

# World Day Against Child Labour

## 12 June 2007



## An overview of child labour in agriculture

Seventy per cent of working children are in agriculture - over 132 million girls and boys aged 5-14 years old. The vast majority of the world's child labourers are not toiling in factories and sweatshops or working as domestics or street vendors in urban areas, they are working on farms and plantations, often from sun up to sun down, planting and harvesting crops, spraying pesticides, and tending livestock on rural farms and plantations. These children play an important role 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. Examples include cocoa/chocolate, coffee, tea, sugar, fruits and vegetables, along with other agricultural products like tobacco and cotton.

It must be emphasized 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 leisure time, can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment. 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 detected in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work.

Agriculture, however, is one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work at any age, along with construction and mining. Whether child labourers work on their parents' farms, are hired to work on the farms or plantations of others, or accompany their migrant farm-worker parents, the hazards and levels of risk they face

can be worse than those for adult workers. Because children's bodies and minds are still growing and developing, exposure to workplace hazards can be more devastating and long lasting for them, resulting in lifelong disabilities. Therefore the line between what is acceptable work and what is not is easily crossed. This problem is not restricted to developing countries but occurs in industrialized countries as well.

Agriculture is also a sector where many children are effectively denied education which blights their future chances of escaping from the cycle of poverty by finding better jobs or becoming self-employed. The rural sector is often characterised by lack of schools, schools of variable quality, problems of retaining teachers in remote rural areas, lack of accessible education for children, poor/variable rates of rural school attendance, and lower standards of educational performance and achievement. Children may also have to walk long distances to and from school. Even where children are in education, school holidays are often built around the sowing and harvesting seasons.

While great progress has been made in many countries in reducing hazardous child labour in other sectors, a number of factors have made agricultural child labour a particularly difficult one to tackle. These are:

Large numbers of children are involved in all types of undertakings ranging from small- and medium-sized family farms, to large farms, plantations, and agro-industrial complexes. Historically, child labour, either as part of "family teams" or as individual workers, has played a significant part in employment in plantations and commercial agriculture around the world. Girl child labour in agriculture forms a significant part of the workforce. Key gender

issues include how girls combine work in agriculture with domestic chores, resulting in reduced educational opportunities for them.

Children around the world become farm labourers at an early age. Most statistical surveys only cover child workers aged 10 and above. However, many children begin work at an even earlier age. Rural children, in particular girls, tend to begin work young, at 5, 6 or 7 years of age. In some countries, children under 10 are estimated to account for 20 per cent of child labour in rural areas.

The work that children perform in agriculture is often invisible and unacknowledged because they assist their parents or relatives on the family farm or they undertake piecework or work under a quota system on larger farms or plantations, often as part of migrant worker families.

Agriculture is historically and traditionally an under-regulated sector in many countries. This means that child labour laws – if they exist – are often less stringent in agricultural industries than in other industries. In some countries, adult and child workers in agriculture are not covered by or are exempt from safety and health laws covering other categories of adult workers. Children, for example, are generally allowed to operate machinery and drive tractors at a younger age in agriculture than in other sectors.

In rural areas especially, household income is insufficient to meet the needs of families. Children work as cheap labour because their parents are poor and do not earn enough to support the family or to send their children to school. Working children represent a plentiful source of cheap labour.

All of the above factors give agriculture a special status and make agricultural child labour a particularly difficult one to tackle. But it is precisely because of these factors – large numbers, girl child workers, hazardous nature of the work, lack of regulation, invisibility, denial of education and the effects of poverty – that agriculture should be a priority sector for the elimination of child labour. Unless a concerted effort is put in place to reducing agricultural child labour, it will be impossible to achieve the

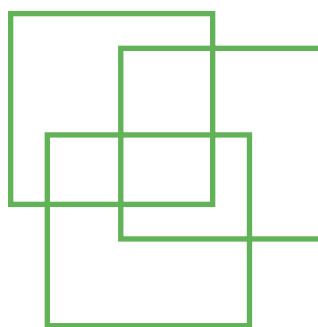
ILO goal of elimination of all worst forms of child labour by 2016.

For agricultural and rural development to be sustainable, it cannot continue to be based on the exploitation of children in child labour. There is growing consensus that agriculture is a priority sector in which to develop and implement strategies, policies and programmes to combat child labour and to put agricultural and rural development and employment on a sustainable footing. In order to scale up work on eliminating child labour in agriculture, the ILO is developing new strategies based on closer cooperation and collaboration with international agricultural organizations<sup>1</sup> including farmers organizations (employers) and agricultural trade unions (workers), and an expanded communication effort centred on the World Day Against Child Labour, 12 June 2007, which will focus on agriculture. IPEC will also seek to mainstream the issue into current ILO work on youth employment and rural employment and development.

### **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

### **International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

[www.ilo.org/childlabour](http://www.ilo.org/childlabour)



<sup>1</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund on 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).

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## Hazardous child labour in agriculture

### What poor health and safety means in practice for child labourers in agriculture

- Bangladesh is a primarily rural country and for many children working to help grow, harvest, transport or sell farm products is a normal, everyday role from the earliest days of childhood. They are regularly exposed to farm machinery and tools that often result in devastating injuries. About 50 children a day are injured by machines, and three of them are injured so severely that they become permanently disabled.
- In Zimbabwe, the wheels of a tractor which had been standing over night had become bogged down in the mud. The following morning, a 12-year-old boy started the tractor, revved up the engine to free the wheels, trying to move in a forward direction (when the safe procedure would have been to try to reverse out). The wheels remained stuck, that is, resisted movement, and the tractor reared up on its front wheels and overturned backwards, fatally crushing the boy beneath it.
- In 2000, an 11-year-old girl, illegally employed on a farm in Ceres, Western Cape, South Africa, fell off a tractor, resulting in the amputation of her left leg.
- In 1990, a 15-year-old migrant farm worker in the USA was fatally electrocuted when a 30-foot section of aluminium irrigation pipe he was moving came into contact with an overhead power line. Two other child labourers with him sustained serious electrical burns to their hands and feet.

70 per cent of working children are in agriculture. From tending cattle, to harvesting crops, to handling machinery, to holding flags to guide planes spraying pesticides, over 132 million children aged 5-14 years old, help

produce the food and drink we consume and the fibres and primary agricultural materials that we use. Child labour in agriculture is not confined to developing countries; it also poses problems in industrialized countries.

A large, though uncertain, number of the 132 million girls and boys carry out "hazardous child labour"<sup>1</sup>, which is work that can threaten their lives, limbs, health, and general well-being. Irrespective of age, agriculture – along with construction and mining – is one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational disease.

Child labourers are susceptible to all the hazards and risks faced by adult workers when placed in the same situation. They are at even greater risk from these dangers because their bodies are still growing and their minds and personalities still developing, and they lack work experience. So the effects of poor to non-existent safety and health protection can often be more devastating and lasting for them. Also, a feature of agriculture that sets it apart from most other forms of child labour is that the children usually live on the farms or plantations where they work. This exposes them to additional risks.

The health and safety hazards and risks they face include:

***Hours of work tend to be extremely long during planting and harvesting***, often from dawn to dusk, excluding the transport time to and from the fields. The intensity of the work offers little

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<sup>1</sup> Hazardous child labour is the largest category of the "worst forms of child labour" defined in the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 182 on Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

chance for rest breaks, and the length of the working day offers insufficient time for recuperation or leisure.

***Much agricultural work is physically demanding and strenuous.*** It can involve long periods of standing, stooping, bending, repetitive and forceful movements in awkward body positions (see cutting tools below), and carrying heavy or awkward loads - baskets, bundles of crops, water containers, etc. - often over long distances.

***Children must often work in extreme temperatures.*** They may work in the hot sun or in cold, wet conditions without suitable clothing, footwear or protective equipment. In hot conditions, they may get dizzy from dehydration because they do not have access to drinking water.

***Child labourers use dangerous cutting tools,*** including machetes, knives, scythes, sickles, etc. to cut crops, hay, weeds, and brushwood. Cuts are frequent and even more serious injuries can be sustained, such as amputations. Repetitive and forceful actions associated with cutting can also harm their musculoskeletal development.

***Children risk falling and injuries from falling objects.*** Child labourers are especially used to help harvest crops. They may fall off ladders or even out of trees while picking high-growing fruit, and may also be injured by fruit pods falling from trees.

***Skin problems are common.*** Many of the crops children work with are abrasive, prickly or contain skin irritants that can provoke allergies, rashes, blistering, etc.

***Child labourers are at risk of being injured or killed by farm vehicles and heavy machinery.*** This includes operating powerful machinery and equipment, tractor overturns and being hit by tractors, trailers, trucks and heavy wagons used to transport farm produce; climbing on or off trailers or other machines whilst these are still in motion, slipping or missing their footing, and falling under them and being crushed or run over.

***Exposure to loud noise can harm hearing.*** Excessive exposure to noisy machinery can lead to hearing problems in later life.

***Many child labourers also mix, load and apply toxic pesticides,*** some of which are extremely poisonous or potentially cancer-causing, whilst others may adversely affect brain function, behaviour and mental health, or can harm both female and male reproduction later in life. Lack of proper pesticide storage facilities or systems for disposal of empty pesticide containers can result in child poisonings or even deaths when containers are used for other purposes.

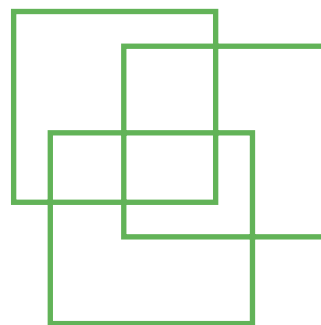
***Child labourers are often exposed to high levels of organic dust*** especially when harvesting or storing crops, preparing feed for farm animals, and sweeping up in workplaces. Breathing organic dust can result in allergic respiratory diseases, such as occupational asthma and extrinsic allergic alveolitis (hypersensitivity, pneumonia).

***Child labourers are at risk of injury and diseases from livestock and wild animals.*** Herding, shepherding and milking farm animals can be risky and children are frequently injured by being jostled, butted, or stamped on by farm animals. Working barefoot in fields or around livestock also exposes them to cuts, bruises, thorn injuries, skin disorders, or even catching water-borne diseases, especially where soils are wet and sticky.

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## Family farms and child labour

Many children work on their parents' farm or holding, or those of close relatives, often on a regular basis after school, at weekend, during school holidays, or even full time even though they are still not of the minimum age to work legally. In some countries, children are sometimes sent or "loaned" by their parents to live and work on a relative's farm in another part of the country.

The family farm is both an enterprise and a homestead on which children and the elderly are likely to be present. In some parts of the world, farm families live in villages surrounded by their farm land. The family farm combines family relationships and childrearing with the production of food and other raw materials.

It is often assumed that family farms are small-scale, subsistence-type enterprises/holdings. In reality, they range from small, subsistence and part-time holdings worked with draught animals and hand tools to very large, commercial, family-held corporations with numerous full-time employees. The terms "commercial agriculture" and "family farm" therefore are *not* mutually exclusive.

Similarities between child labour in commercial agriculture and subsistence agriculture:

- Much of the children's work involves heavy labour
- Work often involves carrying heavy loads
- Working hours are long
- Some of the work is detrimental to schooling
- There is seasonal, higher demand for work, e.g. harvesting

The size and type of operations determine the demand for labour from family members and the need for hired full-time or part-time/casual

workers. A typical farm operation may combine the tasks of crop production and harvesting, livestock rearing and handling, manure disposal, and grain and crop storage. It may also require the use of heavy equipment, pesticide and fertilizer application, machinery maintenance, construction and many other jobs.

It is often assumed that family-based work in rural surroundings cannot possibly be harmful to children – indeed that this type of family solidarity is entirely beneficial. However, it cannot automatically be assumed that children working on small family farms do not face risks similar to those faced by children working on larger commercial farms. With the increasing commercialization and industrialization of agriculture and the restructuring of large commercial plantations into smaller individually owned farmed units in a number of countries, the assumption that children who work with their parents are somehow less at risk seems highly questionable. In many countries, small farms produce much or most of the agricultural grains and, or, fresh produce, and they may be mechanized and make heavy use of pesticides. Small farms, for example, are as likely as larger commercial enterprises to misuse chemicals due to lack of education and training in their handling.

As agriculture in many countries has become increasingly market and export-oriented, the intensification of production has both broadened the range of hazards and heightened the degrees of risk for all workers – child and adult alike.

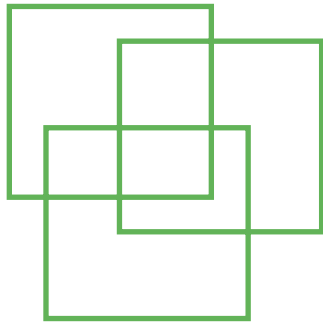
The "family farm" element in agriculture, which is universal and bound up with culture and tradition, often makes it difficult to acknowledge that children can be systematically exploited in such a setting. The fact that children work on family farms can be perceived as "family

solidarity”. Although this can be the case, it is important to take a closer look and examine working conditions (which may well be hazardous) and the amount of time that may be devoted to work and thereby lost to education, particularly by girls.

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## Gender and child labour in agriculture

Whilst working girls and boys in agriculture face many common difficulties, the girl child bears a special burden. With little childcare and limited schooling opportunities, women often take their children with them to the fields. It is difficult to obtain accurate figures on the total number of children engaged in child labour in agriculture, let alone the gender breakdown between girls and boys. They may be perceived as assisting their families rather than labouring, and as such they are not counted in the total number of workers.

In small, family farm settings, it is not uncommon to see girls and boys working side by side their adult relatives. In larger farms and plantations, children may not be officially on the books as workers, but may be working to help fulfil the quotas of the adult relatives or are hired independently. They assist in planting, weeding, picking, carrying heavy loads and handling fertilizers and pesticides, often without proper protective equipment. Wages for women and for children are most often lower than men's, and in many cases children turn over their wages to adults.

Girls are a significant and often invisible part of the agricultural workforce. Girls are particularly disadvantaged as they often undertake household chores prior to going to work in the fields as well as upon returning from them. As domestic chores is often not viewed as work per se, the fact that girls engage in domestic chores such as fetching water over long distances, carrying firewood, cleaning, cooking and caring for younger children, on top of other child labour, needs to be factored in when considering their total workloads. Mothers are more likely to assign domestic chores to their daughters than sons because they perceive domestic chores as "feminine".

The long hours of work can lead to pure physical and mental exhaustion, clearly influencing the health and wellbeing of girl child labourers. An IPEC Rapid Assessment report on girls in child labour in agriculture in Ghana, for example, touches on this in terms of girls not having leisure time. The heavy workload also affects their chances of attending school or performing academically. This situation may be compounded with long, isolated hours in the field where girls may be subjected to violence and abuse.

Inequalities between men and women exacerbate the child labour problem. Strategies for addressing equality issues in child labour need to consider the ways in which male gender identities lead men to act in certain ways, affecting the role of women and hindering the achievement of development goals. One key aspect of women's empowerment is improving their access to land, which in many societies is solely or primarily in the hands of men. The girl child will often find herself working for a male relative her whole life, without ever gaining access to necessary decision-making as an adult woman. Access to credit, resources and training are also limited for many women. And while formal laws may provide for access, local customs and traditions (including those related to marriage, divorce and inheritance) may dictate otherwise. Informing girls and women of their rights and working towards removing the barriers to their access to land and resources are important measures to be taken in enhancing rural development.

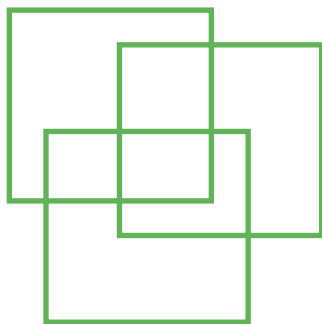
There are cultural, social, psychological and even political problems that revolve around girl child labourers in agriculture. Many questions need to be answered from a legislative, cultural and economic point of view. These problems are

often exacerbated with the migration of men and boys to urban areas, many times leaving the women and girls behind to toil the land without the empowerment necessary to manage both the families and the farms. In Africa where HIV/AIDS is dramatically affecting demographics, women and girls often find themselves in untenable situations regarding both their health and their ability to run their lives. Education and a better understanding of the tangible benefits of gender equity need to be demonstrated in order to impact any positive and lasting change.

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## Migrant families, child labour and child trafficking in agriculture

Migrant labour is a regular feature of agriculture especially during peak times such as harvesting. Migrant workers are found in all types of employment relationships as casual, temporary, seasonal or even full-time workers. They may be migrant workers from a different part of a country, or foreign workers. Wherever they come from, migrant workers are always heavily disadvantaged in terms of pay, health and safety, social protection, housing and medical protection.

It is common practice among migrant, seasonal and temporary agricultural workers to include children as part of a family work unit, particularly where schooling or childcare is unavailable or unaffordable. In these circumstances, children begin to work with their parents from an early age and are unable to attend school. On farms and plantations, children often work alongside their parents for task-based or piece-rated remuneration, but they are not formally hired and do not figure on the payroll. Usually, the earnings of the whole family are listed under the name of the male head of household, who is the only one "employed".

The children of migrant workers are often classified as "helpers" though they do similar and as strenuous work as adults. Equally, they may be hired through contractors, sub-contractors, or team leaders, thus enabling farm and plantation owners to deny responsibility for knowing the ages of the children or the terms under which they were hired. Because work done by these children is not recognized, nor easily recorded in statistics, it goes largely unnoticed.

For many migrant families, the output produced by the children is essential for earning a living wage. For example, a study by the *Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation*

found that on tobacco estates in Malawi, 78 per cent of children between 10 and 14 years of age work either full time or part time with their parents. One in five children less than 15 years old worked full time and a similar number worked part time. Children are usually not employed directly on the estates but work to fill quotas as part of a tenant family: without the child labour, the family cannot meet the quota. In an ILO study on commercial agriculture in South Africa, children on some farms were actually required to work if they wished to live with their parents.

Children of migrant families who work alongside their parents may have been accompanying them to the fields from infancy. Very young children are often brought to the fields because there is little accessible, affordable day care in rural areas. Though not working, these infants, toddlers and young children are exposed to many of the same workplace hazards as their parents. Child labour in this type of setting is also a childcare issue. Furthermore, a report on child labour in US agriculture noted that whilst childcare is generally not available in many agricultural areas, ironically, in some areas where day care centres do exist, they are located immediately adjacent to fields and are readily contaminated with over-spray from pesticide applications.

In addition to children migrating with their families, there are widespread reports of forced labour on agricultural plantations that affect children from elsewhere who are not with their parents. In 2002, a study of child labour on some 1,500 cocoa-producing farms in *Cameroon*, the *Côte d'Ivoire*, *Ghana* and *Nigeria* found that hundreds of thousands of children were engaged in hazardous tasks on cocoa farms. Many child labourers came from impoverished countries in

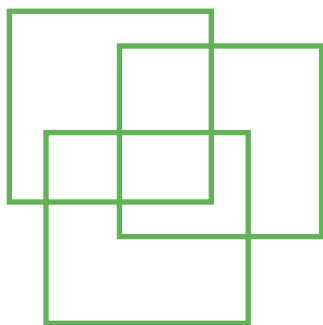
the region like *Burkina Faso*, *Mali* and *Togo*. Parents often sold their children in the belief they would find work and send earnings home. However, once removed from their families, the boys were forced to work in slave-like conditions. In the *Côte d'Ivoire* alone, nearly 12,000 of the child labourers had no relatives in the area, suggesting they were trafficked.

The situation in *Côte d'Ivoire* triggered a public commitment by companies in the global cocoa/chocolate supply chain to address the problems, as most conspicuously demonstrated by the Cocoa Industry Protocol, the International Cocoa Initiative, and the Cocoa Certification and Verification System. Anecdotal evidence from various other countries suggests child trafficking into other types of plantations (such as coffee and rice farms, tea estates and palm oil production farms). Further research is needed to determine the magnitude and scope of child trafficking into these other types of plantations – with a view to developing effective responses.

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## Rural education and child labour in agriculture

The agricultural sector, based in rural areas, is often characterised by lack of schools, schools of variable quality, problems of retaining teachers in remote rural areas, lack of accessible education for children, poor and variable rates of rural school attendance, and lower standards of educational performance and achievement.

Additional complicating factors in rural areas can be the seasonal demand for children's labour (which might conflict with the school calendar), and in some countries the difficulties of educating children from families which regularly move from area to area to manage herds or crops.

Even in countries that provide children with access to elementary education, once children complete elementary school, and if they wish to continue education, the nearest secondary school may be a long distance away. This can make the journey to school impossible, either because of the cost of transport or the time required to travel to school, especially if the child has to walk there and back. Long distances to school can be a particular problem for girls, with their security at risk.

As children drop out of school, they invariably begin to enter the workforce, often at a very early age, and often exposed to dangers.

How to improve the standards of education in rural areas is one of the major challenges facing national governments in efforts to achieve education for all children.

The most recent Education For All Global Monitoring Report states that out-of-school children are mostly poor, rural and with uneducated mothers. It indicates that 82% of out-of-school primary age children live in rural areas. Further, "Because of the large size of rural populations, inequalities in access result

in the vast majority of out-of-school children being from rural households". The share in some individual countries is even higher: Ethiopia (96%), Burkina Faso (95%) Malawi (94%), India (84%).

### Quality education is needed

Whilst it is important to focus on giving all children an opportunity for education it is also important to ensure that children have good quality education. Providing an education of good quality means teachers must be recruited in adequate numbers, and receive the training required to make them effective. Pupil to teacher ratios have to be such to ensure that teachers are able to provide children with the education they deserve.

Some commercial farms and plantations have their own schools, which are largely farmer owned and run. The quality of education on such establishments can vary greatly. Farm schools are often the only accessible sites of education for many children who live with their parents or relatives on commercial farms or plantations.

In South Africa, the Government has taken the decision to convert schools on commercial farms from largely farmer-controlled institutions to ordinary Government-managed public schools with limited farmer/owner responsibility.

Among the important educational issues which countries need to address are:

- The need for schooling close to where people live;
- To consider flexibility in the schooling pattern if significant numbers of children are absent due to work in the fields;
- Improving use of existing elementary school facilities to provide, where possible,

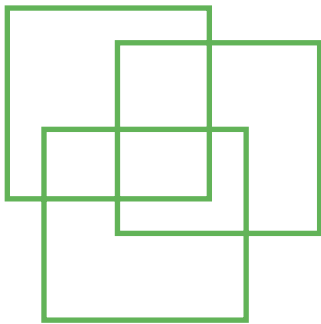
schooling for older children who may have no access to education;

- The need for special measures to attract teachers to rural areas;
- The need for effective monitoring of education standards in rural areas.

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## 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.

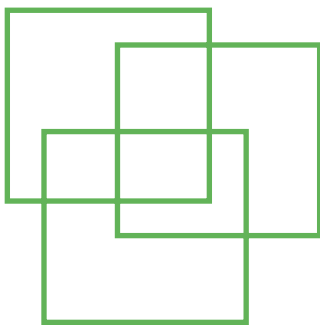
At the international level, the IUF has targeted six major crops – bananas, cocoa, coffee, cut flowers, sugar and tea – for developing links between unions along the food chain, bringing together workers in all stages of the production process and eliminating child labour in crop production.

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.

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## The role of Employers' organizations and their members in combating child labour in agriculture

In the global fight against child labour, employers and employers' organizations play a fundamental role. Employers can take responsible action to remove child labour from their workplaces, they can reduce the risk from hazards for adolescents and they can refuse to hire children. At the political level, employers and employers' organizations can lobby for effective schooling and for remedial programmes, and help raise public awareness and change attitudes towards child labour.

In an effort to target child labour in the agricultural sector, the ILO's Bureau of Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) has since 2004 provided assistance to employers' organizations in more than 10 countries from all over the world, empowering them and their members to take concrete measures aimed at combating child labour in the agricultural sector. The programme, funded by the Government of Norway, is currently operating in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Ghana, Uganda and Mongolia.

With the technical support of ACT/EMP, employers' organizations and their members have in these countries undertaken a variety of different types of activities to achieve progress towards the global aim of eliminating child labour:

The Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE) has been actively involved in combating child labour in the agricultural sector for many years. In 2001, it targeted the tea sector by conducting awareness raising workshops for 160 top managers and 495 middle managers from tea plantations. A total of 660 people were also trained as change agents to follow-up and monitor the situation in the plantations and surrounding communities. In 2004 the FUE

turned its attention to the coffee sector after a survey revealed a high incidence of hazardous child labour in this sector. FUE conducted awareness-raising programmes, assisted in setting up of community child welfare committees, trained change agents and developed information materials.

To reinforce their commitment to combating child labour, the FUE also signed a joint statement with the National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU) and the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers Uganda in 2004, in which they agreed to work together in the fight against child labour in the agricultural sector. A direct result of this agreement is the joint FUE-NOTU initiative to eliminate child labour in the inland fishing sector which was launched in 2006.

In Ghana, the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) is working with its member companies to combat child labour in the agricultural sector. In 2005, codes of conduct on child labour were adopted by five commercial oil palm and rubber plantations and their suppliers. The main aims of these codes of conduct were to:

- 1) Establish principles for responsible farming and labour practices among contractors, subcontractors, smallholders, out-growers and suppliers in relation to child labour; and to
- 2) Clarify the expectations of the plantations of its contractors, subcontractors, smallholders, out-growers, agents and suppliers in relation to child labour.

One of the rubber plantation companies, which employs about 2,500 people, provides social services including educational support to keep children away from work and in school. The company has also set up a school for pupils from Grade 1 to junior secondary school that it also

helps to run. Every year the company provides seven students with secondary school scholarships at a total cost of about 3,600 euros, while as a result of a recent collective bargaining agreement each company employee is now entitled to an annual educational grant of about 18 euros to help pay their children's school expenses.

In Malawi, the Employers' Consultative Association (ECAM) has been targeting the tea sector where it has helped to re-vitalize the Child Protection Committees that monitor the child labour situation. The Tea Association of Malawi (TAM), which is a member of ECAM, has also adopted a policy prohibiting the employment of children below 18 years. Tea companies affiliated to TAM are working closely with the employers' organization to ensure that contracts are awarded only to 'child labour free' estates. One of these companies, for example, which employs 16,500 workers during the peak season, does not hire anyone younger than 18. The same company also runs schools on two of its plantations, and has supported the building or rehabilitation of classrooms, offices and teacher housing at other community and government schools nearby. Free health care is also provided to all workers and their dependants from clinics on the plantations that are staffed by medical officers and registered nurses and supported by a fleet of 17 ambulances.

The national employers' organization in Azerbaijan, ASK, has focused on combating child labour in the cotton growing regions of the country. A rapid assessment survey was conducted in 2004 to determine the prevalence and nature of child labour in 8 cotton-growing regions. This was followed by a national media campaign and the development of training and advocacy materials in Azeri aimed at sensitizing employers and other stakeholders. The ASK is now expanding its activities to eight tobacco and tea-growing regions of Azerbaijan in its fight against child labour.

In Moldova, the national federation of agricultural producers (FNPAIA) has a pool of 15 trainers attached to their regional offices throughout the country, who have traditionally

been training local farmers on business planning and marketing. As a result of the project, these trainers have now acquired additional skills and knowledge on child labour issues and conduct regular awareness-raising sessions on child labour in addition to their other programmes. Special training and advocacy materials have also been developed in the local language.

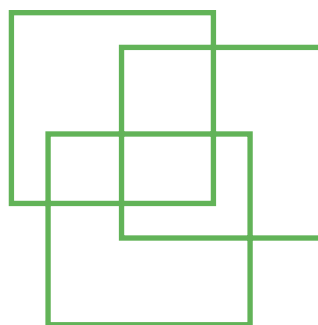
These examples show that many national employers' organisations are taking important steps to combat child labour in the agricultural sector, and that positive results can be achieved using a variety of different approaches such as, actively restricting children's access to the workplace, addressing child labour in the supply chain, training and awareness raising, supporting education systems and collaboration with trade unions and governments. The continued engagement and support of employers' organisations and their members in combating child labour is vital in aiming to achieve the goal of global elimination of harmful work for children.

**More information and examples can be found in the ACT/EMP/IOE guide books for employers entitled, "*Employers and Child Labour*".**

**International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

**International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)**

**[www.ilo.org/childlabour](http://www.ilo.org/childlabour)**





# World Day Against Child Labour

## 12 June 2007



## Cooperatives and elimination of child labour in agriculture

Cooperatives are member-owned and controlled enterprises that are guided in their activities by a series of universally recognised Cooperative Principles and values which lend themselves to tackle child labour. They have an important, but underused potential to tackle child labour in a wide variety of sectors including agriculture, artisanal production, consumer retailing, as well as housing and financial services and other service sectors. Members of cooperatives improve their lives through their cooperatives which provide jobs, income and reasonably priced goods and services. Cooperatives then combat poverty, one of the root causes of the use and spread of child labour.

Cooperatives are significant economic and social business enterprises, varying in size from small self-help neighbourhood organizations to large, multinational enterprises. At the global level, the top 300 cooperatives are responsible for 1 trillion USD in turnover, the equivalent of the Gross Domestic Product of the 10th. largest economy in the world. As much as 50 per cent of the global agricultural output is marketed through cooperatives. In addition, a large share of the markets for agricultural commodities is handled by cooperatives, particularly in grains, dairy, livestock and some export crops.

Cooperatives make development a reality for millions in today's world where poverty and hunger are still touching billions of people. They bring together 800 million people worldwide as cooperative members; they employ 100 million and a further three billion people benefit directly or indirectly from cooperatives.

The major contribution that cooperatives make to eliminating child labour is improving the livelihoods of their members and those in the communities that they serve. In the agricultural sector, cooperatives are a model of enterprise

that farmers can use to improve their incomes and better organise the market for sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, cooperatives are already taking on and can take further actions in the following areas:

- conducting basic awareness raising activities for their members and communities on the elimination of child labour, especially in agriculture;
- taking initiatives to eliminate the use of child labour by cooperatives or by cooperative members, e.g., farmers who supply cooperatives with agricultural produce;
- ensuring that their supply chains are free of child labour, for example, in the case of retail consumer cooperatives who market food, drink and fibres to their customers.

Some examples of current initiatives include the establishment of codes of conduct and policies regarding sound sourcing that strictly prohibit producers and suppliers from using child labour. All include verification and monitoring and foresee sanctions and or remedial actions to be taken in cases where child labour is found to be used. Major retail cooperatives including, but not limited to, Coop Italia (Italy), Coop Norden (Sweden, Denmark, and Norway), Migros (Switzerland), Cooperative Group – CWS - (UK) have these in place.

Agricultural cooperatives too have made commitments to abolish child labour. For example, the Indian Farmers' Fertiliser Cooperative, a large and successful fertiliser cooperative has committed to abolish child labour within its 37,000 cooperatives and their members. In the cocoa and coffee industries in particular, where over 80% of the fair trade products are produced by cooperatives, cooperative members have eliminated child

labour from their production chains. Many cooperative members report that, for the first time, farmers are able to send their children to school because of their association with the cooperative. Some cooperatives also provide scholarship programmes to assist farmers in providing education opportunities to their children.

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