

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

The ILO is not a very typical international organisation. Its constituency is made up of workers' and employers' organisations, as well as governments. Known as "tripartism", this form of representation reflects a belief that sustainable social and economic policies cannot be made without the input of those whose lives are most affected by them. Workers and employers groups - the "social partners" - are important members of civil society. The ILO is thus an international organisation with firm roots in the institutions of civil society.

Tripartism involves social dialogue, or all "types of negotiation, consultation, or exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy". Social dialogue is difficult to sustain without democracy and a market economy. At the same time, it works to promote both of these social institutions, facilitating the functioning of the market by dealing with its social consequences and promoting democracy by allowing the social partners to participate in ILO decision-making processes. Social dialogue also lends itself to active collaboration between the social partners and many other civil society organisations.

### NGO PARTICIPATION

NGOs, in addition to the "social partners", can be involved in ILO activities at two levels. The first is in the organisation's formal decision-making processes. Here, NGOs operate in a consultative role. Three different categories for consultative relations with NGOs have been established. They include: Organisations with an important interest in ILO activities, granted either general or regional consultative status. At present, more than 20 organisations have been recognised in this capacity. They are all oriented either to workers' or employers' activities. The second category consists of international NGOs - other than employers' and workers' organisations - that share the principles and objectives contained in the ILO Constitution. There are currently more than 150 NGOs on this list, including ones involved in the promotion of human rights, poverty alleviation, social security, and gender issues. A third category consists of international NGOs that the Governing Body may invite to ILO meetings dealing with issues in which they have demonstrated a particular interest.

Organisations from civil society can also contribute to ILO activities at an operational level. Technical cooperation is one of the ILO's primary tools for achieving its Decent Work-related goals – it helps countries to put policies into practice. The ILO, in this context, typically works alongside NGOs concerned with local and national development, human rights, and/or indigenous communities. Networks of home-workers, especially those who are women, are also frequent collaborators. These organisations either perform subcontracted tasks or are, themselves, the recipients of assistance. They are usually selected either on the basis of their experience in a particular geographic area or thematic field, or a special relationship that they share with the beneficiaries of a project.

NGOs, finally, are often key players in technical cooperation programmes dealing with the elimination of child labour. For the past 10 years, the ILO's InFocus Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has worked with many different types of organisations. A couple of examples of the form that such collaboration can take include:

#### PERU

In the Programme to Eliminate Child Labour in the Brick Sector in Huachipa, near Lima, IPEC is working with an NGO called AIDECA, a development-oriented NGO, focusing on social and technological issues and forging strong public-private alliances, to provide a new economic model for families making bricks. AIDECA has developed a plan for a new kind of kiln and production system that combines efficiency with ease of operation, low maintenance costs and

low energy consumption. A new community NGO has been established, managed by the beneficiaries, for community governance and management of a "Social Development Brick Factory," for families whose children are not allowed to work. Fifty per cent of profits are reinvested and the other fifty goes to social and educational projects. AIDECA has established programmes in governance and decision making to raise beneficiaries' capacity to run the brickworks. Other NGOs are also involved in education and monitoring of school attendance. Results to date have been highly encouraging.

#### **GUATEMALA**

In Retalhuleu, about 120 miles from Guatemala City, poor families are involved in crushing rock in quarries on the banks of the Samalá River. The aim of the IPEC-backed project is to progressively withdraw children from work by offering improved technology for rock crushing and providing educational alternatives. It also aims to incorporate child labour into the Ministry of Labour's social development agenda and support activities of other social agents in the implementation of policies, and create awareness among the population on child labour as exploitation. The implementing agency is Habitat, an NGO specializing in sustainable development and the environment, supported by IPEC. To date, 121 children have been withdrawn from the quarries and 240 are attending school. Ten families have formed a cooperative and bought their own equipment to crush the rocks, which will significantly improve their economic situation.

#### **WHAT CAN I DO?**

The best way to support the ILO's campaign against for the elimination of child labour is to get involved in its network of non-governmental organisations. If you are a member of a trade union or employer's organisation, this is undoubtedly the most direct route. Both the ILO's Bureau for Workers Activities (ACTRAV) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) have published guides for their members wishing to take action. You can obtain copies of these handbooks either by writing to ACTRAV in Geneva, or visiting the website of the IOE. The website may be found at: <http://www.ioe-emp.org> where the publication appears under "Position Papers and Statements".

It all starts with becoming more informed about the issue of child labour. If you have access to the internet, many of the international NGOs that are active in combatting child labour have informative websites. They also have their own networks of local chapters in which you might want to become involved. If you go the website route, be sure to check out the links that they offer to other organisations with related agendas.

The ILO's IPEC programme has an informative and comprehensive website. A good place to start here might be by viewing the Fact Sheets or the Frequently Asked Questions. This website may be found at: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/intro/>

Some of the kinds of activities through which you might be able to bring about change include:

- Lobbying your government to ratify and apply ILO Conventions to the letter;
- Pressuring your local authorities to enforce laws on education;
- Urging your trade union to take up the cause at home, or in solidarity with unions abroad;
- Urging your employers' confederation to start relevant programmes;
- Helping to create or run educational alternatives for working children;
- Talking to children and parents to encourage them into alternatives;
- Urging local, national and international news media to raise awareness about child labour;
- Distributing IPEC and other anti-child labour documentation, and;
- Being an informed consumer and traveller.

There are many possibilities to get involved in this important battle, but the key thing is to get involved. The ILO can only succeed if its work is supported by members of civil society.