

CHILD LABOUR IN PLANTATION

1. Child labour in plantation in Indonesia at glance

It is estimated that over 1.5 million children aged between 10-17 years are working in the agricultural sector. The three provinces with the largest incidence of child labourers in agricultural sector are North Sumatra (155,196 children), Central Java (204,406) and East Java (224,075). Work in agriculture involves exposure to many hazards including extreme temperatures, pesticides, and organic dust. It also often requires working long hours as well as the use of heavy and dangerous machinery and tools that violate Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards. Within the agricultural sectors, children are found working in plantations in Indonesia. Plantations are generally located near villages and soak up much of the available local labour, including child labour. The poor quality and availability of schools coupled with the general low regard for education in rural areas contributes to a steady supply of child labourers in the plantations. Researches to date inform that in Indonesia children are found working in tobacco plantation, rubber plantation and palm oil.

2. Child labour in tobacco plantations

Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum* L.) are planted in several areas in Indonesia. Main tobacco plantation areas are Deli (North Sumatra), Surakarta, Temanggung, Wonosobo and Kendal in Central Java, Yogyakarta and Besuki, Bojonegoro, Madura and Jember in East Java. These plantations produce various types of tobacco cultivated by companies as well as by the communities. Children are involved in the planting, harvesting as well as tobacco leaves process and they are found working in community plantations as well as in the company owned plantation. In the company owned plantations, most children assist their parents or other adults to accomplish the works and in many cases children were not directly recruited by the companies.

An ILO-IPEC study on child labour in plantation in Jember District, East Java in collaboration with Community Social Development Foundation (YPSM) in 2006 interviewed 100 child labourers and found that:

- 1) Majority of the children found working in tobacco industry in Jember are 15 to 17 years old (86 per cent) and only 14 per cent are under 15 years old. However 56 per cent child labours started to work when they were below 15 years old;
- 2) Types of works usually performed by children are watering (45 per cent), planting tobaccos (27 per cent) and preparing lands (17 per cent);
- 3) 48 per cent of the children working between 7 – 9 hours a day and 7 per cent work more than 9 hours a day and 31 per cent children working 7 days a week which seems excessive for children;
- 4) From 100 interviewed respondents, only 4 per cent working children attend schools, 1 per cent never attends school and 95 per cent have left their schools. Majority of those who already left schools (85 per cent) do not intend to resume their education;
- 5) Most parents (74 per cent) of the interviewed child labourers do not see any negative impact of working children and low appreciation of education has been also pointed as one of the challenges faced in improving education;
- 6) Majority of the children (72 per cent) employed by other persons (i.e. local entrepreneur and company) than their parents and received wages from their employers.

3. Child labour in rubber plantations

Rubber (*Havea brasiliensis*) are cultivated in 24 provinces in Indonesia, one of major rubber producing countries. While South Sumatra is the largest province where rubber is cultivated, Lampung Province where

the Project works is ranked at tenth. Tulang Bawang District in Lampung Province is the district in Lampung with the largest rubber plantation area, cultivated by [private companies as well as communities](#).

Many children (boys and girls, mainly in between 11 and 17 years old) work in community as well as company owned rubber plantation. Initially, they work to help parents in their leisure time. When their parents could not afford school fees the children drop out or do not continue to higher education, then these children will fully work in the plantation.

In rubber plantation children do the works as the adults do. They make incision in rubber trees to tap rubber sap, put vinegar in rubber sap to make it fluid, etc. Tapping rubber sap will last in almost nine hours in a day. The children frequently work from 4 o'clock early morning until 7 o'clock in the morning, and continue working in the afternoon: from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock. Sometimes, if they have cattle, they also cut grass for their cattle: 7 o'clock to 8 o'clock. In the late afternoon, they send the rubber sap to the collector: from 2 o'clock to 3 o'clock. Children also involved in caring the trees (cutting grass and spraying to get rid of weeds and fungus), cultivation of, caring and planting of seedlings.

Children working in rubber plantation are exposed to many hazards, especially biological hazards such as attacks by snakes. Rubber plantation is usually far from the residential areas and workers, especially children are therefore working in isolated places where looking for helps is difficult when facing problems such as harrasments. Another hazard is the use of sharp tool to perform the works.

A Baseline Study on Child Labour on Plantation Areas in Lampung conducted in 2008 by IPEC in collaboration with Institute for Organizational Development and Research (IPOR) Lampung interviewed 755 child labourers (462 boys and 293 girls) in rubber plantations in Lampung and found that:

- 1) 59 per cent of children work in rubber plantation are below 15 years old
- 2) 65 per cent of the interviewed children already drop out from school, and 2 per cent of children never goes to school
- 3) 72 per cent of the interviewed child labourers in rubber plantation do not complete or have not completed basic education
- 4) 52 per cent of interviewed children work for private companies
- 5) 33 per cent of the interviewed child labourers work four to six hours a day, more than half of those work four to six hours are below 15
- 6) 23 per cent work seven days a week, 72 per cent of children who work during seven days are below 15.

4. Child labour in palm oil plantations

Indonesia is one of major palm oil producing country. It contributes 30 per cent of the global production. Major areas of palm oil plantation in Indonesia are North Sumatra, Riau, and Central Kalimantan.

Palm oil fruits grow four to five metres above the ground, along thorny leaf fronds. Fruit bunches, made up of thousands of oval-shaped fruits, weigh between 15 and 25 kilograms. Palm oil palm cultivation includes sowing seeds, transplanting seedlings, harvesting, and transporting fruit bunches. Children primarily collect loose fruit, help carry and loads bunches of oil palm fruit, and weed the oil palm fields. Men and, sometimes, boys cut fruit bunch down from trees using a long, heavy pole with a knife on the end (punting pole) or by climbing them to harvest the fruit directly. The use of the punting pole puts a lot of strain on the musculoskeletal system. Girls and women are responsible for gathering and moving the fruit bunches. Child labour helps families meet daily fruit quotas of between one and two tons.

A Pilot Action Research on Hazardous Forms of Child Labour in Palm Oil Plantation Sector in Indonesia conducted by Directorate on Labour Inspection Norms of Occupational Safety and Health – Ministry of Manpower and Transmigrastion in 2002 interviewed 75 child labourers from 9 to 17 years old on oil palm plantations in Indonesia and found that:

- 1) 85 per cent worked as palm pickers, collecting loose palm fruits, carrying sacks of palm fruits to carts, and pushing carts to a collection site.
- 2) The average load carried was 10 kilograms over a distance of 250 metres.
- 3) Nearly 75 per cent did not have gloves, and most had suffered cuts, scratches and abrasions.
- 4) Nearly 90 per cent had no training before working.
- 5) 68 per cent experienced heat exhaustion at a "heavy heat stress level".
- 6) Average working time was more than four hours per day, without any regular break time.
- 7) Over half worked because their parents ordered them to.
- 8) Nine out of ten children were paid in cash, but parents received 84 per cent of children's earnings.
- 9) Just over half of the children spent between 30 and 60 minutes traveling between their homes and the plantation.

5. Action Programmes

Use the links to explore Action Programmes on child labour in plantation implemented in:

- 1) East Java
- 2) Lampung
- 3) North Sumatra