

Trade union roles in combating child labour

Trade unions, along with Governments and employers, are one of the tripartite constituents of the ILO. Working with trade unions has been a significant area of IPEC's work since the outset of the programme in the early 1990s and within the broader context of the ILO as a whole. They have played a very important role in encouraging the development of the main ILO standards on the issue of child labour. In particular trade unions have been strong advocates and supporters of the [ILO Convention No 138](#) which concerns the minimum age of employment, and [ILO Convention No 182](#) which concerns the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Both these "fundamental" ILO Conventions have been ratified by Indonesia.

Trade unions hold challenging roles in promoting labour standards and ensuring the application of labour standards in the world of work. Child labour is a form of failure in applying labour standards as well as the obstacle in promoting labour standards. The existence of child labours will weaken the bargaining power of adult labours because they can easily be replaced by child labours who can be easily manipulated and paid low wages.

Moreover, according to ILO survey in 2006, yearly school expenses and its related expenses for one child is twice the minimum wage. Therefore, for many labourers it can be hard to keep their children in school which make the children prone to drop-out of school and increase child vulnerability to become child labourers. For these reasons, trade unionists should strengthen their actions against child labour.

Trade unions and child labour

Trade unions have a special and unique role to play in helping tackle child labour. They can help tackle child labour by:

- 1) Campaigning for application of ILO Conventions and National Laws, and by supporting the **Education for All** campaign;
- 2) Gathering information on child labour cases;
- 3) Bargaining with employers so that child labour is not used directly or in the supply chain;
- 4) Supporting local level programmes aimed at helping children who are at risk of WFCL

How can trade unions work with ILO-IPEC? Some examples from Indonesia:

In the first phase of the Project of Support to the Implementation of National Plan of Action, ILO-IPEC in Indonesia and trade unions had in partnership implemented activities which resulted in some good practices in contributing to the elimination of worst forms of child labour (WFCL), as below.

Bringing unions together – child labour concerns all unions

In East Kalimantan a programme was coordinated through an inter union grouping involving unions in three major trade union Confederations, KSPI, KSPSI and KSBSI. The single main cause of early drop out from school is the cost of education. Unions therefore involved in a survey of the costs of elementary and junior secondary education to their members. The aim was to have a clear picture of the share of workers income which is being spent on education. The unions used the data collected in advocacy with other stakeholders aimed at reducing education costs and to support the **Education For All** initiative.

At the national level, the three main Confederations jointly conducted similar survey covering 792 respondents from West Java, East Java and Jakarta in 2006. In 2007, the survey report entitled *Pekerja Anak, Pendidikan Anak Pekerja/Buruh, Skema Bantuan dan Komite Sekolah. Pandangan Serikat Pekerja/Buruh* (Child Labour, Education for Children of Workers, Education Aid Scheme and School Committee. Union's Perspective) was published. The report becomes one of references in advocating education policies and programs.

Education for All - working at school level

In several project sites in five provinces (Jakarta, North Sumatra, West Java, East Java, and East Kalimantan), many children drop out of school early and begin to work in the hazardous sector and are at risk to being trafficked. Work in the sectors can expose children to a range of hazardous practices. In an effort to reduce drop out rates the teachers union, PGRI, implemented a remedial education programme providing additional education support to more than 5,000 children. The programmes boosted the children's commitment to education and helped them to continue in school. At the same time other IPEC supported programmes in the area seek to improve the socio economic situation of families in the area.

In Sukabumi, PGRI in collaboration with local Education Office developed *Pedoman dan Modul Bimbingan dan Konseling Program Pencegahan Pekerja Anak dan Perdagangan Anak bagi Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP)/MTs/Paket B* (Guideline and Module on Career Guidance and Counselling of Prevention of Child Labour and Child Trafficking for Students in Junior High School and Package B). Teachers were trained to use the guideline and module and the module was tried out in 8 Junior Secondary Schools in Sukabumi, West Java.

Preventing child labour through promoting community awareness

As one of main stakeholders of child labour, unions could also initiate and/or involve in through monitoring child labour. It is also part of efforts to prevent child labour.

In Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra, the transport union, SPTI actively involved in supporting efforts to increase awareness of the need to tackle child labour, particularly in the off- shore fishing sector. The union organised activities to increase awareness of their own members about the issue, and also implemented publicity campaigns among the community in Tanjung Balai, where the union has a strong presence.

Supporting union initiatives to help children

The Youth section of SP INDOSAT, an affiliate of ASPEK Indonesia, has for some time been working to support its own programme with street children. The union members have provided funds and volunteered their time to work with street children close to the company's head office in Central Jakarta. In an effort to widen support for this kind of initiative within other branches of the union, and with support from ILO-IPEC, ASPEK organised a workshop to bring together union representatives to see how more initiatives to help vulnerable children could be developed.

Workers education- a key trade union tool

ILO-IPEC has produced an adaptation in Bahasa Indonesia of "Trade Unions and Child Labour", a resource material produced by the ILO Bureau for Workers Activities. This material looks at the main issues involved for unions who wish to act against child labour. Each section of the material contains a linked education activity. Copies of the material are available to unions on request to ILO-IPEC Jakarta.

Current and future works of ILO-IPEC in Indonesia with trade union

Many children in Indonesia still drop out of school and become involved in the labour force before completing their basic education. According to government data some 4 million children fail to complete the required nine years basic education and 1.5 million children between 10 and 14 are out of school and in the workforce. Some of these children are at risk of becoming involved in the worst forms of child labour, the most exploitative or dangerous work. National Labour Survey conducted in February 2006 found 2,749,353 children aged 10 to 17 years old in 33 provinces are working while National Labour Survey in August 2007 found 1,011,919 children aged 10 - 14 years working.

To address the above issue, ILO-IPEC Indonesia will continue its collaboration with trade unions to assist in tackling the problem of child labor in Indonesia.

See also [Mobilisation and capacity-building of teacher trade union in Indonesia in combating child labour project](#).