

Next generation leaving schools due to the military coup



Citizen Action for Transparency



"I was in 9th grade when the school was closed due to Covid-19. I am now 15. I came here to work to earn some money. I don't think I could go back school even the school reopens next year. My parents could not afford it either. Plus, I still have younger sisters to look after and they should be prioritized."

Maung Kaung San (name has been changed),

A child gold miner at a gold mine at Sezin village, Kachin State

The coup d'état staged by the military on February 1, 2021 has unleashed economic, health, education and social upheavals in Myanmar. Many students ranging from primary schools, middle schools and high schools to universities – who are essentially the future of the country – has left the school in a protest against the coup.

Some middle school and high school students, who has left the school, are now at the risk of forsaking their education for good since they have entered workforce to support their parents so that they could help earn money to cover basic needs. They appear to have taken any jobs available. Following the coup, population of child labour has visibly increased; child labour in artisanal gold mining industry – previously few and far between – has come about in recent time.

Citizen Action for Transparency (CAFT) has conducted situational analysis of illegal artisanal gold mining in the after-



I am 17. I am a 11th grade student. I was studying at a boarding school in Monywa last year. I had to take a break for one year when schools were closed due to Covid 19. I thought I could go back to school. But our whole village have to be relocated due to armed conflicts. My family has moved here and I am panning for gold to help support my family. I would like to go back to school if my parents can afford it.

Ma Thi Thi Khaing (name has been changed)

A girl working at a gold mining area in Homalin township, Sagaing Region

There are both male and female working as miners at gold mining areas and most of them are between the age of 15 and 17. Those child miners are either middle school or high school students and are now working to support their family because the schools have been closed due to the coup. Most of the girls are working as cooks or panning for gold.

In the Labour Force, Child Labour and School-to-Work Transition Survey 2015 conducted by International Labour Organization (ILO), a child is defined as any person under the age of 18 according to Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No.182) and Convention on the Rights of the Child. The survey revealed that 50 % of children between the age of 15 and 17 had left the school; more male than female are leaving school; and 75 % of child between the age of 15 and 17 in Myanmar are currently working. 9 % (1.1 million) of total children in the country are working child; population of working child in 7 states and regions is between 9 and 12 %. Since the survey was conducted during peaceful time, the population of child labour would have increased at the time of writing this paper.



Hazardous child labour was defined as working with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools which involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads under unhealthy environment, for example, expose children to hazardous substance, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health. Working environment at an artisanal gold mining includes those circumstances and chance of accidents and risk of deadly injury is also high. Moreover, girls are using mercury for panning for gold without any protection. Artisanal gold mining is a hazardous environment for children. The survey by ILO also pointed out that 43.1 % of child working at artisanal gold mining had been included in the category of hazardous child labour.

Monthly income of children working at artisanal gold mining is between 150,000 and a bit over 200,000 Myanmar Kyats. (the girls earn around 150,000 Kyats while boys earn over 200,000 Kyat). Daily wage is between 5,000 and 7,000 Kyats. Their working hour is more than 8 hours per day and number of holidays are not specified, but two days out of one month are set aside as holidays. Moreover, they are not receiving any health care from their employers and there is no agreement of employments or contracts between employers and employees, but rather rely on verbal agreements.

In Myanmar Mines Law, employment of child labour is explicitly prohibited and any person under the age of 18 are barred from working at mines. Although mining companies poorly abide by the rules, they usually didn't employ children under 18 in the past. Most children did not enter workforce (artisanal gold mining) because schools were still open and economic political situations were relatively stable. However, children have started working at artisanal gold mining and employers has also started to employ children in the aftermath of the coup.

Artisanal gold mining is a harsh and dangerous working environment. Even the adults struggle. Many are working under dangerous conditions in Myanmar where laws and regulations are regularly ignored. The coup has led many students to leave school and work under harsh conditions to earn money to cover basic necessities.

Child education of a country directly correspond to its development. Myanmar's development will lag behind as many children are leaving the schools and entering the workforce because of the coup. In addition, increased child labour in artisanal gold mining is a strong indicator of negative development of the country.

