Child Labor in the Zari Industry

Action Research Report

World Education/Child Development Society

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The names of all children mentioned in the report were changed for confidentiality.
Preface

Child labor in Nepal is a serious concern. Around 40% or 3,140,000 of the 7,700,000 children aged between 5 to 17 years are engaged in work. Of this 3,140,000, about half or 1,600,000 child laborers are in exploitive working conditions; and about 621,000 are in hazardous work. Children are found working in carpet and entertainment industries, mining, beedi making, portering, brick production, embroidery (zari), car/motorcycle repair workshops, domestic work, cross border smuggling and roadside hawking. Each sector has its own array of push/pull factors influencing entry and exit of children and which determine the nature and extent of exploitive work children are exposed to.

To understand the status of children working in the zari industry, World Education’s Naya Bato Naya Paila project funded by United States Department of Labor conducted action research in the zari factories of Nepal.

On behalf of World Education, I would like to acknowledge Child Development Society's efforts and commitment in providing information for preparing this action research report. In addition the efforts of Chief District Officer, Bhaktapur and Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB) were also key in making it possible to have the children working in zari industry removed and reunited with their families.

Findings from this action research will be of use to policy makers in designing and implementing future actions to eliminate child labor. The research undertaken will I believe, also add to the literature and enhance the understanding on child labor, while encouraging deeper debate on this issue and will aid in the goal of preventing as well as of eliminating child labor in the country.

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Project Director, Naya Bato Naya Paila &
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ZARI: FINE EMBROIDERY

Extravagant saris decorated with elaborate glittery metallic embroidery work are the height of women’s fashion in Nepal these days. In Kathmandu, zari saris are in every shop window, especially during the festival and wedding seasons. Zari is a special form of embroidery, originally done with gold or silver thread. While a beautiful, intricate, and delicate form of decoration, the zari industry employs children (predominantly boys) as young as eight years old who are subjected to some of the most disturbing and severe forms of exploitation (e.g., 12 hours work days, 6 days a week, negligible compensation, threats of violence and physical sanctions for not delivering on time). This qualifies the zari industry as one of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL).

Even to the untrained eye, it is evident that shops selling clothing adorned with a variety of zari work are on the rise in the Kathmandu Valley. More women are seen wearing saris, shawls, and dresses with zari handiwork that ranges from simple borders or trimmings to heavily embroidered designs all over the fabric. Wearing such clothes, especially during weddings and other social gatherings, is rapidly becoming a fashion statement as well as a socio-economic status symbol. The more the adornment, the more expensive the item is likely to be. A pashmina shawl with zari work can cost up to $100. A wedding sari with zari work can cost anywhere between $150 to $1,500, depending upon the quality of design; how much zari is used; where it is sold (a boutique vs. general store); and the quality of the sari material.

There are three main types of zari: genuine, imitation and plastic. Genuine zaris are made with real gold thread. This thread is created by turning gold into wire as thin as human hair, beating the wire flat, and wrapping it around a silk thread. Ornate designs are then traced onto fabric and craftsmen spend days stitching the embellishments into the material. These saris come in different types of quality. It is estimated that it takes four workers about four hours to make one low quality sari that sells for Rs. 2,000-5,000 ($23-59). A better quality zari sari which costs anywhere from Rs. 8,000-10,000 ($94-118) takes the same number of workers one day, and a high quality sari will take four workers four days, costing Rs.15,000-18,000 ($176-212).

The prevalence of such extravagant zari work in modern fashion gives an idea of the high demand for such products. Indeed, the industry is extremely prosperous. However, the high prices of the finished products are belied by the low wages that child workers receive for their efforts. Sadly, the shimmering fabrics cover up the exploitation, abuse, and mistreatment of thousands of under-aged child workers.

The commercialization of the zari sector and its rapid mushrooming is a relatively new development in Nepal. The industry has a long cross-border history shared between India and Nepal. Traditionally, zari has been a Muslim craft and was very popular in the Mughal courts of India. While production was always more prevalent in India, recently the industry has rapidly expended in Nepal, primarily in the Kathmandu Valley.
HISTORY OF ZARI IN NEPAL

In Nepal, Muslim communities established themselves in Kathmandu as early as the 1500s and in the Terai as late as the 1800s. In Kathmandu, many worked as skilled craftsmen; mainly as bead makers and tailors around the Asan market. Zari embroidery has always been an integral part of these trades.

As Kathmandu Valley has historically been the center of the zari industry, its rapid industrialization has promoted the demand for the fashionable zari clothing, leading to an environment that welcomed and nurtured the industry’s rapid growth and expansion.

In more recent years, the zari market from India has spilled over into Nepal, especially after the Indian government’s crackdown on child labor in the industry in the early 2000s. The increase in zari’s popularity, combined with the lack of scrutiny, has amplified the overall production of items with zaris. The growing demand has required more workers, and many employers found a cheap solution in employing children. Children have small, nimble hands, which are ideal for the tiny stitching, and are easily exploited as many of them are illiterate and cannot ensure that they are receiving proper wages.

The recent clampdown in India was also a major outcome of NGO activism, in particular the Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save Childhood Campaign) that was catalyzed by pressure from western clothing labels such as GAP. NGO activism and government interest have led to an increasing number of police raids and India has penalized employers if they are caught employing child labor. This is prompting employers to either lay off child laborers or to seek alternative solutions. For those employers
with links in Nepal, one solution has been to open up zari factories here. The following factors were crucial in the shift of zari factories from India to Nepal: the open and porous border between the two countries; child labor laws in Nepal are contradictory as the Child Labor Act forbids children’s work under the age of 16 in an hazardous industry and the Child Labor Law states 14 as the legal working age. Some employers take advantage of the ambiguity created by these two poorly defined government policies; furthermore, labor laws in Nepal are generally considerably weaker than in India, and their enforcement even more so. Therefore instead of trafficking children to India, now children from different districts in Nepal, as well as from India, are brought to the Kathmandu Valley to work in zari sweatshops.

These days, the zari industry in both India and Nepal is thriving. As the hotter summer months approach, zari workers return to the cooler hills of the Kathmandu Valley where factory owners produce more zari in anticipation of the demand created by the summer festivals that start in July, the month of Shrawan, and last until September, the women’s festival of Teej. Once the heat in India subsides, many workers return to the factories there, as demand is always high and the wages are higher than in Nepal. The industry seems to work as a sausage balloon: simply expanding in a different place when squeezed in another.

**WORLD EDUCATION’S ACTION RESEARCH**

In conjunction with the Naya Bato Naya Paila Program, World Education commissioned one of its implementing partners, Child Development Society (CDS), to conduct an action research on the state of child labor in the zari industry. This method was chosen as very little was known about the sector and as it allows findings from the research to be adopted and applied in existing programs and interventions. CDS held an extensive field assessment and collected data related to the situation of child laborers in zari factories. This information was incorporated into the planning and implementation of interventions targeting the children working in zari factories. The results of the research paint a picture of one of the most exploitative sectors of child labor, where young boys are subject not only to long hours in unacceptable working conditions and under debt-bondage, but also malnourishment, torture and exposure to sexual content within the zari factory premises.

Early on, when the action research was initiated, 20-50 workers were found in each given factory, ranging from 7-30 years old. In the 25 sweatshops visited in Bode, Bhaktapur District, a total of 82 child laborers were found: 55 were under 14 years of age and 27 were between the ages of 14 to 17. As all workers were working long hours (12-16 hours per day) in an unhygienic work and living environment, children below 18 years were considered child laborers.

Of these 82 employees, even though all expressed a desire to study more, only 35 had basic literacy skills.

**Table 1. Child laborers found in a 100-factory sample (2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factory District</th>
<th>Total Child Laborers</th>
<th>Under 14 Years</th>
<th>Over 14 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaktapur</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalitpur</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>727</strong></td>
<td><strong>512</strong></td>
<td><strong>215</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sample of children from the 100 factories in the Kathmandu Valley, 20% of the children were illiterate. On average, these children shared that they were forced to work up to 14 hours a day, a fact corroborated by the employers themselves.
The employers are mostly from the same districts as the children, making it easy for them to identify potential workers and for parents or guardians to send their children with the employers. In almost all cases, the parents/guardians of the children under 14 were found to have reportedly taken advances ranging from Rs. 8,000 to 10,000 ($94-117) from the employer. This amount must be repaid through the labor of their children and is effectively a form of debt bondage.

The research found three main ways in which children are introduced to working in zari factories; First, middlemen (dalals) target young boys, telling them that there is no reason to go to school as it will never lead to meaningful employment or better livelihood prospects. They explain that working in a zari factory will provide them not only an income, but also a skill with which to make an income in the future. This has a multiplier effect as the children often convey this message to their friends, and then are taken to factories in groups. These dalals are often in a position to be “trusted”, as they are considered as respected community members. Second, parents who do not support the education of their children are more likely to send them to zari factories for the same reasons. Especially in the Muslim community, where the eldest son is imbued with a sense of duty to provide for the family at a very early age, it is considered more valuable to be earning an income than to be going to school. As some parents do not see the value and long-term benefits of education, they believe it is better for their children to learn a skill early on that will provide future income rather than invest in their education. Finally, children with one or more missing parents are more likely to engage in child labor. Losing one or both parents severely limits the possible income of a family, especially in the most poverty wracked regions of the Terai. These children are usually living with their extended family members who often treat them as a financial burden and expect them to work to support themselves and the rest of the family members.

The findings from the action research were used while designing the most appropriate and suitable educational services tailored specifically to address the needs of children working in the zari industry. As most children were illiterate at the time of identification and enrollment, they were enrolled into Non Formal Education (NFE) bridging classes that taught Nepali, English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. The objective of these classes is to act as a bridge to formal school or upgrade literacy and numeracy skills so that the children/youth can be better prepared for legal and gainful employment opportunities.

HOME COMMUNITIES

The communities where many of the children who work in zari factories come from play a significant role as to why these children enter child labor. Most of the children working in zari factories are trafficked to the Kathmandu Valley from Muslim and also non-Muslim communities in the three border districts of Sarlahi, Mahottari, and Rautahat, as well as a few children from the Indian border state of Bihar. These districts have high Muslim populations, and it is from these communities that children are predominately trafficked. These three districts hold extremely high rates of Out Of School Children (OOSC), poverty, and large population compared to the rest of Nepal. Certain societal factors in these communities such as early child marriage, dowry, and attitudes towards education all contribute to the pressure for children to enter into labor – usually exploitative – at an early age and make these districts a prime recruiting ground for dalals.

These targeted origin border districts have the highest Muslim populations in the country; 19% of Rautahat’s population is Muslim.
However, *dalals* are now branching out from the Muslim community and recruiting boys from the Dalit communities as well. Though the ethnic pool of recruits is expanding, it is important to note that the areas that they come from remain the same.

The fastest growing and poorest populations in Nepal are in Rautahat, Sarlahi, and Mahottari. The poverty that is rampant in these areas is further strained by the increase in population. According to the 2011 Preliminary Population Census Report, Rautahat holds the highest average family household size in Nepal, which is 6.33. In interviews with child workers who were rescued from factories in July 2012, most of the boys came from families of six or seven children. This large family size makes it difficult for parents to provide enough for all members.

The high population density exacerbates poverty on a policy level as well. The government of Nepal provides an equal amount of money and staff across districts for education. However, these funds are not based on population or the number of schools, but simply divided equally between districts. Such policy leaves the schools of Rautahat, Sarlahi, and Mahottari with less support than in other districts. The chart below shows the population of Rautahat, Sarlahi, and Mahottari in contrast to the population of one hill district, Nuwakot, which adjoins Kathmandu.

**Chart 1: Population Status, 2011**

![Population Status, 2011](image)

Source: Central Bureau for Statistics, Nepal

Many of the children working in the *zari* industry come from fragmented families. In some cases, children are missing a parent. Sometimes their father is an alcoholic who does not work, or the father may even be deceased. In many cases where a parent has passed away, the other has eloped with a new spouse and left children to fend for themselves or live with the extended family. Other children come from families where one parent is disabled. Most of the children’s families, when still intact, are landless poor field laborers. Their wages are very low and for the most part they live hand-to-mouth. In all of these situations, children are put under incredible pressure to begin contributing to the family income, or in cases where they have been left alone, to simply survive on their own.

Another issue is the attitude that parents have towards education. Most of the parents of these children are themselves illiterate and have never attended school. Even though some illiterate parents do recognize the value of education and encourage their children to stay in school, others do not see any benefit and only regard it as an additional financial burden. Moreover, traditional practices such as the dowry system and the elder boys’ responsibility to provide monetary support from an early age for paying off the dowry or other family debts affects parental attitudes towards education. These factors are reflected in the fact that these three districts have the highest rate of OOSC in the country (see Table 2.)

**Table 2: Out of School Children (OOSC), 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>WE/Department of Education Survey</th>
<th>National Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahottari</td>
<td>32,056</td>
<td>58,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarlahi</td>
<td>32,396</td>
<td>73,283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rautahat</td>
<td>42,201</td>
<td>77,516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Department of Education/World Education Survey
Central Bureau for Statistics
The 2011 census found higher numbers OOSC but not all these children reside in the district as many are working in other parts of Nepal or across the border in India.

Many of the interviewed parents made it clear that having a skill early on is valued more than getting an education, as it means job security and income. One father from Sarlahi stated that even when his boys went to school, the teacher did not show up most of the time and did not teach his students. When this man was asked why he himself did not go to the school and demand that the teacher do his job, he replied that he is an illiterate farm laborer and no one would listen to him. This reveals many of the insecurities that parents have about themselves as well as perceptions of the education system.

This attitude carries over to the parents’ choice of care for their children. Parents think that their children will be better taken care off in a factory; they will be fed and learn a skill that will provide an income.

Early child marriage is also a significant factor in forcing children into working in *zari* factories. In these Muslim communities, children as young as nine years old are married off. Though they do not live together immediately as wives come to live with their husband’s family at the onset of puberty, this added person is usually a strain for families that already consist of seven or eight members. Young boys who are married early are therefore expected to contribute to the family income and prepare for their wife to come live with the family.

In addition, girls still come with a dowry when they are married. These dowries consist of both cash and in-kind gifts to the husband. Families take loans of several hundred thousand rupees to provide a dowry for their daughters, and sons must contribute to the income to relieve some of this debt (see Akhtar’s story). Despite the fact that dowries have been banned in Nepal since 2009, in most *Terai* communities this practice is still very common and many employers take advantage of the families’ debt associated with this practice. These dowries have also become a major source of violence against girls and women as families often commit to pay a certain amount of dowry that will be spread out during the girl’s first few years of marriage. In cases where the parents cannot fulfill this commitment, the girl becomes subjected to violence by her husband and parents in law. In some extreme cases, the girls are even burnt to death.
Akhtar’s Story

Akhtar arrives for his interview on a bicycle, looking both pleased and shy about the visitors coming to ask questions. He says that he is 16 years old (though he looks about 13) and is already married. For his wife’s dowry, he received Rs. 100,000 in cash ($1,176) and Rs. 50,000 in kind ($588). This is nice for him, but he has three sisters who will need similar dowries when they are to be married. Akhtar is expected to contribute to the family income in order to cover these costs. This is one reason why he worked in zari factories before being rescued in the July 4th, 2012 raid.

The circumstances under which Akhtar went to the factory are similar to the stories of other boys. His paternal uncle took him to a zari factory while his father was away working in Qatar as a laborer. Akhtar was trained in one factory and later transferred to another in the Thimi area in the Kathmandu Valley. Because of his previous training, he earned Rs. 4,000-5,000 per month ($47-59), a rate higher than what most of the other boys receive. He worked in the factory for at least five months. Akhtar explained that in the factory he worked for around 14 hours every day. The living conditions were extremely harsh with no proper beds, poor food hygiene and sanitation. The children worked and slept in the same room with no ability to take proper breaks during work hours and spend some time outside. Furthermore, as Akhtar could not work during evening load shading hours, he had to compensate the lost time during the night instead of the few valuable sleep hours.

CHILDREN IN THE FACTORY

Through World Education’s action research, programmatic interventions, and the raid of July 4th, more has come to light about children’s working conditions in zari factories. Children are forced to work long hours, usually are not properly remunerated, and live under unsanitary and potentially abusive conditions.
A normal workday for children in the zari industry is usually 14 hours long. The children begin work by 8:00 or 9:00 am and rarely stop until 10 at night, though in interviews, many children stated that they often worked until midnight. Breakfast and dinner have to be taken before and after work, while the lunch break, though short, is permitted during work hours. Other than this, breaks are not permitted and the boys work tirelessly all day long.

The actual work of sewing zari designs into fabric is done in one room of the factory. A frame is set in the middle of the room over which the fabric, on which the designs will be stitched, is stretched. Workers sit on the floor clustered around this screen. The actual stitching is performed with a miniscule needle, and great precision is required for the repetitive motions of making tiny stitches for the zari designs.

In the factories, workers are divided into two groups: the Shagirds (apprentices) and Kaarigars (trained workers). New arrivals are immediately categorized as Shagirds and must undergo a mandatory six months training period. During this time, lodging and limited food are provided as well as an allowance of about Rs. 100 per week ($1.50). Otherwise, the Shagirds are not compensated for their work and must even pay for their own needles. The training period is officially six months long but in most cases it is extended for up to a year or even two as employers are able to make higher profits from the uncompensated Shagirds. Once a worker becomes a Kaarigar, his wages range from Rs. 3,000-5,000 ($35-59) per month and can even go up to Rs. 15,000 ($176).

Children who have been trafficked to the factories do not have other places to live; therefore they eat and sleep in the factories as well. They rarely return home, except for the festivals of Eid or Chhath. Children or parents must pay for transportation if they wish to return to their villages for any reason, which is a significant expense.

Children who are working in the factories are getting younger and younger, the youngest found being five years old. For the most part, children are between eight and twelve years old. Most of these children have never attended school, though some have and then later dropped out or ran away. The child workers do not receive proper medical care if they fall ill. This exposes the entire factory to contagious diseases, as most of the workers live together in very close quarters.
The factories themselves are usually unfinished buildings which landlords rent to zari employers at a high rate. Stairwells are unlit and dark, and entrances to the buildings are unfinished, open, and full of rubbish. The screen and work tools are all kept in one room. This room is also where workers take their meals, as well as the sleep area for the young boys who have been trafficked to the factory from elsewhere. The bedding is usually kept in one corner of the room with the work tools until working hours are over. During factory visits, researchers noted that the bedding was dirty and the area in which it was kept was unsanitary as well.

The sanitation conditions in factories are almost inhuman, compounded by the state of the toilet and washing areas as well as poor food and garbage management. There is usually only one toilet for all the workers, and it is doubtful if this toilet is ever cleaned. Rubbish removal and food preparation is often mismanaged as the food is prepared in the same room as the bedroom and workroom and is often unclean and unwashed. Garbage is not removed properly and is often simply disposed off in the entrance of the factory building, if not left standing in the same room as where the food is prepared. This combination of the aforementioned unhygienic conditions results in a breeding ground for infection and disease. Before 2011, children’s engagement in zari factories was not recognized by the Government of Nepal as a WFCL. However, it is clear that children working in zari factories are subjected to extremely exploitative child labor. Interviews and medical examinations of children rescued in the 2012 raid showed evidence of physical and mental abuse and torture. The extended hours of work, insufficient compensation, and severely unsanitary living conditions are some of the reasons why this industry is now included in the sectors of WFCL.

CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

There are many significant concerns regarding child protection. The mistreatment and abusive behavior towards children in the factories, their development without their parents, lack of appropriate healthcare, superior’s violent behavior, high risk of sexual abuse, long working hours, and the fact that they are deprived of their right to education all contribute to a long list of improper treatment. The nature of the work is one cause for concern. Children sit on the floor bent over a screen in settings with low lighting for many hours at a time. This strains their eyes and backs and can

Toilets in zari factories often lack water, are rarely cleaned and are shared by many workers

Doing zari work
lead to developmental problems. In addition, the repetitive nature of the stitch-work can cause carpal tunnel syndrome (a nerve condition caused by repetitive tasks, force and posture). The fact that they do this work for more than 14 hours a day is also disturbing. By law, children above 14 are only permitted to do 14 hours of light work per week. The long hours that zari laborers work is a clear violation of this law. Children above 14 should be working far fewer hours and be given regular breaks instead of being made to sit in a cramped position working for hours on end.

The hygiene and nutrition situation at the factories is another concern. Children are exposed to contagious diseases and do not receive proper treatment when ill. Many of the children are suffering from malnourishment as well. Employers should provide children with proper nourishment that supports their development and medical treatment if children fall ill or sustain any injuries.

Children’s mental development in zari factories is also inhibited for a variety of reasons. These children leave their families from a very young age and are thus catapulted into a harsh environment without the mental and emotional support of their parents. Most of the children from the action research were found to be basically literate, but none of the children working in the factories were permitted to attend school. Even when World Education began offering NFE classes, employers actively created obstacles for children attending the courses. This included depriving the children of breakfast and making them work later to make up for the time that they had lost.
Finally, the most significant concerns were discovered during the July 4th raid on zari factories in Bhaktapur. Employers kept children subdued by giving them addictive substances as rewards for their work. Children were given tobacco products, not only as rewards but also in place of items like toothpaste. In addition, many children had been given mobile phones (and later billed for them, another continuation of the debt bondage). Because these children come from such poverty, these mobiles were truly a status symbol. It was found that most of these mobiles contained pornography, hinting that the employers or older workers with whom they were in constant contact due to the close living quarters may have exposed children to sexual content at an early age.

In addition, during the raid, volunteers who were conducting health screenings found numerous bruises and improperly healed broken bones on some children who had been rescued. These are clear indicators of physical abuse. While children were reluctant to tell the health workers of any injuries, volunteers overheard children telling their parents of the abuse to which they were subjected as punishment. This punishment took many forms including beatings that were so severe as to result in broken limbs. Children were kept in chicken coops at times, and even had needles driven into their skulls. Furthermore, children did not receive any medical attention if injured during their punishments. Such treatment is tantamount to torture.

As mentioned earlier, the physical conditions in the factories leave the children at a risk of a plethora of problems. The emotional factors of living without support from family and being deprived of education leave child workers to grow up unnecessarily limited both physically and mentally. In order to protect the children working in zari factories, a number of actions must be undertaken. Children must receive support for their physical and mental development through proper nutrition, hygiene, and education. They cannot be made to sit in one room for 14 hours per day, six days per week with no time for breaks or playing. In addition, employers must be held responsible for mistreating these children.

**REMOVAL STRATEGIES**

As more is known about child labor in the zari industry and the push and pull factors that cause children to go to work, World Education has devised a number of removal and prevention strategies which use a “soft” approach such as NFE Classes, welcome to school campaigns, family livelihood support, and engaging community leaders in advocacy. These approaches have had varied success. World Education was involved in the raid on zari factories, a “hard” approach at removing child laborers from zaris weatshops that was initiated by the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Bhaktapur. The raids were followed by community based rehabilitation programs that provided support systems for the children and their families. All of these approaches have resulted in important lessons learned and helped to frame the future of prevention and removal strategies.

As a result of information gathered through the action research, World Education/CDS began implementing a NFE class for children working in zari factories. These classes were planned in consultation with the factory employers so as not to conflict with the children’s breakfast time. The classes included instruction in the topics of basic literacy and numeracy. In the beginning, attendance was very good though after a while it dropped off. The implementing staff later discovered that employers were changing the times of breakfast so that children would miss their meals if they attended the NFE classes and would have to work later to make up the work missed. This resulted in declining attendance. World Education/CDS continues to
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From holding needles to holding pencils
offer these classes, but since the raid on July 4th, most of the children under 14 have been sent home. However, in some cases these children have not stayed with their families and have likely either shifted to another factory or gone into some other form of exploitative labor.

Another strategy to remove and prevent children from entering into child labor is to provide vocational skills for children who return home and are too old for school enrollment. In doing so, children will learn valuable skills that will support their livelihoods and reduce their vulnerability to exploitative labor practices.

To address another of the key factors that push children into labor, World Education offers support for family livelihoods. Parents are taught skills such as vegetable farming, animal husbandry, and weaving. Links are also made to microfinance institutions in order to provide parents with economic support that will divert them from sending their children to work (see Rahim’s story). The action research provided insight into challenges for providing family livelihood support as well. Overall, World Education’s partners in the three target districts identified 386 children and 146 families for family livelihood support. When the NGO partners went to the field to approach these families, many of them stated that they were not in fact the parents of the children. It is possible that these families perceived that they were under some kind of investigation and therefore did not wish to identify themselves. Over time though local NGOs have built trust in these communities and by March 2013, all 146 families of rescued boys received support for improved livelihood.

CDS and World Education have also been engaged in advocacy efforts. This includes discussions with madrassa leaders, parents, shopkeepers, and women’s groups who are the largest market for zari products. Discussions with each of these groups have had various results. While madrassa leaders stated that they were willing to take concrete action to fight against this form of child labor, they did not...
actually do so. World Education currently has several efforts that work to mainstream madrassas into the national school system and use the national curriculum. These efforts should include components that teach about the prevention of child labor. Discussions with women’s groups and shop keepers have revealed that retailers and costumers were not aware of the exploitative nature of the zari industry. They did not realize that young boys were employed under abusive and exploitative conditions. When realizing the harsh reality behind this prosperous industry, they felt guilty and were determined to fight against this practice, as well as to share the information among their peers. This has led to raised awareness among the consumers and retail circles of exploitative child labor issues in the zari industry.

World Education was also involved in the government’s raid on zari factories. The first “hard” approach raid took place in January, 2007. A task force comprised of CWIN helpline, the local police and other child rights activists rescued 21 children from a zari factory in Golfutar, Kathmandu Valley. Within two years, in another raid that took place in May 2009, four children were rescued from a zari factory in Kathmandu. In early 2012, the Police in Chitwan has conducted a rescue operation in which 16 children were rescued and transferred to their families. On July 4th, 2012, the CDO of Bhaktapur District, one of the most child labor prone districts in Nepal, conducted a raid on 54 zari factories. In all, 127 children were rescued from the factory and returned to their parents, who in some cases were unaware of the working conditions in the factories. This raid was the largest that the government has undertaken and sets a strong precedent for future actions. It also signals a change in attitude of the government and its new “hard” approach towards child labor. Some challenges have arisen as a result of this raid; one of the tactics that the employers used to counter the raids was to provide the children a fake citizenship certificate with a false birth date. As these children do not have a proper birth certificate, this was a common practice that allowed the factory owners to employ the children under false legal terms. Another challenge was the lack of social support systems in the children’s home communities. Therefore, many of the children who received NFE classes, were rescued during the raids and returned home were at high risk of returning to work in the same sector or one equally as exploitative.

In order to effectively combat child labor in the zari industry, the following actions must be undertaken: an official emergency and long-term response strategy for planning raids in coordination with NGOs; positive engagement of zari employers to increase corporate social responsibility and consumer awareness.
without destroying this niche industry; and a coordinated strategy for targeting the problem of out-of-school children and the high amount of trafficking that occurs in the Terai. Pursuing these steps through coordinated efforts between the government, NGOs, and the zari industry will be crucial to eliminating this sector of WFCL. These steps will strengthen family reintegration and prevention efforts of child labor without targeting the entire zari industry.

An official emergency and long-term response strategy is necessary for the success of future actions like the raid of July 4th. Following the recent raids, the number of children under the age of 14 has significantly declined. There was a major multiplier effect from the raid with many other employers not targeted voluntarily removing children under 14 from their factories. Before the raid, about 70% of children working in the zari factories were under 14. Based on ongoing monitoring visits and reports, NBNP program data from 39 factories found that only 19% of the workers were under 14 years of age. One of the lessons learned from this raid is that clearer roles and responsibilities are needed for key actors, especially during the rescue and repatriation phases.

A six-month initial reintegration plan for the children affected by the July 4th rescue was put together, but this will not suffice to thoroughly prevent them from re-engaging in exploitative labor in the future. Moreover, as prosecution is extremely weak, even when the employers were caught keeping a large number of children in the factory premises, they were only required to pay a fine of Rs. 9,000 ($105), a sum that can be easily recovered by recruiting new children. Therefore, only a comprehensive long-term plan that incorporates government action, such as raids and proper prosecution, as well as preventative efforts of NGOs will ensure that all actors work together to successfully eliminate this form of child labor.

Though the zari industry currently engages in extremely exploitative practices, it is not necessary for the entire industry to be

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**Karim’s Story**

Karim Sheikh, 15 years old, lives in Sarlahi District. He is the oldest son among four siblings; his father suffers from a mental disorder and the mother is disabled.

As the oldest son, Karim was never enrolled in school and at the age of 13 was forced to work in a zari factory in Bhaktapur District where he stayed for two years. Following the July 4th, 2012 raid on the factory, he was rescued and reunited with his family. As part of the rehabilitation process, the family has received Rs. 7,000 ($82) as an income generation support. Furthermore, Karim himself has received additional Rs. 7,000 for establishing a small business. In October 2012, Karim combined the money provided to him and his family and started a goat raising business. Six months later, Karim is now able to support his family’s daily expenses through the earnings generated by his business. As the only breadwinner in his household, most of the earnings are used for the various daily family expenses. However, Karim has also been able to save some money for his future and as of April 2013, has managed to save around Rs. 2,500 ($30).
disassembled. Positively engaging the *zari* employers will help them create better standards for their employees, create fairer labor practices, and engage them in eliminating child labor. Reaching out to them signals that the government and NGOs are not intending to target the industry itself, but instead wish to work together to eliminate child labor and ameliorate the circumstances of under-age workers who are engaged within the industry (and improve conditions for all workers). Employers should provide better care for their employees and should take part in corporate social responsibility, and NGOs can assist them or provide recommendations in how best to do this. Engaging in corporate social responsibility will raise working and living standards for employees in the *zari* factories and contribute to building an industry that values fairness.

Finally, NGOs and government officials need to work together to create a unified strategy for targeting the out-of-school youth in Sarlahi, Rautahat, and Mahottari Districts. Research has shown that these three districts have incredibly high rates of out-of-school children. The link between out-of-school children and trafficking to work in *zari* factories may be broken by interventions that focus on keeping children in schools as well as providing family livelihood support and access to microfinance. NGO and government action in this area is thus critical for preventing these children from entering into the most exploitative forms of child labor.
Child Labor in the Zari Industry

From nonformal class to formal school