

**Child Work in an Interconnected World: Examining The Impact of Free
Trade Policies on Child Labor in Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Zambia**

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Part I: Introduction

“Few human rights abuses are so widely condemned, yet so widely practiced. Let us make child labor a priority because a child in danger is a child that cannot wait.”

-Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General

The new era of globalization has spurred unprecedented global interconnection between formerly disparate nations, bringing about vast economic, social and cultural changes to groups of people throughout the world. There is growing dispute over the impacts of neoliberalism, the movement towards free trade policies and the deregulation of capital flows. In particular, there is extensive debate on whether the growing trade openness of many countries since the 1970's and 1980's has increased or decreased child labor. For decades, government officials, academics and activists have disputed what kinds of policies are the most beneficial for child workers around the world; the future perception of this relationship will undoubtedly influence vital policies protecting children in the years to come.

Free-trade agreements such as NAFTA and Structural Adjustment Programs created by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been instituted on the assumption that greater elimination of trade barriers represents the path to prosperity. Specific to child labor, many of the proponents of free trade argue that economic globalization increases incomes or income opportunities thus reducing the need for families to send their children to work. According to this perspective, lessened trade restrictions reduce child labor rates. In contrast, anti-globalization groups and anti-neoliberal proponents argue that the proliferation of unregulated trade has only caused greater inequality and poverty, driving more children into work. This impassioned debate raises the following key question: have free trade policies affected child labor rates and if so, have they increased or decreased child labor?

This thesis examines both sides of the debate and highlights research conducted in three case-study nations (Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Zambia) in order to determine how increased exposure to the global economy has impacted child labor rates. If the neoliberal proponents are correct, there should be an observable decrease in child labor rates in each country subsequent to opening their economies. If the anti-globalization proponents are correct, there should be a clear detrimental impact on child labor after the opening up of domestic economies to global trade. The clarification of this relationship is crucial for generating policies that improve children's rights and opportunities for prosperity worldwide.

Structure and Methodology

This paper begins by examining the varying definitions of the terms, "child labor," and "neoliberalism," discussing their inherent ambiguities and providing a brief background of each. Next, this paper presents an in-depth analysis of the available literature on the topic from both sides of the debate, providing a critical review of the strengths, weaknesses and validity of these texts. The case study section primarily relies on national statistics, data released by the International Labor Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, and prior research published by geographers, economists and sociologists.

Data on child labor rates in developing countries is limited and therefore the statistics for each country do not cover the exact same time periods. This limited availability of recent data on child labor is certainly an impediment to observing current labor trends. For this reason, the main focus of this paper is not to provide an up-to-date analysis of child labor in each of the three countries but rather, to examine whether it is possible to claim a causal relationship between child labor and free trade policies.

The case study section begins by examining the prevalent child labor situation in Bangladesh, a country greatly immersed in global trade and commodity production. Having implemented extensive neoliberal policies including trade deregulation over the last several decades, Bangladesh is therefore an ideal country for examining child labor rates against free trade policies. The next case study explores Vietnam, a country often cited by pro-neoliberal economists for its increased prosperity subsequent to the opening of its economic barriers to international trade. While Vietnam has not implemented many neoliberal policies and still maintains a communist political system, valuable data can still be drawn from its child labor rates in comparison to its reduction of trade barriers on rice (its predominant export) during the 1990's.

The final case study is Zambia, a country in Sub-Saharan Africa that has recently opened to the global economy and implemented neoliberal policies under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Zambia is also one of the few Sub-Saharan nations to ratify several child labor conventions. The paper concludes with an analysis of case study results and a response to the overarching question of the relationship between free trade policies and child labor.

Part II: Definitions

Child Labor

Though seemingly nonexistent to uninformed citizens of the global north countries, child labor is a widespread phenomenon. According to International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates, there are about 215 million active child laborers globally 18 and younger (ILO, 2010). The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that 150 million children ages 5-14, about 16% of

the global population for this age group, are engaged in child labor (UNICEF, 2011). Around the world, children are involved in many forms of labor such as housework, agricultural work, manufacturing, and in some of the most dreadful cases, slavery and forced sexual labor. News about child labor incidence have penetrated the world media in recent years through egregious abuses of children in Nike footwear factories abroad (Cushman, 1998) and in the production of other everyday brands such as Apple (Garside, 2013) and H&M (Doward, 2012).

Yet there is no universal definition of child labor. International institutions have attempted to provide various classifications of child labor as a general phenomenon. According to the ILO, child labor refers to any form of work that is harmful to the child, impedes or deprives a child's ability to receive an education, or requires a child to combine his/her education with excessive work circumstances (ILO, 2013). Similarly, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child declares that, "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" (1989, Article 32).

The ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Program on Child Labor (SIMPOC), an institution that researches child labor worldwide, provides a more solidified definition of child labor which takes into account a child's age and the number of hours worked. SIMPOC currently defines child labor as:

- A child under 12 who is economically active for 1 or more hours per week,
- A child 14 and under who is economically active for at least 14 hours per week,
- A child 17 and under who is economically active for at least 43 hours per week
- A child 17 and under who participates in activities that are "hazardous by nature or circumstance" for 1 or more hours per week

A child 17 and under who participates in an "unconditional worst form of child labour" such as trafficked children, children in bondage or forced labour, armed conflict, prostitution, pornography, illicit activities. (ILO, 2010)

As defined here, child labor generally refers to activities that are detrimental to a child and his/her personal growth or health. However, definitions established by major international bodies such as the above by SIMPOC are often criticized for promoting narrow views of child labor that fail to acknowledge its inherent complexities. The notion of childhood is not only a biological phenomenon; the concept of a child is a fluid social construction prone to subjectivity among different cultures (Smith & Ansell, 2009). A child's lifestyle, responsibilities and established social norms vary greatly by country and world region. Notions of childhood can even differ significantly within a country, depending on social and economic standing. Furthermore, national legal age to work can also vary greatly.

Similarly, there is the complex issue of distinguishing between child work and child labor. In many countries, including the United States, many children partake in domestic household and agricultural work. In fact, many consider moderate child work in the home setting to be beneficial for a child, boosting personal growth, familial ties, and positive socialization skills (Punch, 2009). In numerous cultures, particularly in Asia, partaking in work on the family farm is an essential part of a child's life. But drawing sharp distinctions between exploitative and acceptable work can be misleading. As Samantha Punch points out, "...it is too simplistic to assume that child work in the urban world of commerce and industry is automatically exploitative, whereas child work in traditional occupations of farming and domestic service is a beneficial and essential form of socialization" (Punch, 2009, p.46).

Indeed, it is dangerous to assume that all domestic child work is necessarily beneficial while all industrial work is purely harmful. As recent thinkers have argued (White, 1996), it is more prudent to view the work of children as a continuum, where one pole represents constructive, beneficial work and the other represents exploitative and damaging work. Various conventions on child labor have attempted to make this distinction between child labor and reasonable child work. In early discussions of child labor at major institutions, child work of any form was considered to be child labor (Rogers & Swinnerton, 2008). However, major institutions have recently attempted to provide a greater distinction between the two forms of work. As the International Labor Organization Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age declares:

National laws or regulations may permit the employment or work of persons 13 to 15 years of age in light work which is-- (a) unlikely 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 (Article 7, section 1)

The above is an example of how the ILO has attempted to define acceptable limits for the work of children. While the majority of children may not work in wealthy nations, children often play a vital role by assisting their families, particularly with agricultural work. It is therefore important to distinguish between child labor and acceptable child work.

In contrast, exploitative labor is often considered to be work that causes physical or psychological harm, pays excessively small wages, involves the working of excessive hours, promotes slave-like environments or fails to provide protection by the law (Punch, 2009, 46). The shocking atrocities associated with the worst forms of child labor are beyond the scope of this paper but numerous researchers, journalists and filmmakers have worked tirelessly to expose

alarming characteristics of child labor.¹ The classification of exploitative labor however is still quite vague and challenging to properly identify. Convention 182 of the International Labor Organization thus identifies the “worst forms of child labor,” in attempt to combat the most egregious human rights violations and point out the forms in which child labor is necessarily exploitative. These forms of child labor are defined in Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182 as:

- (a) All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- (c) The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- (d) Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. (ILO, 1999)

Drawing a distinction between exploitative work and reasonable work helps nations focus in on the elimination of the worst incidences first; a more feasible task than reducing child labor completely. This convention was quickly ratified by a large majority of member nations as it explicitly targets the most extreme types of child labor. Though countries may sign various conventions and treaties, these agreements hold no powerful incentive or legal binding to follow through on the specific goals.

A broader term applied when analyzing the work of children is “economically active.” This refers to a child who, “. . . works for wages (cash or in-kind), works in the family farm in the production and processing of primary products, works in family enterprises that are making primary products for the market, barter, or own consumption, or is unemployed and looking for

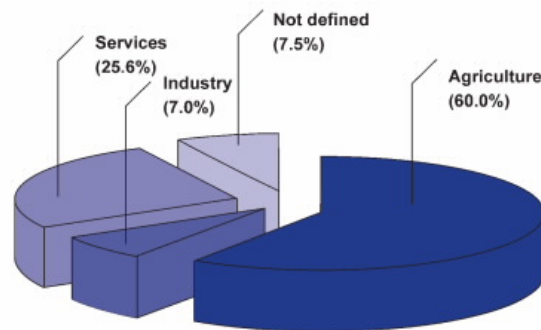
¹ For more information, please see documentary films such as The Dark Side of Chocolate and Stolen Childhoods or information from nonprofit groups such as Save the Children and Free the Children.

these types of work” (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005). Particular studies apply slightly varying definitions for the term economically active. Contrasting definitions will be identified in the case study section.

One major factor why child labor is a controversial moral issue is that it can potentially be very detrimental to a child psychologically and have effects that last through one’s entire lifetime. “Other than forgoing the opportunity to partake in education, the consequences of child labour may include damage to the child’s health, the adoption of self-defeating attitudes, and, perhaps most important, loss of the joy and freedom of childhood per se” (Dunning & Lundan, 2008). The psychological impacts of child labor on children’s well being are well documented, but there is not enough space allotted in this thesis to explore this in detail. Yet as mentioned earlier, it is important to keep in mind the contrasts of childhood perceptions between developed and developing countries. For instance, in one culture an idle child is seen as a beneficial situation, equating a healthy childhood with play, leisure and lack of adult responsibilities whereas in other cultures, an idle child can be seen as symptomatic of parental negligence (Punch, 2009, p.47).

Attempts have been made to track the division of child labor between various industries worldwide. The ILO has estimated the division of child labor between differing types of work (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Division of child labor by industry worldwide



(ILO SIMPOC, 2013)

As apparent in the above figure, the vast majority of child laborers work in agriculture, often on family farms. This is in contrast to a common Western perception of child laborers working mostly in factories and industrial production. Among children ages 5-14, there are more boys working than girls globally (ILO, 2010). Most boys typically work in agriculture while most girls work as domestic servants in homes.

It is also important to consider the difference between the formal and informal sectors of an economy. The ILO describes work in the informal sector to consist of: "...small-scale, self-employed activities (with or without hired workers), typically at a low level of organization and technology, with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes. The activities are usually conducted without proper recognition from the authorities, and escape the attention of the administrative machinery responsible for enforcing laws and regulations" (ILO, 2013). Children working in the informal sector will often face the most egregious conditions. The distinction between work in the formal and informal sectors of an economy will be particularly important when considering child labor statistics because many child laborers working in the informal

sector (such as girls working as domestic servants or boys on family farms) may not be included in calculations.

Arriving at a proper definition of child labor is challenging but important to guide policy decisions. Once a definition is established, it can greatly influence data collection, future legislation, and the overall societal perception of child labor. As the major bodies combating child labor are learning, it is important to avoid imposing a narrow concept of childhood on a very large-scale and multifaceted phenomenon. Moreover, while child labor is a predominantly moral issue for those in the global north, it is an economic issue for the actual families who send their children into work. In order to reduce this complex global issue, specific geographical contexts must be kept in mind.

Neoliberalism

Similar to the concept “child labor”, there is no universally accepted definition of neoliberalism. Since the phenomenon’s emergence in the 1970’s there has been relentless debate over its virtues and detriments. Neoliberalism can be traced back to classical economic liberalism, a philosophy of economist Adam Smith in the 18th century. Smith argues in *The Wealth of Nations* ([1776] in Raphael, 1991) that if governments keep their economic markets free of regulation and intervention, the welfare of society will be enhanced by profit-driven motivations. Classical liberalism also draws on the ideas of John Locke ([1689] in Laslett, 1988), who argued in favor of individual rights and freedoms. In the classical liberal mindset, governments should exercise minimal involvement in all citizen affairs (Thorson & Lie, 2013).

Modern neoliberalism represents a revival of classical liberalism not only applied to individual countries but also to their relation with the global economy. David Harvey, though

critical of neoliberalism, provides a wide-ranging definition of the phenomenon in *Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction* (2007).

“Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, 2007, p.22).

As Harvey points out, neoliberalism is a philosophy based on the notion that the reinforcement of economic freedoms brings about the greatest prosperity both economically and socially. Under this economic philosophy, government institutions should focus on enacting and enforcing policies that embrace a limited regulation of financial affairs thus giving individuals and financial entities freedom to grow.

While modern neoliberalism was manifest among a small collection of thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman in the 1950's, it truly began to take root in the late 1970's and 1980's as political leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher established it as broad economic policy (Heywood, 1992). It came about in part as a reaction to the recession of the 1970's. “When economic growth faltered, economic and social orthodoxies were questioned and, in Britain and America at least, overthrown in favour of a renewed faith in the free market and the values of individual responsibility” (Heywood, 1992, p.52).

More recently, international institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have championed the benefits of neoliberal economics. For countries hoping to receive economic and monetary assistance, these institutions require them to open their borders to international trade and investment. The institutions argue that a nation's gross domestic product and international economic presence can dramatically increase if they adopt their planned measures. They also create Structural

Adjustment Policies, which promote a reduction of trade barriers, privatization of industries, and deregulation of the market.

As increasing numbers of countries have adopted economic models based on neoliberal philosophy, widespread debate has arisen over its benefits and detriments. However, criticisms of free trade policy can be traced back to Marx (1848). While neoliberalism did not exist in its modern form until more than a century after Marx's time, his criticisms are still relevant and mirror the criticisms of contemporary thinkers such as Harvey (2007). As Marx once wrote:

If the free traders cannot understand how one nation can grow at the expense of another, we need not wonder, since the same gentlemen also refuse to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another (Marx [1848] in Toor, 2001, p.198).

Modern critics have raised similar concerns. They argue that economic globalization and neoliberalism foster conditions of inequality. The noble-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has made similar claims that neoliberal policies can cause increased stratification between the rich and poor between and within countries (Stiglitz, 2012). Similarly, many activist groups around the world have been very critical of the World Bank, WTO, and similar institutions for contributing to such inequality.

This debate is at the foundation of the relationship of child labor and economic policy. As will be apparent in the following literature review section, many preconceptions and opinions on neoliberalism color individuals' conclusions on child labor rates. It is also worth noting that the terms globalization, economic globalization and neoliberalism are often misconstrued and are assumed to be synonymous. For instance, many anti-neoliberal groups are known simply as anti-globalization groups. However, globalization is a much broader phenomenon than neoliberalism including the cultural and social dimensions of global change.

Part III: Literature Review

A Google search of the term, “child labor,” brings 250 million results. While child labor was a significant issue during the industrial revolution of the 19th and early 20th centuries, it reemerged again as a major issue in the wake of the changing global economy beginning in the 1970s. Particularly in the last 20 years, the number of academic publications on the topic has grown tremendously. In researching for this thesis, it was therefore important to find respected sources that specifically examine child labor in relation to economics, particularly with regard to neoliberalism and economic globalization. The following provides an overview of literature from proponents of neoliberalism and neoliberalism critics that argue that neoliberalism increases or reduces child labor.

Economic Globalization/Free Trade Reduces Child Labor

There are several highly cited studies that argue in favor of a negative correlation between child labor and countries’ opening up of their economies to foreign trade. Cigno, Rosati, and Guarcello (Cigno et al., 2002) argue that trade exposure either reduces or at least has no significant impact on child labor. As they write: “We could not find empirical evidence that exposure to international trade, and economic integration across national borders, raise the incidence of child labor. If anything, the evidence points the other way” (Cigno et al., 2002, p.1).

They examine economic openness and child labor rates in order to formulate the relationship between free trade and child labor participation. In order to calculate the active child labor force they rely on a country’s measure of primary school enrollment, as opposed to the more often used work participation rate of children 10-14 years old (Cigno et.al, 2002, p.1579). Others have been critical of this measure because it assumes that all children who do not attend

school are necessarily working and those who do go to school are not working. In calculating a country's economic openness, they rely on the Sachs/Warner index, which considers an open economy as one with low tariff rates/non-tariff barriers and without a state monopoly on main exports" (Cigno et al., 2002, p.1579).

After comparing child labor rates against a country's openness for the years 1980-1988 (as calculated on the Sachs Warner Index), the researchers found that child labor has a negative correlation with openness, even after controlling for Gross Domestic Product (GDP), workforce skill composition and domestic health policy (Cigno et al., 2002, p.1587). When using a more conventional formula of calculating openness (imports plus exports divided by GDP), they found analogous results (Cigno et al., 2002, p.1580). Additionally, they argue that countries containing a largely educated workforce benefit more from globalization than countries with poor education rates. Though the researchers are careful not to make any final conclusions on the relationship of globalization and child labor, they find no empirical data supporting the claim that openness to international trade increases the work rates of children. They write that when a country is ostensibly negatively impacted by globalization, it's, "not so much globalization, as the country's inability to take part in it" (Cigno et al., 2002, p.1588).

Their conclusions however raise significant questions over causality. For example, do countries that are open to trade have lower child labor rates or do nations with low child work rates simply trade more? Another extensively cited study that deals with this question concerns Vietnam. Edmonds (Edmonds, 2005) presents evidence that Vietnam has benefited from substantial reductions in its child labor rates subsequent to opening their economy to foreign trade in the 1980s/1990s.

In a later paper examining data across multiple countries, Edmonds and Pavcnik (2006) control for trade factors and find that trade openness increases household wages thus lowering child labor rates (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2006, p.23). In response to criticisms from the anti-globalization movement, they “find no support for the view that when a country's trade expands, product demand changes instigated by trade are associated with increases in child labor” (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2006, p.23). Moreover, the researchers conclude that evidence from Vietnam suggests that greater trade openness increases average incomes per household. Other studies such as Basu (1998) also argue that familial income increases are a positive incentive to send children to school rather than work. Evidence from Vietnam is explored and critiqued in greater detail in the following case study section.

Neumayer and Soysa (2005) argue that economic globalization not only reduces child labor rates through trade but also through foreign direct investment (Neumayer & Soysa, 2005, p.43). Using the conventional primary school attendance rate of children ages 10 to 14 years to determine child labor rates, they find a statistically significant correlation with a country's Foreign Direct Investment (Neumayer & Soysa, 2005, p.58). In contrast to Cigno et al. (2002), the researchers find openness as calculated by the sum of imports and exports divided by GDP to be more suitable for observing the effect of openness on child labor rates because they feel it is more indicative of a country's openness than the Sachs-Warner Index, which is more focused on liberal trade policies (Neumayer & Soysa, 2005, p.59).

Similarly, Shelburne (2001) argues that economic deregulation, trade openness, and increasing economic size reduce the benefits of child labor to society. In agreement with many of the aforementioned studies, he concludes that trade sanctions that penalize countries and manufacturers that use child work are not practical and can be detrimental for child laborers

(Shelburne, 2001, p.374). Some researchers such as Samida have pointed out that neoliberal policies are not directly responsible for reducing child labor (Samida, 2004). Rather, it is increasing incomes that are responsible for this reduction and rising incomes are not necessarily tied with a country's economic openness (Samida, 2004, p.420). But Samida does admit that in cases where trade increases incomes, it may be indirectly beneficial for child labor rates (Samida, 2004, p.429).

Other researchers have examined broader global trends of child labor to examine how globalization has impacted labor worldwide. Clark (2011) examines global rates of child labor and concludes that child labor has significantly decreased over the last several decades. He combines statistics released by the ILO for over 100 countries between the years of 1980 and 2000. He then divides the countries into 5 regions: Europe and the West, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, and East Asia and the Pacific. According to his calculations, every region has experienced dramatic reductions in child labor since 1980.

Yet Clark (2011) does not attribute this change completely to economic globalization. He argues that successful government and institutional organization programs are primarily responsible for the wide-scale decrease. The more a country opens up, the greater these organizations can provide assistance. Clark writes that, "a nation's level of cultural integration in the world polity and economic integration in the world system significantly shape its child labor practices" (Clark, 2011, p.1051). In contrast to the conclusions of Neumayer and Soysa (2005), he found that foreign investment exerts a net positive effect on child labor rates.

Other contemporary economists have made broad claims in favor of neoliberalism and its impacts. These economists have included Friedman (2005) and Bhagwati (2007). Bhagwati in particular argues that child labor can be mitigated by increased involvement in the economy through economic globalization's potential for raising household income. In his book, *In Defense Of Globalization* (2007), he writes that,

Poor parents, no less than rich parents, generally want the best for their children. Poverty is what drives many to put their children to work rather than into school. Parents will choose to feed their children instead of schooling them if forced to make a choice. When incomes improve [due to globalization], poor parents can generally be expected to respond by putting children back in school (Bhagwati, 2007, p.84).

In other words, open economic policies are not the cause of child labor; poverty is the real cause. Thus, according to Bhagwati, if economic globalization increases incomes, it can help decrease child labor activity.

Increased Economic Openness Leads to Increased Child Labor

At a conference in 2000 on child labor and globalization, the general secretary to the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers foundation, Neil Kearney, presented his observations concerning the impact of neoliberal economics on child workers:

The children were singing in a scene that was reminiscent of the galley slaves on the old sailing ships. In the past two decades as we have gone from national regulation to a basically unregulated global economy many galley slaves have been created. Globalization with its increased flows of capital and increased trade has seen borders becoming permeable and societies more open. Markets have become more unstable, companies are under greater pressure and workers are more vulnerable (Lieten, 2003, p.1; Kearney, 2001).

This vivid description captures the concern many individuals have over the impacts of free trade policies on children. Many are concerned that economic globalization is driving higher

percentages of children into work. There are many substantial academic papers written on the notion that free trade policies are detrimental for all workers, including children.

Bullard (2001) issues a similar critical view of neoliberal economic design. She writes that:

Globalization could offer children an escape from lives of toil and drudgery, but instead, it draws more children into servitude. Children stand to lose the most under globalization, which fosters their labor, but provides no assurances for protection in the workplace and no economic advantages to their families (Bullard, 2001, p.156).

In support of this, Bullard discusses the race to the bottom concept, or the notion that multinational corporations are perpetually seeking the cheapest labor in order to maintain competitiveness. In the current global economy, Bullard argues, MNC's are seeking inexpensive labor and many countries are eager to offer cheap work in the hopes of greater economic prosperity and modernization (Bullard, 2001, p.157). Likewise, children will actively seek out new employment opportunities if they and their families are impoverished.

For some developing countries, a large labor force may be their primary way of drawing in foreign capital. Bullard (2001) writes that, "As a result, some countries refuse to enforce their own child labor laws because their economic survival depends on the foreign investment attracted by cheap labor" (p.157). She argues that examples of decreased child labor rates are not the product of globalization, but rather of increasing global awareness and effective international efforts to mitigate it. Several pro-neoliberal writers have however criticized her article's lack of hard statistics. Samida (2004) remarks that Bullard cites no statistics or figures providing data that increased child labor has occurred, regardless of the underlying causes (p.412).

Polakoff (2007) also takes a strong stance against claims that neoliberal policies reduce child labor, arguing that globalization only causes further poverty and inequality, thus worsening

labor crises worldwide. She writes that under economic globalization, poverty has dramatically increased and only led to greater exploitation of laborers, particularly of children (Polakoff, 2007, p.262). She also notes that some writers have even taken to calling economic globalization, “global apartheid” (Polakoff, 2007, p.274). Polakoff’s argument is representative of a larger collective of anti-globalization thinkers who argue that the elimination of economic regulations and trade barriers are a detriment to society.

Many researchers undertaking country-specific case studies rather than comparative examinations often develop a darker view of neoliberal policies; perhaps the effect of observing the atrocities of exploitative child labor firsthand. As Saadia Toor writes (2001):

The fact is that the [World Trade Organization]’s policies are creating conditions for the accentuation of poverty and the decline in the condition of workers everywhere. Child labor is one manifestation or effect of the demands being placed on the majority of the world’s population under a neoliberal economic regime (Toor, 2001, p.204).

She then discusses how free-trade policies and deregulation encourage corporations to seek out child laborers, whom are preferred to adults for they are unassociated with unions, compliant, and have “nimble fingers,” which are particularly useful for the Pakistani carpet and soccer ball industry (Toor, 2001, p.204).

Similar notions that economic globalization is tied to increased child labor rates are expressed in various other studies throughout the world. Abebe (2007), conducting research in Ethiopia, discusses how neoliberal policies have been detrimental to the livelihood of Ethiopian children. He writes, “Pressured by the need for survival in the context of a market-driven economy, children are engaged in exploitative paid work, while capitalism is transforming the conditions of their work in ways that go beyond the imperatives of apprenticeship and

socialization” (Abebe, 2007, p.83). He also notes that similar impacts have occurred in Sudan (Katz, 2004) and Zimbabwe (Robson, 2004).

Other researchers who are skeptical of free trade include Briones (1999) who writes on the negative impact of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC, an essential part of the North American Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA) on women and children workers in Mexico. He argues that while the NAALC is claimed to be a beneficial step, it has only maintained existing ineffective laws protecting women and children. Moreover, Abebe (2007) as well as many other researchers feel that children and women have felt negative impacts resulting particularly from unfair IMF/World Bank plans that neglect human social needs. These plans embody neoliberal economic philosophy.

A Debate of Vital Consequence

As demonstrated by the researchers and writers discussed in this section, there is heated debate over whether globalization is beneficial or detrimental for child laborers. Crucially, this is not simply an inconsequential theoretical quarrel; millions of children’s lives are at stake and dependent upon the kind of policies implemented over the upcoming years. These policies will largely be based upon the opinion international bodies take on the relationship of child labor, globalization, and trade policy.

Part IV: Case Studies

Having explored the debate over the relationship of child labor and neoliberalism in detail, the following examines the experience in three countries. A cautionary note however is the unfortunate and surprising paucity of statistical data on child labor, particularly in developing countries. As discussed earlier, the main focus of this paper is not to provide an up-to-date analysis of child labor in each of the three countries but rather, to examine child labor in relation to free trade policies. After examining the available data for each country and discussing the reliability of the collected statistics, this paper then determines whether any substantial claims can be made on the relationship of free trade policies and child labor for each country respectively.

Case Study 1: Bangladesh



Source: United Nations Department of Cartography, 2013.

Bangladesh Basic Data

Year	Population	GDP (Current U.S. Dollar)	GDP Per Capita (USD)	GINI Coefficient*
1980	80 Million	\$18,114,645,161	225	.259 (1984)
1990	105 Million	\$30,128,776,344	286	.289 (1989)
2000	130 Million	\$47,124,925,462	364	.335
2010	148 Million	\$100,357,022,444	675	.321

*GINI Coefficient data is not available for every year. 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality. Source: World Bank Country Data, 2013; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2013.

Ratified Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Bangladesh
ILO Forced Labor Convention (No. 29)	Yes
ILO Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No. 105)	Yes
ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138)	No
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Yes
ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182)	Yes

Source: UNICEF: Bangladesh at a Glance, 2013.

Bangladesh, a geographically small yet densely populated nation adjacent to India and Myanmar (Burma), is one of the most pervasive child labor environments in the world. Approximately 70% of its 162 million citizens live in rural areas. However, there is a growing urbanization rate which is increasing by 3.1% annually (CIA World Fact Book, 2013). In Bangladesh, child work is an accepted reality and cultural norm. Millions of families rely on the additional household income that their children bring home or the extra workhands for family-owned farms. Since its implementation of free trade policies several decades ago, Bangladesh

has become increasingly involved in the global economy, becoming one of the largest textile producing countries in the world. As a country that has recently embraced economic globalization that also has significant child work participation, Bangladesh presents a valuable scenario for analyzing the impact of neoliberal trade reforms on child labor.

Neoliberal Trade Policies

Bangladesh began implementing Structural Adjustment Policies in the mid 1970's and 1980's under the World Bank in an effort to improve their economic competitiveness and mitigate accumulating debt. Several major trade policy shifts have resulted from this movement. For instance, from 1990 to 2000 Bangladesh's average tariff rate dropped from 89% to 17% (Nurruzzaman, 2004, p.44). Similarly, its trade openness index ranking (ratio of GDP to exports plus imports) increased from 18% in 1990 to 43% in 2008, a relatively high number (World Bank, 2013). Additionally, Bangladesh embarked on a major program of privatization of formerly nationalized industries in the 1980s, turning over major manufacturing companies to private entrepreneurs (Nurruzzaman, 2004, p.36). Since the establishment of new economic reforms, Bangladesh has become progressively immersed in the global economy over the last several decades, producing many export commodities, particularly in the agricultural and garment industries.

Impacts of Economic Globalization in Bangladesh

As discussed in the literature review, many neoliberal proponents argue that free-trade will help grow economies and raise incomes. In Bangladesh this has held true; with notable caveats to follow. Bangladesh's overall GDP increased significantly over the last several decades (Deb et al, 2008). In the 1990's, GDP increased by an impressive 5% annually (Khanam, 2006).

During this period, the population below the international poverty line (roughly \$1.25 per day) decreased from about 56.6% in 1992 to 48.9% in 2000 and 31.5% by 2010 (World Bank, 2013). A 2005 United Nations Development Program paper analyzing poverty incidence at a district level also confirms a significant drop in poverty during this time (Deb et al., 2008, p.3).

On the basis of these statistics, many have claimed that Bangladesh is an example of the positive economic impacts of trade deregulation (Ahmed & Sattar, 2004). Yet although it has brought macro-economic benefits to Bangladesh, these statistics can be misleading. While GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) increased significantly over the last several decades, this statistic masks a growing rate of wealth inequality. For example, in 1991/1992 the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics found that the top 20% owned 44.8% of national wealth, while the bottom 20% owned only 6.52% (BBS, 1995/1996). Wealth inequality continued to diverge, raising the top 20% of society to 50% ownership of wealth in 1995/1996 and the bottom 20% of society to 5.71% ownership (Household Expenditure Surveys 1991/1992, 1995/1996). Despite a decrease in overall GINI from 2000 to 2010 (see basic data table), a 2010 report found that Bangladesh's GINI co-efficient for rural areas (measure of inequality where 0 means perfect equality) increased from .393 in the year 2000 to .430 by 2010 (Timutur & Rhaman, 2011). In fact, some researchers have pointed out that a small cluster of wealthy families control the industrial and financial assets and actively prevent the rest of the population from joining their elite status (Nuruzzamann, 2004).

While economic globalization has brought beneficial increases to overall GDP in Bangladesh, poverty still remains high and income inequality has increased in rural areas. Today, over 30 million Bangladeshi citizens remain below the poverty line (Deb et al, 2008, p.45). This is an important consideration as poverty is the primary cause of child labor incidence. Moreover,

one must be careful not to assume all positive changes in Bangladesh accrued over the last several decades are the direct result of economic globalization. On the other hand, one cannot fully deny the significant economic progress Bangladesh has experienced over the last several decades and its incidental timing with changes in its trade policy.

Findings on Child Labor in Bangladesh

As demonstrated, Bangladesh has adopted major neoliberal trade policies in an effort to grow economically. This makes Bangladesh a useful country for examining the impact of economic globalization on child labor. As discussed in the literature review section, if the neoliberal proponents are correct, there should be drastic reductions in child labor rates in Bangladesh after its economic opening or at least no increase in child work (see Cigno et al., 2002). However, if the anti-neoliberal thinkers are correct, there should be an observable increase in child labor rates.

There are multiple sources of statistics on Bangladesh's child labor rates. The first recognized statistics were calculated in collaboration with the ILO in 1996, a year after Bangladesh joined ILO International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC). With the assistance of the ILO, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics released its first National Child Labor Survey (NCLS) in 1996. In 2002, after the passage of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention 182, Bangladesh conducted its second NCLS study with the ILO. The NCLS is the most accurate data set on Bangladeshi child workers. The goal of the study was to accurately gauge its current child labor situation and many associated facets including gender work division, average wages, and age distribution. Figure 2 presents statistics from both studies in comparison.

Figure 2: Comparison of NCLS statistics 1995/1996 vs. 2002/2003

Variable	NCLS 1995/1996	NCLS 2002/2003	Difference
Total Child Population (Ages 5-14)	34.5 Million	42.3 Million	+7.8 Million
Child Workers (Ages 5-14)	6.5 Million	4.9 Million (14.2%)	-1.6 Million
Child Workers (Ages 15-17)	(Not Available)	2.9 Million	(Not Available)
Labor Participation Rates (ages 5-14)	18.3%	14.2%	-4.1%
Child Laborers ages 5-14 (According to ILO Definition)	4.1 Million	3.2 Million	-.9 Million

Figure 2: Comparison of NCLS Statistics Demonstrating Child Labor Decrease. Source: NCLS 1995/1996, NCLS 2002/2003.

As is apparent, there have been significant changes in the child labor rates over the time period of the two studies. The 1995/1996 National Child Labor Survey compared with 2002/2003 NCLS demonstrates that child labor and the number of working children decreased. it is important to note that the data collection techniques were significantly different (BBS, 2003). First, children ages 15-17 were not included in the 1995/1996 survey and were only counted in 2002/2003. The table reflects an adjustment for this change in age inclusion when comparing work participation rates. Additionally, children who both work and attend school were only first counted in 2002/2003 while they were excluded from the 1995/1996 study (BBS, 119).

According to these statistics, there was a marked decrease in the number of child workers ages 5-14 as well as in the labor participation rate. Other important findings from both studies are that the majority of child laborers work in rural areas, in the informal sector and in the agricultural industry. Additionally, a 2006 BBS/ UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey found the child labor rate for children ages 5-14 to have decreased an additional 2 points, down to 12.8% (UNICEF: Bangladesh at a Glance, 2013).

Different studies demonstrate however that while child work rates have decreased over the last two decades, child labor increased dramatically over the larger time frame. The Bangladesh Labor Force Survey (LFS) demonstrates that the number of child workers ages 10-14 increased from 2.5 million in 1974 to 6.8 million by 2000 (Khanam, 2006, p.9). The LFS however uses a wider definition of economic activity than the National Child Labor Survey and doesn't take population growth into account. Additionally, as some researchers have pointed out, there are inherent data collection problems with these two sources including not counting children ages 10 and younger (Khanam, 2006, p.9). While these studies are not as reputable as others since they do not have the backing of international institutions, they do suggest a significant increase in child labor dating back before its economic reform period. While this data set should be considered with caution, it demonstrates the complexities and difficulties of child labor research.

Child labor rates can also be explored by examining the primary school attendance rate. According to the Education Policy Data Center, there has been a marked increase in school attendance for both sexes, tilted towards slightly higher female attendance (Ahmed & Ninno, 2002). As discussed in the literature review, using school attendance rates as a measure for child labor has been criticized because it assumes that children are either working or in school, neglecting many children who happen to do both, as well as the children who do neither. This is nevertheless a positive trend in line with the decreasing child labor rates in most of the sources; though there may be other causes to consider.

Conclusions on Bangladesh

As might be apparent, many of the studies conducted in Bangladesh are now outdated and due for updates. In particular, a National Child Labor survey has not been conducted in over 10 years. Nevertheless, one can still make some judgments on Bangladesh's social conditions. First, it does seem that the incidence of child labor and work has decreased. As many researchers have noted, there have also been major social policies implemented that attempt to directly mitigate child labor, encourage school attendance and increase other social living standards. First, Bangladesh has ratified several UN and ILO conventions including:

- ILO Forced Labor Convention (No. 29)
- ILO Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No. 105);
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182)

(UNICEF: Bangladesh at a Glance, 2013)

Secondly, Bangladesh has also developed several targeted legal measures such as the 2006 Labor Act that bans the employment of children who are younger than 14 years old and entails other policies that encourage school attendance. This act does not ban light work and does not provide measures to enforce adherence to the law.

The implementation of these treaties and domestic policies have seemingly played a role in the reduction of its child labor rates, though specific impacts are difficult to ascertain precisely. However, Bangladesh's increased involvement in the global economy may have permitted greater collaboration with international institutions such as the ILO and World Bank which in turn helped develop several successful policies such as the "Food for Education" program. Food for Education provides free provisions of wheat/rice to poor families every month in return for

sending their children to school on a regular basis (Ahmed & Ninno, 2002, p.3). Researchers have found that the program has been success full in achieving its aims of boosting school enrollment/attendance and decreasing the rate of dropouts² (Ahmed & Ninno, 2002, p.36). Given these additional factors, we cannot justifiably attribute observed social progress directly to Bangladesh's changing trade policies alone or conclude the existence of a causal relationship between economic globalization and child labor rates.

Additionally, a particularly striking phenomenon occurred in Bangladesh in 1995 that holds significant lessons for future trade policy in regard to labor standards. In an effort to limit the manufacturing of international goods by children in Bangladesh, United States Senator Harkin of Iowa proposed the Child Labor Deterrence Act, which would effectively ban all imported goods from Bangladesh into the U.S. produced by child labor at any stage in production. Bangladeshi factory owners caught wind of the potential trade ban and reacted immediately, firing literally tens of thousands of children in fears of lost future revenue. While the notion of fewer children working may sound favorable, this meant that the fired children lost valuable income for themselves and became forced to seek work in even worse environments (Samida, 2004, p. 422). Though the bill was not passed, this event demonstrates that trade bans on child labor produced goods may not be the most effective way to help working children and their families. Proactive policies such as Bangladesh's Food For Education seem to be more effective at reducing child labor rates rather than plans that may ultimately penalize children.

This brief look at Bangladesh has demonstrated the immediate complexities of finding a direct link between positive social changes and economic trade policies. It does appear that child

² Ahmed & Ninno (2002, p. 36) point out that although more children are attending school, the quality of primary school in Bangladesh still remains poor.

labor rates in Bangladesh have decreased but the major determinant of this change remains unclear. The next case study examines Vietnam, an Asian nation widely cited as an example of the positive social impacts of economic globalization on child labor (Edmonds, 2002)

Case Study 2: Vietnam



Source: Google Map Data

Vietnam Basic Data

Year	Population	GDP (Current U.S. Dollar)	GDP Per Capita	GINI Coefficient*
1985	60 Million	\$14,094,688,428	239	Not Available
1990	67 Million	\$6,471,740,486	98	.357 (1993)
2000	79 Million	\$31,172,517,272	402	.376 (2002)
2010	88 Million	\$106,426,845,157	1224	.356 (2008)

*GINI Coefficient data is not available for every year. 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality. Source: World Bank Country Data, 2013; United Nations Data, 2013.

Ratified Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Vietnam
ILO Forced Labor Convention (No. 29)	No
ILO Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No. 105)	No
ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138)	Yes
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	No
ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182)	Yes

Source: Hindman, 2009.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Vietnam opened up its economic borders and remodeled its trade policies toward neoliberalism and free markets. Subsequently, this ushered in a new era of Vietnamese involvement in the global economy, particularly in the rice industry. Neoliberal proponents often cite Vietnam as an example of the positive impacts that result from embracing free-trade policies (Edmonds 2002; Cigno et al., 2002). They argue that these policies have brought abundant social benefits and reductions in poverty. Recent studies claim that the number of working children in Vietnam was dramatically reduced after the opening of its economy to global trade (Edmonds, 2002). The following explores Vietnam's child labor rates both preceding and following its economic transition and determines whether the findings of recent studies are indeed valid. A supplementary analysis evaluates whether one can attribute a decreasing child labor trend to economic globalization and neoliberal trade policies.

Vietnam's Trade Policy Shift

In 1986, Vietnam began to shift away from communist economic policies toward a more open free-market approach with the implementation of a program called *Doi Moi*, or renovation (Neilsen, 2003). This program towards liberalization had strong impacts on the agricultural

industry, dispersing farming production from centralized factory farms to locally owned family farms. During this time period of economic opening, in 1989, Vietnam placed export quotas on rice out of fears over national food security. By placing quotas on rice exports, Vietnam reduced domestic rice prices, making food more accessible to its low-income citizens (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.1). This occurred because after the traders have exhausted their allotted rice supply to international trade, they will sell the remaining rice for cheaper prices domestically in order to clear their stock. Beginning in 1993, Vietnam gradually removed its quotas on rice exports, doubling its volume of exports by 1996 and completely eliminating all trade restrictions on rice by 1997 (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.2). Vietnam became fully exposed to the international price of rice the same year.

Vietnam became increasingly involved in the global economy during this period of trade liberalization. In fact, Vietnam emerged as the second largest rice exporter in the world in 1997 (only behind Thailand) and has predominantly maintained this position ever since (Neilsen, 2003, p.2). The rice trade is especially important for the Vietnamese people because in 1993, as Vietnam began the process of liberalizing its rice exports, 70% of the population worked in the agricultural industry (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.3). Since numerous families and children participate in the rice industry, trade fluctuations can bear significant impacts on their lives.

Rice is Vietnam's principal export and staple product and its growing involvement in the global rice trade held significant impacts. Over the last 20 years, its economy has expanded at an average annual rate of 7.3% and its per capita income is almost 5 times as high as in 1990 (World Bank, 2011, p.1). According to a 2012 report, using a basic needs poverty line agreed upon in the early 1990s, the poverty headcount fell from 58 percent in the early 1990s to 14.5 percent by 2008, and by these standards was estimated to be well below 10 percent by 2010

(World Bank, 2011). These large gains are often praised and used as a case study by free-trade proponents. As the authors of the 2011 Vietnam Development Report write:

The rapid expansion of the economy has been accompanied by high levels of growth of international trade; large-scale inflows of foreign direct investment; a dramatic reduction in poverty; and almost universal access to primary education, health care, and life-sustaining infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity, piped water, and housing. Vietnam's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy and from an extremely poor country to a lower-middle-income country in less than 20 years—is now a case study in development textbooks (World Bank, 2012, p.10).

As the report describes, the implementation of neoliberal policies has helped Vietnam transition to a lower-middle-income country in an exceptionally short amount of time. They have made great social progress and have displayed skill at passing practical laws (World Bank, 2011).

However, Vietnam is still a developing country and has long strides to make in order to enhance the livelihood of its citizens and ameliorate major social issues (such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation of young girls). A 2004 U.S. State Department study classified Vietnam's human rights conditions as "poor," stating that many citizen freedoms are very limited, discrimination is rampant, and human rights organizations are not allowed to operate there (USDOL, 2004).

Calculating Child Labor Rates in Vietnam

It is clear that Vietnam has experienced dramatic economic growth since the 1980's and the implementation of its *Doi Moi* program. As a developing country with traditionally high child labor rates that has recently transitioned towards neoliberal trade policy, it is an ideal country for which to examine the relationship of free trade and child labor. Research conducted by Edmonds (2002) on Vietnam's child labor rates is widely cited by those who claim that Vietnam's experience provides strong evidence that free trade policies reduce child labor. Edmonds and Pavcnik analyze Vietnam's child labor rates based on the Vietnam Living

Standards Survey (VLSS), a study of 4,000 households, over the entire duration of rice quota changes (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.2). The statistics from the household surveys are then compared against the international price of rice.

When the international price of rice increased, both adult and child wages increased (Edmonds, 2002, p.4). Critics of free trade have pointed out that higher wages attract more children to work, thus intensifying child labor participation. Yet as Edmonds argues, “Higher child wages encourage children to work, but the observed rise in adult wages appears to reduce child labor more than higher child wages increase child labor” (Edmonds, 2002, p.4). Other researchers such as Basu (1998) have verified this point and have demonstrated that increased household income and educational opportunities may help send more children to school instead of work.

Edmonds also found that the international price of rice increased by 29% relative to the increase in rice prices in the consumer price index after Vietnam began its period of liberalization in 1993 until 1998 (Edmonds, 2002, p.1). According to the Vietnam Living Standards Survey, child work decreased drastically. Child labor, according to the ILO definition dropped by 33% between 1993 and 1998 (Edmonds, 2002, p.10). In raw numbers, about 2.2 million less children worked in 1998 than in 1993 (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.31). Moreover, Edmonds and Pavcnik (2002) estimate that about 45% (about 1 million children) of the decrease in child labor rates during the 1990’s was directly caused by the increase in the international price of rice relative to the consumer price index. The researchers conclude that Vietnam’s free trade policies permitted these gains and contributed a great deal towards the reduction of child labor. Figure 3 below depicts the statistics in 1993 against 1998 adapted from the VLSS records.

Figure 3: Vietnamese Child Labor Rates 1993 vs. 1998 (Vietnam Living Standards Survey)

	<u>1993</u>		<u>1998</u>	
	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.
Basic Child Characteristics				
Sample Size	5963		5682	
Age	10.46	0.04	10.75	0.04
Female	.505	.006	.507	.006
Child Labor (ILO definition)	.568	.015	.382	.019
School attendance	.743	.014	.872	.012
Work and not attend school (ILO Definition)	.181	.009	.071	.007
Work Characteristics				
Outside of Household	.023	.003	.014	.002
Within household in Agriculture	.260	.017	.220	.021
Within household in Business	.044	.006	.027	.006
In home production	.517	.014	.529	.018
>=7 hours in home production	.434	.013	.358	.020
Any Work (all categories)	.616	.015	.575	.018

All means are weighted to reflecting sampling probabilities. Standard errors are corrected for sample design. A child engages in "child labor" if a child works an hour or more per week in agriculture, a household business, outside of the household for pay or as a domestic servant, or works 7 or more hours per week in household work or chores. We are missing information on household work for 59 children.

Source: Edmonds & Pavcnik, (2002, p.39)

Key to this finding is the fact that a very large percentage of the population are involved in the rice trade. When the international price of rice rises, the increased earnings flow to millions of households. Yet those not involved in rice production do not benefit from the same trade gains. In fact, while rural child labor decreases in response to higher international prices for rice, urban child labor increases. The 30% increase in rice prices relative to the consumer price index led to a 5% increase in child labor for households living in urban areas (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2002, p.14). Because the domestic price of rice increases in response to international price increases, the urban households were forced to pay greater money for food and thus, have a greater need for their children to bring home additional income.

Conclusions on Vietnam's Child Labor Situation

Vietnam has undoubtedly seen a dramatic reduction in child labor. Even supposing that the Vietnamese Living Standard Survey miscalculated or underestimated the real numbers of workers, most organizations such as the ILO have accepted the notion that child labor has decreased significantly in Vietnam. This raises the following question; to what extent is economic globalization directly responsible for this negative child labor trend?

To examine this question, one must understand that Vietnam benefited from several particular circumstances that were necessary in order to profit from the enactment of free trade policies. First, the positive impacts of the Doi Moi free trade model were contingent upon the conditions of the rice trade; the increases in the international price of rice was incidentally timed with Vietnam's newly adopted trade policies, allowing them to receive the benefits of its trade.³ Second, if such an extensive percentage of the population were not involved in the rice industry as farmers, land-owners, and traders, the benefits from international trade would not have flowed down to millions of children. Households that are not involved with rice production saw no benefits compelling them to remove their children from work. Thus, the child labor reductions seen in Vietnam would not have the potential of being replicated in many other developing countries where there is a much larger landless and/or urban population.

G.K. Lieten (2003) points out that the authors neglect the fact that Vietnam banned all forms of child labor in 1988 (p.5). There appears to be no research available examining the effectiveness of this particular policy on child labor rates in Vietnam. Vietnam has also signed the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182), and the Minimum Age Convention,

³ Edmonds (2002) writes that Vietnam's open economy may have contributed to the growth in the international price of rice.

1973 (No. 138). The government also established a free mandatory education policy for children with its “Law on Universal Primary Education,” ratified in August 1991 (UNESCO & International Bureau of Education, 2011). Article 1 of the law declares that, “The State implements the policy of compulsory universal primary education (UPE) for all children aged 6-14” (UNESCO & International Bureau of Education, 2011, p.3). Providing children with free public schooling and requiring their attendance serves as a significant deterrence to child work. Moreover, these collective actions taken by Vietnamese government may have played a vital role in reducing child labor rates, though macroeconomic gains from economic liberalism may have helped facilitate these efforts.

Case Study 3: Zambia



Source: United Nations Department of Cartography, 2013

Zambia Basic Data

Year	Population	GDP (USD)	GDP Per Capita (USD)	GINI Coefficient*
1980	5.7 Million	\$3,884,531,016	673	Not Available
1990	7.8 Million	\$3,288,381,745	418	52.6 (1993)

2000	10.2 Million	\$3,253,551,750	319	53.4 (1998)
2010	13 Million	\$16,190,196,832	1252	57.5

*GINI Coefficient data is not available for every year. 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality. Source: World Bank Country Data, 2013; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2013.

Ratified Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Zambia
ILO Forced Labor Convention (No. 29)	No
ILO Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (No. 105)	No
ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138)	Yes
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Yes
ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182)	Yes

Source: Hindman, 2009.

Sub-Saharan Africa is currently the most prominent child labor region in the world, in terms of percentage of population. While data suggests that Asian child labor rates are in decline (with fluctuating rates), several countries in Africa are experiencing child labor increases (ILO, 2010). As poverty is the main determinant of child labor, it is undoubtedly the main driving factor in the poorest African nations. Recent studies (ILO, 2010) estimate that almost 40% of children 5-14 in the entire continent are working, with a significant portion falling under the definition of the “Worst Forms of Child Labor.” Zambia, a land-locked nation sharing borders with Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Tanzania, has a particular large child worker population and has a recent history of neoliberal economic reforms.

Just as rice is the principal export good for Vietnam, copper is Zambia's principal export (Nyumbu & Poulson, 2009). The copper industry has been of vital economic importance to Zambia since it gained its independence in 1964 and remains so today. The copper industry is not just imperative for bringing in export revenue and employing a large amount of the population; it also provides key social services including healthcare, housing and education to multitudes of workers (Nyumbu & Poulson, 2009, p.1). Zambia is dependent upon global copper trade for its own vitality and growth. When the industry suffers; the people do as well. The 1970's oil crisis, a diminishing copper demand, and poor national management led to dramatic economic decline, dragging down Zambia's GDP per capita almost 3% annually for two decades (Jensen, 2009). Similarly, when the economic crisis hit the United States in 2008 and subsequently the rest of the global economy, Zambia was greatly affected by reduced demand for its key export. Over the last several decades and throughout these shifting global economic circumstances, Zambia has traversed through various economic reforms.

Economic Reforms in Zambia

In 1983, Zambia embarked on a Structural Adjustment Program under the World Bank and the IMF (Simutanyi, 1996). Reforms included the liberalization of control over commodity prices, the elimination of agricultural subsidies, and devaluation of their currency. In 1985, the Program was further implemented with the adoption of a foreign exchange auction system that aimed to eliminate Zambia's import licensing system, which acts as a trade barrier to imports (Simutanyi, 1996, p.826). Despite several positive impacts on foreign investment, the SAP led to a series of economic troubles for many citizens as it dramatically raised the cost of living while devaluing the Zambian currency and eliminating subsidies that supported workers.

In 1987, after a series of brutal demonstrations in which more than a dozen people were killed, then President Kuanda canceled the liberalization program, stating that the economic reforms had, “brought pain, malnutrition and death to the people of Zambia” (Simutanyi, 1996, p.827). Yet the following year Zambia experienced a deeper economic crisis and was soon compelled to reintroduce similar neoliberal economic reforms. Working with the IMF, the new plan implemented in the early 1990’s included:

- (a) price decontrols of all products (except maize) and inputs;
- (b) exchange rate adjustment in real terms and elimination of exchange rate restrictions;
- (c) liberalization of export and import trade, while providing export incentives;
- (d) fiscal austerity measures to reduce the budget deficit and control inflation;
- (e) monetary policy measures to adjust interest rates and tighten monetary policy;
- (f) reform of the public investment programme to focus on resource allocation to priority sectors and programmes. (Simutanyi, 1996, p.828; Walle & Chille, 1994, p.30)

Additionally, Zambia had significant outstanding debt to repay from the former period of international monetary investment. This ultimately led to greater cuts in social services and increased poverty. Since this period, Zambia has remained deeply connected to the global economy. Moreover, Zambia has been in economic decline for almost 3 decades and has only made some progress in the last several years (Jensen, 2009). Its GDP per capita remained between \$800 and \$1000 from 1980 until 2006, when it began to rise to its present number around \$1600 today, portraying gains made from increased copper mining and greater agricultural development (World Bank, 2013).

Child Labor In Zambia

There is little available child labor statistics for Zambia. Nevertheless, Zambia is still a useful case study because of its unique economic and child labor characteristics. First, there are

detailed papers outlining its economic shift to neoliberalism and Structural Adjustment Policies and the political/social turmoil that followed. Additionally, it is one of the few developing African nations to ratify several U.N./ILO conventions including: the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No. 182), the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also has a free public education system.

The most current child labor statistics for Zambia are from the late 1990's and early 2000's (Jensen, 2009, p.289). Zambia conducted a National Child Labor Survey in conjunction with ILO-SIMPOC in 1999. After extensive searches and contacting the ILO, the actual NCLS is not available for review. Primary data is lacking and therefore secondary sources are cited here. These sources, however, refer to the same statistics but provide variable numbers and appear to include assorted errors. For example, the United States Department of Labor has released a child labor report each year since 2001 for Zambia (UNDOL, 2013). The 2001 report states that, "In 1999, a child labor survey conducted by the Zambia Central Statistical Office, in cooperation with ILO-IPEC, estimated that 58 percent of children under age 15 were working in Zambia." Then in 2002 and every subsequent year, the same exact organization states: "In 1999, the Zambian Central Statistical Office estimated that 11.5 percent (347,357) of children ages 5 to 14 years in Zambia were working." Several other secondary sources also switched between the 10% and 50% statistic. It is possible that various authors have made the mistake of misconstruing the Labor Force Survey results with the National Child Labor Report results. After review, the following data summary from the 1999 NCLS appears to be the most reliable.

As of 1999, 10.8% (300,000) of children ages 5-14 were involved in some form of work (Zambia NCLS, 1999). Of the total child population, 11.3% of boys and 10.3% of girls ages 5-14 were economically active. Almost a quarter of working children also attended school (Jensen,

289). Like the prior two case studies, there is a much higher rate of child work in rural areas; 11.1% against 2.1% in urban environments. Additionally, more than 90% of child workers in Zambia work in the agricultural industry (Jensen, 2009, p. 290). A 1998 World Bank Priority Survey found equivalent results to the 1999 NCLS (Blunch et al, 2005).

Figure 4: Results of the 1999 National Child Labor Survey in Zambia

Variable	NCLS 1999
Child Population (Ages 5-14)	2.8 Million
Percent of Children Economically Active	10.8% (300,000 children)
Percent of Boys Economically Active	11.3%
Percent of Girls Economically Active	10.3%

Source: Zambia National Child Labor Survey, 1999.

However, Zambian Labor Force Surveys (LFS) have found much higher results than the NCLS. The LFS studies demonstrate that from 2005 to 2008, the percentage of working children decreased from 45.84% to 33.73% and children receiving an education increased slightly (ILO, 2012). These numbers are dramatically higher than the NCLS and it is not likely that the percentage of children working grew by 30% in a few years. Yet, there is no information available lending clarity to the comparison of the two studies nor an explanation for the significant difference. If there are divergent definitions and determinants between these studies, they are not made clear in the studies or associated research. One suspects that the LFS study applied a wider definition of the term economically active. As pointed out in the case of Bangladesh, the LFS is not as reliable as statistics released by governments in conjunction with international institutions.

Unfortunately, there has not been another NCLS conducted since the first one in 1999. It is therefore not possible to accurately gauge changes in child labor rates in Zambia over the last decade other than the LFS. Though it has fully implemented neoliberal trade reforms in the recent past, its economy has not significantly improved as its GDP per capita has only increased in recent years and this is only one measure of economic progress.

It is more likely that the reason for Zambia's relatively low child labor participation rate stems from successful domestic policies protecting children rather than varying economic policies. For instance, access to education has played a vital role. "Zambia's policy of providing universal primary education to all children has enabled it to keep school attendance rates relatively high and the incidence of child labor relatively low, compared with many other sub-Saharan African countries" (Jensen, 2009, p.289). Furthermore, Zambia's ratification of child labor conventions and its potential implementation of these agreements may also have been important for encouraging policy implementation. Thus, while neoliberal and free trade policies did not increase child labor activity in Zambia, there are many different factors that can explain its low levels of child labor.

Part V: Conclusion

Child labor is an extremely complex phenomenon and there is no ultimate answer to whether economic globalization is necessarily beneficial or detrimental for child laborers. Based on the results of these three case studies, it is clear that there is no definitive response to the question of the relationship of child labor and economic globalization. There are significant disparities of impacts resulting from neoliberal economic reforms among just three countries, all of which have enacted free trade policies and two of which (Bangladesh and Zambia) have

implemented broader neoliberal economic strategies. It does however appear that neoliberal policies are correlated with reduced child labor rates in the cases of Bangladesh and Vietnam.

As demonstrated, it is difficult to gauge the impacts of specific economic policy changes on child labor rates because there are so many other factors involved. For example, Vietnam benefitted substantially from economic restructuring, as its primary staple of rice happened to perform extremely well in the global economy. Since the majority of its population were involved in the rice trade (over 70% of the population), the commodity raised household incomes enough to send their children to school instead of work. Yet many other factors may have played a role such as Vietnam's outlawing of child labor in 1988 and the establishment of a free and compulsory public education system. Bangladesh has also made economic gains after opening up its economy and its child labor rates have significantly decreased yet the decline was not as much a result of its improved economic status but rather of its effective domestic educational and child labor reduction strategies.⁴ Nevertheless, its macroeconomic gains may have facilitated more resources to be diverted to efforts of education promotion and child labor reduction.

Zambia, which also adopted neoliberal economic reforms, is one of the few sub-Saharan African nations with relatively low child labor rates. Yet the causes behind this achievement may not be directly tied to its economic policies. Though it also opened up its economy with the guidance of the World Bank and IMF in the early 1990's, it had not seen dramatic economic gains like Vietnam or Bangladesh until after 2006, which resulted primarily from increased copper mining and greater agricultural development (see page 42). Its child work rates are low predominantly because of successful domestic policies that protect children and a fruitful public

⁴ While there may have been a significant decrease over the last several decades, child labor and generally poor labor conditions are still prevalent in Bangladesh.

education program. Above all else, it seems apparent from the case studies that the most effective means of combatting child labor stem from direct governmental policies targeted at protecting children's well being and increasing access to education. In some cases, these efforts may be enhanced by the economic gains resulting from successful neoliberal policies.

Furthermore, it is true that the adoption of neoliberal trade reforms can potentially have beneficial impacts on children. Yet it is also equally true that these same reforms can lead to detrimental consequences for children in particular countries given certain unfortunate domestic and international scenarios. Neoliberal trade economics are not a one-size-fits-all program for all countries around the world; a nation must first consider its own domestic factors and economic circumstances before adopting these reforms. Some nations, such as Bangladesh, have experienced economic growth from the enactment of a variety of neoliberal economic policies while others, such as Vietnam, have made economic gains from only implementing free trade policies.

The inherent complexities and complications of child labor demonstrate that variations in its incidence cannot be traced to solitary causes or particular economic policies alone. There are innumerable economic, legislative, and social factors that can play major roles in determining child labor activity. For instance, each of the three case study nations have ratified major conventions of the United Nations and the International Labor Organization that attempt to protect children and improve their livelihoods. While this fact does not necessitate proper implementation, it does represent an apparent commitment by each nation to support children and work towards effective domestic policies to protect them. This paper has highlighted several measures taken in this regard such as successful educational programs in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Zambia. Likewise, there are many factors that cannot be measured quantitatively such as

cultural dimensions or instances of egregious child labor exploitation successfully hidden from national surveys.

Domestic policies make the goal of isolating the impact of free trade and neoliberal policies on child labor rates even more difficult. Most articles discussed in the literature review from both sides raised reputable arguments. For instance, Edmonds (2002) is justified when claiming that there is strong evidence that neoliberal economic policy helped reduce child labor in Vietnam. Likewise, it is reasonable for Bullard (2001) to claim that World Bank/IMF neoliberal policies create conditions that encourage child labor. Yet the authors of various articles on this debate are misguided when they attempt to establish broad conclusions from limited cases.

The impacts of free trade policies and neoliberal economic reforms vary greatly by country and within particular countries over extended time periods. It is therefore imprudent to make any broad claims on the relationship of economic globalization and child labor as solely positive or always destructive; there is no single answer. Moreover, taking a polarized view on this debate only neglects the intricately complex factors involved with child labor and other social phenomena.

The reduction of harmful child labor worldwide is a goal that deserves much greater international attention, improved domestic legislative efforts and increased financial support. As we now live in a vastly interconnected world, citizens bear greater responsibility than for just their own communities. Furthermore, there is not just a strong moral justification to assist children in parts of the world who do not benefit from the advantages citizens enjoy in wealthier nations; there is also a strong economic argument to be made. By giving children and young

people around the world greater opportunities and adequate rights from an early age, we help create more prosperous generations that will further advance the world and society into a brighter future.

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