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Gender dimensions of **child labour** in agriculture



BACKGROUND PAPER





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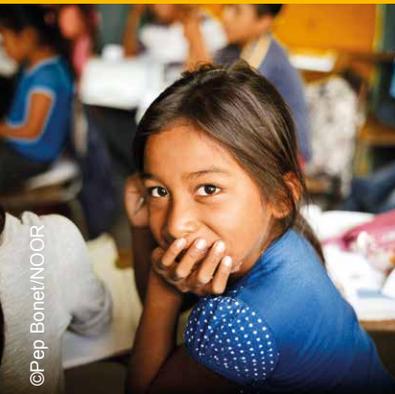
For the first time in a decade, **child labour is on the increase**, severely threatening the realization of the SDGs.

Of the estimated 160 million child labourers in the world in 2020, **70 percent are engaged in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture**, most in family operations, and there will be no elimination of child labour if small-scale farmers and fishers are not mobilized and supported.

Agricultural work is often an entry point into child labour, and **children working in agriculture are generally very young**. Agriculture accounts for 76.6 percent of all child labour in the age group 5-11 years and for 75.8 percent in the age group 12-14 years.

Young people between 15 and 17 years of age are particularly vulnerable to hazardous work, though they may legally join the work force in non-hazardous work. **Stepping up the protection of young workers in agriculture** must be an urgent priority if the world is to realize the Sustainable Development target 8.7.

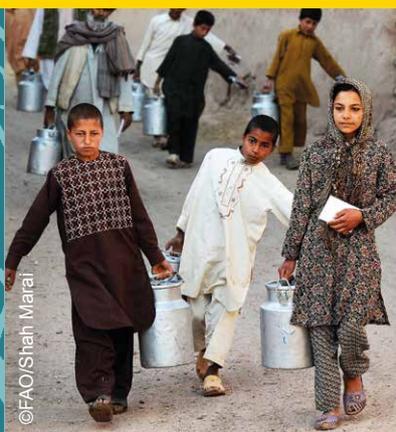
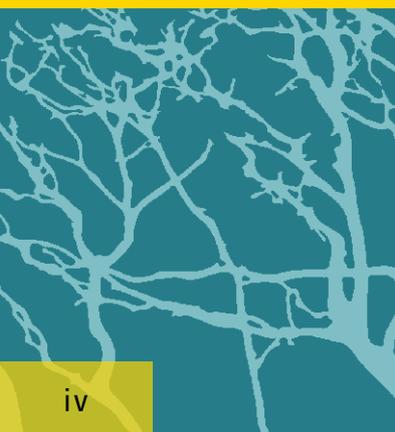
For younger children below the age of 14 to 15 years, ensuring that alternatives to child labour are in place for the children and their families is essential. This includes first and foremost **ensuring that all children, including children in remote rural areas and children on the move, have access to free, good quality compulsory education**.



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Rural girls' and boys' engagement in child labour is primarily driven by poverty and gender-biased social norms, with additional challenges for girls in terms health, safety, education, self-esteem and ability to **grow in social and professional life**.

When rural women are empowered to take decisions on behalf of their families, the intergenerational reproduction of gender inequality patterns can be **broken**: Their daughters and sons are less likely to drop out from school and become involved in child labour.

Rural girls' work is often “invisible” and associated with risks such as excessive burden of domestic chores, restrictions on personal freedom, and gender-based violence.

The specific characteristics of **rural girl's work** (including their domestic responsibilities) need to be fully considered in strategies to eliminate child labour.





Child labour undermines efforts to **eradicate hunger, malnutrition and poverty** for present and future generations.

(ILO and UNICEF, 2021)

What is at stake?

Child labour undermines efforts to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and poverty for present and future generations. According to the latest estimates (ILO and UNICEF, 2021), at the beginning of 2020 there were 160 million children involved in child labour globally, corresponding to almost one in ten of all children worldwide. Of this total, 70 percent were engaged in agriculture, making the sector the primary source of child labour. Therefore, the progress or failure of SDG 8.7 – “eradicating child labour globally by 2025” – will be decided in agriculture.

In accordance with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ Framework on Ending Child Labour in Agriculture (FAO, 2020) and as a contribution to the 2021 International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, this paper highlights the often-neglected gender dimension of child labour in agriculture. It focuses mostly on the conditions of rural girls, because their work is often “invisible”, less valued, and associated with specific gender-based challenges such as overburdening with household chores, restrictions on personal freedom, and gender-based violence.



The challenges

Most child labour – for boys and girls alike – occurs in agriculture. Agriculture is often an entry point into work and economic activities among younger rural children. Child labour takes place in all types of agricultural undertakings, ranging from family subsistence and smallholder farming, capture fisheries, aquaculture and forestry, to commercial plantations and other forms of commercial farming, as well as post-harvest processing and various kinds of agroindustrial complexes.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2021), **112 million children are currently engaged in child labour in agriculture (4 million more than in 2016)**, of which 67.8 million are boys (60.5 percent) and 44.3 million are girls (39.5 percent).



Box 1: Global estimates of child labour

► **Child labour is much more common in rural areas than in urban areas.**

At the beginning of 2020, there were 122.7 million rural children in child labour compared to 37.3 million urban children. The prevalence of child labour in rural areas (13.9 percent) is almost three times higher than in urban areas (4.7 percent). The proportion of child labourers who are rural based is particularly high (above 75 percent) in sub-Saharan Africa and Central, Eastern, Southern and South-eastern Asia.

► **The prevalence of child labour in rural areas is higher for boys than for girls.**

Among rural children aged 5–17 years, 16.1 percent of boys are engaged in child labour compared to 11.6 percent of girls.

► **The inclusion of household chores, however, significantly affects overall child labour estimates.** This inclusion reduces the differential between estimates of boy's and girl's child labour. When the definition of child labour is broadened to include involvement in household chores for 21 hours or more per week, child labour prevalence increases for both sexes – but the rise in girlchild labour is larger, and consequently the gender gap in child labour prevalence narrows.

Percentage of children (rural and urban) aged 5–17 years in child labour	Boys	Girls
Child labour excluding household chores	10.9%	8.1%
Child labour including household chores	12.5%	10.9%

Source: ILO and UNICEF, (2021).

This upturn is partly attributable to the increased incidence of shocks such as conflicts and climate-induced disasters, leading to more precarious agricultural livelihoods and greater reliance on child labour (FAO, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the work burden on children, girls in particular, because it has increased demand for domestic chores and caring responsibilities.

(ILO, 2020)

Past crises have shown that school dropout rates for girls are likely to go up in post-crisis situations, due to such factors as disruption of education, losses of adult jobs and lack of social protection (ILO, 2020). This suggests that the demand for girls' labour may further increase after the COVID-19 crisis is brought under control.

Boys and girls are treated differently in most societies, depending on the existing system of gender relations and the resulting gender division of labour. Mirroring the gender roles of adults, boys are more likely than girls to engage in child labour and are more likely to be involved in hazardous tasks in agriculture, such as handling chemicals, using sharp tools or capturing fish at night on vessels. However, the magnitude of girls' work increases when reproductive and care work

in the household – such as looking after younger children, collecting water and firewood, cooking and cleaning, or doing laundry and other household tasks – is included in the definition of child labour. Girls’ reproductive work often comes in additional to the agricultural work and is seldom given any specific economic value or recognized as work (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). Compared to boys, girls are also more likely to be engaged in multiple tasks, and this “multitasking” may drastically reduce their opportunities for schooling and socializing (De Lange, 2009) and may also increase their exposure to sexual harassment and gender-based violence while undertaking activities such as fetching water (ILO, 2012; FAO, 2020).

Rural girls’ labour is often invisible, as most girls work as unpaid family workers in remote and scattered smallscale farms or family enterprises. Moreover, girls’ work is often actively hidden by families or employers, which is facilitated by limited presence of labour inspectors in rural areas.

(FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010)

Box 2: Girls’ and boys’ child labour hazards in selected agricultural sectors

- ▶ **In sedentary farming**, girls are often responsible for carrying water, collecting and carrying wood. This results in increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries, fatigue and sexual abuse. Those tasks and responsibilities are often present also in other farming systems, accounting for a high proportion of girls’ labour, time and energy input.
- ▶ **In pastoral communities**, animal herding requires boys to spend long periods of time in remote, isolated areas, where they are exposed to very cool temperature, animal attacks, biological hazards, bacterial infections and sexual abuse. Girls are more often in charge of poultry or smaller animals, and they can be affected by transmission of biological hazards, such as salmonella or avian flu.
- ▶ **In fisheries and aquaculture**, boys are more involved than girls in capture fishing and thus are at risk of drowning, hypothermia, entanglement in nets and crushing injuries. Boys also tend to guard fish ponds, including at night. While girls may also be engaged in capture fishing, particularly in gleaning activities in aquaculture, they are more commonly found working in post-harvest activities on-shore, such as processing (including cleaning, degutting and smoking) and selling fish.

Source: ILO, (2010).



Child labour is highly prevalent in situations of poverty and economic vulnerability, environments with cheap, unorganized labour, parental illiteracy, and lack of affordable schooling opportunities for children. All these conditions are gendered, affecting rural girls more and differently than boys. The following paragraphs summarize some of the evidence from available literature:

► **Poverty and household livelihood strategies.** Girls and boys whose families are poor are much more likely to be engaged in child labour than those from more wealthy families. Poverty is also a major determinant of

gender disparities in child labour in rural areas (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). First, in many rural societies, boys are valued more than girls, so when poor parents have to choose between sending their sons or their daughters to school, they are often more willing to invest in boys' education. Furthermore, in rural areas schools are often far away from the family home, and lack of affordable transport constrains girls' school attendance. Poverty also restricts households' ability to access infrastructure such as water and electricity, or services and technologies for agriculture and household



maintenance. As a result, many girls in poorer households take on unpaid household work for their families, usually more so than boys. The double work burden of household chores and economic activities outside the home can further reduce opportunities for school attendance and can present a physical danger to girls, especially when they engage in work that is clearly hazardous rather than light work appropriate to their age, or when they get exposed to gender-based violence while performing tasks such as collecting fuel or fetching water (ILO, 2009).



- ▶ **Social norms and expectations.** Social norms, beliefs and practices play a critical role in shaping child labour and its gender-differentiated patterns. Child labour mirrors adults' labour patterns in many respects in relation to gender, and children's roles are often shaped by local assumptions about what girls and boys can or should do. For instance, caring for small children tends to be a female occupation worldwide, whereas tending livestock tends to be done by boys.

Compared to boys, girls are typically expected to have a wider range of work responsibilities, often combining domestic chores with paid work and schooling.

(Morrow and Boyden, 2010).

Girls' work is often seen by their parents as not only crucial to household maintenance, but also freeing mothers from household responsibilities and thus enabling them to engage in income-generating work away from home (Boyden and Levison, 2010). Such norms and perceptions can push girls into domestic child labour more than boys and consequently limit their options for personal development.

- ▶ **Demographic factors.** Age, birth order, the sex composition of the sibling group, the household composition and the health status of other family members

often influence the tasks undertaken by girls and boys, the conditions and visibility of their work, their vulnerability to hazards and the opportunities they have for non-work activities, such as education, leisure or socializing with peers. Younger children in child labour in agriculture face similar situations, while older boys and girls (from roughly ten years of age) tend to face different challenges and situations, more gendered, compounded for girls by early marriage, exposure to sexual violence and so on. Depending on the contexts, the work burden can be particularly heavy for older daughters who may be required to take on multiple responsibilities, such as looking after their younger siblings, sharing certain household chores with their mothers, and simultaneously contributing to productive activities on the family farm (Boyden and Levison, 2010). Furthermore, teenage girls may experience agespecific reproductive health issues (e.g. menstruation) that are difficult to manage in school environments, making them more vulnerable to engagement in child labour (WHO, 2011).

Early marriage is a demographic phenomenon particularly closely linked to child labour.

Globally, around 20 percent of girls are married before their eighteenth birthday, but in some countries (especially in Central Africa) this proportion approaches or surpasses 70 percent (UNICEF, 2020b). Early marriage of girls can translate into child labour because young brides are often expected to leave school and take up work in the marital home. This is frequently under the close supervision of a mother-in-law and without the protections that had existed in the natal household (AIDS-Free World, 2015).

- ▶ **Lack of access to infrastructure and services.** Girls' work burden is aggravated by poor living conditions and limited access to rural infrastructure. For example, little or no immediate access to potable water, electricity and fuel forces rural households to collect water and firewood from distant places – and girls are often seen as the most cost effective and easily available workers for such tasks. In such situations, girls face further obstacles, such as the risk of sexual abuse during long commutes (FAO and ILO, 2010). As climate change continues to worsen water stress and drought phenomena, girls could find themselves forced to walk longer and further to collect water for the household (UNICEF, 2015; Terre des Hommes, 2017). Longer time to fetch resources among girls significantly reduces their probability of attending school (Nankhuni and Findeis 2004; Nankhuni 2004). On the other hand, children who live in households with more reliable water sources such as water taps have a much lower average time fetching water and report lower school absences (Levison *et al.*, 2018).

- ▶ **Commercial agriculture.** While a significant proportion of rural child labour happens within households and/or family farms, the availability of paid jobs in the commercial sector can be an important driver of rural girls' child labour. Certain types of commercial agriculture – the flower industry, cotton, coffee and cocoa farming, for example – can create jobs that girls can access. If these jobs are associated with regular salary, they can be a powerful factor for household decisions to let girls engage in paid jobs, rather than attend school. Because agriculture is historically an under-regulated sector in many countries, safety and health laws are often less stringent in agricultural industries than they are in other sectors. When there are no boys, girls may be required to engage in physically demanding tasks, such as cutting sugar cane or loading and unloading materials and products, with serious risks for their health (ILO, 2017).
- ▶ **Conflicts, disasters, crises.** Child labour may be greatly intensified by conflict situations, natural disasters and economic, social or health crises. A case in point is the current COVID19 pandemic, which has greatly increased economic insecurity, profoundly disrupted value chains and dramatically constrained services and markets in many countries. When such factors result in losses of household income, poverty and/or indebtedness, expectations that children contribute to productive activities can intensify. Furthermore, in crisis times, gender inequalities may become more severe within families, with girls expected to perform additional household chores



and care responsibilities as well as productive work (UNICEF and ILO, 2020). Additionally, during crises the incidence of early marriage often rises, and the consequence could be a sharp rise in rural girls' work burden due to the need to combine childcare and domestic chores with agricultural work (Koralá, 2017).

- ▶ **Lack of social protection.** The lack of access to social protection represents a major driver of child labour. Most families whose children work, rely on their wages, production or domestic work (including unpaid work carried out predominantly by girls) to make ends meet. Exposure to shocks, resulting in deteriorated

family income, can have a dramatic effect on household decisions. For instance, economic shocks (such as an adult member of the family losing his/her employment and health-related shocks like a serious illness or an occupational injury) and agriculture-related shocks (such as drought, flood and crop failure) can significantly reduce household incomes and cause parents to send children to work to contribute to the family income (ILO, 2013). Inadequate or absent social protection coverage can lead to gender-differentiated impacts on children, e.g. by disproportionately increasing girls' domestic and caring roles (Browne, 2016).



Box 3: Gendered impact of COVID-19 on child labour

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on child labour, with important gendered implications. UNICEF (2020a) estimates that due to public-health related measures, which include school closures, 24 million children worldwide may drop out of school, many of which will be sent to work – a negative coping mechanism by households that struggle with poverty, food insecurity and insufficient access to support services. A global survey of 25 000 children and adults revealed that girls are more heavily impacted than boys by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Save the Children (2020), 63 percent of the girls said they are doing more chores within the house, and 52 percent reported they were spending more time caring for siblings. The corresponding figures for boys were 43 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Furthermore, 20 percent of girls described that they have too many chores to do to be able to learn, compared to 10 percent of boys.

The impacts of child labour

In general, as the nature of child labour is gendered, the impacts of child labour on children are also highly gender-differentiated according to the local context. Child labour impacts on children's health, on education and skills acquisition, and on self-esteem, wellbeing and employment prospects in later life. Each of these aspects is elaborated below:

► **Impact on health.** Child labour is often associated with a high risk of accidents and injuries because children are inexperienced and still developing physically and socially, which makes them much more vulnerable to work-related health risks than adults. Boys' and girls' exposure to specific health hazards are often dependent from the gendered division of tasks and can often be different. For instance, the hazards of smoking fish, a common task for girls in many societies, differ from herding livestock or applying hazardous pesticides. While girls are more commonly found working onshore and suffer respiratory problems from smoke inhalation when drying fish, as well as cuts and burns, boys are more involved in capture fishing and are often at risk of drowning, hypothermia, entanglement and crushing injuries, (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). Furthermore, the elevated incidence of

transactional sex in some fish landing sites exposes girls to sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and therefore, sexually transmitted diseases.

When girls and boys are fetching heavy loads, they can suffer injuries that have long-term negative effects on their physical development and health status. For example, one study found that head-loading, a common-practice across Africa, could have short- and long-term impacts of load-carrying, including damage to head, neck and spine (Porter *et al.*, 2013).

Girls (and boys) working with sharp tools, for example, when weeding fields, harvesting crops, or processing food products such as vegetables or fish, may suffer injuries that can lead to temporary or permanent disability. Some health risks that girls encounter during child labour – such as being exposed to gender-based violence in unsafe work environments – can have a cumulative negative impact on their mental and physical health, including their ability to conceive in later life or give birth to a healthy child. A related issue is that rural girls engaged in child labour, compared to girls enrolled in schools, are more likely to experience an early pregnancy (Kapur, 2018), with negative



Child labour affects girls' ability to play and socialize with other children, which is detrimental for their development.

(Levison et al., 2018; Woodhead, 2004)

health consequences for themselves as well as their children. Thus, rural girl's child labour can have significant negative health implications for present as well as future generations.

- ▶ **Impact on education and skills acquisition.** Because of the triple burden of performing reproductive, productive and care work, rural girls frequently work more hours than boys (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, the remoteness of schools in many rural contexts often means that parents are concerned to send girls to school, for fear of abuse or rape. The result is that girls face more constraints than boys in access to schools and to formal education, with negative effects on the development of their knowledge and skills (ILO, 2010). This ranges from basic literacy and numeracy to “soft” competencies such as knowledge about health and nutrition, integrity, communication, responsibility, flexibility and teamwork (ILO, 2010). A study from Zambia shows that a key reason why girls drop out of school earlier than boys is because of they are overburdened with housework; other factors for girls' school dropout, potentially leading to child labour, include early marriage and pregnancy (Jensen and Nielsen, 1997). When rural girls' participation in child labour deprives them from acquiring elementary education, it might be very difficult for them to “catch up” educationally in later life.

- ▶ **Impact on self-esteem and safety at work.** Self-esteem is a key precondition for achieving success in life, and in

childhood it often starts with playing and socializing. However, child labour affects girls' ability to play and socialize with other children, which is detrimental for their development (Levison *et al.*, 2018; Woodhead, 2004). In the 1980s, Reynolds (1991) found that in the communities she studied in Zimbabwe, ten-year-old girls spent almost as much time working as their mothers, more than their fathers, and substantially more than their brothers. The resulting time in poverty can harm girls' mental and social growth (Abdourahman, 2010). In addition, when girls are allowed by their family to work in other people's households, farms or commercial enterprises, they may find themselves under the control of an employer who does not respect their dignity and rights.

Vulnerable young girls are sometimes subjected to verbal abuse, brutal treatment such as beatings, or sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Consistent subjection may lead to a loss of self-esteem, with girls accepting a low status and feeling unable to challenge the situation.

(ILO, 2009).

Opportunities and recommendations for eliminating girls' labour in agriculture

Experience shows that a combination of economic growth, inclusive rural development, emphasis on education and social protection, and an enabling institutional, legal and policy environment can reduce child labour in agriculture

(FAO, 2020; Edmonds, 2016).

Ending child labour in agriculture requires a gender-responsive approach that is based on sound understanding of the gender-differentiated aspects affecting children in agricultural systems, including related social norms, combined with carefully calibrated actions to reduce the demand side of girls' labour. Different strategies may be necessary to get rural girls out of work and into school than with boys. While different contexts require different interventions, some principles are applicable universally:

Empower rural girls through education

The eradication of girls' labour in agriculture – like any other form of girl child discrimination – requires a strong focus on empowering rural girls and improving their access to key services, such as education. Rural girls' involvement in child labour is directly linked with their low rates of school attendance and higher levels of early drop out from schools compared to boys. These, in turn, are often the consequence of long distance to school, inadequate sanitary facilities at school, safety concerns and fear of gender-based violence within the school environment or during commute. Tackling these problems, for example, by making schools more “girl-friendly” and improving their infrastructure, including providing separate toilets for girls, is a key strategy for empowering rural girls and reducing their involvement in child labour (ILO, 2009). Equally important is providing affordable and quality schooling in rural areas, making schooling more relevant to local communities and rural girls' needs, as well as employing female teachers.

Empower rural women

Empowering rural women economically and socially is a key means of reducing child labour in rural areas. When women can generate income and enjoy equal access to productive resources, services and economic opportunities, the impact on communities, especially girls, can be significant. Supplementary income also aids families to better cope with shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and mitigate the need to rely on girls for labour. Women's access to education plays a critical role, because educated women have a greater say in household decision-making, and when women take decisions on behalf of their families, their daughters are less likely to abandon school to become involved in child labour. Furthermore, by improving the skills and competences of rural women, their capacity to start or grow small businesses increases, which contributes to reducing household poverty, lessening economic dependency on child labour and strengthening households' capacity to finance school education of girls.

Box 4: Child labour and women's education

In the United Republic of Tanzania, girls and boys living in households with a more highly educated female respondent spend less time gathering resources such as water and wood, while those from larger households devote more time to fetching water. Levison *et al.* (2018) hypothesize that women who have gone through education may place more value on children's education and therefore ensure they stay in school and study after school. In households in Northern Tanzania, mother's schooling is strongly associated with girls' attendance hours, while father's education is not as correlated (Burke and Beegle, 2004), suggesting a direct link between women's empowerment and girls' wellbeing.



Action against girl child labour requires the economic and social empowerment of rural women, so that they can take action within their households and have their voices heard in community decision-making as well as policy and planning processes at various levels. In this regard, steps should be taken to promote women's engagement in bodies such as farmers' associations and community organizations, and to ensure that rural women's specific views inform policy debates. For this to happen, rural women need skills in communication, public speaking and leadership to contribute effectively to policy dialogues that will shape their children's future.

Furthermore, **enabling women to organize themselves in groups such as village savings and loans associations helps to build social cohesion in rural communities and can empower women to invest in small businesses or support their daughters' education.**

Box 5: Women's empowerment initiatives to curb child labour in the cocoa sector in Ghana

High levels of child labour continue to persist in the cocoa industry in Ghana, exposing rural boys and girls to a range of negative impacts. In response to these problems, a number of initiatives are being implemented to empower rural women to curb child labour on cocoa farms:

- ▶ **Cocoa Life** is an international agency launched in 2012. In Ghana, Cocoa Life focuses on training regarding cocoa farm maintenance and issues related to the prevention of child labour. One of the agency's objectives is to empower women at the household and community levels, to ensure that development needs of children are understood and met and that children can remain in school.
- ▶ **Solidaridad Network** is an international network that creates a forum for women working in cocoa and chocolate to connect, learn and take inspiration from peers. The objective of the network is to equip women to assume leadership roles in their communities and to increase their participation in farmer cooperatives and organizations.
- ▶ **World Cocoa Foundation** is an international organization whose vision is to see farmers prosper and cocoa communities developed. The Foundation's women's livelihood support programme is designed to increase women's farming skills and their capacities to act against child labour.

Sources: Ghana Talks Business, (2019); Solidaridad, (2021); NORC, (2020).

Increase households' access to services, labour-saving technologies and practices

The value of children's time is affected by the availability of services and labour-saving technologies and, therefore, household decisions concerning how this time is allocated between school and work. Households' improved access to water or electricity is generally associated with lower prevalence of child labour and higher rates of full-time school attendance of children, and these effects tend to be more significant for girls than for boys (Guarcello *et al.*, 2004). Thus, rural households that are "functionally dependent" on the work of girls need to be able to replace their contribution with appropriate technologies, labour-saving and productivity-enhancing methods, both for household tasks and for farming activities. Better technologies are also important to improve occupational health and safety, and thus protect girls' well-being and ensure their healthy development. Agricultural extension services can play a particularly important role in this regard, providing they are sensitized on gender equality and what can be done about girl child labour in the rural contexts they reach out to.

Establish gender-responsive social protection schemes

Extending social protection in rural areas can mitigate the poverty and economic uncertainty that underlie child labour in agriculture. Certain types of social protection interventions, such as cash transfer schemes, appear to have a noticeable reducing effect on domestic chores carried out by girls, especially those from poor and female-headed households (ILO, 2018; Ayifah, 2015). Similarly, school feeding programmes and food-for-schooling programmes can increase girls' school enrolment rates and expand awareness about the actual returns of schooling (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). These examples illustrate that social protection interventions – if designed to change the economic realities that motivate households to use girls' labour as a livelihood or coping strategy – can considerably reduce rural girls' participation in child labour and improve their welfare.

Box 6: Gender-sensitive social protection to eliminate child labour: Prospera Programme in Mexico

The Prospera Programme consists of a cash transfer to eligible poor households to ensure children's regular school attendance. Targeted households receive a cash transfer for each child who regularly attends school. The benefits are typically paid to the female beneficiary. The education grant increases with the grade attended by the child, and in secondary education the amount transferred is major for girls than for boys, i.e. approximately 13 percent higher. In May–June 2017, the programme covered more than 5.9 million households across all of Mexico's 2 457 municipalities.

Source: ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank, (2017).

Stimulate gender-transformative behavioural change

Achieving positive results for rural girls often necessitates transformative interventions to counter unequal gender norms which encourage overburdening girls with household chores. Social and behaviour change interventions can also incentivize parents to treat daughters equally to boys and invest in girls' education. Furthermore, gender-transformative approaches can help to engage men and boys in caregiving and domestic work and value girls as equal partners, as well as increase fathers' motivation to assume greater responsibility for the wellbeing of daughters (MenEngage Alliance, 2021).

Box 7: Addressing attitudes about gender equality through Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools

FAO's junior farmer field and life schools (JFFLS) concentrate on teaching rural youth sustainable farming practices and important life skills. The goal of the JFFLS methodology is to provide girls and boys with the livelihood options and gender-sensitive skills needed for long-term food security, while reducing their vulnerability to child labour. Changing attitudes about gender equality in family life is a key element of the JFFLS approach. In the JFFLSs, girls and boys work together in small groups to share ideas and try out different roles (group leader, marketing manager, finance manager, spokesperson, etc.). This methodology enables boys to learn to value girls as potential leaders, and vice versa, and jointly examine and question traditional gender roles and attitudes.

Source: FAO, (2011).



Increase availability of relevant information, data and analyses

While there is an overall understanding of the causes and consequences pertaining to girl child labour, including the linkages to rural poverty, there is still much to learn about these relationships in specific local contexts in order to develop effective responses. Given the complexity of rural girls' labour, it is crucial to understand their workloads (including the “invisible” domestic and household work) and the circumstances in which they work. Generating specific knowledge on activities carried out predominantly by girls – such as water and firewood collection, whose end use can be either domestic consumption or agriculture – would be key to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of girls' work. Closing the knowledge gap implies both improving the availability of quantitative and qualitative data and enhancing access to and use of such information. Quantitative data on rural girls' labour should be disaggregated by age groups (e.g. 6–10, 11–14, 15–18) and important household characteristics, while qualitative information on work, education and well-being should include the views of both adults and girls themselves. The very process by which information and data are generated can play a significant part in addressing rural girls' labour by allowing for participatory assessments, consultations and awareness raising.

Strengthen institutional, policy and legal frameworks

Development policies and frameworks that seek to reduce poverty and vulnerability of rural children are the key to achieving sustainable progress in tackling child labour. There is an international legal framework for ending child labour in agriculture (FAO, 2020), but many instruments still need to be translated into national legislation and implemented in rural areas. Governments need to ensure that national policies as well as legal and institutional frameworks take into consideration rural girls' special vulnerabilities. Given the informal nature of much of rural girls' labour, engagement of rural families, communities and women's organizations together with farmer associations, rural NGOs, employers and other sectoral institutions is particularly important. Specifically, governments and development partners need to work with rural communities to ensure that parents understand the importance of investing in their daughters' education and future. This is likely to require a comprehensive approach, including awareness raising, more in-depth training, capacity, and organizational development. Ideally, sectoral policies and institutional frameworks should complement each other, for example, efforts to eliminate girl child labour should be a top priority for agricultural and rural development policies and programmes, while the specific characteristics of rural girls' work (including their domestic responsibilities) need to be fully considered in child labour strategies.

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