

The FIFA World Cup and the World Day Against Child Labour

In Sialkot, Pakistan, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), in collaboration with FIFA and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) organized the official launch of a pilot football project.

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Tripartite guests

FIFA World Cup and World Day Against Child Labour 2006 highlight new role for football in child labour elimination

As the FIFA World Cup 2006 captures the attention of the global community throughout the month of June 2006 as the best football teams on the planet compete for the most prized trophy in this hugely popular sport, the key dates of 9 June, the opening of the World Cup, and 12 June, the World Day Against Child Labour, have combined to launch an innovative initiative in which football will play its part in the worldwide movement to prevent and eliminate child labour.

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Representatives from
the Pakistan Football
Federation



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On Friday 9 June 2006, in the world's largest football-stitching industry in Sialkot, Pakistan, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC), in collaboration with FIFA and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), organized the official launch of a pilot football project through which this popular sport will be progressively introduced into the successful child labour prevention and elimination programmes in Sialkot District. Furthermore, the outcome of this project will ultimately benefit child labourers and children at-risk of child labour in ILO-IPEC's global programme.

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Secretary of Labour meets Stitcher team

This activity is a new phase of the football stitching project which has been a trendsetter in combating child labour in Sialkot District in terms of a successful combination of workplace monitoring accompanied by education, health and social protection programmes. By raising awareness among the children involved, their parents and communities, of the value of education and the negative impact of premature involvement of children in work, it has contributed significantly to the elimination of child labour in the football stitching industry and more widely broadly in the area.



Awarding the Trophy

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In this next phase, among other things, football and recreational activities will be provided for the children who benefited from the education and social protection programmes in the earlier phases of the Sialkot project, as well as children in other child labour programmes throughout Pakistan. Sport can contribute to economic and social development, improving health and personal growth in people of all ages, particularly children. ILO-IPEC has identified a growing need for its field operations to focus attention on sport in terms of ensuring the access of former child labourers, their siblings, peers and children generally to recreational and sporting activities as an integral part of their education and rehabilitation.

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This pilot project in Sialkot will be critical in the final elaboration of the ILO-IPEC/FIFA Football Resource Pack that will ultimately benefit child labour prevention and elimination programmes worldwide. Following a launching ceremony in the SCCI offices, including representatives from the Pakistan Football Federation, the Secretary of Labour for the Punjab – an ex-football player himself – kicked off a match between a local football youth team and a team of former football stitchers who, through the ILO-IPEC/FIFA programme, are now mostly in formal schools in Sialkot or, having successfully completing their schooling, are now working under improved conditions in local factories.

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The match was watched by large numbers of children and adults from the local communities and also invited guests from the sporting goods industry in Sialkot and project partners and press. A thrilling game ended in a 0-0 draw in which the football stitching team played with passion and joy, holding their more skilled opponents at bay. When interviewed after the match, the team loudly welcomed the opportunity to play and train more systematically in the future and to build new teams and clubs in their own communities. The sheer excitement in their eyes as they received gifts of their own footballs from the SCCI members was a sight to behold and the celebrations were kicked off with shouts of “FIFA and ILO – Zindabad” (Long Live FIFA and the ILO)!

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Surgical goods team



Earlier in the week, another football match had been organized between two teams of children from the surgical goods programme. The match was organized by one of the NGOs implementing the project with ILO-IPEC to remove children working in the manufacture of surgical goods in cramped and dangerous workshops. The children were a mixed group of those withdrawn from work and now in school or those still working. While a somewhat less skilful game than that played the following day, it was no less thrilling and exciting for those watching on the sidelines. With only a pile of bricks for goalposts and white lines drawn in the dust, the 20 or so boys (rules were stretched a little bit thin) ran around after the ball with an enthusiasm and energy that belied the 47°C heat that beat down relentlessly.

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Local community leaders and one of the leading football manufacturers from Sialkot congratulated the teams on their fine performance and expressed a collective appreciation to FIFA and ILO-IPEC for their commitment to disadvantaged children and their hope that football would live on to provide recreation and pleasure through training and support. Each team was presented with cups, medals and footballs once again generously supplied by local sports goods manufacturers which had been involved in the ILO-IPEC/FIFA programme.

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Leaving this dusty playground on the outskirts of this incredible city, teeming with life and passion, with the cries of “FIFA Zindabad” and “ILO Zindabad” still echoing from the crowds of excited children kicking footballs and having fun, one is struck by the contrast of the lonely young rag-picker with a blue bag slung over his shoulder, as he picks his way through the discarded waste on the ground. He looks up now and then to watch the other children playing. Then, he stops altogether and puts his bag down carefully. Within seconds of putting his bag down, he has thrown his hat alongside it and is running towards a group of boys his age to join in the game of football. This final gesture of happiness from one so deprived underlines the potential impact this project will have on ILO-IPEC programmes all over the world and on helping children everywhere to rediscover the joys of their childhood.

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