

Transcript:

Farmers and wage workers help feed the world and ensure food security, but very often they are poor. Rural families form the vast majority of the world's poorest people.

Much of our food and drink, as well as the raw materials we use to make other products however, are produced by child labour.

Child labour in agriculture is a global phenomenon found in developed and developing countries.

Worldwide, agriculture is the sector where by far the largest share of working children is found – nearly 70 percent, according to the International Labour Organization's International Programme to Eliminate Child Labour, 132 million girls and boys aged 5-14 years old. Girls are particularly disadvantaged as they often undertake household chores either before or after working in the fields.

But what is child labour?

Child labour does not include all work done by children. Worldwide there are 318 million children carrying out some form of work.

A third of these children are not considered child labourers: they contribute to the family's wellbeing, helping out with tasks outside school hours.

The remaining 218 million however are engaged in child labour, 126 million of whom are involved in hazardous child labour.

According to the ILO, child labour is work that harms, abuses and exploits a child or deprives a child of an education.

The main category of child labour in agriculture is what is termed "hazardous child labour".

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous forms of work at any age, along with mining and construction, in terms of work-related fatalities, injuries and ill health.

In agriculture, child labourers are at greater risk than adults when working in the same situation because their minds and bodies are growing and developing. They lack work experience and may be unaware of the hazards and risks they face.

Some of those hazards include:

- long working hours
- carrying heavy loads over long distance
- extreme temperatures
- dangerous cutting tools
- skin problems
- injury or death from heavy machinery
- loud noise
- handling of toxic pesticides
- exposure to high levels organic dust
- injury or disease from livestock and wild animals and;
- injury or death from falling

Florina is 13 and helps out on her family's farm in Romania.

Florina, 13:

I'm afraid of the tractor. When I feel it is getting closer my heart beats fast because I can't see it. And that dust...when the tractor comes, it brings up all the dust from the wheat. If you inhale the dust you can cough all day long.

Children breathe more deeply and frequently than adults. Regular exposure to organic dust puts them at greater risk of developing allergic respiratory diseases, such as asthma.

Florina's mother:

If the girl stays with me all day long then I earn around eight US\$ but if she doesn't, I only get seven. I can't do all the work by myself, my husband is sick. There is no other solution than for her to continue coming to work with me.

Children often work long hours in the field.

Reporter: Did you work here last year or is it the first year when you work in a tobacco field.

Boy: I worked last year as well

Reporter: From what age have you been working? How old were you when you started working

Boy: I don't know!

Reporter: And at what time do you go home?

Boy: When the sun is up.

Reporter: At what time do you go to bed to get up at 4 in the morning?

Boy: Around 7 pm.

In Cameroon, child labour is cheap labour in the cocoa plantations. Children collect and carry heavy loads of cocoa pods that harm the development of their bones, joints and muscles and may result in permanent disability.

In Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and the Côte d'Ivoire over 150,000 children in 2002 were involved in the handling and application of pesticides on cocoa plantations.

Children are at greater risk from repeated exposure to pesticides than adults. They have a higher capacity to absorb toxic substances, whether through breathing or through the skin. Children themselves often prepare the pesticide mixtures which can cause nerve damage and other health problems. Children should not be working with, or be exposed to pesticides.

The ILO and local NGOs set up a pilot project to help Cameroonian children leave the cocoa plantations and go to school.

Beatrice Bime, ILO child labour project, Cameroon:

Investing in a child today is better for the future. And keeping the child out of school is actually delaying the child's future and perpetuating poverty.

Hundreds of Brazilian children in Retirolandia, used to work in sisal production. They no longer do thanks to an ILO programme that put the children in school and the parents to work. There was no shortage of unemployed adults to do the job but these children were cheaper, even though the conditions they worked in - dusty and hot - broke almost every rule in the book.

Noé Silvestre Carneiro, President, Rural Workers' Union:

The situation for working children in this region is extremely dangerous. We have children who have been blinded, because thorns from the Sisal leaves went into their eyes. We have children who have lost a hand in the shredding machine. They work without any protective clothing. So the unions are very concerned. We are all committed, not only here in Retirolandia but all across the country to rescue the children from the exploitation, to put them into good schools so that they can have a better future.

The majority of children has since been removed from Retirolandia's sisal production due to the success of a "goat-to-school" programme supported by the ILO and the National Confederation of Workers in Agriculture.

Goats are loaned to families who can use them for income if they remove children from work and send them to school.

In the coffee and tea plantations of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the ILO has been working with trade unions, employers' organizations and government to end child labour.

Kenneth Kyamulesire, General Manager, Mabale Grower's Tea Factory, Uganda:

The unions have been very active to try to sensitize the employers that it is wrong to employ children. You deny them a lot of opportunities and I think it has made an impact.

Multinational enterprises often source their raw materials from local suppliers and may not be aware of the use of child labour in their production chains. Companies like Philip Morris International realize that the elimination of child labour not only is a moral imperative, but good business sense as well.

Greg Prager, Head of External Relations, Phillip Morris International:

Our suppliers are required to go out into the tobacco fields, visit tobacco fields, ensure that children are not in the fields growing tobacco, ensure that children are in school. We have a role to play in helping to address and helping to solve some of these issues. It's both a moral issue, a responsibility, but there's also a clear business interest and a business need to do this as a corporation.

Ronel is twelve and works full-time in the sugarcane plantations of the Philippines.

Ronel Dagohey:

It's hard work. Sometimes we start at six or seven in the morning.

For now, the future of Ronel and his friends in the Philippines remains the same: weeding, cultivating, turning soil, cutting sugarcane, harvesting, and applying fertilizers and pesticides. Ronel says his hands itch – a reaction to the pesticides he handles daily.

Ronel says he has no choice. But, like every child, he has dreams and aspirations, and they do not include being poisoned by chemical pesticides and wounded from a sharp blade.

Ronel Dagohey:

What do I want? I want to go to school.

Rolling text:

Eliminating child labour in agriculture is essential for poverty reduction and to ensure decent and sustainable livelihoods for both adult workers and young people.

ILO alone cannot resolve this challenge.

This is why a new partnership with international agricultural organisations will be critical for success.