FOOD INSECURITY, EDUCATION & CHILD WORK IN RURAL RAJASTHAN

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I.   INTRODUCTION:

Despite large stocks of food grains, there has been high incidence of malnutrition[1] in India. The high level of under-nourishment imperils women's health and increases the incidence of underweight births. This reflects in infants and young children being more susceptible to diseases and death, which is reflected in high incidence of IMR, stunting and wasting among the children, particularly in the rural areas. Thus, a large number of school age children are not able to concentrate on studies or do not go to school at all. All these manifest in the increasing vulnerability of the children to join work activities at an early age. Millions of children leave the school and get engaged in different kinds of jobs, which are often hazardous in nature.

Child work is a complex phenomenon. Officially in India, children in the age group of 5-14 years, who are engaged in production activities and services involving physical activities and/ or wage, cash or kind are called child workers. Contemporary literature and research, however, has established that children in the age group of 5-14 years, who are out of school, are vulnerable to become child workers. These children either engage in helping the household chores like looking after the younger siblings, collecting water, washing clothes etc. or in non-wage physical activities. Children in this category are defined as 'nowhere children'.

Most of the studies on child work include children in both the categories for the purpose of analysis. The programming implications of both the definitions are different. While the first one can be dealt with by enforcing the legislations on child labour, the second calls for a more holistic approach to the problem of child work.

The causes of child work are generally identified as lack of education among the children – low rate of enrolment and high drop out rate, malnutrition among the children and household poverty leading to inability to afford to send the children to the school. While poverty results in lack of purchasing power among the households, it makes them push their children to work at an early age to supplement the family income. In most of the cases, however, the children are pushed to work for helping the household chores (Burra – 1995). In the rural areas, these children, especially the girl children are engaged in cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, fetching water, etc.- whereby their mental and physical growth gets constrained. These children suffer from worse forms of deprivation and denial of basic necessities like education, health, food, shelter, physical protection, security and recreation. (ILO - 1995).

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[1] There are 208 million undernourished people in India (FAO 1999)

The attempt to link food insecurity as a major cause of child work is of recent origin. Very little literature is available investigating the link between the incidence of child work and food insecurity. The most important issue is to understand the implications of food insecurity at the community and household level and examine its implications on child work and education of the children. Furthermore, it is also important to understand food insecurity in its broader framework rather than considering it as a mere issue of availability or production of food grains.

Thus, the main objective of the paper is to analyze the level of food insecurity in Rajasthan, its spatial pattern across the districts in the state and to examine its implications on the incidence of child labour. Section-II presents the trends and patterns in the level of child labour and its linkages with food insecurity in Rajasthan. The second part of the section gives a macro overview of the level of food insecurity in state. Here, an attempt has also been made to identify the most food insecure districts in the state. This section is primarily based on secondary data and suggests the broad trends in the patterns of food insecurity vis-à-vis child labour. Section III presents the findings of a community level study which was undertaken in five districts of Rajasthan representing different agro-climatic and socio-economic zones of the state. Here an attempt has been made to understand the community level dynamics of food insecurity and their possible bearing on the incidence of child labour. The last section summarises the findings of the paper and delineates the possible policy interventions for food security for reducing the level of child work.

II. CHILD WORK AND FOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL RAJASTHAN:

### Trends and Patterns in Child Work in Rural Rajasthan:

As mentioned in the introductory section, the definition of child labour has been widely debated over the last four decades. For official purposes, children in the age group of 5-14 engaged in wage activities are considered as child workers. Researchers and policy makers however argue for inclusion of those who may not be engaged in wage activity but are out of school. These children are highly susceptible to become child labour and in literature, are defined as "nowhere children". Most of the official databases provide information on both the aspects of child labour. In this paper, we have considered both the categories of children for the purpose of analysis.

The multiplicity of definitions and methods of data collection have resulted in a number of estimates for the working children in the age group of 5-14 in Rajasthan. While the Census of India (1991) shows that 7.8% children were engaged in work activities[2] in the rural areas of Rajasthan, NSS[3] (1994) shows the figure to be 12.2%. The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) however reports a much lower incidence of 1.2% child labour for the rural areas which is much lower than the national average of 5.8%. The high divergence of the NCAER figures from the others is attributed to the relatively smaller size of the sample survey. Importantly, excepting NCAER all other data sources (Census – 1991,

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[2] Includes only the main and marginal workers; does not include the children in the non-workers category.

[3] Includes children in both principal and subsidiary status.

NSS – 1994, Zutsi – 2000) show the incidence of child labour in Rajasthan to be much higher than the national average. While the Census shows the incidence of child labour in Rajasthan to be 1 per cent higher than the national average, the NSS figure for Rajasthan is higher by about 6 per cent than the national average. This reveals the gravity of the problem of child labour in rural Rajasthan.

PERCENT CHILD WORK : DIFFERENT SOURCES
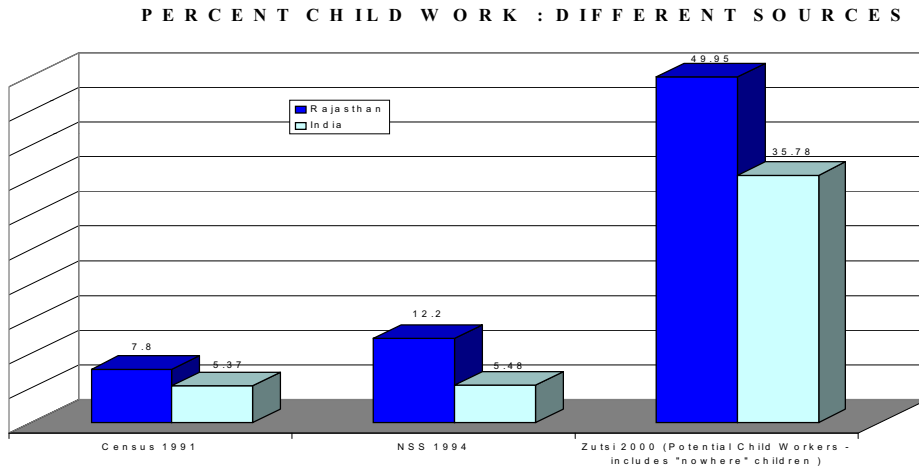
The provisional result of the 2001 Census is yet to come up with information on child labour. The project report on child labour prepared by Zutsi (sponsored by UNESCO - 2000), however, provides estimates of child labour for different states in India. The report provides an alarmingly high estimate of about 50% working and nowhere children in rural Rajasthan for the year 2000. This figure is much higher than the figure estimated for the country as a whole. This makes a case for special interventions for containing the growing incidence of child labour in the state. What is intriguing is that the incidence of child labour has gone up from 5.64% to 7.8% during 1981-91 (Census 1991) in rural Rajasthan. The increase is solely due to the increase in the work participation of the girl children. While the work participation rate of boys in the age group of 5-14 years has come down from 5.98% to 5.19%, the same for girls has gone up from 5.26% to 7.88% in the state during 1981-91. What is more disturbing is that there has been a steep increase in the already high percentage participation of girl children in work activities in the rural areas during the eighties. The figure has gone up from 6.38% in 1981 to 9.75% in 1991.

**WORK PARTICIPATION RATE
(CENSUS 1981 AND 1991)**
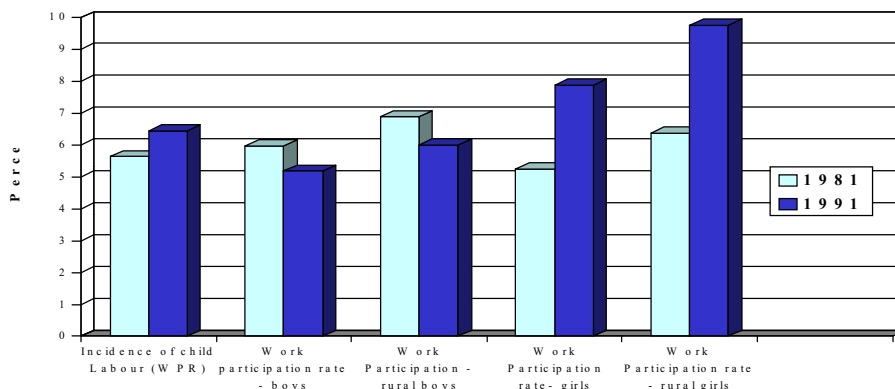
This clearly explains the plight of the girl children in the state and should receive the foremost attention among researchers, policy planners and the programme implementation agencies.

An analysis of the occupational structure in child work participation unravels more miseries of the girl children. Majority of the children in the rural Rajasthan is engaged in the farming sector. The work participation of the girl children is higher than the boys in this sector. Also, the WPR much higher for boys than girls in the hazardous industries like manufacturing and related activities. Specifically, the percentage of girl children working in the hazardous glass industry is much higher than that of boys.

The incidence of "nowhere children" in the state is much higher than the national average. While about 50% of the children in the country are out of school but are not engaged in paid activities, the figure for the state is about 60%. Here too, the percentage of girl children in the age group of 5-14 years who are not attending school is 66%, much higher than the figure for boys in the same age group. This gives a partial explanation of the relatively high incidence of girl child labour in the state.

All these reflect in the low educational indicators for the state. A comparison of the educational indicators for the state and the country as a whole reveals that the drop-out rates for the state is 55.6%, which is among the worst in the country. This could be explained in terms of the low levels of female literacy in the state. Female literacy in the state is a dismal 20% as compared to the national average of 40%. The average performance in the enrolment rate of the state is off-set by the high drop-out rates. To reap the results of the relatively better performance in enrolment, the state must improve the retention rates.

E D U C A T I O N A L   I N D I C A T O R S
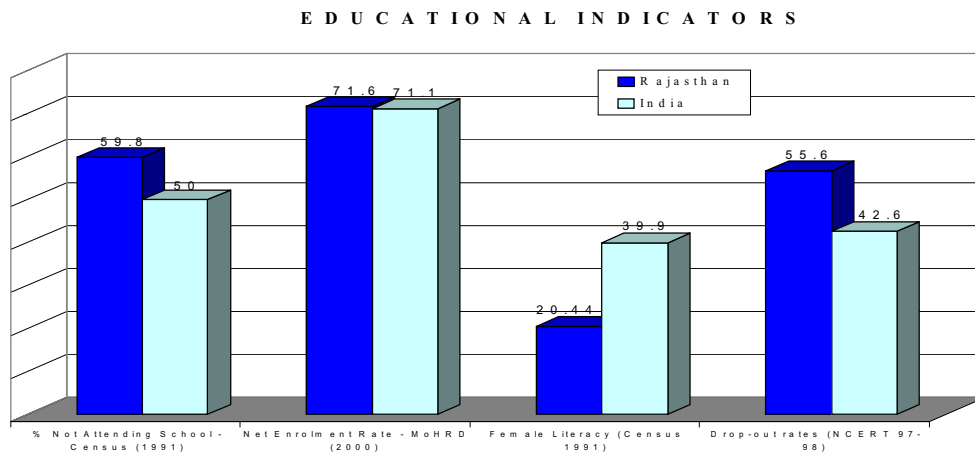
The district level scenario of child labour is more disturbing. The incidence of child labour is not uniform across the districts and there is high disparity in its spatial distribution. The child work map of Rajasthan given below clearly shows clustering in the incidence of child labour in a corridor between the southern and northern parts of the state, the southern part stretching a bit towards the west covering three districts like Barmer, Jalore and Sirohi.

Importantly, the north-arid region, which is highly fertile and is marked by higher agricultural production shows a higher incidence of child labour than the other agro-climatic regions of the state. Five of the seven districts in this region fall in the extreme and high categories of child work. Higher inter-district migration and linked agricultural bonded labour[4] in the region (VAM-WFP - 2000) could be the main reason for such a spatial pattern of child labour.

Work Participation Rate – Census (1991)

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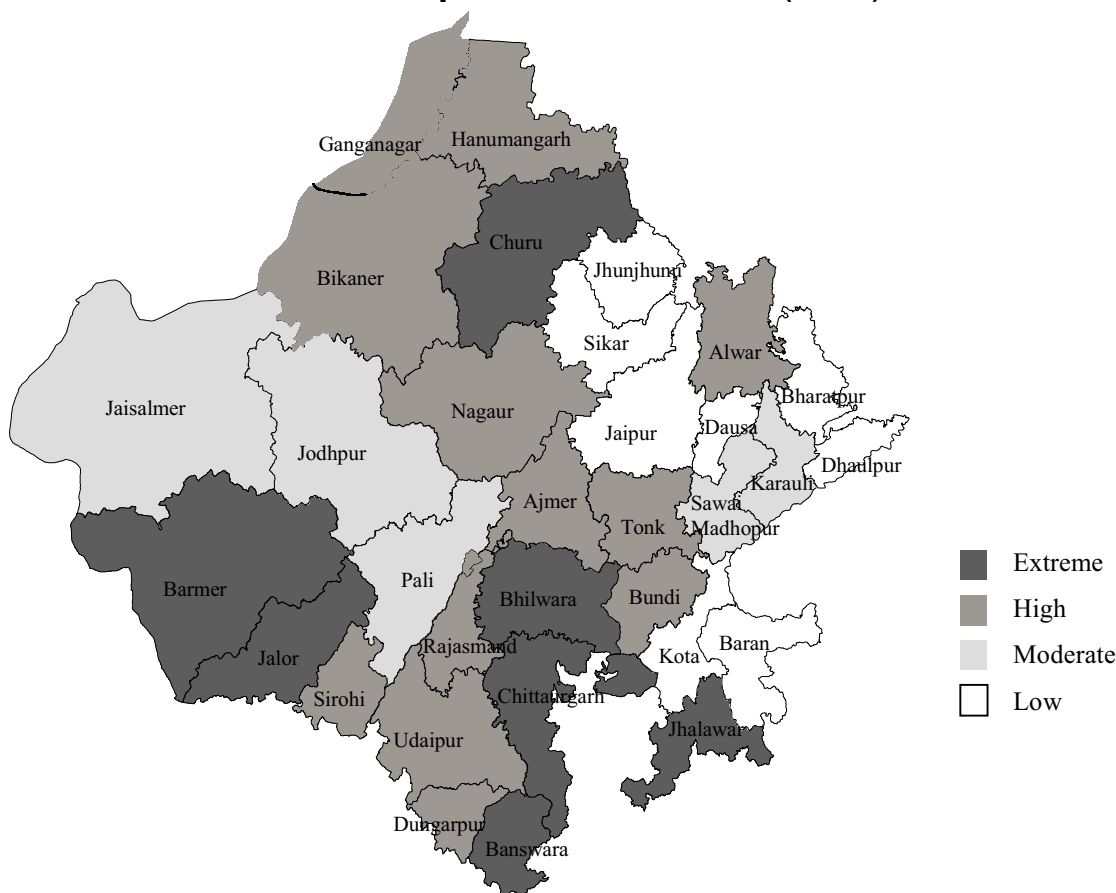
[4] In most of the cases the families migrate with the children to the areas with higher agricultural activities within the state.

The other two regions showing higher incidence of child labour are Southern Aravali Range and Southern Banas-Chambal Range, where there is high concentration of textile and carpet industries. Most of the districts in these ranges bear high incidence of child labour and fall in the extreme or high categories in the child work map of the state.

This implies that because of the lack of adequate employment opportunities or availability of low paid agricultural activities, family income is not able to support the households' requirements. Further, because of differential pattern of growth and the concentration of economic activities in certain regions, there has been large scale inter district migration. When the families migrate during lean season or for a part of the year, the children miss their schools and tend to join hands with their parents at work. Further, even if the children do not migrate with their parents, because of the high opportunity cost involved, children are not sent to the schools and are assigned the duty of taking care of the household activities.

The causes of child work could be seen from two perspectives - low household income trap and suitability of children in some of the production activities. Because of the low family income among the most vulnerable households in the rural areas, children in these families are compelled to engage in economic activities to supplement the family income. Secondly, there are certain production activities like crafts and related production activities (such as carpet and bangle industries) where the hands of the children are more suitable for enhancing productivity. The incidence of such kinds of cases is much higher in Rajasthan than compared to other states because of large number of carpet industries in the state (FIVP, Rajasthan – WFP 2000). The major factor behind child labour, however, is household poverty and non-affordability of the households in meeting their food and calories intake requirements, which is responsible for pushing the children to work even for a lower wage.

Food Insecurity and Child Labour : The Interrelationship

The performance of Rajasthan on all the nutritional indicators is amongst the worst in the country and is lower than the national average. Approximately half of the children (50.6%) are underweight which is four per cent higher than the all India figure. As high as 52%


RAJASTHAN - KEY NUTRITIONAL INDICATORS (NFHS 98-99)
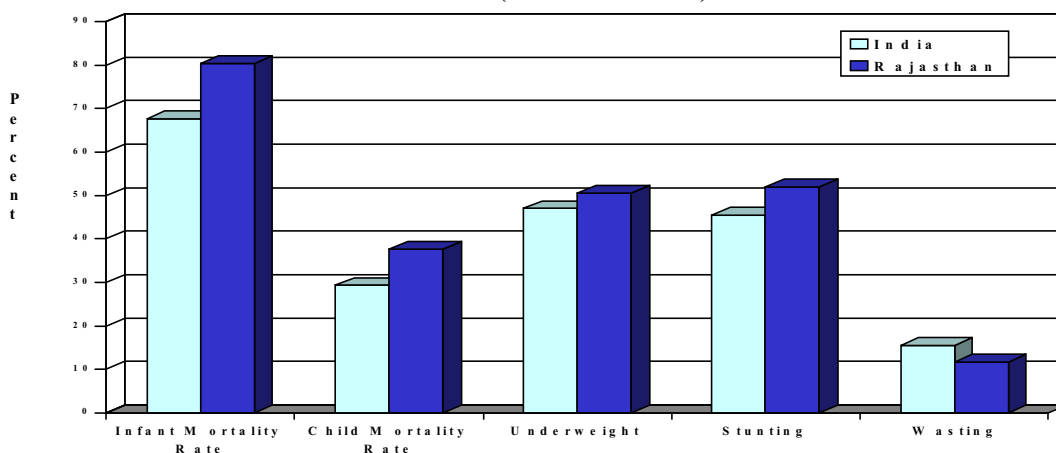
children in the state are stunted[5] against the national average of 45.5%. All these have obvious implications for the capability of the children to attend schools and concentrate on their studies.

In a recent effort, WFP has brought out the Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India in a joint collaboration with the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation of Chennai. The atlas has identified four principal interacting dimensions of food security. These are problem of Availability, Access and Utilization of food and Vulnerability to natural disasters like drought, flood, earthquake, etc. All these dimensions of food insecurity reveal that Rajasthan is one of the severely food insecure states next to Bihar in the country.

Degree of Food Insecurity in Rural Rajasthan
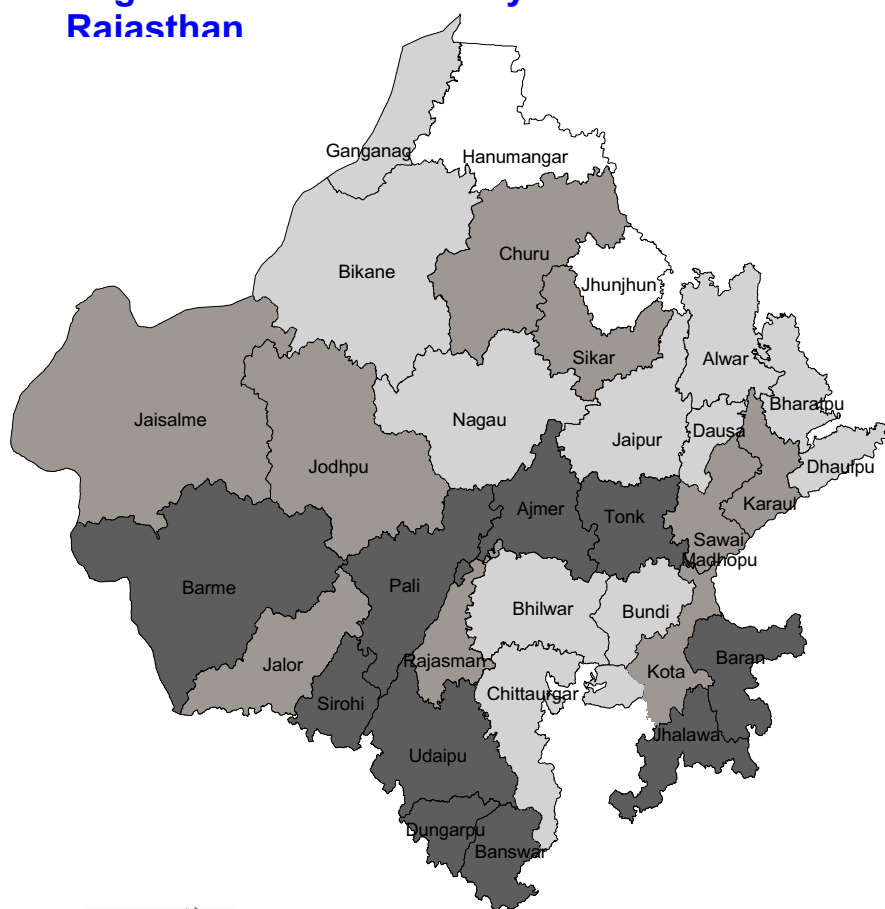
Indicators for Food Insecurity Index of Rajasthan:

1. Pop. Supported by cereal production
2. Seasonality
3. Safety nets
4. Cattle/crop loss
5. Disaster proneness
6. Population below poverty line
7. SC/ST population
8. Net out migration
9. Illiteracy
10. Agricultural labourer
11. Working children
12. Gender disparity in literacy
13. IMR, CMR
14. Sex ratio
15. Gender disparity in IMR & CMR
16. Malnutrition
17. Population supported by anganwadis

World Food Programme , India / ROBINS

Composite Index
Broad

Extreme
High
Moderate
Low

WFP has also prepared a Food Insecurity Map of Rural Rajasthan considering all the indicators[6] of food insecurity for which data are available (see Appendix-1 for preparation of

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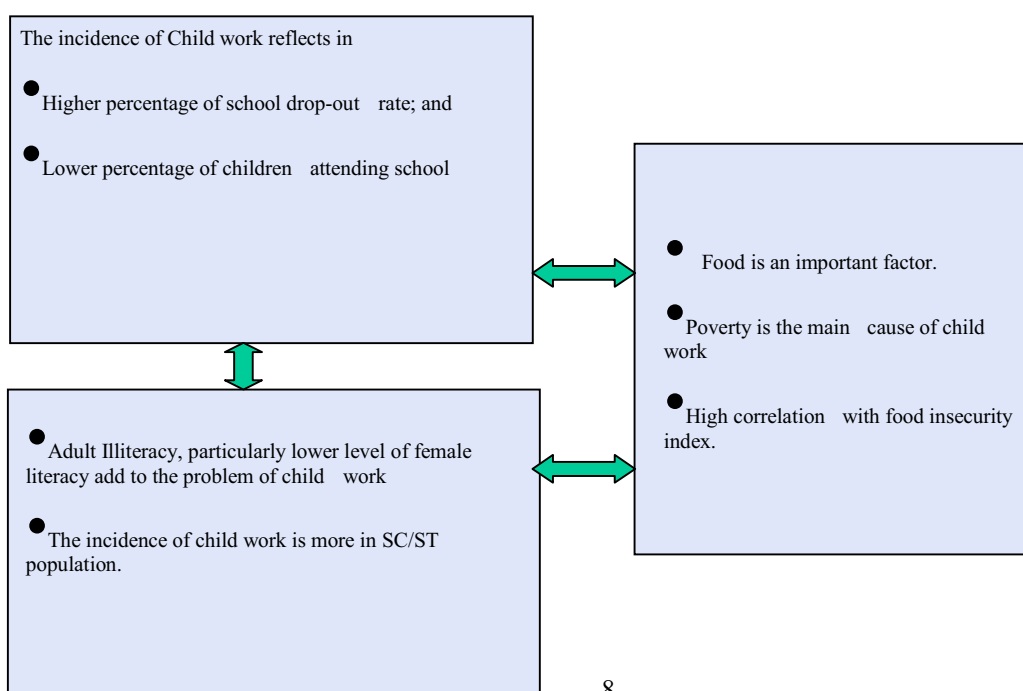[5] Both moderately and Severely stunted children have been considered in the analysis.

[6] The food insecurity indicators are those suggested in the Food Insecurity Atlas of India.

Composite Index). The map portrays the most food insecure districts in 4 typologies viz. 'extreme', 'high', 'moderate' and 'low' food insecure districts. In the map, one can see that there are as many as 10 extremely food insecure districts and 5 highly food insecure districts. It is important to note here that there is a marked overlap between the different typologies in the map for child work and food insecurity in Rajasthan. However, unlike the mid-way corridor in the child work map, the food insecurity map of the state is mostly concentrated around the south and south-west districts like Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur, Sirohi, Jalore, Barmer, Jaisalmer, and Pali and the south-eastern districts like Bara, Jhalawar, Kota, Madhopur, Karauli, Tonk and Ajmer. The exceptions in the south east are Bhilwara, Chittaurgarh and Bundi, where food security and child labour are co-existent. Probably this is because of the large existence of textile and carpet industries in these districts.

Thus, excepting the northern arid plain region, all other regions have marked overlap with the child work map of Rajasthan. Perhaps this is because it receives a number of migrant labourers due to relatively better agricultural assets and higher level of farming activities in the region, (VAM-WFP – 2000). These farmers migrate with their families including the children. As a result, the participation of children in this area is high.

Notwithstanding the relatively diversified locations of child labour vis-à-vis food insecurity in the state, the above analysis reveals that there is significant overlap between the two indicators. This could be confirmed from the fact that child labour shows high and significant correlation with many of the food insecurity indicators. Important among them are percentage of people below the poverty line, illiteracy, seasonality, sex ratio and cattle and crop loss. Importantly, the correlation between child labour and the food insecurity index is also positive and significant. All these bring out a clear link between the level of food insecurity and child labour.

Food Insecurity and Child Work: The Conceptual Links

The incidence of Child work reflects in

- Higher percentage of school drop-out rate; and

- Lower percentage of children attending school

- Food is an important factor.

- Poverty is the main cause of child work

- High correlation with food insecurity index.

- Adult Illiteracy, particularly lower level of female literacy add to the problem of child work

- The incidence of child work is more in SC/ST population.

III.   FOOD INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS AND CHILD LABOUR : THE COMMUNITY LEVEL STUDY :

The present section tries to understand the dynamics of community and household level issues of food insecurity and child labour in rural Rajasthan. A community level study was undertaken jointly by the World Food Programme, CRS and SCF(UK) in 5 districts of Rajasthan, viz. Ajmer, Baran, Barmer, Banswara and Churu, representing different agro-ecological and socio-economic divisions[7] of the state, during October-November 2000. The study was based on focussed group discussions followed by house-listing and collected mainly qualitative information on food security dynamics of the communities. The findings of the study present interesting revelations regarding the community perceptions of food security and their implications for child labour. In the presentation, all the children who are not attending school have been considered as "child workers".

The study revealed that of the five study districts, three districts viz. Barmer, Banswara and Churu have high incidence of child workers. More than 50% of the children in these districts do not go to the school, of which more than 20% of the children are engaged in economic wage activities which is hazardous to their health. Although in Ajmer the percentage of children engaged in work activities in the rural areas is lower than the other three districts, it is still alarming at around 10%.

The study revealed that illiteracy in general and socio-economic factors in particular are the major determinants of child work. Because of cultural reasons, female literacy is much lower in all the study districts. This reflects the passive attitude of the community towards the education of the girl children. The discrimination against the girl children starts right from the birth. At the household level, boys are treated more favourably than the girls in food distribution and education. The mothers start teaching the management of household works like washing clothes, cleaning the house, collecting water, taking care of the younger siblings, collection of fodder and fuel wood, etc. to the girls at an early age, as a matter of cultural practice. As a result, in most of the cases children, particularly the girls, stay back at home[8] and later on engage in wage activities. Apart from helping the household chores, girls also engage in embroidery work and agricultural activities in most of the studied villages. This also partially explains the higher incidence of child marriage in these regions. Such practices are more prevalent among the SC/ST communities.

Further, as a result of the lack of demand for schooling, particularly at the middle and higher level, and lack of social consciousness, the availability of schooling facilities are meagre. One could see the high incidence of child labour in the districts where most or all of the study villages do not have middle level schools. In the studies villages of Banswara, Churu and Barmer no middle school was found. As a result, enrolment at this level of schooling is very

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[7] The state was divided into five agro-ecological and socio-economic zones viz. Northern Arid Plain, Northern Aravali Range, Southern Arid Plain, Southern Aravali Range and the Banas-Chambal Range. This geographical classification, by and large overlaps with the National Sample Survey sub-regions in the state.
[8] The school drop-out rate among the children is high in the studied villages. For example, the average drop-out rates in the villages surveyed in Banswara is 77%, much higher than the national as well as Rajasthan average.

low. The children are thus compelled to stay back home or go to an alternative place for earning. The incidence of both working and nowhere children in these districts is high.

Nonetheless, the most important factors governing the low enrolment rates, and the high incidence of child labour and nowhere children are poverty and household food insecurity which are mainly the outcomes of high seasonality in agricultural activities in the studied districts in particular and Rajasthan in general. It was found that child work is more prevalent among households below the poverty line. The study reveals a positive correlation between the number of food insecure households (see Appendix for the food definition of insecure households) and incidence of child work. The small income from the younger members of the households significantly supplements the household income. Children in the below poverty line households are usually not enrolled in the schools or if enrolled, do not attend the classes because of the high opportunity cost involved in going to the school.

Seasonality in agricultural activities and migration thereof has an important bearing on the incidence of child work. Needless to say, seasonality has a very strong influence on food security in Rajasthan. Rajasthan has been witnessing droughts for three consecutive years and this has had implications on economic wellbeing of the community. Many families are forced to migrate with entire family including children. Most of the labour households in Barmer and Banswara reported migrating with families during the lean seasons to the north arid and Banas-Chambal regions, where the agricultural and economic activities are higher. This disrupts education of children in the mid of the year. Children who migrate with their parents, work at very low wages. Some are even forced into begging by their parents. The recurring nature of poverty and food insecurity has forced the children into activities like animal rearing and fodder collection as also in farming activities like harvesting, weeding, grass cutting in most of the studies villages, even during years of normal monsoon.

Therefore, there is an immediate need to work out suitable policy programming to curb the incidence of child labour in the state. Since the factors influencing child work concern multiple but interlinked dimensions, the programmes for its alleviation need to take an integrated and holistic approach to tackle the issue.

IV.   CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Both secondary and community level analysis in the preceding sections reveal that child work is a multi-dimensional issue and involves a number of socio-economic and cultural factors. It is not only the lack in the availability of schooling facilities but also a shortage of demand for such facilities which multiplies the problem of child labour. The shortage of demand for schooling or to put it in other words, the low enrolment and high drop-out rates in the primary and middle level schools makes the children vulnerable to become child labour. This could be attributed to cultural factors like passive attitude towards female literacy/ education of girls, seasonal factors like uncertain monsoon and loss of productivity and socio-economic factors like household poverty and food insecurity. Child labour is thus a vicious cycle of a number of intertwined dimensions.

Any attempt to reduce or eliminate child labour requires a holistic approach to break the vicious cycle. The issue could be tackled through two strategies: first, strengthening the

education system to improve the rate of retention and to reduce down the school drop-out rate; second, to provide sustainable livelihoods to the households who are below the poverty line and are vulnerable to child labour.

The former could be achieved by providing sustainable training and organising awareness camps imparting the values of sending the children to the school as also on the hazards of child work on the mental and physical development of the children. Here efforts should be paced by the government and non-governmental organisations working for the cause of nowhere and working children to ensure wider coverage of primary schools by providing other inputs like books, education kits etc. Special emphasis needs to be placed for providing education to the children who migrate with their parents.

Further, food could play an important role in the interventions for enhancing the rate of school attendance among the children. It would therefore be important to provide support to the children at schools through effective implementation of schemes like mid-day-meals, morning snacks etc. Further, for the children who have not attended the school going age should also be provided education and free meals so that they maintain a minimum physical standard to be able to concentrate on their studies when they go to the school. It would therefore be important to link up the existing ICDS programme with nursery level education and extending it to all parts of the state. The ICDS could also act as a creche ao that older siblings can attend school. For this to happen, the timing of ICDS centres should be same as that of schools.

However, the educational and nutritional support programmes would succeed only when the opportunity cost of sending the children to the school is substantially low or zero in the poor households. It would therefore be important to break the cycle of poverty and food insecurity to make a dent on the level of child labour. This requires providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to members of the households below the poverty line. Ensuring sustainable returns from agriculture by minimising effects of drought through effective watershed management would be critical for the agricultural economy of Rajasthan. This could also be achieved by developing rural community asset building and watershed management to reduce the impact of seasonality and enhance the productive capacity of the regions, which could check forced migration. Further, during drought years, timely relief work will help in checking migration. This could also make a significant dent on education and child work.

Since livestock and animal husbandry is one of the important means of livelihood in rural Rajasthan, particularly among the food insecure households, development of pasture land and improved watershed management would help strengthen their livelihood security. Also, better infrastructure and cooperation for the production and marketing of animal products will go a long way in enhancing the incomes of the food insecure households. Building up of effective partnerships with the local level NGOs, CBOs and the communities at large will help harnessing the experiences and needs at the local level for better programming and targeting of the programmes.

Appendix – 1

The composite food insecurity map of rural Rajasthan considered 17 food insecurity indicators, covering all the dimensions of food insecurity. Most of these indicators were considered in the Food Insecurity Atlas of Rural India (FIARI). However, all the indicators suggested in the FIARI could not be considered in the Food Insecurity Atlas of Rajasthan because of non-availability of district level data for many of the indicators.

Indicators:

1. Number of persons supported per ton of cereal production per annum
2. Seasonality in Cereals Production
3. Availability of safety nets for food security
4. Total loss of Cattle/crop loss; such losses are higher during the drought years
5. Proneness to disasters like drought, flood, earthquake etc.
6. Percentage of people below the Poverty Line
7. Percentage of SC and ST population
8. Net out migration from the state to other states
9. Rate of Illiteracy (100-Rate of literacy)
10. Percentage of Agricultural Labourer
11. Percentage of children engaged in work activities
12. Gender disparity in the rate of literacy
13. Infant Mortality Rate, Child Mortality Rate
14. Sex Ratio
15. Gender Disparity in IMR & CMR
16. Malnutrition among the children below the age of 5 years
17. Number of People supported per Anganwadi Centre

Methodology:

The method of constructing the composite food insecurity indices involved the following steps;

a) Since, individual indicators chosen for working out vulnerability indices are measured in different units, the division by mean method has been used to convert the indicators into indices. This makes them scale-free and comaparable.
b) The composite food insecurity index has been arrived at by taking the average of the food insecurity indices for the districts
c) The values of the average ranks were then distributed into different classes (using the natural breaks to arrive at the typologies of food insecurity, viz. 'Extreme', 'High', 'Moderate' and 'Low' food insecure categories.
d) These categories were then translated into food insecurity map of rural Rajasthan putting the districts in different typologies to different sheds of the red colour.

Appendix – 2

Identification of Food Insecure Households for the Village level Community Study:

The identification of the Food Insecure/ vulnerable Households/ groups was based on two modules;

1) a household listing to collect information on socio-economic characteristics of the households in the sampled communities, and

2) a vulnerability ranking to distribute the entire community across four groups according to their food security base.

The ranking or grouping of households was conducted according to the following definitions;

Group I: Households which can obtain sufficient food for themselves in normal times without assistance (gift/loan) and who may actually be able to provide (gift/loan) assistance to others.

Group II: Households which can obtain sufficient food for themselves in normal times without assistance (gift/loan) but who can not provide (gift/loan) assistance to others.

Group III: Households which can obtain sufficient food for themselves in normal times with or without assistance (gift/loan) from others (including food aid)

Group IV: Households which can not obtain sufficient food for themselves in normal times without assistance (gift/loan) from others (including food aid)

In the paper, households in Group III and IV have been considered as food insecure.

Appendix – 3:

Classification of Districts into different Agro-climatic and Socio-ecological regions:

North Arid Plain:	Ganganagar, Bikaner, Nagaur, Sikar, Jhunjhunam, Hanumangarh and Churu
North Aravali Range:	Alwar, Dausa, Jaipur and Ajmer
Southern Arid Plain:	Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jalore, Pali and Jodhpur
Southern Aravali Range:	Sirohi, Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Chittaurgarh and Rajsamund
Banas-Chambal Range:	Bhilwara, Bundi, Kota, Jhalawar, Bara, Sawai-Madhepur, Tonk, Karaul, Dhaulpur and Bharatpur

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