

Harvest for the future:

agriculture without
child labour



International
Labour
Organization



World Day Against Child Labour
12 June 2007



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Introduction

The World Day Against Child Labour (WDACL), 12 June 2007, is on elimination of child labour in agriculture, especially the worst forms. Worldwide, agriculture is the sector where by far the largest share of working children is found — nearly 70 percent. Over 132 million girls and boys, aged 5 to 14 years old, work in crop and livestock production, helping supply some of the food and drink we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products.¹

Child labour, according to International Labour Organization conventions, is work that harms children's well-being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. When children are forced to work long hours in the fields, their ability to attend school or skills training is limited, preventing them from gaining education that could help lift them out of poverty in the future. Girls are particularly disadvantaged as they often undertake household chores following work in the fields.

It must be stressed that not all work that children undertake in agriculture is bad for them or would qualify as work to be eliminated under the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 or the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182. Age-appropriate tasks that are of lower risk and do not interfere with a child's schooling and right to leisure time are not at issue here. Indeed, many types of work experience for children can be positive, providing them with practical and social skills for work as adults. Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and work skills are attributes often found in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work.

A strong and sustained global effort is underway to eliminate child labour in agriculture, especially what is termed hazardous child labour. Cooperation on elimination of hazardous child labour in agriculture is actively being developed between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and international agricultural organizations, notably the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP - representing farmers/employers and their organizations), and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF - representing workers and their organizations).

World Day Against Child Labour 12 June 2007 represents a significant landmark in this global effort.

International agricultural agencies and organizations can play important roles in eliminating child labour in agriculture, especially hazardous work. These organizations represent an important conduit to the national level because of their close contacts with national ministries or departments of agriculture, agricultural extension services, farmers' organizations and cooperatives, agricultural producer organizations, agricultural research bodies and other organizations.

¹. This figure includes working children in fisheries and forestry.



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Key Messages

Developed jointly by the ILO, FAO, IFAD, IFPRI/CGIAR, IFAP, and the IUF:

1. Apply laws on child labour

Actions in this regard should include:

- Effective application of the minimum legal working age to jobs in agriculture
- Prohibition of hazardous work in agriculture for girls and boys under 18 years of age and effective prevention of children from entering such work
- Protection of children who have reached the minimum legal age to work, by improving health and safety standards in the agricultural sector.

2. Take action to ensure children do not carry out hazardous work in agriculture

Agriculture is one of the three most hazardous work sectors — along with mining and construction — in terms of work-related deaths and injuries and ill health, and this is especially true for children, whose lack of experience or training and still-developing bodies make them particularly vulnerable. Some agricultural activities — mixing and applying pesticides, using certain types of machinery — are so dangerous that children should be clearly prohibited from engaging in them.

In many developing countries, farmers and waged workers are among the poorest groups in society who often lack knowledge of farm hazards and risks, with implications for child labourers.

3. Promote rural strategies and programmes aimed at improving rural livelihoods, and bring child labour concerns into the mainstream of agricultural policy making

The most important contributor to child labour is poverty. Poor parents in developing countries confront a difficult choice, they must weigh the family's need for food, shelter, and clothing here and

now against an investment in their child's future that could take years to pay off.

Since agricultural child labour is rooted in the livelihood systems of rural areas and the economic vulnerability of families, rural development strategies and programmes aimed at improving rural livelihoods, creating alternative income-generating activities, and addressing health and safety in agriculture, have a critical role to play in helping reduce the use of child labour and the level of hazards and risk associated with it.

Any sustainable solutions of child labour problems in agriculture require national governments, international organizations, donor agencies and civil society organizations to give priority to agriculture and rural development, so that farmers are able to obtain fair prices for their products. National governments, international organizations, donor agencies and civil society organizations should give particular attention in their agricultural policy work to the elimination of hazardous child labour. Child labour concerns should be integrated into the lending practices and conditions for loans of development banks.

Elimination of child labour also means dealing with issues affecting adult agricultural workers as child labour is linked to adult poverty. Policy coherence on child labour must centre on the concept of promoting decent work. Poverty reduction strategies at country level should support the elimination of child labour.

A key to reducing child labour in agriculture is building strong rural institutions, which include farmers' organizations and trade unions to collectively bargain to improve adult incomes, wages and labour standards. Without strong institutions change cannot be brought about.

Key Messages



4. Overcome the urban/rural and gender gap in education

Child labour is part of the survival strategy in many rural areas. In most cases parents would prefer to send their children to school, but two-thirds of the world's poor people live in rural areas, and many rural parents are too poor to pay school fees. Even if schooling is free, costs such as books and other school materials, clothes, shoes, and transportation can be a heavy economic burden. In many cultures, girls are even more disadvantaged as there is a preference to invest in the education of boys when money is limited.

Parents value education. They see it as an avenue for social advancement. They want their children to learn to read and write. When school fees are waived, there is a tremendous increase in the demand for education. It is therefore important that governments make efforts to provide free education, or education at a nominal cost that parents can afford, and to give encouragement for children to attend school.

The frequent shortage of schools in rural areas is an additional disincentive to pulling children out of work and into school. Before steps are taken to move children out of work, it is necessary to make sure they have somewhere to go. If declines in child labour further impoverish poor families or do not go hand-in-hand with high-quality schooling, they could leave children even worse off.

To help poor parents, some countries have decided to provide incentives to families to send their children to school. Programmes that transfer cash or food directly to households that send their children to school and meet other conditions can help significantly reduce child labour and increase school enrolment.

Education is an essential prerequisite for reducing poverty, improving agriculture and the living conditions of rural people and building a food-secure world. But rural children generally have poor access to quality education due to lack of schools, lack of or poorly trained teachers, and irrelevant curricula, or because their families cannot afford the school fees. Measures are urgently needed to overcome the urban/rural and gender gap in education and to improve the quality of basic rural education and access to it.

5. Promote youth employment opportunities in agriculture and rural areas

Children's participation in family farm activities helps them learn valuable skills, build self-esteem and contribute to the generation of household income, which has a positive impact on their own livelihoods. However, children should be prevented from participating in work that is harmful to their health, safety, development and well-being.

Young persons who have attained the minimum legal age for work should be encouraged to enter agricultural work as a means of promoting youth employment. However, it is important to ensure that they receive proper training and work under safe and decent conditions.



The partner organizations

The **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** leads international efforts to defeat hunger by helping member nations to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy. Since its founding in 1945, FAO has provided information, knowledge, policy assistance, and a meeting place for nations to help developing countries and countries in transition to improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all.

FAO recognizes that the causes of child labour in agriculture are rooted in poverty and that generating alternative income sources for rural households is critical to reduce the need for children to work. Most of FAO's work has an indirect effect on child labour. FAO reduces the need for children to work in agriculture through livelihoods diversification, enterprise and agri-business development, improved access to land and other livelihoods assets especially for the landless, employment generation programmes, improvement of labour productivity and adult wages, and strengthened participation of smallholders and workers not only in the market economy, but also in policy formulation.

FAO assists member governments to recognise the different needs and constraints that boys and girls face and to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in agriculture through policy and technical assistance, information, research, and good practices related to rural employment and decent work.

The **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency dedicated to eradicating poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD develops and finances programmes that fit within national systems and respond to the needs, priorities and constraints identified by poor rural people themselves.

Child labour is pertinent to IFAD's mandate because it is both a cause and a result of rural poverty and links up directly and indirectly to IFAD's programme of work in various ways:

- Poverty reduction: IFAD's work to improve access to resources can help break the cycle of rural poverty.

- Promoting market access and income generation for farmers: With increased incomes, farming households are less likely to need to supplement household income by sending their children to work.
- Education: With increased incomes, poor families are more likely to be able to afford school fees and send their sons and daughters to school.
- Improving farm production: By supporting value-added production through improved technology and innovations, children are less likely to be needed for low-skilled and hazardous labour.
- Policy dialogue at global, regional and national levels: Child labour will decrease as more attention and resources are allocated to rural development.
- Partnerships with rural organizations: By working in close consultations with the organizations of farmers, indigenous and tribal peoples, and other groups in rural areas, the risk will be decreased that the children of vulnerable rural households will work as child labourers.

The **Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)** is a strategic alliance of countries, international and regional organizations, and private foundations supporting 15 international agricultural Centres that work with national agricultural research systems and civil society organizations including the private sector. The alliance mobilizes agricultural science to reduce poverty, foster human well being, promote agricultural growth and protect the environment.

As the majority of the work of the CGIAR centres relates to the agricultural and rural sectors in developing countries, child labour is a pertinent issue to the CGIAR mission. The **International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)** and the other CGIAR centres are engaged in research activities to better understand the problem and investigate sustainable solutions by:

- surveying the extent and exploring the causes of child labour in rural areas;
- looking at the implications of child labour in terms of rural school enrolments and its role in the intergenerational transfer of poverty;
- investigating policy options to reduce the incidence and extent of child labour in rural areas
- researching agricultural technologies that can reduce household labour requirements associated with annual cropping in order to reduce the pressure on child labour.

The partner organizations

The **International Labour Organization's** goal is the progressive elimination of child labour by strengthening national capacities to address child labour problems, and by creating a worldwide movement to combat it. A priority is to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, as per ILO Convention No. 182, which include hazardous work, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of children and all forms of slavery.

The ILO seeks to strategically position child labour elimination at the macro-level in socio-economic development and poverty reduction strategies of its member countries in order to encourage mainstreaming and integration of child labour issues and concerns. In doing so, the ILO – through its **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)** – emphasizes the need for assessing and monitoring the extent and nature of the problem, the strengthening of institutional capacities and the provision of assistance for the development and implementation of national policies.

It is clear from IPEC experience that parents and families who are given a viable choice prefer to keep children out of the workplace. Thus, the ILO's strategies have put increasing emphasis on poverty alleviation as well as expanding and improving institutional mechanisms for education and law enforcement, among other key areas of work. As such, the work of IPEC fits into and supports various development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the Education for All Initiative.

The **International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP)** is a world farmers' organization which, currently, represents more than 600 million family farmers with a membership of 115 national farmers' organizations in 80 countries around the world. IFAP's mission is to develop farmers' capacities to influence decisions that affect them at both the domestic and international levels.

For IFAP, the causes of child labour are rooted in the livelihood systems of rural areas. Child labour could almost be described as a function of the neglect of agriculture, along with issues such as, for example, hunger, lack of education and so on.

For IFAP, a key need is to help farm families move out of the poverty trap by improving farmers' incomes, access to markets, and building rural infrastructure. This in turn will boost the role of family farms in combating child labour, and promoting acceptable types of farm work.

Unless the poor are organised they will remain politically powerless and economically disadvantaged. Thus for IFAP, a successful fight against hunger and poverty requires well-organized partners to work with. Farmers' organizations can play a crucial role in rural development as partners with government.

The **International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)** is a global trade union federation with a membership of 363 affiliated organisations representing 12 million workers in 128 countries. Members are employed in agriculture, the preparation and manufacture of food and beverages, hotels, restaurants and catering services, and all stages of tobacco processing.

In its work on agriculture, the IUF targets specific crops, principally – bananas, cocoa, coffee, cut flowers, sugar and tea – with a cross sector focus on occupational health and safety, rural employment and equality issues. The IUF also works on trade union rights, elimination of child labour, HIV/AIDS and migration.

For the IUF, the right to food – a fundamental human right which is violated daily by the persistence of massive hunger – is inseparable from rights for those who produce the world's food. Agricultural workers – the world's largest workforce – often live in poverty and are frequently excluded from social security systems and legal rights enjoyed by other categories of workers. The IUF believes that adult poverty is the major cause of child labour and that working to improve the living and working conditions of adult workers in agriculture is key to the elimination of child labour. As a global trade union representing workers throughout the food chain, the IUF has been able to influence major transnational companies in the food and tobacco sectors to raise standards along the food chain, including eliminating child labour in agriculture.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

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