INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR

AN ACTION PROGRAMME TO PROTECT WORKING CHILDREN AND TO COMBAT AND ELIMINATE CHILD LABOUR
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Children cannot wait

They have but one opportunity for growth and development

they have the right to childhood.

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Children labour is a silent and tragic emergency of our time. The number of children working, and the scale of their suffering, increases year by year. Millions of children are working, many in servitude and under hazardous conditions. This is not an impending crisis; it was there yesterday, it is here today and will, in all probability, continue tomorrow.

Most children work because their families are poor. And if family survival is at stake everyone has to lend a hand. Poverty may be the most significant cause of child labour, but it is not the only one. Many children work because there is little else to do: schools are unavailable, inadequate or too expensive. The children with the least choice about working are those trapped in debt bondage or otherwise coerced into hard labour.

In fact, few human rights abuses are so unanimously condemned, while being so universally practised, as child labour. By any objective measure this issue should rank high on the global agenda, but in practice it is surrounded by a wall of silence and perpetuated by ignorance.
Children cannot wait. They have but one opportunity for growth and development - they have the right to childhood. Putting children to work may seem rational, but there are heavy costs too. Not simply the costs to children exposed to physical, intellectual and emotional damage, but the insidious costs to the society as a whole, in terms of the diminished value of human resources for future development. To be against child labour is to be in support of children's rights to education as the best guarantee of their future and that of society.

Child labour continues to be an affront to the conscience of the world community, but we have an opportunity and the duty to bring to an end, in our times, the worst abuses of child labour.

Recognising this, the ILO has committed itself to a major effort to halt child labour in its most unacceptable forms, and to begin reversing the trend toward reliance on child labour for economic support. The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is an expression of this new commitment and an organic development of the ILO's long-standing work in this field. The ILO's principal response to child labour has been the adoption and application of international labour standards culminating in the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). In recent years the ILO has supplemented its standard-setting work with research, information dissemination and technical assistance.

The programme is an innovation for the ILO. Through IPEC, the ILO is moving to develop national-level demonstration activities worldwide, all of which have a direct bearing on prevention, removal, protection or rehabilitation of child labourers. In addition, it aims at forging alliances between intergovernmental agencies, governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations to implement these activities, and engaging trade unions, labour inspectors, employers' organisations, educators, the media, parents, children and others in a world-wide campaign against child labour.
The initiative for IPEC sprang from a meeting in Bonn between the Director-General of the ILO and the Minister of Labour of Germany in September 1990. This was followed by contacts with other interested governments in November 1990. Consultation on the structure and content of the new programme continued throughout 1991, both inside and outside the ILO, resulting in an initial Programme Document of 6 December 1991. A financial agreement was signed between the Government of Germany and the ILO in December 1991 to the amount of DM 50,000,000 for a period of five years.

The intention of this initial agreement with Germany was to support a sustainable and effective global offensive against child labour in which other donor countries would participate, thereby enlarging the scope and area of activities. A number of countries have shown interest in providing political and financial support to IPEC. In September 1992 Belgium became the second donor.
The problem

Child labour continues to be a problem of enormous dimensions throughout the world. Millions of children are working in exploitative conditions that are harmful to their physical, mental and moral development and in violation of national laws and international standards. The exploitation and subjugation of children, at and through work, is perhaps the single most common form of child abuse and neglect in much of the world today.

It is impossible to have an exact count of the number of child workers in the world. There are estimates which suggest between 100 and 200 million; in developing countries more than 18 per cent of the children between 10 and 14 years are working. At least 7 per cent of the children in Latin America, 18 per cent in Asia and 25 per cent in Africa are working.

Today the demand for child workers is growing, as is the supply of children for work. In the developing world, where 95 per cent of world population growth is occurring, neither food production nor educational systems can keep pace with the expanding number of children. Indeed, it may be the commonly perceived economic value of children which is helping to stimulate population growth in many countries. In urban areas, where the majority of people will be living by the end of the century, traditional social systems which supported the child are disintegrating. Africa, where many families are under great stress from war and drought, and parts of Asia, burdened by rapidly expanding populations, are under particular strain.

It must also be borne in mind that some developing countries have unemployment rates of between 20 and 30 per cent and that 100 to 200 million child labourers represent 4 to 8 per cent of the world employment potential of 2.4 billion. The replacement of child labourers by unemployed adults could in theory have a major impact on employment prospects in many developing countries.

Concern is now growing on two new fronts: exposure of children to new and greater risks and an explosion of the number of child workers in the informal, unregulated sector of the economy, as a result of increasing migration, urbanisation and industrialisation.

Photo: ILO, Geneva
Previously, the bulk of child workers had been working with their families in traditional agriculture or in petty trade, where there was often a loss of opportunity and schooling, particularly for girls, along with fatigue and overwork. These forms of work and concerns continue to exist, but the stakes have been increased - not only future options, but the health and the very lives of child workers are now in danger in many countries.

Most at risk are those children who are "bonded" or forced to work under slave-like conditions. Some are sold by poor parents to the wealthy to work, or are virtually imprisoned behind closed doors as domestic servants or prostitutes. Some are kidnapped, to do the hot, mind-numbing and strenuous labour involved in brick-making, sugar cane-cutting, sweatshops, etc. Given the illegality of child work, many employers strive for invisibility and make little attempt to create humane working conditions.

The gains of the twentieth century - recognition of universal standards of human decency - are now being overturned by the increasing use of children as economic instruments. Such a trend can no longer be ignored by the international community. A world-wide campaign against child labour is long overdue.

The role of the ILO

The protection of children, as an essential element of social justice, is part of the Preamble to the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation. The ILO has, since its foundation, made the question of child labour one of its special concerns. In fact, at the turn of the century, child labour in the factories of the industrialising countries was of such urgent public concern that it was an important stimulus in the creation of the ILO itself.

The principal way in which the ILO has sought to combat child labour is through the adoption and application of international labour standards. The Conventions, in effect,
define acceptable standards of national behaviour, and when ratified by member States they have the force of an international treaty. International labour standards are valuable because they provide governments and their publics with guidelines when formulating their own laws. A Convention on the minimum age for employment was adopted at the first Session of the International Labour Conference in 1919 and ten more have followed. Earlier Conventions set minimum ages for work in specific sectors of the economy, such as industry, underground work and seafaring; in 1973 the ILO Conference decided that the time had come to augment these Conventions with a single, comprehensive instrument. Convention No. 138 of 1973, entitled “Minimum Age for Admission to Employment” came into force on 19 June 1976 and is now the major instrument (along with its accompanying Recommendation (No. 146)) regarding child labour.

Most member States have now ratified one or more of the minimum age Conventions, while Convention No. 138 has been ratified by over 40 member States, including 12 in the developing world. These ratifications have in part stimulated countries to pass national legislation concerning minimum age for employment.

Since the early 1980s the ILO has been supplementing its standard-setting work with research, information dissemination and direct technical assistance. All this work demonstrated that a more comprehensive and coherent effort was needed. As a response, the Director-General selected child labour as a theme for Office-wide focus in 1992-93. Through the Interdepartmental Project on Child Labour, foundations were laid for a broader and more concentrated programme by the ILO. The substantial grant from the German Government has enabled the ILO, through IPEC, to launch more vigorous action to combat child labour. The ILO’s on-going work in the field of child labour helps to set the policy framework for IPEC’s operational activities; these in turn feed back into the Office’s policy and programme development concerning child labour. IPEC is then complementary to and interdependent with a broad range of activities which the ILO has pursued over many years and part of a coherent policy and strategy for combating child labour in the future.
The operational structure of IPEC is based on ILO rules and procedures and on Memoranda of Understanding between the ILO and participating countries. IPEC is an international programme which contains national programmes and which has a Programme Steering Committee and a Programme Management.

Memorandum of Understanding.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the ILO and the Government of the participating country formalises the agreement on the development and execution of national IPEC activities. The Memorandum establishes the areas, principles and modalities of co-operation in the field of child labour between the ILO and the Government. The responsible ministry, which normally will be the Ministry of Labour, co-ordinates internally with associated ministries.

Programme Steering Committee.

A Programme Steering Committee consists of one representative each of the ILO and of donors together with members appointed by the Director-General of the ILO, namely one representative of Brazil, India and Kenya (other participating countries are invited as observers), and one worker member and one employer member appointed following consultation with the respective groups of the ILO Governing Body. Members with an advisory function include a representative of the ILO Interdepartmental Project on Child Labour and representatives of UNICEF and UNESCO. The Programme Steering Committee’s main tasks are: the setting of priorities; the approval of a biennial programme and budget; and the review of programme activities. The secretariat functions of the Programme Steering Committee are undertaken by the Programme Management.

Programme Management.

Under the general supervision of the ILO management, the Programme Manager develops and implements strategies for a world-wide movement against child labour. Within this
context the Programme Management is responsible for the preparation of biennial programmes and budgets and the implementation of the approved programmes. Advisory services are provided to support the development of national programmes for participating countries. The Programme Management scrutinises and selects proposals for action programmes within each national programme, directs and monitors the execution of programme activities and helps to evaluate outcomes.

National Programme Steering Committee

IPEC is being implemented in a highly decentralised manner. Responsibility for project implementation is carried out at national or local levels. It is intended that action programmes be carried out by non-governmental organisations as well as ILO constituents. A National Steering Committee is established in participating countries for consultation on, and selection of, action programme proposals and for the review of national activities; tripartite representation is ensured on this body.

National programme co-ordinator

National programme co-ordinators have been selected by the Programme Management after consultation with governments in participating countries. These co-ordinators are responsible for the preparation of action programmes, recruitment, provision of required inputs, co-ordination, monitoring, evaluation, and the establishment of good relations with governments and non-governmental organisations.

Subregional experts and programme co-ordinators

Subregional experts and programme co-ordinators are in the process of being appointed to assist national programme co-ordinators and to serve as regional focal points. They provide technical guidance, initiate, develop and oversee programme development, maintain financial control and facilitate the exchange of experience between participating countries. Posts for subregional experts and programme co-ordinators can be considered for subregions in which at least three, and exceptionally two, countries participate in IPEC.
Programme Strategy

**IPEC** is a unique programme within the ILO because of its scale and the articulation of its various component elements. The programme operates at three levels:

- Individual action programmes, many at the local community level, which constitute;
  - National action programmes, which in turn comprise;
  - The International action programme.

The very scale and inter-relatedness of IPEC places a premium on central co-ordination and strategic planning both of the national programmes and the world-wide movement against child labour.

Six ILO member States, which requested the ILO's assistance, were selected as priority countries for action in child labour for the period December 1991 to June 1992. These participating countries are: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Thailand and Turkey. It has been agreed to undertake preparatory work in an additional six countries which have expressed interest in participating in the programme: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Egypt, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania.

IPEC is a programme of partnership which places emphasis on equal participation in the decision-making process by all the partners concerned; this principle is built into the Memorandum of Agreement and the National Steering Committees which express the national execution of IPEC.

Child labour is a complex problem for which there is no magic solution. To begin with, the nature and extent of child labour and the form and severity of the exploitation of child labour vary among countries and regions, as does the degree of commitment and scope for action. Any programme must therefore be both flexible and selective and work at different levels with multiple interventions.
An important feature of IPEC’s strategy at the country level is to demonstrate what appears to work (and where) and what does not (and why) and consequently to enhance the programme through the development of action models that enable replication and thus a broadening of impact.

In practical terms this means developing a series of national-level demonstration activities world-wide. A range of activities - awareness-raising, policy-making, institutional development and direct work with and for children - are expected to generate sufficient momentum and action at a high enough level in the participating countries that a significant impact on reducing child labour is achieved, particularly though not exclusively in priority areas such as forced labour and hazardous work.

Achieving such goals will require the forging of partnerships between intergovernmental agencies, governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations, and the engaging of key groups - trade unions, labour inspectors, employers' organisations, educators, the media, parents, children and others - in child protection alliances as part of a world-wide campaign against child labour.

IPEC will seek the full collaboration of, including joint work with, other UN agencies, particularly UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and UNFPA. Co-operation at the international level will also include the establishment of an international network of NGOs and a task group to help co-ordinate international efforts against child labour.

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Target Groups

The seriousness and the size of the problem on the one hand, and the limited resources on the other, require that action programmes be given priority and that they be highly focused on those target groups in each country which are most at risk.

For purposes of reporting, monitoring and evaluating the activities undertaken by the programme, the target groups are divided in the following fashion -

### Intended beneficiaries

- Children working in manufacturing in the formal and informal sector, e.g. factories, industrial enterprises, cottage industries, home production, etc.
- Children working in agriculture in the formal and informal sector, e.g. commercial agriculture, plantations, etc.
- Children working in commercial trade and service industries, e.g. street vending, restaurants, garbage collection, etc.

Within these categories priority will be given where appropriate to:

- Children working under hazardous conditions whether in factories, cottage industries or agriculture;

### Direct recipients

Direct recipients are the partner organisations which will be involved in initiating and implementing the action programmes. The partners consist of:

- Governmental institutions, policy-makers and political leaders, in particular the Ministries of Labour, Education, Health and Welfare, Information and Statistics; and
- Non-governmental organisations, including voluntary agencies (local-level community groups), workers’ and employers’ groups, religious organisations and the media.
Objectives

The long-term development objective of the ILO, and indeed of IPEC, is to contribute to the effective abolition of child labour. This objective, however, cannot be attained immediately; it requires progressive improvements in the social and economic conditions in many countries. The 1979 International Labour Conference Resolution on Child Labour, therefore, called for social and legislative action for the progressive elimination of child labour and, during the transitional period, the protection of working children.

The immediate objectives of the programme are:

- to have enhanced the capability of ILO constituents and NGOs to design, implement and evaluate policies and programmes aimed at the elimination of child labour and the protection of working children;

- to have determined the comparative strengths and weaknesses of various types of intervention at the local community and national levels as models for replication and adaptation; and

- to have established mechanisms at both the national and international level capable of generating and supporting intensive public awareness and social mobilisation campaigns to combat child labour.
Indicators of Performance

It should be borne in mind that the programme’s development goals cannot be achieved in a short period of time. Nor can its achievements be easily quantified. Its role should be viewed as a promoter of basic principles and a catalyst for action. As such, the primary measure of its impact will be the extent to which it has initiated or reinforced a process of change, in the behaviour and work of local communities, governments and the international community at large. This may be difficult to quantify, but the following could be considered as indicators of the impact or success of the programme:

- increased commitment by governments, which could take the following forms:
  - ratification of the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138);
  - policy formulation committing governments to action;
  - increased effectiveness of the application of labour legislation regarding minimum age and working conditions; and
  - requests for ILO technical assistance in policy formulation and in the design, execution and evaluation of action programmes;

- government agencies and NGOs able to continue action programmes in support of working children;

- children and their advocates continue to be capable of self-organisation to improve the conditions of working children;

- a significant increase in the coverage of child labour issues in national and international media and in various fora;

- international networks of NGOs and UN agencies established and functioning to co-ordinate action at the national and international level; and

- increased interest and requests for information.

Ultimately the programme should be judged on its performance in contributing to the halting, and then reversing, of the trend towards children’s participation in exploitative work in general, and the worst abuses (hazardous work and forced labour, etc.) in particular.
Programme Activities

In both participating and preparatory countries the programme will concentrate on three types of action at the national level:

**Stimulating** governments to establish and apply national policies and laws in line with international standards on child labour along with appropriate institutional structures for their implementation;

**Launching** programmes to prevent, remove, protect and rehabilitate child workers which will serve as models to further broaden and deepen activities in the respective countries; and

**Generating** a climate of awareness, concern and demand for action regarding child labour.

In practical terms this will mean that the programme will typically operate with a range of interventions covering:

- collaboration and co-ordination with other UN agencies and international NGOs;
- the collection and dissemination of information on the child labour situation world-wide and responses to it; and
- public awareness campaigns especially targeted at industrialised countries.

Though IPEC will initially focus intensively on a few countries the programme is global in its orientation and activities. Activities at the international level will support these national actions, particularly through the promotion of a world-wide movement against child labour. This second major dimension of the IPEC strategy will include:

- the provision of technical advisory services to all member States willing to co-operate with the ILO;
- review of national policy;
- review of legislation;
- training in programme design, implementation and evaluation;
- training in the appropriate means to apply labour laws to combat child labour and to eradicate the most hazardous and abusive forms such as bonded labour;
- support for non-formal education and vocational training initiatives;
- improvement of existing working conditions and the development of alternative work schemes as transitional protective measures;
provision of health, nutrition, welfare and counselling services;

promotion of self-organisation amongst working children and their advocates;

training in communication and mobilisation strategies;

development of improved data collection;

development of public awareness campaigns in both industrialised and developing countries; and

organisation of national seminars to develop national plans of action to combat child labour.
Programme Outputs

The above activities will result in a series of outputs for the period 1992-93:

- National steering committees established in each of the participating and preparatory countries;
- A national programme formulated for each of the participating and preparatory countries and corresponding action programmes designed;
- One hundred and twenty action programmes implemented and mid-term reports produced and evaluated;
- Child labour units established within Ministries of Labour to:
  - Co-ordinate the formulation and application of labour laws, and
  - Integrate action with other government agencies as appropriate;
- National resource centres established as focal points for public awareness raising;
- Special centres established to deliver services to working children and their families;
- A national curriculum for the training of factory and labour inspectors developed and labour inspectors trained;
- A training package on project design, monitoring and evaluation developed for IPEC staff and partners;
- A training package on communication and mobilisation strategies developed for IPEC staff and partners;
- An international network of UN agencies and international NGOs established;
- Newsletters produced for regular dissemination;
- Publications produced on successful approaches to combating child labour;
- Evaluation reports produced highlighting relative successes and failures to feed back into future programme design;
- National reports on the child labour situation in preparatory countries produced; and
- A global database established, containing qualitative and quantitative information on national situations and responses to child labour, as a resource for long-term programme design.
Programme Implementation

The programme and budget documents approved by the IPEC Steering Committee provide the framework for programme implementation. The programme manager will develop a work plan to ensure that the planned activities for 1992-93 are effectively implemented. The work plan will be developed in consultation with IPEC National Co-ordinators, National Steering Committees and the governments of the participating and preparatory countries. The key activities envisaged for 1992-93 are:

- the implementation of current action programmes in the six participating countries and additional support provided where appropriate;
- the introduction of the programme to donor governments seeking their political and financial support;
- the design and implementation of a communications strategy as part of the world-wide campaign;

Photo: ILO, Geneva/J. Maillard
the organisation of national seminars in the participating and preparatory countries in order to develop national plans of action to combat child labour;

- preparatory work in the additional six countries;

- the design and application of selection criteria and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for action programmes;

- the development and field testing of training programmes and packages (on project design and communication strategies) revised where necessary and in use;

- the development of curricula and training materials for factory and labour inspectors.

- agreements established with other UN agencies and international NGOs to promote the world-wide campaign and to support action at the national level;

- the collection of information and the development of a database; and

- inputs to key meetings, seminars and conferences, e.g. the XIIIth World Congress on Occupational Safety and Health.