CHILD LABOUR IN TRINIDAD

This summary of research findings is based on a Rapid Assessment Study conducted by the International Labour Organization, Caribbean Office in 2002.

The situation of child labourers

The UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster (MIC) Survey of Trinidad and Tobago in 2000 found that:

- About 1.2% of children aged 5-14 years were estimated to be engaged in paid work and less than 1% (0.3%) was found to be participating in unpaid work for someone other than a household member;
- Slightly more than half of the children were estimated to be engaged in domestic tasks, such as cooking, fetching water and caring for other children for less than 4 hours a day while 1% spent more than 4 hours on such tasks;
- Overall, 4.1% of children were estimated to be ‘currently working’ (involved in any paid or unpaid work for someone who is not a member of the household or who did more than 4 hours of housekeeping chores in the household or who did other family work).

Number and Type of Child Labourers

The Rapid Assessment Study examined four (4) occupational areas considered to be the worst forms of child labor: scavenging, agriculture, commercial sexual activity and domestic work. A total of 93 child and young workers were interviewed, 24 of which were 18 years and older, but who had been former child laborers; scavenging (42), agriculture (22), domestic (17) and commercial sexual activity (12).

Scavenging

- It is estimated that a total of 70 children work at the three major landfill sites: Beetham (40), Aripo (10) and Forres Park (20).

- Of the 42 children working as scavengers at the Beetham, Forres Park and Aripo landfill sites, 12 were 18 years and older, the remainder was below 18 years of age. 40 (95%) were male and 2 were female.
• The average age at which children under 18 years started to work in scavenging was 12.7 years; 7 of the 42 children had started by age 10, and 2 had started as early as 6 years.
• Of the 12 children, 15 years or younger, 10 were from the Forres Park landfill; at this site all the children started working between the ages of 10 to 14 years.

Agriculture
• In 1999, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) quarterly labour force survey estimated that there were 3935 children aged 15 to 17 years working in agriculture. Of these, 1627 were working as unpaid family workers while 2308 were working for a non-family member in a private enterprise.
• The children involved in agriculture were from the areas of Penal Rock Road, Carlsen Field and Blanchisseuse and were between 12 and 19 years; half of them worked on family farms. The majority were either 16 years (6) or 17 years (10). 18 were male and 4 were female.

Commercial Sexual Activity
• 12 girls were interviewed, 4 of whom were 16 years old; the others were between 18 (4) to 20 years (3). The average age at which they started to work was 16 years.
• A key informant estimated that there were about 40 boys between 12 to 15 years who attended schools in the Port of Spain area involved in commercial sexual activity.
• About 30 girls were estimated to be involved in commercial sexual activity in the Woodbrook area.

Domestic Work
• The CSO 1999 quarterly labour force survey estimated that a total of 266 girls aged 15 to 17 years were engaged as domestic workers in private homes.
• The girls involved in domestic work were between 13 to 18 years in age, 6 were 17 years.
• 12 (70%) of the girls started domestic work by age 12.

Working Conditions of Child Labourers
• Children involved in scavenging, domestic work, and commercial sexual activity were exposed to harsh and dangerous situations.
• All child labourers except those engaged in commercial sexual activity worked long hours on a daily basis for minimal remuneration. The workers in scavenging normally work 8 hours a day, with 14 working up to 12 hours. Domestic child workers worked the longest (7 hours on average with 4 of the workers working up to 12 hours a day) for the least amount of remuneration. Many of the children involved in agriculture and in domestic work got paid “in kind.”
• The children in scavenging were exposed to high risks of illness (dengue fever) and physical injury. These risks were however minimal for the children in agriculture. Two (2) of the workers in scavenging reported being injured by dump trucks and 17 said they saw other child workers got crushed by trucks.
• Other health hazards workers in scavenging were exposed to include:
  - poisoning due to the handling of lead and copper;
  - ingestion of contaminated food;
  - inhalation of dust, smoke and toxic fumes which could lead to damage to the respiratory system.
• Domestic workers face physical and sexual abuse.
Action taken to improve the situation of children

- Trinidad and Tobago has ratified:
  - ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour;
  - ILO Convention No. 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labor;
  - ILO Convention No. 15 on the Minimum Age (Trimmers and stokers);
  - The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and
  - The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

- In 1992, a National Plan of Action was developed to address priority areas for action, which included children in especially difficult circumstances. Some initiatives were undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development and an Inter-Ministerial Committee appointed by Cabinet to implement measures in the National Plan of Action and report on the situation of children in especially difficult circumstances.

- The UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster (MIC) Survey in 2000 sought to, inter alia, obtain up-to-date information for assessing the situation of children and women in Trinidad and Tobago.

- Ratification of Conventions No. 182 and No. 138 is dependent on the amendment of a number of legislation pertaining to children. A Legislative Review Committee has been set up to examine the various legislative provisions related to child labour.

- The recently adopted Education Policy, which focuses on the full placement of all children in the secondary schools, is an attempt to improve the educational opportunities available to children.

- Other programmes implemented by the Government to assist children and young persons include:
  - The Adult Education Program (provides educational opportunities for persons 16 years and over, who did not benefit from traditional schooling.
  - Youth Development and Apprenticeship Programmes (provides training in vocational and leadership skills for young persons between 14-21 years.
  - Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) (provides training in vocational and entrepreneurial skills, for young persons between 15-30 years).

Please note:
Trinidad and Tobago subsequently ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour on 23 April 2003.