Chapter VI
The study on the subject of child labour leads to the conclusion that it is a complex, multidimensional problem. Child labour in India poses a challenge both to economic planners and policy-makers. In the absence of a consensus in definition, the qualitative dimension of the problem is anybody's guess. The widely varied estimates make planning exercise futile. There is an urgent need for consensus on the definition of child labour/worker.

A child worker is not a monolithic category. Not only does the nature of activities vary widely, the intensity of activities also have a wide range. The developmental problem of children living with parents and those living alone on the streets are also quite different. All these differences necessitate different approaches, methodology, strategies for providing different development programmes to different groups of workers.

There has been an almost universal tendency in the literature to use the terms child work and child labour almost inter-changeably as if they are synonymous. In fact, child labour is a part of child work, denoting that work which is exploitative of the child. Child work become child labour when it threatens the health and development of children. It is child labour, and not child work, that one is trying to root out. After all, child work can be a positive experience and, in the best circumstances, the work carried out by children can prepare them for productive adult life. Throughout their work, they gain increasing status as family members and citizens. They learn the skills of their parents and neighbours. Therefore, children's work can be an integral part of family life and contribute to their healthy development. It builds their confidence and self-esteem. Child work is then regarded as a painless and gradual initiation into adult life. Child work in paid-wage employment outside the family has increased as children are forced to work for their own and their families survival. This qualitative change in child work has opened up more opportunities for exploitation. All work is not harmful for children. Some types of activities under regulated conditions have positive effects for the child and for society. Work experience of the right sort can be a means of acquiring skills, of learning responsibility, of becoming a full member of the community, in short, a valuable part of growing up. Child work is not only a response to economic processes, it also reflects the culturally determined roles and functions of children, the values by which the activities of children are judged, and the nature of the socialization process.
Child labour remains a seriously neglected issue in relation to the magnitude of the problem and though the study of child labour is hampered by several particular research problems, the real constraint lies in the universal perception of it as a low-priority concern. Although its extent and nature vary among countries and regions, child labour remains a widespread phenomenon. The magnitude of the problem, especially in developing countries is great and the task of attacking it is urgent.

What gives cause for concern is work that places too heavy a burden on the child; work that endangers his safety, health or welfare; work that takes advantage of the defenselessness of the child; work that exploits the child as a cheap substitute for adult labour; work that uses the child's effort but does nothing for his development; work that impedes the child's education or training and thus damages his future. Child labour of this kind must be the target of national and international action.

In the present work, an attempt had been made to study various facets of child labour. Children have been defined here as those in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Child labour is defined as that form of work a child is engaged in which is hazardous and harmful to the growth and development of the child. A child employed for others or self-employed contributing to family enterprise, domestic work, cultivation or who works as apprentice acquiring skills on the job would also be considered as child labour. After having reviewed the studies in the area, a further attempt was made to find out their pre-work life and socio-educational life patterns, to locate factors leading them to accept employment and, to identify their socio-economic and family background.

Child labourers are increasing in numbers day by day despite various strategies evolved and implemented to curb child labour in India. Child labour weakens the human resource of the country and creates in the future a mass of people who are not even sufficiently productive as to earn enough to keep themselves out of poverty. Poverty stricken families encourage children to work in order to supplement their family income. Severe parental control and ill-treatment by step-parents plagues the normal growth of the children and forces them to run away from home. Metropolis like Chennai witnesses these runaways who eventually form the child workers brigade. In Chennai City, 37.4 percent of children had runaway from their homes due to lack of parental care and affection. They cannot count on their families for support. They must rely on their own efforts.

No one can deny that child workers who make up the largest segments of child population and their hard labour significantly contributes to the national income of the country. Yet ironically they are denied of the basic right to health care, protection, shelter, nutritious food etc. Only those working children who fall within the areas where the NGO have taken up their projects have been benefitted by their welfare measures. Those working children who are not covered by the NGOs are not benefitted by the welfare activities.
For many children in the developing world the chances of receiving serious education and training are minimal. The direct and indirect costs are prohibitive and, perhaps the relevance and practical value of the education offered are doubted by parents and the children themselves. In Chennai City, 28.3 percent had never been to school, 56.6 percent have dropped out from school very early and 15.1 percent have attended school but only sporadically and without drawing much benefit. In these circumstances, the alternative to work is idleness, begging or crime. Measures taken to improve the economic and social condition in isolation and especially in the absence of alternatives to work may be harmful.

A close look at the issue of child labour prove that child labour is a social crime and many social factors significantly contribute to 'child labour': Drop-outs at primary school-level are of one such potential group that invariably contribute to the rapid growth of child labourers. Studies on the incidence of child labour surfaces that, there is 36 percent of drop-outs at primary level who eventually turnout to be child labourers. The social activists and the organisations involved in the elimination of child labour hold the view that, child labour can be eradicated by making education compulsory or universalization of education. But the survey conducted for the study in Chennai City, revealed that 46.9 percent of children are not interested in studying and if education is made compulsory it will have serious repercussions, because anything that is forced or compelled on children would not have any impact or the desired effect. Further, there is every possibility of children indulging in anti-social activities. It is also revealed from the survey that, the parents of working children are more interested in sending their wards to work rather than to school. So, any effort taken to make education compulsory for children, should first get the co-operation of the parents before initiating any changes in the educational curriculum. The survey confirmed widespread illiteracy among the working children and their parents. 28.3 and 71.7 percent of the working children and their parents are illiterate, 56.6 and 13.7 percent of literate children and parents had not even reached the primary level of education and 15.1 and 3.4 percent of them passed the primary class but did not complete the middle education. Moreover, the parents did not give importance to education of their children because they think education to be purely academic and inappropriate to their life needs. A substantial proportion 18.1 percent of children who were not going to school reported that they were not sent by their parents and another 52.9 percent reported that, they never liked the school education system. 21.0 percent reported that their teachers beat them for no fault of theirs and 9.1 percent wanted to learn the nuances of the work. The fact that child workers are least interested in studies is revealed by the way they express their hard feelings and bitter experiences of their school life. They strongly objected to corporal punishment, ill-treatment and abusive language in front of other children. Negative approach adapted to change the behavioural patterns of children in the guise of discipline might not produce desired results; hence the approach and strategy should be changed.
Several factors play an important role in determining child labour, the educational level of parents being one of them. It is revealed from the analysis that, mother's education play an significant role in child's education. The parents with high literacy level give priority to education of their children whereas illiterate parents do not understand the importance of education in improving the lot of their children. Child labour cannot be eradicated or eliminated. It can only be controlled. Child labour can be controlled by eradicating illiteracy among their parents. The uneducated parents fail to appreciate the role of child education as a key status raiser. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that parents are made education conscious through a greater emphasis on the adult education programme. The literacy drive should instill values and progressive ideas in the minds of parents who should be made to realise the perils of legitimizing that child labour is an exploitative social system. Parents of the working children need to be educated about the horror their children face even if it means implanting a sense of uncomfortable guilt in their minds.

In a number of cases, even if the facilities exist for children to attain their education, the children fail to take advantage of them because they and their parents hardly see any practical value in attending school and sacrificing immediate income. Many view school education as a futile theoretical and academic exercise, which is not adapted to the life of the poor people. Hence, education should be imparted with elements of local needs, including pre-vocational training. Starting from the elementary classes, vocational training should be given to children to train them in some productive work not under the exploitative conditions but as socialization process, in the best possible circumstances. This kind of training would generate a feeling of dignity of labour and enable children to find a job after attaining certain skill to earn higher wages and make a better life. Making vocational training a part of the school curriculum would add life to the dull atmosphere of theoretical knowledge and enhance the development of child through the addition of skills.

For children who are not interested in studies, there should be apprenticeship programmes through vocational training institutes, which could retain children by providing them skilled training as well as mid-day meals, free dresses etc. While providing vocational training the authorities should make sure that the vocation offered should be suitable in such areas like agriculture, social forestry, poultry farming, animal husbandry, horticulture and repairs like two wheeler and four wheeler etc. These sort of training if properly conducted would not only upgrade the skills in traditional vocations, but would also create new venues of employment and self-employment of such children.

Orphanage is another factor which plays an important role in pushing children in to the labour force at an early age. 37.4 percent of working children in Chennai City have no family contacts and live at the mercy of others, who instead of providing them protection
try to exploit them in every possible way. The welfare measures provided by the NGOs and social welfare institutions should benefit these working children than the children who stay with their parents. This means that priority should be given to orphaned working children.

Housing is an important welfare measure necessary for the improvement of health and efficiency of the child workers. This is important for child workers because they should be properly housed to grow up as healthy citizens and contribute to the economic prosperity of the country. Lack of proper housing facilities lead to the impairment of the healthy growth of children and drag them to join the group of undesirable elements leading to anti-social and delinquent behaviours. Most of the child workers in Chennai City stay with their parents in unhealthy conditions, devoid of basic arrangement for sanitation, water supply, lighting arrangements etc. resulting in their unhealthy development. Though the Slum Clearance Board provide them with housing, the parents of these working children dispose their house or rent it out and encroach on available vacant land. The NGOs can play a crucial role in creating awareness on the importance of housing to the parents of child workers. Efforts should also be made to provide housing facilities with necessary basic amenities for children working in informal sector and particularly in those areas having predominate population of child workers.

A wide variation was observed in the income distribution of child workers. The earnings of children in self-employment and family labour depend purely on the nature and place of work and the amount of labour put in. The rag-pickers who work for more than 8 hours a day get a monthly income of Rs. 600-700. 39.4 percent of children give part of their wages to their parents and inturn get some pocket allowances to meet their day-to-day expense for entertainment. The children working for wages are provided tea, food and shelter by the employer. The latter is provided only to children working in hotels and as sundal vendors.

Mushrooming of small and large industries in North Chennai is another factor that has contributed to producing child labourers in that part of the city. Vyasarpadi, Kodungaiyur, Walltax Road have the highest child labour population, followed by Egmore, Park Town, Parrys and Santhome area. Very few children are found working in Choolai, Kilpauk, Kodambakkam, Virugambakkam, Greams Road and Chetpet due to fewer slums. The highest number of children are found working in Zone X due to their self-employed nature of work and very few children are found working in Zone VIII.

Some occupations are considered gender-specific like metal work and polishing, mechanic work, sundal vendors, hotels and domestic work. Others like wooden-box making, collecting plastic cups and hairs and prawn processing are area specific. The dis-integration
of the joint family system and acceptance of small family norm are evident among the child workers family. It is revealed from the survey that 58.7 percent are medium in size with four to six members and 14.3 percent have upto three members.

It is revealed that, family environment is the main cause for 54.0 percent of children opting to work. For those children, who were idling away their time, their parents forced them to work because they felt that the job disciplines the child and protects him against vagrancy and delinquency. Though there are some advantage of child labour the negative effects outweigh the positive ones.

Early employment retards the physical and mental development of a child. The lack of education restricts his vision of society and he cannot see beyond the narrow limits of the occupation he is engaged in. He loses his confidence, his ambitions remain low and he does not aspire to reach even a mediocre position in the labour market and in this present socio-economic circumstances the proposal of complete abolition of child labour from the country or ban on child labour does not seem to be viable. The economic independence at an early age makes a child pseudo-mature. To differentiate himself from the non-working children and to assimilate in the adult world he develops certain bad habits such as smoking, gambling, drug-addiction etc. Under the spell of these habits he spends less money on his food and more on those anti-social activities. The strain of work and inadequate nutritional intake put a negative effect on his healthy development. Working children in Chennai City suffer from the incidence of malnutrition and under-nourishment. The hazards that they face in Chennai, is not due to the nature of occupation as to the special vulnerability of the child worker. Occupation such as domestic labour, children working in dhabas and street vending children fall prey to abusive and violent adults or even forced to engage in immoral or illegal activities.

Any action-plan framed for the welfare of the children by the concerned authorities should consider the following facts: what is the average expectation of a poor Indian family from a child; socio-economic structure of the area where from the child hails; The present employment and self-employment facilities available in urban areas; The present system of elementary and secondary education and facilities for vocational guidance or orientation and training; and the plan period programmes for such activities. When it comes to implementing these vocational training for skill development and skill upgradation, it is necessary to know how much the NGOs could contribute inspite of the haphazard infrastructure and limited resources at their command. One should not ignore their role simply because they might not represent any formal governmental structure in the country.
Since it is difficult to organise the unorganized sector as they are spread all over the country, a single policy prescription cannot be applied to the whole range of unorganized labour. The group is too large and too amorphous to be treated as a single category. It therefore necessitates a wide variation of policy measures for each sub-category. It is not possible for the government to adopt similar prescriptions for artisans, workers illegally manufacturing fire works, sellers of basic food stuffs and other items etc. The legislative approach is not sufficient to combat child labour. The coverage is limited and many national laws tend to exclude the informal sector where most children work. Legislation can also unintentionally make the situation worse, by driving child labour underground into the mushrooming unregulated sector, where detection and therefore protection are more difficult. It is therefore important to ensure that legislation is complemented by other reinforcing and complementary measures.

A multiple policy approach is necessary in dealing with the problem of working children. They have to be seen distinctly in the categories of wage earning employment as, paid family workers; as apprentices in traditional crafts and as working and school going children. Each specific category has its own peculiar problems which need to be attended to comprehensively.

Legal sanctions are also not stringent enough to act as a deterrent, as the action against the employers for employing these children is not imprisonment but fines which are low in relation to their income. Law alone cannot solve the problem of child workers in the informal sector. There should be an organization or association created to highlight their problems and grievances.

Regarding the recent supreme court judgement on the working hours of children in non-hazardous jobs should not be more than 4 to 6 hours a day and that it should receive at least 2 hours of education each day with the cost of such education to be borne by the employer is good and benefits the children. But the judgement gives the opinion that child labour can be practiced in non-hazardous industries and only the working time of the child should be reduced.

It has also given the Government a practical way to demonstrate to the world community that it is doing something about the problem. This is particularly fortuitous at a time when the Indian Government, among others, is coming under increasing pressure from industrialised nations to deal with such labour practices.

The Supreme Court judgement and UNICEF report highlight crucial aspects of the debate on how the practice of making children work can be stopped. The judgement, which
is path-breaking in many ways, is limited in scope because it confines itself to implementation of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986. The Act has loopholes that have been the subject of extensive discussion. For instance, even though it does have a schedule of hazardous industries in which no children should be employed, it does not deal with working children in whole range of other occupations which cannot be specified as hazardous.

The court suggests that factory inspectors visit establishments employing children and ensure that the provisions of the Act are implemented. They are given ever-increasing tasks, from monitoring compliance of environmental laws to those dealing with occupational hazards and child labour. Yet, at a practical level, their word carries little clout. To expect such a cadre of individuals to be in the vanguard of implementing a difficult law is clearly not realistic.

However, the most positive aspect of the ruling is the practical suggestions it makes about dealing with those using children in hazardous industries. The court directed that those who employed children should contribute Rs. 20,000 per child to a corpus which will then help pay for the child education. In addition, employer must either employ an adult member of the child’s family or pay an additional Rs. 5000 as compensation to the family for the loss of an earning member. Such a corpus, if the amount could ever be collected, would form the foundation of a rehabilitation scheme for children in a number of industries such as carpet-weaving and glass work.

Taking into consideration of the various methods or strategies adopted by government, NGOs and other institutions to end child labour in hazardous industries by the year 2000 it is doubtful whether the stated objective of the government of ending child labour in hazardous industries by the year 2000 would be achieved and also it is doubtful of how the country would deal with such a vast problem of child labour in other occupations as well.

IPEC was implemented in India at a time when the increased worldwide attention to the growing problem of child labour was beginning to strike a sympathetic chord in Indian society, with the consequential highlighting of existing inadequacies and a clamour for more effective alternative. IPEC found an energetic and receptive partner in the Ministry of Labour, which was willing to explore, through IPEC, alternatives to the traditional approach whether in the matter of involvement of NGOs or the need for awareness - raising for social change or in a community and family-based approach to the problem. The Ministry also played a crucial role in the active search and promotion of NGOs to act as implementing agencies of IPEC projects. IPEC also played a major role in creating awareness of the problem of child labour among several key groups (ie) NGOs, employer’s organisations, research and academic institutions and government departments.
The IPEC approach is extremely flexible and offered the partner organisations ample scope for determining independently the level and type of intervention required. Each project has been developed for the specific area or situation at hand. The ability to develop strategies on an experimental basis helped foster new approaches. The direct funding of implementing agencies by the ILO was a strength. It saved the implementing agencies both time and energy by reducing the bureaucratic problems generally associated with projects in which the funding is routed through government departments. Another strength of these programmes was that they brought together a large number of NGOs working on child labour, enabling them to coordinate and share experiences. The diversity of NGOs and geographical areas covered has fostered a good beginning and established a more concrete basis for future work.

There is no structured procedure adopted by IPEC for selecting projects and/or NGOs. While flexibility has certain advantages, the other side of the coin was that the implementing agencies were unclear about the design of the programme and the system of reporting. There are no regional offices or regional coordinators to provide periodic reports from their region to the head office. If there had been one, the monitoring and evaluation of the projects would be much easier.

Since the government measures to safeguard the interest of the children failed on many fronts due to public non-participation, the role of non-governmental organisations is of immense help. The people wanted an increase in their income as much as welfare amenities provided by the NGOs to the children. The problems of communities are so vast and complex that the state alone cannot tackle the problem, the state requires the support of NGOs to implement its efforts. They have played a pioneering role in the development in the last one century. They have demonstrated the capacity to initiate and experiment with new programmes, stimulate the interest of the community, have shown sensitivity to meet difficult problems in the ways that State cannot adopt. They have the qualities of flexibility of service, personal touch and closeness to the people and the target group. The effectiveness of NGOs is attributed to two major factors: Firstly, since its workers do not belong to the government departments, they are relatively more acceptable to the people due to their aversion towards government Officials in some areas. Secondly, since the workers of the NGOs operate at the grass-root level, they constitute the strongest source of motivating the people by their personal interaction and involvement with the problems that the people face in their day-to-day routine activities.

An analysis of the activities or interventions of NGOs in dealing with child labour reveal that by and large they are project oriented. In the name of rehabilitation and imbibing skills, some NGOs themselves use children as labour to run 'dhabas', courier
service and produce crafts etc. Most of the strategies are related to symptoms of child labour and not the causes. NGOs provide shelter, literacy, health check-up, enable to open bank accounts, provide recreation etc. Most of these activities cannot sustain in the long run. The projects are not focused but diluted with irregular campaigns, frequent press reports which has an overall effect making the problem a non-issue. The strategies have unclear approach and rhetoric belief. The leadership of child labour campaign is still urban elite. Except in the cases of a few NGOs, others have not even attempted association of child labourers themselves. Only a few NGOs have employed staff who were child labourers a few years ago. The need of the hour is to critically examine NGOs strategies and programmes for combating child labour from the perspective of children. The need for children's participation to assess the strength of the programme which intend to benefit them is crucial. It is not only essential to the programme but it is the right of the child to participation. In any developmental process, the victims of any social injustice should be made to be aware of the conditions, causes of their present state of exploitation and enabled to articulate the course of direction in which they could be empowered and liberated. NGOs need to constantly monitor their own efforts in combating child labour, otherwise their efforts would only regulate and perpetuate child labour.

Though a number of NGOs have been functioning for the welfare of children in Chennai City, all of them concentrate on street children. Measures should be taken to set up an NGO which functions only for the working children. Secondly, most of the NGOs take up many projects and the workload prevent them from doing anything concrete for the working children. If their concentration is on a single project, more time and resources can be allocated and many useful programmes can be worked out benefitting the child workers. Thirdly, more than one NGO functions in the same geographical area, with same clientele and provides more or less similar services. A better approach would be to cater to the different clientele or providing different services to the same clientele in a geographical area. Fourthly, all the NGOs working for street and working children are concerned only with the particular area they are working. They stick on to that area of operation and do not care for the children in other areas. If an NGO take up the area which has been under the control of another NGO, fights arise and enemity develops between them. If these NGOs shed their ego clashes and social status, then the child labourers would be benefitted and the problem can be regulated. Moreover, there is no clear definition on what is meant by hazardous and non-hazardous occupations. The occupation that is considered hazardous in factory is not considered hazardous in home environment. Because of this disparity, no steps or measures can be taken to control child labour.

A nation wide awareness campaign should be created among the public. The campaign should postulate an attitudinal change, that is to effect a change in the attitudes of top-level decision makers as well as parents and in children. Children constitute the most
important asset of any nation. Each child is an asset to the society and the future welfare of the society is clearly related to the welfare of the child. Even though child labour cannot be eradicated, the working children should be facilitated with better prospects for a bright future.

The NGOs engaged in working with child workers including the ILO should collect sufficient data about the number of children employed all over the country, nature of their employment, working hours, minimum wages paid and facilities offered by the employers concerned. Unless there is complete and definite data about such facts, it would not be possible to draw out an Action plan for these children.

NGOs are often seen by the public as opportunistic issue holders who shift their focus from one subject to another depending on the current public attention the subject gets and on the availability of funding. While this image is changing, the lack of professionalism of NGOs, the elitist image of some of the more high profile ones and their constant travels abroad to attend conferences, meetings and seminars have also hurt the image of NGOs in the public eye. The good work being done by many NGOs keeping a low key and profile is distorted by this contrary image in the public mind. The benefits given to the working children by the NGOs make them dependent on the NGO rather than equip them with strategies to cope with varied situations.

The overall programme of rehabilitation of child labour needs people's participation and co-operation from all sectors of people (ie) from their families to the societies working for them. Realization of people is very much essential by which they can think for these children exploited at different work spots. Their overall support would be helpful in achieving the objectives of rehabilitation of child labour.

However, the co-ordinated efforts of government and non-governmental organisations, employers, voluntary organisations and social workers through active public support can definitely help in ameliorating or controlling the problem from the state as from the country.

NGOs can appeal and urge on moral, constitutional or human grounds for the adoption of a proper rehabilitation policy for the country as a whole. One suggestion is to have a professional expert rehabilitation service. The members of such a professional service may have their views about the environmental impact or working conditions of the sectors in which children are employed. However, their professional efforts would not be dissipated by fighting on too many fronts but would be focused on a one point programme of making rehabilitation as humane and as beneficial in the long run as possible. Instead of leaving such exercise to the implementing agencies, it should be contracted out to one of a number
of professional expert organisations, who would want to do it for monetary considerations as well as professional pride and gratification.

There should be a number of such competing organisations or professional services which would bid to take over various aspects of rehabilitation from implementing authorities, like State or Central governments, Corporation etc. The multiplicity of such organisations and healthy competition between them would ensure quality of service as well as prevent other undesirable features of monopolies. The sole purpose of these service organisations would be to economically achieve proper rehabilitation that would be acceptable to all people concerned.

Inspite of the good work done by NGOs, there are several problems faced by them. The problems are with the working children, staff of the NGO, law enforcing authorities, and due to lack of facilities and finance. The problem with working children is that, many of them think that the only way of survival was attack. They were highly unpredictable and this created problems for the NGOs as they could not organise any specific programme with confidence. Because of the unpredictable nature of these children, sometimes the programmes organised proved to be successful and at other times, they could be total failures. This made it difficult for them to show any tangible results many a time. Though the children were protective of one another, frequent fight among them became ugly sometimes and violent at other times. Their lack of trust of the adult world also created problems for the NGOs working with them. Lack of continuity of work, lack of motivation and enthusiasm of the children and lack of trust, made it difficult to organise programmes. The problem with the staff is that, many staff working in NGO leave the job once they get better job with high salary. Low salary and problems of late hours of work and lack of interest of the children in participating in the programmes, seemed to be the problems which made the staff leave the NGOs. This was a big drain on the NGO as they had to train the staff afresh all the time. The staff of the NGO have problems with the law enforcing authorities in meeting and releasing the children from lock-ups for the crimes not committed by them. This creates a rift between the law enforcing authorities and the NGO. The innovative programmes of the NGOs required facilities which in turn needed money. Many NGOs in Chennai City were working on shoe-string budgets and could not afford creative and imaginative programmes. The funds were not easily available for them and even when they were available, they were very inadequate and there were far too many restrictions.

Among the elite, whether from the government or among the activists, no one is so bold as to support or defend the cause of child labour. The debate is between two groups, both of whom deplore its existence. But while one group is for immediate and total ban on it, the other is for the gradual easing out of the phenomenon. The two perceptions are to be found equally amongst non-governmental organisations and government. Child labour issue
need to be seen not in isolation but in relation to livelihood and larger development issues. It is a complex socio-economic demographic phenomenon, which needs the attention of both government and the public. Child labour is not meaningful where it is imparted by persons as a skill to their children in the form of socialization of the new generation. Skills are learned by way of inheritance. That is why in India, child labourers are first rate weavers and excellent carpenters. The highest concern lies where the process takes place through exploitative mechanism which consumes more energies than the child possesses and the work is done under great physical and mental strain. Solidarity and networking among NGOs, journalists, lawyers, government officials, is the need of the hour. Therefore the best strategies or solutions for combating child labour would be as follows:

- An extensive and intensive study is required to identify and assess different aspects of the child labour in informal sectors in different parts of the country.
- A comparative study should be conducted on working children in informal sectors in different occupations to find out the effects of work on their growth and development.
- The existing legal framework for employment of children is rather dispersed and patchy. The greatest drawback of the laws is in its non-coverage. More than three fourth of the total child workers are employed in agriculture and in unorganized sectors, but there is no law to take care of the workers employed in them.
- The raising of public awareness and supporting community action should be given top priority in any scheme concerning child labour. Some NGOs have done good work and their involvement should be explored.
- Major emphasis should be on vocational training, so that employment of children over the age of 14 helps in creating a skilled adult, a technician and a master craftsman.

Efforts aimed at combating child labour should deal with the following: preventive measures that can check the further inflow of child labour into the existing child labour force, amelioration of the working and living conditions of the children who cannot be rehabilitated effectively and rehabilitation of child workers for whom rehabilitation is possible and required. The focus necessarily needs to fall on the vulnerable sections of society who are more prone to this social evil.

Despite a growing bank of studies and data and relentless campaigning by anti-child labour groups in the country, the political will to deal with the problem is lacking. And as far as the public are concerned, few people are willing to take a stand within their own establishments or homes on this issue or to work towards arousing public opinion to declare child labour as unacceptable. Yet no society can or should accept this as a necessary evil. In the long-term, both the political will at the top and this push from below, from an informed and concerned society, will be the only way in which a effect can be made at resolving this vexed issue.