



From **Commitment**
to **Action:**



**An Inter-Agency
Working Paper on
the Elimination of
Child Labour and
the Achievement of
Education For All**

The Millennium Development Goals are "achievable"

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as “an unprecedented promise by world leaders to address, as a single package, peace, security, development, human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Why are the MDGs so different? he asked. “Because they are *achievable*.” And it is because they are achievable that every member of the international community must focus its full attention and act in close partnership to make good on their promise.

Significant strides have been made in the last decade or so to improve the lives of many people in developing countries. The 2005 MDG Report notes that, in Asia, the number of people living on less than US\$1 a day dropped by nearly a quarter of a billion between 1990 and 2001, a period of rapid economic growth particularly in China and India, the world’s two most populous countries. However, progress in one region has been offset by decline in another. The number of very poor in sub-Saharan Africa is growing, agriculture has stagnated and HIV/AIDS has claimed the lives of countless people in their most productive years.

The figures in the text box on this page speak for themselves, but this is not a new phenomenon. The statistics, causes and consequences of the inequities in our world have been there for all to see and analyse over the years. Those who suffer most from these injustices,

Statistics tell their own story

If the MDGs and the elimination of the worst forms of child labour are achievable, some of the unresolved issues will need to be resolved. For example, why are there over 100 million children still not enrolled in primary school? Why do 40 per cent of children who are enrolled in primary schools in least-developed countries drop out? Why are girls most affected? And why, when technology has done so much to improve and lengthen lives in developed countries, are there an estimated 245 million child labourers aged 5 to 17 worldwide of whom 171 million are toiling in hazardous conditions, putting their health and lives at risk in order to survive¹?

While thousands of children have benefited from a wide range of development programmes undertaken by various agencies, including the ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, and continue to do so, it remains unclear as to whether progress is being made and sustained in all regions and what the impact of prevention has been on younger children. This will be clarified in due course as further research is undertaken. What is certain is that children will suffer the adverse consequences of recent natural disasters such as the hurricanes in the Americas, the tsunami in Asia and the earthquake in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, and of conflicts around the world, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. How these will contribute to factors that push children into situations of child labour has yet to be determined.

¹ Source: “Every Child Counts – New Global Estimates on Child Labour”, ILO, 2002


and continue to do so, are those who are least well equipped to defend themselves and who most need help and support: children. The economic exploitation of children is one of the greatest challenges in terms of human development facing the world today and is an effective indicator of the impact of poverty and lack of access to quality education in any country.

There is an urgent need to analyse and tackle child labour within the broader framework of the MDGs as part of the international community's efforts to ensure the Goals' success. The greatest challenge in dealing with this global phenomenon is in recognizing its cross-cutting nature. Child labour needs to be acknowledged as a major obstacle to the achievement of the Goals, particularly the ones relating to

Causes of child labour

Child labour can stem from one or more causes in any given country, such as:

- extreme poverty and the need for all family members to contribute economically to their survival;
- very limited access to education institutions or programmes, for example, lack of school facilities in rural sub-Saharan Africa;
- cultural and/or traditional practices in certain geographical locations or among certain peoples, for example, migrant workers, indigenous populations and lower castes;
- employment practices where small businesses may prefer to employ children as they can pay them less than adults and because children are young, defenceless and docile and may be bullied into doing work they should not or work long hours;
- vulnerable children being coerced into illegal activities, such as drug smuggling;
- poorly funded, trained and equipped education systems and teaching staff;
- discriminatory practices in society and in education, for example, against girls or certain population groups, such as indigenous peoples;
- lack of acknowledgement of the problem of child labour by some governments, other socio-economic and political actors and even the public at large, and a failure to deal with the issue as a priority;
- the death of parents or guardians from HIV/AIDS, creating a new generation of child-headed households;
- armed conflict and children being forced to take up arms or give support in other forms of labour;
- trafficking or criminal practices, such as commercial sexual exploitation;
- or any combination of the above or other phenomena that either encourage or oblige children to leave their childhood, education and family behind and enter the labour market.



education, gender equality, fighting HIV/AIDS and eradicating poverty.

Partnership: the driving force behind the MDGs

The factors which either push or pull children into situations of child labour are an integral part of the subject areas of seven of the MDGs – eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability. And yet, the prevalence of child labour is not included as a specific indicator in the measurement of any of these seven Goals.

As to MDG 8 on developing a global partnership for development, this must be the basis for the co-ordinated and sustained response of the international community to eliminating child labour. It is the engine that must drive this campaign forward, and it should do so by putting particular emphasis on the crucial role of education, the second Goal, in providing children, their families and communities with alternatives and in preventing children entering the workplace too early.

Education: a powerful tool in the fight against child labour

Free, compulsory and good quality education provided up to the minimum age of employment as defined by ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment is

widely promoted and accepted as the key to progressively eliminating child labour. However, with the minimum age for employment being 15 or 16, and in some special cases 14, in most developing countries, it is evident that for the majority of them providing free schooling up until that age is unrealistic in the immediate future. Even MDG 2 calling for universal primary education by 2015 is not on target at present, and graduating primary schoolchildren can still be three to five years below the minimum age for employment. This lack of harmonization within the legislative framework between the minimum age of employment and the end of compulsory education will continue to be a challenge for many countries and the international community.

Education has a dual role in relation to child labour. Firstly, it is a crucial element in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of child labourers. Secondly, it is a powerful tool in preventing children at risk from slipping into situations of child labour. Innovative non-formal or transitional education programmes specifically target child labourers and enable them to “catch up” with their peers in the formal education system and so gradually reintegrate into formal education, which is very important for further education and employment. Education programmes designed for child labourers take into account their ages and the levels of literacy and psychosocial development to facilitate their reintegration into formal schools or vocational training.

Education provides former child labourers with fundamental literacy and numeric skills. It builds their confidence and self-esteem, enhancing their communication skills. Many programmes targeting child labourers include life skills components to help them build a sense of independence and often provide them with skills training in a range of crafts and trades based on local labour market assessments. For many of these children, the education and training they receive could enable them to obtain better and safer jobs under improved working conditions in the future. It is a lifeline to becoming fulfilled and productive adults and in shaping their approach and attitudes towards the education needs and aspirations of future generations. It can help in breaking out of the downward spiral of poverty.


However, interventions in education need to be accompanied by interventions that aim at changing attitudes in society and addressing the survival needs of families. Improved access to education programmes and better quality of education, including curricula suited to the needs and aspirations of affected children, will have a significant effect, but they need to be supported by other programmes that focus on, for example, poverty reduction, awareness raising, legal reform, regulation and enforcement, income generation, employment promotion for adults and social safety nets for families prone to resort to child labour.

Education systems must be inclusive

In the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO Director-General Mr Koïchiro Matsuura informs the international community that “the number of out-of-school children is declining too slowly to achieve universal primary education by 2015” (MDG 2). In itself, this is an early warning that must be heeded by every country, agency, institution and organization worldwide to ensure that efforts are redoubled to get this Goal back on track. Mr Matsuura further points out, in calling for the improved quality of education, that “quality [of education] must pass the test of equity: an education system characterized by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission”.

The 2005 Report highlights the need for education to “be inclusive, responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of learners and giving appropriate weight to the abilities, skills and knowledge they bring to the teaching and learning process”. The Dakar Framework For Action (2000) also underlines the need for all countries to promote an inclusive learning environment within the education system. As a starting point to establish inclusiveness, it is essential that education systems reach out to all children, whatever their circumstances, situation, gender, origins, religion or culture.

This point is further reinforced in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which places children at the cen-



tre of the quest for the universal application of human rights. This international instrument spells out the basic human rights of all children without discrimination and protects these rights by setting standards in health care, education and other services. It also protects children from economic exploitation. This indivisibility of their rights is key to children's development.

Do we know enough about why children do not go to school?

A crucial target group for inclusive education strategies is the millions of child labourers worldwide who have never attended school, have dropped out of school or combine school and work. It is not enough to expect education systems to have the capacity to reach out to children in special circumstances and/or who are severely disadvantaged. Investing in programmes related to EFA goals must also include specific elements that address the needs and expectations of children from disadvantaged groups. If not, then these programmes will fail in their attempts to ensure all children benefit from primary education. Out-of-school children – the majority of whom are likely to be child labourers – are not in school for a reason and it is not necessarily by building more schools or training more teachers that they may be persuaded to enroll.

First and foremost, the reasons for children not being in school need to be researched and analysed in order to formulate effective strategies to address them. The development of specific programmes designed to take on

the education, training and socio-economic needs of working children, their families and their communities is a critical aspect of the work of some key agencies in this field, including ILO, UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF, Global March Against Child Labour and the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a global alliance of civil society organizations.

Quality education starts with learners themselves

The physical and psychosocial consequences of child labour are numerous and terribly damaging to young minds and bodies, for example, stunted growth, injury, disease including HIV/AIDS, insecurity, anti-social behaviour, low self-esteem, attention deficiency ... the list is long and harrowing. Working from an early age will invariably have a negative impact on a child's ability to learn and to socialize, in short, to be a child. If systems and programmes do not take these challenging characteristics into account within the broader aim of providing universal primary education for all children, then inevitably they will either not reach these children or will fail to retain them in the classroom. In other cases, education authorities need to find ways of reaching out to the parents of the children and convincing them of the necessity and advantage of sending their children, particularly girls, to school.

As education systems become more responsive to the needs, expectations and special circumstances of child labourers, linked to the improved socio-economic

conomic situation of parents, families and communities which can be sustained through growth, then real change can be effected and progress can be made in making the MDGs a reality. It is this interdependence between the MDGs and the need for different groups of decision-makers and partners to work in close co-operation that highlights the vital importance of MDG 8 on establishing a global partnership for development and underpins the aims and objectives of a proposed **Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education For All**.

Global partnership and inter-sectoral co-operation for development works


It is clear to those involved in global efforts to combat child labour, reduce poverty and ensure access to quality education for all children that none of these individual aims can be achieved in isolation. In this light, it is an overriding priority of the agencies and organizations involved in these development areas to turn the calls for inter-agency co-operation into practical and concrete programmes and activities.

A significant step to be taken along this path towards practical joint action is to ensure that it is replicated at all levels: local, national, regional and international. The major challenge in effectively engaging the problem of child labour is in understanding its cross-cutting causes and consequences. It cannot be the responsibility of one government department, one or two organizations or a few

agencies to deal with such a vast and disparate problem. It is the responsibility of nearly every line ministry in any government: Economy, Education, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Health, Labour, Rural Development or Agriculture, Social Welfare and Women and Gender. This, in itself, can be the cause of difficulties in terms of elaborating a co-ordinated response, particularly in developing countries where the human and financial resources and capacities are not necessarily available to sustain an inter-ministerial approach.

Where progress needs to be accelerated, and wherein lie the objectives of the agency partners hosting the Inter-Agency Round Tables on Child Labour and Education, is in the elaboration of a strategy to make effective and action-oriented links between different development partners which have a stake in the global initiatives on the elimination of child labour and/or EFA. It is vital that the mutual dependence of these two fields of development is identified and reinforced and in as explicit a manner as possible. This will require closer co-operation between and within donor structures, particularly governments of industrialized countries.

Most UN agencies are linked to a particular government department and many funding sources are similarly linked to different areas of development. For example, the ILO works primarily with Ministries of Labour, UNESCO with Ministries of Education, UNICEF with Ministries of Health, Education, Social Affairs or Women and Children, and so



on. These governmental links are often reflected in funding allocations, with Ministries of Education focusing on EFA and Ministries of Labour focusing on labour-related support and child labour. If there is to be improved coherence in order to achieve MDG 8, this will require closer co-ordination throughout the funding and development support structures in each country, and between agencies and civil society organizations.

Ensure greater integration of national action and development plans

According to the 2005 UN MDG Report, “most of the recent increase in aid has been used to cancel debts and meet humanitarian and reconstruction needs in the aftermath of emergencies. Debt relief ... does not necessarily provide new finance for social services or poverty reduction. Similarly, emergency and disaster relief, although essential, does not address long-term development needs ... More aid needs to go hand in hand with more effective use of aid – by advancing a recipient country’s own development strategies.”

This is also an area where greater co-ordination is required between donor and recipient countries. At present, nearly every global initiative requires the elaboration by the recipient country of National Action Plans, in particular, plans dealing with how to implement EFA strategies, how to eliminate the worst forms of child labour and how to reduce poverty

(Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, PRSPs). To guarantee more effective use of aid from all perspectives, it would be important to ensure an integrated approach to the development of National Action Plans, that they are coherent with one another and that the links between them are reinforced through joint strategies and activities.

Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education For All

How can this coherence be established and what mechanisms can be set up to sustain it over time? In November 2003, an initiative was launched at the first Inter-Agency Round Table on Child Labour and Education organized during the annual meeting of the UNESCO High-Level Group on EFA in New Delhi, India. The Round Table issued a joint statement, the New Delhi Declaration, calling for greater co-ordination between initiatives and resources directed towards providing quality education for all children and eliminating child labour. In order to promote this enhanced co-ordination and to move the agenda forward in terms of mainstreaming and monitoring, the host organizations – ILO, UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF and Global March Against Child Labour – proposed the formation of a Global Task Force on Child Labour and EFA, which should include all concerned parties, other UN agencies, donors, governments, business representatives, workers’ organizations and other civil society organizations.

In the interim, an Inter-Agency Working Group on Child Labour and Education has been established and is focused on ensuring that the co-operation between agencies moves quickly to practical concerted action on the ground. A joint publication on emerging good practices in education and child labour will support the elaboration of results-oriented activities that can be put in place by countries intent on tackling these twin challenges. In addition, a strategy for capacity-building programmes and training materials for relevant line ministries is being elaborated to support the creation of co-ordination measures to ensure the linking of national programmes on child labour elimination and EFA.


Terms of reference for the Global Task Force are being finalized and it could be in place by 2006. This alliance of agencies, partners and organizations sharing similar interests and responsibilities, combined with the active involvement of the countries concerned, will enable a more effective approach to resource management, project implementation, follow-up and monitoring. The Task Force would facilitate collaboration in the areas of: coordination of the comparative advantage of different partners; resource mobilization; upstream assistance in policy development and reform and capacity building among various partners, including relevant line ministries; awareness raising and other areas of advocacy; promotion of dialogue between governments, social partners

and civil society; coordination of knowledge management; and identification of new areas of research.

MDG Summit reaffirms global commitment to keep the promise of 2015

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan explains that “2005 is crucial in our work to achieve the [Millennium Development] Goals.” The Millennium Summit in New York in September 2005 marked a milestone in the MDG initiative: a third of the way towards 2015, five years gone and ten remaining. In assessing how far the international community had come and what is still required, world leaders resolved “to adopt, by 2006, and implement comprehensive national development strategies to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals”. It is vitally important that the elimination of child labour is mainstreamed into this process.

The Summit also reaffirmed its “commitment to support developing country efforts to ensure that all children have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality, to eliminate gender inequality and imbalance and to renew efforts to improve girls’ education”. World leaders pledged to continue “to support the efforts of developing countries in the implementation of the Education for All initiative, including with enhanced resources of all types through the Education for All Fast-Track Initiative



(FTI) in support of country-led national education plans”. If EFA is to have any meaning for the more than 245 million child labourers around the world, it must truly be for all and must link into global efforts to eliminate child labour. This commitment is reinforced within the Summit resolution which goes on

to emphasize that measures to be taken to ensure decent work for all “should also encompass the elimination of the worst forms of child labour”.

Eliminating child labour is achievable, affordable and an investment for the future

The international community feels strongly that child labour can be progressively eliminated, commencing with its worst forms. Conventions and commitments to this goal have been made and reinforced, and a number of large scale programmes, for example ILO-IPEC’s Time-Bound Programmes, are in place in different countries worldwide. However, global support for international mechanisms in itself will not be enough, and more needs to be done and quickly. In order to further strengthen the foundations of this platform of support, it is important to consider other elements of why child labour should be eliminated rapidly, for example what the impact is in terms of costs and benefits for the global economy and for the countries, families and children concerned.

A study commissioned by ILO-IPEC in 2004, entitled “Investing in every child”, looked at the estimated costs of each element of the programme to eliminate child labour and the projected economic gains from eliminating child labour and replacing it with education. The generic model – necessarily hypothetical in its approach

– concluded that the benefits of eliminating child labour would be nearly seven times greater than the costs, or an estimated US\$5.1 trillion in the developing and transitional economies, where most child labourers are found. Moreover, child labour could be eliminated and replaced by universal primary education by 2015 (MDG 2) and universal lower secondary education by 2020 at an estimated total cost of US\$760 billion.

The study applies a model to developing and transitional economies worldwide and projects that all regions of the world would experience large net gains from the elimination of child labour, although in the initial years, the costs would almost certainly exceed returns. However, net economic flows would turn dramatically positive as the effects of improved education and health take hold. By 2020, costs would be far outweighed by the returns, leaving annual benefits of around US\$60 billion.

Eliminating child labour could yield an enormous return on investment – and a priceless benefit for children and their families.

Mainstreaming efforts to address child labour through education policies and systems makes a difference

It is vital for the lives of child labourers and future generations of child workers that faster and more significant progress is made in the area of mainstreaming efforts to address child labour through policies and programmes on education and through EFA. One of the outcomes of discussions between the ILO, UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF and Global March has been that it would be of considerable help to countries trying to deal with the problem of child labour and implementing EFA strategies to find out more about what approaches have been used elsewhere that have worked and how and where concerns about sustainability remain (see box “Statistics tell their own story”). National case studies will be documented and disseminated and an Inter-Agency Working Paper on Emerging Good Practices in the Elimination of Child Labour and the Achievement of EFA will be prepared for the 3rd Round Table on Child Labour and EFA, Beijing, China, 28 November 2005. National case studies may include, for example:

- The effect of implementing compulsory education legislation and lengthening its application. In China, the government brought in its nine-year compulsory education in 1986. By 1998, nearly 99 per cent of school-age children were enrolled in primary school. It is estimated that universal primary education has been established in about 90 per cent of the country's regions and new projects are under way to expand universal primary education in rural areas.
- In Turkey, two child labour surveys were conducted in 1994 and 1999. The indicators revealed that the prevalence of child labour in the country had fallen during this five-year period, during which the government had also introduced new legislation extending the number of years of compulsory education.
- Integrating social support services into education systems (Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes). Education often brings with it various direct and indirect costs, for example, text books, uniforms, transport and food. Many of these costs are beyond the reach of poor families, who may also have to cope with the loss of income from children going to school. Some countries, for example Brazil, have introduced programmes to offset these costs and ensure that poor families send their children to school. The PETI programme aims to eradicate the worst forms of child labour while increasing educational attainment and reducing poverty. It provides a monthly allowance to poor families provided that children are enrolled in and stay in school. After-school activities also ensure that children do not work when not in school. Similar programmes are in place in a number of countries.
- Introducing universal primary education in accordance with MDG 2 and also to target child labour elimination. A number of developing countries are working towards the achievement of universal primary education with the dual objective of complying with Goal 2 but also of attempting to reduce the number of children who are out of school and working. The Kenyan government enacted the Children's Act in 2003, which provides the framework for universal primary education, including feeding programmes for poor regions, textbooks funds and other forms of stipends. India, Malawi, Niger and Pakistan are also working towards universal primary education to help reduce the incidence of child labour.

From commitment to action

Solutions to such an entrenched and endemic problem as child labour are as complex as the issue itself and, in the most intractable of instances, are not necessarily even clearly defined. There is a shared determination within the international community to meet these challenges head-on and to work together to elaborate effective responses, but it will require fur-

ther mobilization of resources and support which need to be sustained over the next decade or so leading up to 2015 and beyond. The international community and its partners share this heavy burden of responsibility, and the Global Task Force on Child Labour and EFA would be an effective catalyst to ensure that the elimination of child labour and EFA move from commitment to action.

This working paper has been produced by the member organizations of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Child Labour and Education:

- **International Labour Organization (ILO)**
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
4, Route des Morillons
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland
www.ilo.org
- **The World Bank**
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433
USA
www.worldbank.org
- **UNESCO**
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France
www.unesco.org
- **UNICEF**
3, UN Plaza
New York 10017
USA
www.unicef.org
- **Global March Against Child Labour**
International Secretariat
E-868, Ground Floor
Chittaranjan Park
New Delhi - 110 019
India
www.globalmarch.org