

Tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture

Guidance on policy and practice



International
Labour
Organization

Overview of child labour in agriculture



International
Programme on
the Elimination
of Child Labour

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Guidance on policy and practice

Guidebook 2

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International Labour Organization
International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

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Tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture: Guidance on policy and practice
Overview of child labour in agriculture

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Contents

I. Introductory note	vii
■ I.I The ILO's view on child labour	vii
■ I.II The ILO's strategy to eliminate child labour	viii
■ I.III The scope of agricultural activities covered	viii
■ I.IV The contents of this guidebook	ix
Chapter 1: An introduction to child labour in agriculture	1
■ 1.1 The size and nature of the global agricultural workforce . . .	3
■ 1.2 Children are part of the global agricultural workforce	5
■ 1.3 Child labour is found on a wide variety of agricultural undertakings.	5
■ 1.4 Main types of child labour in agriculture	5
● 1.4.1 Family farm child labour	5
● 1.4.2 Child labour on commercial farms and plantations. . . .	7
● 1.4.3 Labour contracting in commercial agriculture	10
● 1.4.4 Bonded child labour in agriculture	11
● 1.4.5 Trafficking and forced/slave child labour in agriculture.	12
■ 1.5 Hazardous child labour in agriculture	12
■ 1.6 Children start working in agriculture at an early age	13
■ 1.7 Gender and child labour in agriculture	15
■ 1.8 The link between child domestic labour and agriculture . .	16
Chapter 2: Causes of child labour in agriculture	18
■ 2.1 Factors influencing the supply of child labour in agriculture	19
● 2.1.1 Poverty	19
● 2.1.2 The importance of child workers' contributions to household economies	20
● 2.1.3 Lack of accessible rural-urban education and low educational standards for child workers in agriculture . . .	21
● 2.1.4 Availability of vocational training, skills training and apprenticeships	23
● 2.1.5 Cultural or family traditions	23
● 2.1.6 The HIV/AIDS pandemic	23

■ 2.2 Factors influencing the demand for child labour in agriculture	24
● 2.2.1 Lack or non-enforcement of regulations and laws	25
● 2.2.2 Children as a cheap source of labour	25
● 2.2.3 Rural development and employment	26
● 2.2.4 Fair globalization and access to international markets	27
● 2.2.5 The global agri-food industry and child labour, and the role of consumers	28
Chapter 3: Examples of child labour found in the production of selected commodities	30
■ 3.1 Cocoa	30
■ 3.2 Coffee	31
■ 3.3 Cottonseed	31
■ 3.4 Flowers	32
■ 3.5 Sugar cane	32
■ 3.6 Tea	33
■ 3.7 Tobacco	35
Notes	37
Figures	
■ Box 1: Similarities between child labour in commercial agriculture and subsistence agriculture	6
■ Box 2: Farmers' views on child labour	7
■ Box 3: Deep-rooted images of women and child workers in tea cultivation in India	9
■ Box 4: Poor school attendance and performance of agricultural child labourers	21
■ Box 5: School "holidays" in rural Central Asia	22
Tables:	
■ Table 1: Numbers of child labourers by age in Central American countries	14

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Guidance on policy and practice

Additional information on CDROM

The CD-ROM contains five IPEC Guidebooks:

Guidebook 1: *User guide, including background policy information*

Guidebook 2: *An overview of child labour in agriculture*

Guidebook 3: *Eliminating hazardous child labour in agriculture*

Guidebook 4: *Initiatives to tackle hazardous child labour in agriculture*

Guidebook 5: *Training resources for Guidebooks 1-4.*

To supplement the five Guidebooks, additional information on tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture is provided on the CD-ROM as follows:

■ International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and their Recommendations

- Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (No. 182); and Recommendation (No. 190).
- Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973 (No. 138); and Recommendation (No. 146).
- Convention concerning Safety and Health in Agriculture, 2001 (No.184); and Recommendation (No.192).

■ ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour: Publications

- IPEC: *Training Resource Pack on Elimination of Hazardous Child Labour in Agriculture* (Geneva, ILO, 2005).
- IPEC. *Bolivia - Child labour in sugarcane* (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2002.
- IPEC: *Ecuador - Child labour in flower plantations.* (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2000.
- IPEC: *El Salvador - Child labour in sugarcane.* (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2002.
- IPEC: *Tanzania - Children Working in Commercial Agriculture in Coffee.* (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2002.
- IPEC: *Tanzania - Child Labour in the Horticulture Sector in Arumeru District.* (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2002.

- IPEC: *Tanzania - Children Working in Commercial Agriculture in Tea*. (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2002.
- IPEC: *Tanzania - Children Working in Commercial Agriculture in Tobacco*. (ILO, Geneva), Rapid assessment, 2001.

■ **ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACTEMP)**

- *Rapid assessment on child labour in the horticultural sector in Moldova*. Moldovan National Federation of Employers in Agriculture and Food Industry (FNPAIA) and ILO ACTEMP, Chisnau, Moldova, 2005.
- *Rapid assessment survey report: Child labour in five commercial oil palm and rubber plantations in Ghana*. Ghana Employers' Association and ILO ACTEMP, 2005.

■ **ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV)**

Bitter Harvest: Child labour in agriculture. ILO ACTRAV, Geneva, 2002.

■ **ILO SAFEWORK/CIS**

Links to *ILO Encyclopaedia on occupational safety & health*.

■ **Internet connection**

<http://www.ilo.org.childlabour>

I. Introductory note

I.1 The ILO's view on child labour

The International Labour Organization's goal with regard to child labour is the progressive elimination of all its forms worldwide. The worst forms of child labour, which include hazardous work, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of children and all forms of slavery, among others, should be abolished as a priority.

This guidebook and the three others of this series are based on the framework on child labour policy provided by the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, (No. 182). Both these Conventions are explained in detail in Guidebook 1, "Background policy information".

In brief, child labour is work that harms children's well being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. Child labour is work which, by its nature and/or the way it is carried out, harms, abuses and exploits the child or deprives the child of an education. As per Convention No. 182, the term "child" shall apply to all persons *under the age of 18*.¹

"Hazardous child labour" is work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in children being killed, or injured (often permanently) and/or made ill (often permanently) as a consequence of poor safety and health standards and working arrangements. Child labour in agriculture is of particular concern as agriculture is one of the most dangerous and under-regulated economic sectors worldwide for all workers, and it is the sector where over 70 per cent of child labour is found.

As mandated by its tripartite constituents – governments and employers' and workers' organizations – the ILO's immediate goal is the elimination of hazardous child labour (along with the other worst forms) in all occupational sectors. In agriculture, governments may make only limited exemptions – as per Article 16 of the ILO Convention on Safety and Health in Agriculture, 2001 (No. 184) – for what are termed "young workers". Young workers aged 16 to 17 years may carry out hazardous tasks as part of their training, but only under strict supervision – and never as part of their routine work.

I.II The ILO's strategy to eliminate child labour

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.

On a practical level, IPEC supports programmes to *prevent* children from ever starting work, *withdraw* children from workplaces and *rehabilitate* child labourers through placement in schools and/or skills training and other services. However, the reality is that many children – both above and below the minimum legal age for employment – continue to work in hazardous conditions and are at immediate risk. Therefore, *protection* is another key priority. This means improving safety and health standards in workplaces where children are found in order to prevent child deaths, accidents and ill health of both children who can legally work and those under the minimum age, pending withdrawal.

I.III The scope of agricultural activities covered

Agriculture is a complex and heterogeneous economic sector comprised of a number of sub-sectors. It involves agricultural production methods that differ from country to country and between developed and developing countries. It ranges from highly mechanized, intensive commercial and industrialized production to traditional small-scale, subsistence-type farming. The distinction that has traditionally been drawn between these two types of farming is slowly eroding, however, with the increasing commercialization and industrialization of agriculture, especially in response to the promotion of export-orientated agriculture by governments and multinational enterprises.

“Agriculture” covers different types of farming activities, such as crop production, horticultural/fruit production, livestock raising, livestock-food preparation, forestry activities, fish farming, and insect raising. It also includes many other associated activities: the primary processing and packaging of agricultural and animal products, crop

storage, pest management, irrigation, construction and domestic tasks (carrying of water, fuel-wood, etc.), as well as the use and maintenance of machinery, equipment, appliances, tools and agricultural installations. It can include any process, operation, transport or storage directly related to agricultural production. This should be considered as a working definition of agriculture and not exclusive.

I.IV The contents of this guidebook

Chapter 1, “An introduction to child labour in agriculture” describes the numerous ways children are engaged in agriculture around the world and the range of tasks they perform. Child labourers may work on farms with very basic types of equipment, machinery and agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) or on commercial enterprises with intensive, highly mechanized production systems. In the vast majority of circumstances, children face serious risks from the inherently hazardous nature of agricultural work.

In Chapter 2, “Causes of child labour in agriculture”, the principal factors that encourage the use of child labour are introduced. While poverty is perhaps the overarching reason children become agricultural workers, it is by no means the only one, nor is it an excuse for the practice. Other influences are also reviewed, including: the lack of accessible quality education, cultural or family traditions, and, in some regions of the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Among the factors that affect demand are weak regulations and non-enforcement of laws, deficient rural development, difficult access to global markets agricultural goods and consumer pressure.

Chapter 3 of this guidebook provides detailed examples child labour in the production of seven commodities – cocoa, coffee, cottonseed, flowers, sugar cane, tea and tobacco. In each section the principal characteristics of the work children perform, the conditions under which they perform them and the hazards and risks that they face are described.

Chapter 1:

An introduction to child labour in agriculture



The strategic importance of agriculture in the overall economic development of many countries stems from a combination of factors: agriculture is a source of food, export revenue (for many countries, the only source) and capital formation; it has many linkages with other sectors; and, most importantly, it is a significant source of employment, particularly in developing countries, for millions of men, women and children. The agricultural sector is key to rural development.

Girls and boys have historically been and continue to be part of the world's agricultural workforce. They play an important role in crop and livestock production. Much of the food and drink we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products are produced by child labour in agriculture. The use of child labour in agriculture is a global phenomenon and is found in both developed and developing countries.

Agriculture is the economic sector where most child labour is found. The bulk of working children in the world are found on farms and plantations, not in factories, shops or urban areas. According to IPEC global estimates in 2006, nearly 70 per cent of all child labourers work in agriculture.

While for many the thought of growing up on a farm evokes images of an idyllic childhood with girls and boys working alongside their parents or grandparents in the fresh air and being taught the values of daily chores, the reality is often altogether different. Many of the world's child labourers in agriculture perform hazardous labour – work that can threaten their lives, limbs, health and general well-being. Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work at any age, along with construction and mining. In terms of fatalities, it ranks second only to mining.¹ It is also a sector where many children are effectively denied education through factors which include, for example, lack of schools and teachers, lack of free education and so on.

The “family farm” element in agriculture that is universal and bound-up with culture and tradition makes it difficult to acknowledge that children can be exploited in such a setting. Children working on family farms can be interpreted as family solidarity. Though this can be the case, it is important to penetrate below the surface and examine working conditions, many of which may well be hazardous, and the amount of time, particularly from girls, that may be devoted to work and thereby lost to education.

Children become farm labourers around the world at an early age. Most statistical surveys only cover child workers aged 10 and above. Many children begin work at an earlier age, however. 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.² 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.

Not all work that children undertake in agriculture or elsewhere is bad for them. 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. Such work can contribute both to children's development and the welfare of their families: it can help prepare children to be useful and productive members of society as adults. Child labour is another matter, however. It degrades, often harms and even kills children. It blocks their access to education and/or skills training and

generally limits their possibilities of economic and social mobility and advancement in later life. Child labour also has a long-term negative impact on economic development. Children working today are absent from education that can help them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to gain productive employment in the future. In turn, an educated workforce is a key ingredient for the development of their societies.³

The prevalence of child labour in agriculture undermines decent work, sustainable agriculture, rural development and food security as it perpetuates a cycle where household income for both farmers and waged workers is insufficient to meet their economic needs. Reducing child labour, therefore, often means helping parents to engage in new income-generating activities.

All of the above factors give agriculture a special status and often make it a no-go area for child labour action. But it is precisely because of these factors – large numbers, 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. Sadly, this is not the case. Since the resurgence of attention to child labour in the early 1990s, far more attention has gone to child labour in the formal export sector, which accounts for perhaps no more than 5 per cent of child labour worldwide, and to specific areas of concern like trafficking.

For agriculture and rural development to be sustainable, it cannot continue to be based on exploitative child labour. In developing and implementing strategies, policies and programmes to combat child labour and put agricultural and rural development and employment on a sustainable footing, many elements and factors need to be taken into account. The following sections describe the many facets of child labour in agriculture and elaborate further on the issues highlighted in the previous paragraphs.

1.1 The size and nature of the global agricultural workforce

The agricultural workforce, which is made up principally of farmers and waged/hired workers, including migrant workers, is estimated at 1.1 to 1.2 billion, accounting for over 50 per cent of the global workforce. Agriculture remains the dominant sector for many countries and central to their economies and to their social structures and organization.⁴

This agricultural workforce is still among the least organized into representative organizations of self-employed farmers or waged workers, continues to register some of the highest incidence of poverty and has least access to effective forms of social protection.⁵

In many countries, the nature of this workforce is undergoing important changes, all or some of which may impact on child labour. Some of the major changes include:

- **The number of waged agricultural workers is growing in most regions of the world even though the agricultural workforce as a whole is shrinking.** More and more small farmers are leaving the land, which is being bought up by large enterprises that rely on waged labour. There are an estimated 450 million waged agricultural workers, representing over 40 per cent of the total agricultural workforce.⁶ This growth in the numbers of waged workers and decline of small farmers in part reflects the increasing industrialization of agriculture in many parts of the world as countries encourage export-orientated agriculture.
- **The number of waged women workers is rapidly increasing.** They already account on average for 20-30 per cent of the waged workforce. Added to the numbers of women farmers, this means that women now account for over 60 per cent of the total agricultural workforce. Women produce two-thirds of the world's food. In general, women provide 50-60 per cent of farm labour, which increases to 80 per cent in rice production.⁷
- **There is increasing use of migrant labour in many countries.** Migrants may come from a different part of a country or be foreign workers. Wherever they come from, migrant workers are always heavily disadvantaged in terms of pay, social protection, housing and medical protection. The migrant labour force often consists of whole families, although only the head of the family is formally employed. In many countries, children of migrant and seasonal workers work next to their parents but do not figure on the payroll. As much work is paid on a piece-rate basis, migrant and seasonal workers need their children to work in order to achieve a living wage.
- **Agricultural employment and conditions of work are becoming increasingly casualized.** Employers are increasingly replacing full-time labour with casual, temporary and migrant labour, and hiring workers through contractors and subcontractors, thereby breaking the direct employment relationship. The consequences of casualization are evident in lower wages, longer hours of work, and lower health, safety and environmental standards and levels of social protection.
- **Many small farmers regularly work on a farm or plantation for part of the year to supplement their meagre earnings.** Their annual income depends on waged work as a regular source of revenue. In reality, they are part-farmer/part-waged worker. A 1998 study of the Mexican agricultural labour market, for example, estimated that as many as 4.8 million farmers, forming 78.3 per cent of the rural labour force, were engaged as waged workers for at least part of the year.⁸ This phenomenon of wage-dependent smallholders, though well known, rarely forms part of agricultural programmes to increase smallholders' wages and improve working conditions and is rarely taken into account in poverty eradication programmes and strategies.

1.2 Children are part of the global agricultural workforce

Historically, children have been part of the agricultural workforce and this is still the reality in many countries today. Of an estimated 218 million child labourers in all occupational sectors in 2006, some 70 per cent of children work in agriculture (with forestry and inland fisheries included).⁹ As the majority of work in rural areas is agricultural, nine out of ten working children in rural areas are engaged in agriculture or similar activities.

Though agriculture takes place mainly in a rural setting, urban agriculture, which is labour intensive and occurs on small plots of land, is found in both developing and industrialized countries. An estimated 200 million farmers work part time in urban agriculture. Thus, agricultural child labourers may also be found in urban areas.

Child labour in agriculture is also a global phenomenon. It is found in all regions of the world and in both developing and developed countries. In Africa, for example, it is estimated that there are between 56 and 72 million child workers in agriculture.¹⁰

According to data from the Current Population Survey, in the United States in 1996, there were an estimated 300,000 workers aged 15 to 17 in agriculture. About 75 per cent of these adolescents were paid farm workers, 15 per cent were self-employed, and 10 per cent were unpaid family workers.¹¹

1.3 Child labour is found on a wide variety of agricultural undertakings

Agricultural child labourers work on all types of undertakings, ranging from family farms (small, medium, and large-sized), corporate-run farms, plantations, and agro-industrial complexes. They may work with basic equipment and low levels of mechanization and agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, electrical energy, etc.) or intensive, highly organized, highly capitalized, commercial production systems.

1.4 Main types of child labour in agriculture

There are several types of child labour in agriculture. These include child labour on family farms, child labour on commercial farms and plantations, labour contracted to commercial farms, bonded child labour, and trafficking and forced labour/slavery.

1.4.1 Family farm 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 where 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 also both an enterprise and a homestead on which both 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.¹²

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” are *not* mutually exclusive (see box 1).

Box 1: 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

Source: Proposed areas of action to be addressed in the National Child Labour Action Programme for South Africa. Department of Labour. Funded by IPEC. Draft, May 2003, p 27.

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 “idyllic” rural surroundings cannot possibly be harmful to children – indeed that this type of family solidarity is entirely beneficial (see box 2). 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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

Box 2: Farmers' views on child labour

As with child labour in general, there is a need to encourage and develop safe and creative ways for children to work in agriculture without interfering with their education. Many farmers and farming communities argue that certain types of child work in agriculture are beneficial for the child. Among the arguments put forward are that farm work is part of the socialization of the child; it teaches them to work with others; it allows them to acquire practical skills; and it helps maintain family ties and perpetuate the farm heritage of land handed down to the daughter or son in their turn.

Whilst many of these arguments have merits, the scope of work through which the child gains experience and socialization skills includes elements of hazardous work, even for children under the minimum age for work. For example, a US study¹ of farm fathers in Wisconsin reported on the reasons for children's participation in hazardous work on family farms. Fathers were asked about selected factors that influenced their decision to allow young children to drive tractors, ride on tractors, and be near the hind (kicking) legs of dairy cows. These high-risk activities were very common practices, and the fathers believed strongly that they were justified because they would help children gain farm experience, develop a strong work ethic, spend time with other family members (during farm work), build self-confidence and save work time and money for their fathers.

Findings from US focus groups discussions with family farmers found that most farmers (involved in these groups) believe that the heritage they have gained from their great grand-parents has been passed down through generations, along with the land. They yearn to continue the farming lineage to their children and grandchildren, even when economic times are difficult. Thus farm families expect their children to learn the business, help with "chores" from an early age, and "shadow" the same-sex parent in their farm duties. The life-style on many family farms maintains traditions of years past. Family participation plays a central role in preserving stability.²

¹ B.C. Lee., et al.: "Factors influencing exposure of children to major hazards on family farms" in *Journal of Rural Health*, (USA), 1997, 13(3): pp. 206-215.

² Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of the Child Labour; the National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine: *Protecting Youth at Work: Health, Safety, and Development of Working Children and Adolescents in the United States* (Washington DC, National Academy Press; 1998), pp. 146-147.

1.4.2 Child labour on commercial farms and plantations

Historically, child labour, as part of migrant family units or as individually hired workers, has been very much part of employment on plantations and in other forms of commercial agriculture around the world. Numerous crop cultivations are known to involve child labour. Children who work on commercial farms typically experience long and arduous working hours, little safety and health protection, and inadequate diet, rest and education.

The term "plantation agriculture" is widely used to describe large-scale, commercial agricultural enterprises in tropical and sub-tropical regions where industrial methods are applied to crop production and primary processing farming. Plantation agriculture includes short-rotation crops, such as pineapples and sugar cane, as well as long-term tree crops such as bananas, rubber and oil palm. For the production of some crops, such as sugar and tea, plantation owners increasingly rely on outgrowers. Outgrowers are usually smallholder farmers who organize and contract their production via their own farmer-run association to a large agribusiness corporation (usually a plantation). Outgrower associations often have a labour section, which hires casual and seasonal labour for its smallholder farmers as and when required. However, information is lacking on

whether or not in certain instances outgrower associations hire and supply child labour as well.

The 1996 ILO report *Wageworkers in agriculture – Conditions of employment and work* refers to sample surveys for a number of countries that suggest that the prevalence of child labour in both small and large commercial farms is relatively high. In Brazil, one survey carried out in 1993 reported that 25 per cent of the total labour force was made up of children aged 14 years or under. A similar survey on the sugar cane producing region of north-eastern Brazil found children and adolescents aged 7 to 17 made up no less than 25 per cent of the 240,000 workers cutting cane in the Zona de Mata. The majority had started work between the ages of 7 and 10, and 90 per cent were working with no formal contract of employment, no work card, and no social security coverage. Forty-three per cent were paid indirectly through the family head. Over 80 per cent of the households with working children were below the poverty line, and in 79 per cent of the sample households, children contributed from 10 to 50 per cent of total household income. In the northern states of Mexico, where horticultural production has expanded considerably, in 1994 between 20 to 35 per cent of the labour force was composed of children between the ages of 8 and 14 years.

Agriculture is a major user of child labour in Azerbaijan, especially in cotton production and crops like tobacco. Child labour in cotton is used for all types of activities that require hand work and physical strength – picking, crop thinning, weeding, etc. The majority of child labourers are recruited locally (i.e. they are not migrant labour). The employer makes a verbal agreement with the head of the family, which does not specify the number of workers to be engaged nor whether any of these would be child labourers. So children are involved in cotton production with the consent of their parents but without any formal labour contract. In the Soviet era, it was state policy to encourage engaging whole families in cotton production as a main source of family income, and this tradition has been carried on.¹⁵

Migrant family work units

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. 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 classed 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 child work 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 Foundation for the Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

Children who work alongside their parents may have been accompanying them to the fields from infancy (see box 3). 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”.¹⁸

Box 3: Deep-rooted images of women and child workers in tea cultivation in India

A former chairman of the Tea Board in West Bengal describes how a child becomes a worker:

The workers are as attached to the land as the tea bushes. They were born in the tea estates. They live there all their lives. They die there. The mother who works in the tea gardens has no place to leave her children. She puts her child on her back and brings the child with her when she works. What is more natural than that the child wants to know what the mother is doing and wants to help her pluck the tea. That is how the child becomes a worker. It is easy for children to pluck. Their fingers are nimble and the bushes are at their height. The child plucks the leaves and puts them in her mother's basket. Whatever the child plucks increases the pay of the mother. I would not say that the children are employed. They are helping their parents. Then, when the child is twelve, she is given a basket of her own and earns her own wages. She is paid half of what an adult is given.

Source: US Department of Labour: By the Sweat and Toil of Children, Volume II; The Use of Child Labor in US Agricultural Imports and Forced and Bonded Child Labor. A Report to the Committee on Appropriations, 1995, p. 48.

Children hired as individual labourers

Girls and boys are also frequently recruited as individual workers, whether directly by a farmer or plantation owner or via a labour contractor. A rapid assessment study conducted by IPEC in Tanzania for several commercial crops described the recruitment of child workers in coffee growing areas during the picking season. Sixty per

cent of the working children were girls aged between 10 and 13 years old.¹⁹ The main tasks performed by the children were picking coffee berries, pruning, weeding, and pesticide spraying. These were carried out without any protective clothing or equipment. The children also performed difficult and strenuous activities, irrespective of their ages. Other hazards included snake and insect bites and wild animals attacks. The children worked on average between eight and ten hours per day, depending on the season.

1.4.3 Labour contracting in commercial agriculture

Many children are employed through labour contractors. Employing labour through intermediaries is a long-standing practice on plantations and increasingly common in other forms of commercial agriculture. Employers, who need to be able to count upon a supply of labour in periods of peak demand, call on the services of labour contractors specialized in the recruitment, transport and management of waged agricultural workers. This can include hiring children. Involving intermediaries undermines the employer–employee relationship by creating a “grey area” around the employer's responsibilities and leading to a disregard for labour legislation. It enables farm and plantation owners to deny responsibility for knowing the ages of the children or the terms under which they were hired. Conditions of employment are generally insecure and the labour contractors frequently abuse their authority over the workers by asking for commissions, over-charging for transport, housing and food, holding back wages and imposing debt slavery.²⁰ Generally, conditions of work for contract labour are inferior to those of directly employed labour.²¹



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1.4.4 Bonded child labour in agriculture

Bonded labour is a form of forced labour where workers are tied or “bound” to their employer, often through forms of indebtedness. It is found in various different economic sectors but is most common in agriculture.

A prevalent form of bonded labour is debt bondage, which is found predominantly in South Asia and Latin America. It is a form of modern slavery whereby, in return for a cash advance or credit, a person offers their labour and/or that of their child for an indefinite period (until the debt is repaid). Sometimes, only the child is pledged/bonded, becoming a commodity in the process.

Debt bondage is sometimes personally bonded labour secured by debt (which can extend over generations) or the increasingly widespread practice in commercial agriculture, both large and small-scale, involving the debt-based attachment of casual and migrant workers. The use of debt to keep workers – including child labourers – tied to production at the agricultural undertaking until they (or the family) pay it off is one of the main features of forced labour in numerous settings. Often these “debts” are fraudulently imposed without any written contract and include inflated costs of transport, food, lodging, work tools, etc. Frequently, in cases where workers have identity documents or working papers, these may be retained by the labour contractor.²² Workers also may be subject to violence or threats of violence against themselves or family members, which serves to prevent them from fleeing or seeking alternative employment.

Debt bondage is commonly found in rural areas where traditional class or caste structures and semi-feudal relationships survive. Landless or near landless households and migrant labourers are particularly vulnerable to debt bondage because they have no alternative sources of credit. It also occurs under land tenancy or sharecropper arrangements. When wages are insufficient to cover necessary expenditures such as food, tools or seed, tenants and sharecropper families often rely on the landowner for loans and other forms of advances.

There are various definitions of the term “bonded labourer” in international and national law. According to the ILO, the term refers to a worker who renders service under conditions of bondage arising from economic considerations notably indebtedness through a loan or advance.²³ The implication is that the worker (or dependants or heirs) is tied to a particular employer/creditor for a specified or unspecified period until the loan is repaid. The root causes of bonded labour are deeper than indebtedness alone, including elements such as discrimination, unequal power structures, caste, landlessness and so on.

1.4.5 Trafficking and forced/slave child labour in agriculture

Direct forced child labour, often linked to child trafficking, is also found in agriculture. There have been quite widespread reports of forced labour on agricultural plantations in West Africa affecting children in particular. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, there is information on children being forced to work on plantations who come from certain ethnic groups in the country as well as from Burkina Faso and Mali. An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 children from Mali are working on plantations in Côte d'Ivoire. Benin and Togo are two other countries in the region where children in forced agricultural labour have been detected.²⁴

In 2002, a study of child labour on some 1,500 cocoa-producing farms in Cameroon, the Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria was carried out by the Sustainable Tree Crops Program of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in cooperation with IPEC.²⁵ The study 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. In its 2000 report on human rights the US Department of State observed that children are regularly trafficked into the country from neighbouring countries and sold into forced labour.²⁶

This situation in Côte d'Ivoire triggered a public commitment by the 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,²⁷ and the Cocoa Certification and Verification System which are all discussed in Guidebook 4, Chapter 5.

1.5 Hazardous child labour in agriculture

Child labourers are at risk from a wide variety of machinery, biological, physical, chemical, dust, ergonomic, welfare/hygiene and psychosocial hazards, as well as long hours of work and poor living conditions. For both child and adult workers, agriculture is one of the three most dangerous industries to work in along with construction and mining.²⁸ Fatality rates associated with agricultural work are second only to mining.²⁹

Injuries and ill-health sustained by child labourers may also have long-term consequences and result in physical disability or health problems in adult life.³⁰ Equally, health problems linked to exposure to hazardous substances at work, such as cancers or reproductive disorders, may not show up until the child is well into adulthood.

In most countries, there are no reliable annual statistics regarding fatal and nonfatal occupational injuries and diseases in agriculture because there is no national surveillance system for agricultural

workers. While comprehensive statistics may be lacking, evidence is not. Children performing tasks on their family farm or as employees of others or simply accompanying working adults face grave risks. Unfortunately, ghastly accidents like those illustrated in the following examples pulled from various studies and media reports from the United States and South Africa are not isolated incidents:

- In 1990, a 15-year-old boy, a migrant farm worker, in Colorado, 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.³¹
- In 1998, a 14-year-old high school boy was killed in Wisconsin, USA when the tractor he was driving overturned on an icy county road and pinned him.³²
- 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.³³

The hazards that led to the accidents described above and the many other types of dangers facing children in agriculture are reviewed in detail in *Guidebook 3: Eliminating hazardous child labour in agriculture*.



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1.6 Children start working in agriculture at an early age

Children start working as farm labourers at an early age in all types of agriculture on both family farms and in large commercial enterprises. Rural children, in particular girls, tend to begin work young, at 5, 6 or 7 years of age. Precise figures on ages and numbers are often difficult to obtain as most statistical surveys only cover child labourers aged 10 and above. However, in some countries, children under 10 are estimated to account for 20 per cent of child labour in rural areas (see table 1).³⁴

Table 1: Numbers of child labourers by age in Central American countries

Country (Year)	Total number of agricultural child labourers		5-9 years Girls and Boys	10-14 years Girls and Boys	15-17 years Girls and Boys
Belize (2001)	Girls	1,000	500	1,500	2,000
	Boys	3,000			
Costa Rica (2002)	Girls	11,000	9,000	19,000	22,000
	Boys	39,000			
El Salvador (2001)	Girls	9,000	51,000	6,000	48,000
	Boys	96,000			
Guatemala (2000)	Girls	108,000	268,000	66,000	206,000
	Boys	432,000			
Honduras (2002)	Girls	14,000	10,000	90,000	97,000
	Boys	183,000			
Nicaragua (2000)	Girls	17,000	16,000	63,000	55,000
	Boys	117,000			
Panama (2000)	Girls	3,000	10,000	2,000	12,000
	Boys	21,000			

Source: IPEC: *Trabajo Infantil en la Agricultura en cifras - Centroamérica, Panama y Republica Dominicana* (San Jose, ILO, 2005).

Estimates from several of other studies support the assumption that many children start work in agriculture from a very young age in many countries.

In Egypt, A 1998 national labour survey conducted by the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) estimated that there were about 1.47 million working children in Egypt, with agriculture being the main area of employment. Of working children in the 6-11 year age group, 41.9 per cent were in agriculture, and in the 12-14 year age group, 58.1 per cent were in agriculture. Together, these two age groups accounted for 77.8 per cent of the total number of child labour workers.³⁵

In Turkey, it is estimated that 35-40 percent of an 800,000 to 1.2 million migrant agricultural workers are children between 5 and 17 years of age. Most of these children leave their permanent places of residence for part of the year in order to accompany their families in seasonal labour at agricultural enterprises owned by others.³⁶

A 2001-02 survey of 486 children working on 22 farms producing hybrid cottonseeds in the Mahaboobnagar and Kurnool districts of India revealed that 88 per cent of the workforce were aged between 6 and 14, and 78 per cent were girls.³⁷

An IPEC rapid assessment study of working children in tobacco cultivation in Lebanon found that the majority of the children were 12-15 years old, with many 9-12 year-olds also engaged in the work. Some children below 5 years of age were engaged in leaf drying, a dangerous task which requires threading leaves using sharp steelheads.³⁸

An IPEC study on rural child labour in Moldova found that there was a tendency to use child labour from a very early age, as young as 4-6 years. Furthermore, the study noted an increased use of child labour over the last seven to eight years linked to a decline in living standards and agricultural production.³⁹

A United States Department of Labor report on child labour⁴⁰ found that in Guatemala and Honduras, children as young as 6 years helped their parents during the coffee planting and harvesting seasons. The same report noted that an estimated 60 per cent of children working on oil palm plantations in Malaysia were 6-10 years old.

US studies⁴¹ regarding children's work in agriculture reveal a variety of specific tasks and chores performed by children beginning at very young ages. Children's work on farms ranges from gathering eggs by the age of 5 to operating a pickup truck before the age of 11. Males perform nearly all tasks at a younger age than females.

1.7 Gender and child labour in agriculture

It is often 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. As noted earlier, many working children may be perceived as helping their parents or employers rather than labouring and so they are not counted in the total number of workers. Girls are frequently seen to be helping out even though this activity takes many hours of their day and affects their schooling.⁴² Similarly, as domestic labour is often not viewed as work per se, the fact that girl child labourers engage in domestic chores on top of other child labour needs to be factored in when considering their total workloads.

Girl child labour in agriculture forms a significant part of the workforce. For example, the importance of women's and children's participation in tea plantation workforces in Asia is reflected in official data on the structure of employment in Assam Tea Gardens, contained in a 1991 administrative report on the working of the Plantation Labour Act. The report stated that there were approximately 672,000 workers (women, men and children – permanent and temporary categories, both resident and non-resident on plantations).

Three quarters of these tea workers were resident on plantations and almost 60 per cent were permanent workers. Of the total workforce, women represented 45.9 per cent of total workers; men represented 39.7 per cent, and children 14.4 per cent (of whom less than one third were permanent workers, and these were mostly boys). Girls

accounted for over half of all children employed but, for 83 per cent of them, their employment was temporary and of a casual nature.⁴³

Another Indian report on female child labour in rural areas noted that, “In addition to employment for wages, girls are invariably seen collecting firewood or fetching water for households in rural villages and participating in other domestic and non-domestic work, for example, engaged in cottage industry.” Many similar Indian studies, the report added, “...indicate that the burden of household duties, from looking after younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, to fetching, carrying water over long distances fall upon the girl child. Performing such household chores is not considered as being “work”, either by the family and definitely not by women and girls themselves”.⁴⁴

From a gender perspective, one of the key issues not fully addressed in many studies covering girl child labour in agriculture is how girls combine work in agriculture with domestic chores. It was touched upon in an IPEC Rapid Assessment report on girl child labour in agriculture in Ghana in terms of girls not having leisure time.⁴⁵ Girls in comparison to boys must perform household duties after agricultural duties, whereas boys mentioned more leisure type activities that they enjoy when not working in the fields. Teenage girls work longer hours weekly in both market and domestic work than boys, whether or not they are enrolled in school (on top of the work in the plantations). Mothers are more likely to assign domestic chores to their daughters than sons because they perceive domestic chores are feminine. This is particularly true in rural areas, where girls are expected to assist the mother with farm work and household chores as well as taking care of the younger siblings.

There are many cultural, social, psychological and even political issues that revolve around the problem of child labour and girl child labour in agriculture. Many more questions need to be answered from a legislative, cultural and economic point of view. What is clear from the different ILO-IPEC rapid assessment studies for the Philippines, Ghana and Ecuador, for example, is that both boys and girls are engaged in paid and unpaid agricultural work.⁴⁶

1.8 The link between child domestic labour and agriculture

As described in section 1.7 above, many children, particularly girls, combine domestic chores and agricultural work. The Tanzanian trade union, the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers’ Union (CHODAWU), has found that the types of work carried out by child domestic workers in rural areas typically include washing clothes, dishes, babysitting, fetching water, collecting firewood, gardening, taking care of poultry and animals on the premises, (including milking cows) and harvesting crops. In other words, child domestic workers frequently carry out agricultural tasks as part of their “domestic” duties.⁴⁷

In Nepal, under the Kamalhari practice of bonded labour, 8-16 year-old girls of the Kamaiya worked in the house of their landlords as domestic servants. Some of the “domestic” duties involved agricultural activities, such as collecting grass for cattle, cleaning out cowsheds, taking care of livestock and so on. Following the Bonded Labour Prohibition Act, 2001, the Kamaiyas were legally free from the clutches of landlords. However, many Kamaiyas became homeless as a result with no stable source of income after their freedom. Some resorted to earning a living through sharecropping arrangements with their former landlords, receiving land for sharecropping in return for agreeing that their children work as domestic servants in their landlords' houses.⁴⁸

The custom of children on farms combining domestic and agricultural chores appears to have consequences beyond the farm as well. Child domestic labour in urban areas is, in many cases, the result of migration from the rural areas to the cities. Children who work as domestics in urban areas often come from farming families. For example a 1997 survey of child domestic labour in Sri Lanka reported that one third of the domestic labour force was children and that 44% come from families working in the plantation sector.⁴⁹ In such instances, trade unions that work in rural areas, including agricultural workers' unions, can play a special role in helping protect child domestic workers. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), which organizes agricultural plantation workers, is active in helping protect child domestic workers who are from plantation families. They also help prevent children under the minimum working age from entering child domestic labour.

Chapter 2: Causes of child labour in agriculture



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This chapter reviews the supply and demand factors that influence the use of child labour in agriculture and some of the policy implications on the local, national and international levels.

Among the important factors that push children into the workforce discussed here are family poverty, lack of accessible, quality education (including skills training and apprenticeships), lack of employment opportunities and decent work for adults, and cultural traditions. In some countries, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has added to the supply of child labourers by decimating adult populations and leaving millions of orphans to fend for themselves.

Research on the causes of child labour tends to concentrate on supply factors both because of a commonly shared view that poverty is the driving force and because of a justifiable preoccupation with the plight of these children. But the demand for child workers also plays a critical role in determining the involvement of child labourers in hazardous work.

Two demand factors were touched upon in earlier sections – the exploitation of children of migrant families on commercial farms and how the use of intermediaries to hire seasonal labour may encourage the employment of underage workers. In addition to these, one could also cite the weak enforcement or non-regulation of age restrictions in agriculture (discussed in detail in Guidebook 3), the intensification of

agricultural production for export, protectionism in developing countries and falling world commodity prices, which put pressure on employers to lower costs by hiring children who will work for less pay. The policies of the global agri-food industry and consumer pressure can also influence demand for child labour in important ways (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.5).

2.1 Factors influencing the supply of child labour in agriculture

2.1.1 Poverty

In many low-income countries, agriculture accounts for a large proportion of economic activity and an even higher proportion of employment. Seventy-five per cent of the 1.1 billion poor with less than one dollar per day live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. The incidence of poverty is highest in countries that depend on primary commodity exports.¹ In 2001, two-thirds of these poor were found in Asia (44 per cent in South Asia and 24 per cent in East Asia); 24 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 6.5 per cent in Latin America and Caribbean.²

Poverty has many aspects of which malnutrition is a central aspect. Malnutrition reduces the capacity for work, lowers resistance to disease, and adversely affects children's physical and mental development, schooling and educational achievements (see also Guidebook 3, Chapter 2, section 2.14).

Poverty is not confined to subsistence farming but is a feature of commercial agriculture as well. High incidences of poverty are common among waged agricultural workers on plantations. In 1987, for example, Indonesian agricultural workers accounted for less than 10 per cent of the rural workforce but recorded the highest incidence of poverty with 38 per cent of all agricultural waged workers below the poverty line.³ Debt or the threat of debt is very often at the root of hazardous and bonded child labour.

In many instances, working children represent a plentiful source of cheap labour. The prevalence of child labour in agriculture undermines decent work for adults, sustainable agriculture and food security as it maintains a cycle where household income for both farmers and waged workers is insufficient to meet their economic needs. It is now widely acknowledged that child labour cannot be tackled in isolation from addressing the problem of rural poverty.

In terms of eliminating poverty, improving income and wages for agricultural workers and farmers will in the long term reduce child labour by ensuring that these groups have the economic means to support their families and ensure their access to education. Key income determinants for farmers and waged workers in terms of poverty elimination/reduction are listed below.

- ***For smallholders producing commodity crops:*** Access to land, producer prices, share of total income derived from commodities, productivity, access to technology, state of infrastructure, marketing institutions, and lack of access to credit.
- ***For smallholders working partly as wage labourers in farms and plantations:*** Number of days worked, wage level, number of wage earners in the household.
- ***For full-time waged workers on farms and plantations:*** wage level, number of wage earners in household.
- ***For casual workers on farms and plantations:*** number of days worked, wage level, number of wage earners in household; share of income derived from plantation/farm wage work.⁴

In addition, small-scale farmers and waged agricultural workers should be a key target group of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal No. 1 – to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:

- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day;
- Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

It should be noted that, while poverty is often cited as the principal cause of child labour, it is neither a prerequisite nor an excuse for it. There are poor countries where child labour is extensively practised and others where it is not. Kerala State in India, for example, though poor, has virtually abolished child labour.⁵ Pockets of child labour – including hazardous child labour in agriculture – can be found in wealthy countries as well.

2.1.2 The importance of child workers' contributions to household economies

As indicated in the report for the ILO Tripartite Meeting in 1996 on improving conditions of employment and work of agricultural wagedworkers, there is a need for a better understanding of the economics of child labour in commercial agriculture which would assist in the design of better policies, measures and initiatives. The contribution of children's labour to total family income and the relationship of households with working children to the poverty line require further investigation.

The importance to a poor family of one of them having a job cannot be overestimated. From available information collected through a series of rapid assessments conducted by IPEC, the income from children's work is frequently important for the family's survival. In rural *Tanzania*, for instance, households with children working on coffee plantations and farms, on small and large-scale tea plantations and on tobacco farms and plantations were found to have low levels of income, and many children were relying on themselves for food and other expenses.⁶

For some families, child labour is the only way to generate enough income to ensure a least partial schooling for their children in the case where basic education is not free. Equally, schools in rural areas sometimes encourage child labour to generate income for the school. The question of school fees also often generates biases regarding boys' education, which is seen, in some societies, as a better "investment", with more possibilities of income returns for the families.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that each job held by a migrant worker in Côte d'Ivoire contributes to the economic well being of twenty members of his/her extended family in the region.⁷

2.1.3 Lack of accessible rural-urban education and low educational standards for child workers in agriculture

The agricultural 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. This blights the agricultural child labourers' future chances of escaping from the cycle of poverty by finding better jobs or becoming self-employed. Even where children are in education, school holidays are often built round the sowing and harvesting seasons. This arrangement is supported by ILO Minimum Age (Agriculture) Convention, No. 10 (1921) though there are important safeguards (see box 4). In many countries, schools are officially allowed to close for several weeks so that children can work on the farms and plantations (see box 5). There are also many cases where the schools organize and supply children for use as labour, and not only in holiday periods. Although child labour in agriculture is supposed to take place outside of schooling, in reality, during harvesting and other peak times, children must work long and hard all day.

Box 4: Poor school attendance and performance of agricultural child labourers

Many children who live in rural areas where child labour is rampant do not attend school on a regular basis or have poor levels of performance linked to excessive hours of work. The ILO Convention on Minimum Age (Agriculture), No. 10 (1921) lays down standards regarding the employment of children during compulsory school hours. Article 1 states that, "Children under the age of 14 years may not be employed or work in any public or private agricultural undertaking, or in any branch thereof, save outside the hours fixed for school attendance. If they are employed outside the hours of school attendance, the employment shall not be such as to prejudice their attendance at school." Article 2 allows that, "For purposes of practical vocational instruction the periods and the hours of school attendance may be so arranged as to permit the employment of children on light agricultural work and in particular on light work connected with the harvest, provided that such employment shall not reduce the total annual period of school attendance to less than eight months."

Box 5: School “holidays” in rural Central Asia

The economies of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia are agrarian and rely heavily on the cotton industry. Uzbekistan's exports in 2004 were thought to be worth at least US\$ 1 billion - it is the country's most important cash crop, known as “white gold”. In some parts of the country, cotton is a virtual monoculture.

From September to December, local officials close many rural schools so that tens of thousands of young children in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan can be sent into the cotton fields to bring in the harvest. In October 2004, a minister with Uzbekistan's public education department admitted that at least 44,000 senior pupils and students had been mobilized to help pick the country's cotton. Local rights activists say the figure does not take into account the number of young children forced into the fields – they say they have seen children as young as 7 years working there. If you go to the cotton fields, the only people working are women and children. Children from the ages of 10 upwards help adults to pick cotton by hand for between 2 and 5 US cents a kilogram. A small child might be able to pick 30kg a day. Often, employers deduct food and housing costs from what they earn, leaving them with very little.

All three governments deny accusations that children are forced into work, saying it is the parents from rural communities who send their children into the fields to earn much-needed cash. Some families rely on seasonal work, taking their children with them wherever there is a living to be had. Very often, the children come from poor rural areas where there are no opportunities to earn cash, so the children are taken out of schools to work for money.

¹BBC News: 21/02/2005; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/4267559.stm>

Additional research is needed to assess the impact of structural adjustment programmes on rural-based primary school infrastructures in many countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, school fees and other costs have been introduced which are not affordable for many rural households. Many children are working to cover these costs. It is clear that in tobacco growing areas in Tanzania, school children work on tobacco farms or plantations in order to meet school expenses, such as fees, contributions to school buildings, and other school requirements such as uniforms, books, etc.⁸

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. Farms 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, for example, 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. This conversion process, which involves concluding contracts with each farmer owner where a school is located, has proved to be very slow, even threatening the continued operations of such schools. Yet, if a school closes, there is then the problem of transporting the children, often long distances, to the nearest available school.⁹

2.1.4 Availability of vocational training, skills training and apprenticeships

To make elimination of child labour in rural areas a reality, farmers' associations, farmers' cooperatives, agricultural trade unions and similar bodies should be enlisted to develop skills training programmes and apprenticeship schemes for children above the minimum working age. Such training would include developing/strengthening children's basic education skills, occupational safety and health knowledge and skills, health education knowledge, and knowledge on access to micro-credit. These downstream activities would need to link to upstream work in terms of building the capacities of vocational institutions in rural areas to provide skills training and help with apprenticeship programmes. In general, there is a move away from vocational training to promoting skills training in educational curricula and training programmes.

2.1.5 Cultural or family traditions

In some societies, children working alongside adults is considered an essential element of their socialization. Such work is, for example, a valued tradition in parts of Africa. In the same way, participation of children in the mobility of adults within the West and Central-African sub-region, either by travelling with their parents or by being placed in the household of other members of the larger family for study or apprenticeship, is a widespread and traditional practice.

Families may place great importance on children following in their parents' footsteps. This tradition may also reinforce prevailing social biases: girls imitate their mothers and boys their fathers and grandfathers. If a family has a tradition of engagement in a hazardous occupation, there is a great likelihood that its children will enter the same line of work.

2.1.6 The HIV/AIDS pandemic

AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome), a disease caused by destruction of the immune system by a virus called HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), generally hits at the most productive age groups. The majority of the 40 million people infected with HIV are in the prime of their working lives.¹⁰ At least 25 million of those infected with HIV are workers aged 15 to 49 years. The impacts on rural families' livelihoods, farming systems and food security have been especially severe.

The implications of HIV/AIDS on child labour in agriculture have not yet been thoroughly explored. Little effort has been made to correlate rises in child labour and HIV/AIDS in developing countries¹¹. A series of IPEC rapid assessment studies in Africa suggests that HIV/AIDS is among the major causes of child labour in that region.¹²

In agricultural communities, the number of child-headed households has increased as the parents have died from the virus and extended

family networks cannot cope with the sheer numbers of orphans.¹³ An estimated 14 million children under the age of 15 have been orphaned by AIDS, 95 per cent of them in Africa. By 2010 it is estimated there could be as many as 35 million.

The growing number of AIDS orphans means that farm work is often vital for these children as a means to earn enough food or money for their own survival. AIDS orphans may be allowed to work in agriculture to cover the costs of their remaining on the farm or plantation and to pay school fees. However, there is a very real danger that these children will be exploited and their health put further at risk by exposure to occupational health and safety hazards.¹⁴

There is growing pressure to use child labour to fill the gaps in the agricultural workforce caused by adult AIDS-related deaths. By 2010, Sub-Saharan Africa's total labour force is expected to have shrunk by 9 per cent due to HIV/AIDS. Losses may top 20 per cent in the worst affected countries. By 2015, the losses could reach up to 12 per cent overall, reducing the labour supply by as much as 30-40 per cent in the highest prevalence countries.¹⁵ Given that 70-90 per cent of the work force in these African countries is in agriculture, there are clear implications for the continued, or even increased use, of child labour.

Child labourers are also often at direct risk of infection. Through their vulnerability to sexual exploitation/harassment they can fuel the spread of the disease (see also Guidebook 3, Chapter 2, section 2.10)

2.2 Factors influencing the demand for child labour in agriculture

There are a number of reasons why employers hire child labour. Two common explanations are the “irreplaceable” skills afforded by child workers (the “nimble fingers” argument) and the lower cost of child labour.

The “nimble fingers” argument – that only children with small fingers have the ability (or have an advantage) to do delicate tasks like picking flowers and tea leaves or tying knots in fine carpets – has been largely discredited. ILO studies in a variety of hazardous industries, such as carpet making, glass production and gem and diamond polishing, have shown it to be entirely fallacious. In all of these industries, adults worked side by side with child workers performing almost all of the same tasks.¹⁶

A number of factors influence demand for child labour in agriculture. Some of these are discussed in the following sections. Overall, the best explanations for why employers hire children are that they can get away with it, that children are more easily exploited than adults and that they can pay children much less.

2.2.1 Lack or non-enforcement of regulations and laws

Weak or non-existent labour laws and non-enforcement where laws exist greatly facilitate the practice of using child labour in agriculture.

Compared to other economic sectors, agricultural workers – whatever their age – are often only poorly protected by national labour law. As a result, working conditions in this sector remain poor and well below those prevailing in other economic sectors. In addition, social protection in the form of employment-related benefits, access to health care and social security are less well developed, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, such as landless day labourers, temporary and migrant workers, women workers and child labourers.

Agricultural and rural workers are still often denied the right to organize and bargain collectively either by legislative or practical barriers. Enforcement of agricultural safety and health legislation and standards is often weak or non-existent. Application of general labour laws can be problematic in rural areas where employers and workers may be less familiar with the details of the law. Compliance may be considered impractical, particularly on small-scale farms and enterprises.

Even in countries that have a legal framework to address child labour, there are often problems of illegal employment of children. One of the consequences of this is that it can increase the levels of risk to them.

2.2.2 Children as a cheap source of labour

That child workers are paid less than their adult counterparts is generally true. This is certainly the case in agriculture as the following examples from a 1995 United States Department of Labor study¹⁷ illustrate:

Central and Latin America: According to the study, children (aged 12-14) comprise perhaps 30 per cent of internal migrants within Guatemala working on coffee, sugar cane, cardamom and cotton plantations. They do the same work as adults and are paid half as much. In Peru the government estimated that 7.5 million children under 15 were employed in 1992, and that 70 per cent of these were child agricultural workers. Many of these child labourers migrated to work, worked 10-12 hours per day, 6 days per week, and were paid half the adult wage. In Brazil, child labour is widely used on sugar cane plantations throughout the country. In the principal cane growing and processing area, children and adolescents aged 10-17 accounted for approximately 25 per cent of the total number of cane workers. In many cases children worked with their families, contributing to the daily amount of cane cut, the quota for which was 4 tons per day in 1995. Payment was typically made to the head of the family.

Asia: Children working on vegetable farms in the Philippines put in 10 hours a day for six days and a half day on Sunday and earned less than half the pay of adult workers. In Malaysia, children worked largely as part of a family unit, helping parents achieve targets to earn

the daily wage (e.g. 600-700 rubber trees tapped; 1.5 - 2.0 tons of palm oil fruit collected). To meet these daily quotas, assistance from children who were not paid directly was essential. In Thailand, deceptive recruiting and debt bondage of children occurred in connection with sugar plantations. Children and adults were enticed into taking loans and became entrapped in debt bondage.

Africa: Plantations and farms in many countries hire children directly as contract workers, often sending trucks to collect child workers in peak agricultural season. Children comprised 58 per cent of the coffee plantation workforce in Kenya during peak season, working with mothers on a piece-rate basis for low earnings. In South Africa, there were reports of Mozambican refugee children recruited by local farmers, put to work and then reported to the police for deportation as illegal aliens when payment for their labour became due. In Egypt, children are regularly employed picking jasmine. Children are recruited from villages between July and October to gather flowers in the middle of the night when the essence is purest. Child labourers worked nine-hour shifts without stopping under threat of physical abuse. In Tanzania, child workers (aged 12-14) on sisal plantations worked under hazardous conditions up to 11 hours per day, 6 days per week, with no regular or specified rest periods. Their earnings were approximately half of those of adults.

Several studies have noted that in some industries children are less productive than adults, however. Thus the savings to employers generated by using child labour are illusory in some cases. ILO studies of carpet and bangle production in India suggest that, as a portion of the final price, cost savings realised through child labour are surprisingly small – less than 5 per cent for bangles and between 5-10 per cent for carpets.¹⁸ The implication from this research is that child labour is not in fact economically necessary for the carpet industry to survive in the market, and that relatively small changes in the financial arrangements between loom owners, exporters and importers could reduce the incentive for employing child workers. Comparable data on productivity and child labour in agriculture are lacking, however.

2.2.3 Rural development and employment

Elimination of child labour also has to be seen in the context of the importance of rural and agricultural development strategies, especially employment creation opportunities for adults. Along with on-farm product diversification to get away from dependency on a single crop and boosting farm productivity and technology, diversification of the rural production economy is essential if rural poverty and child labour are to be tackled. The upgrading of primary production exports and diversification of the export structure is often a priority.¹⁹

While agriculture cannot be expected to absorb all of the incremental rural labour force, its direct contribution to employment generation, including wage employment, and its indirect contribution towards greater diversification of the economy are critical.²⁰

2.2.4 Fair globalization and access to international markets

The scale and nature of agricultural production is changing rapidly in many countries and regions due to globalization, trade rules and structural adjustment programmes. Governments are increasingly promoting intensive, export-orientated agriculture in their countries. The production of labour-intensive exotic crops, such as flowers and vegetables, is being promoted, often at the expense of staple food crops. More and more farmers worldwide – whatever the nature or size of their enterprises – are being tied to commercial production.

What are the implications of globalization for child labour in agriculture? Will it lead to increased use of child labour or the opposite? There is no simple answer as globalization has many facets/aspects that bear on this question as well as on the issue of elimination rural poverty. The main aspects of globalization that need to be considered with regard to child labour in agriculture can be grouped under two headings: 1) multilateral rules on trade, agricultural protectionism and commodity prices and 2) growth of intensive, export-orientated agriculture.

1. Multilateral rules on trade, agricultural protectionism and commodity prices

As Juan Somavia, the ILO Director General states: “The quest for a fair globalization that creates opportunities for all will dominate international affairs in the next decade”.²¹ To achieve this, multilateral rules for trade need to be balanced and fair. However, as the ILO’s report on fair globalization notes, “A glaring inequality in the global trading system is the persistence of trade barriers in the North against labour-intensive goods produced in the South”.²² Agricultural protectionism is a well-recognized inequality and is a major obstacle to the reduction of poverty, negating much of the good that is being done through overseas development assistance. Agricultural subsidies in the industrialized countries are now estimated to amount to over US\$ 1 billion per day, whilst 70-75 per cent of the world’s poor live in rural areas and subsist on less than one dollar a day.²³

The report goes on to note that, “The problem of falling world prices for agricultural commodities is related to the issue of agricultural protectionism. Many developing countries and least developed countries still depend on agricultural commodities for more than half their export earnings. Yet from 1980 to 2000, world prices for 18 major export commodities fell by 25 per cent in real terms. The fall was particularly significant in the case of cotton (47 per cent), coffee (64 per cent), rice (60.8 per cent), cocoa (71.1 per cent), and sugar (76.6 per cent)”.²⁴ The dramatic falls in world commodity prices for agricultural products have hit small farmers hard and increased pressure on them to cut production costs by using cheap child labour in order to survive and compete.

Whilst there is no easy answer to combat the problem of falling prices, the World Bank estimates that, for example, the removal of

agricultural protection and support in the cotton sector would increase prices by 13 per cent over ten years (2004-2014) and world trade in cotton by 6 per cent.²⁵

2. Growth of intensive, export-orientated agriculture

Globalization and structural adjustment have transformed agriculture in many countries into an export-oriented sector, heavily dependent on migrant labour. This has consequences for child labour. Migrant labour based on families may mean children working as part of a family unit. Also, greater mechanization and use of pesticides, for example, may increase the range of hazards and the levels of risk.

There is a need to better understand if export-orientated agriculture is resulting in the increased use of child labour. There is also a need for information on what are the impacts of falling agricultural commodity process prices on child labour.

2.2.5 The global agri-food industry and child labour, and the role of consumers

Agriculture is part of a global agri-food industry that is increasingly dominated by multinational enterprises (MNEs) in crop growing animal raising, food processing, marketing, and distribution. MNEs control and influence large parts of the food chain. The agri-food industry is the largest industrial sector in the world.

MNEs in the agriculture/food supply chain can greatly influence - positively or negatively - the use of child labour in agriculture as they have a major role in determining what is produced and under what conditions, including labour standards. Supermarkets often directly contract farmers to supply them, fixing the price and setting the labour and other conditions under which the crops or livestock (including fish/shrimps) are produced. According to a 2003 trade union consultation on irregular migration and human trafficking in Europe, it is essentially the large supermarket chains that force farmers to produce at very low cost. Farmers respond to the pressure by decreasing their labour costs, thus passing the burden on to the workers.²⁶ The pressure to cut labour costs can result in exploitation of children, who are paid only a fraction of an adult wage.

There is a growing sensitivity among consumers to social issues like child labour. Unfavourable publicity due to dubious environmental and social production/marketing methods by companies can result in unforeseen and often rapid changes in consumer choice and purchasing behaviour. Some companies have literally lost their markets overnight when consumers stopped buying their goods, and this was often accompanied by rapid falls in the stock markets prices of company shares and stocks.

As a result, there has been a major and rapid increase of interest in what is termed “corporate social responsibility”. Companies and/or industrial sectors/associations have introduced voluntary codes of conduct, initiatives, standards, etc. whereby they pledge to raise

environmental and social standards in relation to the whole life cycle of the products they produce and sell.

A linked phenomenon is the growth of “fair trade” or “ethical trading” initiatives. The organizations and social movements driving these campaign and organize to improve prices for small producers by improving their market opportunities. They try to ensure that the farmers – and sometimes workers – who produce the crops and livestock receive fair prices for their work and for their produce.

Chapter 3:

Examples of child labour found in the production of selected commodities



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The following examples illustrate the working conditions, hazards and risks children face in specific types of crop production. They are drawn from various studies carried out by IPEC and other organizations.

3.1 Cocoa

A study by the Sustainable Tree Crops Program, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture on child labour on 1,500 cocoa farms in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria estimated that 146,000 children under 15 were clearing fields on these farms using machetes, and 153,000 children were involved in the application of pesticides without protective equipment¹ (see also Appendix 1 of Guidebook 3).

The study concluded that the picture that emerges is one of a sector with stagnant technology, low yields and an increasing demand for unskilled workers trapped in a circle of poverty. Salaried children were most clearly trapped in a vicious circle. The majority of these children had never been to school and were earning subsistence wages, driven

into this labour by economic circumstances. Most of these children were from the drier savannah areas of Africa, where family livelihoods are inherently uncertain and households are forced into survival strategies, including sending children to cocoa plantations in other countries to work.

A report by Save the Children Canada on labour conditions on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire indicated that, in some cases, "Children under the age of 14 have worked for three to five years for 10-12 hours a day and had not been paid a wage. Some children also being reported being beaten and denied food because their work output did not meet the farmer's expectations. Other children indicated they had to carry heavy loads on their backs which often caused open wounds which are still visible today".²

3.2 Coffee

An IPEC rapid assessment study of child labour in coffee growing in Tanzania showed that child workers are regularly recruited in coffee growing areas during the picking season. The majority were aged 10-13 years old, and girls constituted the majority (60 per cent).³

The main tasks performed by the children were picking coffee berries, pruning, weeding and pesticide spraying, without any protective clothing or equipment. Some children sprayed pesticides for three hours per day on average. The children were exposed to tough and strenuous activities irrespective of their age. Other hazards included snake and insect bites, and attacks by wild animals. Children worked on average between eight and 10 hours per day, depending on the season.

3.3 Cottonseed

Changes in types of agricultural production can generate new demands for child labour. In India, for example, the introduction of hybrid cottonseeds in the early 1970s not only contributed to the rise in productivity and quality of cotton, but also generated a substantial amount of additional employment in the agricultural sector, particularly in the state of Andhra Pradesh, which accounts for about 65 per cent of Indian cottonseed production. However, much of the extra employment generated was the hiring of female children as bonded labourers.

An estimated 450,000 children, in the age group of 6 to 14 years, are employed in cottonseed fields in India, with about 248,000 of them in Andhra Pradesh alone. Local seed farmers, who cultivate hybrid cottonseeds for national and multinational enterprise seed companies, secure the labour of girls by offering loans to their parents in advance of cultivation, compelling the girls to work at the terms set by the employer for the entire season, and, in practice, for several years. These girls work long days, are paid very little, are deprived of an education and are exposed for long periods to dangerous agricultural chemicals.⁴

3.4 Flowers

In the Ecuadorian flower industry, children under 15 years old are classed as “helpers” and so do not figure on the official payroll. This false classification makes it difficult to estimate the total number of child labourers working in the flower industry in this country.

An IPEC rapid assessment study⁵ found several specific dangers and accident/ill health risks:

- Falls occurred when constructing the wooden or aluminium frames of glasshouses. Children climb on the frames to complete the construction but the struts are often too thin to support their weight.
- Physical injuries, exhaustion and musculo-skeletal injuries resulted from heavy work preparing raised seed beds. The work involves removing 1 metre depth of soil, which is then fumigated with pesticides (often methyl bromide which is a highly toxic pesticide) to sterilise it, and then replacing the soil and working it to a smooth surface.
- There was exposure to pesticides, particularly Methyl bromide in the seedbeds, which can be breathed in as a gas when the soil is being worked. Other pesticides were also applied in the glasshouses and children handled sprayed plants when picking and packing flowers.

3.5 Sugar cane

An IPEC rapid assessment study⁶ of working conditions of child labourers in sugar cane production in El Salvador found that 70 per cent of the children in the study area were aged 7-14 years old, with boys in the majority (see also Appendix 2 in Guidebook 3). In respect of the health and safety problems experienced by the children, the assessment found that:

- Children worked very long days, waking at 05:00. Those who went to school finished work around midday, while others continued working until 15:00 or 16:00 hours. On average, boys worked for five hours and girls six hours. Girls were engaged in preparing the land and planting the sugar cane. Boys cut the harvested canes, sliced them into smaller pieces, and sprayed the fields with chemical pesticides.
- Children typically did not wear gloves or any other kind of protective clothing. Only a few wore shoes. Exposure to scorching sun was a problem as there were few or no trees to provide shade on most plantations.
- Injuries from cutting instruments such as machetes were the most common ones. Agricultural tools were often too heavy and awkward for children to use properly, resulting in injuries and back, shoulder, neck and arm problems. Other health

complaints included blisters, headaches, respiratory problems and eye irritations.

Similarly, a trade union investigation⁷ into child labour in sugar cane production in Mayuge district, eastern Uganda found children working on outgrower sugar farms cutting cane. They tied the cane into bundles of ten, transported them to the roadside from fields and stacked them into heaps of 50 bundles. The children were paid Uganda shillings 700 per heap (less than 50 cents US) and on average could only make two heaps in a 12-hour day.

Safety and health problems faced by these children included:

- exposure to toxic pesticides,
- cuts and abrasions from cane trash,
- lifting of heavy loads,
- long working hours,
- over-exposure to rains and hot sun,
- snake and insect bites, and
- harsh supervision.

A US Department of Labor report⁸ covering child labour in sugar cane growing in Brazil found that on one plantation, over half the children had suffered some type of occupational accident, with knife wounds on the arms, hands and legs accounting for over 85 per cent of them. Other health problems included respiratory, skin, and stomach problems; back, leg, and arm pain; headaches from prolonged exposure to the sun; conjunctivitis; and mental and physical stress from having to meet high daily production quotas.

Roughly 90 per cent of the children and 40 per cent of the adults were unregistered workers. Thus, employers generally did not provide children with boots or protective clothing. Most wore rubber sandals or worked barefoot.

Over 40 per cent of the children worked more than 40 hours per week. On one plantation, children woke up at 04:00 and went to work without eating breakfast.

3.6 Tea

An IPEC baseline survey⁹ in three tea growing districts - Korogwe, Lushoto, Muheza – in Tanzania concluded that hazardous child labour existed both on small and large-scale tea growing farms (plantations). The majority of the 1,000 children studied were 11-14 years old, with girls in the majority. The children interviewed were engaged in plucking and carrying the tea leaves. They worked on average eight hours per day, usually without a lunch break as they continued plucking to earn more money. Forty-four per cent of the children interviewed experienced health problems, the most common ones reported being:

- chest infections due to cold and winds and rain, as no warm clothing was provided;
- skin diseases and bruises due to lack of shoes/boots and protective cover on arms and legs, and linked to the fact that their clothes were always dirty;
- intestinal worms due to poor water and sanitation facilities; and
- muscle and back pains due to carrying of heavy loads.

A child of 13 carries up to 20 kilograms and a child of 14 up to 30 kilograms. These loads were carried over considerable distances as the weighing stations were from 1-4 kilometres from the tea fields.

Similarly, an IPEC rapid assessment study¹⁰ of child labour on tea estates in Lushoto and Rungwe districts of Tanzania found that children were working without any warm clothing, raincoats or boots. As a result, they suffered from cold related health problems, especially during heavy rains. Without boots, they also suffered leg injuries from thorns and protruding tea stumps and had no protection against snakebites. Their clothes were always dirty, which increased the risk of infection. In Rungwe district, they were exposed to toxic herbicides (pesticides). Sexual harassment of girls was reported as a problem.

The average working day for children engaged in plucking and carrying green tea leaves was eight hours. Thirteen year-olds carried up to 20 kilograms and 14 year-olds up to 30 kilograms of green tea leaves from the fields to the weighing stations, often for distances between one and four kilometres.

A US Department of Labor report¹¹ on child labour on tea plantations in a variety of countries found that in India, for example, some children were born, lived and died on the tea estates. They traditionally began working by helping their parents pluck and sort leaves and carry baskets of harvested tea. Once they reached the age of 12, they were given their own basket, earning half of what an adult labourer earned.

The same report found that tea estates in Zimbabwe employed a large number of children, often 10 to 12 years old, on part-time and piece-rate bases. They began work at 05:30, walked five to eight kilometres to the tea fields, and plucked tea leaves until school began at 13:00. If they failed to pluck the minimum daily load, they were forced to work on Saturday as a punishment.

A survey by the Employer's Federation of Sri Lanka¹² of 161 tea estates "employing" 2,070 child labourers between the ages of 14 and 16, found that the main safety and health hazards were unguarded machinery, exposure to fertilizers and pesticides, accidents due to uneven and sloping terrain in the fields, and exposure to extreme weather conditions.



3.7 Tobacco

An IPEC rapid assessment study¹³ on tobacco growing in the Iringa and Urambo districts, Tanzania reported a number of hazards and risks.

Children lacked protective equipment, including warm clothing during the rainy and cold seasons. Due to the lack of boots, they were injured by thorns and tree stumps, especially when walking barefoot to fell trees in thorny woods in order to get logs for curing tobacco. They suffered from headaches, fevers, nosebleeds, sunburns and fungal infections on toes and fingers from working in stagnant water.

Other health effects included eye inflammation, coughs and tuberculosis due to tobacco fumes and smoke from burning logs in curing sheds, and dry skin and anaemia from exposure to excessive heat. They suffered skin problems from using bare hands and spoons to apply chemical fertilizers, and chest pains and respiratory problems from inhaling fertilizer dust. Children applied toxic pesticides using bare hands.

The two main sources of accidental injury were fires during curing and the use of sharp implements. Knives were used to prune tobacco. They carried out repetitive and exhaustive work using hoes, axes and pangas (machetes). Fires resulted in burns and even fatalities.

Children regularly worked from eight to 14 hours a day, with shifts of 18 to 20 hours during harvest time as they worked in the fields during the day and in the barns curing tobacco throughout the night. The rooms where they slept at night were not insulated in any way

Carrying water for the seedbeds in Urambo district often involved children walking five to ten kilometres;

In both districts, working children, particularly girls, suffered sexual harassment and assault. Consequently, some children suffered from sexually transmitted diseases, including syphilis.

An IPEC rapid assessment report¹⁴ of working children in tobacco cultivation in Lebanon found that the majority of the children were 12-15 years old, with many 9-12 year-olds also engaged in the work. Some children below 5 years of age were engaged in leaf drying. Almost all the children were unpaid family labour.

The premises where children work were small, dirty and full of dust. Field work involved high temperatures and intensive sunlight. Children classed the work as “tiring, boring and hard”.

At least a quarter of the children had been injured at least once during their work: cuts were the most common source of injury as the children had no gloves or special work clothes. Such injuries were especially prevalent among children under 5 years of age when they put the tobacco leaves on threads using special steelheads.

Children walked long distances to the fields, taking 15 to 30 minutes for the journey, and were afraid of insects and snakes during their walks through the fields. They worked an average of six hours per day.

A joint study in the Dominican Republic by IPEC and the Foundation for Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco found that both girls and boys were found in the tobacco growing plantations. There was, however, a sex-based division of labour: girls would separate and roll up tobacco leaves, boys would carry heavy loads.¹⁵

Furthermore, in the Dominican Republic, according to the research, there was a very high level of “social tolerance” of child agricultural labour, as 71 per cent of the children interviewed in Santiago considered that it is vital to start working between 6-12 years old. On the other hand, 82.5 per cent of the parents also believed that they needed the income they got from their children’s work. From the employers’ point of view (the owners of the farms), it also seemed acceptable to have children working from an early age, as long as the parents were looking after them.¹⁶

NOTES

Introductory Note

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