

FACT FILE: CHILD LABOUR



Across Africa, there are an estimated 80 million child workers, a number that could rise to 100 million by 2015.

We are grateful to Anti-Slavery International for allowing us to use this photo.

Background/History

What is child labour? the phenomenon of children in employment.

In many countries, it is considered inappropriate or exploitative if a child below a certain age works, except for some household chores and of course school work. (link to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child>)

An employer is often not allowed to hire a child below a certain age.

This minimum age depends on the country.

The use of children as labourers is now considered by wealthy countries as a human rights violation, and outlawed, link to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights

While poorer countries may allow it, as families often rely on the labours of their children for survival and sometimes it is the only source of income.

Child labour: refers to children working in contravention of ILO standards contained in Conventions 138 and 182. This means all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged between 12 and 14 engaged in more than light work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.

Worst forms of child labour: These involve children being enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into illegal activities or exposed to hazards.

When did this problem first come to the world's attention?

UNICEF is not opposed to children working. Why is this?

Children Working



Some types of work make useful, positive contributions to a child's development.

Work can help children learn about responsibility and develop particular skills that will benefit them and the rest of society.

Often, work is a vital source of income that helps to sustain children and their families.

But, across the world, millions of children do extremely hazardous work in harmful conditions, putting their health, education, personal and social development, and even their lives at risk.

- Full time work at a very early age
- Dangerous workplaces
- Excessive working hours
- Subjection to psychological, verbal, physical and sexual abuse
- Obligated to work by circumstances or individuals
- Limited or no pay
- Work and life on the streets in bad conditions

When did this problem first come to the world's attention?

Child labour came under the international spotlight in the 1990s.

For the first time the industrialised world's diplomats and economists started discussing why vast numbers of children were working rather than being educated, and what should be done about it.

The focus was on developing countries.

This new attention to an old issue was largely due to worries raised by people in industrialised countries such as the United Kingdom. Trade unionists, politicians and campaigners for social justice voiced concern that jobs were disappearing rapidly as businesses switched production from the industrialised world to developing countries where labour costs were much lower.

Simultaneously, organisations in developing countries sounded the alarm when they saw children working longer and longer hours – not only producing goods for export, but also providing a cheap and malleable workforce for the local economy.



As more attention was given to the work children were performing, so the statistics about the numbers involved became more startling.

In the early 1990s, the number of children between 5 and 14 in full-time employment had been 100 million but by 1996 it was 120 million.

In 2002, when the information available had been scrutinised more carefully, the total was estimated at 211 million, along with a further 141 million young people aged 15 to 17 who were also in employment.

The Facts

At the beginning of the new millennium, 1 in 12 children in the world were reckoned to be involved in work that put their health at risk or caused them serious harm.

- The Situation in Africa
- Where Children work
- Why do children work?
- Why are children exploited?
- Ways of combating child labour
- What some children face (links to children working)
- HIV's impact on child labour

Africa has the highest incidence of child labour in the world.

According to the ILO, 41 per cent of all African children between the ages of 5 and 14 are involved in some form of economic activity.

Among girls, the participation rate also is the highest: 37 per cent in Africa.

Recognizing that the roots of child labour lie in family poverty, the ILO draws a distinction between:

- normal family obligations and
- work which gives rise to exploitation and abuse.

The Situation in Africa

It is no coincidence that Africa is the poorest region, with the weakest school systems. Children from poorer families are far more likely to seek work.

In Tanzania, parents often see little choice but to have their children help directly on their own farms or in informal sector activities.

Ms. Leila Sheikh, director of the Tanzania Media Women's Association, states simply: "Poverty is the major problem."

According to an ILO study on Tanzania, the incidence of child labour in the country has risen partly because of the deterioration of the school system, which was itself a victim of economic problems.

Poor infrastructure, low teacher morale and the introduction of school fees under the country's structural adjustment programme have contributed to higher drop-out and truancy rates.

This has brought down Tanzania's once-high primary enrolment rate: from 90 per cent in 1980 to 77.8 per cent in 1996.

Thirty per cent of all children between 10 and 14 are not attending school, and many end up working. In villages around mining sites, the school drop-out rate is around 30-40 per cent.

According to a 1999 Child Labour Survey in Zimbabwe, conducted by the ILO:

If your household income is below Z\$2,000 (US\$36) per month, 88 per cent of children aged 5-17 from those household will be economically active

As family incomes rose above Z\$3,000, the participation rate dropped to less than 1 per cent.

Parents and guardians of working children, when asked why they let their children work, most often responded "to supplement household income" or "to help household in enterprise.

Why do children work?

- Most children work because their families are poor and their labour is necessary for their survival. Children in developing countries start work so young because they and their families need the extra income. Indeed, many end up working unpaid for their employers in exchange for their board and lodging.
- AIDS is another contributing factor in many African countries. By killing so many breadwinners, it has driven more families deeper into poverty.
- Discrimination on grounds including gender, race or religion also plays its part in why some children work.

- Children are often employed and exploited because, compared to adults, they are more vulnerable, cheaper to hire and are less likely to demand higher wages or better working conditions.
- Some employers falsely argue that children are particularly suited to certain types of work because of their small size and "nimble fingers".
- For many children, school is not an option. Education can be expensive and some parents feel that what their children will learn is irrelevant to the realities of their everyday lives and futures. In many cases, school is also physically inaccessible or lessons are not taught in the child's mother tongue, or both.

- As well as being a result of poverty, child labour also leads to greater poverty. Many working children do not have the opportunity to go to school and often grow up to be unskilled adults trapped in poorly paid jobs, and in turn will look to their own children to supplement the family's income.

In contrast, children in industrialised countries, including the UK, seek work for quite different reasons, usually to establish financial independence from their parents.

The HIV impact on child labour

Asked about child labour on Tanzanian tea estates, Mr. Norman Kelly, general manager of the Brooke Bond plantation replied: "The adult workforce is fast diminishing because of the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among many workers."

A UNICEF study of six countries in Eastern and Southern Africa found that the "dissolution of families from HIV/AIDS increases the likelihood of children being forced into exploitative labour.... Just when children should be in school, their burdensome new role as family breadwinner forces them to drop out."

The UNICEF study on Eastern and Southern Africa similarly acknowledges that African culture allows children to work within the family and community, but economic hardships, HIV/AIDS and other disasters "have distorted traditional forms of child work into exploitative practices."

1 in 4 Zambian children is an orphan. 1/2 of these are from their parents dying from AIDS. This leaves many children as head of household and in charge of family finances for younger siblings.

Why are children exploited?

Employers see children as generally:

- docile
- fast
- agile
- above all cheap
- dispensable

Consequently, millions of children in developing countries toil long hours for little reward with no fringe benefits, insurance or security.

Working children are more likely to suffer occupational injuries because:

- unsafe working conditions
- inexperience
- fatigue
- most work places were designed for adults to work in

Where do children work:

- On the land
- In households – as domestic workers
- In factories – making products such as matches, fireworks and glassware
- On the street – as beggars
- Outdoor industry: brick kilns, mines, construction
- In bars, restaurants and tourist establishments
- In sexual exploitation
- As soldiers 300,000 child soldiers are currently involved in conflicts in over 30 areas – some as young as 10!

Child Camel Jockeys

Traffickers abduct or lure boys as young as four or five years old away from their families in South Asia and Africa with promises of well-paid work, education and training. In reality they are kept in harsh and dangerous conditions. They get up early and work through the day in hot temperatures. They are not given enough food and water, which keeps them light so they can race faster. Racing at speeds of 40-50 kilometres per hour, some children fall and suffer serious injuries and some even die.

Ahmed (not his real name)

When he was five and a half years old, Ahmed was trafficked from his home in Sudan to Abu Dhabi in the Gulf State of the United Arab Emirates to work as a camel jockey. He travelled on a false passport, which claimed he was the trafficker's "son".

Over a period of six years he was trafficked to different places in the United Arab Emirates, then Kuwait and finally to Qatar, from where he returned home.

Ahmed came first in many camel races, and when he did, the race organisers gave his "kafeel" a car as a prize but Ahmed received nothing. He worked long hours and did not go to school, although he was allowed to rest when there were no races. He was not given enough to eat and sometimes he was beaten with a "soot" (whip). Once he was injured when a camel walked over his body and he had to be taken to hospital.

(A kafeel is a citizen of the country who acts as sponsor/guarantor for a foreign migrant for the purpose of gaining entry into the country. Often the kafeel will be the foreign migrant's employer.)

Zia (not his real name)

Zia was trafficked to the United Arab Emirates from Bangladesh when he was six years old and stayed there for 11 years in total.

He was used as a camel jockey for the first five years, then, when it was decided that he had grown "too big" (although he is small even now), he was put to work on the camel farm.

"At the beginning the camel trainer would put me on the camel's back and tie me with ropes on to the camel so I couldn't fall off. I hated it. ... I won several races but all the prizes went to the camel owner. I got nothing, except occasionally I was given a few tips ... I would save this money for when I was really hungry. I would try and buy food in the night while the caretaker wasn't around to see....I had a Pakistani caretaker. He used to beat me. If I tried to rest while I was working he would follow me and beat me. I was so unhappy. I wanted to come home but I couldn't say anything to anyone in case my owner found out. He would torture me."

"I fell off several times. One time, I broke my leg and now have serious internal injuries in my left leg. I can't walk properly and have problems climbing stairs. I have no good memories..."

Ways of Combating Child Labour

Without access to education, children will remain incapable of escaping from the poverty cycle.

Since the problem is closely linked to the continent's poverty, and can only be eliminated with increases in family incomes and children's educational opportunities, UNICEF, the ILO and other groups are focusing initially on the "worst forms" of child labour.

Many organisations only concentrate on the 'worst forms of child labour' which include forced labour and slavery, prostitution, employment in the drug trade and other criminal activities, and occupations that are especially dangerous to children's health and security.

The UN spelled out the full range of children's rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989. This has been signed and ratified by all the countries in the world except two. Somalia currently has no government to sign it and the United States refuses to sign it!

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) have also produced a number of conventions: Forced Labour Convention no.29, 1930; the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and of Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956.

The OAU's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Articles 24 and 29), was created especially for African countries (UN, 1999)

In 1999, a new international convention was adopted at the annual International Labour Conference, the "Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention" (also referred to as ILO Convention 182). This identified four categories of child labour, which governments, trade unions and employers' organisations all agreed it was urgent to stop. The Convention was rapidly ratified and came into force the following year.

Child labour needs to address education, poverty, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, gender gap

Current Events

The African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY), is an entirely child-led and managed grass-roots movement, based in 57 towns in 18 African countries with a membership of 20,000 working children and young people. In 2004, ten years after it was formally established Africa-wide, the movement remains one of the most innovative, participatory, rights-based and child-led movements in the world. Link to AMWCY: <http://www.enda.sn/eja/anglais/index.htm>

The African Movement wants the realisation of 12 rights in particular, and they are:

- Right to vocational training
- Right to remain in our villages (not to have to go to the cities)
- Right to exercise our working activities in safety
- Right to light and limited work
- Right to rest during illness
- Right to be respected
- Right to be listened to
- Right to healthcare
- Right to learn to read and write
- Right to play and have free time
- Right to express and organise ourselves
- Right to equitable justice in case of problems

At their fifth international conference in 2000, the Movement declared that:

"In those places where we are organised, our 12 rights have considerably progressed for us and for other working children and youth. We can now learn to read and write, we benefit from better health care, we can express ourselves, we are respected by everyone as well as by the judicial system, we are well treated and can work in safer environments working in a manner compatible with our capacities and can sometimes rest. We are now able to have more leisure time and fewer children leave the villages after we went to tell them of the dangers."

The International Anti-Slavery Movement often has campaigns to raise awareness about child labour.

Currently they have a campaign against forced labour in cocoa farms and trafficking.

Glossary:

Child Labour: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 affirmed the rights of the world's children to be protected against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. By 1995, it had been ratified by 185 nations, making it the most widely adopted human rights convention. Many countries have adopted legislation stipulating minimum ages below which children cannot legally be employed and specifying conditions under which children can work. Link to <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm>

The International Labour Office (ILO) Minimum Age Convention of 1973 sets 13 as the lowest age when children can work, and then for light work only.

Worst forms of child labour: These involve children being enslaved, forcibly recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into illegal activities or exposed to hazards.

Unconditional worst forms of child labour – the first three categories of 'worst forms of child labour, as defined by other international laws (and consequently "unconditional"); work considered hazardous for young workers has to be identified in each country and may vary from country to country. Minimum age for admission to employment – a legal minimum age set for full-time employment in more than 130 of the world's 194 countries.

Child trafficking- children under the age of 18 recruited in one place and then moved to another (sometimes across borders) to be subjected to commercial sexual exploitation or near-slavery (forced labour or servitude).

The AU is the African Union. It was set up, much like the various European organisations, to help African countries to co-operate and to provide a forum for debate. Much like the Council of Europe, it makes resolutions that African Countries should uphold. Link to AU <http://www.africanunion.org/>

Statistics

The vast majority of working children – about 70 per cent – work in the agriculture sector.

Sub-Saharan Africa has an estimated 48 million child workers.

Almost one child in three (29 per cent) below the age of 15 is economically active;

15 per cent of children in the Middle East and North Africa are working; approximately 2.5 million and 2.4 million children are working in developed and transition economies respectively.

A recent UNICEF survey in 25 countries in just one region, sub-Saharan Africa, revealed that almost one-third of the working children aged between 5 and 14 were involved in the “unconditional worst forms” of child labour.

In addition, almost 10 per cent were working for more than 43 hours a week, threatening their well-being.

The incidence of child labour is highest in Africa, where 41% of 5- to 14-year-olds are known to work, compared with 21% in Asia and 17% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Nevertheless, with its higher population, Asia has the largest total number of working children, 60 per cent of the world's total.

Official figures produced by the ILO indicate that at least 200 million young children under the age of 15 are working to support themselves and their families. The actual total may be twice as high.



Definitions:

Child/children – everyone under the age of 18, entitled to the rights proclaimed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to be protected from economic exploitation.

The EU Directive on young workers uses “adolescents” to refer to 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds who are entitled by their country’s law to have left school and to be in full-time employment, but who still have rights to special forms of protection.

Child labour – conventionally referred to children working before they reached the lawful minimum age for employment in their country (nowadays usually 14, 15 or, as in the UK, 16), often the same as the cut-off age for compulsory attendance at school.

Now redefined to refer to all young people engaged in harmful employment, whether they are school age or older.

By the mid 1990s, there was evidence that vast numbers of children below the minimum age of 14 were working full-time. Responding to concern about this, the ILO began to draft a new convention. This involved getting international agreement on the circumstances in which children of any age should not be working, as well as identifying the steps for governments to take to eliminate what came to be called the “worst forms” of child labour. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention was adopted in 1999 and came into force a year later.

Definitions Child work: Children’s or adolescents’ participation in work – economic activity – that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with their education, is often positive. Light work (that does not interfere with education) is permitted from the age of 12 years under ILO Convention No.138.

Research Links

A great site for information and updated news.

<http://www.antislavery.org/homepage/antislavery/childlabour.htm>

Inability to escape from the Good site for resources:

<http://www.globalmarch.org/resourcecentre/Reports.php>

<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/Vol15no3/153Chil4.htm>

A good site to find out what other kids think about child labour. Part of the UNICEF site.

<http://www.unicef.org/voy/media/news.2003-08.PDF>

Report on the end of child exploitation, p.35-52 on child labour in the UK is a good comparison tool:

http://www.unicef.org/brazil/estudo_uk.pdf

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_labour

Wikipedia on the Convention on the rights of the child:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child

Wikipedia, definition of human rights; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights

Unicef fact file on Child Labour: http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/child_labour.pdf



CHILD LABOUR: DISCUSSION POINTS

What would you call 'excessive working hours' or a 'very young age'?
Should children be stopped from working if their family needs the money they bring?

Are industrialised countries worried about the children or the loss of employment opportunities in their own countries?

Are there any solutions to these problems of child labour?
Why do children in industrialised countries work?

Is HIV/AIDS an adequate excuse for child labour?
Should there be more orphanages that support the vulnerable, or should children receive allowances to make sure they stay at school?

How do we stop the demand from industrial countries for goods produced cheaply by children? How do we change employers' perceptions?

How can we reverse the trend and encourage students back to school, even when their family is facing hardship?

Where do children in your area work?

Should governments intervene and force changes in child employment laws?
Are International agreements worth the paper they are written on?