

World Day Against Child Labour

12 June 2007



Trade unions and elimination of child labour in agriculture

Agricultural trade unions play an instrumental role in the elimination of child labour as the agricultural workers whom they represent and organize are at the very heart of the food production system on farms and plantations.

Trade unions realize that combating child labour goes hand in hand with the attainment of basic trade union objectives – jobs, living wages, improved working conditions and non-discrimination in employment. A number of trade unions have been very active in implementing campaigns to eliminate child labour, which both helps children and complements their other principal activities.

Trade unions are increasingly participating in partnerships, alliances and networks to tackle child labour in agriculture. These range from alliances with a single partner, such as a government, international agency, employers' body or transnational enterprise, to multi-stakeholder initiatives that include transnational enterprises and other stakeholders along the food/commodity supply chain. These sorts of activities also include strengthening cooperation with employers on child labour through social dialogue.

Examples of trade union initiatives at national and local levels to combat child labour include:

In Ghana, the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) have been working together to train farmers as trainers on elimination of hazardous child labour in agriculture. These farmer trainers then give awareness raising talks and training to their fellow farmers, villagers, tribal chiefs, district officials and others on how to eliminate

hazardous child labour. Initially, 20 smallholder farmers in the cocoa, oil palm, orange, rubber, maize, cotton, cassava fishing and rice sectors were trained and they also signed up for ACTRAV's child labour campaign "Make Your Farm A Child Labour Free Zone". The farmers also became members of GAWU, boosting this trade union's capacity to tackle child labour.

GAWU also negotiated a collective bargaining agreement with the Ghana Oil Palm Development Company, committing management and the union to work together to eradicate child labour in and around plantations. As a result, for example, farmers in a community called Akenkase within the Company's catchments area, having undertaken continuous educational programmes using role-plays and other participatory methods, decided to stop using child labour. They have formed a labour pool so they can help out on each other's farms with harvests and other tasks.

In rural areas in Kyrgyzstan, almost all children work in the fields before and after school because low agricultural prices mean small farmers cannot pay for adult labour. A joint ILO-ACTRAV and International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) project is training trade union representatives to help them eliminate hazardous child labour in cotton, rice and tobacco production. The Kyrgyzstan Agricultural Workers Union, an IUF affiliate, has well developed infrastructures in all regions of the country which aid project implementation.

The project is also helping small farmers to increase productivity and income so that they will be able to hire adult workers. The union owns small plots of land in all seven regions, which are used for training small farmers. This land also serves as a guarantee for bank credits for

farmers who want to convert to more sustainable forms of agricultural production and for developing micro-credit cooperatives for union members.

At the international level, the IUF has targeted six major crops – bananas, cocoa, coffee, cut flowers, sugar and tea – for developing links between unions along the food chain, bringing together workers in all stages of the production process and eliminating child labour in crop production.

The IUF is also actively involved in a variety of multi-stakeholder initiatives. The union federation helped set up the Foundation for the Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco and the International Cocoa Initiative and is now on the board of directors of the latter. The IUF is part of the trade union-NGO coalition that drew up the International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers in 1998 and is now a key participant in the recently launched Fair Flowers Fair Plants label. The IUF also actively participates in the Common Code for the Coffee Community.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

www.ilo.org/childlabour

