involved with agricultural labour. We also looked at the research base, the Rural Education and Development Society, a local NGO that accommodated me in my stay and in this research. The last because their vocational skills training programme was followed by the group of former girl child labourers of this study.

The target population of this research is made up of local NGOs concerned with (eliminating) child labour and of former girl child labourers who participated in the REDS skills training upon withdrawal from child labour at a certain point in their young lives. The choice for this last target population has been argued for (as in why former, why girl, and why from the agriculture sector) and the skills training they participated in has been given more attention.

We had a closer look at the methods and techniques used for the primary data collection. This included information on sampling, procedure and process, as well as practical difficulties encountered with respect to these. We have come to learn that the findings of this research mainly derive from twenty-five semi-structured interviews with former girl child labourers and from five (six, if counting an interview by email) semi-structured interviews with local NGOs concerned with child labour. Findings have also been based on information from a focus group discussion and from two case studies that were held. Secondary data collection methods are those of a literature study.

The main limitation experienced to obtain the necessary data for this thesis has been the language barrier. Not speaking Tamil and interviewing with the help of a translator is believed to have seriously hindered keeping control over my research and providing better, more accurate, and especially more in-depth results. To my deepest regret it has been a factor that has kept too big of a distance between respondents and myself as a researcher. Closer involvement would have probably not only improved results, it would have made the entire experience of interviewing these women even *more* enjoyable and memorable.

The following two chapters shall start dealing with the actual research findings and answer the main questions of this thesis with the help of the data acquired through the above described research methods and techniques. They shall also hopefully enrich the reader's knowledge with further insights and dazzle his or her mind with further questions.

5 Listening to what former girl child labourers say

The previous chapter has familiarized us with the methods and techniques of the research conducted for this thesis. Previous chapters have introduced the background information of this thesis as well as of the topic of this research. With this information in mind, we are now able to come to terms with the research findings. The current as well as the following chapter shall deal with these.

In order to gain information on how former girl child labourers speak of child labour and education, one needs to talk directly to them. For this purpose twenty-one detailed interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire. With the data deriving from these interviews and with data acquired from a focus group discussion (twenty-eight participants of the target group), this chapter attempts to portray how former girl child labourers once engaged in Tamil Nadu's agriculture sector speak of their past, present, and future. It attempts to delineate underlying issues and comes up with a representation of their life worlds, experiences, thoughts, and views.

The two case studies (see Appendix III & IV) conducted for this study deserve a closer look for a more complete picture. The information in this chapter has been presented according to theme and is therefore quite fragmented; it does not describe the twenty or so separate lives but comes up with the generalities and peculiarities of these individuals. The case studies provide a more specific look at the past and especially the current lives of two former girl child labourers. Their more complete picture should be enriching in the sense of catching more of the dynamics that go hand in hand with their life story. Despite missing certain depth due to several technical problems in the research, the case studies do illustrate much of what is also said in this chapter. Their reading is strongly advised.

The respondents for the individual interviews are now adolescent and adult women, ranging between twenty and thirty-nine years old. The majority of respondents is under the age of thirty. Their current location varies from 0 to 22km from Kootturavupatty where they followed the vocational skills training at REDS at a certain point in their lives.

The forthcoming chapter presents the gathered data and analyzes how former girl child labourers speak of child labour (and education) in order to find answers to the first main research question of this thesis: *Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations?* The sub-questions belonging to this question are partly answered within the different divisions of this chapter. This is always explicitly mentioned in the text; the sub-questions referred to as 'of this chapter'. It is only in the conclusion of this chapter that the answers to its main research question (the first main question of this thesis) as well as its sub-questions shall be concretely dealt with and answered. The sub-questions of the first main research question are:

1. What are the experiences of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training)?
2. How do former girl child labourers value child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training) and how have they been influenced by both?
3. What notions do former girl child labourers have about the rights of children and what are their interpretations of- and views towards universal rights of the child? Do they resist them for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks *or* do they embrace them as an avenue for emancipation?
4. What do former girl child labourers' interpretations, accounts, valuations, and desires tell us about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour, this especially in the face of this approach being universalistic? Do former girl child labourers *use* a rights-based way of thinking about child labour and education?

The research findings of this chapter have been divided as follows. The first deals with the child labour experience (5.1); the context and conditions for this labour as well as the reality (the experiences) of it. The second (5.2) looks at the experiences of these respondents with participating in a vocational skills training programme upon withdrawal from agricultural child labour. The third set of findings (5.3) concentrates more on the specific views and valuations the former girl child labourers of this study have towards child labour, education (in the form of both schooling and a vocational skills training programme), and universal child rights. This with the aim of finding out whether their views coincide with universalistic (rights-based) approaches to child labour or whether they lean more towards (culturally) relativistic stances. Before dealing with the answers to all the research questions of this chapter (in the conclusion), the fourth set of findings (5.4) shall shed light on the current lives of the former girl child labourers of this study. It shall focus on how these respondents have been influenced by their past; what the impact of child labour and education have been. We shall also take note of their hopes and dreams for the future.

5.1 The child labour experience

In this section we shall first focus on the context that allowed or pushed the respondents into child labour. We will then continue by looking at the actual situation or reality of being a child labour. Taking into account the definitions and (age) boundaries of child labour as inspired by international conventions and declarations pertaining to human and child rights, it suffices to state that all but two of the respondents of this study were child *labourers*. This is said with recognition of the complexity there is to defining child labour and the different standpoints and perspectives it can be viewed from. The classification has not been made following definitions of child labour according to Indian law and regulation because this categorization is believed to be too narrow and therefore insufficient on several fronts.

The two respondents are not strictly categorized as child labourers due to varying reasons. One of them performed labour at the age of eighteen to nineteen years, thus not technically speaking a child. The other performed approximately ten hours of work (domestic and agricultural) within the household setting per week from the age of ten to twelve years. This does not coincide with UNICEF's classification of child labour according to age in relation to the minimum number of exceeded labour hours. It must be mentioned, however, that this classification is not the only one adhered to- nor has it been strictly followed in order to classify child labour in this research. The work performed by the above respondent was light, and the work did not interfere with her education as she dropped out for other reasons. Therefore she is classified in this study as having performed child *work.*

Where the technicalities of the types of labour performed and its settings (e.g. daily hours of labour) differed, there is in general a commonality of engagement in agricultural labour (with exception of one respondent who only performed domestic labour as a child) that has interfered with the children's education at the time and/or has likely been harmful to their health and physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. According to Article 32 of the UN CRC a child has the right to be protected from any work that falls into that described above, but also from any work that is hazardous or economically exploitative. With respect to the latter the difficulties of identifying economic exploitation within the context of family farm labour must be clear. Exploitation has long been overlooked in this setting as it has been directly linked to factory work or wage work only.

Together with case-specific interpretation; categorizing the child labour as within the *agriculture* sector; setting the ultimate age boundary of eighteen to categorize a 'child'; and using UNICEF's classification of child labour, the aforementioned differentiation between labour and work has been made with regard to the former girl child labourers of this study. What cannot be said with certainty is whether the labour they performed as a child was also hazardous. The research findings only illustrate that exposure to high temperatures and the sun for long hours were physically harmful. In none of the cases did the nature of the agricultural labour involve handling hazardous substances (e.g. pesticides), perhaps because of the nature and setting of the agricultural labour in this specific rural area. Many respondents did refer to the labour as something that was mentally difficult and physically *painful*. Perhaps in this light it could be regarded as hazardous, but the term remains difficult to define and apply. This research was not intended to determine the hazardousness of child labour. It has therefore not adopted specific means to do so and little can be said about this. Especially about the psychological hazardousness, as there is little room for distinguishing this through any instruments (which is also considered to be a major weakness of ILO Recommendation No.190, clarifying hazardous types of work primarily by *physical* harm), particularly for someone who does not have a background in psychology. Despite this, an attempt has been made to discover the impact child labour has had on the subjects of this study.

The dataset of former girl child labourers engaged in the agriculture sector has been reduced from an original twenty-one to eighteen interviews; the three respondents not fitting the original criteria for the target group are an individual who was not a child when she performed labour, an individual who performed domestic (and not agricultural) child labour, and an individual who was not

involved in child labour but in child work. The last respondent also *herself* did not conceptualize her labour as having been child labour; the hours were not too long and the work (on the family plot of land and some minor domestic chores within the home) was more incidental and also not considered dangerous, painful, or harmful. The respondent who only engaged in domestic labour as a child, and therefore does not form part of the original data set, illustrates an important aspect with regard to the division of labour in poor rural families. Namely that she – as a child – dropped out of school at the age of fifteen years in order to manage the household and her two younger siblings (who did go to school) so that her parents could go out for (agricultural) wage labour.

The former girl child labourers of this research performed child labour from as young as five years to as old as eighteen years. The majority (67%) continued up to the age of eighteen years (and some beyond) once they started labour as a child. Those who stopped being a child labourer before the age of eighteen did so because they were enrolled in the REDS skills training programme. The average duration of child labouring years for the former girl child labourers of this study is 5,6 years; the shortest duration was one year while the longest was thirteen.

5.1.1 The child labour context

The context in which child labour could take place mainly refers to the household setting and (financial) situation of respondents' families at the time they were child labourers. It also refers to the motives that were at play to engage in agricultural labour as a child and includes experiences with primary and secondary school. This information could give us a better idea of what the contributing factors are for girl children to become agricultural labourers and what particular issues they face with regard to this.

More than half of the respondents are from relatively large families (four or more children), which might be an additional factor leading to poverty situations often described. At the time of becoming a child labourer the majority of the girls' parents had their own small (if lucky 1,5acres, but usually less) plot of land. They mainly cultivated paddy, vegetables, groundnuts, and/or chilli's (depending on what crop suited the area best) primarily in order to sell the harvest at the local market (usually done by mothers). More often than not, however, their land could not provide sufficient income to support the family. The problems pertaining to this were mainly those of an unsatisfactory water supply to irrigate the land.

What becomes clear is that small landholders and their families need to have several different income sources in this area in order to survive. In most cases one or both of the respondents' parents found supplementary income as an agricultural wage labourer, sometimes on their relatives' or neighbours' land. Within each family the children were very likely to either contribute to the family plot of land or become wage labourers themselves. It is safe to say that in their past the household income of the respondents' families was met by a labour contribution of almost all members. Other forms of supplementary income generation included rearing goats (for meat) and taking on cows (for the sale of milk). In one case a father set snares in order to sell rabbit meat, while another father had a goat-butchery for additional income. There was only one case where a father had a supplementary (low-

ranking) job as a Government employee; cleaning offices and providing staff with tea. A gender division in parent employment was not always present, however, mothers were usually more occupied with domestic work, work on the family plot of land, and attending to any animals. A partial explanation for this could be the gender income inequality when it comes to agricultural wage labour (where women used to and probably still do receive less for the same work delivered).

The above paragraph has illustrated the household (financial) situation for the landholding families of the (former) girl child labourers. The context for child labour to occur becomes somewhat apparent. What has not yet been discussed are the landless families. Of the seven respondents with (at least when they were a child) a landless family, six had parents who were involved in agriculture as a means of income generation for the household. The odd one out in this study, as in the only former girl child labourer engaged in the agricultural sector *without* parents being involved in the sector at the time, is the daughter of a petty shop owner. The parents of those girls with a landless family were in all other cases involved in agricultural wage labour on someone else's land. Usually both parents did so, accompanied by some if not all of their children (at times). There was one family that owned a few cows to sell milk for supplementary income, and one family that had herded goats for similar purposes. Besides from this the financial situation of the landless families seems to have been more acute than that of the families owning a plot of land. The 'landless family' respondents described and accentuated their past situation more in the sense of having faced major financial problems, an extremely poor household situation, and a strong deficiency in family income.

Most of the respondents had two parents mutually supporting the household income. Senthura Devi, however, was not so lucky. Together with her two sisters she was orphaned at a young age (see Appendix III). Perhaps one would expect more drunk and useless fathers (women tend to not drink in Tamil Nadu society) adding to the problematic financial situations. With exception of one father who was a drunkard, one father who passed away, one father who had a physical disorder, and another father who had two wives and was himself useless in providing income for the family (he was described as 'lazy' by the daughter), all fathers seem to have contributed for the benefit of the family. Thus, not drastically increasing the burden on their wives and children to do so on their own. None of the respondents mentioned explicitly a dysfunctioning mother. With regard to these matters one cannot make blunt conclusions, however. It must not be forgotten that important data with regard to such issues could be missing due to possible taboos and feelings of shame.

Male domination and female discrimination in Tamil Nadu society has not received much attention in this thesis yet. Nonetheless, its issues will definitely be addressed in the forthcoming. In Tamil Nadu, having daughters or sons usually directly influences the household's financial situation due to the fact that girls earn less than boys if they work and because they are – in general – expensive. They are expensive in the sense that parents want to marry them off (preferably to an arranged spouse) in order to guarantee their future (financial) security, a marriage including the customary bridal dowry. As Kalai Selvi, the second of four daughters from a landless family says: "having four daughters was a liability for my parents and brought lots of insecurity to the household future income and possibilities for marriage".

We have looked into the child labour context from the aspect of the household situation and will continue doing so from the angle of what the actual motives to engage in child labour have been for the respondents. Herein it is safe to say that children form part of the rural family work unit, they are part of a collective family strategy to generate income and survive. Despite the difficulties of agriculture in this part of Tamil Nadu it seems that many rural families have relied and still do rely on it as a means of living. There is currently little other opportunity for employment within this area and the rural exodus of young men to work as unskilled migrant labourers in places such as Dubai where they seem to be exploited for a meagre (albeit higher than any form of employment they could obtain in rural Sivagangai District) wage is unfolding at an extreme rate. The consequences of which for those women and children left behind are yet to be deciphered.

Motives to engage in child labour

The primary motivation that former girl child labourers of this study gave for becoming engaged in agricultural (and sometimes also in domestic household) labour as a child is the situation of the family; that is the situation of income deficiency experienced by the household. Some of the girls had additional motives for doing so, especially where they felt discouraged to continue their education (primary or secondary school). There are two cases where the girls became child labourers for a different reason.

The first girl wanted to work at the time because she was eager to learn the skills of farming (especially within the family's own plot of land, something she did on holidays and in free time – not during school). She also wanted some money of her own (besides giving a portion of the income to her parents) in order to buy things, something that became important when she dropped out of school and could participate in (agricultural) wage labour. The twenty-three year old Nithya was the second respondent to not mention the poverty situation of the household as a motive to engage in child labour. She became fully engaged in child labourer when her parents said 'enough' and made her drop out of school at the age of fifteen. From then on the mainly domestic labour within the sphere of the household, but also her contribution to the family land plot (especially in the rainy season) increased. She was never a wage labourer. Nithya explained that her parents did not pull her out of school due to their economic situation but because:

"As a girl they did not want me to go out anymore. I still wanted to finish my education, but was not allowed to. My younger brother and sister were allowed to finish their secondary education and are currently studying at a college. I am not jealous of them; I was unable to fight against my parents' will, something my sister was able to do"

The above illustrates two aspects of girl discrimination. The first is the restriction of girls to go out (also to school) without the supervision of an elder. This seems to become a major issue for many parents once their daughters have 'attained puberty' (started to menstruate). Girls are then protected from the outside world (from love romances, attacks by men, etc.) by confining them to the home. The second aspect of girl discrimination illuminated here is that a younger brother (and sister) *were* allowed to finish education and are currently even in college. The fact that Nithya explicitly mentioned

that her sister was able to fight against her parents' will (and she was not) in fact illustrates that her brother was most probably never encouraged to drop out of school at all.

Box 5.1 displays some of the main motives of the respondents to have engaged in labour as a child. The income deficiency of the household is mentioned as the most dominant push factor. The girls often wanted to help the family survive and did this through their labour. There are several cases where failure in education has been an additional motive to quit school and start working. More on this in the section on education. As can be seen in box 5.1, the household situation of insufficient income is often phrased in terms of being poor or in poverty. Even though this is not a study on the conceptualization of the term poverty, it is noteworthy to quote one respondent who said:

"I contributed voluntarily to the family plot of land, they were small jobs and the hours were not as long as wage labour hours. The wage labour was done because it made money. We suffered economically but were not in poverty, food was assured, so we were not in poverty. When I failed 9th standard, my father said I should not continue with school and should stay at home. I decided to go for work instead of doing nothing at home. I wanted to have something to do"

The above shows us that the abstract notion of poverty is interpreted as being without food. Suffering economically (probably similar to the experiences of the other girl child labourers) is not poverty according to this respondent. Furthermore, it shows how failure in school often directly leads to dropping out. Whether it is the child's or the parents' choice.

Box 5.1: Main motives to engage in labour as a child

The poverty situation of the household pushed me. I was also not doing well in school; my parents could also not afford resources (e.g. ink pens) necessary for school.

My parents died when I was 10 years old, I lived alone together with my two older sisters. We all did wage labour in order to survive, to create a source of income. We had to; we needed the income to survive.

The main reason to engage in child labour was poverty. We didn't have anything, we were 'helpless' and therefore I had to go to agricultural labour.

The choice at home was either school or labour. Private schooling (with English) was too expensive for my parents. The income was to help my parents.

We ate porridge (poor man's food) only and had to borrow clothes from neighbours. My older sister had been working as a wage labourer (digging wells) to fund my education. I felt guilty towards my sister and decided to drop out and work myself.

My wage would help for the basic need of foods and domestic expenses of the household.

It was an economic compulsion. My parents also didn't find education important.

Many children choose to do labour because what's the use of going to school? Parents do not compel their children to go to school also.

My family was landless, my parents did wage labour, there was no alternative. Where is the way to eat (otherwise)? After my father died I also wanted to support my mother more.

The income from our land was always insufficient; I had to earn in order to compensate this income deficiency so when I was 15 years old I went with my two older sisters for wage labour. Failing 9th standard had also discouraged me to continue with school and to become a labourer.

The only reason was due to poverty that I engaged in agricultural child labour and dropped out of school. 90% was due to poverty, and 10% was that I was also losing interest in school.

The choice

Looking at the motives to engage in child labour, it seems the girls often thought they should contribute to the household income (even drop out of school to do so) and help the family survive through their labour. When asked whether the choice to do so was their own, the majority of the women says it was. There could be bias in this; for under the circumstances and pressure of the family situation the choice that might seem one's own can in fact be heavily influenced by other family members. The agency children have to choose their own course of life seems then, to be a forced choice that is largely decided by their situation. The agency of children becomes a *responsibility* of coping with a (their) situation that holds little 'choices'.

Only one former girl child labourer stated that it was her parents decision she should be engaged in labour as a child. There was a minority who said that the choice was made by their parents as well as by themselves, an extra motive being – in one case – that the girl did not like going to school at the time and "wanted to contribute to the needs of the family" and "could not just sit at home and do nothing". In the case of Poomalar, now twenty-one years old, her mother convinced her to start labouring for the family income by explaining to her the economic situation of the family. Her mother wanted Poomalar's two younger brothers to study; something Poomalar's labour was needed for. The gender preference for schooling boys is apparent here. Another respondent also mentioned that she obeyed her mother's wish for her to contribute to the household needs.

Most of the girls who chose to engage in agricultural labour without being motivated or almost compelled to do so by their parents mainly did so because they themselves felt they had to help alleviate the suffering of the family. It is, however, difficult to judge whether their choice is wholly individual and whether they have not been influenced by their parents in some way. Children understanding the difficulties parents face and consequently deciding to contribute through labour is said by one of the respondents to be 'widely happening'. Things the respondents would say were:

"I wanted to share the suffering of the family, I noticed my parents were having a difficult time financially and so I volunteered to help out by herding our goats daily"

"I had an understanding of the needs of the family situation and therefore contributed" (she cries)

There are a few cases where the former girl child labourers said that it was neither their parents nor themselves that made the choice for them to engage in labour. It was in fact not so much of a choice at all, it was the *situation* of poverty: "my parents didn't need to motivate me, we were in severe poverty. Naturally, we had to go" and "I knew the situation, our food was insufficient. If I worked, we could eat three times a day, so I volunteered". The choice of becoming a child labourer is then not really one that can be *taken*, instead it is more of an obligation for the family to survive. For the orphaned Senthura Devi the choice of labour "was not a choice but a must" as they had no other means to get by or family who could care for them.

What about going to school?

Education, going to school, is part and parcel of the context in which child labour occurred for the subjects of this study. In India primary school runs from 1st to 5th standard, middle school from 6th to 8th, high school from 9th to 10th standard, and higher secondary school from 11th to 12th standard. The costs of going to school, particular situations *at* school, and the performances in education by the girls are factors that influenced whether to drop out or not and to consequentially engage in child labour. Another issue arising with respect to this is the role parents play in the dropping out of their children. Do they want the girls to stop going to school if they fail a standard or if they attain puberty? Do they encourage the girls to continue with school if they show signs of wanting to drop out (which can have multiple reasons) and does the benefit of their children contributing to the family income outweigh the costs of education? Despite the fact that certain questions within this range remain largely unanswered in this study, the following should give a better idea about the experiences former child labours have with the education that preceded their time as a labouring child. It should also give some insights as to how this education was valued by them at the time and the mechanisms that were at play with regard to their schooling vis-à-vis becoming a labourer. Also about whether and how their labour interfered with their schooling.

None of the respondents of this research completed their full schooling (passing the 12th standard). Some of the reasons for dropping out of school are ascribed to a disinterest in studying or

failing a certain standard and therefore feeling discouraged. In the majority of these cases the parents did not compel their daughter to continue, probably due to varying reasons. Nevertheless, in the case of Sundari, it was her parents who gave importance to her education (maybe also because the household income was sufficient) while she herself was more interested in labour. They tried to compel and encourage her to continue her schooling but she refused because of her failure. Now she regrets not listening to her parents and actually works in villages where she motivates children to stay in school, "I know how much I've lost because of dropping out of school, and do not want other children to lose that as well". Other reasons for dropping out are more circumstantial, and include the story of Kaleeswari whose father was a drunkard. She was a good student, but the family situation, the fighting of her parents and her father beating her mother used to occupy her mind and affect her performance in school. She feels bad that her studies were affected by this and says her older brothers dropped out of school for the same reasons. She also says the economic situation of the household was in desperate need of more income (they had running debts), and therefore she also had to engage in more labour.

Other reasons for dropping out included, in one case, parents who just did not want their daughter to go out to school anymore (described previously). Another startling case is that of Poomalar, who developed appendicitis and was operated. At the time she missed her exam that would lead her to the 10th standard. After she recovered she had little interest to re-take the exam and continue with her education. The main reason for this was the effort needed to actually reach the school. They lived in a remote village without direct transport to the village her school was in. They used to leave at 6:45 in the morning and walk to a nearby village to take a bus. They would return at 7:00 in the evening. This was experienced as too much trouble, and therefore she decided to drop out and not take all the effort to re-enter school after her appendicitis. Her performance in school had also been deteriorating, which discouraged her to stay motivated. It made her psychologically upset she says and she decided to drop out for this reason as well. Poomalar's parents also did not encourage her to continue school as they gave priority to her brother's education. The above case of Poomalar illustrates a combination of factors that can lead to school drop-out and child labour.

The bulk of motivation, however, for withdrawing from school was said to be the financial situation of the family and the need for more income (through the girls' full time engagement in labour). The parents either needed their labour contribution and/or could simply not afford to support their children's education. Even though many schools, especially Government schools were (and are) free, the costs of school materials such as notebooks and uniforms, let alone any necessary transport to school – were unaffordable. One of the girls was in a local primary school up to the 5th standard and had to go to a residential middle school afterwards, but her parents could not afford the school fees of 100 INR/month (equivalent of approximately 1,60 Euro). For this reason as well as the general need for labour contribution, she came to herd the family's twenty goats. Dropping out of school due to the financial situation of the household was often combined with other reasons for terminating education. These reasons can be diverse as can also be read underneath in Anbuselvi's description (box 5.2).

Approximately 67% of the respondents managed to pass the 9th and/or 10th standard, the rest dropped out before this. Many of the girls were already contributing through their labour during school holidays, weekends, and in spare time when they were still in school. After dropping out they became more full time labourers, especially in wage labour. There was only one respondent who, after withdrawing from education at the age of fifteen, did not become a full time child labourer but instead immediately followed the vocational skills training programme at REDS.

Box 5.2: Anbuselvi drops out of school to become a full time child labourer

I was in school up to the 8th standard, and had combined schooling with agricultural labour for some years. I worked in agriculture on an irregular basis (during my school holidays and free days); on our family plot of land and sometimes as a wage labourer. My parents were also wage labourers, we were poor. We could not even buy ribbons for my hair. I once cut a neighbours black t-shirt in order to have the compulsory black colour (at school) for my ribbons. The wage labour attracted me and I could earn 20-25 INR/day with it. So I decided to drop out of school and earn money, I not only worked in agriculture but also in weaving mills and in a broom manufacturing unit. Besides the financial factor, there was another reason why I dropped out of school. I had attained puberty and therefore my parents said I could no longer continue school; I had to stay home or work. At the time I wanted to challenge this custom but did not know how to. This custom is no longer practiced anymore today. I was a good student and I liked education.

As said, before dropping out of school to attend to labour, many of the girls combined school with work (agriculture and domestic) at home. This particular work can be considered labour if it, amongst others, interferes with education. Only two respondents mentioned that when they were still in school their labour interfered with their education, one would do agricultural labour before and after school from the age of seven years. In these cases school did not reduce the hours available for labour, but lead to the so-called double burden of having to go to school *and* to do labour (or to the triple burden of school, labour, and domestic work). Some of the respondents were explicit in mentioning that during the combined period of school and work in their young lives, the work never compromised their schooling: "I would work on free days, holidays, and before school started". One woman described how her mother would only allow her to help on their land if she had finished all her homework. Overall, however, most girls dropped out of school at a certain point in order to contribute to the household survival, the hours of labour in fact reducing the hours available for school. It seems then that the costs of schooling did not outweigh the benefits (of labour), at least not on the short term.

<u>How school was experienced</u>

With respect to the first sub-question of this chapter we can say that the education preceding the engagement of the respondents in child labour overall seems to have been experienced positively. Little disadvantages, with exception of a few cases where the location of the school was a bit far and thus more effort (a long walk) and/or money needed to be spent on transport costs, seem to have been associated with the respondents' education. Other problems that came forward in the focus group discussion were those of corporal punishment by teachers, the lack of toilets (and thus open defecation), and the quality of education – especially the motivation by teachers – itself not being good

enough. In general a major positive point about school was being able to see friends and learn new things.

Those doing well in their school performances seemed to have enjoyed it the most; they did not feel they were failing and were therefore encouraged to continue. The only thing they did not like about education prior to child labour is the fact that they had to stop: "I disliked discontinuing" due to the poverty situation at home. Some of the more insecure girls now regret having dropped out, and wished they would have continued despite their failure in school. They wish they would not have gotten so upset about their bad marks. This is also the case with Saghayam who dropped out in 5th standard because she disliked studying and being confined to rules and schedules. Her teachers had tried to convince her to stay in school, saying she would regret this later (which she now does). The findings of this study seem to suggest a marginal role of parents in encouraging their children to continue education in the face of setbacks in their performance. Perhaps an increased encouragement from school and parents for girls (and boys for that matter) to continue their studies and stay motivated could in the future help reduce drop-out rates and also directly linked to that, child labour incidence. This can, however, not be warranted and needs further research. It is not just to put the burden of finding solutions to child labour so much on parents' shoulders; however they do and should play their part. In the case of systems of exploitation and discrimination that go beyond parents, these parents alone cannot be expected to hold the keys to eradicate child labour.

When asked about whether they were discriminated at school most women said they did not experience this themselves. There was one individual who said she was discriminated by her male classmates who made fun of her because they were jealous of her good performance, they simply could not stand a girl being better than them at something. The male attitude of superiority to females is strong in this part of India. This also became apparent in the focus group discussion where the bullying of boys was recognized as a bad experience related to school. While this discrimination is gender-related, Jebamani – a Dalit – shares a story of caste discrimination in school: "there is one incidence that happened in school which still makes me feel very bad. In the 6th standard I was standing in a queue for drinking water at school. All girls were in the queue, and at the water facility there was one tumbler. When it was my turn to drink, I took the cup and just before I brought it to my mouth two girls behind me started beating me and said, 'how do you expect we should drink now, we cannot drink from the same cup because you are a Dalit!'. The headmistress got to know about the incidence and beat the two girls and for punishment they had to kneel on stones outside in the hot sun for forty-five minutes. This is something I will never forget". In the group discussion caste discrimination was recalled to have been present in several occasions. One of the participants of the discussion had dropped out of school because of this reason only. Where in one case teachers might be supportive of the underdog, the case of the orphaned girl – Senthura Devi – illustrates that teachers can also be your enemy (if you are poor for example):

"The teachers used to scold me in front of the whole class because I could not afford to buy books and other school materials after my parents died. They did not know my situation at first, but even when they did they got fed up with me not having the appropriate school materials. It made me feel bitter; education became bitter because of

the teachers. When I failed that year I thought, why not stop school and just make a living through wage labour. This was necessary anyway for our direct survival"

The inability to buy books (due to a lack of money) and other school materials is something that often led to discrimination by teachers; this has also been articulated by the participants of the group discussion.

5.1.2 The reality of child labour

With respect to the first sub-question of this chapter the current section 5.1.2 should give the reader a better idea of the experiences former girl child labourers have with regard to child labour. It shall give us a better notion of the types of child labour, particularly in agriculture, practiced by the respondents. It will also bring some more clarity about what it means to be a child labourer by taking a closer look at lifeworlds. Experiences and valuations of the labour as well as how it made the girls feel when they were young shall be illuminated. The occurrence of direct discrimination faced as a labouring child shall also be explored.

The type of child labour practiced by the majority of girls from landless families was wage labour in the agriculture sector. This wage labour would take place in their own and/or in surrounding villages; wherever there was a demand. In most cases it took place on land owned by non-relatives. The labour included weeding, irrigating, flower picking, transplanting paddy, harvesting groundnuts and vegetables, and loading harvests on trucks. One of the women used to combine this wage labour with collecting and preparing fodder for their five cows. Only one of the seven girls with a landless family background did *not* work as a wage labour, she spent whole days herding the twenty goats her family had.

Those girls whose parents did own land (eleven in this study) combined different types of labour. While still in school the majority contributed to the family land through their labour. However, after dropping out of school all but one of the girls became involved in agricultural wage labour and some also additionally in non-agricultural wage labour (e.g. digging wells and construction work). The girl who did not do wage labour was involved in domestic and agricultural labour in and around the home on a full-time basis. They used to grow groundnuts, millet, and beans. Together with these agricultural products, those families with their own land also grew chillis, vegetables or paddy – depending on what was suitable for their land and whether they had enough water to irrigate. The labour for children herein varied; e.g. weeding, harvesting, and planting. Wage labour usually occurred near their village (in all cases on the land of non-relatives) and many of the girls still contributed to the own family farm labour (also collecting fodder for their cows if necessary) during this time as well. Wages were usually paid in cash; however there were a few cases where wages were paid in measures of groundnuts or rice (which the girl's mother then used to sell for cash at the local market).

Wage labour was done in groups of girls only; there were no boys in the groups. It might be the nature of the particular work that discriminated in gender, it might be because boys were more often than girls privileged to go ahead with education, or it might be because boys and girls were kept

separately for 'safety' purposes – mainly to avoid any (love) relationships. The reasons for this remain unexplored in this study, the aforementioned is merely speculative. The focus group discussion participants stated that boys were usually in school or engaged in other types of child labour (mainly in factories). The discussion also showed that of twenty-eight participants none had been involved in bonded (agricultural) labour as a child.

Life worlds

A typical day of the girl child labourers started early in the morning at around 4:30 or 5:00. It would then include domestic chores in the house such as cleaning and cooking before having breakfast. Some had to fetch water, which was often a long walk there and back. At around 8:00 the wage labour day would start in the fields and lasted up to about 2 or 3 pm, with a half hour break in between. Once at home the girls would usually have a short rest (some would watch television if they had a TV, some would read a newspaper, others would simply rest) before doing more domestic work (cooking especially, but also fetching water and cleaning), having dinner, and going to sleep at around 21:00. There was often a combination of domestic work at home and agricultural work (either at home or on a wage basis outside the home) among the respondents; the total number of hours, the circumstances, and the interference with school making it child labour.

The hours of wage labour were usually around six or seven hours per day, however one respondent used to be forced (by her wage labour employer) to work ten hours daily with just a half hour break. Before attending to this labour she would have done domestic chores at home from as early as 4 am, and *after* coming back from the fields she would still have more chores to do at home. Underneath three different respondents share a typical day as a child labourer. The first is a girl who herded the family's goats all day; she was never a wage labourer. The second is a girl who combined agricultural and domestic work at home with wage labour. The third describes how labour was combined with school:

"I would wake up at 5:00 and do some domestic work and collect fertilizer (dung) with my parents. Then I would graze our goats at 9:00 until 18:00. I would take some lunch with me or receive some food from the villagers I came across near the fields where I grazed the animals. But I was always hungry. When I returned home I would help with domestic work and eat before going to sleep. These tasks included washing, cooking, and fetching water for all the goats – this was a big task"

"I used to get up around 6:00 to fetch water for at home and do some washing, take the cow for some grazing, and then go to work (wage labour). Sometimes I would take the cow with me to the labour site and it would graze there. After finishing the work on the fields I used to collect grass for the cow and go home around 14:00. There I milked the cow (milk was brought to a milk corporation and sold there) and my mother always did all the cooking"

"When still also attending school I got up at 4:30 and collected fodder and water for the cows, then I assisted my mother with agricultural labour on a relatives' land nearby. After that I would go to school at 9:00 and come home at 17:00, then I would fetch more water and do some domestic chores to help my mother. When fully a child

labourer, the routine would be similar but instead of going to school I went to a wage labour site (agriculture). At that time I also still did domestic work at home"

Experiences and feelings

The former girl child labourers were asked what the positive and negative experiences with regard to their labour were. It often seemed they felt that they were stating the obvious when they talked about this. They usually found it difficult to elaborate about the experiences. The table on the next page shows a summary of some of the most important things said about what the girls liked most and least about the labour in agriculture when they were a child. Amongst the most positive attributes of the labour was the income. This was a good thing as it enabled them to help their family (financially), which made them feel happy and/or proud at the time. Some of them also felt they had some economic power of their own; they could now occasionally buy themselves something. A few women found the labour enjoyable or said the labour made them feel more responsible as well, preparing them for married life, for example. Nevertheless, even though their labour supported their family, it was usually experienced as a *necessity*, "it just had to be done" to contribute to the household income. One woman mentioned the income was a positive attribute, however even this was not considered a positive thing: "no education and their future is gone". The second most frequently mentioned positive aspect of (wage) labour was working together as a group (of girls) and spending time together; the talk and gossip.

The two most negative aspects of labour were said to be 1- missing out on education and 2- the painful experiences of hard work under difficult climatic conditions; the hardship. Employers (in wage labour) were often pushy and pressurized the girls to work, work, work with little time for rest; only a thirty minute lunch break in a day's work of six to eight hours. The nature of the work was painful, something a great majority of the respondents stated. A harmful aspect of the labour was the sun – especially causing bad headaches – and the high temperature (reaching forty degrees Celsius in summer), but also the innate nature of agricultural work:

"The sun was my number one enemy, but I would also have pains in my body and on my hands and fingers"

By most, especially the wage labour, was not enjoyed on the whole. The girls wanted to contribute to the family income, but the agricultural labour was difficult and too much of a pain. For some this suffering weighs heavier in valuing their child labour (especially in retrospect) than the fact that they were helping their parents financially. For others, entangled in a poor financial family situation, it did and still does not: "the physical pain…but then you think of the family situation and don't feel it so much. You learn to ignore the pain". The majority of former girl child labourers speak of the hardships of child labour; of the physical pain of the work under difficult climatic conditions and of the mental pain of missing out on education and further chances in life.

Positive attributes	**Negative attributes**
Working as a group during wage labour, talking (and	Being amongst a group of girls in wage labour there was

gossiping) with friends while working was fun and made time pass quickly.	sometimes gossip and quarreling amongst us.
The income was positive, I felt happy/good I could help my parents with the household income through my labour. I felt proud to come home with either money or measures of rice. I can say nothing good about it, only the food and money it brought for the younger ones (her sisters). I would have rather gone to school but this did help the family. Earning an income helped my mother and gave me some economic power to keep some small amount for myself.	The labour was difficult, I would come home tired and I did not look nice. The labour was often physically painful. This was the worst aspect of the work. The sun was tiring and physically painful. At bedtime I'd realize what happened to my body, my head and neck would be painful and I would sometimes feel like I had a sun stroke. It was suffering, daily. The sun was painful (especially during wage labour, because on our own land I would have more breaks). Physically your body would suffer badly, lots of pain.
I did not mind the labour as I also continued my schooling besides contributing through labour. My earned wages were used to pay for my school fees.	Being pulled out of school and doing labour (domestic and occasionally agricultural) was more disappointing than being able to help the family. I do not feel good about missing out on my education.
If I would not have gone to labour and not finished education I would have been alone at the home and this would have then had a negative psychological impact on me, therefore I liked the labour.	There was much insecurity for girls, my parents used to worry when I would go out for labour. Nothing ever happened, but they were afraid something would happen and that the community would think and speak badly of us.
The labour on our own plot of land was o.k., the wage labour was worse.	I was often hungry.
I enjoyed the whole day. I would wake up early and go to work fresh.	The rules (wage labour) were strict, the break was only 30 minutes and we were always forced to work until late. If we needed to go home an hour earlier for any reason, the employer would not let us go. We could only go on one condition, and that was not getting any pay for that day. The employer would never allow you a minute of rest, they could be pushy.
The labour was a compensation for me and my parents for not being in school.	
Being able to support the family income, having that responsibility – prepared me for adult life.	
It was a preparation for married life as well, it taught me how to be a good wife and contribute to the family income as well as doing the domestic work.	

Learning more about agriculture.	
I enjoyed helping my mother on our own plot of land: time should be spent usefully.	

Being a child labourer was a painful experience for most respondents in the sense of missing out on education (see box 5.3) and in the sense of the physical pains of labour. It made them feel good, happy, and sometimes proud in the sense of being able to help their family cope in turbulent financial times. In general the respondents seem to have justified or accepted their history of child labour as something that was necessary to help their family survive. They still see little other possibilities or choices if they were in the same situation again today. In acute financial need a direct contribution to family survival through a child's labour seems to carry more logic than making sure the child goes to school. If the costs of school cannot be paid for there seems to be little choice for parents but to have their children work for the family income.

Box 5.3: Feelings as a child labourer

The child labour I did made me feel very bad, it was the worst job. If you don't like a child, send her to do goat herding. It used to feel hungry and it was physically very tiring. From 9:00-18:00 there was no moment of rest, no single moment to sit down, as the goats were always everywhere and I was running from one place to the other in order to control the 20 animals. This in the hot sun, was extremely tiring. I did feel happy that I was able to provide support to the family. Everybody contributed as much as they could, and it made me feel proud personally. But this did not weigh against the fact that it was physically too much and that I missed out on my education.

Looking back, most respondents have great regrets about their situation but "it is due to the family situation that children have to go and work for income". Many feel they had no choice or option at the time; they were forced by their situation. They feel bad, sometimes deeply sad, that they missed going to school:

"Had I gone to school and studied I would have a better position. The labour was a survival strategy, it was only for income, there was no other way"

Some of the respondents have explicitly mentioned that the labour was not only a physical but also a *mental* strain – "a pain for the body and mind" – making them feel sad about doing things they thought they should not be doing (working so hard in agriculture at such a young age) and about missing school. While some of the women have very firm stances towards their child labour past (for example: "it was very difficult as a child and I blame parents who send their children to child labour. It's a crime which should not be forgiven"), others have more mediated thoughts on their own experience: "children may contribute their labour voluntarily but it should not be compelled by their situation and parents. I felt o.k. about my labour, I enjoyed it, it was my own decision. Despite this fact, it *was* difficult and because of child labour you lose three things: 1- parental love and affection (they see you as a labourer earning for the family, and not as a child), 2- your health and 3- your education". Despite the abovementioned the respondent felt more positive than negative about her time as a child labourer. This was rare amongst answers of respondents; probably her valuation is

mainly attributable to the fact that she *wanted* to work and consciously chose for it herself. The three things she mentions a child loses through labour are, however, very sharply articulated.

Experiences with respect to child labour seem to primarily be related to the poor financial situation at home. Some women gave the idea of being completely overtaken by poverty to do what they did at the time. Feeling sad about the labour was not in question; it was feeling sad about their entire situation, their poverty, and their inability to go to school. They believe child labour should never be taken as that, but as a contribution in the form of work to the family income. It is a dire need and becomes a responsibility of those children whose labour is part of a collective family strategy to survive:

"Child labour made me feel happy in the sense that I saw my friends. The group work was always enjoyable; I could talk to my friends. Also the fact that I supported my family made me feel good. However, the pain of labour was dominant. This was the most negative aspect of child labour. The labour did not make me feel sad; it only made me feel pain"

Coming back to the first sub-question of this chapter, one can conclude that the participants of this study experienced and felt more negative about their child labour than positive. When it comes to feelings and experiences, the negative attributes outweighed the positive ones according to the majority. This especially in retrospect. Despite this, however, the factor of being able to support family survival was decisive for them to engage in labour as a child. And it still would be if circumstances of financial deficiency in the family were similar again, they believe. Under difficult financial circumstances the respondents felt happy they could help their parents; their labour was a remedy that helped fight poverty. Overall, however, the greater majority did not at all enjoy the experience of child labour.

Discrimination

One would expect child labourers, especially those in wage labour, to face lots of discrimination within their child labour situation – especially from their employer. One would also expect that these poor children might face discrimination within their community. What this study suggests according to the data, however, is that there was little direct discrimination or abuse. It is expected that these findings are slightly skewed due to the sensitivity (taboos on caste and gender discrimination) of the issue, but also due to the fact that much discrimination might have gone unnoticed. The last is said especially with regard to gender discrimination but the same could hold for any discrimination related to religion, caste, or to social and economic positions.

Girls in Tamil Nadu society in general have an inferior position. Being borne into a female unfriendly social environment might make one accustomed to gender discrimination; more insensitive to notice it. "The gender distinction is introduced early in life. In India, for instance, in the process of learning to be women girls are taught to accept and internalize dominant conceptions of femininity and of the place of women in society" (Kakar 1981 in Nieuwenhuys 1994: 23). The unwanted position of girls goes hand in hand with the dowry costs that accompany their marriage. Though many of the

women did not directly express feelings of gender discrimination, the very essence of their position was sometimes characterized in their name: Pothum Ponnu meaning 'do not want another daughter' comes from a family of four daughters and one son while Kaleeswari meaning 'God of destruction' is the only daughter in a family of five children. Their unwanted position speaks for itself; it is all in the name.

The greater part of the respondents said they faced no discrimination as a child labourer; neither from their employer nor from their community or family. Those that *were* discriminated by their employer never spoke of physical violence. Their employers would scold them if they arrived late, if the job was not done properly, if they did not work hard or quick enough, or if they asked for a break. Discrimination by employers *was* said to be there. Some girls would be selective in where to go for wage labour, picking sites of relatives or friends in order to avoid discrimination and guarantee a good employer. During the focus group discussion the women did mention that as girls they had a submissive role and were often forced to work hard and pressurized to work beyond their limits because "for women it's o.k. to do hard work". This was said to be a generally accepted attitude at wage labour sites.

From the community there was little discrimination according to the respondents, sometimes a little nagging here and there which could be ignored. One of the girls was scolded by her school friends because they were angry that she dropped out. Another was occasionally teased by some girls in her village because of her caste. For the most part there was no discrimination because "people don't. In every home the situation is like that". In the villages many children used to work in agriculture. One woman said that this situation has changed today in the village where she lives: "now children who work are often discriminated, the mindset in villages is changing. People think let my children go to school and not suffer like me. It's because their position has changed as well (probably financially)". It was only Senthura Devi who was really discriminated by her community once she was parentless together with her sisters:

"Our inability to lead a normal life was looked down upon. Rich people treated us like beggars, people looked down on us. At temple festivals we would have bad clothing, some people would look down on us and say mean things"

5.2 Participating in a vocational skills training programme

All eighteen women who fit the target group criteria of this study completed a six month training programme at REDS in Kootturavupatty between the years 1987 and 2006. For the most part (66%) they were eighteen (or younger) when they participated. The youngest was eleven years old. Her parents were so desperate to get her into the training that she lied about her age in order to get enrolled (the training was for girls a little older, say from about fourteen years of age). She regrets lying at the time and cried while she explained this, her story illustrates her desperate situation to grasp an opportunity to escape some of the hardships she was facing in life at that time.

At the moment of enrolling in the REDS programme, the period of the respondents' past involvement in *child* labour ranged between one and thirteen years with a roughly estimated average of about five years. The girls who were above eighteen years old when they took part in the vocational skills training at REDS were child labourers until eighteen years, afterwards setting forth the same or similar labour but no longer as a child (as defined according to age). The oldest one was twenty-four years old.

Of those girls who followed the training below the age of eighteen, a small majority continued to do agricultural (wage) labour once they were home again, usually combining it with other income generating activities (mainly tailoring, which was learned at REDS) and domestic chores. The little alternative options of employment in the area are probably the cause of this; almost everybody lives through practicing agriculture (either on own or other peoples' land) here.

The current section (5.2) shall give attention to the experiences with regard to following this type of education and with regard to withdrawing from child labour. During the length of the training programme only a minority of girls fully withdrew from child labour in the sense that when they were home during leave days they did not do any agricultural labour: "on leave days my mother said I did not have to work, I was there (at home) on holiday and I was already working enough during the week (learning a skill) she said". Some of these girls only worked if they wanted to. Despite some exceptions, most girls did *not* withdraw fully from child labour when they were participating in the skills training. When they were home during holidays they would have to do any necessary work. Some would do domestic labour, some helped out on the family land plot, and some had to go for wage labour (often it was also a combination of the above). Those who only partially withdrew from the labour (because they were following a training at REDS and did not engage in child labour when they were *there*) either wanted – themselves - to contribute to the family needs when they were at home during holidays or their parents obliged them to contribute:

"I still contributed; I could not sit at home and watch my mother and sister struggle. On leave days during the six month REDS training I wanted to prevent my mother's suffering by going to wage labour with her"

"My parents would argue that I had good food and good rest at REDS and could therefore help out while I was with them during holidays"

5.2.1 Withdrawing from child labour

As has become clear from the above, despite the skills training, child labour continued (after having followed the skills training) for a small majority of those girls who completed the programme below the age of eighteen years. One can conclude that they did not fully withdraw from agricultural child labour after the training. The vocational skills training not being able to eliminate child labour in this sense, but able at least to provide other income generating skills that the young girls could practice. Widening their opportunities of employment; giving them a tool for self-employment (especially tailoring) that could be practised from the safety of the home.

While still a child labourer most of the respondents got to know about the vocational skills training programme at REDS by word of mouth: some girls from their village had followed the training and advised them to go. In two cases a father was informed about the programme in a similar way and subsequently advised his daughter to go as it would be useful according to him. The fact that the training was a cheap option (no costs for feeding them and free short-term education for their daughter, increasing her income generating capacity) for the fathers might also have been considered, but this was never explicitly mentioned. Other respondents got to know about the training through their neighbours; REDS staff members living in their village; or through a co-worker in wage labour. Some living near the location of the training obviously soon got to know about it. A respondent of the first batch of the training programme (in 1987) came to know about it because REDS came to their village to inform parents and girls about the programme and selected participants there. There were always many applicants for the programme; one of the women interviewed said she had to apply twice before she got enrolled. Of course, the NGO had to pick out the neediest cases for each batch.

When asked what was needed to make their full or partial withdrawal from child labour - thus the participation in the vocational skills training – possible on the part of the household situation, most women recalled the family had to make adjustments. These were mainly minor adjustments as the financial burden of one of their children disappeared and there was more prospect of her earning more money for the family once she would complete the training. One could say that the girls' support was missed by the family, but in a large majority of the cases this was compensated by other family members or by other income earning means. This was the case in the situation of the now twenty-five year old Pachaiammal:

"*In order to make it possible for me to stop labour and start the training, my parents adjusted by taking on one cow which was used for selling the milk to a corporation. This compensated the income I otherwise brought in to the family through my labour"*

Some families had to adjust their expenses in order to cope, but on the whole the adjustments were minor and not extremely difficult according to respondents. Having the girls at REDS obviously also *saved* the families money, which made parents happy. The main income earners of the family continued to work and thus the household could cope without big adjustments. Only two women said explicitly that the lack of their financial contribution (when they were at REDS) was a problem for their family, but even so they managed somehow:

"*My mother and older sisters suffered a lot, more than when I was still at home, in order to make up for the income that I used to contribute. But they still encouraged me to learn the skill (tailoring) at REDS. My mother and sister had to work extra hard, their suffering made me feel very bad"*

Motives to participate

The motives to withdraw (even partially or temporarily) from child labour and participate in the skills training programme vary but are related and often combined. The majority joined the training from

their own interest; a few were encouraged mainly by their parents (for different reasons) but not forced by them and made their own choice to join. At the time many of the girls saw the training as the best alternative (and possibility within the area) to being a child labourer and as the second best alternative after education. The training being free was something several respondents mentioned as an important motive to join. This is also expected to be a factor that made most parents not discourage their children to join. Moreover, it was an opportunity to not be in the sun anymore, "I wanted to learn a skill efficiently, especially tailoring, in order to earn a living once I was home again by working from the home and not in the sun".

Another motive that was expressed for participating in the training programme was that it was a safe place. Besides parents arguing this, some of the girls themselves felt this as well. This was the case for Senthura Devi, but also for Pothum Ponnu who said she had always wanted to learn something, but was never able to afford to do so. The skills training was an opportunity as it was (besides a registration fee of 150 INR) free of charge. She also liked the fact that the training was multi-faceted, so not only learning skills, but learning many things important in life. The motivation was also that there were other girls to hang out with. And "there was safety". Being a girl of a low caste, the male (especially of higher castes) domination over females (of lower castes) is tough. They are considered 'cheap' and often scolded and made fun of by these boys. They are unable to report this anywhere as they have no strong position as a member of a low caste. Here we see gender discrimination and caste discrimination as a combined force. REDS provided Pothum Ponnu a feeling of safety within this context; her basic needs were met and she felt protected.

As we can see from Pothum Ponnu's account, the attribute of learning something (again) was also a decisive motive to join the training. In this study this was in fact the most frequently mentioned motive; many girls had the desire to learn something more in life and most of them had a special interest in tailoring (or other skills within the programme). The prospect of better income earning opportunities later in life is directly linked to this, as also expressed by the respondents as a very important motive for participating in the training. Learning a skill was believed to give them more dignity and independence in life, help them be self-supportive; it would enable them to have control over their work, and was considered to be more sustainable than wage labour. The above is worded, also in combination with other motives to participate in the skills training, as follows:

"I wanted to learn this skill (tailoring) because it would be very valuable; one sari blouse (sewn in about 30 minutes) would make the same amount of money as a whole day of wage labour in agriculture"

"I was attracted to the REDS programme because I did not enjoy child labour and wanted a way out. I also always had an interest for sewing. I cried and cried at home because of the labour and told my parents I wanted to learn something and go to REDS"

"I wanted to join so I would not have to be in the sun and do hard work, I could sit inside and learn a skill that was also suitable in later life for inside work. The skill would later provide more income than work in agriculture"

"A girl should be self-supportive, this is necessary. You must learn a skill for your own life, to satisfy your own needs so that you do not have to ask anybody else for anything. It gives you dignity"

The story of Jebamani who attended the skills training at the age of twenty-three, so not technically speaking from a direct situation of *child* labour, is illuminated here as she offers a motive to participate in the training that is a little different from those of other respondents. Jebamani was always interested in learning a skill, but even more so after her husband left her. He was torturous and did not allow her to learn a skill, nor did he provide the needs for her. After labour as a child she got married to him and came to work in a chemical factory where she lost all her hair. The situation was bad, the marriage did not work, and after managing to get a divorce she wanted to follow the training so that she could later provide for herself by means of more reasonable work. It would also fulfill her desire to learn more (skills) in life.

Supported or discouraged?

As has already become clear it is not and has never *been* unusual for girls to be involved in (agricultural) labour in this part of India. In this light it would be interesting to find out whether there is any discouragement, originating from feelings of jealousy, from within communities towards girls who participate in a skills training. Nothing of this can be concluded from the data of this research. There is no mentioning of individuals within the community who discouraged the girls to get involved in the training. The women say their communities seemed to support them, at least they did not show their disapproval. There was no case of explicit support of community members to the girls either. Tailoring is a widely accepted skill and profession for women and is very much appreciated in Tamil Nadu. Friends of the girls were all supportive of their choice to participate in the REDS programme.

All but one of the respondents said their parents encouraged them in the decision to take part in the training at REDS. Five of the girls were heavily motivated by their parents, especially by their mothers, to join the training. One of the mothers argued that it (tailoring) would be a good support to the family later. A father motivated his daughter to go because she would not only be learning skills, but 'life' in general. Parents were usually happy that their daughters would learn a skill, that they were in a safe place, and that the training was free:

"My parents were convinced that herding the goats was not as suitable for me as the REDS training would be. They thought the vocational skills training would be a better solution. They got to know about the REDS programme because REDS was one of the first NGOs in their area and it caught their attention. My parents sent me here; they approached the REDS staff in tears. The fact that it was free, that REDS would provide decent nutrition and training was a major motivation as they were in poverty and could not afford any other type of education for me. Also my parents thought it was safe for me as an unmarried girl to go to REDS, I would be safe there. Now spinsters have more freedom and braveness to travel alone. After I completed the training, my two younger sisters also did the skills training at REDS, the holistic approach and focus on tailoring skills appealed to them and our parents"

Some parents were more indifferent, "if it's your desire, you go" but supported the girls in the sense of at least not *dis*couraging them to go. Male domination appears again when one of the respondents

states that both her parents encouraged her to do the training, but that her mother simply did so because the girl's father did; "my mother accepts everything my father says".

In order to find out whether those girls with parents who supported them to join the vocational training programme were also the girls with parents who did not want them to do any labour when they were home during holidays (during the six months of the course), a comparison was made. This did not reveal a strong argument for the above relation. Of the respondents who explicitly mentioned that their parents encouraged their desire to follow the training at REDS, a very small majority said they did *not* engage in child labour during leave days (full withdrawal from child labour). In two of the latter (eight) cases did parents strongly advise and initiate the idea of their daughter going to REDS. The fact that almost all parents supported the choice of their daughter to follow the vocational skills training at a certain point, but that a great part of these parents *did* want their children to do labour while at home on leave days might point to the extreme needy financial situation of the family. It could also point to the fact that parents consider children helping out at home (to this extent) a normal way of life. This is all speculation as the interviews held did not carry this particular depth. It is only just to conclude here that approval and encouragement of the skills training (by parents) does not consequentially mean disapproval of the agricultural (wage) and domestic labour contribution of the child at home. This above is said taking in mind selection bias. Girls whose parents did not allow them to participate in the training (and thus did *not* join) were not interviewed.

In general one can say that the girl child labourers of this study were supported by their community, their family (especially parents), and by their friends in their participation in a vocational skills training. They were not discouraged, at least. This does not apply to Kaleeswari, however, she forms the exception with regard to that in this study. Her father was not willing to let her come to REDS, he thought that "as a girl you must be at home, doing nothing". Which is again a form of gender discrimination; a gender-biased belief of what girls should and should not be doing. Kaleeswari's mother, however, was happy that her daughter could join the skills training. Because Kaleeswari had dropped out of school her mother thought she must at least learn a skill that she could use later in life. Her mother convinced her husband (with the help of Kaleeswari's brothers), in the end, that their daughter should attend the training. Maybe an illustration of resistance against gender discrimination, in this case by a mother. Where one of Kaleeswari's parents initially did not support her joining the REDS training programme, he *did* support it in the end. This leads to the given that all of the girls of this study who had parents at the time, received their parents' support for participating in the training. Nevertheless, one with more encouragement than the other.

5.2.2 Experiences

Former girl child labourers who participated in the residential vocational skills training programme at a certain point in their lives were asked to share their experiences about the programme. The hereby following shall help answer the first sub-question of this chapter. With regard to this question we have already looked at the experiences of child labour as well as the experiences of education in the sense

of formal schooling. We now look at the experiences of education in the sense of a vocational skills training.

The respondents were first asked what skills they learned. All respondents mentioned tailoring which was also the main skill taught in the programme; from trousers to different models of sari blouses and from 'nighties' to dresses. Bag making (from plastics, wire, palm leaf, and banana fiber) and plastic wire ornament (e.g. flowers, vases) making were mentioned by almost all respondents. Hand embroidery and mat weaving were mentioned less, the latter expectedly because it was dropped in the programme after it became apparent that most participants had little interest in it. Any of the general skills such as personal hygiene and general health practices, cooking, life skills, etc. were hardly ever explicitly recalled by those interviewed. Only when asked did they answer shortly with "yes, that also". This could be because the interview question might have made it seem like they should mention the vocational skills only. It could also be because these general skills were never explicitly taken up in the curriculum and came more with a learning through living approach. A very small minority said they also learned discipline, environmental awareness, and gardening or agricultural technicalities. The last because they sometimes had to work in the REDS garden in spare time. In relation to personal hygiene – the information on how to keep the body clean, especially the procedure of disinfecting and washing pieces of cloth during menstruation (sanitary napkins were either hardly available or unaffordable) – the women often said that it was only at REDS that they learned about this. When Sundari, now thirty-one years old, was asked whether she could not have learned these things from her parents (mother) she said: "their contribution would not be as effective, your mother might teach you something, but parents are ignorant to many things and also have bad habits (e.g. considering hygiene, especially in relation to menstruation)".

All participants of this study said they enjoyed the training at REDS and found it useful. Their experiences with this form of education are very positive. It, however, serves to be a bit wary of such remarks due to the close relation they might have seen between the NGO and (myself) the researcher. The translator was also one of REDS' leading figures and the interviews were held at the REDS office in Kootturavupatty. The above makes it highly likely that respondents gave socially desired answers or felt afraid to mention anything negative and be critical about the programme in general or about its contents. This must strongly be kept in mind in the further reading below.

What was liked most and what least?

In general, when asked what was liked most and least about the training, many of those interviewed said they liked everything and disliked nothing. The question led to some shyness among respondents and a hesitation to elaborate sometimes, especially concerning negative aspects of the training.

Things liked most about the training were learning the tailoring, living as a group, learning good behavior - especially discipline, and learning something useful (income-wise) for the future. Living, learning, and working as a group and spending time together was something widely appreciated by respondents: "it was such a wonderful time in my life, we were like a big family" and "I was happier here than at home, I wanted to stay here and live with the girls". The group feeling,

interactions, and friendships; the love and care for each other were greatly valued. Learning good behavior or discipline is something, surprisingly, most girls liked about the training (also at the time). The systematic way of life was appreciated, as was learning the life skills and health issues for girls and the ability to control yourself and have discipline and patience. Learning something useful was something that was liked about the training and primarily came down to having an alternative income generation activity in the future, something that could sustain their (families') lives. When Kalai Selvi completed the training her parents expected her to contribute to the household income through her skills. They motivated, and encouraged her (as well as her sisters later) to do the training in the first place:

"(…) advantages were that we no longer had to borrow clothes (sari blouses) from neighbors because now we could afford our own because of my tailoring. I earned a good income and felt proud. Also this income made it possible for me to help finance further schooling of my two younger sisters in a residential school (after which they also dropped out in 8th standard and joined the same REDS training). They dropped out because their school had no higher standards and because of the poverty in the household it was no longer possible to pay for their education. I have also been able to guide my sisters in their tailoring; this is another benefit of my training"

Transferring the knowledge learnt, especially tailoring skills, was also valued as useful and a positive factor of the training. Additional most liked things about the vocational skills training are summarized in box 5.4. The training was experienced positively because it gave the girls things but also because it took certain things *away* from them – namely, the hardship of working out in the hot sun. They could now be inside for the largest part of the day, learning a skill that could later in life also be practiced – to earn a living – from inside the home.

Box 5.4: Additional things liked about the REDS training

- It was a quiet place
- It was a learning 'environment'
- There was lots of fruit to eat
- There was love, care, affection, and support from the staff
- It had a holistic approach
- Leadership role taught leadership, responsibility, and organization qualities
- No longer being in the sun
- Being away from the daily confrontation with the struggles and worries at home; feeling freed from these worries
- It made girls less shy

Things liked least about the training at REDS were mat weaving, which was later also scraped from the programme. It required too much patience and was not interesting; many of the girls also felt they would not be weaving mats in their future. The respondents also said they did not like it that the training was only six months (it should have lasted about a year); this was usually considered too short a time period to learn enough. They would have liked to learn more modern dress types and models in order to increase later income generation possibilities. Further things marginally mentioned in this category include being homesick at times (even though the group would comfort these

individuals), not liking cooking, not liking the fact that some girls were negative and disobedient, and not liking that the rules were quite strict. A lot more of the last was expected (because REDS' current residential programme for school going brick-kiln and scavengers' children seems very strict), but either the girls did not find it *very* strict in general, they *liked* the fact that it was strict (it made them learn discipline), or they disliked it but were hesitant to express these matters. It could also be the case that the training was genuinely experienced as very positive with little negative aspects to it. The feeling of sadness (experienced by many) upon completion of the programme could argue for this. However, the reasons for this sadness could also just be missing the group life and girlfriends. Nevertheless, for a few of the respondents the thing they liked least about the training was the fact that it ended: "parting was the saddest day in my life". In general, from the data, this study can conclude that the experiences of education in the sense of a vocational skills training programme are positive.

Feelings during the training

At the time of following the programme all girls felt good, happy, proud, and/or confident about following the skills training (see box 5.5 for an impression). Most said they felt happy at that time because they were learning something (that would stay with them all their life), they would become self-dependent, the training cheered them up, it made them feel they were part of something, and it made them feel safe. The latter is something a respondent who had a drunken father stressed in particular. She was the only out of eighteen who said she sometimes felt worried at that time (when she was residential at REDS) because of the situation at home. Some of the girls felt happy because they were learning for free, others because they were finally able to learn tailoring (which they desired before) or simply because they were no longer out on the fields doing hard work in the hot sun.

Box 5.5: How did the training make you feel?

I felt happy, proud, and more confident. The same hours I would spend tailoring in the future would make more money than the same hours of agricultural labour. More than double the amount. I was happy to learn a skill and also felt good about not being at home and facing the problems there.

I was very happy the training offered me the chance to be relieved from the physical strains of child labour, I was happy to throw it off.

I thought that the skill would help me in my future. I felt happy as I had always been attracted to sewing (machines). I wanted to be independent in the future, and the skills training could help me with that. I don ￼ want to be at the mercy of somebody, I want to stand on my own legs, be proud, and earn my own money. I did not feel bad that my family missed my labour because I knew that I could earn more for the family household once I would have learned the skill.

It made me feel very good; I liked the environment and the entire experience. I felt proud; I was doing what I wanted and using my opportunities.

The training made most respondents feel proud of themselves because they now could 'own' a skill and learn things. It often made them feel more confident as well: "I did not have to go back to (agricultural) labour because I could use my skill in the future to make a decent living, this made me

feel very good". The period – the experience of a skills training - is in general described as 'jolly' by the respondents; with little problems and a more positive outlook towards the future.

Problems faced

Any possible problems faced during the skills training period (either in- or outside the residential programme) are part and parcel of the general experiences of following such education. It appeared that in general the subjects of this study experienced little problems *inside* the programme (so at REDS) and none with regard to the programme *itself*. The latter is expected to be biased. Most women recalled having little problems while they were at REDS; they were all one as a group and supported each other. There were at times minor irritations and misunderstandings amongst the girls, but nothing serious. Small quarrels naturally appeared (e.g. wrongly using each others things) but this led to no further problems. Problems within the groups must have differed per batch. One particular problem one girl faced during her training was that she had to keep her age (eleven) secret as she was scared she would be sent home if it came to light that she was younger than the regular age of admittance.

Some women stated that there was occasionally minor caste discrimination by other girls within the programme, while other women said "there was no opportunity for discrimination". Caste discrimination was not tolerated by REDS and sanctioned with an expulsion from the programme. One respondent who was discriminated slightly because of her caste only dealt with this shortly as the issue was addressed by staff and the discrimination stopped. The overall majority felt that differences in caste were no problem at REDS and that "you didn't know who belonged to what caste in the group and we lived as one group". While expressing a similar statement, one of the respondents became emotional and cried. Perhaps she experienced caste discrimination in the programme or outside (in her village), which was said - by some - to have been present in their village. Overall, little notation is made of caste discrimination by respondents. Perhaps because they are unable to discern all caste discrimination as it might have been so rooted in their daily lives that much of it came unnoticed, or perhaps because they were ashamed to speak about it. It might also be possible that there was really no or only minor incidence of caste discrimination in their lives.

While following their vocational skills training, respondents said they also experienced little problems with respect to the *outside* situation, their family situation: "I was happy here as I was not faced with the household problems of my family. At home it was always labour, labour, labour. At REDS I had a good alternative to this: class time and free time". Most parents were happy that their daughter was enjoying free education which also held potential for contributing to the household income after completion of the training. Some were happy that the status of their girl would increase due to the education, and others were happy that their child was in a safe place and well taken care of (also food intake). A few respondents recall having felt homesick, especially at the beginning of the six month programme. Some felt sad (which was experienced as a problem) when they thought of the economic situation at home, especially of their *mother's* situation:

"My mother and sister were working hard when I was away. Thinking of their labour was very painful. My sister visited me every weekend, but my mother only visited sometimes because she had too many responsibilities at home"

What became apparent is that the girls (if they felt bad about the home situation) especially felt sorrow for their mother's situation and not for their father's. In most of these cases it was their father who was described as 'lazy'; demonstrating the often difficult situation and especially burden wives carry in Tamil Nadu society and the repercussions this has on their daughters. The daughter of a father who was a drunk sheds light (in tears) on how such a difficult but not uncommon circumstance influences children:

"I suffered thinking of my father. It was a sorrow feeling, also when I would think of the situation of my brothers – that their future was spoilt also. It has mentally affected me and my brothers, we all have emotional damage and disturbances still today because of our youth"

5.2.3 Reflecting on the past

Regrets about missing out on education and being a child labourer have already surfaced in the previous writing. In order to find out more about whether the respondents might have actually *liked* working as a child they were asked (in a fictive situation) what they would do if they were young again and faced the same situation and 'choices'. The intention of this question was to get insight into their overall reflection on their experience as a working child. The aim of getting to know these things is to test whether, for this particular group of former girl child labourers, the labour was experienced as a positive thing. In the recent past various authors have pressed forward a new approach with regard to child labour, or better said – child *work.* Notably, one that stresses a child's right to employment and to make his or her own choices with regard to this. Of course they also reject the exploitation of children, but rather than arguing for an abolitionist approach to end child labour they argue for the regulation of child labour and working conditions of children. They take a more relativistic stance towards what childhood should be comprised of and what the role of work can be in that. They argue that the child is a social actor and that his/her wish and right to work should be respected. If this is the case, one would expect former child labourers (or child *workers*, the line is a difficult one to draw) to give priority to work if they faced the fictional choice again. As becomes clear underneath, however, this is not the case. Perhaps because this study focuses on strictly those engaged in *labour* and not just those in regulated work. If these respondents had experienced child work and not labour, they would have probably answered differently. But still, if they in any sense (not themselves having been child workers) saw importance for children to be allowed to work (and not labour) they might have brought this forward. They did not. They regret having laboured as a child, having been a child labourer, this despite *wanting* to have been so (or at least feeling compelled to by the poor financial situation of the family) at the time.

Looking back, all of the eighteen respondents of this study would rather finish school (pass the 12th standard) than drop out and become fully engaged in agricultural (and often domestic) labour at a

young age; they say they recognize the importance of education now. The above described regulative movement (of child work) condemns child labour and supports education as well, but drawing the line to what extent children should be allowed to work is difficult. This thesis illustrates that a group of women who regularly laboured - who were child labourers - later regret having done so. They especially resent the fact that because of the work they missed out on completing school. Those respondents who were content and even happy as a child to quit school also hold deep regrets today. The labour was mainly experienced as a painful thing; particularly the burning sun but also missing out on education.

When asked whether they think their fictive choice ('if they could do things over') to continue with school and even finish it would be realisable the answers turn out grim. History would repeat itself. Box 5.6 includes some reflections on the situation. The respondents believe that if the financial situation of their family is poor, they would not be able to go to school, let alone finish it. This would be the decisive factor for them. If there was no money shortage in the family and education therefore possible, one respondent stressed that parents and children still need to be *convinced* that education is important. Mindsets about the importance of education are apparently also decisive.

Some of the girls who dropped out because they failed and therefore felt discouraged to continue said they would finish school rather than work the way they did as a child if they were in the same situation again. Maybe they would need some more guidance and motivation, as one respondent said, "because I wouldn't be a brilliant student and would be afraid to fail in school". Only one of the women was confidently positive about the possibility of her choice: "I would finish school without a second thought, this would be easily possible up to the 12^{th} standard" because she had her parents support, also at the time. It was only her own failure that had discouraged her to continue education. All in all the priority, in retrospect, is given to education (over child labour) if it can be facilitated financially and if the children's labour is not needed at home (in kind or wages). The former girl child labourers consider that for a child, education carries more benefits than labour. Therefore, they would not wish to be a child involved in labour or regular work, their wish would be to finish school. This would only be possible under a favourable economic situation of the household, something strongly emphasized by the respondents.

Box 5.6: If possible to do things over

Education would be my dream, but the family situation would determine my fate. I would not choose for child labour.

Only education is my first priority. Labour is a bitter thing, the sun is painful. Education secures your future. I regret stopping school and would still, even now, want to continue my education.

If there was no poverty, I would prefer school.

There should be no compromise with schooling, it should be the main thing in life. This if the household income is supportive and even then can only take place if parents and children are convinced of the importance of schooling and do not drop out. I want that age again, I feel I've lost my good days and opportunities in life.

Education only. Through education you can get better employment later, I would have been more dignified and would have learned more in life.

Education would be my choice but if there was extreme poverty again, this would not be possible.

I would finish school, but would prefer a skills training over school. Even if I go to school, I can't do anything.

I would want to be educated, but also further in higher education - learning more about pharmaceutics.

Education would have priority because it is the most important thing and it is very necessary for the future, especially considering the world around – girls need education.

The current section 5.2.3 tells us something about the second sub-question of this chapter. Where the first sub-question is related to the experiences, the second is related to the valuations of child labour and education. Apparently former girl child labourers value child labour (in the agriculture sector) in a negative sense. Its only value is being something that can be undertaken to help the family survive in financially turbulent times. We also come to see that the completion of formal schooling is greatly valued; it is something respondents have missed in their life because they had to work. They regret this deeply and – in retrospect – prioritize education over labour as a child.

Asking adult women who have been child labourers themselves to reflect on such a situation is believed to be valuable next to research being done on *children* and the similar questions they are asked. For a child it might not always be as easy to reflect on his/her situation simply because these individuals are younger and in general have less experience in life. Children arguing they like work or want to work and dislike school might just do so from a position where they cannot yet fully distinct important elements in life. Working at a young age could very well only just benefit these children on the short term. The experiences, judgement, and thoughts of *former* child labourers will hold important information with regard to the topic. Information that could serve to improve the situation of many children who currently face a similar fate.

To find out how the former girl child labourers would fictionally prioritize the above 'choices' with inclusion of one more choice – the vocational skills training at REDS – we come with the following results. Only one of those questioned set the priority as 1- vocational skills training 2- child labour 3- finishing primary and secondary education because "good education does not always lead to employment". This seems especially the case in this area where most people work in a marginal and drought prone agriculture sector. A minority would choose the same first choice but would give finishing primary and secondary education a higher priority than child labour. They would choose the

vocational skills training over primary and secondary education because they find learning a (technical) skill more useful for future life. Some of them also state that they feel insecure about their capacity to study. Even though the belief of a skill being more useful for future life than education is quite commonly held, and many of the respondents found it difficult to choose between learning a skill and completing full schooling, the greatest majority (by far) of respondents would choose 1- finishing primary and secondary education 2- vocational skills training 3- child labour. Child labour is not considered a choice by many, "you're pushed into it" and "would not want it at all". They argue that learning a skill is a good alternative opportunity to education and to gain an income in later life:

"Even though education definitely has my first priority, a vocational skills training offers more potential for future income generation than agricultural child labour. It also relieves you from the pain and sun of labour in agriculture"

"At that age you (a child) should go to school, you must go to school. If that's not possible for some reason, a vocational skills training is the 2nd best alternative. Child labour is not a choice, it often becomes a must"

Within the lines of the second sub-question of this chapter, the abovementioned leads us to conclude that the vocational skills training programme at REDS has been highly valued by former girl child labourers. It is argued to be an important alternative in the case of not being able to finish formal schooling. Where several respondents, for practical reasons, find a vocational skills training more valuable than formal schooling, most respondents attribute most value to formal schooling.

5.3 Views on child labour, education, and child rights

Having looked into the context for- and situation of child labour as well as into the experiences of following a vocational skills training, we now come to look a bit more concretely at views. The views and valuations expressed by the main subjects of this study have already surfaced in the previously written, but in what follows we look at more general valuations with regard to child labour, education, and (universal) children's rights. These are, as expected, very much influenced by their personal history; by their own experiences. The valuations relate to the second sub-question of this chapter, while the notions about children's rights and the views towards universal child rights relate more to the third. Furthermore, the fourth sub-question of this chapter will receive attention when focusing on respondents' views towards universal child rights and the meaning and uses a rights-based approach to child labour might have in relation to this.

5.3.1 Child labour

In order to find out how respondents value child labour it is first important to find out what they think child labour is. This starts by their conceptualization of their own labour as a child; would they call it labour in the sense of being either exploitative, harmful, damaging, and/or interfering with their education OR do they believe their contribution was in the form of work and not labour? The most

important question asked to get insight into such factors being: 'was the work you did as a child inappropriate for you at *that* time?'

Of the twenty-one interviewed, this study has categorized eighteen respondents as former child labourers, the reasons why have already been drawn out. A researcher's interpretation about her research subjects does not have to coincide with what these individuals themselves believe to be true about themselves. Thirty-nine percent of the eighteen respondents who were categorized as having engaged in child labour did not think the labour they did was inappropriate for them at that time (and age). The reasons given for this varied:

- They were older than what they believe the minimum age for children to work should be (around 15 or 16 years)
- It was their own choice to work and to drop out of school after failing, despite the fact that parents in some cases encouraged them to continue with school
- It was a contribution that had to be made to the family income and survival, their labour was therefore not seen strictly as child labour but as *a contribution*
- Working at home (also on the land) a few hours a day was not considered inappropriate

Of those who believed they were not child labourers, some did mention that the experience of the work was painful. This is something they had in common with all respondents who *did* conceptualize their own past situation as one of child labour and not just work. The age up to eighteen years should be for education and not for work according to many of them. The labour was usually considered too painful and difficult for their age. Being deprived of education during that time particularly made the work inappropriate according to them:

"The labour I did was damaging and harmful. It is a painful thing to the mind and body"
"It was not ok, mentally and physically. It has militated my development because I could not go to school"

"The labour was painful - physically and mentally: you are nothing, there is nothing to celebrate about yourself"

"I'm one of the best examples of a spoilt childhood. Children should enjoy life and education"

What is child labour?

Defining child labour is difficult, also for those who have been child labourers. The majority of respondents said the work they did was not appropriate for their age because of 1- the nature of the work (difficult and painful) and 2- they should have gone to school. This study shows that former child labourers vary in opinion when it comes to what age *is* appropriate for the work they engaged in. Some draw the line at ten years, others at around fifteen, and still others at around eighteen or even twenty.

The focus group discussion clearly showed that conceptualizations of what a 'child' is ranges from individuals below the age of five, thirteen, fifteen, to those of eighteen years. There is little age

conceptualization of a child and the term is mostly socially constructed and related to stages in life such as attaining puberty or marriage.

What becomes clear is that it is not so much the age of a child that determines whether particular work is inappropriate, but the *nature* of the work. The term child labour then does not apply in the sense of what the age of a child is; one respondent explained how she thinks a child is someone up to the age of ten years and the labour she did should not be engaged in by anyone under the age of twenty. The moment deciding when such labour should be allowed depends on the maturity of the mind or the cross into adulthood (which some point to be at fifteen and others at twenty years). This study shows that there is a discrepancy between what is socially seen to be a child and what is considered inappropriate work for individuals with a certain age (something internationally identified as 'child' labour). The former child labourers of this study do not automatically link the term child to the inappropriate nature (harmful aspects) of the general term 'child labour' (as adopted by the international arena). Many respondents see these two things separately.

Respondents have also described child labour as work that stands in the way of "completing education up to the 12th standard". This falls directly in line with international definitions that can be traced to the UN CRC. During the focus group discussion there was consensus that the age to work should not be below eighteen years, the ultimate age limit was set at sixteen years. Any work done before these ages should only be done in any spare time the 'children' have. They can engage in this work in order to learn things, but not to contribute – by spending a lot of time working – to the family income. Running small errands for parents, learning some agricultural skills, and minor domestic chores should be allowed according to the participants of the discussion, but school should remain most important.

Constructions of childhood

Notions of child labour automatically carry ideas of what a child is and what childhood should be comprised of; does labour, for example, have a place in it? According to the majority of the former girl child labourers of this study, it certainly does not. The term child is socially constructed and often not precisely linked to the unacceptability of 'child labour' by respondents. Some women have pointed to the fact that the term child can point to persons under the age of ten or fifteen years, for example, while the labour that those above this age engage in is still inappropriate for their age. Childhood is also a socially constructed term, moreover it is a term quite unfamiliar to some respondents ("what do you mean with this word?") and seems especially difficult to strictly link to age. It is the period in life of being a child, it is a period that should be "jolly" and enjoyed according to the women of this study. Childhood includes good health and nutrition, a clean environment, play, and enjoying life. It is a stage in life filled with happiness. In particular it involves not being bothered about the problems at home:

"*Childhood should be jolly, it should be happy. You shouldn't be forced to think about the family situation, you should have no worries about it and be free from that concern"*

"Childhood is the best period in one's life, you are free from worries and family burdens. You are innocent and have no analytical capacity to create worries, you can just enjoy life"

Besides freedom from worries, another important content of childhood is said to be education (see box 5.7). Many of the respondents did not mention this in the first place, only after specific enquiry did they stress it as a very important part of childhood. They could have answered this according to an expected (socially) desired reply. However, this is not believed to be the case. It is more likely that they had a more restricted breadth of the term 'childhood' in mind during the interview.

Box 5.7: Childhood includes going to school

Childhood includes good food, clothes, a safe place to live, and parents should see whether they can fulfill the (material) desires of their children, they should also love to go to school, children should have that desire, it is part of childhood.

Childhood is something that should be enjoyed. Education is part of childhood as well, at least for today 뭘 ◆ childhood. In my time it was not part of childhood.

Childhood should be a time when children learn things (in or outside the home), they should not be confined to the home; they should have the freedom to move around, play, and go to school. It should come from two sides; the parents need to encourage their children to enjoy life (and education) and the child needs to develop and gain attributes such as self-confidence. The majority of respondents also thought child labour should definitely not be a part of childhood because it stands in the way of education and enjoying life: "when you labour, everything is blocked" and "I lost my childhood, my education, and my rights to freedom because of labour". Despite this, respondents recognize that "child labour becomes part of childhood here, as children need to contribute to the household" and "childhood is something children should enjoy but if the situation of poverty compels you as a child to contribute, you must". The joys of childhood and importance of education seem subservient to the need to contribute to the household income in situations of poverty. Even though undesired, child labour automatically becomes a part of childhood due to financial situations:

"If you are poor you have to contribute, also as a child - you are not free"

Even though it is believed that children should not fix the poverty of the household, they should help out where possible. The situation makes it "seem there is no escape from poverty and child labour", it is a vicious cycle especially when recognized that "education is not the solution to all problems". In reality, poverty is a part of childhood here. A situation that easily leads to children engaging in labour; something that has not been unusual in this area and has maybe (undesirably) become a part of childhood.

One respondent mentioned that children should also learn to contribute to (domestic) work at home during childhood, albeit only *minor* work. Another believed childhood should not contain too many luxuries, which was most probably because she herself enjoyed little luxuries as a child.

Valuing child labour

The majority of respondents do in general not value child labour very positively; they feel it has deprived them of their education (finishing school) and caused them (physical and/or mental) pain and suffering. This answer to the second sub-question of this chapter has already come forward in the sections prior to this one. They believe child labour is bad for children and they would rather see children go to school. However, the financial hardships faced by the family forces children to work. The short term benefits so necessary that finishing education becomes difficult if not impossible (financially) for children. It is as though they see no better solutions under such tough circumstances, still. Being born into poverty is said to give children little options but to work.

The main value of child labour lies in being able to contribute to the much needed household income (in cash or kind) directly, or to take over the work at home so that other family members can go out and earn money or work the land. The ability to contribute to an alleviation of the family's suffering is something that made the girls happy at the time. Overall, however, the respondents seem to think the pain and deprivation aspects of child labour weigh heavier than this (especially in retrospect: "as a child you don't realize you're losing your future, your education"). There was one interesting exception to this; twenty-four year old Malarvizhi who conceptualized child labour as a 'part of rural life', as a part of family life in this area and who valued it in a positive sense for that:

"You can go to school, but contributing to agricultural labour is also necessary, it is an important part of life here. The contribution is a part of family life, if you don't contribute (also as a child), I would consider it wrong"

Malarvizhi was a child labourer from the age of seven onwards and dropped out of school in 10th standard in order to go for daily wage labour. It must be noted that the above was said in presence of some of her older family members (she was interviewed at home due to her pregnancy), which might have influenced her replies. Nevertheless, Malarvizhi gives us a totally different outlook on valuing (agricultural) child labour. Lets now proceed with the more general overall valuations.

A large majority of respondents values child labour as bad and involving too much suffering; mentally and physically (see box 5.8).

Box 5.8: Child labour is bad

Child labour is not fit for young girls. It spoils your future, your life. Child labour makes people irresponsible, the parents start viewing their children as adults and give them too much freedom.

Every child has dreams, child labour prevents them from achieving their desires. Physically and mentally they suffer very badly.

Child labour is a very painful thing, even for adults agricultural labour is difficult and painful. You can imagine how children must suffer.

I only know how hard it is, there is too much pain and the sun is too hot. For that age it is a burden, there is too much work and it involves too much suffering. Not going to school is also bad, there are no positive aspects to the labour it is just the family situation of poverty that forces you to go.

Child labour is bad as it affects your mind and your body. The child labour was hard work, we had to carry heavy loads which is not good for a child. Then the adults always pushed us to work even more. That situation was mentally painful.

The labour is remembered as very difficult (especially due to the hot sun), too much of a hardship for children. With respect to this it is mentioned that times are changing, that children want an easier life today. The question remains, however, whether this is possible. Whether children are actually able to (despite the pressure of poverty and parents) continue school and not become child labourers. Compulsion to labour by parents is by some seen as a crime, "parents can suffer for the sake of their children's future, but children should not suffer. Poverty is there, it is a problem, but why should children suffer from this by doing child labour?". Others keep explaining child labour as a result of poverty; the situation being the decisive factor, the labour necessary for direct family survival:

"Child labour is something dislikeable but I had no other way"

"It depends on the family situation. You cannot say it is unnecessary if children are forced to go because of the situation, if they have no other choice. As a child you learn to accept it. If there is sufficient opportunity (financially) for education, then children should go to school"

Desiring change

"Because of labour the child is lost, it loses her future. Why should we choose the loss of a child over the loss of income? We should consider the future of the child, whatever the difficulties of the family situation may be. We should not compromise a child's schooling"

One of the participants of this study beautifully weighs up the costs and benefits of child labour here, keeping in mind the future of a child as opposed to the short-term benefits of her labour. The greatest majority of former girl child labourers desires child labour to be eliminated, also for their children. The poverty situation seems to be given as a justification or explanation for the labour to happen, however this is also not seen as something 'justified' in itself – poverty (and child labour) just happens. "If possible it should be abolished" and children should go to school; in an ideal situation the minimum age for labour (or the type of work they did) should be around eighteen years when children have

completed school up till the 12th standard . In a slightly less ideal situation this age barrier is lowered to around fifteen years. In any case individuals younger than fifteen years should be in school according to most respondents.

Many of the women who participated in this study are now mothers themselves. They are strongly against compromising the schooling of their children for the benefit of the household income. During the focus group discussion the participants also concluded that a child should not go to work but to school. The situation at home is what compels children to go to work, something the former girl child labourers say will lead to deep regrets about missing school. This regret – today – motivates them to keep their own children in school. The respondents who are now mothers *all* send their children to school. It might occur that children have to do some minor work, but this should not be allowed to interfere with education according to the mothers:

"My children can contribute to the household agricultural work on our plot of land, but only if it doesn't interfere with their education. They should in no circumstance attend wage labour. Child labour is o.k. to supplement the family income if it is only incidental and not continuous or long-term"

Respondents have recognized that times are changing and that more importance is given to education: "today parents more often think let us suffer, let the children go to school". They recognize that parents now more often believe that through education their children will have a better future. These types of messages are said to be transmitted through television, with actors as role models. The role of the latter in changing rural mindsets with regard to education and child labour definitely seems worthy of more research. The focus group discussion participants, all from rural villages in the nearby area, say that people in their villages are developing mindsets that condemn child labour and favour education. This due to more awareness raising but also due to free education which is said to encourage many parents to send their children to school. The opportunity to educate their children is something parents are starting to value more and more. Despite the developments, however, there is still child labour in their villages; approximately five to ten out of every one hundred children in their village are estimated to be child labourers. We should be careful when talking about the necessity to change mindsets (especially of parents) in order to 'solve' child labour problems. Of course this is an important factor, but such calls seem to unjustly withhold a hidden message that people themselves (parents) - their ignorant mindsets - are mainly to blame for child labour. Such messages are dangerous as they take disregard of local contexts and the problems people are facing therein and how they are coping with those problems (also as a family). It takes disregard of the societal systems of exploitation, of the role of poverty, and so forth.

5.3.2 Education

We have come to see that education is viewed as something very important and valuable for a child by former child labourers, more so than work or labour. A vocational skills training, in general, is valued particularly in the case of not being able to complete formal schooling (see 5.2.3) or as something that

is useful to do *after* completing the 12th standard. Before looking at the valuations of a vocational skills training, the valuation of education in the form of primary and secondary schooling shall be explored.

Valuing going to school

Going to school is valued as very important by the majority of respondents of the individual interviews, but also by the participants of the focus group discussion. Such messages, related to the second sub-question of this chapter, have already become clear in the above reading. In order to find out a bit more about schooling, the women were asked to elaborate more on the contemporary issues they come across today with regard to their child's schooling. The respondents as well as the participants of the group discussion generally value (finishing formal) education as something very positive, but the following should also bring to light some of the less positively valued attributes of education. Many of these problems were also things *they* experienced when they were still in school. As can be seen, most are practical problems. The problems also show the rather unprofessional and student-unfriendly characteristics that schools often tend(ed) to carry in this part of India.

The women of this study have recognized several problems about schools in their area today. The main one is corporal punishment; something they say discourages many children to go to school. This punishment is justified by several participants in the sense that it is believed to be the only way a teacher can keep control of the class (the teacher-student ratio is generally very high in India, about 1:60). Secondary schools are also a problem in terms of their absence (as opposed to primary schools) in many of the villages. This is especially a problem for further educating girls because parents are said to find it difficult to send their daughters who have attained puberty to a more faraway school. This situation is recognized as one that often discourages any further education for village girls. The learning system in schools is also believed to be a major problem, however this *is* changing. The Government of India is unleashing an 'activity based learning' scheme to prevent learning through memorization which often leads to little conceptualization and understanding. The women of this study are happy with this because it is more practical.

Another problem about schools is the mismanagement of the free mid-day meals provided by Government. These should stimulate school attendance, however many women say the meals are of very poor quality and there is also mismanagement of the food. This discourages some children from going to school, especially because refusing the mid-day school meals is something teachers blackmail students with (e.g. by refusing to give them certain books). This blackmail is explained by the fact that the school staff need children eating the meals in case of a Government inspector showing up. For similar supervising committees of the Government, it is said that schools hide their drop-out rates. Additional problems recognized with regard to education for girls are that boys regularly make fun of girls; something the former girl child labourers have themselves often also experienced. The absence of toilet facilities is something that discourages girls to go to school as well, particularly due to the lack of privacy. Any toilets available are said to be locked by teachers and used for personal use instead of for the children.

Valuing vocational skills training programmes

It is generally believed that a skills training gives one new opportunities in life, it is a good help to becoming more self-dependent, especially for girls. Moreover, a skills training such as the one provided by REDS is valued for giving girls (and young women) more confidence:

"You become independent and don't expect others to have mercy on you (you have self-worth). You are independent and can earn a living while you are not subservient, your attitude is strengthened"

Some respondents were convinced that a skills training is more practical than completing formal schooling (see 5.2.3); the prior believed to lead to employment directly while the latter often does not due to the limited employment opportunities in this region. This is contradicted by other voices stressing that finishing school will provide better employment (*if* available) in the future, which also leads to "a better position in society". The future world is competitive, as also recognized by one respondent, and "you (will) need education to compete with others in life". It is then sad - in the case of perceived bad Government schools - that private, more qualitative schools are unaffordable for many parents who share this view.

Overall, education is viewed as something that should be enjoyed; it should include friendships and ofcourse learning: "at home you learn too little, in education you learn other things in life". The need and importance for education is highly recognized by the participants of this study:

"Without it you are nothing!"

"Education is the minimum requirement demand on parents to bring up their children in a better way. I want to educate my daughters well, I cannot read their homework notes, I want them to be able to do that when they are a mother"

All respondents believe their training at REDS was a good solution for them, they are very happy they followed it. It was a good alternative to school and they had the opportunity to learn something. They were away from difficult situations at home, difficult labour in the hot sun, and made friends. It also gave them an opportunity to improve their future life, the income from tailoring (if the demand is high enough) being higher than that from labour in agriculture. Overall, education – also in the sense of a vocational skills training – has been very positively valued by the women of this study. This has also already become clear in the previously written sections above and is related to the second sub-question of this chapter.

In order to find out a bit more about the valuation but also the importance of vocational skills training programmes, the main research subjects of this study were asked what they would like to see improved in such programmes or what would have helped them more in the past. They were also asked whether they think these types of programmes (that aim to eliminate child labour) are effective, and if not – what *should* be done to eliminate child labour (which seems a common desire of the

respondents). The aforementioned contributes to adding more critical views about education, also in the form of a skills training.

Improving such a vocational skills training programme was not necessary according to three respondents. The other respondents had many ideas to improve skills training programmes; some very creative ideas were shared. These ideas could certainly be useful for future programme designs of a skills training. More than half of those interviewed thinks the programme should have been longer (approximately ten to twelve months) so that they could learn things more thoroughly; learn more types of skills and more depth of particular skills (especially in tailoring):

"Designs should be more, we should learn more modern styles of tailoring and also learn how to embroider small pieces of glass on sari's. There should be a broadening of skills, children's wear too"

Learning more and particularly *modern* models (also for men) in tailoring was considered very useful as it would widen the opportunity to make more income later. Learning more types of different skills (see box 5.9) was also believed to widen the opportunities for employment in later life. However, a careful look at the future market demand would have to decide what these particular skills should be. Growing competition amongst tailors has been signaled in villages; the tailoring market seems saturated and "only your quality will make you survive". A focus on not one but several types of skills in a vocational skills training programme is suggested because "one skill would be boring and also because a focus on one might not suit demand later. You need alternative employment skills in that case". Having several skills is safer and would enable finding future employment according to whatever skills are in demand at that time.

Upon completion of the programme REDS was able to help just several of the participants get hold of a sewing machine. There could have been better (private or by REDS) schemes that would enable the girls to get a sewing machine after completion of the training. In that case there would have been more of a guarantee that participants could actually practice the skill once at home and not relapse into old patterns of (child) labour. One respondent has also cleverly suggested that it would have been useful if they learned in the training how to set up a tailoring shop.

Box 5.9: Types of skills that could be taught

Making toys from banana fiber
Learning how to operate machines for machine embroidery (instead of hand embroidery) so that you can work at an export-oriented embroidery company (more income)
Learning how to grow ornamental plants in an own nursery
Making small rugs from the tailoring waste (pieces of cloth)
Candle making
Operating computers, this is necessary in the future
Handicrafts that earn more money, such as making chairs or cots
Learning how to buy/sell cloth for sewing (at bulk shops, so that you are able to increase any profit margin for yourself)
Knitting
Running a petty shop (near the home)

How child labour should be eliminated

To eliminate child labour vocational skills training programmes are believed to be important, effective, and helpful according to the respondents of this study. Nonetheless, such a training should be a *second* priority. According to the majority finishing school is more important and there should thus be programmes that prevent dropping out through a focus on the retention of children in schools: "our children shouldn't be like us, you have a better future if you go to school".

A big component of such programmes would be awareness raising amongst parents; this is seen as most important. According to the women of this study parents need to know the importance of school, not dropping out, and not allowing children to engage in child labour. Additionally there should be awareness raising for children; those in school should be convinced to stay in school, those out of school should be convinced to go to school. One way to convince children would be to "let people like me serve as an example how to not spoil your life. You can earn money at any age, but you can go to school only at a young age". Former child labourers should spread the message that children should go to school and not to work.

The focus group discussion led the women to conclude that raising awareness about the importance of going to school is the most important step to eradicate child labour. Villages (the people *in* these villages) need to be educated about child rights, the harm of child labour, and the importance of education. Theatre as a means to spread such messages was proposed as it attracts many people and it is a form of recreation that can easily transmit important messages about child labour and education. It is crucial here to take note of the fact that those previously involved in child labour recognize that education about child rights, child labour, and education is the most important step to eradicate child labour. This self-critical aspect on village mindsets seems harsh and implies that changing mindsets is – according to former child labourers – extremely important. They seem to blame themselves, their parents, their situation, their village mindsets for child labour and with that they embrace the more novel thoughts on the importance of education and child rights and the 'no' to child labour. It should be strongly taken in mind that the above was recognized as the most important step to eradicate child labour by the respondents of the focus group discussion; making the chance of the aforementioned being a socially desired response very likely. The village environment is pointed to be an obstacle to eradicate child labour in agriculture. Not only because of mindsets but also because of the perpetuating situation of poverty, because of limited employment options in the area, and maybe also because of the inherent historic tradition of using children to contribute to family labour in this rural area.

Besides a focus on going and staying in school, other programmes that could help eradicate child labour are said to be those with measures to tackle poverty:

"They drop out because of poverty, so we should deal with poverty first. We should reach children through their parents/families with economic initiatives"

The above describes how creating income generation activities for parents can help press down poverty and alleviate children from their necessary position as earners in the family, so that they can

finish formal education. Programmes assuring income or at least *food* availability were mentioned by respondents. They believe this would automatically lead to parents sending their children to school and not to labour because "if there is no poverty the family will definitely send their children to school". Programmes (currently running in different places all over India) that financially support parents in financing their children's education (e.g. through free schools, uniforms, textbooks, and lunch) are believed to be successful in preventing children to drop out and become child labourers.

5.3.3 Child rights

Former girl child labourers were asked to give their views on those child rights regarding child labour and education; the results of this shall be reviewed in the latter part of this section (5.3.3) about the views on universal child rights. These results directly relate to sub-question three of this chapter and therewith also include the notions (respondents have) about what the rights of children should be in general. The latter shall be reviewed first hereunder.

It is safe to say that the majority of respondents, as a child, had little notion of their rights: "I did not know children had any rights". Not having a *notion* of child rights at that time, is by some women immediately drawn back to the situation of being compelled to work and not getting the opportunity to learn anything about child rights. Some of the women had some notion of child rights when they were young, but mainly in terms of feeling they had no rights. They had to go to labour and drop out of school because of the financial status of the household.

In the present, most of the women (some of whom are mothers now) do have notions of what the rights of a child are or should be. Their notions are mainly within the lines of their own interpretation and not specifically framed as those stipulated in the UN CRC. Nevertheless, their notions often seem to lead back to the important fundamentals of what are internationally regarded as the rights of children. This seems to favour a universalistic belief of there being more universality in international child rights than accredited by relativists. We see later that the former child labourers of this study more often than not agree with universal child rights. One woman states that she learned about child rights at REDS during her training, but most have not explicitly learned about child rights anywhere and have more innate, instinctual understandings of what children should and should not 'enjoy'.

With regard to sub-question three of this chapter, we can discern the following general notions former girl child labourers have about the rights of children. The majority of those interviewed believes that children should have the right to *freedom*. This freedom is said to include different things; the freedom to go to school, to play (also with other children), and to choose things. Many of the respondents said children should have the right to make small choices; e.g. in what to eat and what to wear. With regard to whether they should be able to choose if they work or go to school, almost all respondents said they should be obliged to go to school. Children also have the right to good nutrition and good *care* (e.g. health care and personal clothes), moreover they "should have the right to enjoy life – that's their basic right". Children should not undergo harsh punishments by parents and most women agree that child labour is something "we should not accept anymore". Instead, children should

go to school (as a matter of right). Several respondents mentioned this basic right (to education) of the child themselves, others convincingly agreed with it when asked whether this should be a right of the child. Children should also have the right to see things and learn. Education is important in this, but for their further development they should be able to develop an interest in arts and culture and be able to practice these.

The focus group discussion showed that there is little knowledge about universal (child) rights. The women participating in the discussion were of the opinion that children should have the right to speak and to be listened to, they should have the freedom to do as they want as much as possible, and they should also have the right to education. A part of the group said they should have this right if they *want* to go to school, while another part of the group said there should be no compromise at all for education. This demonstrates that education as a 'must' for all children is not (yet) a firmly institutionalized mindset. There is also little knowledge of the Indian law regarding compulsory education up to the age of fourteen years. It is rather paradoxical to see on the one hand that children, especially *girls* are very tightly controlled by parents (e.g. in marriage) while on the other hand (e.g. in going to school) children seem more free to do as they please. Seemingly parental control highly differs per topic, perhaps depending on the parents' motivation for a particular cause for their child. Where they might find an arranged marriage important, they might be less bothered with their child finishing school. Perhaps this is paradoxical from a Eurocentric perspective only; from a relativistic stance it might merely be a different distribution in the valuation of the importance of different things for a child.

The women say they are becoming more and more aware about universal child rights, in some villages NGOs are actively raising awareness about them. They say there is a great interest in these rights, especially knowing more about the importance of education and the negative aspects of child labour. The capacity, however, to be able to *ensure* these rights is recognized to be a difficult factor. Child rights are recognized to be constrained by financial limitations, this is something several respondents note and it seems completely understandable given their background. Rights can only be enjoyed within the financial capacities of the family:

"Child rights are a limited factor, but they should be enjoyed. If there is no money, there are also limited rights"

Rights can only be effectuated in the case of an absence of (severe) financial hardship in the household. One respondent goes as far as saying that the first right concerning children is that parents should only be allowed to have a maximum of two children, and that only if they can financially afford the care for more children they can have them. This in order to be able to allow for their children to enjoy their rights (notions of which are described above) and life as a child. Children have the right to want things and to ask their parents for things as this makes the child happy. There should then be enough financial possibility to fulfill this right next to others' such as education and the freedom to play.

In the above reading we have come to see, with regard to sub-question three of this chapter, that former girl child labourers' own notions of the rights of children are in line with universalistic

thoughts on the matter. One might expect that these respondents would hold a more or less relativistic view of children's rights, but they – interestingly – lean more towards a universalistic stance. This does not necessarily mean that they are responding to the (trickled down) interpretations and views of international institutions and NGOs. Instead, they seem to be responding to their own past situation and to what they see happening around them. They are responding, then, to the situation of financial insecurity and poverty; to the hardships of labour for a child; and to the pain – also later in life – of educational (formal schooling) deprivation. They formulate child rights from such a perspective, and probably not so much in *first* instance from the perspective of the 'best interest of the child'.

Views on universal child rights

The following should illuminate the second part of the third sub-question of this chapter; the interpretations and views that former girl child labourers have with regard to universal rights of the child. Also whether the women resist such universal rights for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks *or* whether they embrace them as an avenue for emancipation. Respondents were not asked to give their view of every universal child right that relates to child labour. The scope of the study limited this. The rights (with regard to child labour) that *were* discussed were limited to the most obvious ones: the right to education (CRC Article 28), the right to freedom from exploitation (CRC Article 32), and the right to participation (CRC Article 12).

The universal right to education and the right to freedom from exploitation, as laid down in the CRC are enthusiastically agreed upon by all former girl child labourers of this study. Some being more outspoken than others with agreeing. All in all the women are happy that these rights exist. Education is believed to be important ("miss it, miss your life") and many respondents state all children should compulsorily finish school (up to the 12^{th} standard), while others give minimum age boundaries until which education should at least be followed. Respondents recognized that amongst many things, education especially needs to be of good quality and should also allow room for play and other development of the child. This is an important view, for the Indian education system seems primarily focused on studying and learning through memorization - with little focus on actual comprehension. Living with a group of school children (seven to thirteen years old) at REDS gave insight into this. The memorization of poems by Shakespeare proved a point: words are memorized in their correct order, but the *meaning* of even the simplest words or sentences (also in non-Shakespearean writing) remain a puzzle to the children. This is typical non-comprehensive learning.

All respondents think that the exploitation of children is something we need to get rid of as "children are not treated with dignity" and they do work that is not appropriate (harmful physically and mentally) for their age. They think it is a pity that children are forced into labour because of the financial situation of the family. In child labour one cannot enjoy the rights they should have as a child, there "is no freedom". Ensuring the basic right to education is therefore important as it is a place where you learn about your other rights:

"All child rights are possible only if they (children) go to school, there they can enjoy and learn about their other rights"

Looking at the right of the child to participate in decisions that affect them directly withholds controversy amongst the respondents. This right, in an extreme form, can come to include the question of whether children should be allowed to participate in the decision whether to work or go to school. The regulative movement towards child work, attributing considerable agency to the child, would favour such a right while abolitionists would take a more protective stance. Amongst the respondents this right, in its extreme form, led to diverse views that all-in-all seem to fall more in line with the abolitionist – rather than regulative – approaches to child work and labour. Even though some respondents believe children should have this decision-making power, the majority does not. They give more importance to the right to education than the right to work. The believe that children are not mature enough to make such decisions, they do not know how important education is: "they are so playful and cannot make decisions that adults should make". This is something that parents should know and therefore they should make sure their children enjoy their right to education, even if their children *want* to work. Children should be convinced and compelled to go to school, and parents should also be convinced of the importance of school. There are, according to one of the respondents, two different types of parents: those who have been child labourers themselves and therefore think 'I do not want my child to go through the same and to miss out on education' and those who for the same reason think 'if I went through it, why shouldn't my child, it's just the way of life here'.

In general the view held by most respondents of this study is that school should never be compromised for work, even if it is the child's own choice:

"Children should never be given the right to choose work over education. They cannot make such decisions at this age. The parents are responsible. Parents shouldn't have the right to send their children for child labour, why should you have children if you send them to work? To spoil them?"
"They get spoilt, then they don't know it yet, they will only know it later. We know it already"

In general respondents believe that children should not have the right to participate in their choice to work instead of go to school. On the contrary, when it comes to their choice of schooling over work – it is believed that children *should* have the right to participate in this decision. This shows that overall, education is given preference over child labour; a child's choice to be educated should be supported as it is considered more safe and beneficial than child labourer. Children should be prevented from what is considered a wrong choice in life and their decision-making power should therefore only be granted when in favour of the 'correct' choice. The right of a child to education weighing heavier than his or her right to work.

There was a small minority of former girl child labourers who agreed with the right to education and the right to freedom from exploitation, but who also agreed fully with the right of the child to participate in his/her decision to either work or go to school:

"Children should have the right to do what they want to do. Their rights are that they should have the freedom to choose. We should then not force them to go to school if they want to work themselves. But we should convince

them to go to school and not to labour, even if they do not want to go to school. Convince them that through education they will not have to struggle later in life. The child should decide"

"If a child volunteers to go to work, I would agree with the right to work. When a family's in poverty there are many expenses for school. If a child in a poor family wants to work, they should be able to choose work over school, let them support the family. If a child in a family that is not poor wants to go to labour, they should not be allowed to do so, they need to go to school because they have the opportunity"

"If they want to work instead of go to school, let them go to work. Why force them to go to school?"

Reading the above opinions (which are exceptions to the majority) we see that there *are* respondents who believe children should have the right to choose work over school. One of the respondents said effort should be put into convincing children to go to school; the *decision* in the end, however, had to remain the child's. Another respondent placed the right to participation in the choice of work over school within the poverty context; only children in poor families should have the right to choose this. The last reply demonstrates how a respondent who finds the right to education and freedom from exploitation important, finds the freedom of the child to participate in his/her own decision-making even more important.

With regard to the second part of the third sub-question of this chapter, one could conclude that the former girl child labourers (from the agriculture sector) of this study do not resist universal child rights for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks. In fact, it seems that they embrace these universal rights. The respondents have positive attitudes towards- and views about such rights as the freedom from exploitation, to education, and to participation in decisions affecting their life. Their own interpretations of important rights children should have (especially within a child labour context), as previously discussed, seem to fall in line with major provisions of *universal* child rights. Even though not *all* international child rights (of the CRC, for example) related to the issue of child labour were discussed with the respondents, the abovementioned can be concluded on the basis of a few of the most self-evident ones.

The current section (5.3.3) has also given answers to the fourth sub-question of this chapter; namely that a rights-based approach to child labour (by local Tamil Nadu NGOs, for example) *can* have uses and meaning for those directly involved with child labour at the local level. This because they (*former* child labourers) seem to embrace universal rights of the child that serve to protect children from the same hardships these women have themselves faced as a child. Because this group of respondents does not indicate that these rights are too universalistic, the rights-based approach (in essence universalistic) is probably not something they would object to or discard. In the face of little radically relativistic notions of child rights, such an avenue for protecting children (from becoming a child labourer) seems – in general – warmly welcomed by the former child labourers of this study.

5.4 Current lives, the impact of the past, and future hopes & dreams

The following section shall focus on the current lives of former girl child labourers, also on their employment activities. We look at whether this income generation is linked to their skills training and whether they are still active in the agriculture sector at all. Marriage, especially the problems related to it, shall also be given attention. This is something that has (had) major influence on the lives of the women of this study and it gives us a better idea of the struggles that many women in Tamil Nadu society face.

We shall explore the major impacts the vocational skills training has had; not only in terms of current income generation but also in more general terms. The women of this study also share the ways in which child labour has impacted their lives. There will be a closer look at how these women now see themselves as a woman in their society, what their self-perception or ideas of identity are. Does this have any relation with their history as a child labourer or with having participated in a vocational skills training? We conclude with an outlook on the future; what are the hopes and dreams of former girl child labourers for their future?

5.4.1 Current lives

Half of the respondents interviewed do not live at home with their family anymore; of those who *do,* about half are or have been married and live at home again primarily due to marital problems. The women no longer living at home are all married and the majority lives together as a nuclear family with their spouse (and any children) while some live together with their husband's family. The latter is a common practice in this area.

The five respondents who have not yet gotten married are still at home with their parents. Two of these want to get married ("let it come"), one is about to get married, one is indifferent about getting married, and one strongly does not want to get married. She is thirty-one years old and lives with her mother who is now a widow. She does not want to marry because she sees too much suffering around her of women with marital problems. The fact that she is infertile because of an absent uterus makes marriage practically impossible due to her; nobody wants to marry her because of this. The focus group discussion showed that many of the married women feel they are like slaves at home. Male domination is said to be present in marriages (some women more open about it than others), the husbands in control of what the women are and are not to do. One participant in the group discussion was brave enough to say that she "is not treated properly at home" when the subject of physical abuse was raised. Most of the women who are married have children, all of the ones not married are childless. There are a few women who are with children but without a husband, one because of a suicide. Those married but without a child are so because they 1- have fertility problems or 2- have not been married for very long.

When asked what major problems are personally faced today, the group discussion participants mentioned the alcoholism of husbands, property disputes, and dowry. Most problems are described to be related to the money deficiency of the household; this is the root cause of family problems according to the participants of the discussion. The women remained quiet about problems with their

in-laws, presumably because many of the women are in some way connected and fear that such shared information within the group could fire back at them in the future. During the individual interviews in-law problems were brought to light more frequently, probably because the respondents saw less harm in opening up about it to people who are not directly connected to their current lives.

Employment

All women are involved with domestic work within the household. Most of the women who have not gotten married yet and still live at home seem to have picked up the same routine with regard to labour as before participation in the REDS vocational skills training. In fact this is something that occurred for most respondents who finished the course before the age of eighteen years. Some were able to combine tailoring with agricultural work (on family land or in wage labour). Tailoring only, however, and *not* being involved at all in agriculture was difficult because the demand for tailors was not always high and there were limited other employment opportunities around. This is still the case today, only seven out of eighteen respondents have tailoring as their main source of income generation (often next to that of their husband's income). Just two women *only* work as a tailor (their husband's have a relatively high income), all of the remaining respondents combine tailoring with other income generating activities. The vocational skills training has not been effective therefore in providing full-time employment skills to the former girl child labourers. Nevertheless, it has been effective in the sense of giving these women an additional means of income generation. All of those who followed the training in fact use their skill (tailoring) to earn some money. Tailoring is done within the home (self-employment) by all but one of the respondents; she is employed in a tailoring shop where she works on a wage basis. In total seven of the eighteen former child labourers of this study are not at all working in the agriculture sector anymore (these are not in specific the same respondents who have tailoring as their main source of employment) and an additional two no longer do agricultural *wage* labour.

The majority of the respondents of this study are currently involved in multiple income generating activities: "if you cannot tailor, you compensate by doing agricultural labour". They point to the good income tailoring provides, but then again they are faced with a meager demand and therefore have to deviate to other forms of employment. More often than not this is agricultural labour (either on family land plots or on wage basis elsewhere). Other additional income generating activities that were mentioned include running a phone shop at the home, making strings of jasmine flower buds (sold as hair decoration), being a cook, working in a small shop, weaving coconut leaves (used to thatch roofs), and basket making (a skill also learned at REDS). A few women are also involved with voluntary work in their community. The most popular supplementary income earning activity is managing a (or several) cows in order to sell the milk to a nearby milk corporation. The women are occupied with caring for the animals, making sure they are fed (sometimes fodder is grown on family land), milking them, and bringing the milk to a corporation where it is sold and further processed.

Box 5.10: Current lives and employment activities

Sundari is 31 years old and lives with her mother (her father died). She is unmarried and happy about that; she sees too much suffering around her of married women and she says she cannot marry because of her infertility. Sundari and her mother have their own piece of land and small jobs. She is happy but misses her father in daily life. Sundari earns her income through wage labour in agriculture, tailoring (if she has time), and a job in the 떴ultural Group She is a voluntary member of the 떴ultural Group This is a Government initiative that raises awareness about women empowerment, literacy, social problems (e.g. alcoholism) in villages, etc. She gets paid 700 INR/month (about 11 Euro) for this. The money is meant for any transport fees made for the job, but whatever she has left of it adds to her monthly income. Sundari is also a voluntary member of the 멖ome Guard This is a program sponsored by Government and includes helping out in villages with practical things (e.g. regulating traffic and regulative roles in the villages during election times). Sundari is an organizational talent, well-witted, and very enthusiastic one of those people it is hard to keep up with. She has been elected in her village to do development work there through a local Panchayat (Government) administration, something she is very proud of. She is currently also pursuing her own education; she is in her 3rd year[f]or a Bachelor of Arts (studying History) degree, a course she follows at home in her free time (a 멵orrespondence course.

Kaleeswa**ri is 28 ye**ars old, she married the son of her father 뭩 sister at the age of 23 years. She has two daughters and her husband works as an electrician. His income is insufficient. Since the REDS training she has not been involved in agriculture anymore, something she is happy about. 밒f I wouldn 뫂 tailor now, I 뭗 have to do agricultural work again Her tailoring skills have provided her income in the past, but at the moment she is occupied with the care for one of her daughters who suffers from epilepsy. Kaleeswari has lived from this skill in the past and proven a great entrepreneur. She has confidence, pride, and an income because of it also. After the REDS course she worked in a popular tailoring shop for 2 years, where she advanced her skills by learning new models. She then opened her own training centre for girls, with a little financial help from her father. She had the centre for about 1.5 years, providing 2000 INR/month (about 32 Euro). She had gotten a certification from a national tailoring institution, so she could also grant her students after completion of the course a renowned certificate. She had to close the training centre due to the epilepsy of her daughter, but she is planning to reopen it in the near future. Besides offering the tailoring courses she also wants the centre to produce and sell products in the future. Kaleeswari is determined to reopen the training centre again and feels confident that this will happen despite her daughter 뭩 illness. She says it is important for the household 뭩 survival. They have no house at the moment (they do not live with her husband 뭩 family), they rent and move from house to house. She wants a steady income again in order to construct or buy their own house.

Most women use any free time during the day and especially evenings to tailor. They receive orders (usually sari blouses) from people in their village, and in general make most profit during upcoming festivals when there is a higher demand for new clothing. The involvement in tailoring as a means to generate income seems to depend mainly on 1- any other work, especially on own family land plots that has to be attended to and 2- the demand within the village. More and more clothes are readily manufactured and available (quite cheaply) in shops and the necessity of tailors is therefore declining. Also, there is a market saturation in the sense that there are many tailors in each village. The income generation from tailoring then depends on the quality of your work and whether you are known for this in the village. Box 5.10 illustrates the current lives and employment activities of two former girl child labourers.

It is safe to say that a majority of the women of this study are satisfied with their current income and the conditions of their employment. With regard to the latter part of the second sub-question of this chapter one can conclude that in terms of employment, the former child labourers of this study have been influenced by their past; by child labour and by education. The labour as a child has stood in the way of completing formal schooling, which in turn has likely decreased their current employment opportunities. This is said, but the extent to which this has occurred remains unclear because there are little employment opportunities in rural Sivagangai District in the first place. The

vocational skills training (particularly tailoring) has proven useful to generate income, albeit usually only in a supplementary manner. Tailoring pays well, better than agricultural wage labour for the same number of hours spent working. Those with own land are also happy they have another skill, particularly in the face of declining harvests and prices for their produce: "it's not worth it anymore to work under the sun, but there are no options here". Having the skill might help them, but even here the options are limited because in general the demand side for tailors is low. In most of the villages there is a market saturation when it comes to tailoring. For these women it appears that employment is difficult in this area, therefore most of them get by through taking up multiple forms of income generating activities. A few also have a husband working abroad as an unskilled (construction) worker. The skills learned at REDS, in most cases, are able to provide an additional source of income. However, the amount differs per person and in general the amount of income from tailoring is decreasing. Some of the women have stressed that although their current income is sufficient at the moment, they will need more in the future for their children's further education:

"For the time being the pay and our income is good, the children are in school and their needs are met. But after they are finished with school I expect financial problems to educate them (e.g. in a college)"

The problems with regard to employment recognized by the focus group discussion participants are those of little tailoring demand in their village and a lack of knowledge of more tailoring models that could increase their employment opportunities. Women with young children find it difficult to go out to work if they cannot leave their children with relatives or friends. They ideally need home-based employment. This is something the tailoring skill has enabled for them, but unfortunately there is currently little demand for their labour. In general the largest problem with regard to employment is that there are so little opportunities for it in their area. Even agriculture, for some the last resort, is facing growing problems with regard to decreasing harvests and decreasing prices for produce. The employment situation faces acute problems in this area. Several of the women say the National Rural Employment Programme (a Government initiative) has been useful for them. It provides them additional income with a guarantee of one hundred workdays per person per year with a daily wage of 80 INR/day (about 1,30 Euro). A major deficiency of the programme is that Government people "eat up the money" and the daily wage is reduced by fifty percent.

Marriage

The culture of arranged marriages is very strong in this part of India, and it appears from the women in this study that these marriages often go hand in hand with much trouble. A woman's position as the underdog in such situations deserves attention in this chapter as it illustrates the dark side of many women's lives (see box 5.11). It cannot be justly concluded that the problems underneath are all due to the culture of arranged marriages. It is expected, however, that some of them do have a relation to this. There were only a few respondents who explicitly spoke about the problems they had with regard to their marriage or spouse. In this research much remains unsaid about the magnitude of these problems.

Box 5.11: A widow

Kalai Selvi is now 28 years old but got married at the age of twelve. It was an arranged marriage; her parents were desperate to get their daughters married as soon as possible ﷿tying them to some form of stability or financial security in later life. Kalai Selvi had learned at REDS (she participated in the training at the age of eleven) that child marriages are not o.k., but her parents compelled her to get married. Her parents felt they had a problem with four daughters, getting them all married and settled in life was a stressful thing for them. Her sisters were darker-skinned than her, her parents thought marrying them would be more difficult due to their skin color. Kalai Selvi was lighter skinned, chubbier, and healthier looking- which made it easier to marry her at the time. Especially since her parents 뱓ook every opportunity﷿to marry her off. Kalai Selvi 뭩 husband recently hung himself after problems in their marriage and escalating conflicts between them. She feels sad about it and gets very emotional when sharing the story. She says she feels ashamed about the suicide of her husband, a factor that withheld her from seeking any help from people at the time it happened. Failing marriages are accompanied with a great feeling of shame, as is the suicide of a husband. Kalai Selvi currently lives with her mother, together with her older sisters and with her own two children. All three women have become widows within the time span of five years: 뱕e share the loss of our husbands and will sorrow until our deaths about losing them﷿ She feels happy that she can support her children through tailoring (she is known as a good tailor in her village and gets many orders because of this) and selling her cow 뭩 milk. She regrets ever getting married to her husband at such a young age.

Bridal dowry does not play a minor role in arranged marriages. The amount of money a father has to marry his daughter off seems decisive for the type of man she will marry. Not necessarily the 'type' of man but more his background and his financial capabilities to support his wife and possible future children. This was also the case with one of the respondents of this study who was married off to a 'defected' (handicapped) man because her parents could not find another candidate who would marry for such a poor dowry. Poor parents have a poor dowry available for their daughter's marriage, as do parents who have many daughters. Girls are expensive in this society due to the costs that come with marrying them within the arranged marriage culture. Female infanticide and female feticide are also not uncommon practices in Tamil Nadu. This does not imply that the above atrocities are only caused because of bridal dowries, but it shows the unwanted position females have. Dowry related problems are said to be major here; including debts due to poverty, murders, and even suicides.

There was a case in this study where a respondent was deserted by her husband four months after the marriage because his parents thought the dowry paid by her family was too little. In-laws can make the life of a woman miserable, especially when she and her husband live with them. There are several women in this study who say they have been (mentally) tortured by their mother-in-law. Nasty tricks (the forced abortion of her first child also) were played to discredit the bride described above. Her husband has left her and she has gathered enough strength to fight off her suicidal thoughts, but she cannot file for a divorce.

With regard to in-law cruelty as well as cruelty by a spouse another one of the subjects of this research makes it apparent how she has practically become a slave for her husband's family. When she was pregnant with her first child her husband left her and only came back again after eight years. She was pregnant with their second child soon after that, but she gave this child to her sister who was infertile. Her husband demanded her to abort the child because of their poverty situation (they would not be able to care for two children), but giving the child to her sister seemed a better option. While telling this story the respondent cries but decides she wants to go ahead with the interview. She says her husband is a cruel man and demands her to work (he works 2-3 days a week cutting firewood) in

order to not only sustain *their* family but also to sustain his mother. The financial burden of paying her mother-in-law 1.000 INR/month (equivalent of about 16 Euro) is heavy and was initialized after the daily cooking she did for her in-laws was complained about (the money should compensate the cooking). Furthermore, this woman is still repaying a debt held by her husband at a petty shop (tobacco and alcohol). In some situations a woman is truly better off without a man!

Infertility can also be a big problem in a marriage, something we see with Jebamani (now thirty-nine years old). Her husband divorced her soon after the marriage because she "could not give him children". She moved back to her parents place and soon after received one of her sister's twin daughters.

Another problem regarding husbands includes them being away as migrant workers. Missing them, especially shortly after marriage or having a child is experienced as something difficult: "missing him is painful". Especially if the money earned by a husband is for the greatest part spent on paying off debts that his parents have or paying for his sister's dowry and *not* on sustaining his own family.

Love marriages

Love marriages do occur but they seem uncommon, only two women in this study are proud holders of such a marriage. Against the backdrop of the above described problems experienced with regard to marriage, the following story deserves illumination. It demonstrates another side, of how marriage could be - *also* within Tamil Nadu society. It also shows the consequences (losing family) that a love marriage can have.

Sigappi is now twenty-five years old and has a son of two years. She got married five years ago to a man who her family did not approve of. Her mother had already arranged for Sigappi to marry her uncle (her mother's younger brother). Luckily Sigappi's husband's family supported their marriage. They got married in a temple after Sigappi ran away from home. Her husband was a migrant labourer in the Middle East but came back to marry her after the news reached him that Sigappi's family was taking serious steps to marry her off to her uncle. After the marriage they roamed around for a while before they finally settled with his family. Her in-laws keep her well she says, something also noteworthy with regard to other respondents' in-laws. Sigappi has no contact with her own family anymore, only one of her sisters visits her secretly sometimes. At the moment Sigappi's husband works abroad again because he cannot find employment in their village (or nearby). While he is there he can save money for the family. Sigappi does some tailoring but receives little orders. She works mainly in agriculture; two thirds of the time in wage labour and one third of the time on their own plot of land. If she has many tailoring orders she gives those priority over agricultural labour. She is happy about her own employment: "my income can support me and my son, I do not expect any money from my family in-law, I want to be independent". The agricultural labour now makes about 60 INR/day (about one Euro) for her, but through tailoring she could earn two to three times that amount per day. Unfortunately she has too little orders, there is a lot of competition and then "agriculture is the only alternative here". The tailoring currently supplements her income, though she wishes it could be her main source of income.

5.4.2 What is the impact of the past?

The past definitely has had an impact on the current lives of the former girl child labourers of this study. It is, however, for certain that measuring impact is something difficult to do, for on what terms does one do so? We look underneath more at the *influences* child labour as well as the vocational skills training have had on the group of women studied in this research. This comes to terms with the latter part of the second sub-question of this chapter. An extensive impact assessment shall not be made, as this reaches beyond the scope of this more explorative study. Instead we consider the ways in which past lives have been shaped by the history of child labour and by a skills training; this on the basis of how respondents word it. What do they find important and how do they look back on their experiences with child labour and education (in the form of a vocational skills training programme); what implications or meaning do these two factors of their past have for their present and future? Explicit attention is also given to the ways they now see themselves (as a woman) in society and to any notions of identity they have.

Impact of child labour

Not only recollecting their present life and problems (as discussed in the previous section above), but also recollecting their past as a child labourer has led to some emotional interviews. Rethinking and telling about their past family situation of financial deficiency and also the fact that they had to engage in child labour, made some respondents cry. The psychological impact of child labour and its context seems to speak for itself.

Overall, the majority of participants in this study say their current lives have been shaped or influenced by their past as a child labourer. This mainly in the sense that they have not been able to finish their formal education (primary *and* secondary school) up to the 12th standard. They have been impacted by child labour in the sense that they now live with feelings of regret with regard to (not finishing) schooling. Child labour is said by most to have had influence on their development because of this, and not in a positive way. Most women believe their development has been hampered due to child labour because 1- the child labour (sometimes among other factors) withheld or replaced their schooling and 2- the child labour gave them a bad *feeling* because of the conditions and nature of the work, but also because it made them miss out on education. In box 5.12 one finds an overview of how women describe the influence child labour has had on them. Note that this impact is by all women described in a negative sense, there is not one participant in this study who says child labour has had an overall positive influence or impact on her. The way child labour has influenced the women in their later lives is especially along mental or psychological terms, none of the women mentioned current physical problems due to their past as a labouring child.

There were only two former girl child labourers who had a more neutral stance about the influence child labour has had on their lives and persona. One was a child labourer for only one year and says the impact was only minor. The other respondent says child labour has not impacted her in a negative way, she has nothing negative to say about it (and nothing positive either) because she believes it is a part of rural life and should just be taken as that. She has no regrets about her past as a child labourer. Apart from these two cases it is safe to conclude that child labour, in general, is

believed to have had a negative influence on the lives of those who have been engaged in it. This primarily because it prevents completing education – which together with the nature and conditions of the work itself – has made most women feel small or inferior: "I have a pain in my mind about it". Having been able to contribute to the household survival at the time is an aspect of the labour that is still regarded positively, however.

Box 5.12: The influence of child labour

It has damaged me, I cannot live a decent life without education.

It makes me feel sad I had to offer my labour at such a young age.

It makes me feel small; having missed education and having been a child labourer.

It has damaged my future, my development is spoiled.

You lose your self-worth in society. If you have studied, your position is better. Child labour causes suffering and damages your entire life.

It has affected my development because if I was completely educated I would have been better placed.

It has been a disturbing aspect in my life. Now I want to study but it 뭩 too late; what you can 뭚 do at the age of five, you can 뭚 do at the age of fifty (a Tamil saying).

Impact of the vocational skills training

"I was like a frog, coming out of the well and seeing the world. I gained self-confidence about being able to lead a better life, and making this possible on my own in the future"

The impact of the training at REDS stands in stark contrast to that of child labour, as the prior is by all respondents said to have had a positive influence on their lives and persona. Some caution is necessary with this interpretation, however. Nevertheless, in answering the latter part of the second sub-question of this chapter, it becomes clear that the vocational skills training has had an impact or influence on two fronts. One is financially, which has already come to light in section 5.4.1. All respondents use their tailoring skill in some way to generate income, most as a *supplementary* income generation activity because full-time employment in this skill is difficult (also with limited models of tailoring they know). Despite this being so, the training has influenced them in the sense of providing (additional) direct income or at least giving them the *feeling* of financial security (also for the future). Thus, next to having an influence on current employment opportunities, the training at REDS has also had more general influences on its participants (see box 5.13).

According to the vast majority, a major impact the training has had on them is that it taught them more than just a set of skills. They learned good behavior or 'discipline' which is important for "self development and giving you a place in society". It gives you recognition in society, it gives you 'dignity' (an also frequently mentioned term) or positive recognition and respect received by the village community for who you are; it is where they place you. It involves learning good habits, structure, patience, respect (no shouting or fighting), self-discipline, talking to people and communicating in a

proper manner, and keeping yourself and your surroundings clean. These general aspects (along with others such as personal hygiene, health matters, and learning how to cook) contribute to learning basic life skills: "I learned life here". Most women say the six month skills training drastically changed them in the sense of giving them more confidence in life and they wish the programme was still running. They say there are many girls in their village who would benefit from such a thing in the same way they did.

Box 5.13: The influence of a vocational skills training programme

I was like a blind person, but after the training at REDS I could see the light for my future. The tailoring skills have now become my asset, my skill, and I feel very good about that. They ensure income in my future. I also learned good discipline and life skills and I had counseling. All of this has an effective role on my life.

I am very happy with the training, it taught me skills that now provide income. I am also able to support my two children and my mother and one of my sisters. I am now the head of the family, I provide the main income. This makes me feel proud.

I just married my husband, but even after that you 뭙 e still independent. You don 뭎 need his mercy. A woman should be independent, if you become a widow the skill will provide you this.

If I would have not attended the REDS training I would have surely suffered more in life, it helped me towards a more reliable income in the future.

It has been good for my development and confidence, only after the training I developed hope and self-confidence in myself.

At REDS I overcame the inferiority feeling I gained because of dropping out of school and being a child labourer.

I feel that I can survive because I have learned the skill.

Besides being happy to have learned general skills such as good behavior and discipline during the training, respondents were also happy to have had the opportunity to learn the particular skills (tailoring, etc.) at REDS. The latter not only in terms of leading to income opportunities, but also in the light of a good second alternative to not having finished formal schooling. All skills learned, the general as well as the particular ones have given the respondents a greater feeling of self-esteem and self-confidence as they have been educated further in *something*. In this sense the training has been very effective, even in the face of little employment opportunities with regard to the particular skills learned. The women not only feel more proud, confident, and empowered because of their possibilities of financial independence but also because they have *learned* something (despite not having finished school) and know how to practice certain skills (particularly tailoring). Within the context of Tamil Nadu society increasing the self-worth of women, is believed to be extremely important. The participants of the skills training, in general, said the training has made them feel more confident about their income generating possibilities and capabilities; in the present as well as in the future. In the light of the many problems faced by women in this society, this is the main strength of such a skills training programme. A boost in confidence and earning capabilities is likely to work in favour of a stronger position of (these) women in society. Many of the respondents also state this; the training has given them a better *place* in society.

The aforementioned has illustrated the positive influences former girl child labourers ascribe to a vocational skills training they followed - upon withdrawal from agricultural child labour - at an NGO. Both at the time of following the training as well as later in life this training has positively influenced their lives. This especially in the sense of *feelings* (confidence, independence, dignity, etc.), but also more directly in the sense of widening (under limited circumstances) the possibilities of income generation activities (also from the home). Having had the opportunity to follow such a programme has had positive implications for the future lives of these women.

Self-perception now

When respondents were asked how aspects of their identity have been influenced by the training, there were some confused looks. Most linked their identity directly to their capability to practice a skill and provide income with it. This has made them feel more independent and confident as they feel their skill can help them gain income. Being able to earn money through tailoring (and having learned the skill in the first place) also makes many of the women feel proud and feel that they are leading a dignified life. This has been a major influence of the vocational skills training programme.

Their identity is influenced in the sense that they feel proud, respected, and better placed because of the fact that they learned a skill that can help take care of their needs. Being more brave as a person is especially important for women within a male dominated society. In general the training has given the women more confidence in life and more self-worth. We see that the vocational skills training has had a big influence on the former girl child labourers of this study in a positive sense – their self-perception is directly related to this in most cases:

"The training made me a braver person. Because I had learned a skill I felt confident not to be subservient anymore, I can stand on my own two feet now and have no fear"

"I enjoy a special status now, I'm very much needed in the community"

"I consider that I am now better placed compared to those who did not undergo a skills training. I am proud and confident. I can definitely earn the money to provide in my own needs now. Especially by tailoring. I bought a sewing machine with contributions from an uncle after the course had ended"

"I am appreciated because of the training, I gained increased respect in the village because I have a skill"

Women were asked how they now see or think of themselves, as a woman, in society. The results of this study show that they feel better placed in their community because they have undergone a skills training. Many claim they get more recognition and respect in their community - live a more dignified life - because of this: "I am no longer looked at as a cheap person" and "people look at me with dignity and respect, there's a name, a position for me". The overall majority of respondents sees themselves mainly within the terms of having learned tailoring skills. They see themselves as responsible and confident women. Some also still identify themselves as a school drop-out, illustrating

the impact this has had on them. One of the women mentioned being a wife is also part of her identity, another mentioned the role God plays in her life and the importance of religion (Christianity).

It seems, from their accounts, that the current self-perception of the former girl child labourers of this study has a strong relation with their history of having completed a vocational skills training programme. Their self-perception relating to child labour mainly consists of 1- having missed out on formal schooling due to having had to engage in labour as a child and 2- having had the opportunity to *depart* from the reality of child labour, hopefully also for their children. Perhaps the focus of the interviews on the vocational skills training has led most respondents to describe their identity and base their self-perception mainly around learning this skill (tailoring). However, it could also be that the training and the skill they are now able to practice (and generate income with to a certain extent) have genuinely played a major role in their lives thus far.

5.4.3 Hopes and dreams

In general most hopes and dreams respondents have for their future, are those related to their children. Especially educating their children and making sure they are able to finish formal schooling and not ever become child labourers. With regard to themselves most women wish that they will be able to generate sufficient income in the future. This often in order to make sure their children can be educated and settled in life (with good employment and a good place in society): "they should not be like me, they should not end up like me, they need to get better jobs. This is possible if I will earn enough money to support their education". Sufficient income generation in the future is also important in order to guarantee their *own* future financial survival (independence) and to generate (or maintain) a respected or dignified position in their community. The latter remains very important for women in this society as they cope with issues of male dominance. According to an informant, male dominance is maybe the most disturbing factor in this society. Females are subservient and sometimes sub-human even. This is changing (particularly in urban areas) due to the media and education on gender justice. However, in rural areas the changes are remarked to be very, very slow.

In general the hopes and dreams of women for themselves are modest, they primarily hope that their children will have a better life than they have had:

"I have a dream for my children only: my son should be an engineer and my daughter a doctor. If this does not work out, they should become good teachers. For myself, I don't want to be richer or poorer than I am. As long as I can fulfill my personal needs and those of the family, I will be happy"

Some of the respondents who had not married yet wished (for the future) to find a husband soon and have children that would be fully educated. One respondent laughed when she was asked whether she had any dreams for the future: "I'm satisfied with what I have, I don't have any dreams; what's the purpose of dreams?". She sees no point in dreaming; life the way it is, is just something that has to be dealt with. Perhaps dealing with the hardships of everyday life has left her with little hope to have or

attain anything more. She has learnt to be satisfied with what she has and does not want anything more.

For one of the respondents with a rough recent past because her husband left her, her dream is to learn to live and look at things more positively: "I suffer already in my life and many people do not want to see or talk to me". She hopes the skills she learned at REDS will help her develop further so that she eventually will acquire a better position in the community. Having a good position in society is a central desire of the majority of respondents; not only for themselves but also for their children. This position is gained by being educated and being able to manage oneself and the family through decent employment. Which, in the case of the women of this study, includes tailoring even though the demand is low and only the best tailors get a reasonable number of orders. Some respondents have explicitly mentioned their dream to learn either more tailoring skills (to expand their income generation capabilities) or be employed in a different form of employment – one that offers more financial stability, also for the future:

"I want to be able to work in the future so that my son can go to school. I want to be self-dependent, I don't want to depend on anybody. I want a job with a monthly salary and use tailoring as supplementary income (because demand is limited). A monthly income provides more financial security. As long as I can finance it my son will stay in school, he should not be working"

"I would like a good job in the Government, this pays a good monthly salary and assures retirement benefits. Working in Government, I could also help other people, like I do now"

Box 5.14: Dreams for the future

I hope the future will bring a good upbringing of my children, I want to settle them well in life. I live for my children. Besides that, I am alone, I am looked down on by the community because I am a widow. This is difficult for me, but I am happy. I can make my own decisions, it is only the loneliness that makes me suffer. I wanted to commit suicide but my children need me. My children see me struggle now because I had no good education, I hope they will take every opportunity to finish school.

I want to provide my children better education than I had. I want to be responsible to settle the children in life. I want to remain independent and work for many years so I can save money for the future. I cannot depend on my children in the future, but they can depend on me. My husband also wants this.

I want to develop this skill (tailoring) further and start a shop in the future because my husband's income is not enough – especially if we have children. The economic position of women should become more important.

I will see to it that my children achieve education and a better life. I also want to improve myself and my skills in order to have a better future for my family; not only economically but also a good name and position in society, also for my daughters. I will do my best.

My dream for the future is to be more educated, this would be good for the future. One day I want to buy a house. This would give me more status in society. My brothers and sisters studied and are employed well at the moment. I want them to be proud of me and desire to work hard for this. I also want to get married in about a year, and then have two children.

Box 5.14 displays some of the hopes and dreams of former girl child labourers. It also illustrates, in general, the dreams in relation to offering children the things (especially education) that could not be fully enjoyed by respondents themselves in their past. Protecting them from the hardships

they themselves faced in, their often, young lives. The vitality and strength, the ambition and dedication of the women of this study should become clear. We see that education seems to be more and more recognized as something important for children; times might indeed be changing. The respondents of this study argue that they will do their utter best to make sure their children can stay in school and will not have to do any work that interferes with going to school. They also stress the importance of their (financial) independence and the ways in which they have attained better places in society. Many of the women seem to have come from the darkness and found the means to walk into the light; some, however, able to take bigger leaps than others. Nevertheless, it seems that at least the respondents of this study feel strong enough to keep heading in the direction they believe is the correct one. A direction that falls well in line with what is - in a universalistic sense - considered the 'right' one.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research data obtained by listening to what former girl child labourers say about child labour and education. The information displayed has served to come to terms with the first main research question of this thesis and its sub-questions. The extensive research findings have been divided theme-wise in the chapter: experiences with child labour; experiences with a vocational skills training programme; views and valuations of child labour, education, and universal child rights; and current lives, impacts of child labour & education, and future hopes & dreams. In this conclusion we shall attempt to find more concrete answers to the first main research question of this thesis, summarizing much of what has already appeared in the four thematic sections of the chapter. This is done by, first, having a closer look at each of the sub-questions.

What are the experiences of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training)? With regard to this first sub-question one can conclude that the experiences of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour in the agriculture sector are not at all positive. The work is often described as having been painful; both physically as well as mentally in the sense of missing out on education. The child labour was not enjoyed by any of the respondents, especially not in retrospect as they have dealt – in general – with great regrets about not having finished formal schooling up to the 12th standard. Engaging in labour as a child has been explained as a dire necessity to help the family survive, not so much as a free 'choice'. Respondents felt their work was necessary to keep the family standing, something not uncommon for children of the rural poor. The respondents felt they had to contribute, many *wanted* to contribute in order to relieve some of the financial burdens of the family. We see that their agency has been constricted and narrowed down to coping with a situation; taking on a responsibility rather than having the full capacity to choose within limited conditions.

Among respondents of this study the context for child labour was one of poverty or income deficiency of the household in combination with other factors. Especially those related to problems at school or poor performance in school which often led to feelings of failure and discouragement to

continue. The role of parents and teachers in encouraging children to stay in school in such situations remains largely unexplored in this study. Formal schooling was, in general, experienced positively by the respondents. Especially by those doing well in school. Dropping out of school was mainly attributed to (a combination of) parents not being able to afford school costs; the time for schooling - after first being combined with work – being replaced with labour; and feeling discouraged to continue due to failure. Problems at home but also at school led to child labour. Education in the sense of a vocational skills training programme has been very positively experienced by the former girl child labourers of this study. Being out of the sun and no longer facing the hardships of agricultural labour; being able to learn something after having dropped out of formal schooling; the group life during the residential program; and learning skills that could help them generate income in the future were things that made the girls feel 'jolly' and more confident at the time.

How do former girl child labourers value child labour (in the agriculture sector) and education (both formal schooling as well as a vocational skills training) and how have they been influenced by both? Answering the second sub-question of this chapter leads to conclude that child labour is - by the large majority of respondents - valued as something negative. Only one respondent mentioned it being a 'part of rural life'. Child labour deprives one of education (going to school) and causes mental and physical suffering. These attributes weigh heavier than its positive attribute of contributing to the family survival in financially turbulent times. Nevertheless, respondents state there are little choices when confronted with such dilemma's: work becomes necessary. Formal schooling is highly valued, finishing education up to the 12th standard is recognized as very important by most of the women of this study. Furthermore, it is something they regret having missed as a child because they had to work. A vocational skills training is highly valued as well, but by most respondents only as an *alternative* to not finishing school or additionally *after* finishing school. Formal schooling is prioritized by the greater majority. Those who prioritize a skills training over finishing school do so for practical reasons; within this area such a training is believed to lead to more employment than formal education.

The respondents of this study have been influenced by child labour in a negative sense. The labour, as a child, was difficult and still today they are impacted by it. Firstly because they have not been able to finish formal schooling and deeply regret this, also because it maybe might have given them more opportunities in life. Secondly because they *feel* bad about the labour they did as a child; the conditions as well as the nature of the work were painful, both mentally and physically. Child labour has made the respondents miss their education, something they – in general – feel inferior and 'small' about. It is no longer a physical pain, but a mental one, that has influenced them till today. The influence of the vocational skills training is said to be very positive. Tailoring, the main skill learned, is used by all respondents to support their current income. This, however, in most cases in a *supplementary* way. There is little tailoring demand due to, amongst other reasons, a market saturation of tailors in the rural villages. The tailoring models taught at REDS were also limited. The other skills learned are hardly practiced for income generation by this group of former participants. Employment opportunities are very scarce at the moment, even agriculture is suffering from declining

harvests and prices. Most of the women devise multiple income generation activities, often next to work (sometimes abroad) undertaken by their husbands. Next to offering *some* solace employment-wise, the vocational skills training has primarily influenced the former girl child labourers in the sense of providing them a feeling of financial security, independence, pride, and confidence. Not only because they feel they have an opportunity to generate income in the future but also because they have been educated in at least something. This, along with the skill they can practice, is something that has influenced the women in the sense that they feel they are leading a dignified life now. They gain recognition and respect from their community; they feel they are better placed because they have undergone the skills training and possess a skill. According to all of the respondents the skills training has been a good second alternative to missing out on formal schooling.

What notions do former girl child labourers have about the rights of children and what are their interpretations of- and views towards universal rights of the child? Do they resist them for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks or do they embrace them as an avenue for emancipation? With regard to the third sub-question of this chapter (and of the first main research question of this thesis) we can conclude that former girl child labourers have notions of child rights that are framed by their own experiences and interpretations. These rights are not exactly framed as they are in the UN CRC, but they are for the most part very much in line with the fundamental provisions of universal child rights. The basic elements are strikingly similar. The right to being free from child labour or exploitation, rights to education, to freedom, to play, and to good health care and nutrition were mentioned as most important by respondents. Moreover, children should enjoy life and be 'jolly' – something which does *not* include missing out on education and being a child labourer according to the women of this study. They, surprisingly, lean less towards a relativistic stance when it comes to viewing universal rights of the child. They seem to embrace these and their own notions of child rights are in fact very similar to them. Universal child rights are not at all resisted for being unrepresentative of their lifeworlds and local cultural frameworks. This study shows that the universal provisions of the rights of the child might indeed hold more universal validity than often attributed by relativists. The views and interpretations of former child labourers with regard to child rights seem to coincide - more than they conflict - with universalist (rights-based) approaches to child labour.

It is important to realize that the respondents of this study are responding to universal child rights, probably, from their own past; their own experiences. They are responding from difficult, turbulent financial situations; they are responding to the hardships of child labour that they themselves have experienced; and they are responding to the pain they have felt and still feel of missing out on (formal) schooling. They formulate and interpret (universal) child rights from such perspectives rather than from the ideals of universal child rights – 'the best interest of the child' – in the *first* place. They embrace universal child rights, at least those rights discussed during the interview, from such (their own) perspectives, experiences, and feelings. They might indeed embrace them as an avenue for emancipation; for liberating their society and its future children from the same hardships they have themselves faced because of child labour.

What do former girl child labourers' interpretations, accounts, valuations, and desires tell us about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour, this especially in the face of this approach being universalistic? Do former girl child labourers use a rights-based way of thinking about child labour and education? The fourth and last sub-question of this chapter is closely linked to the first main research question of this study. We have seen that in this study the interpretations, accounts, and valuations of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour, education, and the rights of children lean towards universalistic stances that strongly condemn such work for children and argue that all children should be in school. This implies that for these respondents a rights-based approach to child labour *can* have uses and meaning; they can be a means to protect their children from the same hardships they have themselves faced as a child. For this reason these approaches are, together with universal child rights, expected to be warmly welcomed. Universal child rights are not considered too universalistic according to former girl child labourers in this study; the rights-based approach to child labour (based mainly on such universal rights) is then something they would probably not reject. According to the women of this study, the steps most necessary to eliminate child labour (something the respondents of this study desire) are those that make sure children can finish school. Awareness raising (about the importance of school and the harm of child labour), directed at both parents and children, in order to avoid children from dropping out *and* measures to tackle poverty so that this cannot form an obstacle to a child staying in school - are considered important. Many of those local NGOs with a rights-based approach to child labour (and education) are, in this case, doing what those formerly involved say *should* be done to tackle child labour. In this sense the use and meaning of such an approach seems to be in accordance with reality. The women of this study have clearly articulated their desire to protect their own (future) children from the childhood experiences they themselves have faced. In this regard they seem to embrace universal child rights as a means that can provide such protection.

The question of whether former girl child labourers themselves *use* a rights-based way of thinking about child labour and education is more disputable. Even though their accounts, interpretations, experiences, valuations, and desires – when talking about child labour (and education) – seem to fall in line with a rights-based way of thinking, they do not seem to *stem* from such a thinking or ideology in the first place. This is something important that needs to be kept in mind. They seem to part, instead, from these women's own past lives as a child as well as from their current lives as *former* child labourers and – in some cases – as mothers. They do not use a rights-based way of thinking about child labour themselves, despite the fact that they do embrace such rights and thinking with regard to child labour. The women of this study use a more practical way of thinking about child labour, as based on their own experiences as a child and still today as an adult living with the consequences of having had to engage in labour as a child; especially having had to miss out on completing formal schooling. The latter is, in retrospect, regarded to be one of the most important things (and an inherent right) for children according to the women of this study. They seem to warmly welcome universal rights. However, their own conceptualization of what rights a child should have are not so much linked to the ideology of child rights and 'the best interest of the child', but more to what

the consequences are of a deprivation of certain important things in life (e.g. education) for a child. Consequences they themselves have experienced first hand. Being formally educated - something child labour obstructs - is believed to lead to a more dignified life, a better position within society, a better income later in life (if there are employment opportunities), and more recognition and respect from the community.

It is not particularly a rights-based thinking used in the first place by former girl child labourers, but a thinking in terms of deprivation and hardships; a thinking that seems to fight the social and economic, even cultural systems that are in place and perpetuate instead of resist phenomena such as child labour amongst the children of the rural poor. Overall then, even though universal child rights and rights-based approaches to child labour *can* have uses and meaning for local actors; such discussions seem marginally relevant when realizing that these actors are more concerned with the everyday reality of child labour - the experiences and the hardships, and *not* whether and where exactly such labour is in conflict with particular rights. The problem of child labour is approached from a different angle; not from a rights-based way of thinking (this is how NGOs seem to approach the problem) but from a *practical* way of thinking. Even though rights-based approaches might then be less relevant for these women in their way of conceptualizing, thinking, and speaking of child labour, their notions of universal child rights (and thus the rights-based approaches to child labour based on these) do seem to be welcomed by these women as avenues that could help protect future generations from the same fate they have experienced in life.

Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations? This first main research question of this thesis has been partly answered already with the help of its sub-questions. We have explored the past lifeworlds of former girl child labourers engaged in agriculture within the rural Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu. We have, through their experiences with both child labour itself as well as with the context and conditions that allow for it to occur, seen the complex and intertwined factors that push children into labour. The desperate situation of income deficiency and the need of rural children to work as part of a family strategy to survive have become clear. We have also been familiarized with education in the sense of formal schooling and how dropping out relates to becoming more involved with child labour. In general going to school has been quite positively experienced by respondents (especially by those doing well and not failing), this besides some exceptional cases of course. Child labour has, overall, been experienced as painful by the respondents of this study. The nature and conditions of the work were physically (especially the hot sun) and mentally painful, the last particularly in terms of not being able to complete formal education. Today the women still feel bad about the labour they did as a child; about the fact that it had to happen and that it disabled them to complete their formal education. The last is, particularly in retrospect, a painful negative attribute of child labour. The residential vocational skills training programme at REDS has been experienced positively by the former girl child labourers of this study. Being out of the sun and having a second alternative to formal schooling, an opportunity to learn

something (tailoring) with good future income earning opportunities from the home gave the girls a good feeling at the time. The group life was also something very much enjoyed by the majority of respondents.

The valuations of child labour and education relate to the former girl child labourers' own experiences with regard to these. Child labour is, in general, not considered something positive. Moreover, it is viewed as something negative but necessary in a situation of acute income deficiency faced by the family. It is not so much a choice but something a child is then forced to do, it is a responsibility she has to take on. It is not something enjoyable according to the women of this study, but it is something necessary and its most positive aspect is therefore that it helps alleviate the suffering of the family (at least on the short-term). Formal schooling has the highest priority according to the majority of respondents; it is considered very important for a child's development and future possibilities in life. Furthermore, it is something they themselves have been deprived of (for differing but similar reasons). A vocational skills training is by most former girl child labourers seen as the second best alternative to finishing formal education or as something that should be done in *addition* to completing formal schooling. It is highly valued for playing its part in such situations. Finishing education up to the 12th standard, however, receives most importance.

The current lifeworlds of the former girl child labourers of this study differ; many are married and have children. We have reviewed some of the problems faced by the respondents of this study in their (recent) current lives, especially those related to (arranged) marriages, their spouses, and in-laws. All women use their tailoring skills to supplement their income, while many still work in agriculture as well. The income from tailoring is profitable but the demand is so meager that the women need to devise *multiple* ways to generate income; amongst them agricultural work. Child labour has influenced them today, in their current lives, within the lines of not having been able to finish formal schooling. This has led to deep regrets many of the women feel with regard to their past because it makes them feel inferior and also because it has possibly reduced the breadth of employment opportunities. Education in the sense of the skills training has influenced former girl child labourers directly in the sense of giving them an additional means to generate income, but also less directly in the sense of giving them a better feeling of self-worth, confidence, pride, and independence. The fact that they have learned a skill and can practice a skill makes them feel proud, more dignified, respected, and better placed in their community. The *feeling* of financial security and independence due to the income earning possibilities of the skill is also important.

Hopes, dreams, and desires of former girl child labourers for the future relate mainly to being able to practice their skill and generate income through it. Those with children or those with future hopes of having children, mainly have dreams for their children and not so much for themselves. These women hope their children will be fully educated and will stay in school up to the 12th standard. It is for this reason that their other dream – generating sufficient income – is important. They do not want to face acute situations of financial deficiency that demand their child's labour in a family strategy of survival. By all means they want to prevent this from happening and desire their income to be sufficient in the future in order to not only allow their children to finish formal education up to the 12th

standard but also to educate them further. The reality of this happening, however, is recognized to be difficult. With respect to child labour in general, the overall majority of former girl child labourers desires it to be fully eliminated and desires children to be educated and not to drop out of school for *any* reason.

The experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers concerning child labour (and education) relate, in a way, to universalistic rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local NGOs. Even though their thinking about this issue does not seem to *stem* from a rights-based way of thinking; they do seem to embrace such thinking as a means to protect children from the same fate they have undergone as a child. We have already gone into this in detail in answering sub-question four. For the most part the uses and meaning of a rights-based approach centralizing universal child rights mainly lies within this context. The local actors (former girl child labourers) themselves initially react to their own situation not from the standpoint of child rights' deprivation but from their own local cultural frameworks which have not been able to prevent or protect them from having to engage in labour and (therefore) also from missing out on formal schooling. In retrospect it is the experiences of hardship, sadness, and pain – the everyday reality of child labour – that composes how these women speak of child labour and education. Despite such practical thinking outside the terms of children's rights, the women of this study *do* agree with such universal provisions for children – especially in the face of child labour. Their own notions of child rights, in fact, seem to coincide more than conflict with universalistic child rights. The rights-based approach, then, seems warmly welcomed as an avenue that could make up for what their social system cannot provide or even deprives children of. Former girl child labourers surprisingly lean towards a less relativistic stance than relativists would argue. They perhaps show that there is more universality in (the fundamental provisions of) international child rights than attributed by relativists.

The following chapter shall continue with the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour for local actors; but instead of focusing on the receivers, it focuses on the providers (local Tamil Nadu NGOs) of aid directed through a rights-based approach. It shall look at how these organizations speak of child labour and why and in what ways their activities relate to a universalistic rights-based approach to child labour.

6 Local NGOs and their approach to child labour

In the previous chapter we have already come to terms with the part of the research findings related to the first main research question of this thesis. Chapter five discussed how former girl child labourers engaged in agriculture speak of child labour and education and at how their interpretations, accounts, valuations, and desires relate to the universalistic RBAs to child labour that are often used by local NGOs. The current chapter shall set forth such discussions, focusing on these local Tamil Nadu NGOs that deal with child labour issues. In an attempt to answer the second main research question of this thesis, the forthcoming chapter shall look at how these local NGOs speak of child labour and whether, how, and why their activities are aligned with a rights-based approach.

At the end of the chapter the second main research question of this thesis shall be answered: *How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour?* The question is answered with the help of four sub-questions:

1. How do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations speak of child labour and of education in relation to child labour?
2. What activities do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations operate with regard to child labour and are these operated (and in what ways) from a rights-based perspective?
3. How have universal rights of the child been received by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations and do they not feel these are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality? How has the rights-based approach been received and adopted by local non-governmental organizations?
4. What does the motivation and application of a rights-based approach by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations tell us about the meaning and uses of this approach to child labour? How has such an approach shaped their ways of thinking, their institutional practices, and their modes of operation?

The abovementioned sub-questions of this chapter shall not be systematically answered throughout the chapter. The reason for this is that they do not properly coincide with the thematic divisions and build-up of the chapter. The sub-questions shall be partly answered within the different divisions of the chapter, and this shall always be explicitly mentioned in the text. The conclusion of this chapter shall deal concretely with answering these sub-questions.

The research findings have been structured according to the following divisions. The first deals with an overview of the different local NGOs studied for this research and the activities they operate with regard to child labour (6.1); also their application of a RBA to child labour. The second concentrates on how these NGOs speak of child labour and education (6.2); including some of their thoughts on the 'problem'. The third set of findings focuses more on why the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study take up RBAs in their anti-child labour activities (6.3) and what their views are about the

universalistic aspect of internationally recognized child rights. This is expected to lead to a better understanding of the motivation of a RBA to child labour as used by local NGOs in Tamil Nadu. This kind of information could tell us more about the practicability of this approach to eliminate child labour.

To find out more about the approach of local NGOs with regard to the child labour issue, five interviews were conducted with NGOs located in different parts of Tamil Nadu. They are each different in their own way but have the commonality of dealing with child labour in one way or another. Of course speaking with representatives (usually the director and sometimes additional staff) of an NGO includes speaking with individuals who might entangle much information with what they themselves think or believe. An NGO is only an organization made up of different individuals each striving (hopefully) for a similar goal; catching the essence (if this exists) of what the organization *itself* stands for is therefore not an easy task. Nevertheless, the forthcoming attempts to find out more about these NGOs; how they are engaged with issues of child labour (and education in relation to child labour.

A sixth interview was attempted with the Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) through email. This NGO was not visited due to logistical problems; it is located in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The semi-structured questionnaire for this NGO remains partly unanswered as further questions sent by email found no reply. Despite this, the NGO has been taken up in the writing underneath. This because it has great success in its approach to combat child labour and promote education (see chapter two). Several informants have also mentioned this organization.

One must strongly keep in mind that the research findings of this study are based on just six local NGOs and therefore they are unlikely to capture the diversity of local NGOs and their different (rights-based) approaches to child labour. Only a small part of the spectrum of how such an approach is internalized and acted upon by local NGOs is reflected. Any conclusions are only valid within this limited spectrum, however, the possibility of them holding a more general truth for further NGOs in Tamil Nadu does exist.

6.1 The NGOs and their activities regarding child labour

The hereby following shall present some background information on the local NGOs that were interviewed for this study as well as a description of the activities they operate(d) with regard to child labour. We explore whether these activities are operated from a RBA and in what way. This shall, altogether, lead to answers to the second sub-question of this chapter. We try to grasp what is, in general, done most with regard to child labour by these NGOs. This should give us an idea of what is being done in the field and *how* this is done.

6.1.1 HEAL-M

The Human Education and Action for Liberation Movement (HEAL-M) in south India's Kanyakumari District has worked on integrated development for the distressed community of southern Tamil Nadu since 1986. It visualizes an egalitarian society based on equality, justice, and opportunity to all –

irrespective of caste, religion, or socio-economic status. It acts upon the divisions of people; especially those created by religious dogmas, the political, and the caste system. It is a rights-faced movement, basic human rights being the main principles for their actions. Education is considered important to empower communities; through sensitization people will be able to reject the doctrines of exclusion and assert their rights (to equality). 'Human Education' is directed to educate people that they should be released from their chained positions in society and that there should and can be more equality amongst different people. It is believed that people can act only if they are informed about their situation, their rights, and the ways to attain their rights. 'Liberation' is being free from situations of illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, and overall – being free from chained positions of exclusion. 'Action' is the component that follows education and leads to liberation, it is the action of the local people *themselves.* Grassroot level organization of people forms the main principle of the HEAL movement. HEAL-M strictly speaking does not see itself as an NGO but as a people's organization that encourages and facilitates people to take action. Through Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) people themselves raise awareness about rights in their community and act upon those rights.

HEAL-M focuses particularly on the most disadvantaged and marginalized people: women, children, (bonded) child labourers, youth, the disabled, Dalits, widows, and the Tsunami affected. Their spear points include empowering marginalized people through education (through CBOs and SHGs also). They are involved with campaigning, networking, lobbying, and advocacy to promote child rights and fight against child labour. They use a RBA, also to child labour: their awareness raising programmes include sensitizing marginalized persons to their rights and how to access these.

HEAL-M does not have many particular child labour projects, they only have evening centres that operate in the evenings during the week and on Sundays during the day. These centres, thirty-five in nearby villages, accommodate child labourers (girls and boys from any child labour sector) who still engage in child labour but usually still go to school. These children learn about problems in society; their causes, their impact, and how these problems can be dealt with. They are taught how to handle certain problems such as child trafficking, gender discrimination (e.g. female infanticide), child marriage, child labour, dowry problems, domestic violence, sexual harassment, health matters, and natural and man-made disasters.

The activities centres cover approximately 1.400 children in total. Besides learning about the above described issues in society through an image book (with drawings made by children) and learning that they – as children – are also part of society and can play a role in the development of their village, the evening centres provide more. Psycho-social care, joyful learning (about their rights), identification and development of the creative potential of children, developing social skills, and providing literacy and numeric skills to those in need. The centres are also directed at avoiding school drop-outs and improving academic performance.

The centres also form Children's Circles and Children Protection Groups (both encouraging child participation) as well as village Committees for Child Rights Protection. There are monthly meetings where parents can give feedback and suggestions about the centres. The centres are an important

place for identifying cases of child abuse amongst child labourers. The activities centres do *not* play an active role in 'rescuing' children from their position as labourers. They merely support them, many of whom are (partially) still in school, in their learning and sensitize them about their rights and the importance of staying in school.

HEAL-M's motivation for acting with regard to child labour is their belief in the right to education and the right to freedom from exploitation. Their approach to chid labour is rights-based.

The Campaign Against Child Labour

HEAL-M's director, who has been a child labourer himself, is the current State Convener of Tamil Nadu for the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL). This Terre des Hommes initiative stemming from 1992 functions in all thirty-one districts of Tamil Nadu and is spread over twenty-one states in India. It is a nationwide network made up of hundreds of organizations (mostly NGOs working for child development and the promotion and protection of child rights) and individuals from women's groups, trade unions, academic institutions, media agencies, lawyers, students, teachers, and citizens. Committed to eradicating child labour through opinion building, awareness raising, advocacy, and lobbying on different levels - it also investigates cases of child exploitation. The CACL intervenes in particular cases of child rights violations, aiming to restore the rights of children. They occasionally file cases against certain employers if they have sufficient evidence (from the community) that children are employed there. The CACL generates mass awareness and pressurizes politics (e.g. through lobbying).

The network emphasizes the failure of the education system to prevent school drop-outs and ensure full-time education of all persons under the age of eighteen; it presses forward the need to amend the Indian law to include compulsory education for all those under eighteen years. The CACL's ideology is directly based on child rights and uses a RBA to child labour and education. The CACL also demands that Government include agriculture as a child labour sector. Furthermore, they feel that girl children are most vulnerable to exploitation and therefore need more protection through Government laws. CACL also demands the implementation of various schemes for the rehabilitation of rescued child labourers. It also calls for making education more child friendly in order to help avoid school drop-outs. This network against child labour campaigns through advocacy and lobbying in central Government departments and ministries as well as in Tamil Nadu Government. An example of their immediate action is filing a complaint to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development in Delhi in January 2009 after the Right to Education Bill had been convened without consultation from any civil society organizations. The Parliamentary Standing Committee is supposed to gather information and opinions from the different States in India regarding each Bill they pass, CACL was quite angry that this did not happen and sent a letter of protest. This is a form of campaigning against child labour and *for* education at Government level.

During the 2009 elections in India, CACL came up with a manifesto on the eradication of child labour and the enforcement of the right to education. This was submitted to all political parties and forms another example of campaigning for child rights. The manifesto stated that all employment of

children up to eighteen years either for wages or not, found in any establishment, occupation (so also in agriculture), or workshop should be prohibited. There should be no distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous occupations, as all employment is believed to be hazardous to the wellbeing of the child. These children should go to school, and thus Government should make education up to eighteen years free, compulsory, non-discriminative, and qualitatively high in order to avoid drop-outs. In fact the entire education system needs to be reformed according to the CACL (e.g. also improving teacher trainings and the teacher-student ratio). Amendment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act is also argued for. The manifesto further argues for the promotion of livelihood rights and employment for adults. This in order to guarantee a family income that prevents drop-outs (due to income demand of the household), and prevents family migration due to unemployment, poverty, indebtedness, etc. Adult employment is generally believed to help prevent children from becoming labourers.

Awareness raising takes place at the village level where the CACL tries to create awareness amongst communities as well as employers that it is illegal to employ children. It also takes place on a larger scale; mass public awareness raising programmes sensitize the public and empower people to say no to child labour and yes to school for anyone under the age of eighteen. The CACL also has enrolment and school retention campaigns to promote education, but these fall mainly under the Education Network of the CACL which is also occupied with improving education. Awareness is raised among parents, employers, communities, and children. This awareness is created through street plays, leaflets, posters, etc. The CACL also tries to identify those employers who make (illegal) use of children as labourers. Furthermore, they have campaigns directed at school enrolment, not dropping out, and child rights.

CACL tries to work closely with Panchayat (local Government) institutions in villages to ensure there are no drop-outs; parents of children who are likely to proceed into child labour should be identified by the Panchayat council and consequently action should be undertaken in order to avoid this (e.g. more financial support through Government schemes to these families).

Problems faced by the CACL are said to be budget related, but also Government related: "Government only talks, it does not act". The CACL faces barriers and opposition in Government to press forward their ideas and rights for children. As should have become clear, the CACL operates from a RBA.

6.1.2 CCRD

The Centre for Child Rights and Development in Chennai (CCRD) was founded in 1999 and is a large organization with twenty full-time employees, ninety-six part-time employees, and a numerable reservoir of village based volunteers. CCRD uses a RBA to child labour and education. This mainly through promoting awareness of rights on the local village level, but also through a major focus on advocacy, lobbying, and campaign interventions on other levels. The organization also has some practical long-term activities with regard to eliminating child labour. As a member of the CACL they also carry out any activities related to this. CCRD supports the National Commission for the Protection

of Child Rights (NCPCR), a special commission for children set up by the Indian Government (see chapter two).

CCRD's ideology is based on child rights; they need to be promoted and protected in order to ensure 'normal' childhood growth and development. This is the duty of the state and the responsibility of all adults in society. They envision a new world order with a new human rights culture that lives by the value of 'the best interest of children'. Their mission is thus advocacy and social mobilization "to build the broadest possible alliance for a social consensus and collective action to stop the denial of the human rights of children" and to promote and protect child rights. They firmly believe that *all* forms of child labour are hazardous and that a child (a person under the age of eighteen years) should not be engaged in work. This because they have little trust in the regulation of certain forms of child work. CCRD sees compulsory qualitative education up to the age of eighteen years as an important right of the child.

This NGO strives to influence public policy, create awareness, and mobilize public opinion and resources in order to enable all children to live in human dignity and security. CCRD does this by providing support to voluntary organizations, campaigns, and networks that work on children's issues at the state- and at the national level by providing trainings to interest groups (NGOs, students of social work and law, teachers, trade unionists, enforcement officials, etc.); by organizing national, regional, and state level seminars, workshops, and consultations; by having established an ongoing documentation and information dissemination service (in the form of a half-yearly newsletter on children's issues in the regional language); and by direct field based interventions in twenty-four locations in order to enable children from marginalized families to access health and educational facilities. In addition to the last mentioned, the empowerment of children is facilitated by the formation of village level Children's Associations (led by children). At the moment the organization mainly concentrates on child labour and rights pertaining to this. However, CCRD also focuses on the selective abortion of females (feticide) and female infanticide through media activities.

The activities with regard to child labour can be divided in 1- direct field based interventions (long-term projects with a rehabilitation and prevention component) and 2- advocacy, lobbying, and campaigning intervention. Most advocacy and awareness raising (also through theatre) is carried out jointly and in support of the CACL because a collective initiative is believed to be more powerful and taken more seriously by courts and Government. CCRD also takes individual initiatives within this field. Mainly through maintaining and supporting networks with other NGOs, CBOs, Dalit & women's organizations, teachers associations, trade unions, networks campaigning for child rights, Government agencies, academic institutions, and with the media. The Campaign Against Child Trafficking (CACT), an offshoot of the CACL, is a campaign that CCRD also supports.

CCRD's motivation for acting with regard to child labour are the international legal standards, especially the UN CRC. CCRD believes these international standards or rights for children are necessary and in the best interest of the child, cutting across all countries and peoples. They operate from a rights-based approach. Within the field they believe superstitious beliefs are to blame for the resistance against preventing child labour and supporting education. The culture of silence, of not

being able to assert, to accept things as your fate is a problem and leads to a situation of apathy as well. People have little opportunities to become aware, therefore the importance of NGO action according to CCRD. Such notions of local NGOs seem ironic; largely blaming local people (their superstitious beliefs) for their situation takes disregard of the social, cultural, political, etc. systems of exploitation and deprivation these people are more often than not exposed to.

Direct field based intervention

These interventions are made up of a rehabilitation and a prevention component. Rehabilitation programmes without prevention programmes are said to have little use on the long term. Prevention needs to be implemented next to rehabilitation in order to make the latter sustainable. The total duration of the CCRD direct field based intervention, taking place in twenty-four villages, is approximately ten years. CCRD does not believe in rehabilitation without prevention (the other way round is possible) and has chosen for these intensive field based interventions as they are expected to be most effective. So far their intervention has proven to be successful according to CCRD. The NGO focuses on both boys and girls in their programmes as they believe both are important, also for long-term sustainable change regarding gender discrimination.

Child participation in these programmes takes place through Children's Collectives (children 11–18 years old). Together with Village Children's Protection Committees (adults, approximately fifteen to twenty people) these Children's Collectives are slowly given the task of monitoring child labour and school drop-out incidence. They are to sustain CCRD's work of rehabilitation and prevention on the long-term once CCRD leaves the projects' areas. CCRD currently provides capacity building support for these committees, striving to make them autonomous in the future. The empowerment of children is facilitated by the formation of village-level Children's Associations. The total membership of these in all twenty-four villages amounts to about 600 children.

Rehabilitation

CCRD operates in twenty-four villages (six in Chennai and suburbs, and sixteen in neighboring districts). They target (potential) child labourers (and drop-outs) who are from marginalized families in the villages. The labour in which these children were involved are mainly those of an urban setting; brick kilns, petty shops, mechanic shops for boys and domestic servants for girls.

The rehabilitation of children under the age of fourteen years is mainly carried out through bridge courses that are directed to mainstream children into formal education. They take approximately two to three years, depending on the age of the child and his/her academic performance. These two factors decide when and at what level (which standard) the child can re-enter school. In the rehabilitation component of the field based intervention first children and then parents are convinced about the importance of school and the harm of child labour. Both children and parents are also informed about child rights. About 75% of the parents were convinced easily while 25% took a little longer to be convinced to admit their children in a bridge course. It was more difficult to convince child labourers' parents than drop-outs' parents of the importance of education. This because the prior

were probably more stuck in particular (profitable) roles for the family. CCRD had to convince by word, they did not have funds to financially replace a child's labour to parents. In total about 200 children (60 child labourers and 140 drop-outs) were taken up in the project, most of them were Dalit children.

CCRD has been able to eventually mainstream about 90% of the children who followed the bridge courses. 10% were not mainstreamed, they were mostly children who were a little older and therefore had their reasons for not going back to school. Of the drop-outs 100% were mainstreamed in school again. This was not the case for the former child labourers as they had a more difficult time learning everything again; they could not catch up so easily.

According to CCRD it is difficult to enroll children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years in a bridge course because they feel and think they are already adults. They have worked for years and besides the practical impossibilities of education, their motivation is often lacking. For them CCRD organized vocational skills trainings on the basis of what the employable skills on the market were at that time: computer skills for boys and girls, placement of boys as apprentices in mechanics shops, and tailoring for girls targeted at getting them employed in urban settings (not self-employed at home) for export garments.

Prevention

Besides the rehabilitation of (potential) child labourers (school drop-outs), CCRD is active in the prevention of child labour and drop-outs at the village level. Amongst CCRD's prevention programmes for child labour, are evening learning centres where children are informed about their rights; 1- that it is a violation to be deprived of school under the age of fourteen years and 2- that child labour is illegal and not in the best interest of the child. Children also receive extra school tuition in the learning centres to make up for poor Government schooling. The focus of CCRD's learning centres is at all times on child friendly learning: learning through playing. Evening centres run six days a week from 17:00-20:00.

Life Skills Education is also included in the prevention package; three hours every month in the evening centres. This is directed to children/youth between the ages of ten and twenty. It covers the development of adolescence and is based on ten 'skills' that should make children more self-confident, motivate them to stay in school, and teach them more general knowledge. The last includes learning about reproductive health, about societal problems, and also about certain specific rights. The ten general skills that are taught include critical thinking and negotiating skills. Life Skills Education is especially directed to save the girl child from child labour and from child marriage in specific. Gender issues are discussed with both girls and boys, the latter to make a male dominated society more sensitive to the gender issues at play for women. The approach is more holistic, and starts at early ages to tackle such issues at its roots. The Life Skills Education is a platform for sensitization on gender discrimination, domestic violence, female feticide and infanticide, male domination, dowry suicides, etc.

Another important part of the prevention component of CCRD's field based intervention is monitoring children who are in school. Monitoring whether they do not drop out and engage in child

labour again. They do this in the twenty-four villages where they carried out rehabilitation programmes.

Summer camps are an important component of CCRD's activities to prevent child labour. They are not directly targeted at child labourers or drop-outs, but at the wider population of children. In Chennai the camps are neighborhood based, in the villages they are village based. The two week summer camps ensure that children do not get demotivated (and are prone to drop out) for school during their one month summer holiday. Those who are in poverty or in most need get priority to join the camps. If there is enough placement capacity, whoever wants to join is admitted to the camps. In order to carry out these activities in six (of the twenty-four) villages, sixteen part-time and six full-time staff are appointed. Learning is combined with playing. The summer camp batches are divided in three according to school standards. There is a batch for children in 1st to 3rd standard (only mornings), for 4th to 6th and for 7th to 12th standard. For this study two summer camps in the beach (fisher's community) slums of Chennai were visited, one for children of the 4th to 6th standard and one for children of the 7th to 12th standard. The children sang songs, did coloring and arts, they did dance, and played music on local instruments. The children seemed happy in the camps and did not want to leave; they went home for lunch but came back earlier as they liked it so much. At the end of the day they also did not want to leave. They started daily from 10:00-13:00. After a lunch break, the programme continued from 15:00-17:00.

6.1.3 HOPE

The Holistic Approach for People's Empowerment (HOPE), based in Pondicherry, originates from the year 1996. The NGO was set up by the current director because he wanted the freedom to work and apply his *own* strategies and ideas and because being his own boss would provide him a better income. He worked and was a consultant for different NGOs before he founded HOPE. The income in his earlier employment was considered too little for the work delivered. As opposed to CCRD, HOPE does not have many staff members; eight full-time employees and ten part-timers.

HOPE was first a consultancy organization to other NGOs. Later it got in touch with advocacy and campaigning organizations and slowly got involved as the base for these activities in Pondicherry. During the political rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party there were attacks on Christians, HOPE condemned these and this is how the organization started to expand its activities on human rights. With an initial focus on human rights and Christians there has been a shift of focus to that on the rights of minorities in general, in which children have an especially vulnerable position. The organization's vision is to enable minorities to feel they belong to society. This through *extensive* campaigning and *intensive* grass root activities and support services to other NGOs holding the same vision. HOPE is involved with giving trainings to other NGOs on particular issues, programme approaches, and on practical matters (such as using the internet for social advocacy).

The NGO is currently primarily occupied with activities that are offshoots of the previous Tsunami projects along the Pondicherry coast (which was heavily hit). These mainly focus on the rehabilitation of minorities within the post-Tsunami context. Oxfam Australia and Terre des Hommes

Germany are the main overseas donors of these projects at the moment. SHGs for women are currently run in different locations; each focussing on different forms of income generation. Activities include brick selling, managing a small petty shop, and food making. Women's empowerment and raising awareness of women's and children's rights also forms an important component of the SHGs; they receive as well as transmit such messages in their community. Posters and pamphlets about child labour are distributed and street theatres are used as a medium to transmit messages about child labour and education. Certain international and national regulations and laws regarding illegal child labour and compulsory education are pointed to in order to make communities more legal-literate.

Children are the most vulnerable minorities within the post-Tsunami setting according to HOPE. Child labour issues are included in awareness raising programmes and in all rehabilitation programmes. Campaigns are also explicitly directed at parents as the NGO believes that they have the duty to protect the rights of children. All in all the organization uses a RBA to child labour. Campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying is mostly done with other organizations and within the CACL. However, it is also incorporated in many of HOPE's activities. They are especially active in this regard on the village level, where special child labour boards are set up. They distribute leaflets and provide awareness on human and child rights. Certain information with regard to these rights is displayed on billboards in almost every village HOPE is active in. On child labour day (April 30th in India), the organization always holds special events; street theatres, drawing competitions for children, etc.

Child participation in HOPE's activities takes place in the evaluation of its activities. Their advice and demands are taken up and are said to lead to more successful programmes with regard to the child labour (elimination) activities.

With regard to child labour the NGO used to operate (in 2002) bridge courses for school drop-outs and child labourers. Staff from the local villages would identify child labourers and drop-outs in their village. Motivating parents and children was always difficult. The bridge courses took place in the evenings (after school or labour) and promoted education and ensured preparation for enrolment in formal schools. HOPE had no financial strength and aimed to help approximately twenty to thirty children but could only accommodate for ten. Nevertheless, for these ten children it was successful in terms of them being mainstreamed in Government schemes (bridge courses) later. HOPE did not keep in touch with them afterwards due to the increased workload after the Tsunami struck. Most child-centred programmes currently running arein fact post-Tsunami rehabilitation activities. They include elements such as child rights and child labour. HOPE does not only focus on child rights.

Besides campaigning and advocacy, HOPE currently acts upon child labour through summer camps and evening centres in Tsunami-affected villages along the coast of Pondicherry. Almost all children in this area are probably in some way affected by the Tsunami. The selected children for these programmes are according to need and interest of the children themselves. Child rights are promoted and so these are child rights protection activities. The summer camps last three days, on the last day children receive a certificate of participation. Participating children are in 6th standard or higher. The camps are run by the ideology of 'learning how to learn'. Children are taught practical and social skills, a book is used with pictures to demonstrate and the focus is really on making learning something fun.

The learning is not based on memorization, which is often the case in schools. One such camp was visited for this research.

Evening centres are run in about six villages and are open six days a week. They include one hour of playing and sharing information or thoughts and then one hour of motivating the children to learn, helping the children with homework and extra tuition, telling them about the importance of education, and also educating them about child rights. The children between five and ten years who participate in these evening centres are motivated and supported in their learning in order to prevent them from becoming child labourers. They should help children identify and deal with obstacles to learning. The centres aim to make learning joyful. Unfortunately HOPE is having problems with funding the evening centres, something that jeopardizes their future existence.

HOPE's motivation for acting with regard to child labour is to protect and ensure the rights of vulnerable minorities, especially children. Their activities regarding child labour are operated from a RBA.

6.1.4 SISU

The Society for Integrated Social Upliftment (SISU, also meaning 'child' in Tamil) is a very outspoken religious (Christian) NGO. It is "a community in service to God among the poor". Founded in 1991 and based mainly in the Thoothukkudi District with several field offices, it has a holistic approach that 1- attempts to strengthen communities and raise leadership for a new way of life (through for example income generation assistance and introducing group lending schemes to promote small business enterprises amongst the poor), 2- cares for the neglected and downtrodden groups of people in need, and 3- mobilizes relief and timely intervention for child survival. The Thoothukkudi District, known for its match-making factories, is an important location for SISU's work because of the large number of children working in the factories. The NGO likes being involved with relief, need-based activities (such as in the Tsunami rehabilitation phase), but is mainly involved with more long-term projects. SISU is dedicated to work among the less privileged and rural communities, with a special focus on issues related to child welfare (education - especially of girls, child labour, but also preventing female feticide and infanticide), women development, and organizing communities for integrated development. They "serve God by serving the poor who are most vulnerable". Their prime concern are children because they are the most vulnerable in society.

SISU seeks funds from external foreign donors but also from Government. They are experiencing an increased difficulty to attract external funding from abroad as they say there is a shift of aid away from Tamil Nadu to other regions of India (and the world) that are regarded as more needy. This also influences their budget available for anti-child labour activities. Though short-term funds are not very difficult to find, it is difficult to acquire more long-term funding and commitment from overseas donors. SISU believes projects need to be minimally five years in order to ensure greater effectiveness.

SISU's activities with regard to child labour are various. They are mainly targeted at children, but parents are also organized within communities to take up economic development initiatives

(preventing the need for children's contribution through labour). The criteria for children being involved in SISU programmes is that they are under the age of eighteen. There is no gendered focus because all children should have equal opportunities. The child labour focus in this area is urgent due to the match-making and fireworks industries in the region. Children involved in this sector are SISU's prime target group, they have activities especially for this group of child labourers because in this area the match-making industries include most child labourers (more so than, for example, in agriculture). Visiting a typical Thoothukkudi village in the match-making areas of the District, one will see a few relatively small factories that tend to not look like an ordinary factory at all. The match-making typically takes place in a building that reminds one more of a house; driving past them one will not notice much, for the inside is dark - any open door or window cannot be looked into from a distance. Many of the women in these match-making villages fold and glue match boxes throughout the day; while talking with neighbours, while breastfeeding their child, etc. At all and any time they seem to be folding and gluing the tiny bluish-purple boxes.

SISU operates a rehabilitation project aiming at the re-enrolment of drop-outs who are often child labourers within the match-making industries in the Toothukkudi District. The area, in between the Ghats mountain range is perfect for match-making due to the hot dry climate and accompanying dry winds (drying the matches). The rehabilitation project includes tutorial centres in several villages within the District. These centres take up students of 8th to 12th standard who have dropped out (for at least six months) and have often been engaged in child labour in the factories. The main goal is to qualify them for their formal exams (in 8th, 10th, and 12th standard). One such centre was visited for this study; in a small classroom with wooden benches approximately ten to fifteen students were receiving education from one teacher. The students divided according to their standard but also according to their sex; boys and girls sat separately. The students enjoyed their classes and were happy with the opportunities they now had for their future. Three students recalled how they are now able to be mainstreamed into school or a vocational skills training with the possibility of an apprenticeship (e.g. as electrician). The three students described how they came to work in the match-making industries in their village; their fathers became sick and his income had to be replaced through their labour. Convincing their parents to let them attend the tutorial centres and stop with the labour was a difficult task according to SISU. The tutorial centres are similar to bridge schools. They have daily programmes from 9:00 to 13:00 in order to get the former drop-outs ready for their exams and possible re-enrolment in schools. It takes a lot of effort to motivate these children and especially their parents to allow the children to come to the tutorial centres. The latter are said to need a lot of child rights awareness and then confidence to let their child enter the tutorial centre (or go back to school if possible). When students pass the 10th or 12th standard Government exams, SISU helps them apply for higher education at e.g. a college. SISU's teachers and staff advise what they think is appropriate and together with the student and parents they make a decision for further education of the child.

SISU also has a two year vocational skills training and non-formal education for senior children who are unable to join regular school again. The type of vocational skills training followed is based on their attitude and feasibility. Skills include, amongst others; computer courses, handicrafts, and

tailoring (for women). With regard to the last they also have loans for sewing machines. The vocational skills training programme is regarded to be very successful according to SISU. The tailoring skill development programme takes place in eight villages and also includes embroidery. For the vocational skills training and non-formal education as well as for the rehabilitation project, participants are carefully selected. They must be under the age of eighteen and they must have been out of school for at least six months. SISU assesses the family situation three times, each time a different party does the assessment. This in order to avoid misuse of their programmes. The assessments are based on personal interviews with the child and parents. SISU also looks at whether it is possible for the child to re-enter school straight away instead of participating in SISU's activities first.

Evening centres for coaching and tutorial assistance are present in fifteen villages in the District. Their aim is to prevent students from dropping out by helping them attain good school results. However, the centres do not only focus on school knowledge, they also allow for "childhood privileges" such as games, playing, and developing talents. The children also learn more general knowledge here. The evening centres operate after school from 17:00 to 18:30 six days a week, each centre having one local teacher. The salary is paid by SISU and by parents (small donation). The evening centres encourage children to have aspirations and especially to stay in school. Children are also familiarized with child rights (against child labour and *for* education). Many of the villages with evening centres also have a Children's Club, organized by SISU, to promote child development through recreation (hobbies, talents) and general knowledge. They have picnics, sports competitions, and occasionally go sight-seeing. The Children's Clubs are SISU's only programmes with explicit child participation. The clubs are run by children; they have the freedom to choose and prepare particular activities. The children also organize and participate in rallies for child rights. SISU regularly has meetings in order to get feedback from the children about the Children's Club. This has proven useful and interesting, problems are discussed and participation is stimulated by SISU by stressing that only their (children's) participation will benefit them.

With regard to child labour as well as in general, SISU has little campaigning, lobbying, and advocacy activities. It is also not a member of the CACL. Campaigning against child labour and for child rights is not a major part of their programming at the moment but they say it will be in the future. Getting into prevention and eradication, the root causes, will be most fruitful in tackling the major problems. Attitudes about child labour and education need to be changed among parents, public stakeholders, and children themselves. First SISU's ideology was to help ("bless") as many people (children) as possible through direct intervention, but now this is regarded to be more effective through a *preventive* rather than curative focus. SISU feels they will be capable of focussing more on prevention in their target villages because they have a strong footing in these communities and are respected by the villagers; their messages should thus be easily accepted. Campaigning, advocacy, and awareness raising will – in SISU's future – take place especially at the *local* level.

SISU's motivation for acting with regard to child labour lies in their desire to help the most vulnerable groups in society. In their area of operation child labourers in the match-making industries

and school drop-outs who are potential child labourers come to form a major vulnerable group in society. They use a RBA to child labour and education in their activities, but this is not very explicit.

6.1.5 REDS

The Rural Education and Development Society (REDS) in Sivagangai District has been the base for this research and its past vocational skills training programme for former girl child labourers forms a cornerstone of this study. REDS was founded in 1983 to benefit several villages in a severe drought-prone area then known as Ramnad District (which is now the area around Kootturavupatty in Sivagangai District, in 1985 the name changed). This area was selected (after research) as most deserving from a broader area. The target area covered thirty villages at the time with an 'integrated rural development programme' – the typical late seventies' and eighties' development model. It was composed of education, community organization, economic development (mainly through agriculture; e.g. introducing crops that needed less water input), and health. The history of programmes REDS has facilitated is therefore extremely diverse.

The NGO was set up by taking regard of Paolo Freire's framework of the culture of silence and apathy of the poor. REDS activities were based on the last of three types of awareness or consciousness inherent to these groups of people:

- Magical awareness: people come together and act together in certain circumstances. There is a collective feeling that comes and goes where they in previous situations do not consider one another, in certain circumstances individuals work together and are friends for a more collective goal.
- Naïve awareness: the poor know they are poor but are not willing or capable to do anything about it.
- Critical awareness: critical awareness awakens in oppressed individuals who are then able to critically analyze their situation and act upon it.

Critical awareness cuts across the culture of silence of the poor and it is this awareness that REDS still wants to initiate. It seems very much related to later debates on agency and the actor-oriented approach. Rural development is still the main mission of REDS, especially targeted at women and children. It is believed that voluntary effort can speed up the development of villages and that Government alone cannot do this. Health, education, economic development, and community organization are currently all still areas of focus and have proven more successful with a greater involvement of women. Besides the ideology of rural development, REDS has an ideology of self-help which in turn is believed to be the best path to rural development. The self-actualization process; enabling people to perceive and get involved in their own situation is something REDS supports. The awareness, role perception, and involvement of individuals is very important. REDS uses a participatory development approach based on awareness, interest, decision making, and action.

In the early nineties of the previous century there was a shift in development practice from integrated rural development to more issue-based rural development. This was helpful to focus on specific issues, for example: women, child labour, child labour among girls, vocational skills trainings,

supplementary schools, awareness raising, and residential primary schools. Basic health also became a major focal point for REDS at this time. Dalits and women became even more so their major focus, female infanticide was also addressed through campaigning due to the alarming declining sex-ratio of females in Tamil Nadu. The social side of female infanticide is something REDS offered trainings about to local doctors.

REDS is currently still involved in various activities. It provides trainings to other NGOs, mostly to grassroot staff in the local area. In Kanyakumari REDS is currently involved with local health awareness programmes that aim to benefit post-Tsunami populations. They also have evening centres for children in Kanyakumari. The total number of REDS staff members is currently approximately forty-eight.

With regard to child labour REDS carried out several activities in the past. For under fives they ran day care education centres in order to stimulate children to have a positive attitude towards education from an early age. These projects were transferred to Government schemes concerning child development in the course of time. In the early nineties street plays were also organised (in about 170 villages) to raise awareness about the importance of education and to fight child labour in an effective way. REDS also had supplementary schools in forty-five villages in order to pick up (through playful learning) the interest of children for formal schooling. These supplementary schools were targeted mainly at child labourers in the early morning and in the evening.

From 1986 to about 2006 a vocational skills training programme was organized for girls who were either engaged in agricultural child labour or were prone to be engaged in it. The former participants of this programme are a main target group of this research (see chapter five). The skills training (tailoring) was an alternative for child labourers and those who had missed out on education for an extended period of time. These individuals were too far behind and/or too old to follow a bridge course and be mainstreamed again into formal education. Any individuals that were applicable for a bridge course were forwarded to other NGOs offering such courses. Besides the vocational skills trainings there was a focus on gender inequality and health. The education of girls was given priority to that over boys because their position is believed to be most exploited due to superstitious beliefs and culture. Women emancipation, the education of girls important in this, were/are major ideologies of REDS. Further information on this REDS programme has already surfaced throughout this thesis, therefore we shall not go into it any further here.

In 1998 a hostel was set up for child labourers and children of poor (Dalit) families. A Government scheme accommodated for this but the hostel was closed a few years ago due to Government corruption and bribes concerning the funding. With regard to child labour activities REDS currently runs a hostel for brick kiln and scavengers' (collecting rubbish, also hospital rubbish and needles) children (aged about seven to thirteen years) in the 3rd to 8th standard in Kootturavupatty. The twenty or so children here are residential, their parents visit them on Sundays if they have enough money for transport. During school holidays the children go home. The children are here so as to be prevented from becoming child labourers (mainly in the brick kilns) if they were to stay at home. Many parents are brick kiln labourers, a sector known for its high incidence of bonded labour. Targeting the

children of these parents prevents the risk of their parents agreeing for their children to labour in the brick kilns under bonded circumstances. Often parents cannot accommodate for their children as they are out all day at labour sites, another reason for them to bring their children to REDS. The children are often semi-orphans or have parents who migrate often for labour. In Kootturavupatty the children go to a nearby school by foot and at REDS they follow a strict regime of washing themselves, their clothes, keeping their sleeping hall clean, and doing additional chores at REDS. This next to the daily hours of study, also after school.

Education is a cornerstone to intervene against child labour according to REDS. The NGO is currently not very much involved with advocacy, lobbying, or campaigning against child labour and *for* education. The NGO is also not a member of the CACL because it does not believe in the effectivity of such large networks. The intentions are said to be good but the networks often do not work in practice according to REDS. The chairman (Alexander) says this is also the reason why donors are supporting these large network programmes less nowadays. REDS (especially Alexander) believes that most NGOs joining these networks are mainly interested in participating for self-betterment. This makes these NGOs and the network in general lose sight of the preset common goals. The networks are ineffective according to REDS: there is little consultation amongst NGOs within the network, there is too much competition between the NGOs, and there is little coherence. The networks are then believed to be a waste of time, effort, and financial resources.

REDS used to be more involved with awareness raising and campaigning. They have chosen to focus now on one group of children (in the residential hostel) only and make sure they attend full time education and do not become (bonded) child labourers. REDS has always had a special focus on girls (and women) because they are considered most vulnerable, but also keeping in mind women empowerment. Their aim for the current Kootturavupatty hostel is to get as many girls as possible but the batch for this year is already dominated by boys. The NGO cannot exclude boys from the residential hostel as they are also vulnerable to becoming child labourers. REDS aims to help the most vulnerable; mainly women and children, and in that mainly Dalits or those coming from Scheduled Tribes or Scheduled Castes. When asked whether it is easier for parents to admit their children to such a residential programme rather than to (financially) support them themselves, REDS agrees. The participants of their residential programme have been carefully selected, however, and the main intention remains to prevent children from child labour.

Participatory development is greatly valued by REDS and has been one of the main approaches to their work. With regard to the current hostel children, however, there is little participation. They are only free on Sundays and can participate only in deciding their play activities then. For the further part the hostel has a strict regime in order to keep all the (young) children organized and obedient. Before any meals or snacks, when they are all together and the food is distributed, they can ask questions or make complaints. The question that arises here is whether they do this at all. Being based at REDS in Kootturavupatty during this field research did not lead to any such observation. Probably not because the children seem quite afraid due to the strict regime. Making a complaint is something they are probably very hesitant to do.

Current problems REDS faces with regard to their current child labour activity (the residential hostel) is a lack of funding; the "resource crunch". They are running the hostel on their own meagre funds at the moment. In general, with respect to overseas donors, REDS identifies the lack of sustainability in funds as a problem. There is little long-term commitment from external donors which makes it difficult to conduct effective (long-term) work. The lack of mutual learning between donor- and field NGOs is also recognized. There should be more feedback and listening to each other. The participation is largely missing, so why are they 'partners' in the first place? There should be more sharing in order to improve. This is something most field NGOs desire. Government corruption is also identified as a core problem. NGOs who yield to corruption will find it easier to survive. REDS does not, it has a strong moral ethic and does not want to compromise on their service to the children. Not by Government nor by external donor NGOs (with their self determination and 'arrogance of money') will they make decisions they do not themselves fully support. They want to be independent and do not want to give in to donor demands that are in conflict with their own ideas, norms, and values. The NGO signals here the occurrence of external (overseas) donors demanding local NGOs to conform to *their* wishes and requirements.

REDS' motivations for acting with regard to child labour are that children are one of their main target groups. Acting against child labour was and still is a long-term development investment because children are the future. Therefore they are prioritised. Children are also most vulnerable to exploitation, also by their own parents. Especially girl children, who have less privileges in this culture, need to be protected. Though REDS takes up rights-oriented points (e.g. the importance of education and preventing child labour) in their grounds for action with regard to child labour, they currently do not have a very explicit focus on rights.

6.1.6 MVF

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) in Adhra Pradesh was founded in 1981 in memory of Prof. Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya. It was to be an institution for research on issues related to social transformation. It is currently a foundation striving to increase rural as well as urban communities in their capacity to eradicate child labour, this has been its focus since 1991. The abolition of child labour is an end goal which is to be achieved by universalizing school education for all children (a child being under the age of eighteen). This in itself has also become a goal for the MVF. Funding is provided by various government as well as non-government agencies. The latter are many and vary from ILO-IPEC to HIVOS to UNICEF to the European Union. Their projects are carried out with support of local and state Government authorities, teachers, representatives, volunteers, education activists, parents, and children themselves.

The MVF aims to abolish child labour in all its forms and to universalize education, also through mainstreaming children into formal schools. This is mainly done by creating a social norm that supports the child's right to education and that he/she should not go to work. The MVF uses a RBA in its activities and programmes to eliminate child labour and promote education. Moreover, they work with the following principles or 'non-negotiables':

- All children *must* attend full time formal day schools
- Any child out of school is a child *labourer*
- *All* work is hazardous and harms the overall growth & development of a child
- There must be a *total* abolition of child labour, any child work is also child labour
- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned

Child Rights Protection Committees were set up to institutionalize the support for child rights. The committees acted as watchdogs and brought incidences of bonded labour, girl child abuse, or child marriages to the fore. The committees helped communities to accept the idea that children should go to school. Bridging the gap between the local people and the local bodies, these committees were later registered as Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPFs). MVF only originated and facilitates these CRPFs; they are community-dependent and driven: "change is possible if the entire community is informed about child rights".

Aside from their main focus on child labour, the MVF also carries out activities that focus on decreasing maternal and infant mortality, stopping child marriages, and improving the health of children under the age of three. They focus on child rights, women empowerment (also through rights), and also on natural resource management. The MVF, however, works *mainly* towards the total abolition of child labour in all its forms and mainstreaming child labourers into formal schools. No child should work and every child should attend full-time formal school as a matter of right. The MVF was one of the first NGOs working with residential bridge courses to encourage older children (child labourers) to study again and be mainstreamed. With regard to child labour the MVF also uses youth volunteers who:

- Mobilize support and motivate communities to join the campaign against child labour
- Motivate parents and children that school and not work is the best place for a child to be
- Establish contacts on village Government level
- Pressurize schools to prevent drop-outs

Residential bridge course camps prepare older children who have missed out on education to take up (formal) schooling again. They help in the transition from worker to student and at the meantime prepare parents to accept and adjust to the situation of their child going to school. The MVF stresses that schools also need to be prepared to take up former drop-outs (and child labourers) into their system. Schools can be apprehensive about the capacity of these children to learn. They need to ensure that children who are still slightly behind are able to catch up with the class and they need to take consideration of these children's background. The MVF also calls for close monitoring of mainstreamed children in order to ensure retention in schools. This retention should also be stimulated by removing any barriers that motivate children to drop out of school.

Despite their many actions at the grassroots level, the MVF is also active at the macro-level; through advocacy and lobbying. This is an integral part of their work, they believe the problem of child

labour cannot be solved without action on these levels. Through advocacy and engaging with policy makers the MVF wishes to make systemic changes in increasing the number of students enrolled in school, increasing the number of school drop-outs that re-enter schooling, releasing child labourers from their labour, and supporting girls who are vulnerable to child marriage and other rights' violations. The MVF networks regularly with national advocacy groups such as the CACL.

The MVF supports and strengthens existing local institutions, structures (e.g. schools, hostels), and Government programmes rather than initiating new programmes that totally replace already existing ones. They strive to work through existing institutions (that protect child rights, including education). They want to enhance the capacities of state Governments and national Government to ensure children's right to education. Furthermore, they strive to increase community support to strengthen existing institutions and their capacities.

The MVF has proven successful in its approach to eliminate child labour. It therefore also provides technical support to various governments and NGOs in other states in India, also in Tamil Nadu. This support has also stretched to Nepal, Central America, and Africa. The MVF gives workshops, trainings, and orientation programmes on child rights for several national and international agencies as well as representatives of Government.

When it comes to targeting child labourers the MVF does not have a specific target group in the sense of gender or type of labour. They focus mainly on those who have dropped out of school (and are in child labour) or are prone to drop out. On the micro level they also focus on parents who need to be convinced to send their children to school and therefore not let them engage in work or labour that interferes with this. Their focus on changing mindsets suggests that a large part of the child labour problem is created due to local mindsets (not conforming to universal ones); parents largely blamed – due to their maybe even 'backward' mindsets about the importance of education – for child labour. Though this might seem the case with the MVF, they also recognize that many parents want their children to be educated (thus they *have* the 'correct' mindsets) but have little means to ensure this. The MVF then does place child labour within wider frameworks and systems of exploitation. Communities are targeted to organize public action and Government is a focal point when it comes to delivering services and pressing forward particular matters that relate to child rights.

With regard to the right of children to participate, the MVF takes caution. They stimulate child participation but are not sure to what extent a children should be able to press forward their own choice in certain things. Above all children need protection, which is something adults should provide.

MVF's motivation to act with regard to child labour is the right of the child to education (as laid down in the UN CRC) and the right to be free from exploitation. Children's right to education must be protected by all. The organization clearly works from a RBA in its (anti-)child labour activities.

6.1.7 Common factors

With regard to the second sub-question of this chapter, we see that local Tamil Nadu NGOs are each involved with child labour activities in different but very similar ways. With exception of CCRD and the MVF which each have child labour (and education in relation to this) as a central focus, we see that

most NGOs focus on child labour but not as the organization's *main* focal point. All NGOs take up wider issues; CCRD and the MVF especially with regard to children, the remaining NGOs also with regard to other vulnerable minorities (such as women and Dalits) in the community. These NGOs have a broader focus, child labour sometimes only integrated as an element of other programmes.

The ideology behind the NGOs of this study often stems from religious faith; especially Christianity. SISU proclaims this more than any other of the NGOs that have a Christian background (as far as known; HOPE, REDS, and probably CCRD and HEAL-M). Serving God by helping people is an important motivation for these NGOs, however, most of them act from several different principles and not only on religious grounds.

All NGOs use child rights in some way or another in their activities, some more clearly than others. Where several of the NGOs (HEAL-M, CCRD, HOPE, and MVF) have an explicit RBA to child labour (and education) others use a RBA in their child labour activities in a less explicit manner (SISU and REDS). These latter NGOs are also the only ones who are not members of the CACL and who currently have no campaigning, advocacy, or lobbying activities with regard to child labour. We see that particular NGOs stress the importance of child rights more in their child labour activities than others. This while all of them articulate the common belief that children (and implicitly their different rights) need protection, especially through safeguarding their rights. With regard to the second sub-question of this research it is safe to conclude that the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study operate their activities with regard to child labour, from a rights-based perspective or approach. The ways in which, however, vary even though they have much in common. Activities operated - by the local NGOs of this study - with regard to child labour are summarized in the hereby following.

We see that the majority of NGOs in this study are involved with providing other NGOs or institutions trainings, also on (universal) child rights. There seems to be a lot going on in this respect within the local Indian NGO context. In general we can see that with regard to child labour elimination activities, most NGOs of this study are involved (or have been) with campaigning (also through the CACL), advocacy, and lobbying against child labour and *for* education. Some more on the local, micro level (sensitization and awareness raising about national and international child rights at the local village level through, amongst others, campaigning) while others more on the Governmental, macro level (mainly through advocacy and lobbying). Some of the NGOs, such as CCRD and MVF, have more of a focus on these things rather than on field based activities. It is safe to say that *all* NGOs in this study are involved with awareness raising and education, however. This on different levels; from raising awareness in communities (on child rights, the importance of education, and the harm of child labour) to pressing forward certain issues in Government. Campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying is directed from a RBA; pressing forth an acceptance, proper implementation, and enforcement of universal child rights but also – minimally – that of national Indian child labour and education laws.

Further, we can see that activities - of the NGOs of this study - with regard to child labour are mainly those related to education. These activities are very popular, perhaps because they are most practicable. Raising knowledge about the harm child labour does and the necessity for educating children forms a major component of these education activities. It seems the NGOs are trying to

change the mindsets of people within communities. Preventing children from dropping out of school and ending up in child labour as well as accommodating child labourers' withdrawal from labour is the major general activity all NGOs have in common. The rehabilitation of former or potential child labourers (often drop-outs) is another major component of the education activities NGOs run in relation to child labour. For children having dropped out of school and in most cases having a history of child labour this is mainly done through tutorial centres, bridge courses, and vocational skills trainings (for those unable to be mainstreamed in the formal education system). For children still in school and/or child labour, evening centres and summer camps are organized to motivate children to learn and if they are still in school – not to drop out. Within these activity programmes child labourers are convinced of the importance of education and the ills of child labour. They are usually also familiarized with the general rights of the child when it comes to education and child labour. Moreover, they are familiarized with the fact that learning can be *enjoyable*. This, in combination with awareness raising amongst parents in communities (as practiced concomitantly by most of the NGOs), might lead to effective results in the common mission of NGOs concerned with children to abolish child labour and ensure education for all children.

Several of the NGOs have been involved with releasing (bonded) child labourers from their positions. This direct intervention that physically disengages children from child labour is, however, a "risky business" and it might therefore not be something these NGOs have taken up on a wide scale. It involves careful investigation, negotiation, and involvement of different parties and organizations in order to be successful. In the face of these complexities, a focus on for example education, seems more fruitful.

Motivation to act

The main motivation to operate child labour activities is to end child labour and prevent drop-outs that are likely to become engaged in child labour. HEAL-M, CCRD, HOPE, and the MVF wish to eliminate child labour because they regard it to be inappropriate on the grounds of universal child rights (in particular the right to education and the right to freedom from exploitation). These rights should be adhered to, they should be protected and not violated. These NGOs are currently active in the sense of campaigning and explicit awareness raising about child rights as well as in advocacy and lobbying. This is different for SISU and REDS. The last mentioned wishes to eliminate child labour (and therefore has and still does act towards this) because they see this as a long-term investment: children are the future – they need to be educated and they should therefore not be engaged in labour. Children are vulnerable to exploitation and therefore need to be protected. As one can see, these motives are not linked directly to *rights*; they come from a belief or value (which is also found in child rights). Such ideology or value is coherent with universal child rights. This case is similar for SISU, they support and spread messages about children's rights, but their own innate motivation to end child labour is their desire to help the most vulnerable groups in society. Both REDS and SISU are also the only NGOs in this study with no explicit campaigning, advocacy, or lobbying activities with regard to child labour and education at the moment.

It is just to conclude that all the NGOs in this study desire change with regard to child labour and that all these 'change values' are in line with international children's rights. However, where one NGO uses the protection of child rights as a main motive to act upon the eradication of child labour, another stresses they are keen to protect children who are vulnerable and *in need*. They are slightly less occupied with enforcing international child rights as their operational ideal; they are just trying to protect the vulnerable. Child rights *are* used by them but do not become the explicit means to reach an end goal. Child rights seem to be used in a less formalistic or institutionalized manner by them.

6.2 Speaking of child labour

The hereby following shall come to terms with how local Tamil Nadu NGOs speak of child labour. In doing so, it shall give answers to the first sub-question of this chapter. We first look at how these NGOs conceptualize child labour. Their notions of what a 'child' and 'childhood' are shall be reviewed within this conceptualization. Furthermore, we look into the NGOs' ideas on the main causes of child labour and what should be done to eradicate it – a common desire they all share. What can these organizations, especially their people, tell us from their experience in the field?

6.2.1 What is 'child labour'?

All NGOs interviewed for this study as well as the MVF define a child according to age; a child is a person under the age of eighteen years. This is in line with international law and regulation, especially as laid down in UN conventions. It is striking to see that these NGOs leave no room for relativistic interpretations of what a child is. Of course, as NGOs they need to set firm boundaries in order to carry out their activities with regard to child labour. It is unclear to what extent most NGOs are – if at all – exactly influenced with such interpretations by funding donors or international conventions. HEAL-M was clear on this. They argue that a child's age is that as can be found in UN conventions, meaning that these conventions are influential in molding their operational definitions. The Indian Constitution's age boundary of a child (fourteen years) is said to be outdated and in need of revision in order to come to a more common (international) understanding of what the age of a child is. HEAL-M, or at least its director, believes that all developed nations adhere to UN conventions; "India is also rapidly developing and should now stick to international standards when it comes to children" as well. Government is suspected (to want to) stick to the fourteen years boundary as this keeps the compulsory schooling budget low. Also because in their reliance on big industries, Government is believed to want to keep industries happy and therefore leaves the employment (for low wages) of individuals between fourteen and eighteen years in these industries unrestricted:

"The age boundary is held by the Government to ensure cheap labour in factories, the Government is for wealthy people and does little for the disadvantaged people in society. They have several laws but there is no implementation" –Y. Siluvai Vasthian (Director HEAL-M)

The NGOs of this study are clear on what child labour is; with their definition of a child being under eighteen years of age *child labour* comes down to being any work or labour that is not in the best interest of the child (but who decides this?). All forms of child labour are considered hazardous, a stance that contrasts with that of the Indian Government. Elder children who care for their siblings are, for example, also considered child labourers according to SISU. The ultimate indicator and definition of child labour is the deprivation of education; labour interfering with school is definitely *not done*. It appears that the majority of the NGOs do not have a clear-cut operational definition of child labour; it just comes down to the abovementioned. Child labour is often defined by NGOs as labour that interferes with schooling. It is ultimately work inappropriate for children (under eighteen years), work that should be done by adults. Alexander (REDS) mentions that outsiders see child labour differently from insiders. They see it from *their* perspective, a universalistic abolitionist perspective which is (maybe unfortunately) inapplicable to the Tamil Nadu context. Child labour comes down to being labour that is compulsory due to circumstances (of income deficiency), outsiders must realize this and also be able to view child labour from *this* context. Nevertheless, this is not a justification for child labour according to Alexander.

When making the difference between child work and child labour we are confronted with a difficult question, for what work *can* a child actually do? Thomas, the CCRD director states that "child work contributes to the normal development of the child while child labour prevents this development". A child should not be burdened with parents' responsibilities in the name of becoming a responsible adult. CCRD is clear with respect to such justifications of child labour and says "the only work of a child should be to learn and play, these are also human *rights*". Minor work or household chores are acceptable according to the NGOs, however any work too harmful or hazardous (physically and mentally) for their tender age should not be tolerated. This because it severely interrupts with their education as well as their social, mental, and/or physical development.

Childhood

Child labour is often described by the NGOs as an activity that deprives children of their childhood experiences. The conceptualization of childhood is intricately linked to that of child labour; the one seems to go without the other – they cannot go together. Child labour should not be a component of childhood according to the NGOs. Being a child labourer means being robbed of your childhood.

Childhood is something that should be labour-free; it should include proper education (learning through playing also) as well as the development of individual skills and talents. It should include play and the freedom from mental and physical burdens, and also from discrimination. Childhood is agreed to be a period of learning and (mental and physical) development, for which Alexander (REDS) says children should "be able to utilize human resources". Freedom in minor choices should also be granted during childhood.

6.2.2 Thoughts on the causes of child labour

The NGOs interviewed for this research point to several factors that lead to child labour. Many are to be found on the micro level and are concerned with mindsets and income deficiency. The mindsets are also those concerned with education and the valuation of its importance. The majority of NGOs, however, point to problems in education and schools as the *main* cause of child labour. They do not believe that poverty is its main cause (as implied by the poverty-child labour cycle). The MVF states that this cannot be true because there are instances where children of very poor families *do* go to school while others who are better-off still engage in child labour. They are convinced that it is not only an economic decision that sends a child either to school or to work. Factors such as tradition, ignorance, unfamiliarity with the schooling system, and a lack of alternatives motivate parents to send their children to labour instead of to school. These particular mindsets with regard to education are a problem. CCRD mentions a common mindset of illiterate parents believing that intelligence is only genetic; they do not think they are smart so their children are not smart either – school will have no use, they are just unable (due to genetic inheritance) to become smart and therefore it is better for them to work. In this thesis it is argued that fully blaming ignorant mindsets, etc. of parents (for child labour) does injustice to the magnitude of intertwined factors that actually lead to child labour. Moreover, largely blaming parents for child labour takes disregard of the fact that they are also actors operating within systems of exclusion, exploitation, and so forth; they are trying to cope, trying to *live* within constrictive situations of income deficiency and poverty. Their mindsets, therefore, need to be placed within such light and the extent in which they are to blame for child labour should then strongly be reconsidered.

Though the findings underneath do not capture all problems related to education (the main cause of child labour according to the NGOs) that lead to child labour, they do give an impression of some of the most important issues at play. The lack of quality education is mentioned by most NGOs:

"The cause of child labour is not mainly poverty, it is the quality of education in this country" -S. Thomas Jayaraj (Director CCRD)

Students are said to learn little in school due to inadequate teaching methods and an overall failing curricula (crammed syllabi that need to be memorized; there is little learning by doing) and school system. This problem seems especially acute in those cases where poor parents are motivated to send their children to school but then if the child learns nothing, they start to weigh up the costs and benefits. It is then more logical to not waste time and let children work for the family income. There is also a reasonable incidence of corporal punishment (of students by teachers) in Tamil Nadu schools. School becomes a place where a child's rights are directly and physically violated. Children are said to be more inclined to drop out because of this, which in turn increases their susceptibility to become child labourers.

Some practical problems with regard to going to school include its high costs. Even though Government schools should be free up to the age of fourteen years, these schools are said to often request contribution fees (which is illegal). Parents face relatively high school fees as well as

associated costs for school supplies for their school-going children. Another problem that discourages education (and therefore leads to child labour) is the distance of schools from home. The traveling of girls to- and from school is often an obstacle for parents once their daughters have attained puberty. This is when the protection issues around girls increase because their potentiality and readiness for married life is signaled. Even though primary schools are present in almost all villages, middle- and high schools often require some traveling. The age of enrollment in these schools coincides generally with girls attaining puberty; the barrier to these levels of education set. Other problems for girls in schools are the absence of proper sanitary facilities.

Poverty is in general not regarded to be the main cause of child labour according to the NGOs of this study. It is instead an additional circumstantial factor that pushes a child into labour. This is especially the case in situations where one parent falls ill and his/her income needs to be replaced by children. SISU also points to the emotional blackmail (e.g. 'if you don't work we will not be able to eat') of parents as a driver of child labour. REDS was the only NGO in this study that sees poverty as the basic promoter of child labour, this in addition to the customs of child labour being a part of (rural) life in this part of India. With exception of REDS, the NGOs of this study say that poverty does not cause child labour. In this sense the poverty-child labour cycle seems untrue; at least as in poverty not being the main cause of child labour. The part of the cycle demonstrating that child labour leads to poverty *has* been widely recognized by the interviewed NGOs. This because it leads to adult unemployment and a decrease in education. The key to break the vicious poverty-child labour cycle is generally considered to be education (see chapter two). Good quality education that is widely accessible, equitable, free, and safe is something the NGOs see as very important to help eradicate child labour. The fact is, however, that this very key – fitting the exact keyhole or problem – is difficult to acquire. Education itself is mentioned as the main cause of child labour. If the solution to child labour lies in education, there is still a long way to go.

Further causes for child labour that were mentioned by NGOs representatives were dropping out of school (which remains the bridge to child labour) because of gender- or caste discrimination; high rates of adult unemployment; and migration of families (parents in search of employment). SISU mentioned the pull factors of the match-making industry; their desire for fast (the nimble finger theory), cheap, easily controllable workers. In general the weak Indian legislation (on child labour and education) and its tardy implementation have also been pointed to as factors that seriously cause child labour to perpetuate.

6.2.3 Eliminating child labour

The NGO representatives were asked what solutions they deem fit to eliminate or at least reduce the incidence of child labour in Tamil Nadu. Education was mentioned as the most important one as this is also considered to be the main problem leading to child labour in the first place. Child labour should be ended first and foremost through primary and secondary education that is qualitative, equitable, accessible, free, and compulsory up to the age of eighteen years. Decent and retentive enrolment in

school is believed to be followed automatically by a lower incidence of child labour. The whole constituting a *preventive* solution to eliminate child labour.

The education system needs to be reformed according to the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study; it needs to be improved in order to avoid drop-outs and to provide qualitative education to India's children. Ensuring the right to education should be effectuated first and foremost by stronger laws and especially firmer implementation and enforcement of those laws. Alongside education laws, the child labour laws (Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act) in India need to be adapted as well (e.g. to include all forms of labour as hazardous and to stretch the age boundary of a child up to eighteen years) and then properly implemented and enforced. This in order to keep children "in school and not in the workplace". Politically there should be a will to do this, the laws that are there should "come alive" and law enforcement should not be laden with bribes and corruption. Government should play a pro-active role to ban child labour and practice a qualitative education system, it should not only blame parents and other factors for child labour. The NGOs argue that Government should not evade its responsibility as duty bearer of national- as well as international child rights. The paradoxical thing is, however, that many of the local NGOs *themselves* also blame parents (apparently just like Government does) for child labour. Albeit, maybe in less of a magnitude than sometimes seems apparent. They *do*, after all, mainly blame education systems and schools for child labour.

For those individuals who have dropped out of school to engage in labour and who are now too old to be mainstreamed back into the formal education system, vocational skills trainings are believed – by the NGOs – to be necessary to avoid these children from continuing or relapsing in child labour. Furthermore, bridge courses are considered extremely effective to re-enrol (mainstream) children in schools. These are both more curative (and not preventive) solutions to eliminate child labour.

On the micro level countering culture is considered to be important; changing mindsets about the importance of education and the harm of child labour. Alongside this, the NGOs have pointed to employment provision and better wages for adults as a necessity to end child labour. This so that parents do not 'have to' send their children for labour in order to contribute to a family income that is otherwise deficient. Providing employment opportunities is not only important for parents but it is also extremely important for children *themselves.* A better employment prospective after finishing school should motivate children to actually go ahead and complete their formal schooling. This is vital to those children who are discouraged to continue school, also because they see little use of school if there are no or only bad jobs available afterwards. For in that case they are likely to start work straight away and earn money rather than waste time on education that is believed to not bring them any further up.

When we compare the NGOs' actual activities with regard to child labour (and education) with what they claim necessary to end child labour we can conclude two important things. One is that NGOs seem to be replacing what Government is failing to do. The NGOs are concerned with educating children, keeping them in school, re-enrolling them in schools, teaching them vocational skills; all in all preventing them from becoming or staying child labourers. Two is that the majority of NGOs in this study are pressing forward - through campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying - the laws and regulations

(and amendments to these) they feel Government should implement and properly enforce. Another activity claimed necessary and also taken up by many of the NGOs is awareness raising within villages about child rights and the importance of education. We also see that through SHGs some of the NGOs are trying to secure income generation for women, for mothers, who will hopefully then be less in need of their children's income in the future. In general the NGOs are involved with what they believe is necessary to end child labour.

6.3 Using a rights-based approach

We have seen how the NGOs of this study use a RBA in their child labour activities and programmes. The child rights that are enacted upon are mainly the freedom from exploitation and the right to education, as enshrined in the UN CRC. The NGOs often do not act upon the Indian laws laid down with regard to child labour and education, instead they often argue for an *amendment* of these laws. They mainly use international standards as their main grounds for action. All the NGOs seem to agree with general international human rights and with basic rights of the child within these. In this study we do not elaborate to have a look at every single one of these rights. Concerning child labour the NGOs recognize and often act upon two main rights of the child.

The first is the right of the child (Article 32, UN CRC) to be protected from exploitation and performing hazardous work that interferes with education and is harmful to a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and/or social development. The majority of NGOs conceptualize all child labour and all work that interferes with education as a hazard to children. These are believed to cause harm to the child's development – on many fronts. The second right of the child that receives most attention by the NGOs dealing with child labour issues is the right of the child to education (Article 28, UN CRC). This is a right that they do not only recognize, it is one that many of the NGOs actively try to give *shape* to within their own area of operation. This through campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying – especially with regard to Government amendment and implementation of education laws. Along with Article 28 of the UN CRC the NGOs of this study stress that primary education should be compulsory and available free to all. The NGOs however, take this right to education farther in the sense that not only education should be compulsory and free; but education should be compulsory and free to all up to the age of eighteen years. The NGOs also press forward the necessity for Government to take measures to encourage school attendance and reduce drop-out rates (also part of Article 28). We see that where Government falls short in these measures, the NGOs step in at the field level. Directing many of their anti-child labour activities towards such measures. Looking at Article 29 of the CRC, we see that education should involve the development of the child's personality and talents. This is a belief that the NGOs also indicate to be important; it is something they also *practice* in their education activities (that aim to reduce child labour incidence). With respect to this last point it cannot be said whether the NGOs have derived the need for such practices from the UN CRC or whether it is something they genuinely recognize and therefore reinforce (even if it were not explicated in the UN CRC). This holds true for the entire RBA; do NGOs simply operate from particular universal child rights or do they

operate from their own genuine beliefs that happen to coincide with these rights? And if they operate with regard to child labour (and education) from this RBA, what exactly are the motives to do so?

The forthcoming shall try to explore such questions and shall build upon previous information of this chapter that looked into the applications and motivations for acting with regard to child labour and for using a RBA to do so. We shall continue to elaborate on this, also on what the NGOs actually *think* of these particular rights and why they find them important. Unfortunately little of the MVF's beliefs and motivation for their beliefs and action is represented due to the absence of a personal interview. Nevertheless, the data from the NGOs that were interviewed serves to elicit some important answers to the third and fourth sub-question of this chapter.

6.3.1 Using child rights

The NGO spokespersons were asked during the interview whether and what child rights they explicitly use in their activities concerning child labour elimination. This in order to find out which rights they find most important. We have already seen that the NGOs, some more explicitly than others, base their work on particular rights. The rights these NGOs work with are not in the first place national ones but international ones as established in international conventions, this because the prior are regarded to be too restrictive and a failure due to weak implementation and enforcement.

The right to education is by all NGOs mentioned as an important right of the child, by many of them it is stated to be the *most* important right – especially with regard to child labour. This right is taken as a fundamental right, as the basis for a child's development. It should be free, compulsory, qualitative, equitable, safe, and accessible up to the age of eighteen years. This is something all local NGOs of this study agree with. The majority actively internalizes the right to education in their activities. An increase in education (also in terms of awareness about its importance and about the harmfulness of child labour) enrolment is believed to go hand in hand with a decrease in child labour. The right to education and the right to be free from exploitation (child labour) therefore also go hand in hand. As REDS' chairman Alexander states:

"If they (villages) are free of child labour and children are enrolled and mainstreamed in schools, 95% of the problems will be solved. Education should be compulsory and free up to the age of 18 years and not up to 14 years"

It should by now be clear that universalizing education is something strongly urged by NGOs dealing with child labour issues in the field. School enrolment coincides with a reduction in child labour incidence, so it is believed. Schools in India need to be improved, however. They need to be more child friendly, on many terms, in order to motivate children to stay in school. One of these is making school a place where learning becomes enjoyable. Where there is no pressure of memorization skills only; failure in such skills should not automatically lead to insecurity amongst students which is then followed with drastic measures such as dropping out. In order to be a place that allows children to

develop in general, schools need to focus on skills and talents of individuals – not just on book knowledge.

Perhaps the right to education is mentioned as the most important right that is prioritized and acted upon by NGOs – in order to curb child labour – because it is a right that is concrete in the sense that NGOs are able to make it practicable in certain ways. They can act upon it by initiating education (promotion) activities, for example. It is assumed that this differs from the practicability of a child's right to be free from exploitation (i.e. child labour). Besides campaigning, advocacy, lobbying, and raising awareness about this right and the detrimental side there is to child labour, the NGOs of this study are not very active (directly) with regard to it. Some have operated or been involved in releasing or 'rescuing' child (bonded) labourers from the workplace, but this is said to be difficult and risky. Practical intervention seems to fall beyond the capacity of NGOs; it is in need of more holistic and firm involvement. The last especially from Government. The right to be free from exploitation seems to be made practicable (by NGOs) mainly through the right to education because these NGOs do not have the capacity to organize firm direct interventions targeted at releasing child labourers. Instead they are bound to more 'soft' measures targeted at awareness raising and so forth. This is different for education, with regard to this they *do* have the capacity to initiate practicable, direct interventions.

In general the right to education is explicitly used by the local NGOs of this study. This falls within the framework of the desire of the NGOs to eliminate child labour and make the right to freedom from exploitation a reality for all children. Overall children should have the right to be protected; a right that goes together with not being a child labourer and being able to go to school. The more outspoken NGOs will say there should be no employment whatsoever (be it child labour or child work) for persons under eighteen years of age and that anything interfering with the formal education of children is detrimental to their development. The right to be free from exploitation is an important right, but seems less practical for NGOs to work with directly. Nevertheless, the values behind it are decisive for the NGOs of this study to use a RBA to deal with child labour.

In general the rights children should have, the rights that should protect them, are mentioned – by the NGOs of this study – in terms of (besides education and an absence of child labour) good health, equal status, making choices, participating, being heard, and being able to express themselves. Such important values can be traced back to the evening centres and summer camps run by several of the NGOs. They tend to focus more holistically on the development of the child (which is in line with Article 29 of the CRC); taking into consideration such rights next to education itself. The right of the child to participate (for example in choices that affect their lives) is somewhat disputable amongst the NGOs, depending mainly on what the nature of the participation is and also the magnitude of the choice in question (see the next heading).

None of the NGOs said that children should have a right to work. The United Nations does state that youths (between the ages of 15 and 24 years) – so in terms of age also children between 15 and 18 years – should have the right to work and especially have rights *at* work. This leads back to the discussion about the differences between child labour and child work for those individuals between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years. It suffices to say that the NGOs of this study apparently, from their

experience in Tamil Nadu, do not believe in non-exploitative work of children within the local context of the areas they operate in. At least, they seem to believe that India cannot accommodate for the regulation of child (those above the age of fifteen) work. Leading more often than not to a more zero-tolerance attitude towards child labour and child work.

With regard to universal rights of the child we can conclude, keeping sub-question three of this chapter in mind, that the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study have embraced such rights and are very much in favour of them.

The right to participation

The right of the child to participate, to be heard, and to express him or herself, seems controversial. This in the face of what sort of decisions they should be able to participate in. All local NGOs of this study agree that child protection needs to be promoted with the participation of those involved – so, especially with children. Looking critically at the NGOs and their methods of including child participation in their programmes, however, leads to the finding that these methods in fact do not seem very clearly delineated or incorporated in their activities. It is recognized that further research into these methods would be necessary to make the above conclusion truly valid. The suspicion remains, however, that the elements of child participation in the programmes of the NGOs of this study are restricted and may even be only marginally incorporated just to satisfy donor demands of 'participation'. Again, the results from the data cannot argue for the validity of such a statement.

Looking in general at the freedom and right of the child to participate in the decisions that affect his/her life, people differ in opinion. This depending mainly on the types of decisions a child should be able to participate in. The local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study were questioned about which decisions a child should be (un)able to make. They were also asked whether children should have the right to participate in their decision to go to school or to work/labour. This extreme of the right to participate in choices that affect their lives has been brought up in order to find out more about where NGOs draw the line. In contrast to more regulative perspectives about child work, which tend to support the freedom of choice and participation in the above decision, the local NGOs of this study – with their more abolitionist approach and perspectives towards child labour (and work) – do not support appropriating children decision-making power in such 'big' decisions. Children should not have the right to participate in their decision to go to work instead of to school. They *should*, however, have the right to choose going to school over child labour. This because children are considered, in most cases, to not be aware of the drastic consequences child labour and educational deprivation can have. They choose by the moment, probably without considering future long-term consequences of their decision. Even though child participation is highly respected, it "should not go against the interest of the child". The previously mentioned fully corresponds with what the former girl child labourers of this study had to say about such participation rights (see chapter five).

CCRD stresses that parents should not let their children make the decision to drop out of school or to engage in work. This is a problem because parents are said to often be 'ignorant' (though this is changing) and need to learn how to tell their children that education is important and a lack of it

is detrimental to the child's development. CCRD hopes for more parental control in the direction of keeping their children in school and away from work. In this case, parents need to be convinced that education is important – in any case more important than labour – for their child. The NGOs of this study urge for a total abolition of child labour and child work, the lines between work and labour are too difficult to draw according to them and the one (if allowed) creates space for the other to survive:

"We should not compromise between allowing child work as this creates a space from child work to child labour" –Raymond (Director SISU)

Work carried out by a child that *should* be allowed includes minor light chores within and around the family home. This includes work that does not interfere with education, it is 'normal'. Occasionally washing the vessels after a meal or any other minor small contributions should be allowed. This is a normal part of growing up for most children across the globe. It is noteworthy that there are incidences of parents complaining (SISU) that their children have become lazy and will not do *any* sort of chores at home because that is 'their right'. This seems an unforeseen effect of educating children about their rights. Nevertheless, it is an extreme and the above situation is either attributable to the fact that parents still want or expect their children to contribute more than just minor work or to the fact that a minority of children has misinterpreted their rights and purposively misuses them.

REDS, despite urging its total abolition, offers a nuanced attitude about the abolition of all child work. For children there is no escape from light forms of labour, especially not in the rural (agricultural) situation. Alexander (REDS) says one cannot be too idealistic, one needs to be realistic instead. There needs to be a certain level of tolerance of child work because its total eradication is impossible. This differs from child labour, from the hazardous forms of child work, these do need to be eliminated by, amongst others, sensitizing people to its harms. REDS takes a realistic stance by concluding that poverty and culture are factors that stand in the way of the total abolition of child labour and child work:

"You're compelled to have a zero-tolerance view towards child labour and child work but we need to wait for some more time in order to realize this in reality due to the realities of poverty and culture that are still very much alive and have a strong force" –Alexander (Chairman REDS)

6.3.2 Why a rights-based approach?

With regard to the fourth sub-question of this chapter, it proved difficult to find out what exactly the motivations are of the local NGOs of this study to use a RBA. This also because what they say might not exactly correspond with what is true. It is not argued that the NGOs of this study have lied about their motives for using RBAs. However, one should be cautioned for biased answers. This is said especially with regard to whether NGOs use a rights-based approach because of a genuine personal interest and belief in its values or whether they have adopted such approaches because larger (international) agencies have trickled down certain values and approaches. In this case using a RBA to

child labour and education is not something intricately valued by the NGO but merely a measure to – for example – comply with (international) donor demands and acquire funding. This study does not verify this to be the case, but it does not exclude its impossibility either. Further in-depth research into the different NGOs and their policy would be required to conclude anything of this calibre. It is suspected that even if NGOs adopt such an approach to comply with donor demands, they themselves do incorporate the values of- and belief *in* such an approach.

Using a RBA could be a tool to acquire funding but it could also be a practical tool to take action, to give weight and shape to activities and programmes dealing with child labour (and education in relation to this). The approach could also be used because it gives their work and what they stand for as an NGO a more theoretical and/or moral and ethical base. The findings of this study cannot come to terms with the exact motives the NGOs have for using a RBA; there is too much difficulty in discerning whether NGOs truly say what is true (maybe because even they do not really know what exactly their motive for using a RBA is; it could be something slowly and not explicitly internalized by the organization). Having said this it *is* believed that we cannot simply discard NGO claims of genuinely agreeing with their RBA on the basis of their independent opinion. The NGOs generally hold different views and beliefs than those practiced by rule in their country. They step in – in their drive to protect the rights of vulnerable people - where they believe Government is failing. Their protectionist, firm attitudes often derive from their *own* beliefs. Even though we must be critical in assessing whether these are not pressed forward by outside perceptions – even by the 'business' of aid – we should also remember that NGOs have their own genuine views. The attitude of NGOs simply adapting to Eurocentric ideas is a dangerous one; it reduces local NGOs to child-like organizations not capable of holding such ideas without being parented to adopt them. This study in no means adopts such an idea, it merely recognizes the possibility of its existence.

With regard to the third sub-question of this chapter, the overall majority of NGOs in this study states they adhere to international child rights and a RBA because they genuinely believe in universal child rights. The approach seems to give their work a moral basis. It is also a useful tool through which they believe socio-economic justice can be installed and disparities in society can be reduced. The CCRD director seemed offended when asked why the organization uses a RBA:

"The rights are universal, so why should they be different per country? Why should they <u>not</u> apply to India, are we less important?"

CCRD is convinced that the argument of children's rights being too universalistic is untrue; children all over the world have the same rights. Arguments against this are said to be used by governments to escape the obligations they have regarding these international laws and agreements. The organization goes as far as saying that traditional, cultural practices and rituals should "not affect (deny or violate) children's human rights". They need to make room for these universal rights. The above demonstrates how universalism is given more weight than relativism by (at least some) local NGOs with respect to child rights. Haider, in his paper on working children in Bangladesh, has also observed that "ironically many NGOs instead of appreciating (these) local norms and values, are increasingly seeking to raise

child rights awareness, and more so challenging the attitudes, values, perceptions and beliefs of local societies from a Eurocentric standpoint" and that this quest is "often driven by behind-the-scene donor agendas, while many NGO workers and activists are quite aware of realities that compose the complex terrain they navigate" (White,2002; Ruwanpura and Roncolato,2006 in Haider,2008: 64).

Kirkemann Boesen and Martin state that "many organisations are introduced to rights-based development through the guidelines and policies of their partner or donor agencies in a way that relates to a specific subject or way of managing programmes" (2007: 6). The role of foreign donor agencies in local NGOs' adoption of a RBA to child labour and education has not become clear in this study. None of the NGOs expressed that a RBA is used just to acquire funding for their projects. HOPE makes this clear by explaining that they used a RBA in their campaigns and programmes *before* they ever received any funding from external donors. They do not use a RBA because everybody else uses it or because of donor demands, they say. SISU mentioned that they only adopted the UN CRC and accompanying rights after they had learned about them through donors. This is an interesting point. This NGO has subsequently integrated this approach in its own development approach. Ensuring the rights of children has become an integral part of empowering minorities, in the end of creating development. With regard to the third sub-question of this chapter it is safe to say that the rights-based approach to child labour has been received and adopted differently (also in varying degrees) by the local NGOs of this study.

Alexander (REDS) believes that local NGOs taking up a RBA are often driven by donors to do so, however, he also believes there are many NGOs who take up such an approach because they genuinely believe in the universal rights of the child. REDS has come to provide us with a glance as to how a RBA is adopted by an NGO (just as SISU has). Rights are becoming more and more a point of focus for NGOs, also for REDS. However, they also themselves genuinely agree with- or *feel* for these rights. They had just not adapted their approach to them (yet). REDS admits they initially did not use a RBA, but are becoming more and more an NGO that does use it consciously. The sensitivity of a RBA is recognized to be a current trend in development work. In the eighties of the last century there was little perception amongst NGOs about rights, especially not about acting on their behalf. Development work is now said to be changing from an ideology of charity to one of justice. With regard to child labour the UN CRC is said to have helped in this, but it leaves no working models for NGOs. It is an intellectual guide that helps NGOs come to a better understanding, that helps them come up with a conceptual framework and more clarity to design their programmes. In this sense the RBA becomes a practical tool for NGOs to operate their child labour activities. This is especially the case with those NGOs actively engaged with campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying. They very explicitly use a RBA - also by giving particular rights more meaning in order to align them with the local context - as a guiding tool for policy change. The rights themselves are not the end goal, they are the means or tools used – also by local NGOs – to reach certain ideals such as justice and 'development'.

The universal aspect of international child rights

The NGOs of this study were asked to comment on whether the rights used in their RBAs (i.e. those rights of the UN CRC) are too universalistic. Whether they believe the rights are too much constituted from a Eurocentric perspective. Their answers provide more clarity with regard to the third sub-question of this chapter; whether these local NGOs do not feel universal child rights are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality. This research shows that the majority of NGOs interviewed for this study believes the rights are indeed universalistic, but that this is not a bad thing. For they believe there *should* be such universal standards and that they *are* applicable to their situation (children in Tamil Nadu). Claiming they are too 'western' is believed, by CCRD, a justification for Government not to act upon them. The organization believes "there should be no debates about whether these (rights) are western or not. They should have been implemented a long time ago and are not in conflict with our culture". The majority of the NGOs of this study does not believe that international child rights are too Eurocentric and therefore unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks.

Two of the NGOs, however, felt there needs to be some room within the universalistic approach to adapt it to the local context. These adaptations should only be minor. SISU questions those universal rights of the child about religious freedom and discipline. The outspokenly Christian organization would like these rights to be balanced according to the Christian fate (their norms and values). They also want certain value systems in India to be kept in place and not to succumb to foreign ideologies. This seems paradoxical as what they strive for seems, at times, in conflict with some of these value systems. REDS agrees with universal child rights but does state that they need to be sensitized to the local situation when applying them – even if it makes these rights lose some of their power. The universal rights are necessary to encourage the philosophy and motivation of child rights. But we do need to think globally and act locally according to REDS. The variations in child labour, for example, need to be placed in their context. The global thought to get rid of all child labour and work is considered to be too idealistic if one takes account of its local contexts. In that sense the CRC is not entirely applicable; it is not adapted to every local context and takes little account of any typical problems within that context. Despite this, Alexander (REDS) recognizes that the UN is an organization that is compelled to look at matters in a universalistic sense and therefore does not and cannot make compromises in the CRC. This is also considered *necessary* in order to drive any change at all with regard to child labour. The spirit is a universalistic outlook that does relate to local reality and can therefore be a motivation for change. When asked whether the RBA to child labour (and education) actually elicits the actual interpretations and experiences of those girls involved in child labour (and possibly in education), Alexander thinks they at least do not conflict. The findings of this study, based on what former girl child labourers have said (see chapter five), indeed conclude this.

With regard to the universality and therefore applicability of universal (child) rights; both the former girl child labourers as well as the NGOs of this study have said things that are in line with what the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has once said with regard to this:

"It was never the people who complain of human rights as a Western or Northern imposition. It is too often their leaders who do so. But as democracy advances across the globe, those leaders will not always have their way. That is what gives me confidence that, one day, these rights will prevail" (Annan,1997).

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on five local Tamil Nadu (and one in Andhra Pradesh) NGOs dealing with child labour issues; how they speak of child labour (and education in relation to this) and whether, how, and why their activities are aligned with a rights-based approach. The different NGOs and their activities with regard to child labour were reviewed; the application of a RBA in this becoming apparent. Furthermore, the NGOs' experiences and thoughts on the issue of child labour have surfaced. The chapter has ventured to come to terms with the motivations local NGOs have to use a RBA. Unfortunately, these motivations have not become easily discernable in this study due to the possible factor of a misrepresentation of true motivations. In spite of this, we have seen that these NGOs in general agree with the provisions of universal child rights and do not believe that such rights are too universalistic. We have also seen that the local NGOs use (universal) child rights and thus a RBA in different ways and to different extents; some more explicitly than others. Those NGOs using them less explicitly (SISU and REDS) work less from – in the first place – a child rights ideology. Instead their own ideology (of helping the most vulnerable in society) seems to cross paths with this rights-based ideology, which makes taking up such an approach a natural thing to do. Those NGOs using RBAs to child labour more implicitly were also less involved with campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying.

In this conclusion we shall attempt to find more concrete answers to the second main research question of this thesis, summarizing much of what has already appeared in the three thematic sections of this chapter. This is done by, first, having a closer look at each of the sub-questions.

How do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations speak of child labour and of education in relation to child labour? With regard to the first sub-question of this chapter one can conclude that local Tamil Nadu NGOs speak of child labour as something bad and unjust; something that denies and violates a child's rights to education and to being free from exploitation. Speaking of child labour is very much related to speaking of education; the two have an intricate linkage (even an inverse relationship). Problems considering education and schools are the main cause of child labour (and not poverty) in India according to the NGOs of this study. Therefore, improvements in education are also in general spoken of most frequently as the solution to child labour. This in terms of education being of good quality, enjoyable (child friendly learning), accessible, safe, free, equitable, and compulsory up to the age of eighteen years. Education is spoken of as something very important, as a necessary precondition for a child's development on many fronts. Furthermore, it is in general considered something that empowers communities and sensitizes people to assert their rights. Child labour is something that barricades this and should be eradicated due to its harmful effects on the development of a child, not only in a physical sense but also socially, morally, and psychologically.

Both child labour and education are spoken of in a universalistic sense by the majority of local NGOs in this study; abolitionist approaches to child labour and work seem to be preferred over regulative ones. The NGOs seem to withhold more universalistic than (cultural) relativistic stances towards child labour and universal child rights. Notions of the local NGOs about what a 'child' is, what child labour is, and whether the latter can be a part of childhood are strongly in line with universalistic notions. Childhood should be labour-free and should include education. We have also seen that many of these local NGOs also blame the ignorant mindsets or attitudes of parents (towards education and child labour) for child labour. This also seems to show little relativistic thinking on their behalf and takes disregard of the restrictive conditions or systems (social, cultural, economic, caste, etc.) in which parents' attitudes and mindsets have been shaped.

What activities do local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations operate with regard to child labour and are these operated from a rights-based perspective? In answering sub-question two of this chapter we can safely conclude that all the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study operate their child labour activities from a rights-based perspective or approach. The manner and extent to which, however, differs slightly. We see that with exception of CCRD and MVF, child labour is not the main focal point of the organizations; they take up wider issues targeted at vulnerable (especially children) groups in society. Some of the NGOs have also been more explicit in using universal child rights in their activities than others. Their ideologies, in turn, are also more based on the principles of these rights and the 'best interest of the child'. For other NGOs such as SISU and REDS, we have seen that they use a RBA in a more implicit manner. The ideology and values from which they work coincide with these rights but these rights are not the main point of departure for their activities. This is more the case for HEAL-M, HOPE, CCRD, and MVF.

The activities operated by the local NGOs of this study correspond quite well with what those formerly involved (see chapter five) say *should* be done. They are mainly focused on education; activities within these lines are popular. The focus on particular education activities differs per NGO, but they can roughly be divided into two. The first is directed more to campaigning, awareness raising, advocacy, and lobbying from the micro- to the macro level *for* education (up to the 12th standard) and *against* child labour in all sectors and for all children under the age of eighteen years. The second is directed more to practical interventions with regard to education; both preventive (preventing drop-outs) and curative (rehabilitating former child labourers and/or drop-outs). The latter includes bridge courses, tutorial centres, and vocational skills training programmes while the prior includes evening centres and summer camps. We have come to see that the activities of the NGOs of this study with regard to child labour fall mainly within the lines sketched above.

Education becomes more of a focal point than child labour itself, perhaps because it provides more opportunities for direct action. It seems the cornerstone of interventions, while direct intervention or action with regard to child labour (e.g. releasing or 'rescuing' children from child labour situations) seems to lie beyond the capacity of the local NGOs; this is a risky business and needs a more holistic effort. Such rescuing, instead, falls mainly within softer approaches of *convincing* child labourers and parents that the child should be in school and not in work. Changing mindsets through

awareness raising about the importance of education, the harmfulness of child labour, and a sensitization to child rights. Furthermore, also lobbying on the macro-level, especially with Government, to change current- and create additional firm legislation regarding child labour and education. Legislation that conforms to universal child rights standards and even fills those in *beyond* such standards. Moreover, legislation that is properly implemented and also properly enforced by Government. Where the first of these approaches is directed at rights-holders, we see that the last targets duty bearers.

How have universal rights of the child been received by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations and do they not feel these are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality? How has the rights-based approach been received and adopted by local non-governmental organizations? The first part of this third sub-question can be answered by saying that these universal child rights have been well-received and embraced by the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study. They have clearly expressed, in general, that they do not feel these rights are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality. REDS has carefully warned that these ideals, however important and appreciated as generators for action, are still difficult to apply in reality. Nevertheless, this research shows that the NGOs believe international child rights are universalistic, but that this is not a bad thing; they *are* applicable to children (also child labourers) in Tamil Nadu. Despite this maybe being difficult. Directly related to the acceptance of these universal child rights are the universalistic RBAs to child labour used by these NGOs. Such approaches have been adopted explicitly by some and more implicitly by others; they have been received – it seems – as tools to promote universal child rights. Something which these NGOs genuinely seem to agree with. The RBA has become a useful tool through which these local NGOs can apply or practice their values, beliefs, and ideals (which are in line with the ideals of universal child rights) with regard to (protecting) children; with regard to child labour. It is also a tool that gives their work a moral foundation to depart from.

What does the motivation and application of a rights-based approach by local Tamil Nadu non-governmental organizations tell us about the meaning and uses of this approach to child labour? How has such an approach shaped their ways of thinking, their institutional practices, and their modes of operation? The final sub-question of this chapter is related more to its main research question. It was difficult to find out what exactly the motivations are of the local NGOs of this study to use a RBA. Especially with regard to whether they use such an approach because of a genuine personal interest and belief in its values or whether they have adopted such approaches because larger (international) agencies have trickled down certain values and approaches or have even *demanded* them to do so (e.g. through funding mechanisms). Even though the NGOs argue the prior it remains difficult to judge whether this is the truth. This does not mean they are lying about things; an incorporation of such universal approaches due to donor demands could seep in and go unnoticed throughout the years. This study in no means discredits the fact that local NGOs can and do have such genuine beliefs in universal child rights, it merely issues a warning with regard to this. In general the majority of the local NGOs in this study motivates using a RBA with their genuine belief in universal child rights. Especially those

rights to education and to freedom from exploitation; they work from the principle of the 'best interest of the child'; promoting, protecting, and trying to ensure child rights. Some of the NGOs have also given their motivation for a RBA as something to help protect vulnerable groups in society – this without explicitly focusing on their rights in *first* instance.

The motivation and application of a RBA by local Tamil Nadu NGOs shows us that the meaning and uses of this approach to child labour are mainly those that fall within the provisions of these universal child rights. The approach seems to be a strong force *in,* and therefore also seems to lead more *to* dealing with child labour through campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying rather than through direct grassroots intervention and movements that aim to 'save children in need' and fight against injustice and exploitation. With this there is also (seemingly) a shift in focus towards education in relation to child labour, rather than on child labour itself. This also because the latter seems – in a practicable sense – a lot more difficult to operate from. Child rights have become a focal point from which to fight against child labour. This might cause losing ground with reality and what is actually experienced within the field. The focus is so much on how things *should* be, that how things actually *are* and why so might be more easily overlooked. The approach then has little meaning for what is truly happening in reality and avenues for change that lie within that reality. Avenues that depart from this reality rather than from abstract notions of rights. Where the local NGOs of this study speak of child labour through a rights-language, the former girl child labourers of this study do so through a language of hardship, struggles, poverty, and coping (see chapter five).

How exactly the RBA to child labour has shaped local NGOs' ways of thinking, their institutional practices, and their modes of operation is difficult to say. This study lacks more in-depth historical analysis for this. What *can* be concluded is that such approaches make NGOs think in terms of rights and perhaps less in terms of reality. Their modes of operation are also largely based on universal (child) rights; the NGOs becoming very much concerned with advocating such rights (also on the local level) and their proper implementation and enforcement in national legislation rather than being concerned with pro-active fighting against the injustices in society that add up and lead to child labour in the first place. Directly acting upon child labour, by for example releasing those children engaged in it, also becoming less of a customary approach to the problem. In this sense the application of the RBA seems to have led to little concrete action, but to lots of campaigning, networking, advocacy, and lobbying with child rights as a practical tool. Action is very much directed at what 'Government should' do as the main duty bearer of child rights; education as a top-down approach rather than broad, liberation-oriented grassroots approaches of NGOs – at least so it seems.

How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour? In order to answer the second main research question of this thesis (the main research question of this chapter) we have already looked at how local NGOs dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education. The activities they operate with regard to child labour have also become clear (see answers to sub-questions above).

The ways in which their mode of operation relates to a universalistic RBA to child labour comes down to using universal child rights as a base and motivation for their actions. Some local NGOs obviously using such approaches more explicitly than others. The ways in which such approaches are used seem mainly based on education (as a right) in relation to child labour prevention. But also the right to be free from exploitation and provisions of regulations and laws banning child labour are taken up. Nevertheless, education seems the most popular area of intervention within this universalistic RBA to child labour. Probably because it is very practicable for NGOs, especially within the lines of RBAs. Campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying – the latter on the macro-level (focusing on duty bearers), while the prior also on the micro-level (focusing on rights-holders) – seem to be becoming major modes of operation related to a rights-based approach. With the inherent danger of maybe replacing a focus on reality and what *is* happening with a focus on rights and what *should* be happening.

The reasons why the local Tamil Nadu NGOs' mode of operation relates to a universalistic RBA to child labour is primarily a practical one; such an approach provides tools (rights) that form the means by which to carry out activities. It is also one, apparently, of a genuine belief of these NGOs in universal child rights. Hereby the RBA also forms a moral base for these local NGOs to work from.

The following chapter is the last of this thesis. It is the conclusion and shall review the main accomplishments and findings of this thesis and answer as well as discuss its two main research questions. It will look at whether the research findings have been able to reach the aims and goals of this MSc research. Moreover, it shall illuminate whether the problem statement has been answered. Possible recommendations shall also be made where considered necessary.

7 Conclusion

The previous two chapters have presented and discussed the research findings of this MSc research. The current chapter shall review the achievements of this thesis and summarize its main findings by discussing the answers to the two main research questions and relating them more to the rights-based approach (to child labour). Moreover, an attempt is made to place the research findings more into perspective, also vis-à-vis each other. At the end of this chapter we shall look at whether the aims of this thesis have been achieved and to what extent the problems formulated in the problem statement have been solved. Limits and limitations shall be reviewed and any recommendations for future research shall also be presented.

This thesis has been based on extensive conversations and interviews with former girl child labourers engaged in the agricultural sector and local NGOs (dealing with child labour) in Tamil Nadu, South India. From these two angles the practicability, meaning, and uses of a RBA to child labour have been investigated. Especially taking into regard the universality of such an approach based primarily on international human (child) rights as laid down in UN conventions and declarations. This study has looked at the ways in which the rights-based approach or rather approach*es* – as there is not one uniform RBA to child labour – have been adopted by local NGOs and whether this relates at all to what women who have been child labourers themselves have to say about child labour, education, and universal child rights. Within this, it looks especially at how local actors speak of child labour and education in relation to this. At a certain point in their young lives, the former child labourers of this study participated in a residential vocational skills training programme at REDS. This programme served to withdraw them from labour and provide them with other alternatives in life through education.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is composed mainly of the RBA to child labour, and inherent to this it takes up a human (child) rights perspective to child labour. The study departs from this perspective in order to interpret the research findings and answer the research questions. A fundamental assumption of this research has been that many local NGOs in Tamil Nadu take up a RBA to deal with child labour issues.

Chapter one gave an introduction to this thesis in terms of its problem statement, research questions, aims, and limits. We shall review these in the hereby following. Chapter two gave some background information in order to familiarize the reader with the topic of this thesis and improve his or her understanding of the findings of this study. Child labour has been defined in this thesis as any work carried out by a child (under eighteen years) that is either exploitative, hazardous, harmful (mentally, socially, spiritually, physically, morally) or interferes with their education (in particular compulsory schooling); and therefore is very likely to damage several if not all facets of their development. This differs from child *work* which does not have the above harmful characteristics. We have discussed the position of abolitionist and regulative perspectives to working children. The prior condemning all child work because the one easily leads to the other and because the line between

labour and work is too difficult to draw in practice. The latter perspective urges to allow for child work as an activity in the interest of many children all over the world who actually *want* to work.

Chapter two has also given some background information on the main international conventions and national (Indian) legislation on child labour and education. We have seen that Article 32 (on child labour) of the UN CRC (1989) lacks firm implementation and enforcement in India and that the national Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act (1986) is too restrictive in its focus. It conceptualizes children as under the age of fourteen years and only prohibits work in hazardous occupations while it regulates child work in other occupations. This regulation is said to fall short and the hazardous occupations are only those identified by Government. Agriculture, holding the largest child labour force in India (as well as worldwide), is not on this list while it is a sector in which the regulation of child work is extremely difficult.

Official Indian statistics count approximately 13 million child (under fourteen years) labourers in the country, while unofficial estimates run in the 60-100 million. The nowhere children who are neither in school (there are approximately 85 million out of school children in India) nor officially in child labour, are counted into these unofficial estimates. The out of school and drop-out statistics signal an ineffective implementation and enforcement of Article 21A of the Constitution of India; namely that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of six and fourteen. Apparently controlling and regulating this is difficult in the face of an education system that itself seems in need of amendment in order to be more qualitative, equitable, safe, free, and accessible.

We have learned about the vulnerable position of girls in Tamil Nadu society and the gender discrimination they face from early stages in life (female feticide and infanticide are not uncommon). A girl is given less priority to enjoy schooling, a girl is more likely to engage in child work or labour that is unpaid (especially in agriculture), and a girl is more likely to face double burdens of domestic work at home on top of any other work she might already be doing. In general, a girl's life is worth less than that of a boy; she is expensive for a family, especially because of the bridal dowry associated with her marriage.

The main causes and consequences of child labour have been identified in chapter two. Child labour is a factor that perpetuates poverty and poverty is a factor that causes child labour. Child labour, however, is not only caused by poverty as implied by the poverty-child labour cycle. Many push and pull factors are at play, they add up and simultaneously lead to situations of child labour. The role of education (a lack of it) is a major factor causing child labour (and poverty). It has become clear that education (be it safe, free, accessible, qualitative, and equitable) is therefore a dominant solution or approach to tackle child labour. It is also widely applied by local NGOs. In terms of the poverty-child labour cycle, education is seen as the key to break it. Education is believed to decrease child labour incidence (the two have an inverse relationship) which in turn decreases poverty on the long-term. Education is also believed to decrease poverty directly, which in turn pushes less children into labour.

Chapter three introduced the theoretical framework of this research. A human child rights perspective to child labour has been taken up in this thesis. It must be noted that this thesis does not

take disregard of the existence of various other perspectives (social, cultural, economic, etc.) to child labour. In attempting to find answers to the research questions, this study has been concerned with universal child rights relating to child labour. The human rights perspective becomes particularly apparent in the RBAs to child labour of both international as well as local NGOs.

The human rights perspective to child labour is based on the values and standards of human rights including those rights tracing back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Convention No.138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work, and ILO Convention No.182 on the worst forms of child labour. The best interest of the child and the protection of his or her rights (and their denial or violation) are fundamental in the human rights perspective and the RBAs of local NGOs to child labour.

A rights-based approach to child labour stems from viewing these issues from a human (child) rights perspective. It defines the problem of child labour and its solutions in terms of a human rights rationale. It is a discourse or philosophy utilized by local NGOs and others to mainstream programmes according to the language of universal human rights. This to give their work a theoretical, practical, ideological, and/or moral base. It is presumably also a discourse or philosophy that carries a meaning or at least *uses* for those whom it targets; in this study former girl child labourers.

Major elements of the RBA to child labour relate to rights-holders and duty bearers. Rights-holders are children who are (prone to become) child labourers; they are entitled to (claim) their rights. Something local NGOs dealing with child labour (by means of a RBA) try to promote and strengthen; especially through raising awareness. Duty bearers are to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of rights-holders. With regard to child labour, Government is the largest duty bearer but also parents, teachers, and employers hold duties with respect to child rights. NGOs with a RBA often try to strengthen or at least encourage duty bearers to meet their obligations towards rights-holders. Duty bearers are held *accountable* to do so.

Chapter three has reviewed some of the major strengths and weaknesses of the RBA; in relation to these it has given more content to the debate between universalism and (cultural) relativism when it comes to human rights. A debate which is said to have reached an impasse, a debate contemporary human rights anthropologists are moving *beyond.* Their new ways of dealing with human rights focus on their uses, meanings, and relationships in particular local contexts. Matters that this MSc research also touches upon.

Chapter four presented the methods and techniques used to conduct the research for this MSc thesis. The setting of this study in the rural Sivagangai District of South India's Tamil Nadu state was clarified. The former girl child labourers of this study are all from the Sivagangai District; they were a child labourer in this district and still live in the same district. The local NGOs of this study are technically speaking not all based in Tamil Nadu. The two main target groups of this research are 1- local Tamil Nadu NGOs dealing with child labour issues and 2- women who used to be a child labourer (in the agriculture sector) in Sivagangai District and followed a vocational skills training programme at REDS at a particular moment in their young lives. The motivation for a focus on *former* child labourers,

on *girls*, and on those engaged in *agriculture* has been clarified in chapter four. Furthermore, background information on the residential vocational skills training programme has also been provided.

This study was intended to be explorative, interpretative, and descriptive in nature. Common research methods of the social sciences were used for primary data collection; semi-structured interviews, case studies, and a focus group discussion. The limitations of this study relate mainly to the language barrier, something especially restrictive for conducting the case studies. Another limitation is a possible bias in the answers of respondents (the women) that relate to their experiences concerning the vocational skills training at REDS. The interviews were held at the REDS office in Kootturavupatty and in the presence of REDS staff; the translator being a leading REDS figure. Respondents could also have seen me, as a researcher, too much linked to REDS; making them apprehensive perhaps to share any negative things about the training. A major limitation of this study with respect to the local NGOs dealing with child labour is that only five were interviewed directly (and one in Andhra Pradesh via email). These NGOs probably do not capture the great diversity of local NGOs dealing with child labour and the ways in which and the reasons why different local NGOs take up, internalize, and practice a RBA to child labour. Conclusions in this study about the local NGOs in Tamil Nadu are therefore assumed to only carry a limited general validity.

Chapter five discussed the research findings that relate to the first main research question of this thesis: *Speaking of child labour and education, what are the past and current lifeworlds, experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu - and do these relate to the (universalistic) rights-based approaches to child labour that are often used by local non-governmental organizations?*

We have seen, through former girl child labourers' accounts of their past experiences with child labour and education, the complex and intertwined push factors of child labour. The women of this study have mainly blamed the situation of income deficiency or poverty for their need to work as a child; it was part of a rural family strategy to survive, it was a *necessity* according to them. The poverty-child labour cycle seems evident here. However, the former girl child labourers also addressed additional factors that led to child labour. These were mainly related to problems regarding education. We have seen how education in the sense of formal schooling was experienced and how dropping out (for different reasons) related to becoming involved with child labour.

Overall, going to school was a positive experience for the women of this study, especially for those not failing. Failure was a factor that easily led to discouragement to continue in school. Avenues for future research are manifold here; more clarity about the role of parents and teachers in encouraging a child to stay in school in such situations could, for example, provide important insights for solutions to such problems. Past lifeworlds as a child labourer are primarily spoken of in a negative sense. It was – in general – a painful experience; the nature and conditions of the work were physically and mentally painful. The latter primarily because the girls were missing out on formal education. The fact that their labour had to happen due to the difficult financial situation of their family is something that was mentally painful as well. We see that, especially in *retrospect*, these mental pains are still alive and maybe even strengthened – especially those related to not having been able to

complete formal education. The REDS vocational skills training was experienced positively and as a good second alternative to formal schooling. The girls were at the time happy they were out of the sun (no longer facing the hardships of agricultural labour) and were learning *something* (especially the tailoring). Moreover, they were learning something that could help generate income in the future and prevent them from having to engage in agricultural work.

The valuations of child labour and education are based on the former girl child labourers' own experiences with regard to these. Child labour is viewed as something negative (because it deprives one of education and causes mental and physical suffering) *but* necessary in a situation of acute income deficiency. It was not enjoyed by the women of this study, it has been valued primarily in terms of something the girls could do to help alleviate the family suffering. They, more often than not, did not see child labour as a choice but as a must or responsibility due to the circumstances of financial deficiency faced by the family. Within this context they often 'wanted' to help. We see that their agency was narrowed down to coping with a situation and taking on a responsibility rather than having the full capacity to choose within limited conditions. Child labour was economically valued at the time, and also still in retrospect; but it was – all along - *undesirable* work.

Formal schooling is valued as most important by the former girl child labourers of this study. It is considered very important for a child's development and future possibilities in life. Furthermore, it is something they themselves have been deprived of. A skills training is by most former girl child labourers seen as the second best alternative to finishing formal education or as something that should be done in addition to completing formal schooling. Valuations by former girl child labourers are argued to be important because they are *retrospective* valuations and views; they withhold information about the impact of child labour on the long-term.

The current lifeworlds of the women of this study differ. Many are married and have children, others are looking forward to getting married and having children, some are infertile, unmarried, widowed, and so forth. With regard to current employment we have seen that all women use their tailoring skills to supplement their income, while many still work in agriculture as well. Tailoring is profitable but market saturation has led to a meager demand. Employment in this rural area is difficult, becoming evermore so because of growing difficulties (due to the climate) for agriculture. The women, today, devise multiple ways to generate income and to make ends meet.

This study concludes that child labour is harmful to the development and wellbeing of individuals. Child labour has influenced the former girl child labourers, in their current lives, within the terms of not having been able to finish formal schooling. The deep regrets related to this makes many of the women still feel inferior and small today. Another influence of the labour is that the women are extremely motivated to prevent their own (future) children from the same fate they faced as a child. This is possible if they are able to earn enough money to support their child's education and if they do not need their child's labour contribution (in cash or kind) to survive as a family.

The influence of the vocational skills training, besides leading directly to additional means for income generation and *chances* of employment, also has an indirect impact. The women feel they are better placed in their community because they have learned a skill and can practice it. They feel proud,

respected, and feel they are leading a more dignified life because of this. It is safe to conclude that such indirect influences of a skills training outweigh the direct ones. The women have more self-worth and self-confidence, moreover they feel more independent. The latter is very noteworthy and important in a male-dominated society. The women at least have the feeling of financial security and independence due to their income earning possibilities through tailoring (and the other skills).

Hopes, dreams, and desires of former girl child labourers for the future relate mainly to being able to practice their skill and generating income with it. This in particular to be able to fully educate their children (up to the 12th standard and even further). The women have little dreams for themselves, most dreams of mothers are those for their children. By all means they want to prevent their children's labour from being necessary in a family strategy for survival and they want their children to complete formal education. With respect to child labour in general, the overall majority of former girl child labourers desires it to be fully eliminated and desires children to be educated and not to drop out of school for *any* reason.

The experiences, views, valuations, and desires of former girl child labourers concerning child labour (and education) relate, in a way, to universalistic RBAs to child labour that are often used by local NGOs. Their thinking about child labour and education does not stem from a rights-based way of thinking, however. Nevertheless, it does correspond with it and these women do happen to embrace such (universal child rights) thinking. This, then, not from an ideological principle of adherence to human rights and the 'best interest of the child' but from the idea of protecting children from the same fate they have themselves undergone. They do not react from an initial situation of child rights' deprivation, violation, or denial but from a situation of their own experiences. It is the experiences of turbulent financial situations, hardship, sadness, and pain – the everyday reality of child labour – that decides how these women speak of child labour and education. It is not a language of human rights that they use but a language of hardships, struggle, and coping. The women of this study use a more practical way of thinking in terms of deprivation and hardships; a thinking that seems to fight the social and economic, even cultural systems that are in place and perpetuate instead of resist phenomena such as child labour amongst the children of the rural poor.

The former girl child labourers have their own notions of child rights which unexpectedly coincide more than conflict with universal child rights. Such universal rights are embraced, as they fall in line with the women's own notions of what children should and should not have (to do). The women surprisingly lean little to relativistic stances when it comes to child rights. This illustrates there might be more universality in the fundamental provisions of international child rights than argued by relativists. Within the context of the abovementioned, the RBA seems warmly welcomed by the former girl child labourers of this study. It relates to their situation as an avenue for emancipation; for liberating their society and its future children from the same hardships they have themselves faced because of child labour. This is the meaning such an approach might have for them.

We have seen that in this study the interpretations, accounts, and valuations of former girl child labourers with regard to child labour, education, and the rights of children lean towards universalistic stances that strongly condemn such work for children and argue that all children should

be in school. This implies that for these respondents a RBA to child labour *can* have uses and meaning; they can be a means to protect their children from the same hardships they have themselves faced. These women, however, speak of child labour and education not from a human child rights perspective but from a perspective of hardships and struggles representative of their own past. They hardly *use* a rights-based way of thinking about child labour and education. Even though their accounts, interpretations, experiences, valuations, and desires – when talking about child labour (and education) – seem to fall in line with a rights-based way of thinking, they do not *stem* from such thinking or ideology in the first place. Their own conceptualization of what rights a child should have are not so much linked to the ideology of child rights and 'the best interest of the child', but more to what the consequences are of a deprivation of certain important things in life (e.g. education). Consequences they themselves have experienced firsthand. Being fully educated - something child labour obstructs - is believed to lead to a more dignified life, a better position within society, a better income later in life (if there are employment opportunities), and more recognition and respect from the community.

Overall then, even though universal child rights and RBAs to child labour can have uses and meaning for local actors; such discussions seem less relevant when realizing that these actors are more concerned with the everyday reality of child labour - the experiences and the hardships, and *not* whether and where exactly such labour is in conflict with particular rights. Even though RBAs might – then – be less relevant for these women in their way of conceptualizing, thinking, and speaking of child labour, their notions of universal child rights are welcomed as avenues to protect future generations. This is where, in a very practical sense, such approaches can have uses and meaning for local actors.

Chapter six discussed the research findings that relate to the second main research question of this thesis: *How do local non-governmental organizations dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu speak of child labour and education, what activities do they operate with regard to child labour, and in what ways and why does their mode of operation relate to a (universalistic) rights-based approach to child labour?*

The local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study speak of child labour as something bad; it denies and violates a child's rights to education and to being free from exploitation. Speaking of child labour is very much related to speaking of education. Problems in education and schools are the main cause of child labour in India according to these NGOs. This contrasts with what the former girl child labourers have given as the main argument (from their experiences) as a cause of child labour; namely a situation of severe income deficiency faced by the household. Nevertheless, these women have *also* pointed to problems regarding education (e.g. failure) to have caused dropping out and a subsequent engagement in child labour.

The NGOs of this study speak of education and improvements therein as the main solution to child labour. This because education is where they place the root of the child labour problem. Education is considered something very important for the general development of a child and for empowering communities. It is also a means or place (school) where children can be sensitized to their (further) rights. Child labour is something that obstructs education and should for this reason as well as because of its harmful effects, be eradicated. The local NGOs dealing with child labour in Tamil Nadu

speak of this labour and education in a universalistic manner. Abolitionist approaches seem to gain preference over regulative ones. The majority of the NGOs base their work on universal child rights and show little relativistic thinking. Their blaming ignorant mindsets of parents, for example, seems to take disregard of the context in which child labour tends to occur; disregard of the restrictive conditions or systems in which parents' mindsets have been shaped. Further research is recommended on the exact role of parents' mindsets with regard to child labour and education in order to find out whether these attitudes play such a large role and how exactly so.

The local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study operate their child labour activities from a RBA. The manner and extent to which, however, differs. There is not one universalistic rights-based approach; it is an approach that comes in many forms – placed on a continuum of differing gradations. With exception of CCRD and MVF, child labour is not the main focal point of the organizations; they take up wider issues targeted at vulnerable groups in society. Some of the NGOs have been more explicit in using universal child rights in their activities than others. Their ideologies are also more based on the principles of these rights and the 'best interest of the child'. Other NGOs such as SISU and REDS work less from a child rights ideology. Instead their ideology of helping the most vulnerable in society seems to cross paths with this rights-based ideology. Taking up such an approach is then a natural thing to do rather than something done in first instance. These two NGOs are also less involved with campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying.

The activities operated by the local NGOs of this study correspond quite well with what those formerly involved say should be done; awareness raising directed at parents and children in order to avoid children from dropping out and engaging in labour. The NGOs focus mainly on education activities (differing per NGO) that are generally dividable into two categories. The first type are directed at campaigning, raising awareness, advocacy, and lobbying from the micro- to the macro-level *for* education and *against* child labour. The second type are directed more at practical interventions with regard to education; both preventive and curative. The latter includes bridge courses, tutorial centres, and vocational skills training programmes while the prior includes evening centres and summer camps.

In order to eliminate child labour both the local NGOs and the former girl child labourers were asked what needs to be done. While the local NGOs framed solutions particularly in terms of 'Government should' and also at times 'parents should', the former child labourers clearly talked more about 'parents should'. This might show that they are either not much aware of the obligations of Government as a duty bearer of child rights and/or that they place much of the problem within their own local context, holding parents accountable as duty bearers of child rights. Or at least of making sure that their children are educated and not in situations of child labour.

The NGOs of this study act with regard to child labour mainly through the aforementioned two types of education activities. They focus little *directly* on child labour, probably because this withholds little opportunities for action. Further research is recommended to find out whether the above holds true in general for more local Tamil Nadu NGOs and why exactly such a focus is hardly adopted (anymore). Direct child labour action such as releasing or 'rescuing' child labours is a risky business in

need of holistic efforts. It seems to fall beyond the capacity of these local NGOs. Their approaches are therefore maybe more directed – from a child rights rationale – at ensuring decent education in order to prevent child labour in the first place. In general the current approaches of NGOs seem *softer,* directed at campaigning, advocacy and awareness raising that makes communities (parents, children, employers, etc.) child rights literate and sensitive to the positive effects of decent education and the negative effects of child labour. Furthermore, these approaches are directed at campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying on higher levels, particularly with Government, in order to push forward amendments in current child labour and education legislation and to create *new* firmer legislation in order to curb child labour. Also to push forward the need and duty of Government (as duty bearers of child rights, also those of the UN CRC which India has ratified) to properly implement and *enforce* child labour- and education legislation.

The ways in which the NGOs' mode of operation relates to a universalistic RBA to child labour is that they use universal child rights as a motivation and point of departure for their actions. Especially the right of the child to education is used because decent or proper education is believed to prevent child labour. But probably also because it is very practicable to work with for local NGOs. It must be mentioned that international and national regulations and legislation banning child labour are also taken up in these NGOs' RBAs.

Universal child rights have been embraced by the local Tamil Nadu NGOs of this study. They have clearly expressed, in general, that they do not feel these rights are too western or unrepresentative of local cultural frameworks due to their universality. RBAs are used as tools to promote universal child rights; and for those less explicitly involved with a firm RBA – as tools to reach their general ideals of protecting children.

The reasons why the local Tamil Nadu NGOs' mode of operation relates to a universalistic RBA seems primarily a practical one; it provides tools that form the means to carry out activities. It is also one of a genuine belief in universal child rights. Thus, the RBA also forms a moral base for these local NGOs to work from. The exact motivation for the NGOs of this study to use a RBA has not been further discerned in this research. Especially whether they use such an approach not only for practical purposes or from a genuine personal interest and belief in its values, but because external donors pressurize or demand them to do so. It is believed that further extensive research into these motives would lead to interesting results.

The RBA has a sound practicability for local NGOs, and in that sense it has a meaning to them. They can use such an approach as a strong force to deal with child labour. A rights-based approach gives them a direct means to work with and goals (universal child rights) to achieve. Campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying – the latter on the macro-level (focusing on duty bearers), while the prior two also on the micro-level (focusing on rights-holders) – seem to be major modes of operation related to a RBA. Along with such developments there seems to be a particular focus on education in relation to child labour rather than on child labour *itself*. The approach carries little tools other than rights for direct pro-active grassroots intervention and therefore also seems of little use when it comes to direct action-oriented child labour interventions.

The rights language of local NGOs differs from the language of hardships, struggles, and coping used by former girl child labourers. Speaking of child labour the latter group uses a language based on the reality of child labour. RBAs to child labour, as internalized and practiced by local NGOs, focus on how things *should* be. In doing so they could be overlooking the reality of how things actually *are* and why so. The approach then has little meaning when it comes to what is truly happening in reality and the avenues for change that lie herein. Avenues departing from the local context rather than from the abstract notions of universal rights. All this is said with recognition of the fact that taking note of reality does not have to imply letting go of universal child rights altogether. For we have also seen that former girl child labourers' notions of child rights regarding child labour and education are actually quite in line with these universal child rights. Taking note of reality merely has the power to prevent tunnelled views and solutions to particular problems. In general it is important to not only think in terms of rights but also in terms of reality; child rights must not take disregard of (and overshadow) reality within local contexts and the avenues of change therein.

A focus on child rights through RBAs to child labour seems to have overshadowed direct intervention by NGOs in chid labour situations. Actions are primarily those of campaigning, networking, advocacy, and lobbying in addition to some practical preventive and curative educational activities. The application of RBAs seems to have led to little concrete action, instead they have mainly led to holding duty bearers accountable and sensitizing and strengthening rights-holders to (claim) their rights. Of course these are, from a universalistic view, not bad developments. Far from so. It just implies that under the umbrella of rights, local NGOs seem to be losing ground as liberation-oriented grassroots movements.

With regard to the problem statement, this thesis has accomplished to get to know more about how those formerly involved in agricultural child labour speak of it and of education. This study has brought to light the experiences and valuations of child labour of those who have directly experienced it in their past. This has also been done with regard to education; both in the sense of formal schooling as well as in the sense of a vocational skills training followed upon withdrawal from child labour. The retrospective outlook of *former* child labourers on these issues adds perspective to studies on current child labourers and gives us a better idea of the dynamics and influences of child labour and education; in the past but also in the *present* lives of former child labourers. The firsthand experiences and views of these women give an accurate reflection of reality; a reflection that needs to be taken into account when we speak of child labour. With respect to another problem identified at the onset of this research, this thesis has succeeded in creating more knowledge as to whether and how the experiences, views, valuations, and desires (of former girl child labourers) – with regard to child labour – relate to what is being said and done by local NGOs. Also about what the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach, as often used by these NGOs, are for those (having been) directly involved.

This thesis has furthermore been able to reflect on another set of problems; it has given some insights into whether and why local NGOs in the field take up a rights-based approach (to child labour) and how they interpret and apply universalistic child rights and such an approach in the first place. The insights into the why question are incomplete in this research and therefore identified as in need of

further extensive, in-depth research. This last point, on further research, in fact applies to all of the research findings of this study. Especially in order to gain more *complete* answers to the problem statement. This thesis has given us information about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach to child labour from the angle of NGOs and it has also warned us about some of the inherent dangers of using only an approach that focuses on rights. It has looked at the practicability of a rights-based approach to child labour; linking the latter to both local NGOs and former girl child labourers in Tamil Nadu.

The abovementioned illustrates that this thesis has achieved its aims. However, perhaps to a limited extent. There is no full information, but then again, when is there? Whether the goal of this thesis - the insights of this study serving as input for further policy-oriented research on those issues discussed and initially studied in this research - shall be achieved remains questionable. Hopefully those reading this thesis and actively involved with its described issues, shall take its findings into consideration. The thesis is intended to trigger more critical thinking about the meaning and uses of a rights-based approach, something it is believed to have achieved. Any strong recommendations on the basis of the research findings of this thesis cannot be made. However, some minor ones – especially related to interesting or necessary future research – have been made. Hopefully this study shall be followed by many more focusing on former child labourers because these retrospective experiences, thoughts, and views are extremely valuable - due to their reflective character - for future decision-making with regard to child labour. Such research is strongly recommended in future policy-oriented research on the topic.

All of the above has been concluded with consideration of the limits of this MSc research. Namely that it has focused on former girl child labourers of the *agriculture* sector who have been able to follow education (a vocational skills training) upon withdrawal (at least temporary) from child labour. Their experiences and views most probably differ from child labourers who have never followed a training after their period as a child labourer or from child labourers who have been engaged in other sectors of child labour or who have followed other types of vocational skills training programmes (at other NGOs). It also focuses on former and not current child labourers. This might be a limit, but it is also a major strength of this research due to the fact that there are relatively little studies with such a focus. A second major limit is that only six NGOs were consulted (technically speaking only four in Tamil Nadu). The extent of diversity amongst these particular NGOs is not expected to be truly reflective of the diversity in approaches to child labour amongst all NGOs in Tamil Nadu. The validity of this study when it comes to general conclusions about local Tamil Nadu NGOs and their rights-based approaches, is therefore not guaranteed. This thesis furthermore limits itself to a human child rights perspective to child labour. To a rights-based approach to child labour and education. In its focus it takes less account of social, cultural, or economic perspectives to child labour.

This thesis argues for child labour issues to be studied from a variety of angles and perspectives in the future; thematically (e.g. poverty, labour market conditions, justice, human rights) but also subject-wise. We need to know more about- and directly from current as well as former child labourers, from current as well as former child *workers*, from NGOs dealing with child labour issues,

from employers, from school children who do not work as a child labourer or worker, from Government officials, and so forth. The puzzle has so many missing pieces that we can only do our best to link several of its pieces together in order to form a certain degree of understanding and possible avenues for (desired) change. We need to first and foremost, in order to retrace some of the missing pieces of the puzzle, find those *who* can tell us more about them. This with the spirit of enabling children's lights to shine like diamonds, wherever they may be in the sky so high.

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Appendix I- Semi-structured questionnaire: former girl child labourers

Date interview	-
Place interview	-
Translator	-
Special note	-

Respondent #	-
Name	-
Current age	-
Current location	-
Current employment status	-

1 Experiences with regard to child labour in the agricultural sector

a. - Age child labourer: – to – yrs. Duration: – yrs.
- Type of agricultural child labour & employed by who (paid?).
- Where did the labour take place (village)
- Household setting at the time (lived with parents/alone/siblings).
- Household situation, income patterns (parents' source of income/caste hierarchy).

b. - Motives to engage in child labour (contextual background, push & pull factors). Why work: income for yourself, to help parents, or part of training to be responsible adults, etc.
- Was it a free choice & who made the choice (herself/parents).

c. - Withdrawal (partial/full) from (primary) education to engage in child labour? Type of education followed & highest attained level.
- How was this education experienced in the 1st place: advantages & disadvantages, why (e.g. discrimination)? What you liked most and what least?

d. - Life world as a girl child labourer (typical day: types of activities, circumstances of labour, hazardous/harmful conditions, how treated e.g. by employer). Life world after agricultural labour was done (e.g. household).
- Positive (benefits: source of income for them, way of helping their parents, part of their training to be responsible adults, etc.) and negative experiences (disadvantages) of labour (coping). What you liked most and what least?
- How did the labour make them feel: positive & negative attributes (humiliation, exploitation, abuse, effects on possible schooling, insecurity, discrimination, earning money, supporting family, skills and training, pride, respect, friendship, etc.). How did they think of themselves?
-Discrimination faced as a child labourer (who discriminated: employer? Community? How).

e. -Withdrawal from child labour, how could it take place and how was it experienced (difficult, partial or total withdrawal). How they got to know about the REDS programme.
-What was needed to make the withdrawal possible (e.g. adjustments in household, cost aspect).

f. -If you were young again and you could do things over would you choose for child labour again (or formal primary education)? Would this be possible (free choice?). WHY this choice, the importance?

2 Experiences with regard to education upon withdrawal from child labour

a. - At what age joined skills training, when, participated 6 months?
- Fully (or partially) withdrew from child labour when started the skills training.

b. - Motives to withdraw from child labour and to participate in the skills training.
- Parents, community, friends' support?

c. -Type of vocational skills training followed, enjoyed it or not.
- Benefits and disadvantages of vocational skills training; positive (learning something, discipline, friendship, etc.) & negative attributes (e.g. strict, did not see family). What you liked most, what you liked least?
- Have learned something (broad), what?

d. - Was their any form of discrimination while participation in skills training, either in the program or outside (e.g. by community, etc.)
- Problems faced during the vocational skills training period in your life.

e. - How did the skills training make you feel as a person: as a child/youth, as a girl (happy, sad, pride, independence, autonomy, guilt, etc.). THEN.
-How aspects of your identity are influenced by the skills training: self-esteem, self-confidence, future aspirations. NOW.

f. - If you were young again and you could do things over would you choose for the REDS vocational skills training over child labour? WHY?
- Place in order: formal primary education, child labour, REDS.

3 Valuing child labour & education and views towards child rights

Child labour

- Looking back, how do you now value child labour overall (good or bad? Why: e.g. bad company, ill health, deprives you of things like education, useful aspects learned through child labour).
- Do you desire change with regard child labour and if so- what (for your children, e.g.). Should it be abolished or is it justified given cultural and socio-economic settings?

Education

- How do you value education (especially the vocational skills training, but perhaps also primary education maybe once enrolled in).
- Was the vocational skills training a good solution (for them), are they happy they followed it.
- Employed now or not, if not- still what other values has the skills training had that are now of use to them (e.g. psychologically). Impact!
- What would they like to see improved in vocational skills training programs, what are major needs according to them. What do you suggest local NGO programs should take up in their activities, what would help/would have helped you?
- Do they think these types of programs aiming to eliminate child labour are effective, why. What *should* they do then? (On what level combat child labour, if agree that it should be eliminated?)

Child rights

- The agricultural labour you performed as a child, do you consider this was child labour or child work? How would you define 'child labour' (age, hours, type of work!) and 'childhood' (your social construction)?
- As a child labourer, did you have a notion of your rights? What notion?
- As an adult now, do you have a notion of children's rights? What notion?
- Views on the right to education and its universalization.

- Views on the abolition of child labour and the right to freedom from exploitation.
- Views on the right to work, more important than the right to education? (View on the right to participation, own decision-making power in whether they want to work or go to school? Who *should* decide, and what should they decide. Why?)

4	**Current life worlds, the impact of child labour & education, and future desires, hopes, and dreams**

a. - Current household setting, situation (e.g. married, children), living conditions, household income patterns.
- Currently employed, what type of employment (linked to skills training?), conditions, good/bad, pay, etc.
- Do you still work in the agricultural sector (under what conditions, how often, what activities, paid, etc.)

b. - Is your current life world shaped by your past as a child labourer and how.
- How might child labour have impacted (presumably militated) your development and persona. How aspects of their identity might have been influenced: self-esteem, self-confidence, future aspirations.
- What has the impact of the vocational skill training been, has it changed your situation either financially or as a person (socially/mentally/confidence/empowerment).
- Notions of identity now, how do you see yourself and what do you think of yourself (perceptions of themselves: self-esteem, self-confidence). Is it related to past as a child labourer and influenced by the skills training. How do they <u>feel now</u>.

c. - On all fronts (personal, employment/career aspirations, family, child labour & education in general) what are your expectations, desires, hopes, and dreams for the future. Current plans for the future.
- Having experienced child labour and education, if you have children in the future, what do you want them to experience? Do you think this will be possible?

Appendix II- Semi-structured questionnaire: NGOs

Date: Name NGO:
Location: Name informant:

1. Background information on their organization
   - When was it founded, how does it operate (types of funding)
   - Field of operation, what their NGO does (spear points)
   - Ideology of the NGO

2. Activities/programs with regard to child labour
   - What kind of programs & activities do they operate, why these types (e.g. skills training, advocacy)? What are the cornerstones of their interventions and programs with regard to child labour and what are these programs made up of?
   - Work with former girl child labourers from the agricultural sector? What are target groups, why? (withdrawing, education, advocacy, e.g.) Why girl focus, or why not?
   - What is the main selection criteria for their program participants (target group), how are they selected, according to what importance? (In case of vst do you check whether there is really no opportunity to for the children to go back to formal primary/secondary education?)
   - Do they also work *with* the target group, include them in program decision making (right to participation)?
   - What are their grounds/motivations for acting with regard to (girl) child labour?
   - What practical or legal issues do they face in their child labour programs/projects?
   - Do they think it is easier for parents to let their children attend a vst program (especially when residential: free!) than to financially support them (and their education) themselves? Maybe even let them drop out of school to attend a free NGO program?

3. (International) rights-based approach to child labour & education
   - Does this NGO use a rights-based approach to combat child labour and promote education in relation to child labour (vocational skills training or formal primary/secondary education)? How and why (gives their work a theoretical/moral/ethical basis OR makes acquiring external funding easier, e.g. to suit donor demands OR is it a practical tool to help them take action and carry out projects?). Do they genuinely agree with the rights?
   - Do they use child's rights in their actions (which ones) and what child's rights do they find important and how do they interpret them. Why these rights are used, are their other alternatives? How do they apply child's rights (to education, to freedom from exploitation, to a right to work, and to participation) in their decision making and programs? Do they base their work on the established rights of the child as laid down in international conventions? Also what a child is, age-wise?
   - Do they not feel these rights are constituted from a Eurocentric/Western perspective?
   - Do they think this rights-based approach actually elicits the actual interpretations, experiences, and life worlds of those girls involved in child labour and education
   - What are their opinions on child participation, especially whether they urge total abolition of child labour and child work or whether they urge abolition of child labour and regulation of child work.

4. Discussing child labour
   - What is a **child**, what is **child labour**, what is **childhood** (e.g. labour free, education?) according to them: their constructions? What general operational definitions do they have with respect to these?

- Causes & consequences of child labour, their thoughts?
- Main motivations to end child labour?
- How do they speak of education and its universalization?
- Main solutions to eliminate/decrease child labour incidence? Possibilities & impossibilities (constraints) to end child labour? How, through education (formal education and/or skills training)? Possibilities & constraints of education also.

Appendix III- Case study

Senthura Devi

INTRODUCTION
I met Devi on several occasions: during the interview at the REDS office in Kootturavupatty (when I saw her first), at her house for two days, during the Focus Group Discussion at the REDS office, and finally when I spent a night with her and her family in Keelavaniangudi. Considering her history and marriage with Murugan (the REDS driver) has made me feel a lot for her. She is special and her life a success story in which she is happily married (a love marriage), has two children, a nice home, and adds to the household income by using her tailoring skills. Skills she learned at the vocational skills training she participated in at REDS. Through a close relation with Murugan I have gotten close to her and her children. It is through her husband that I also got to know more about their life as a family; their worries but also their joys. The joys perhaps standing out:

"I do not have a palace with huge marble pillars; I am not a rich king or rich man. My children are my pillars, they are the pillars of our own palace. My family is my palace and that makes us rich"
-Murugan describing their family lifeline

Devi is a loving mother and devoted wife, it seems. She also makes a confident impression on me. It has been an eye-opener and an honor to spend time with her warmhearted family. A family this loving appeared special to me, not only according to Indian standards but in general. They seem to have something priceless - there is so much love, joy, warmth, and laughter in this family.

I follow with a short description of some restrictions I faced for this case study and an outline of Senthura Devi – her past and her current life. Following that is a precise description of each day spent with her and her family which includes additional information about her current daily life. Some photo's are attached at the end of this document to give a small impression.

RESTRICTIONS
One of the most difficult conditions for the case study was the absence of a translator. Alex had been translating for me during the interviews, but spending two days with me at Devi's house would be too much to ask really. It would also probably stand even more in the way of Devi going about her daily activities. I decided my sole presence with less talking would lead to more information and observation than the presence of Alex *and* me. And so I spent two days with Devi, and to my surprise we were able

to understand and converse about simple matters. This also with the help of her children who spoke a little English as they learnt some of it in school. They were helpful with some basic translations at times. More complicated questions were difficult to ask as she could not understand what I was trying to ask. Therefore, I saved some questions and discussed them with Devi at the REDS office one day when Alex was also there to translate for me.

In my opinion good case studies, the way they should be and the way they are intended, can only be conducted if the researcher is fluent in the local language. Of course I knew this, but the complications of a translator for a case study is something I overlooked for the most part. Nevertheless, I tried to make the most of what I could under the circumstances. We had a good time together, and I *was* able to get a better idea of what Devi's daily life looks like. Despite this, the purpose of the case study as in getting round stories and linking the pieces of a puzzle together, was difficult.

Another restriction is that I spent two days from morning to afternoon/evening with Devi at her home, which of course does not cover an entire day. Therefore sleeping over at her house also gave me a better idea of what the evenings and very early mornings are like.

A major restriction that must be noted is the true reflectivity of Devi's life in the days I spent with her. Indians have great hospitality and Devi also spent effort and time to take good care of me. The meals might have had slightly more dishes than usual, for example. My presence was not hidden, and as a visitor the days I spent with Devi and her family must also have been 'different' for them. This could have been slightly avoided if I would have spent several weeks if not months in the village with her and her family.

Regardless of these restrictions I had a great time at Murugan and Devi's house and enjoyed getting to know them and their children. Talking to them about wider issues and getting to know their relatives and neighbors. Even though some curious individuals came 'to have a look' at me in the beginning, this never lasted long and recognizing each other later in the village with a quick wave felt good. They seemed to accept and welcome me. It was quite surprising to see how normal Devi and her family were around and towards me when others would visit. Devi treated me as one of her family members and she was very laid back about my presence towards others. There was never any commotion, there was obviously some interest towards me but people would not sit and stare at me or fully focus on my presence. Most people coming by the house sorted out what they came for with Devi while they let me sit, mind my own business, and observe *their* conversation (the main lines sometimes comprehendible for me through mere facial expressions, voice intonations, and some Tamil words).

DEVI'S PROFILE

Devi is a 35 year old mother of two children: her son Ajith is 12 years old, her daughter Abi 10 years old. Ajith is going to 7th standard in June, Abi to 6th. Devi is married to Murugan, the REDS driver. They live as a nuclear family in a village named Keelavaniangudi which is located about 10km from Kootturavupatty (location of the REDS office). Keelavaniangudi is near Sivagangai, the capital of Sivagangai District. Many of Murugan's relatives live in Keelavaniangudi. Their housing is spread throughout the village, they do not all live on one compound.

Devi comes across as a strong, confident, and happy woman despite her rough past. She is grateful for her husband, their love, and their children. She says she lives a happy life with no big problems. Their prime problem is their son who has a heart condition for which they cannot pay an operation in a private clinic. This causes a nagging pain to her; they have been on a Government hospital waiting list for about 10 years and have frequent hospital visits. She feels bad for him; the fact that he must be so cautious with regard to physical activity (e.g. running around) and the fact that she often has to refuse his intake of ice-cream and cold drinks.

Devi has no particular dreams for her future as she is actually content and happy with her current situation: "I don't want to be richer or poorer than I am. As long as I can fulfill the current personal needs and those of the family, I will be happy". She only has a dream for her children: that her son should be an engineer and her daughter a doctor; if this does not work out they should become good teachers. Above everything, her son should be operated soon and she hopes the operation will succeed and give him a more healthy and especially longer life.

Devi started child labour at the age of 5 years on a family plot of land during all 'free' days. Her parents had this small piece of land and also worked as wage labourers. When Devi was 10 years old both her parents died; the one shortly after the other (due to physical conditions). She was left with her two older sisters and they had to manage their own survival. There were no relatives that could care for them. During this time Devi was still in school, combining schooling with wage labour (on free days) in her village. However, in the 10th standard she failed and dropped out of school because there was an urgent need for more income for her and her sisters but also because the school she was in showed little support for her. In fact, she was often ridiculed by teachers because she was unable to buy pens, books, notebooks, and her other school requirements. Even when the teachers were informed about her situation (as an orphan and without much money to buy these things) they still scolded her and got fed up with her not having the appropriate materials. She feels very bad about this situation because she really enjoyed education and learning things, but also being with her girlfriends. The situation of ridiculing made it easier for her to drop out of school, she saw no use in continuing if she would get scolded constantly. This especially in the face of needing more income to survive.

Devi worked as a fulltime wage labourer (in agriculture) from the age of 10 years to 19 years, encompassing 8 years of child wage labour. Her days were busy. She did domestic work (cooking, cleaning) from 4-7am. After that she attended agricultural wage labour until 5pm (totaling approximately 10 hours per work day) with just a short half hour break. The labour she did was mainly weeding and harvesting. The conditions were difficult, the employer's rules were strict. Once at home she would have to do domestic chores together with her sisters and help cook dinner before going to bed. The wage labour was not experienced positively, except for the income it provided and the group of girl peers she would chat with. Devi's child labour, especially after her parents died, was part of a direct survival strategy she had to take up with her sisters. According to them there was no other way at the time. Their young lives were difficult and they felt that people in their village always looked down on them (e.g. because of their old clothes) due to their inability to lead a normal life.

Devi withdrew from the wage labour at the age of 19 years when she joined the six month REDS vocational skills training programme. An older co-worker had informed her about the training; that it was free of costs and would be good for her as she was suffering badly due to her situation. Devi's residential stay with REDS was not a financial problem for her sister in terms of missing out on Devi's contribution to their income as they also made no costs for her. Devi was happy to be able to learn a skill (in a safe place) that could help her earn a living in later life. The daily life with the other girls was also something she enjoyed and she felt more and more confident that she would not have to go back to agricultural (wage) labour to earn a living. She could earn money in the future through her learnt skills.

Devi met Murugan at REDS where he was the driver (since 1986). After her training Devi also worked at REDS as a tailoring teacher for two years. The two became close and when she was 21 years old (and he was 31 years old) they got married in 1996. They had two children and eventually settled in a small house that is of their liking in Keelavaniangudi. Their main income is Murugan's REDS salary, however Devi has also created additional household income throughout the years by tailoring. After she stopped working at REDS she became self-employed at home where she had managed to buy her own sewing machine. Devi has not worked in agriculture again since her REDS training. She tailors clothes for her family but also on order from within her village. There is rising competition with regard to receiving orders, and so she has (paradoxically) started to earn money by teaching (even more) women tailoring. She also does occasional basket making, but mainly for the own family use. Devi says their combined (Murugan and Devi) household income is sufficient for the time being, however it would be nice if they had more money they could save so that an operation for their son would be possible. Their income *does* cover the current costs they make as a family and she is happy with what they have. They do foresee a problem in the future when the children finish school and there is a need for further education (e.g. in a college). The REDS training has been useful. It has taught her the skill of tailoring through which she makes additional family income now. It also gives her confidence, pride, and a feeling of independence knowing that she can provide for herself. Devi is also involved in a community lending scheme (through her involvement in a Self Help Group) that involves a small interest rate in order to fight off big money lenders. She feels well placed, recognized, and respected in her village. Feelings that she did not have during the hardships of survival after her parents died and when she was a full-time wage labourer.

DAY 1: 25.05.2009 10:00 – 18:00

Murugan drives me to his home in Keelavaniangudi around 9:30 and we arrive at 10:00. A few days before I had an interview at the REDS office with Devi. She has been looking forward to meeting me ever since I arrived in India. I had already talked to her over phone several times through Murugan.

I am enthusiastically welcomed by Devi. Murugan also seems proud to show me his house and introduce me to his two children Ajith and Abi. They have been living in this particular house for three years now. They show me the house which is not very big but looks well kept. They live in the largest part of the house while a small part of the house is inhabited by an older couple who have their own entrance at the other side of the small building. They have a small garden around the house which is rather arid and has a few trees and shrubs. The lavatory is set in a small separate building inside the garden, while at the front of the house there is a small approximately 1m² water tank which is used for daily washing, etc. purposes. It is usually filled up by a tank connected to it, but the past ten days there has been no water. This is something that happens frequently. They (primarily Devi) has to fetch water at the nearby village water pump to fulfill the family requirements. Walking up and down several times to fetch the water provision for a day is a heavy task according to her.

The house has a small porch to sit outside, then a front porch that is roofed and part of the house but which is locked in on the front side by open wire rosters. It has a wooden cot (bed) where Murugan usually sleeps with one of the children as it is cool there. Devi's sewing maching is also placed in one corner. The living room follows after this covered porch, it is about 15m² and has a few cupboards, a fridge, a television and stereo set (from Dubai), and a fan. From here you directly enter the kitchen through an opening in the wall. The kitchen forms the backside of the house and has a cooking set (gas) on one side, a small sink (with no water connection) and lots of vessels and cooking supplies lined up along the sides. A small room (2m²) connected to the kitchen functions as a temple for worship. It is filled with pictures of Hindu Gods, some gold colored ornaments, candles, and incense. This is a Hindu family.

After showing me around, Devi has the tea (chai) ready. We all have a quick cup together and I get acquainted with the children before Murugan leaves to work again.

I am given a chair, they have a few plastic ones but they prefer to sit on the floor in the sitting room. Devi presents me two photo albums; one of her wedding with Murugan and the other of her children's 'function'. A ceremony for young children where their ears get pierced by needle and their hair (head) is shaved. With pride they lead me through the albums and show me who's who. I also come across some photo's of Murugan in Dubai where he worked for three years in construction. Chai is made a few times throughout the day, Murugan has told Devi that I love it.

Together with Ajith, Abi, and their cousin 'black boy' (everytime Ajith and Abi would tease him for his dark skin I would change it to 'beautiful boy' and they would all laugh) I spent the rest of the morning playing card and board (snakes & ladders and local) games in the living room, which was fun. We all sit on the floor, laugh about our (bad) luck and each other's mistakes. In the meantime Devi spends some time in the kitchen but also comes to sit with us while doing some kitchen (cooking) work. She cuts vegetables, and watches us play, while I tell her about my family and country.

It is a weekday but the children are at home because they have their four week summer holiday (month of May). Of course this makes Devi's day different from those when the children are in school. She makes more time for the children during the holidays and spends time keeping an eye on them. This is especially necessary for Ajith who has a heart condition and can often not keep himself from running and rough play with the other children, something his heart cannot take too well. When the children are in school Devi usuallyl spends time tailoring, something she hardly does during the school holidays.

In the early afternoon I sit outside the house with Devi and Abi for some time. Ajith and 'black boy' are roaming about the village, and they get Abi and me a cool drink from a local village kiosk. Something they seem to enjoy doing, being given the money and responsibility of the task. While I enjoy the ice cold drink in the blistering heat, different relatives drop by the house and talk with Devi and obviously want to know some more about the foreign visitor. They all have their husband's name tattooed on the insides of their lower arm. I look at it and ask them about it. I am wearing a chudidar (Indian

traditional women's wear: long puffed pants with a short-sleeved shirt that stretches to the knees) and they ask me why I am not wearing a sari. I tell them sari's are too hot and that I respect the Indian ladies for walking around in these sometimes heavy cloths while the outside temperature is above 40 degrees Celsius. We laugh. A flower vendor walks past the fence (made of palm leafs) of the house and is called in because Devi wants to buy a string of jasmine flowers ('malia poo') for my hair. She gets a comb and rearranges my hair (with the flowers) as a mother would do.

Around 13:30 we have a big lunch, Devi has been preparing it during the morning and course of the afternoon. We ate inside, on the living room floor. When Ajith's rooster popped inside to let him know he was also hungry, Ajith immediately went to feed him outside. Devi waited for us three to finish lunch before having her own. This is customary here, the women serve the family first before they eat themselves. This partly because we all eat by hand (right hand!) which makes serving yourself extra portions or getting anything (e.g. water) difficult. I convince Devi to eat while we are halfway, at least. While she is still finishing her lunch and the children have gone out to play, I ask her about her marriage and husband Murugan.

She is happy to tell me about her husband and their marriage. She is enthusiastic and proudly tells me about their 'love' marriage (as opposed to the many arranged marriages in Tamil Nadu). She is very happy with her husband, says she is so happy with him and has a good marriage and a happy life. Even though they do not live as a joint family (with Murugan's relatives) I ask her whether she is happy about the fact that many of his relatives live in the same village. Devi is happy with this because her relatives are good with her and her children. She does not like it that Murugan often is unable to sleep at home due to his work, but at least she has family nearby to pass time with and also to feel safe. I also ask Devi about her past; about her parents' death and about her life with her sisters as orphans after that. She was ten years old when her mother died of diabetes. Soon after her mother's death her father died of a blood clot in his brain. The time was difficult, getting by and surviving on their own. The three sisters did wage labour to get by at that time, for some time in combination with going to school. The unfriendly and unsupportive school situation drove Devi to become a full time wage labourer at a young age. That is, until she went to REDS to take part in the vocational skills training programme. I ask her what she thinks she would have been doing in life if she had not participated in the training. She does not know but says that her sisters would have taken responsibility (for her). Her sisters currently live in Madurai which is about a one hour drive by car from her village. They occasionally see each other but not very frequently. I ask her if she thinks back of her time as a child labourer a lot, she says she is thinking about it more and more often. She reflects on that period in her life and is happy to reflect especially about the fact that the time is over. It has made her determined to prevent her children from the same fate.

We talk about her children. Ajith was born with a malfunctioning heart, it is not an uncommon dysfunction in the 'West' and is treated through a surgical procedure. In India this is not something that can easily be done for your son. Murugan had already shared the problem with me before but I also talk about it with Devi. They have been on a waiting list for Ajith to be operated for many years (approximately ten years if not more) in a Government hospital. Meanwhile his condition is deteriorating and they are trying to save for an operation in a private clinic. However, the costs of an operation here are so high (180000 INR, almost 3000 Euro) that they will probably never be able to pay for it and they can only accommodate for regular check ups and scans in the meantime (3000-5000 INR each time, an equivalent of 50-80 Euro). She shows me the cabinet of his medicine and when Ajith comes in he proudly shows me all his medical files, ECG's, and scans. Devi says he is happy with the attention he gets in the hospital and all the scans and photo's they take home. However, she says "he does not know what it means and I do". The boy himself is not very occupied with his condition, it seems. He only dislikes the fact that he cannot run and be too active when playing with friends in his village. He also cannot tolerate extremely cold and hot fluids. Missing out on ice-cream is something he is not happy about with the current hot weather! Devi tells me she always needs to keep an eye on Ajith, make sure he does not run too much and does not consume things that he cannot tolerate with his condition. This is difficult as he is often tempted to enjoy these things along with the other children. Ajith and Abi are currently in a Government (Tamil) school. I ask Devi whether they are experiencing any problems with regard to the school or their learning, but she says there are none. The children used to be in an English school for two years when Murugan was in Dubai, the household income could financially support this more expensive school at that time. Their current school is quite far away and the children are transported there and back by auto rickshaw which costs about 300

INR/month (approximately 5 Euro). This is equivalent to the (expensive!) costs their fridge makes electricity-wise each month.

Devi is very affectionate with her children and gives them the attention they deserve. They do not have to do a lot around the house, minor errands (which they enjoy, so it seems) and a little help carrying the vessels and dishes outside to their water tank. This is where Devi washes the dishes while I also sit outside. She will not accept my help as I am her guest she says. Meanwhile some relatives walk in and they talk while she washes. Ajith was out playing with 'black boy' and Abi was sitting, watching her mother and occasionally helping her. Abi also went inside and practiced her dancing in front of the TV to some Tamil songs. She is the best dancer of her class and after some encouragement agrees to show it off to me. There is no waste disposal system in their village, which is very very common in Tamil Nadu and perhaps all of India. All rubbish (tin cans, plastic bottles, spoilt food) is thrown over their fence on a small plot of land where several chickens compete for leftovers with some stray dogs and a cat. The milkman comes to the house by two-wheeler with a big vessel of fresh milk from which he fills up a small jug Devi gives him. They work with a card system and do not pay the milkman directly, something everyone in the village does.

At around 16:00 Devi asks me about our 'walk', she has been meaning to show me around her village all day. Abi joins us and after we come across Ajith and 'black boy' along the way, they also join us. The village is small and extremely peaceful, many of Murugan's relatives (his mother's side) live there and our walk is made up of a quick hello at almost every door. Everywhere she takes me we are offered either tea, fresh coconut juice, or some freshly plucked fruits from the garden. I look at every home's small temple and sometimes we sit down for a while. Devi talks while I am given another photo-album to look at. I am shown the cows the families own and am invited to upcoming weddings. The village seems a safe place, also for Devi and the children on the days and nights that Murugan is not with them. I ask Devi if there is a lot of child labour in her village or amongst the village children at the moment. She is not aware of any child labourers in the sense of children being regularly employed. She mentions that one family has their children work as wage labourers during the school holidays.

We continue our walk amidst some cows and goats, we come across a small lake (that is drying up) where a relative is washing clothes while her children are swimming. Devi talks to her and then we continue to end up at quite a big Hindu temple. They proudly show me around and tell me to take pictures before we head 'home' again at around 17:30. Ajith and 'black boy' do not obey Devi and go swimming in the small lake. Ajith does not have a strong immune system and she thinks the swimming will make him catch a cold (which he did!).

Murugan is already waiting at the house to drive me back to the REDS office when we come back. We all had a cup of tea and Ajith and Abi flocked around Murugan, happy to see their father again.

DAY 2: 26.05.2009 10:30 – 18:30

Murugan drove me to his family again and he thinks it is funny that I always talk about 'Devi's house'. He jokes that it is Murugan's house, and we agree midway to call it 'Murugan and Devi's' house. Even though Tamil Nadu has an extremely male-dominated society, Murugan seems an exception in this. He is proud of his love marriage and shares its ins and outs. They actually met when Murugan was working at REDS and Devi was participating in the vocational skills training programme at REDS. After completing the programme she became one of the tailoring teachers for following tailoring batches, and that is when they fell in love. They got married without the complications of an exorbitant bridal dowry and simply shared their love and 'wealth'.

I was warmly welcomed again with some hot chai while Ajith and Abi flocked around their father once again. Playing and joking with him, but not for long as he had to attend to his work. Even though I had just had breakfast, Devi made me some deep-fried snacks which I consumed with the children over some card and board games. Devi sat with us while cutting up some vegetables for lunch and welcoming visitors with a quick chat and glass of water. I sat with her and some of her guests (relatives) while the children were out playing and we tried to talk a little. I brought my small photo-album and showed her some pictures of my family and home country that were soon shared with all the guests and later with Ajith and Abi. When I ask Devi about the small worshipping 'temple' in their house she tells me they all spend some time daily in the room to worship their Hindu Gods. On Friday

mornings they light all candles in the temple and spend some more time there. Some time ago I had a conversation with Murugan about Hinduism as opposed to Christianity and he especially stressed that his family is not very strict with regard to religion. They 'pray' or worship to their Gods but they keep it short and basic. Gratitude and strength is something they get out of their worshipping, but they also seem to realize that they have to make things happen by themselves as well; worship or pray alone will not do the trick.

Before lunch I walked through the neighborhood with Devi again, seeing some people we did not see yesterday. She showed me around some of her neighbors' vegetable gardens and everywhere we are offered coconuts, fruits, and tea while I try and tell something about myself using a few basic Tamil words to make it easier. I am shown some more wedding albums again as well.

We had a big lunch again and Devi does not eat with us. She says it used to be even more extreme in the 'old' days, her mother would stand while the family would be eating, for example. At least Devi *sits* with us. I ask Devi how she experienced the time her husband was in Dubai (migrant labour is extremely common for men in Tamil Nadu, especially in this arid and employment-devoid district). Devi and Murugan got married in 1996 and Murugan then left REDS (where he had worked since 1986) to work in Dubai (more income) at the end of 1998 when Ajith was one year old. He worked there until the beginning of 2002, so in total for about three years. He would visit home after every 6 months. Devi was not happy at that time, she says she missed him – even more so after having both children. Now she is very happy that they live as a family and are together again with the four of them. Murugan regained his job at REDS as a driver, now with a higher salary to support his wife and children (about 6000 INR/month as apposed to the one or two thousand INR/month before).

After lunch Devi washes up the dishes while I sit outside with a relative and Abi. Abi is happy to go back to school again soon, especially about seeing her friends. Over the one month holiday she missed her friends; they live far away and did not meet. However, they did speak over phone a few times. Mobile phones are owned by almost every family in India. Again, Devi does not want me to help her. A local vendor passes by and we buy each other small hairclips. I am also given a cooldrink to fight the heat. I ask Devi about her daily routine when the children go to school. As it is holiday now she does very little tailoring, instead she tries to relax a little while keeping an eye on her children and doing the housework: "I now spend more time taking care of the children and supervising their playing, especially since Ajith has a heart problem". When talking to her about her past and current income generation through being a tailoring teacher, she shows me a photo of one of her students who took poison (suicide) after her marriage when she appeared to not be able to get pregnant (and all the problems with her spouse and his family because of this).

After our late lunch and all the cleaning up we (Devi, Ajith, Abi, 'black boy', a relative, and I) go for a walk outside the village, but before we go there is some commotion. The water connection is working again and we clean out the small outside water tank in order to fill it with fresh water again. Devi is happy, this means she does not have to go and fetch water tomorrow morning! All around the village people start watering their plants, filling buckets, and washing clothes. We walked down the road and visited another relative. Devi is happy she does not have an outside kitchen running on firewood (she cooks with gas) like many of her relatives. After the short visit we walk into a field, a sugarcane plantation. We eat fresh sugarcane while Ajith looks for picture-perfect Kodak spots for me to snap a shot. We walk for about an hour, and on our way home we meet another relative in the bush who is herding her goats with a friend. After a quick talk and exchange of basic information about me, we pass a group of boys playing cricket on our way home.

It is already around 18:00 when we come 'home' and Devi makes me chai. Soon after Murugan arrives to drive me back to the REDS office. We all have another cup of tea, and Devi wants me to stay a little bit longer after every cup by offering me another. We exchange addresses and they invite me to sleep over at their place before I return back to the Netherlands.

Devi's usual daily routine

4:30-6:00	Wakes up, fetches water if the water tap at the tank outside is not working. Walks to fetch about 10 big loads of water if necessary. She then sweeps the garden, makes the chalk designs in front of the entrance of the house, and washes the dishes of the previous evening.
6:00-8:30	Inside work, especially cooking the lunch Ajith and Abi need to take to school. She also wakes up the children and gets them ready for school. Breakfast is usually leftovers from the previous evening.
8:30-9:00	The children get picked up by auto rickshaw to go to school. Devi cleans up everything in the house.
9:00-13:00	Devi has two 2 hour sessions where she teaches two women tailoring at her home. They both come six days a week and it makes about 200 INR per student per month (3,00 – 3,50 Euro).
13:00-16:30	She has lunch and relaxes or visits some neighbors or relatives (or they visit her). She also does any sewing for her own family (and some embroidery on certain pieces) or any orders. However there are little orders from her village, about 2 or 3 sari blouses per week if she is lucky. Each sari blouse takes about an hour to make and makes 25 INR (about 0,40 Euro). She also makes in-skirts for under the sari but these are little in demand since they are mechanically produced nowadays. Devi sews girl uniforms (boys' are ready-made) but only in June when the demand is high because of the onset of the school year. She can then have about ten of these orders a week. There is a lot of competition in her village tailoring wise, while the demand in general is declining. She says her teaching others the tailoring skills will probably be a stab in her own back on the long term (increased competition), but nevertheless it does provide her some extra income on the short term.
16:30-17:30	Children return home and are given some snacks. They are bathed and play for a bit.
17:30-18:00	The children finish playing and are allowed to watch TV for half an hour. They fight over what channel to watch.
18:00-20:00	Ajith and Abi do their homework and Devi supervises and helps them if necessary.
20:30	They all have dinner and go to sleep around 21:00 or 21:30. They sleep together in the living room on straw mats and a pillow. If it is very hot at night and Murugan is home, he will sleep in the front porch part of the house with one of the children.

DAY 3: 06.06.2009 – 07.06.2009 16:00 – 13:00

Murugan has been excited all day about me coming to spend the night with his family. We pack a thin mattress in the car as he does not want me to sleep directly on the floor. After dropping me off at the house Murugan has some work he still has to attend to. I spend the afternoon talking a little with Devi and playing some games with Ajith and Abi. Some friends and relatives stopped by and some stayed to discuss their family problems with Devi outside in the garden. An older relative visits with two injections that Devi apparently knows how to inject in his bottom. She worked as a doctor's assistant for two years in Madurai. Over several cups of tea these activities took place. Passersby recognizing me from before greet me and one of the villagers walks past the house with his milk cow again, the cow peeking in through the fence and having a look at us.

Devi tells me she had received two sari blouse orders this week. Murugan came home around 8 pm and the children were happy to see him, swirling around him and joking. I sit outside with Devi and Murugan for about an hour, talking about their work and whether they are content with it. They are, but more income would be better as they could then save for Ajith's operation.

At around 21:00 we have dinner in the living room, on the floor, while we watch a Tamil picture (movie). The whole family explains the proceedings of the movie and we laugh. Right after dinner we go to bed at around 22:00. I sleep with Devi and Abi in the living room while Ajith and Murugan sleep on the bed (without mattress) on the front porch.

I slept well and woke up several times early in the morning, hearing Devi getting up, sweeping the garden, and cooking our breakfast in the adjacent kitchen. When I get up Murugan has already gone to the car workshop and we have breakfast when he returns.

I am not able to eat anything and feel incredibly noxious, feverish, and ill. Refusing the food is something very difficult to do, but once they understand I am not feeling well they only want to adjust my intake and take care of me. They are very worried about me and feel it is their fault. I slept on the bed on the front porch with a fan directed at my feverish head all morning. While I was feeling ill I realized even more how warm and loving this family is, they cared for me as though I was their own child.

In the early afternoon Murugan took me back to the REDS office where I had some more rest. They kept close contact about how I was and whether I was improving the next day.

Murugan, Hanna, Devi: at REDS

Abi & Devi, front of the house

'Black boy', Ajith, Abi

Devi lighting their indoor temple

Appendix IV- Case study

Saghayam (Sahaya Mary)

INTRODUCTION
I met Saghayam on several occasions. She was my first respondent in the general semi-structured interviews, she was present at my Focus Group Discussion, and I spent two days with her at her home.

She was chosen as my second case study due to her background but also the possibility of me staying with her for two days. The last being difficult to do with other respondents. She is very open-minded and has known REDS and the REDS staff for a long time. She also has frequent contact with them and therefore is able to understand the purpose of my visit better than other respondents. She is able to accommodate me at her home without further expectations from me and I am therefore more 'at home' and safe with her rather than with many other of my respondents (from which I chose the case studies).

I follow here with the restrictions for the case study, Saghayam's profile, and the events that occurred during my stay with her each day. Lastly, there are some photo's to give a better idea of her setting, her life, and my stay with her.

RESTRICTIONS
A major restriction is that Saghayam hardly knows any English, making communication very very difficult. Nevertheless, basic things and questions can be communicated through basic English, several basic Tamil words, as well as through a neighbor who is on leave from his construction work in Dubai (where he picked up reasonable English). Despite this, it should be noted that without a translator there is little depth to the case, and it does not actually form a typical case as in getting a full story and satisfactory background information about her life, her experiences, and her views. This made the case study very difficult and also tiring for me. Participative observation was very important.

Another restriction is that I spent two days with her from morning (not early morning) to evening, so no *complete* days. The time I spent with her might also not be truly reflective of her typical day and

life. They are just two days in a whole year and they must be different as she is also occupied with caring for me. This is very important in Tamil culture and therefore a lot of attention goes out to this. She did often, however, carry out her own daily activities without taking bother of me too much. At least, that is what it seemed like. Nevertheless I am constantly pampered with fresh lemon drinks, tea, mango's, and so forth.

I had a good time with Saghayam and her neighbors and tried to tell them about my country and family as well (through photo's). One of her young neighbors (a teenage boy) constantly spent the two days around me, interested in the foreign visitor. Asking me questions, sometimes simply observing me. I was enthusiastically received and enjoyed my time with them, and I hope they did with me.

SAGHAYAM'S PROFILE

Saghayam is a 32 year old woman, married to a man who is currently working in Dubai (construction worker) as there is little employment opportunity where they live and as the salary in Dubai is higher. She has no children (probably infertile) and lives alone, but she does not *feel* alone because she has lots of people around who she spends time with while she carries out her daily activities.

Saghayam was an agricultural child labourer from her 10th to her 14th year of age; she did weeding, transplanting paddy, harvesting, etc. This was mainly in the form of contribution to family labour on a family plot near their house. However, she also did some wage labour (agricultural and construction) at times in the villages surrounding theirs. Wage labour was from 6:00-14:00 with one break. After work she would return home and would have a short rest before helping out with the domestic work around the house (cooking, fetching water, cleaning, etc.). She would have to help out in the household until she went to bed. Her body suffered pains, her hands and fingers especially but also the heat of the sun. Despite this she felt good about the labour in the sense that she was contributing to the family income. She felt responsible and experienced it as a preparation for adult life, for married life. She also enjoyed spending time with her friends during the wage labour and felt proud after delivering good labour. The child labour did not make her feel sad, it only made her body feel pain, she says. She says she has not been mistreated by her employers because she was a responsible type that always did what employers said.

She lived with her parents and one older brother, two older sisters, and two younger brothers. They experienced an income deficiency and were 'poor', her parents had trouble getting sufficient income from their piece of land due to a lack of water. All children contributed to the family income through their labour, but her two youngest brothers were in school at the time. The poverty situation of the household was what pushed her into labour as a child.

She studied up to the 5th standard, dropping out at the age of 10 years. She did not like going to school and was not (to her regret) forced to stay in school. She dropped out because she disliked studying, the rules, and the schedules. The family situation and demand for more household income also seemed more pressing at this time than staying in school.

Saghayam had heard about the REDS programme when she was 14 years old and her parents supported her to join the vocational skills training in 1994. Her family did not miss her income to the household because they also had no expenses for her (e.g. food) when she was residential at REDS. Minor adjustments were made where necessary. When she was at home on leave days she would not have to do any (domestic or agricultural) labour. Saghayam was motivated to learn a skill that would be suitable for later in life, but also a skill that could be taken up from inside the home so she would no longer have to spend time in the hot sun. She was able to motivate some of her old child labour friends at that time to also join the training. The training has made her feel better placed, proud, and confident. She can use her skills to earn some money and at least provide in her own needs.

She currently uses her tailoring mainly for her income, but she also makes jasmine strings ('malia poo'), and her husband earns money in Dubai. Agricultural labour is no longer necessary for her survival, but she incidentally works on her father's land for one or two days in the agricultural season. She says the labour as a child has damaged her, she used to feel inferior because she was a labourer and a drop-out. It was primarily when she was *young* that she felt bad about these things, she has overcome them now she says. The vocational skills training at REDS made her feel confident,

empowered, and more financially stable. She is very proud of her tailoring skill and feels recognition from the community because of her skill.

She currently wishes she could learn more tailoring models so that she can expand her possibilities for income generation. She also would like to have children but she seems to be infertile. They are running medical tests to find out what the exact problem is.

DAY 1: 04.06.2009 10:30 – 18:00

Murugan took me to Saghayam's house which is located very near Kootturavupatty, just a 10 minute drive by car. In the interview Saghayam said she was from Mangampatty but I presume this is where she grew up. She actually lives in Ideya Melur now, the two villages are not located far from each other. Saghayam lives in a house that is divided into three parts to accommodate three different families. She thus has very close neighbors, the walls in between each family's part of the house are not even closed. You can hear the neighbors talk and watch TV. The village is small and located off the road with a lot of open space between each house. A lot of her husband's relatives live in the village, as well as other 'family'. She calls everybody family actually. Saghayam (and her husband's part of the house) is small, there is a front room used for stalling her sewing machine and for tailoring, then there is a small bedroom/living room, and lastly a small kitchen with a gas cooker but without water facilities. There is a lot of room around the house, a small water pump and an improvised toilet (a shutter and some bricks) for urinating. Open defecation is reality for the further part.

At around 10:30 I arrive and Saghayam makes me chai. The first few hours are incredibly tiring due to the poor communication. However, I soon meet her neighbors who drop by occasionally. Some stay with us, one of them just returned from Dubai (a man) and tells me all about it (he has worked there for six years already and is currently applying for a new visa) and is also later able to do some basic translation for me. His toddler nephew is also constantly with us, at first shy of this white, white-haired stranger but soon cheeky and catching my attention by calling out to me with "aka" (sister) all the time.

It does not take long before Saghayam presents me her wedding album, and I find myself flipping the pages through all the ceremonies and feasts. While doing this one of her neighbors brings one of the daily bags of jasmine flowers. He brings half a kilo of jasmine flower buds twice a day, totaling to one kg. Saghayam spends 4-5 hours per day making jasmine strings (used in Tamil Nadu as hair decoration for women) by knotting the flowers together with a thread. This makes 20 INR a day which comes down to about 30-35 euro*cents*! She does it for the profit but also for "time pass". While talking with neighbors she knots the flowers and tries to teach me. I spend half an hour to tie two flower buds to the string before I give up. I will never learn this skill. But hey, we had a big laugh over it!

Saghayam tells me that her husband has been in Dubai (construction work) for fifteen months now and that they speak to each other over phone briefly every week. She misses him and tells me about his past as a child labourer. He worked in a hotel in Madurai from his 10^{th} to his 25^{th} year. Being in Dubai now and exploited for his hard work is something that makes her husband feel 'low' of himself, but they need the income and as there is so little employment in their area they see no other option. She knows the situation is not ideal but the poverty is causing them to take this measure. In Dubai you earn more, but there are also problems. The employers often do not treat the migrant labourers well and female headed households are left behind in Tamil Nadu.

Saghayam's neighbors and relatives are constantly with us, especially her teenage boy neighbor who finds me very interesting. He is sixteen years old and has two more weeks until he will start a course at a technical engineering college. He passed 10^{th} standard in a Government school but the quality is so bad that he does not see the use to continue and would like to learn a skill right away at the engineering college. He would like to finish school, but his parents can also not afford the fees and extra costs of a private school.

I hold babies, I meet toddlers who have never seen a white person before and dash away from me as soon as possible, and one of the villagers wants to give me her son, desperate for an expected better future for him in Europe. Saghayam tells me that she only tailors if there is a demand. A woman in her village brings two sari blouse orders that day. If she receives orders she will tailor at night while

making jasmine strings and talking with neighbors for the most part during the day. She receives little tailoring orders due to the growing competition (number of tailors and price competition), only during festival seasons the demand rises.

Saghayam does all the cooking preparations in between the many visits from the other villagers and we finally sit down around 13:30 for a big lunch for the two of us. We laugh and Saghayam makes fun of the fact that I eat so slowly, and I make fun of the fact that she eats so quickly. We sit around a bit, I watch her make the jasmine strings and occasionally try and ask or talk about something.

At the end of the afternoon, together with her neighbors, we go out to the palm trees and a long stick tool is made to knock a bunch of palm fruits off the tree. We eat the fruits and then a beehive in one of the palm trees is disturbed with the tool in order to get hold of part of the nest *with* fresh honey. Eating honey off the rate was divine, however, the larvae still in the rate were not.

I spent some time with Saghayam's neighbor, an older woman. Asking about the stored cow dung in front of the house leads to a demonstration of a morning ritual. A handful of cow dung is mixed (by hand) with some water and subsequently the mixture is spread out in front of the home. What follows is a dung stench and a couple more flies. After this we turn to the other side of the house and sit outside Saghayam's place. Accompanied by many flies, some chicken, Saghayam's white cat (which she washes with soap every week), and some neighbors that come and go, I finish a last cup of chai. This form of daily socialization is customary here; especially making jasmine strings while talking with relatives, neighbors, and other villagers. When Saghayam finishes the flower string at the end of the day she gives me a small part and pins it to my hair.

I make a round by bicycle in the village, just to show them I know how to ride a bicycle (which they did not believe at first) and it is great entertainment for the entire village. They are happy here, with everything when I ask them whether they like their village and this place. They want me to stay a month in order to improve their English, the earlier I come again tomorrow, the better – they say. Murugan picks me up around six o'clock and we leave after a short chat.

DAY 2: 05.06.2009 10:00-18:00

Murugan dropped me at Saghayam's house around 10am and a neighbor comes in to give me a string of jasmine for in my hair. She is amazed by the softness of my hair and strokes my hair a few times to feel it while saying it is so nice and questioning me about the hair treatments I use. They are a lot more simple than hers, that is what we conclude!

I have tea and Saghayam receives her jasmine buds which she ties with her string until about 15:00 (with interruptions of cooking, making tea, feeding her cat, etc.). She ties the jasmine while neighbors drop by and her 16 year old neighbor comes to accompany us for the rest of the day as soon as he finds out that I have arrived. He wants to learn more English and therefore likes talking to me in order to practice. He shows me his family photo albums while we sit outside, all the 'functions' (of ear piercing and weddings) pass by and he shows me who is who.

I then go for a short bicycle ride around the village again, avoiding cows and waving to the neighbors. The climate is tiring, it is extremely hot, Saghayam is also complaining about it while she sits under her fan. We discuss about the darker clouds in the distance, will they bring us some rain? Her neighbor comes in to say she is off to the hospital due to an aching arm. I ask Saghayam when her husband will be back, she says in November/December but he will probably return to Dubai after that again. People come in and I share with them (and Saghayam) more about my life; what we eat, what we do, what my country looks like.

There is little economic activity to take up in this area. Some farming, but the area is drought ridden and agriculture is difficult. The situation of husbands going out for migrant labour is perfectly understandable.

Around 13:30 we have lunch (Saghayam and I), and later all visitors inquire with me what I had for lunch. Something very important to ask about here. We have fresh lemon juice later and Saghayam makes me chai several times. When I ask, Saghayam tells me she likes doing embroidery better than

tailoring, making the jasmine strings only has her 3rd preference. However, her income generation is completely in the reverse order. She does some tailoring while I am there in the afternoon. She cuts the cloth for a sari blouse with great skill in just ten minutes, all measurements taken into account. Making one blouse takes about 45 minutes to one hour in total. It is extremely interesting to watch her, and to realize that this is a skill she has learned through the REDS vocational skills training. She has invested in a simple sewing machine that has one stitch mode and is driven by foot. It cost about 3000 INR (about 50 Euro). I ask her about her usual daily routine.

Saghayam's daily routine

5:00-6:00	Wakes up and prays (she is Christian).
6:00-10:00	Breakfast (water rice & chilies), bathes, cleans the house, the vessels, and cooks lunch.
10:00-15:00	Does the jasmine string making (malia poo) while neighbors drop by and they have conversations.
15:00-18:00	If she has orders she does some tailoring, otherwise she sits outside or visits others. She has no TV.
18:00-21:00	She has dinner and goes to sleep.

Saghayam lives alone, but she does not feel lonely. She says there are many people around and she seems to be happy. The only problem is money and that is what keeps her husband abroad, something she is not very happy about. Even though he phones her regularly, she misses him.

At the end of the afternoon she washes the dishes left from our lunch and refuses my help. At 17:00 she is finished and comes to sit outside with us (neighbors, villagers), she talks a little and we listen to some Tamil songs on a mobile phone. I am introduced to new villagers constantly and they all teach me some more Tamil words while I try and teach them some English.

Around 18:00 I am picked up and I say goodbye to everybody. The day was tiring: the 'talking', the intensive listening, asking questions, and *answering* questions.

Saghayam's house

Saghayam: tailoring at home

Saghayam: making jasmine strings

Appendix V- Focus group discussion

Programme:

11:00 – 12:00	Welcome (Rachel, Hanna) and silent prayer 'Thoughts on child labour now' 'Thoughts on education now' 'Experiences as a child labourer'
12:00 - 12:15	Break
12:15 – 13:15	'Experiences as a child with education' 'Lifeworlds now'
13:15 – 13:30	Questions for me Word of thanks, giving the gifts, group photo
13:30 – 15:00	Lunch

Discussion:

Thoughts on child labour now

- What do they know about universal (e.g. UN CRC) child rights on child labour and education?
- What is a child (age), what kind of labour/work should he/she be allowed to do?
- Is child labour more difficult for girls than for boys, why? Is there lots of child labour in their village?
- What work/labour are children allowed to do? What is harmful to their development?
- What is important to end child labor: more laws and proper implementation, better schools, adult employment, awareness (child rights and education importance) raising, vocational training and bridge courses? Why, how?

Thoughts on education now

- What are the main problems (good/bad) of the education system/schools today?
- Are their children in school now, why? Faced decision to engage their child in child labour?
- What to do if your child wants to drop out?
- What are additional problems with regard to education for girls?

Experiences as a child labourer

- Main reason for becoming a child labourer (poverty/education)?
- Kinds of labour: agriculture, domestic, etc?
- Any bonded labourers?
- Most home-based labour or wage labour?
- Only girls at wage labour sites and ages of wage labourers?
- Sharing their experiences (good/bad) about being a child labourer?
- What were additional problems for girls regarding child labour?

Experiences as a child with education

- Who dropped out to become a child labourer and did you agree?
- How was education experienced (good/bad)?
- Toilet facilities at school for girls, fees and costs (books, pens, admission), (corporal) punishment, reachability/location, studying method (memorizing), teacher: student ration? Experience with.
- What about education could have been better (e.g. to keep you from dropping out)?
- What were additional problems for girls in education?

Lifeworlds now

- What discrimination (caste or gender) have you faced in your life?
- Abuse, any form at any stage?
- What are (employment) occupations now? Satisfied with them?
- What are the major problems/issues they face today?
- What has REDS vocational skills training meant to them and their lives? Without it, what would they be doing now?
- What are additional problems for females with regard to employment now?

Appendix VI- Photographs

Interview at REDS: a respondent, Alexander, Hanna

Participants of focus group discussion