



The role of Employers' organizations and their members in combating child labour in agriculture

In the global fight against child labour, employers and employers' organizations play a fundamental role. Employers can take responsible action to remove child labour from their workplaces, they can reduce the risk from hazards for adolescents and they can refuse to hire children. At the political level, employers and employers' organizations can lobby for effective schooling and for remedial programmes, and help raise public awareness and change attitudes towards child labour.

In an effort to target child labour in the agricultural sector, the ILO's Bureau of Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) has since 2004 provided assistance to employers' organizations in more than 10 countries from all over the world, empowering them and their members to take concrete measures aimed at combating child labour in the agricultural sector. The programme, funded by the Government of Norway, is currently operating in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Ghana, Uganda and Mongolia.

With the technical support of ACT/EMP, employers' organizations and their members have in these countries undertaken a variety of different types of activities to achieve progress towards the global aim of eliminating child labour:

The Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE) has been actively involved in combating child labour in the agricultural sector for many years. In 2001, it targeted the tea sector by conducting awareness raising workshops for 160 top managers and 495 middle managers from tea plantations. A total of 660 people were also trained as change agents to follow-up and monitor the situation in the plantations and surrounding communities. In 2004 the FUE

turned its attention to the coffee sector after a survey revealed a high incidence of hazardous child labour in this sector. FUE conducted awareness-raising programmes, assisted in setting up of community child welfare committees, trained change agents and developed information materials.

To reinforce their commitment to combating child labour, the FUE also signed a joint statement with the National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU) and the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers Uganda in 2004, in which they agreed to work together in the fight against child labour in the agricultural sector. A direct result of this agreement is the joint FUE-NOTU initiative to eliminate child labour in the inland fishing sector which was launched in 2006.

In Ghana, the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) is working with its member companies to combat child labour in the agricultural sector. In 2005, codes of conduct on child labour were adopted by five commercial oil palm and rubber plantations and their suppliers. The main aims of these codes of conduct were to:

- 1) Establish principles for responsible farming and labour practices among contractors, subcontractors, smallholders, out-growers and suppliers in relation to child labour; and to
- 2) Clarify the expectations of the plantations of its contractors, subcontractors, smallholders, out-growers, agents and suppliers in relation to child labour.

One of the rubber plantation companies, which employs about 2,500 people, provides social services including educational support to keep children away from work and in school. The company has also set up a school for pupils from Grade 1 to junior secondary school that it also

helps to run. Every year the company provides seven students with secondary school scholarships at a total cost of about 3,600 euros, while as a result of a recent collective bargaining agreement each company employee is now entitled to an annual educational grant of about 18 euros to help pay their children's school expenses.

In Malawi, the Employers' Consultative Association (ECAM) has been targeting the tea sector where it has helped to re-vitalize the Child Protection Committees that monitor the child labour situation. The Tea Association of Malawi (TAM), which is a member of ECAM, has also adopted a policy prohibiting the employment of children below 18 years. Tea companies affiliated to TAM are working closely with the employers' organization to ensure that contracts are awarded only to 'child labour free' estates. One of these companies, for example, which employs 16,500 workers during the peak season, does not hire anyone younger than 18. The same company also runs schools on two of its plantations, and has supported the building or rehabilitation of classrooms, offices and teacher housing at other community and government schools nearby. Free health care is also provided to all workers and their dependants from clinics on the plantations that are staffed by medical officers and registered nurses and supported by a fleet of 17 ambulances.

The national employers' organization in Azerbaijan, ASK, has focused on combating child labour in the cotton growing regions of the country. A rapid assessment survey was conducted in 2004 to determine the prevalence and nature of child labour in 8 cotton-growing regions. This was followed by a national media campaign and the development of training and advocacy materials in Azeri aimed at sensitizing employers and other stakeholders. The ASK is now expanding its activities to eight tobacco and tea-growing regions of Azerbaijan in its fight against child labour.

In Moldova, the national federation of agricultural producers (FNPAIA) has a pool of 15 trainers attached to their regional offices throughout the country, who have traditionally

been training local farmers on business planning and marketing. As a result of the project, these trainers have now acquired additional skills and knowledge on child labour issues and conduct regular awareness-raising sessions on child labour in addition to their other programmes. Special training and advocacy materials have also been developed in the local language.

These examples show that many national employers' organisations are taking important steps to combat child labour in the agricultural sector, and that positive results can be achieved using a variety of different approaches such as, actively restricting children's access to the workplace, addressing child labour in the supply chain, training and awareness raising, supporting education systems and collaboration with trade unions and governments. The continued engagement and support of employers' organisations and their members in combating child labour is vital in aiming to achieve the goal of global elimination of harmful work for children.

More information and examples can be found in the ACT/EMP/IOE guide books for employers entitled, "*Employers and Child Labour*".

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

www.ilo.org/childlabour

