

## **The Poverty Cycle of Kiln Workers in Cambodia**

### **Background Information**

According to a 2018 report, 70% of the rural population in Cambodia heavily rely on agriculture that is extremely sensitive to climate change. (Brickell, Katherine, et al., 2018) However, with the increasing factors that have led to climate change, especially due to kiln workers, there has been an inconsistency in rain patterns and an increase of floods that have caused the suffering of many farmers. As many farmers have been unsuccessful adapting to the constantly changing rainfall patterns, this has impacted their crops and have led to financial burdens as well as a lower quality of life due to an increase of pests and vermin due to the inconsistent weather.

### **Genealogy**

With the lack of support for these farmers, a majority have been victims of going into huge debts and taking on loans. Unfortunately, many have been unable to pay off these debts and had no choice but to go through exploitation through kiln owners that buy off their debts in return for cheap labor. Kiln workers get trapped into these agreements and are put into horrible labor conditions as they are put in jobs that are detrimental to the environment and their health as brick and garment workers. Kiln workers are a huge contributor to climate change with huge usage of fossil fuels and toxic emissions.

A research article written by Natarajan, Brickell, Parsons from the Journal "Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space" delves further into the issue of the

rural-urban divide in Cambodia with emphasis on the brick kiln workers in the provincial areas. Their article highlights that although farmers are forced into working into alternative work due to climate change plaguing their livelihoods, they are stuck again as kiln workers for the same reason of climate change but this time being the cause of it with the inconsistent and heavy rains. (Natarajan, N., Brickell, K., & Parsons, L., 2019).

An additional report had gathered a sample of kiln workers and noted an average amount of debt for these workers to be \$712, which is a large amount when basing it off the Cambodian economy. (Brickell, Katherine, et al., 2018). The market economy is fueling this cycle through the purchase of cheaper clothing and urbanization of land as these products have been through the work of kiln workers. The negative environmental impact through Kiln workers have continued to induce climate change. As a result, the endless cycle of poverty continues to persist in Cambodia.

After having read research articles on climate change and having lived in Cambodia myself, I believe that the inconsistent and drastic changes caused by global warming have had a negative impact on many farmers.

From personal experience, I have had many relatives who have had respiratory problems that have developed in the long run due to the living conditions in Cambodia. My aunt had recently passed away for this very reason upon having small cell carcinoma in her lungs that is suspected to have been from the living conditions in Cambodia.

The cycle of poverty continues when an increasing number of farmers have been given no support and have had to take on loans upon their rural-hardships due to the distress caused by climate change. My paper will be emphasizing the issue of the huge gap

within the economy of Cambodia due to climate change that has led to an unending cycle of poverty.

### **Significance of Case Study**

This case is relevant to the climate crisis today as it is a common issue that persists in Southeast Asia. For instance, a study done in West Bengal, India shows that more than half of the women working as brick kiln workers are as a result of poverty. ( Das, Rabin, 2013)

Furthermore, it also continues to be an issue in Pakistan. From a personal story from Idrees, a victim himself in Pakistan, had suffered as a brick kiln worker for over a decade and had to sell his kidney to free himself from slavery of being a kiln worker. (Upadhyaya, Prasad, 2008) This shows the extremity of the issue of kiln workers that has continued in Southeast Asia due to poverty.

### **Solutions**

I believe that it would be a huge step to end the work kiln workers as it has been a result of Cambodia's lack of adaptation in response to climate change. Hence, more awareness pertaining to the issues of kiln workers is essential to build a stronger community to fight against the government to aid farmers and push for a more environmentally friendly country.

As a start, activists should work to build charitable fundings to aid kiln workers in order to free them of their debts and bonds to kiln owners. That way, these workers can escape from the terrible conditions they face as brick and garment workers. Furthermore, with more awareness within the country, sustainable clothing should be encouraged to put a halt on sweatshop workers.

## **Conclusion**

If we are able to make a difference and put an end to kiln owners, this could be a major breakthrough for the world as we are removing major contributors to climate change from omitting these jobs as they have been detrimental to the environment as well as those in poverty.

## **Works Cited**

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4. Upadhyaya, Krishna Prasad. "Poverty, discrimination and slavery: The reality of bonded labour in India, Nepal and Pakistan." (2008).