

**NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS'  
(EMPLOYERS') ORGANIZATIONS OF AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC**

**REPORT**

**on**

**FACT FINDING MISSION TO THE TEA AND TOBACCO PRODUCING  
REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC**

**Baku 2007**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Since July 2004 the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs' (Employers') Confederation of Azerbaijan Republic has been implementing the project on "The role of employers in the elimination of child labour in commercial agriculture" under the ILO ACT/EMP's Programme on combating child labour.

Within the project ASK carried out different awareness-raising and advocacy measures to increase employers' legal and ethic responsibility concerned child labour, and also to involve them and other stakeholders in more active work on removing this incident.

The project has obtained the following results:

- Capacity of Azerbaijan Employers' Organization and its regional offices strengthened
- Awareness on child labour issues increased
- Employers take initiatives in eliminating child labour
- Social dialogue strengthened
- Close cooperation with media established

Having intervened in the cotton production sector of agriculture by having reduced the prevalence of child labour, ASK organized a fact finding mission to assess the child labour situation in the tea and tobacco regions of the country.

The Mission was organized to 4 tea-growing districts – Masally, Lenkoran, Astara and Lerik from 23 April to 07 May, 2007 and 4 tobacco-growing districts – Sheki, Gakh, Zagatala and Balakan from 28 May-09 June, 2007.

The mission was conducted by Mrs. Sadagat Gambarova, Child Labour Focal Person, Mr. Alipasha Gaybaliyev, Projects consultant, Mr. Ilgar Asadov, Project expert, Mr. Elshad Ismayilov, technical assistant.

During this mission, the project team visited the tea and tobacco plantations, local authorities' offices, municipalities and schools, family households, tea processing and tobacco fermentation plants of Lenkoran and Sheki - Zagatala Economic Zones, and Azerbaijan Tea Association. .

The mission gathered information on the incidence of child labour in tea and tobacco production, learned about the health and education situation of working

children, and sought to understand the level of awareness of employers and other stakeholders on child labour. All stakeholders were informed about the project objectives and introduced to the project team; while people at the local level were identified for facilitating future project realization.

Based on the facts obtained, 80 per cent of labour force used in agriculture remains to be women and children. Child labour, especially of girls and very young boys, is widely applied in all spheres of agriculture, including tea- and tobacco-growing.

As growing of both tea and tobacco is a very long process taking between 12-14 months, children are obliged to work at the plantations all year. They normally start working earlier in the morning till night, in total about 10-12 hours a day. Children are involved practically in all aspects of work within the tea- and tobacco-growing processes.

The main reason for child labour is the difficult financial status of families. Employers give jobs to children to support their poor families, while children prefer to work instead of attending school because of the low quality of secondary education, the problems with youth employment. As young people receiving higher education fail to find a competent job in their native regions they are obliged to be engaged in any kind of work, sometimes in unworthy conditions, that decrease the value of education in children's opinion

According to representatives of educational institutions, school attendance is only 70-80 per cent. While this indicator is itself unsatisfactory, it fails to describe the situation accurately. Interviews with parents and children revealed a different situation showing a rate of about 40 per cent.

The education situation according to regions. Sharp differences exist in particular between plain and mountain settlements. In the latter, several factors impact negatively on the situation. Bad roads, lack of ,or the inadequacy of, school buildings, lack of teachers and low professional level of teachers, serious problems with infrastructure, and, most significantly, family relations - especially the preservation of traditional approaches to girls - ,

The level of public health services is low, which is especially the case in the Lenkoran Economic Zone. There are no medical centers in the majority of the villages. Fortunately, according to the data obtained from health departments, the particularly acute infectious diseases are not widespread in the region due to its pure air and water. Moreover, the tea sort planted in Azerbaijan contains the minimum quantity of special toxic agents like, for example, mercury.

In comparison, the level of medical services rendering to the population in the Sheki and Zagatala district is comparatively high, where different medical centers are operating in the most of villages.

Nevertheless, the population in the Sheki-Zagatala region expressed their concerns over children's health in relation to 1) the impact of tobacco as a hazardous plant on humans and 2) the impact of the Gabala radar station functioning in the region.

As both regions are covered with woodlands, children run the danger of being attacked by wild animals and getting stings from poisonous insects and snakes. Moreover, because of the lack of gas supply in the villages they very often catch a cold.

The usage of drugs is widely spread in Lenkoran Economic Zone. Because the region is situated on the boundary zone with the Iran Islamic Republic it is used as a transit territory for the transportation of narcotics. Moreover, cases of growing narcotic plants are often revealed in the region.

The interviewed people in both regions possess different attitudes towards child labour. The majority of parents accept the engagement of their children in any kind of work as a normal case, nevertheless they think that their children must attend school and get good education, but in this case they have no understanding about relations between child labour and schooling. The situation with "child labour" concept in mountainous tobacco-growing areas is worse. Raising such kind of problem itself surprised the people who have serious infrastructure, social and other problems. According to their words child labour issue occupies one of the last places among their numerous problems. In comparison, some of them, more educated, also teachers, community leaders, and local authorities had shown more understanding saying that it will be better for children to combine schooling and work that can help them to get necessary skills and experience. As regards the parents of children on family farms, they had discrepant attitude to the issue. On the one hand they expressed anxiety about the future of their children saying that the involvement of children in labour activity at early ages harms their education opportunities and health, from the other hand they said that their farms need children's work. In this respect, employers, including land owners, plantation managers, brigade-leaders consider children engaged in tea and tobacco growing to be unfavorable to their business activities, as children often fail to observe the requirements, thus causing a low-grade product to be obtained. Moreover, employers are to some extent aware of the negative impact of child labour on children's education and health. Hence, they negatively approach the use of child labour. Of course, they have very superficial knowledge on legislation and labour standards.

As a whole, the population possess very restricted views and awareness in regard to the problem of child labour. Some said they had never heard about *child labour* and failed to understand the term. Parents normally approach the efforts of their children by considering it as "support to the family". It is evident that there is no any idea of children's rights, constitution and labour rights, in such cases.

The representatives of local executive authorities also expressed a negative attitude towards use of child labour.

Gender issues were paid special attention by the project team in the course of the mission trips. The common feature in both regions was that girls were thought of as being more exploitable in tea and tobacco growing. Based on data of official statistics and local population, it is clear that girls in both regions have more restricted opportunities to receive education.

As a result of mission, the project team was successful in getting useful information on child labour widely applied in the tea- and tobacco-growing sectors of Azerbaijan.

The awareness and knowledge of local people including employers on essence of child labour and its negative impact on children health and schooling, children's rights, labour legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic and international labour standards are on a low level.

Thus, the project team arrived at a conclusion that, there is a great need to continue the project in the tea and tobacco regions, and above all, to carry out child labour awareness-raising activities for entrepreneurs and other stakeholders.

To prevent the use of child labour in the agricultural works (especially) in the tea- and tobacco-growing sectors, certain measures are recommended for implementation.

- It will be very useful and important to submit child labour facts obtained from the project regions to the broad society.
- Awareness raising at the national level (media campaign) and the local level
- Lobby for improved education and health services in the regions. (design a strategy for this)
- At the local level: the development of a policy with the Tea Association
- Design and conduct training in 1) occupational health and safety (OSH) and 2) Hazardous child labour
- Engage in collaboration with other IGO's and NGO's.

## INTRODUCTION

Since July 2004 the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs' (Employers') Confederation of Azerbaijan Republic is successfully implementing the project on "The role of employers in the elimination of child labour in commercial agriculture" under the ILO ACT/EMP's Programme on combating child labour.

In Azerbaijan, the transition economy is surrounded by numerous socio-economic problems, and child labour still is a very prevalent characteristic. . The conquest of independence and, thus, the collapse of collective farm system, transition to the market economy and social changes occurred in the country, including military situation in Azerbaijan caused the birth of risk groups in the country. These groups, especially children, became burdened with emerging problems, which quickly appeared in regions where agriculture is prevalent.

ASK has carried out different important activities within the project: Studying the use of child labour in the agricultural sector with special emphasis on cotton-growing and also, strengthening the capacity of employers in combating child labour. .

The survey was conducted in 8 cotton regions of Azerbaijan - Sabirabad, Bilasuvar, Imishli, Agjabedi, Ujar, Kurdamir, Barda and Beylagan, to investigate the health and education situation of children involved in cotton-growing works, the reasons of their recruiting, their living and work conditions, the negative impact of labour on their health and education, and moreover, to learn about the legislative acts of the Azerbaijan Republic and international rules on child labour.

It became obvious from the research results that child labour is widely applied in these territories, where cotton-growing works negatively impact on children's health and education, physical and moral development, and their future growth in skilful labour force. The whole society, including employers, bear responsibility for such a wide use of child labour.

Therefore, ASK. being the union of employers in the republic, carried out different awareness-raising and advisory measures to involve them in more active work on the elimination of child labour, aimed to increase employers' legal and ethic responsibility concerned child labour. Fortunately, the activities implemented within the project yielded good results. The majority of employers carried out certain works at their enterprises and farms for eliminating the problem, parallel with realization and evaluation of child labour. Moreover, employers supported children deprived from education to return to schools.

Having successfully intervened in cotton-growing sphere ASK decided to organize the fact finding, supported by ILO ACT/EMP, , with the purpose to provide child labour evaluation in the country's tea and tobacco plantations.

The Mission visited 4 tea-growing districts – Masally, Lenkoran, Astara and Lerik from 23 April to 07 May, 2007 and 4 tobacco-growing districts – Sheki, Gakh, Zagatala and Balakan from 28 May-09 June, 2007.

The mission was conducted by Mrs. Sadagat Gambarova, Child Labour Focal Person, Mr. Alipasha Gaybaliyev, Projects consultant, Mr. Ilgar Asadov, Project expert, Mr. Elshad Ismayilov, technical assistant.

In order to reveal and study facts on the use of child labour, children's health and education the project working group arranged trips to the following regions:

Lenkoran Economic Zone: tea plantations, family households, Azerbaijan Tea Association, tea processing plants, local authorities' offices, municipalities and schools in Masally, Lenkoran, Astara and Lerik districts;

Sheki - Zagatala Economic Zone: tobacco plantations of Sheki, Gakh, Zagatala and Balakan districts, Zagatala tea and flower-plantations, family households, tobacco fermentation plants, local authorities' offices, municipalities and schools.

### **Mission objectives**

The mission was conducted to reach the following objectives:

1. To reveal and observe the child labour incident in tea and tobacco production, to learn health and education situation of children,
2. To learn the awareness of employers and other stakeholders on child labour,
3. To inform stakeholders on project objectives for the problem solution,
4. To introduce the project team,
5. To identify persons at the local level for facilitating the project realization.

## **1. LENKORAN ECONOMIC ZONE**

### **1.1. Geographical location and territory**

The Lenkoran Economic Zone of Azerbaijan Republic includes the administrative districts of Astara, Jalilabad, Lerik, Masally, Yardimly and Lenkoran and is located in the southeastern Azerbaijan. The economic region borders on the Caspian Sea in the east and on the Islamic Republic of Iran in the west and south. The overall territory of the economic region is 6,080 sq. km. and covers seven per cent of the country's territory. There are 632 populated areas in the region where 6 of them are towns, 10 urban settlements and 477 ones are rural settlements. According to its specific relief and landscape, the territory of the region is divided into two parts - the Lenkoran plain and the Talysh mountains. 26 per cent of the territory of economic zone is covered with forests.

### **1.2. Demography**

The favorable natural conditions in the economic region have played a significant role in the settlement of the population. The local population numbers 753,700 and accounts for 9.3 per cent of the total country's population. 365,600 of them are employable. The average density of the population in the region is 124 people per each square kilometer. On the Lenkoran plain, which is the most densely-populated area, this indicator is 170, when in the highlands it accounts 60-80 people. Thus, density of population is 40 % more than average indicator throughout the republic. The population of the economic region has a high pace of growth.

The ethnic composition of population is also different. Besides Azerbaijanians, here Talyshes live when accounts about 15 per cent of the local population. Population in the region, for the most part, professes Islam, where the impact of religion, including traditions and customs is considerably strong.

### **1.3. Living and occupation of population**

Traditionally agriculture is considered to be the main occupation of population in the Lenkoran Economic Zone. People, in general, are engaged in tea-, vegetable-, fruit-growing and cattle-breeding. Nevertheless, this occupation fails to provide living of families. According to the data from 2005, the average monthly nominal salary of population accounts 69,3 AZN ( 80 US\$).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> State Statistics Committee, Regions of Azerbaijan, 2006

The level of unemployment is still high. Official statistics from 2005 accounts 2360 persons with status of unemployment. But this indicator reflects only the number of persons officially registered in employment agencies. Consequently, there is high migration of population in the region. Population migrates abroad, where majority of them leaves for Russia, Ukraine, and another part to Baku in search of a job. Such as, in the course of mission we succeeded to get information on the all male population from the Hirkan settlement of Lenkoran district to be working in the quarry in Baku. Only old people, women and children remained in that settlement. During cotton-picking time some families go to the cotton regions to become employed.

Mainly, women and children are those to do agricultural works. Of course, this is due to both tradition and migration of the male population.

Otherwise, due to favourable climatic conditions and great experience tea-growing is the most perspective occupation for the region and people's living. But, recent decay in the tea industry hampers population to be engaged in this branch. Unfortunately, some big plantations were destroyed and the crops used for fodder industry.

Moreover, the high density of the population means that families tend to have very small ground areas. From this point of view, it is impossible to develop tea-growing or other agricultural branches at the small ground areas. Therefore, people prefer moving to other countries than cultivate the land which fails to provide their living.

Nevertheless, different measures on regional development recently carried out by the government, includes successful execution of state programmes adopted to support socio-economic development of regions and to facilitate for considerable improvements of infrastructure in the region. Thus, it was the first time to provide the gas supply of Lerik town. At the present time settlements and villages are also planned to gain gas supply. Besides, drinking water supply in the region is satisfactory.

Above all, the increased care to the development of tourism industry in the region has a positive impact on the employment opportunities of population.

#### **1.4. Economy**

The agrarian-industrial complex forms the basis of the region's economy. The humid subtropical climate, fertile land, water and recent activities implemented in the line of infrastructure improvement create great opportunities for the development of agriculture. Vegetable-, tea-, grain- and fruit-growing are dominant branches in the structure of agriculture. 99 per cent of the tea produced in

the Azerbaijan Republic fall to the share of this economic zone. The lowland parts of Masally, Lenkoran and Astara districts specialize in tea-growing and vegetables.

The industry of the Lenkoran economic region has developed on the basis of local agricultural products and is based mainly on the processing of plants and fish products. Up to 90 per cent of industrial products fall to the share of the food industry. In the food industry, fish processing, fruit and vegetable tins, tea, wine production and tobacco processing play an important role. Apart from that, different enterprises processing meat, milk and cheese, as well as bakeries are working here. In the economic region, there are also plants producing construction materials, furniture, repairing vehicles, producing machinery. Poultry breeding is also developed in the Lenkoran district.

The beautiful natural landscape, hot and cold mineral waters, the favorable climatic conditions and the developed transport network create auspicious conditions for the development of resorts and tourism in the region.

All the same, the economy of the region is full of certain problems. Today some engineering, timber, woodworking plants as well as enterprises producing construction materials, products of light and food industry successfully operating in its due time like state enterprises have fell into decay. Thus, there is a great need to restore the potential through the new capital investments and modernization of production. Local entrepreneurs are not also so skillful in purchasing of equipment, obtaining the qualitative seeds and fertilizers, and necessary veterinary drugs and facilities, creating of mini-plants, organization on sale of finished products and so on.

To restore production of black and green tea, to create tea packaging and processing branches mean to make the important step in the economy of region.

Besides, establishment of enterprises providing stock, supply and sale services in the region could promote satisfaction of needs and solving problems of local entrepreneurs.

## **1.5. Agriculture**

The favourable natural and economic conditions of the Lenkoran Economic Zone, humid subtropical climate create good opportunities for the development of agriculture and sowing without irrigation. So, up to 86,6 per cent of agricultural lands are situated in the non-irrigation zone, when another 13,4 per cent in the irrigation zone. At the same time, sometimes in the arid summer months there carried out supplementary measure on water supply.

The lack of available land anyhow restricts possibilities to expand the sown areas and, thus, decreases the production rate and the chance to achieve record harvests. The obsolescence of equipment and techniques became private property of local entrepreneurs in the privatization process and the deficiency of means to purchase the new ones make executing the above-stated measures very problematic. Of course, both inability of local entrepreneurs wishing to farm, but having no initial capital, to obtain credits, and the lack of preferential credits render impossible to solve the problems arisen.

Though out of proceeds of credits allowed to the republic it seemed practicable to develop agriculture and related branches (processing sphere, packaging, storage and transportation of finished products, etc.). Unfortunately, the existing projects failed yielding the desired results. The main reason stands for non-constructive execution of projects on the part of local executive authorities and assignment of the big bureaucratic staff to control activities, a lot of fuss and trouble during several months for obtaining even small credits disregarding such important factors in agriculture as time and season, reduced the availability of created opportunities to nothing. One of the projects more or less produced an effect, purchasing of agricultural equipment, was that of grant project implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Azerbaijan Republic out of proceeds of funds allowed to our country by the Japan government.

The main of problems in the agricultural sector is non-adequacy of processing branch to modern requirements. Thus, obtaining of the necessary resources for creation of new production spheres and purchasing of the new equipment to replace the old ones devolved from the privatized state enterprises are practically inaccessible for local entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the infrastructure, being the dominant factor of market economy has not been developed yet. The lack of wholesale raw-material markets which are very important for producers, at the same time, the non-establishment of marketing relations necessary in providing customers with finished products should serve an example for the current negative situation.

## **1.6. Tea production**

Tea after water is considered to be the most consumable drink in the world. The average annual temperature of 14<sup>0</sup> C, the annual precipitation of 2000 mm and the humidity coefficient of not less 70 per cent are important conditions for planting of tea. Moreover, tea industry remains to be one of the economically sound and profitable branches of agriculture in the world.

Tea-growing is one of the most developed agricultural branches in the Lenkoran Economic Zone. Here the first tea culturing is concurring with 1930. In times of

the past USSR that economic zone took the second place in tea production. Then, about 15 tea-processing plants were functioning in Azerbaijan and due to its quality the produced tea became well-known in the world. Tea-growing in those districts served the main source of income and, consequently, the living standard of population was considerably high.

But, after conquering the independence transition to the market economy, rupture of economic relations with former soviet enterprises and other objective reasons caused serious damage to the tea industry. Since the early nineties tea-growing as well as all economic sectors went through crisis, which resulted in productivity slowdown and quality not agreeable to the required standards.

About 10 hectares under tea plantations were destroyed. The tea-planting areas were reduced from 13 thousands hectares in 1999 to 3,6 thousands hectares in 2002. Just as green tea-leaf production was reduced accordingly from 26 thousands tons to 1,4 tons in 2002. In 1980s, 60-65 per cent of tea demand was covered by local production, when today this indicator fails to exceed even 15 per cent. Green tea-leaf picking was reduced from 24 thousands tons (1993) to 2,440 tons (2002), which accounts only 14 per cent of total demand.

This tendency should be justified in different ways. First, the problem was dependent on nature of land reform carried out. Thus, as a result of land reform land areas including tea plantations were distributed among population, which created their own small farms where tea growing was not so favourable. Hence, a lot of tea areas were destroyed and replaced by other vegetable growing. The other part of tea plantations became shabby and available for house-building. The second reason is clearly explained by tea fermentation plants to be in debt to tea growers.

Besides, farmers complain of the lack of state care about tea-growing. They consider important granting of long-term credits to local entrepreneurs in favour of the development of tea industry.

At the present time only 5 of 15 tea processing plants existing in the Lenkoran Economic Zone are functioning. Management of these plants signs contracts with tea-growers, and farmers, in turn, pick and deliver tea leaves to the same plants. Tea, for the most part, is grown in small farms or family households.

According to experts, development of tea production could promote rapid growth of agricultural sector in Azerbaijan. Moreover, there are all necessary conditions for the development of this branch in the country. Thus, the region is rich of local raw materials base, energy resources, local experienced experts, competitive labour force and a good opportunity to enter the international markets.

No doubt, there are certain needs to be supplied for the development of tea production, which are

- ❖ Involvement of foreign investments, specialists, techniques and experience exchange;
- ❖ Increase of production for both local and foreign markets, reconstruction and modernization of resources and existing enterprises;
- ❖ Creating production of new products in accordance with market requirements;
- ❖ Establishment of business relations with leading foreign companies experienced in tea production;
- ❖ Increase of export of high quality products;
- ❖ Application of tools and techniques of modern management.

Recent years are observed in certain measures carried out facilitating growth of tea production. Establishment of enterprises jointly with foreign companies in 2002, restoration of tea areas and attempts of some rural population to consolidate their small lots in a farm make a positive impact on development of tea industry.

Therefore, one of the key conditions in the occurred situation is to increase interest of local population in tea-growing. Thus, the “Sun-Tea-Azerbaijan” tea-packing OJSC allocated fund of 34 000 AZN (40 000 US\$) as prepayment for tea-plants care.

Recent five years the “Azersun Holding” Company had a success to increase the buying price of green tea leaves from 0.06 – 0.08 AZN (0.07 – 0.09 US\$) to 0.24 AZN (0.28 US\$) per a kilo. The Company also has privatized the tea factory Nr. 2 in the Astara district with further purchasing of new equipment and repair works. Today, one could say, there is a certain progress.

The activities implemented in accordance with agribusiness plans on restoration of tea areas in Lenkoran were good to provide investment in tea industry. About 14 hectares of tea areas were privatized and land treatment carried out to restore the previous thickness of existing tea areas. In the framework of the “Development and crediting of agriculture” project farmers and landowners were obtained a credit of 13,3 thousands manats for the development of tea-growing.

Reclamation works occupy 60 hectares of lands with the purpose to eliminate thinness of tea areas in the Masally district.

The part of population in the Astara district consolidated their tea plantations obtained due to a land reform and created a big farm. Productivity in the similar farm is proved to be higher.

The more decisive step for eliminating the decay in the tea-growing through strengthening the legal base became adoption of the Law of Azerbaijan Republic on Tea-Growing in 2002.

## **1.7. Azerbaijan Tea Association**

During the visits to Lenkaran Economic Zone the project team held a meeting in Azerbaijan Tea Association. The Association was founded in 1999 by some tea growing and processing enterprises. The main activity trends are to preserve and develop tea traditions in Azerbaijan, to make efforts to promote work relations between tea growers and **processors**, to help their business activity, to protect their rights, to reach the development of tea production at modern and scientific level and to contribute the development of country economy.

During the meeting with the Association president, Farman Guliyev, he mentioned the problems existing in the tea production and the ways of their solution. According to his words, in order to remove the social, economic and environmental problems in the south region which occupies a key place in tea production of the republic, this sphere should be under the state monopoly. Mr. Guliyev also state his attitude and ideas towards the project. He said that children are engaged in all agricultural work including tea growing. To remove this problem all stakeholders must make joint efforts. Following his thoughts, the development of tea production at the modern level, that is, the creation of good investment environment, the use of modern technology and application of international labour standards can create a good conditions to attract skilled labour force to tea production that could decrease the need in child labour. He also expressed his readiness and desire to render all kind assistance with respect in the project implementation.

## **1.8. Law of Azerbaijan Republic on Tea-Growing**

The current law stipulates legal bases in the Azerbaijan Republic providing organization of tea-growing, regulation of tea production, processing and turnover, including quality of tea products. The law is aimed to provide restoration and progress of tea-growing in the country, to strengthen economic and legal bases to enter the consumers' market with competitive tea products agreeable to the international standards through tea production incentive.

By the law, growing, picking and delivery of tea leaves should be implemented in accordance with normative documents and technological norms. The permissible dozes of harmful chemical substances, biological and other preparations used in the tea-growing are determined by the relevant normative documents.

Equipment applied in the production and processing of tea leaves before import is obligatory to get expert evaluation and state registration in the order determined by the executive authority.

## **2. SHEKI-ZAGATALA ECONOMIC ZONE**

### **2.1. Geographical location and territory**

The Sheki-Zagatala economic zone of the Azerbaijan Republic includes the administrative districts of Balakan, Zagatala, Gakh, Sheki, Gabala and Oguz and is located in the northwestern Azerbaijan, in the north of the Great Caucasian mountains. The economic region borders on Georgia in the west and on Russia in the north.

The overall territory of the economic region is 8,96 sq. km. and makes up 10,3 per cent of the country's territory.

### **2.2. Demography**

The total population of the region is 531,9 thousands people which accounts 6,5 per cent of the country's population. Population, as usual, lives in the submountain part, including 27 per cent in the towns, but 73 per cent in the settlements. Recent decade the average annual birth-rate was equaled to 1,5 per cent. The low density of population in the regions accounts 59 persons per each sq. km.

The ethnic composition of population is also different. Besides Azerbaijanians, here numerous Avars, Lacs, Sachurs, Lezghins, Georgians, as well as other nations like Turks, Russians and Ukrainians live.

### **2.3. Living and occupation of population**

Traditionally agriculture is considered to be the main occupation of population in the Sheki-Zagatala economic zone, represented by tea-, tobacco-, flower-, grain-, fruit-growing, sericulture, cattle-breeding and viticulture. But, problems retarding development of agriculture fail to provide the desired living of population.

Particularly, the unsatisfactory infrastructure of region negatively impacts development of farms. In spite of recent years the energy problem has been partly solved in rural areas, there is no any gas supply of villages leading to destruction of forests. In some places the drinking water supply seems to be bad.

Thus, there are serious problems connected with employment of population. Official statistics from 2005 accounts 2968 persons with status of unemployment. Unfortunately, those are only official figures which fail to describe the real situation.

Therefore, the high migration level of population remains to be in the region. Population, for the most part, migrates to Siberian and Tyumen regions of Russia and due to high salary becomes engaged in construction sphere.

According to the data from 2005, the average monthly nominal salary of population accounts 65,3 AZN.<sup>2</sup> Families provide their living owing to earnings of other family members gone abroad and occupation with gardening, especially nut-growing.

Although the 4 neighboring districts provided in the project are included into the same economic zone they strongly differ from each other. This difference appears in their traditions, customs, occupations of population and, even, in traditional approaches to the education. It may be concerned with variety of the population's ethnic composition. There are only Sheki and Zagatala to be the most developed among these districts. Thus, Sheki being one of the ancient cities of Azerbaijan is well-known by folk crafts and production of traditional sweets. There are a lot of developed small production and trade companies functioning in this sphere. Moreover, rich historical monuments create a good opportunity for the city to receive large quantity of tourists. The beautiful nature of Zagatala district promotes development of local tourism, especially mountaineering. These two districts are distinguished by their advanced social infrastructure.

In contrast to them the Balakan and Gakh districts are economically disadvantaged. Here, the level of unemployment and migration is comparatively high. There are great problems with development of small and medium entrepreneurial enterprises. Nevertheless, recent measures implemented in favor of tourism development, including, start to the construction of international airport in the region give up hope for improving the situation existing in this sphere.

## **2.4. Economy**

The industry of region is considered to be comparatively less-developed and unvaried. Rather more 3 per cent of the total country's industrial product falls at the share of this region. The Sheki district occupying 30 per cent of the territory of economic zone yields half of gross production. Light and food industries processing, especially, agricultural products are specialized spheres of the region's industry. The tobacco fermentation plant (Balakan), mulberry growing (Sheki), silkworm breeding, production of eastern sweets, Zagatala and Nij nut-shelling plants, Sheki winery, Zagatala tea factory, Balakan and Gakh canning factories, provender milling plant and meat-packing plant should serve evidence of that. The above-mentioned productions are working, mainly, due to local raw materials.

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<sup>2</sup> State Statistics Committee, Regions of Azerbaijan, 2006

Silkworm breeding lays the basis of light industry. The different-sized enterprises of clothing industry are functioning in all regional centers.

The subsurface resources of economic zone, energy of rivers create wide opportunities for both development of light industry and modern metallurgy, chemical and power industries.

The beautiful nature of Sheki-Zagatala economic zone changed it into the great recreation and tourism region of Azerbaijan.

## **2.5. Agriculture**

The Sheki-Zagatala economic zone mainly consisting of highlands and aridity region possesses short land resources, where only 43 per cent of them are usable in agriculture. 90 per cent of these arable lands are located in the Alazan-Haftaran plain, Ajnohur meadow and lowlands. 40-41 per cent of agricultural plants are grown in the conditions of artificial irrigation. Thus, horticultural farms of tobacco, tea, vegetables, grape and fruits were adapted to local conditions and became comparatively more profitable areas.

Today there arisen a tendency to develop cattle-breeding at the land areas passed into private ownership in the privatization time. As a result, there is a great need in creating the mini-plants producing dairy foods.

The Sheki economic region in comparison with other regions in the republic is of more interest of foreign investors, explained by its wonderful nature, economic potential, highly skilled labour resources and geographical location of region. At the same time, as compared with other regions the increased social activity of population stimulates the more intensive development of small entrepreneurship.

## **2.6. Tobacco-growing**

Though tobacco was known in the Southern Caucasus, including Azerbaijan in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, experts insisted upon that plant started to be grown only after 1896 in the country. Tobacco, first being cultivated at the territory of Balakan district, then, became the main economical activity of neighbouring districts. In the Soviet times state programme on development of tobacco-growing was got under way, where tobacco-growing laid the base of economy.

More 75 per cent of tobacco currently produced in Azerbaijan fall at the share of Sheki-Zagatala economic zone. Population of this region has a good experience and opportunities for tobacco-growing.

In the 1970-80<sup>th</sup> years Azerbaijan took the second place on tobacco production among the former USSR republics. The collapse of the Soviet Union and, thus, rupture of the existing economic relations, difficulties appeared with sale and processing of products depressed interest of capable population engaged in tobacco-growing. Hence, the quantity of present tobacco farms is considerably reduced as compared with the previous years.

Thus, the total sown areas were reduced from 14 800 hectares in 1990 to 8 000 hectares in 1995, which decreased production of tobacco in the country from 17 700 tons in 1991 to 1200 tons in 2002.

Then, raw stuff obtained through processing of tobacco species, grown many long years in the country, failed to be exported abroad due to its inadequacy to the international standards. The local cigarette producers also disregard local tobacco and, thus, farmers find themselves in difficulty to market. As to rural population, the purchase price of tobacco is very cheap. The growing of tobacco mainly used in cigarette production costs heavy expenses to farmers. Therefore, some tobacco areas were destroyed and replaced by more advantageous for population nut-gardens.

Moreover, the non-availability of current technology in the production process decreases the quality of product, when processing enterprises, cigarette producing companies prefer high-quality raw stuff. At the present time 7 tobacco plants and small shops are functioning at the territory. There are no any experienced specialists at these enterprises and the simple method of drying is applied, which decreases the quality of tobacco. So, the Azerbaijan tobacco is also known as a low-grade product abroad. Tobacco processed primitively at these shops is sold to foreign companies in the Russian market.

The other reason justifying reduction of tobacco production is that of military occupation of several tobacco regions.

The total amount of net profit obtained from tobacco goods in the country accounts about 200 millions dollars per year and is considered to be one of the most profitable agricultural spheres. So, government, tobacco fermentation plants and enterprises producing tobacco goods are very interested to extend the output of this product. To release this sector from the existing crisis it is required to involve here enterprises engaged in cigarette production in the country as well as foreign entrepreneurs.

Recent measures carried out to develop tobacco-growing were successful to yield certain results. Thus, the sown areas allocated for tobacco-growing since 2003 have been slightly increased and reached 2 thousands of hectares.

“European Tobacco - Baku” JSC being the greatest cigarette producer in Azerbaijan is concerned with tobacco-growing development in the country. The Company is aimed to strengthen the local source of raw materials through implementation of certain activities. Cultivation of such aromatic tobacco species as “Virginia” and “Berly” is also expanding.

Parallel with that, the Company is carrying out the other activities. Thus, the Company creates opportunities for the tobacco-growing development through using local raw stuff in the cigarette production of different brands. “European Tobacco - Baku” signs the contract with USA “Demon” Company, which supports local farmers to enter into relations with this company.

“European Tobacco - Baku” and “Gabala Tobacco” JSC composed the joint action plan. In accordance with the current action plan, relevant workshops are organized in the tobacco regions, where farmers become informed on growing, picking and storage of tobacco as well as receive booklets composed of useful recommendations.

To increase the interest of farmers in this sphere there provided to create the initiative groups.

Tobacco, as usual, is growing in family households and farms. In this respect, fermentation plants sign contracts with management of these farms and according to the contract, supports them in obtaining equipment, fertilizers, etc. necessary for the product growing.

Despite all of these, tobacco production indicators leave much to be desired. The effective way to release this sphere from prevailing crisis is that of state support and granting of preferential credits to farmers.

## **2.7. Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Tobacco and Tobacco Products**

Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Tobacco and Tobacco Products came into force from January 1, 2002.

The present Law regulates relations on production, sale and purchase, export and import of tobacco, consumption of tobacco and tobacco products, and identifies the relevant directions of state policy.

The main directions of leading policy are determined to be growing of high-quality and valuable product brands, increase of exports, protection of domestic market and prevention of population from hazardous impacts occurred in the tobacco-growing.

The relevant clauses of the Law demand determination of agrotechnical and technical regulations on tobacco growing as well as regulation of activity and social protection of tobacco growers.

According to the Law, growing, picking, stringing, drying and primary processing of tobacco should be fulfilled in compliance with the normative documents and technological norms. In this respect, all legal and physical entities engaged in entrepreneurial activity producing tobacco and tobacco products are compulsory to keep within the requirements of the relevant documents.

### **3. STATE PROGRAMME ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC FOR 2004-2008 YEARS**

Azerbaijan is divided into ten economic zones, which are different by their climates, texture of soils, mineral wealth, local resources and occupations. With due regard to that State Programme on Socio-economic Development of Regions of Azerbaijan Republic for 2004-2008 years was approved by the 11 February 2004 decree No 24 of the president of Azerbaijan Republic. Within the programme a special state fund was allocated to promote economic, social and cultural development of regions.

The key goal of State Programme is to intensify the development of entrepreneurship in the regions, to achieve dynamic economic development, increase of the population's employment and, thus, decrease of the poverty level in the country through efficient use of manpower, natural and economic potential of regions. Measures carried out in this direction create opportunities to expand the economic strength of regions and facilitate solution of social problems as well as to provide eliminating the acute difference in the economic development of regions and obtaining the regional balance.

The relevant action plan to support execution of State Programme, including, Action Plan on speeding-up the socio-economic development of both Lenkoran and Sheki-Zagatala economic zones were approved.

Thus, since Action Plans are approved, certain works on regional development have been purposefully carried out. There is a considerable progress in the energy, gas, water supply and drainage system of the region. Installation of new modular power supplies and transformers, mounting of new gas lines could somehow cover such kind of needs of local population.

Numerous schools were equipped with the purpose to strengthen the material and technical base of schools in the Astara district, including additional classrooms were built to 3 schools in Lenkoran and the other ones were subjected to major repairs; 26 schools in the Masally district were provided with computers, where also given start to construction of new schools.

In one of the settlements of Lerik district the ambulance room and hospital were repaired, when in the next three ones the quite new medial centers were constructed.

Parallel with other branches of agriculture it was good to create conditions for the development of tea-growing in the Lenkoran economic region and tobacco-growing and silkworm breeding in the Sheki-Zagatala economic region.

## **4. OBSERVATIONS**

### **4.1. Child labour factor**

Based on facts obtained, 80 per cent of labour force, used in agriculture, remains to be women and children. Child labour, especially of girls and very young boys, is widely applied in all spheres of agriculture, including tea- and tobacco-growing. In this respect, the great percentage of child labour falls at the share of family households.

As growing of both tea and tobacco is a very long process spreading 12-14 months, children are obliged to work here all the year. They start working earlier in the morning till night hours, about 10-12 hours a day.

In their works children can use only primitive tools as rakes, cropping shears, etc. Moreover, aside from tea- and tobacco-growing their participation also occurs in cattle-breeding, fruit-, rice- and flower-growing. Thus, children are the only ones to be engaged in picking and sale of berries, chopping, delivery and sale of firewood from the forest.

### **4.2. Works with involvement of children**

The matter is children are involved practically in all works within tea- and tobacco-growing processes.

As usual, cultivation works applied in tea-growing, which are enrichment and softening of tea-plant roots, plowing (actually repeated 7 times), cutting of tea-plants, fertilizing, picking of tea leaves (this process continues 6 months – from the second part of April up to the end of October), are carried out by active participation of children.

In case of tobacco-growing, child labour is directly applied in preparation of hothouses, fertilizing, irrigation, plowing, transportation of plants from hothouses, picking (repeated 5 times), stringing of leaves and packaging.

### **4.3. Reasons of child labour**

Information acquired from entrepreneurs and other targeted groups during trips served a good opportunity to reveal the reasons of child labour. Thus,

- ❖ There is a great need in child labour explained by heavy financial status of families;

- ❖ The children do not tend to education caused by low quality of secondary education and availability of youth unemployment problems and, hence, prefer more to work;
- ❖ Child labour is of traditional nature, where all agricultural works as ever are carried out by women and children;
- ❖ The very limited use of equipment in agriculture remains the other works to be implemented manually, as well as there is lack of labour force due to high migration level of population;
- ❖ The employer gives jobs to children to support their poor families;
- ❖ Another reason is justified by lack of knowledge. Except for representatives of executive authorities and educational institutions the other targeted groups have no a clear idea of the negative impact of child labour on both education and health of children.

## 4.4. Education

### 4.4.1. General situation and problems in education

The available facts entitle us to discuss education problems typical for all regions of Azerbaijan including both Lenkoran and Sheki-Zagatala economic zones. The representatives of local executive authorities assess this situation to be the most “painful” problems occurred in the regions.

Thus, it is interesting to explain those observations as regards education of children from two viewpoints: on the one hand, general situation and problems in education, on the other hand, different approaches and observations concerned with education.

Division of population according to education in each of economic regions is given in the following tables (see Tables 1 and 2):

*Table 1. Division of population according to education in the Lenkoran economic region*

	Total		Male		Female	
	persons	percentage	persons	percentage	persons	percentage
Total	637655	100	309956	100	327699	100
<i>Educated with</i>						
Higher education	23688	3,7	19279	6,2	4409	1,3
Uncompleted higher education	1552	0,2	959	0,3	593	0,2

Secondary special education	33677	5,3	21480	6,9	12197	3,7
General secondary education	284586	44,6	131937	42,6	152649	46,6
Uncompleted secondary education	98138	15,4	39293	12,7	58845	18,0
Primary vocational education	15187	2,4	12923	4,2	2264	0,7
Primary education	89454	14,0	4057	13,1	48877	14,9
<i>Uneducated with</i>						
Only reading and writing skills	79482	12,5	39351	12,7	40131	12,2
Illiteracy	11891	1,9	4159	1,3	7732	2,4

(Six-aged and above, from data on 1999 year's population census)

*Table 2. Division of population according to education in the Sheki-Zagatala economic region*

	Total		Male		Female	
	persons	percentage	persons	percentage	persons	percentage
Total	456806	100,0	221998	100,0	234808	100,0
<i>Educated with</i>						
Higher education	23540	5,2	13694	6,2	9846	4,2
Uncompleted higher education	1466	0,3	798	0,4	668	0,3
Secondary special education	46416	10,2	22414	10,1	24002	10,2
General secondary education	172247	37,7	81676	36,8	90571	38,6
Uncompleted secondary	67643	14,8	30245	13,6	37388	15,9

education						
Primary vocational education	23142	5,1	15993	7,2	7149	3,0
Primary education	60556	13,3	27976	12,6	32580	13,9
<i>Uneducated with</i>						
Only reading and writing skills	53547	11,7	26248	11,8	27799	11,8
Illiteracy	8249	1,8	2951	1,3	5298	2,7

(Six-aged and above, from data on 1999 year's population census)

Thus, based on indicators from the Lenkoran economic region the higher educated people account 3,7 per cent. Here, women with higher education are about 4 times less than men, when with secondary special education 2 times less and with primary vocational education 4 times less than men. It is justified by availability of problems with girls to continue education or to be engaged in any vocation.

In the given division, the uneducated people account only 14,3 per cent, among them 1,9 per cent are people with complete illiteracy, moreover, women are 2 times more than men.

According to Table 2, situation with the Sheki-Zagatala economic region is about the same as to be in the other regions, where uneducated people account 13,5 per cent with 1,8 per cent of completely illiterate people. Similarly, the illiterate women here are 2 times more than men.

By data obtained from the representatives of educational institutions, school-attendance of children makes only 70-80 per cent. Anyway this indicator is unsatisfactory, but moreover, it fails to describe reality. Interviews with parents and children were successful to reveal the different situation which proves real school-attendance of children to be about 40 per cent.

This situation appeared in the education sphere should be explained by the following reasons:

- ❖ Due to heavy financial status of families children possess restricted possibilities to receive education;
- ❖ The low quality of education decreases interest of children in education and, thus, they prefer to work;
- ❖ The youth with higher education faces the unemployment problem. Hence, children become indifferent to continue education;

- ❖ The passage to schools in the highlands is very difficult; in the most of settlements there is no any school and children are obliged to get through long distance to go to school in the neighboring settlements;
- ❖ The representatives of executive authorities could explain the other distinct reason that is youth unemployment problem as a result of availability of private higher schools and numerous employers disregarding diplomas of those schools, i.e. fail of private higher schools graduates to find decent work by profession.

#### **4.4.2. Different observations and approaches to education**

During mission it was useful for us to learn one interesting aspect, when situation with education and approach to education are considerably different in the districts and even villages included into the same region. The sharp difference exists especially between plain and mountain settlements. Bad roads, lack of school buildings or their inadequacy to the necessary requirements, including lack of teachers and low professional level, more serious problems with infrastructure and, mainly, family relations, especially preservation of traditional approaches to girls, in the mountain settlements all make a negative impact on education level.

Thus, there is only primary school in the Tangit village of Gakh district, then, pupils with third-class primary education have to go to the 4 km distant neighboring Bairaly village to continue education. Children are not provided with transport to attend lessons and they are obliged to walk this distance. In rather cold weather children already refuse to go to school.

Among 12 villages visited in the Lenkoran region during mission the situation with education seemed to be satisfactory only in the Veraful village of Astara district and Hamarmesha village of Lerik district. But, in other places there exists either poor material-and-technical basis of schools or low school-attendance of children. For example, some modern schools were constructed and given to use in different villages, but they suffer from lack of children. Especially, the school-attendance of children above 7-class education is the lowest.

Interviews with children revealed that 7 of them didn't go to school at all and, thus, couldn't write and read. Besides, 12 of children belonging to Talysh ethnic group could not speak Azeri. If Talysh language is taught only in primary schools, it proves that children are either of primary education, i.e. four-class pupils, or they didn't go to school at all. The other children stated on their seven-class education, i.e. uncompleted compulsory education. The situation with education of girls is worse. Cases of their early marriage (at the age of 14-16) are widespread, which for the most part fall to the share of Masally and Lerik districts.

Generally, in the southern zone of Azerbaijan, i.e. in the Lenkoran region, people traditionally prefer to “earn money” than to continue education. Even since the Soviet times “speculation”, i.e. trade business was prevailing in the region. Therefore, today “this desire to earn money from an early age” appears among teenagers.

But, the attitude to education is different in the Sheki-Zagatala economic region. In general, population’s world view is very progressive. Here, people traditionally gave more preference to receive higher education and live as “intellectuals” than to work in the profitable spheres. Even, today, people show preference for education, especially, education of girls. Problems with education, the high level of illiteracy among girls are in direct concern with living of population and socio-economic situation of the region.

The positive fact is recent years both government and other relevant structures carry out different measures aimed to strengthening the material and technical basis of schools. The activity of international organizations is comparatively strong in the Zagatala and Sheki districts. These organizations support schools to be provided for the required equipment.

Moreover, in some of villages entrepreneurs support equipment, repair and construction works necessary for school buildings.

#### **4.4.3. Situation in vocational training and State Programme on Vocational Training Development in Azerbaijan Republic for 2007-2012**

The complex economic and political conditions appeared in Azerbaijan in 1988-1993 made its negative impact on vocational training in the country. The sharp decline in production volume and, thus, the reduced demand for skilled manpower in the labour market caused paralysis of that system. So, despite the recently increased attention to the sphere of vocational training in the republic there are serious problems here which should be generalized as follows:

- ❖ The material, technical and educational bases of vocational training centers don’t meet the modern requirements;
- ❖ The existing management structure of vocational training is not quite adequate to the principles of market economy, when its financing by state budget seems to be inefficient;
- ❖ The manpower training doesn’t satisfy the requirements of labour market;
- ❖ The professional specialists fail in the vocational training system; the training level of pedagogical and engineering staff is unsatisfactory.

But, the recent dynamic economic development in the country puts satisfaction of demand arisen in the labour market for competitive high-experienced specialists in

the forefront. In this respect, the overall socio-economic development of regions requires solution of labour force problem from view point of labour resources in the region.

To provide solution of these problems State Programme on Vocational Training Development in the Azerbaijan Republic for 2007-2012 was approved by the presidential decree of Azerbaijan Republic from 03 July, 2007.

The Programme serves for satisfaction of demand for vocational specialists in accordance with development requirements of the country's economy and creation of the efficient vocational training system to enable population to get modern profession.

The Action Plan prepared within the Programme provides for implementation of activities on construction of new vocational training schools, repairs of the existing ones, their provision with modern equipment in the relevant regions. Moreover, the Action Plan includes problems concerned with creation of modern vocational training schools, improvement of state regulation and control mechanisms of the vocational training quality.

The Programme requires relevant structures to make a forecast on training of specialists in accordance with lines of development and needs of regions.

#### **4.5. Children's health and public health services**

Thus, the level of public health services rendering to the population as well as to children is low, which, for the most part, occurs in the Lenkoran Economic Zone. There are no any medical centers in the majority of villages. Fortunately, according to the data obtained from health departments, the particularly acute infectious diseases are not widespread in the region due to its pure air and water. Moreover, the tea-growing in Azerbaijan consumers the minimum quantity of special toxic agents like, for example, mercury.

There was also accented on the great impact of solar radiation at the territory, but, any check-up has been never done connected with its negative impact on people, especially children.

As opposed to that, the level of medical services rendering to the population in the Sheki and Zagatala district is comparatively high. Different medical centers are operating in the most of villages.

Nevertheless, the population in the Sheki-Zagatala region expressed their concerns over children's health in relation to 1) the impact of tobacco as a hazardous plant on humans and 2) the impact of the Gabala radar station functioning in the region.

It should be noted that the first reason was confirmed by the relevant state structures, when the second one was strongly objected.

As both regions are covered with woodlands, children run the danger of being attacked by wild animals and getting stings from poisonous insects and snakes. Moreover, because of the lack of gas supply in the villages they very often catch a cold.

The Laws of Azerbaijan Republic on “Tobacco and Tobacco Products” and “Tea-growing” demand growing, picking, drying, processing and other processes of these plants to be implemented in accordance with normative documents and technological norms.

It should be accented on none of technical requirements are observed in the growing of tea and tobacco. Thus, people, including children, participating in the both picking and fertilizing processes do not use any protective means and clothing, even they have no the idea of that.

Children are obliged to work for a long time in the damp, humid weather or blazing sun. According to children, the most unpleasant and hard work for them remains to be stringing of tobacco leaves. This work is usually done by children in the night time, when sometimes they have to work till the morning.

Based on normative documents, certain places, i.e. special buildings should be allocated for the tobacco drying. But, observations revealed that tobacco leaves undergo drying only in the houses which represents a danger for the health of resident people, especially children.

#### **4.6. Hazards**

The main hazards for children working in the tea and tobacco productions can be associated with long working hours under severe sunshine and also cold-windy weather, night work, being imposed to the impact of solar radiation and tobacco as a hazardous plant on human organism, fertilizes, danger of biting by poisonous insects and snakes, attack of wild animals, dust from field work and cuts from primitive and rough work tools.

#### **4.7. Usage of drugs**

The usage of drugs is widely spread in Lenkoran Economic Zone. Because of the region is situated on the boundary zone with the Iran Islamic Republic it is used as

a transit territory for the transportation of narcotics. Besides, the cases of growing narcotic plants are often revealed in the region.

The case rising anxiety is that youth, even school children use drugs. During the visits to the project areas, people the team has met including local authorities and community members acknowledged this fact.

#### **4.8. Child labour awareness and attitude**

Thus, the stakeholders in both regions possess the different attitude towards child labour. The majority of parents accept the engagement of their children in any kind of work as a normal case, nevertheless they think that their children must attend school and get good education, but in this case they have no understanding about relations between child labour and schooling. The situation with “child labour” concept in mountainous tobacco-growing areas is worse. Raising such kind of problem itself surprised the people who have serious infrastructure, social and other problems. According to their words child labour issue occupies one of the last places among their numerous problems. In comparison, some of them, more educated, also teachers, community leaders, and local authorities had shown more understanding saying that it will be better for children to combine schooling and work that can help them to get necessary skills and experience. As regards the parents of children on family farms, they had discrepant attitude to the issue. On the one hand they expressed anxiety about the future of their children saying that the involvement of children in labour activity at early ages harms their education opportunities and health, from the other hand they said that their farms need children’s work. In this respect, employers, including land owners, plantation managers, brigade-leaders consider children engaged in tea and tobacco growing to be unfavorable to their business activities, as children often fail to observe the requirements, thus causing a low-grade product to be obtained. Moreover, employers are to some extent aware of the negative impact of child labour on children’s education and health. Hence, they negatively approach the use of child labour. Of course, they have very superficial knowledge on legislation and labour standards.

As a whole, population possesses very restricted world views and awareness in regard to the problem. Such kind of situation is considerably worse in the remote mountainous settlements. “We never heard about and, thus, fail to understand the term of *child labour*”, they said. Parents normally approach the efforts of their children and consider them as “support to family”. Actually, here there is no any idea of children’s rights, constitution and labour rights.

The representatives of local executive authorities also expressed negative attitude towards use of child labour. They rejected the opinion as “Children fail to attend lessons by their own request” and stated that children, in reality, preferred to work because of the unsatisfactory education level.

#### **4.9. Gender approach**

Gender issues were paid special attention of project team in the course of mission trips. Thus, the common feature of gender in both regions was concluded in girls being more exploitable in tea and tobacco growing. Another problem is that of connected with education of girls. Based on data of official statistics and local population, it becomes obvious that girls in both regions possess more restricted opportunities to receive education. The difference is just explained by unlike approaches to the problem. For example, in the Lenkoran region girls find themselves in the worse situation. Some communities consider unwanted the trip of girls to the city on purpose to receive higher education and, thus, even there is no any need for them to receive secondary education. As opposed to that, people in the Sheki-Zagatala region feel positive views on education of girls, when more prefer them to be provided with education. But, the poor economic situation prevents many families from supporting their children to continue education, and, thus, the early marriage of girls seems to be the only way out.

#### **4.10. Project approach**

The mission was also aimed at presentation of objectives and introduction of project team to the stakeholders. All meetings were held in very open and sincere conditions. People in those regions prefer to discuss the more actual problems. Of course, the similar case, for the most part, has a certain attitude towards parents and employers. But, the interesting fact is that, representatives of both local executive authorities and municipalities frankly approached opinions on labour activity and education of children and recognized the existence of problem. They and other groups considered project implementation in the region very positive and expressed their readiness to support project team in realization of project goals.

Besides, during mission the relevant persons were assigned at places to promote activities to be carried out within the project.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The ASK project team organized a mission to the 4 tea-growing districts of Azerbaijan – Lenkoran, Astara, Masally and Lerik, and 4 tobacco-growing districts – Balakan, Zagatala, Sheki and Gakh, including Gabala district. During mission child labour facts were researched at those territories, and project team and project objectives were presented to the interested parties in the course of meetings with them. Moreover, mission trips enabled to learn more of the population's mode of living and occupation, socio-economic situation in the regions.

As a result of mission, the project team was successful to get useful information on child labour to be widely applied in the tea- and tobacco-growing sectors of Azerbaijan. As is known, their age limit varies from 8 to 16.

Children are obliged to work here all the year because of tea and tobacco growing processes. Moreover, they become actively involved in the other agricultural works.

The local people are either unaware of child labour, children's rights, labour legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic and international labour standards, or this awareness is on a low level.

Children work in the unfavourable conditions, when their health and safety are disregarded.

The education level as well as children's school-attendance all remain to be low. Particularly, there are great problems with education of girls, which attracted a special attention in the Lenkoran Economic Zone.

Thus, the project team arrived at a conclusion that, there is a great need to continue the project in the tea and tobacco regions, above all, to carry out child labour awareness-raising activities for entrepreneurs and other stakeholders.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent use of child labour in the agricultural works, especially, in the tea- and tobacco-growing sectors the certain measures are recommended for the implementation.

It will be very useful and important to submit child labour facts obtained from the project regions to the broad society, including employers and local executive authorities, to hold *round-table meetings* with the purpose to involve all stakeholders in the problem solution, to get encouragement for the implementation of project activities.

The population's knowledge and awareness on child labour are on a low level. Thus, different *awareness-raising and training workshops* on the national legislation and international legal norms as regards child labour and labour relations should be held for employers and parents-farmers.

In this concern, *training aids* should be prepared and *trainings* organized for persons assigned at places for holding workshops and active involvement in the project activities to provide proper carrying out of training measures on child labour.

Employers implementing activities on combating child labour should work in close cooperation with local executive structures and mass media to involve them in active struggle against the problem.

ASK is on the point to join the alternative projects as employment of population, especially youth and women, entrepreneurial education for youth, application of labour standards at workplaces to support elimination of child labour in the country.

The Employers' Organization in combating child labour should make an attempt to strengthening the dialogue through joint activity with social partners.

At last, highlighting of child labour problem in the course of implementation of state programmes recently approved in the republic promises to yield good results.