



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
International Programme of Elimination of Child Labour – IPEC

IPEC SOUTH AMERICA



Executive Summary
Baseline for the prevention and
gradual elimination of child labour in
the flower industry in the districts of
Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo,
Ecuador

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INTRODUCTION

The ILO's International Programme of Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), Ecuadoran authorities and representatives of civil society are in the process of designing a National Plan for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. There is a need for updated quantitative and qualitative information that will provide details about child labour. One important sector involved in this area is the flower industry, especially in Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo, two districts in the Province of Pichincha.

The cultivation and exportation of flowers is an activity that has grown rapidly in Ecuador in recent years. These workplaces are reported to use child labour. This study represents an effort to obtain objective information about the subject.

PURPOSE

- ♣ To identify 1,000 children working on flower farms in Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo, determine their working conditions and family and educational situation, discover their perceptions of their work, identify dangerous processes, explore the dynamics and relationships related to social responses to child labour in the flower industry, and identify the characteristics of the socio-economic situation in the districts of Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo in the Province of Pichincha.
- ♣ To make available updated information that can serve as a basis for planning actions aimed at eliminating child labour in this sector.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Identify and register the names and addresses of 1,000 children working on flower farms in the Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo districts and their families.
2. Describe the principal socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the 1,000 identified children and their families.
3. Describe productive and domestic work process and working conditions and identify dangerous work processes and resulting health problems in 1,000 children.
4. Identify the amount, type and source of income received by children and how it is used by the individual and the family.
5. Understand the children's perception of their work, dangerous processes and their rights in the flower industry.
6. Identify the companies that use child labour, with an emphasis on dangerous work.
7. Carry out an exploratory study of the socio-economic context of the places (parishes) where the families of the children interviewed live and inventory the existing health care, educational and labour resources so that actions can be implemented that lead to the elimination of child labour.
8. Identify the institutions, unions, associations and social programmes (governmental, NGOs, international agencies, etc.) in the area where flower industry workers live and study their functionality, response capacity and interaction with programmes for the elimination of dangerous child labour.
9. Study perceptions of the problems, demands and other important elements of the child labour situation and gather ideas for solutions from governmental and non-governmental institutions, the affected children, their families and producers.

METHODOLOGY

Study location

The study was carried out in the districts of Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo (Tabacundo), which are part of the province of Pichincha, the country's main flower-producing region. In 2000, 34.3% of the entire area under flower production nationwide was located in these two districts (1,030.6 hectares under flower cultivation, of an estimated national total of 3,004.7 hectares).

These two districts were selected because of the large number of flower producers and because they have the longest history of this type of agroindustry (approximately 20 years).

Design and observation techniques

This is a descriptive study that includes an analysis of the context and its relationship to the object of the study.

Methodological triangulation was applied with a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Primary and secondary sources were used.

Qualitative techniques included analysis of documents, interviews with 14 expert informants (authorities, professionals, community members), 13 semi-structured surveys with managers of flower companies (DINASA, MSP), four focus groups of working children, one group interview of parents and participatory observation.

Quantitative techniques used:

- i) One survey applied to 1,000 children, which consisted of six modules (general information, household information and information about family members, including family income, education, living conditions, working and conditions, health and dangerous work processes).
- ii) Analysis of documents by institutions in the area of the study.
- iii) Data from information systems, tables, graphics and maps of geographical, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the sector.

RESULTS

The flower industry

Flower production in Ecuador began 20 years ago and is currently one of the country's top export sectors, after oil, bananas and shrimp. It has experienced rapid growth and flower producers now operate in six provinces in the Ecuadorian highlands. The districts of Cayambe and Tabacundo represent about 52% of flower production in the province of Pichincha.

Ecuadoran flowers are considered the finest in the world. The country's geographic conditions, especially its microclimates and light levels, give the flowers unique characteristics, including bud size, stem length and colour intensity. Production costs, however, are higher than in neighbouring Colombia, another flower-producing country.

The principal factors are the dollarisation of the Ecuadoran economy and the cost of electrical energy and air freight.

Cultivation of one hectare of flowers requires approximately 13 labourers. If that is multiplied by the 3,200 hectares under cultivation, we find that the sector creates about 41,600 direct jobs. Women constitute about 60% of the work force. This sector also creates approximately 500,000 indirect jobs.

About 68% of all flowers exported by Ecuador are shipped to the United States, while the rest go to markets in Europe, Japan and other countries. Since the industry began in Ecuador, production has skyrocketed. According to data from Expoflores, however, exports have grown only slightly in the past few years. At the end of 2000, a total of 4,377,000 boxes were produced, representing US\$193 million in sales. In 2001, the figure was 4,814,000 boxes, worth US\$205 million.

Peaks in exports come on certain dates, particularly holidays (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and the year-end holidays). At those times, production increases to as much as 50,000 boxes a day, while the average for the rest of the year is approximately 15,000 boxes. Recruitment of children to work on the flower farms increases at peak times.

A large number of flower companies are organised in the Association of Flower Producers and Exporters (Expoflores), which was founded in 1988. It is impossible to precisely identify those that are not affiliated, but unaffiliated companies are known to account for 40% of the area under flower cultivation.

Working children

There was an equitable gender balance among the 1,000 children interviewed (55% male and 45% female), and 25% were under age 15. About 3% were married or living with a partner and the majority (85.4%) were mestizo, although 7% identified themselves as indigenous. Twenty-one working children had children. About two-thirds were born in Cayambe-Tabacundo and only 1.2% were recent migrants (less than one year).

On average, children in the flower industry began working at age 13 and 96% said it was their only job. Sixty of the 1,000 interviewed began working in the flower industry before they were 10 years old. About 80% have been doing this type of work for between one and four years. The majority (90%) are paid; only one boy received no remuneration. The majority of the children work in the morning and/or afternoon and are employed by companies having more than 100 workers.

With regard to the type of work done, in general the children engage in nearly all flower farming tasks. The jobs most frequently held by children are post-harvest (40%); cultivation, cleaning and pruning (31%); and harvest (11%).

Families of working children

The majority of the families are structured families with an average of 5.47 members. The largest group had children under age 15. It was difficult to locate parents for focus group meetings because they were out of the house working in some income-generating activity in the area.

Income of families and working children

The average monthly income is US\$406.60 per family and US\$76 per person, but in half the families of the children studied (48%), the income was insufficient to purchase basic necessities (estimated to cost \$345). Nearly 70% of the working children have an income of about US\$100 per month.

Children's education

Almost all the children surveyed know how to read and write (99.3%) and 57% attend school. Of those who work and do not attend school (43%), the most important reasons for not studying were a lack of economic resources and the need to work. The children and adolescents who are farthest behind the appropriate grade for their age are those between ages 14 and 17, for obvious reasons related to their early entry into the work force.

Children's perceptions of work, risks and rights

The majority work to help their families (65.4%) and pay for their schooling (23.5%). For the great majority, giving up work would result in a worsening of their living conditions and would also mean they could no longer study. A small percentage said their families required them to work (7.7%).

One-third of those surveyed would prefer just to study (33.7%), while 26% said they would prefer to study and work. One-third would like to find a better job, indicating dissatisfaction with their current work situation.

The children working on flower farms and their parents perceive this work as *“hard, humiliating, a kind of suffering, monotonous and something to be endured.”*

Within *“the culture of poverty,”* however, child labour is legitimised as an ideal way for children to learn *“take care of themselves in life”* and a pattern that passes from generation to generation.

Families believe that work strengthens the children's *“sense of responsibility,”* and it becomes a point of pride for the children as they grow up.

Like their parents, the children perceive the greatest risk as *“losing my job.”* In the mothers' perception, the greatest risk is that a daughter will *“become pregnant”* or that a son will *“have to make a commitment”* (live with a partner because she is pregnant) or *“become an alcoholic, drug addict or gang member.”*

For working girls, the most frequent risk is sexual harassment by assistants, supervisors, co-workers, technical personnel or agricultural engineers on the farms.

Working boys perceive that *“being careless”* is a risk. If they are not careful, they could fall while repairing a greenhouse, become tangled in the hoses used for spraying agricultural chemicals or suffer *“an accident — and these are always the fault of a careless worker, not the company.”* The children have little knowledge of and pay little attention to the real origin of workplace accidents and illnesses.

All (girls, boys and parents) say they were unaware of children's rights.

Dangerous processes

Working children are exposed to several dangerous processes. One is the seasonal or third-party hiring that deprives them of rights such as social security. Others include long work days, little rest time, exposure to agricultural chemicals and the multiple workload (working on the flower farms, at home and at school).

More than half say the work is intense and monotonous. The majority work on weekends as well as during the week.

Those surveyed acknowledge that at work they are subject to physical aggression, mistreatment or humiliating treatment by their supervisors.

Working with roses exposes them to scratches and fatigue. Dangerous processes also include the use of sharp tools and working in high places. Other significant risks include exposure to heat and cold, exposure to sunlight for long periods, and the use of pesticides and disinfectants, to which approximately half the respondents said they were exposed.

Health situation, prevention measures and access to services

Nearly half the respondents (45.8%) have suffered some occupational accident or illness. The most frequent health problems are respiratory complaints, cuts and scrapes, and gastro-intestinal illnesses.

Access to formal health-care services is poor. About half turn to friends or relatives or take care of themselves. Barely one-third consult a doctor, nurse or hospital, although a significant number go to pharmacies. Only one person went to a traditional healer. Most of those surveyed said that they or their parents pay for any treatment (70%).

Overall, 20% used no type of personal protection. This rate was highest among children under age 10 (50%).

Expert informants' perceptions of child labour

The majority of those interviewed believe that the groups at highest risk because of work related to the flower industry are children, adolescents and women. According to those surveyed, this relationship has had an effect on social, family and community organisation.

In recent years, Ecuadoran society, especially in this region, has experienced a broad range of socio-economic, political and cultural changes. These changes are reflected in specific ways:

- Children and youths drop out of school to work
- Working parents leave their children alone or, at best, with neighbours or relatives.
- Children become responsible for household chores at a very early age, which implies an overload of tasks and a high risk.
- Premature pregnancies occur, with various social consequences (single mothers, abortions, etc.)
- Disintegration of the community
- Alcohol and drug consumption among youth

- Youth gangs
- Inappropriate handling of household money; young people begin to develop alienating patterns of consumption
- Poor nutrition and a tendency to replace traditional food with canned or processed food such as noodles, sardines and other prepared items.

According to those surveyed, young people in these two districts work on the plantations because the pay is higher than for any other kind of work. They are aware of the health risks posed by exposure to the chemicals used on the farms, but they see this as the only well-paid source of work.

The businesspeople surveyed said they believed that flower production in Ecuador has had a positive impact on the region. Women, who traditionally have engaged in activities with little or no remuneration (milking cows, tending family gardens, etc.) have become the economic mainstay of their households because of work in the flower industry. They can better contribute to their children's food, clothing and education. The per-capita income of workers in the area has also increased.

Business owners say that the farms comply with international norms regarding wages, that they value and make efforts to improve the quality of the work force, and that jobs are rotated to motivate and protect the workers.

The social programme known as "Flowers in Ecuador" monitors producers to ensure, among other things, that no children under 15 are working.

These respondents agreed with other expert informants that the principal reasons why adolescents begin working on flower farms are economic. In rural areas, parents with a large number of children are forced to put their children into the work force at an early age. Another factor is the presence of subcontractors who include children among their workers.

Factors related to child labour

In the opinion of the expert informants, the processes that most tend to lead to child labour in the area studied are related to the production model; legal, political and institutional models; and public response.

Because of its use of high technology and its insertion into the international market, the flower industry requires a large number of workers per hectare. Demand is higher during certain seasons of the year.

Besides the benefits for the production process, increased labour flexibility, the tendency to use third-party services and a decrease in workers' organising rights are factors that affect not only adult workers, but also children working in the flower industry.

The institutional and political conditions and policies that should protect the rights of children and adolescents who live and/or work in the area are fragile. Three factors have a bearing on this problem:

- a) Social policies in Ecuador
- b) Policies regarding child labour
- c) Community and labour organisation

With regard to social policies in Ecuador, it should be noted that there are no policies regarding decent work. In addition, the government budget for implementing social programmes and ensuring compliance with laws protecting workers' rights are limited or non-existent. If there were clearly defined economic and productive policies that supported small and medium-size businesses and if adults had adequate protection and working conditions, fewer children would be in the work force.

With regard to policies on child labour, despite efforts in recent years, the policies protecting children and adolescents are still very weak. This limitation significantly affects social, productive and cultural relationships, as reflected in the following problems:

- Virtual invisibility of child labour
- Gender-based inequities
- Lack of explicit policies for effective citizen participation in the issue of child labour
- Limitations in mechanisms for social compensation, dialogue and control involving flower-production companies.
- Inefficient application of legal norms on child labour. In the case of certain companies, the children's labour relationship is not transparent.
- There are no municipal regulations or ordinances for applying the law.
- Low levels of institutional development and a lack of trained personnel with a knowledge of laws regarding child labour.
- Limitations in the organisation of local governments' systems for protecting children.
- The few actions that are taken depend more on coercion than on persuasion or consensus.
- Dispersion of and lack of coordination among private and public agencies and organisations.

Twelve of the 14 people interviewed were unaware of policies for the elimination of child labour. The other two had limited knowledge of the subject.

With regard to community and labour organisation, respondents said that the flower industry has weakened traditional forms of community organisation. Because of the long work days, workers can no longer participate in traditional community activities (communal labour and assemblies). The weakness of labour and community organisation, combined with a lack of community oversight, leads to the legitimisation and use of child labour.

Business owners said that it was difficult to balance production commitments with the workers' long absences for traditional festivals.

Many expert informants said that child labour "is not a problem," and that children and youths have historically participated in family and community work because of the belief that "it is the parents' duty to teach their children to work."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The information from this study makes it possible to locate the children who are most vulnerable and at greatest risk. With this information, it is also possible to identify solutions and define policies and intervention programmes that involve the majority of community stakeholders, businesspeople, the children and their families.

1. The most vulnerable children and those who should be considered a priority for interventions are:
 - a) Those under age 15, who represent one-fourth of those involved in this study.
 - b) Working children who have dropped out of school but say they would like to resume their studies.
 - c) Children exposed to pesticides.
 - d) Children from families whose incomes are insufficient to meet basic needs.
 - e) Girls, because of the risk of sexual harassment.
 - f) Boys and girls who are living as couples and have children.

2. To locate these children, this study includes a list with the names and addresses of 1,000 children. Because the information has been gathered, there is also an ethical obligation to return to these children with specific proposals for helping to solve their problems. The main catalysts should be the national agencies responsible for programmes for eliminating child labour, with support from ILO/IPEC.

3. Workshops with the children and families involved in this study. One objective should be to inform and raise awareness about:
 - a) The dangers of work for children
 - b) Rights and responsibilities
 - c) Perceptions and concepts regarding child labour.
 - d) Analysis of viable proposals for eliminating child labour that are socially and culturally sustainable.
 - e) Occupational risks and prevention measures on the flower farms.

4. Workshops with mid-level managers of the companies, including such issues as violence, abuse and sexual harassment in the workplace.

5. A study, based on primary sources (within the workplaces) of dangerous processes (occupational risks) and possible measures for health promotion, protection and prevention.

6. Priority guidelines for an integral community response could include:
 - a) Obtaining commitments from local, sectoral and national authorities to control and eliminate child labour in this sector.

 - b) Including the issue of child labour on the political agenda of local institutions, especially local governments and district development councils (Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo). One mechanism could be the District Assembly and the Children's Government of the Municipality of Cayambe, which makes it possible to include working children and their parents as key stakeholders in the process of eliminating child labour.

 - c) Creating a task force on child labour in the District Councils with the participation of local institutions and businesspeople. These would be responsible for defining local inter-sectoral and inter-institutional policies.

 - d) Strengthening the institutional development of local governments so they can formulate, apply and evaluate municipal ordinances aimed at eliminating child labour.

- e) Stimulating policies and action plans based on primary health care, epidemiological oversight and occupational safety and health. Service provision agreements between the flower farms and health-care centres in the area should be supported.
- f) The possibility of establishing local health insurance for the families of working children should be discussed with the active participation of the various stakeholders in the two districts.
- g) Training in occupational health for health-care personnel in Ministry of Health facilities and the flower industry's medical services, and development of a system for monitoring the effects of exposure to hazardous processes.
- h) Because of the type of workplace exposure (agricultural chemicals), this study should go into greater depth in other areas (for example, to determine early effects on the nervous system through a battery of neuro-behavioral tests).
- i) Development of an Information, Education and Communication programme to raise public awareness and educate the local population about the same issues covered in the workshops for children and parents (children's and workers' rights, effects of child labour, dangerous processes in flower production using child labour, etc.).
- j) Including the issue of children's rights and the effects of child labour in the school curriculum (upper grades).
- k) Seeking income-generation alternatives for adult relatives of working children, because these will pose less risk and produce greater benefits for the families and the community. These must be studied with local stakeholders.

7. From the businesses' standpoint, the following recommendations are made:

- a) Strict control of subcontractors so that they do not employ children
- b) In-depth analysis of the reasons why children are in the work force.
- c) If adolescents must be employed on the farms, connect this with their studies so the tasks contribute to their education.
- d) Control of occupational safety and hygiene
- e) Educational assistance for low-income children (scholarships, school supplies, etc.)
- f) Make every effort to keep children under 15 out of the work force and seek less dangerous tasks for those between ages 15 and 18.

The solutions mentioned here required preliminary processes that allow for an optimal social response to the problem. The most important include:

1. Discussion of the results of this study with organisations of flower producers, especially Expoflores, which has expressed its willingness to participate in the search for solutions to this problem. This is an important activity but also a delicate one, so it will be necessary to establish frank, comprehensive and honest dialogue among business owners, representatives of institutions and civil society. The main objective must be the elimination of the use of child labour in their businesses.

2. Analyse the results and define the most appropriate intervention strategies for the definition of national policies with the National Committee for the Gradual Elimination of Child Labour (*Comité Nacional para la Erradicación Progresiva del Trabajo Infantil, CONEPTI*).

3. Discuss the results of the study with the working children and their families to jointly define the most appropriate alternatives. This should include discussion of the possibility of holding the workshops described above.

4. Analyse the results with the main stakeholders in the districts of Cayambe and Pedro Moncayo, with the goal of designing a consensus-based, inter-institutional, multidisciplinary and participatory action plan.

5. Prepare a map of stakeholders and power to define negotiation and lobbying strategies.

6. The implementation of Time Bound Programmes, which have recently been encouraged in Ecuador by ILO/IPEC, is key. From an ethical standpoint, implementing specific actions directed at the children who participated in this study is an obligation.