

Eliminating child labour in Bolivia: The role of education

Education is often cited as the key to eliminating child labour. But by itself, education isn't enough. ILO Online reports from Bolivia showing how adding decent work for adults to education of children, together, with a quotient of political will, can make the equation work.

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POTOSÍ, Bolivia (ILO News) – When 11-year-old Juanita Aivillo Ari and her six brothers and sisters arrived at the foot of a mine in this southern Bolivian city seven years ago, she and her family were in dire straits.

Juanita and her family had exhausted the capacity of their small plot of agricultural land in a rural community to feed them, let alone make a living.

Like hundreds of other families, they wound up at a mine at the Cerro Rico mountain, where her father found work as a miner and her mother as a guard. The long-working hours meant that Juanita and her siblings were often left alone in a precarious hut at the camp.

When her older brothers left to start families of their own, life for Juanita and her two other siblings became lonelier and even more precarious. They would have suffered the same fate as many other children in the mining camps that are exposed to hazardous child labour, navigating narrow tunnels, if her parents hadn't been approached by the CEPROMIN (*Centro de Promoción Minera*) non-governmental organization.

CEPROMIN runs a project on improving the living conditions of children and mining families living in the mining camps of Potosí. Juanita and her brothers are among some 450 children now enrolled in the project. The project makes sure they are properly fed and looked after and, most importantly, that they receive a quality education. In addition, the project addresses the needs of adults, improving the socio economic environment. This combined approach can make a big difference.

"The equation is pretty straightforward", says Constance Thomas, Director of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). "We will not eliminate child labour without universal education. Conversely, we will not ensure every child is in school unless we bring an end to child labour, in particular its worst forms. At the same time we have to ensure that parents have access to decent work, so that they do not depend on the children going out to work".

Juanita had never attended school but since joining the project she has proven to be one of the smartest students in the class. She dreams of continuing her studies and of a better life. However, Juanita is one of the fortunate children.

The third and latest ILO Global Report on child labour says that there has been a mere 3 per cent reduction in child labour between 2004 and 2008, while in the previous four years the decrease had been as high as 10 per cent. The Report warns that unless global efforts are significantly stepped up, the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 will not be reached.

The Report also warns that if current trends continue, the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015, or any of the other seven Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for that matter, will also be missed.

"There are alarming signs that efforts to eliminate child labour are waning. Four years ago, the encouraging trends of the second Global Report on child labour led us to believe that the elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2016 was possible. Now we see that goal is moving further and further away", said Ms. Thomas.

To reenergize the worldwide movement against child labour, delegates from 80 countries attending a recent conference in The Hague approved a Roadmap to substantially increase global efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016. The Roadmap calls on governments, social partners and civil society organizations to strengthen access to education, social protection and decent work.

This year's World Day on Child Labour theme "[Go for the goal, end child labour](#)" echoes the start of the football World Cup in South Africa and is a reminder of the work that still needs to be done to rid the world of child labour.

However, as Ms. Thomas points out, none of this will amount to much unless words are turned into action. “We know what works: quality education for children and decent work for adults. All we need is strong political will”, she concludes.