



FAO's Work on Eliminating Child Labour in Agriculture 2007 – 2009

January 2010



Prepared by the Rural Employment Team

*Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

1. The problem of Child Labour in Agriculture

Worldwide, agriculture is the economic sector where by far the largest share of working children is found - nearly 70 percent of the world's child labourers are agricultural workers, many of them work in hazardous occupations¹. Over 132 million girls and boys aged 5 to 14 years old work in crop and livestock production, as well as forestry and fisheries, helping to supply some of the food and drink we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products². The highest child labour percentage (about 80-90 percent) is reported for sub-Saharan Africa and among very young children (5-9 years)³.

Child labour is defined by the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age⁴, 1973, and the ILO Convention No.182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour⁵, 1999, as work that harms children's well-being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. Child labour is work that is damaging to a child's physical, social, mental, psychological and spiritual development because it is work performed at too early an age. It deprives children of their childhood, their dignity and rights. Children who do not complete their primary education are likely to remain illiterate and never acquire the skills needed to get a decent employment and contribute to the development of a modern economy and agriculture⁶. In this respect, child labour strongly undermines the efforts to promote decent youth employment which is a key element in revitalizing agriculture around the world.

When children are forced to work long hours in the fields, their ability to attend school or skills training is limited, preventing them from gaining education that could help lift them out of poverty in the future. Girls are particularly disadvantaged as they often undertake household chores following work in the fields.

Due to these facts, FAO recognises that the efforts on the progressive elimination of child labour worldwide should be enhanced, with priority given to the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in agriculture. The worst forms of child labour, as defined by the ILO Convention No.182⁷, include all forms of slavery, use of child soldiers, trafficking of children, commercial sexual exploitation, the use of children in illicit activities and hazardous child labour. The latter category is particularly relevant for agriculture⁸.

¹ IPEC Action against child labour 2006-2007: Progress and future priorities, ILO. Geneva, February 2008.

² FAO-ILO website: http://www.fao-ilo.org/fao-ilo-child/en/?no_cache=1

³ Source: ILO Child labour data country briefs at <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/ChildlabourstatisticsSIMPOC/lang-en/index.htm>

⁴ ILO. C138 Minimum Age Convention. Geneva 1973.

⁵ ILO. C182 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. Geneva 1999.

⁶ UN Global Compact <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/aboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/principle5.html>

⁷ ILO Convention No. 182 defines the worst forms of child labour as: a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

⁸ Besides the ILO conventions covering child labour there are also some sector specific standards and national laws set by governments, the industry and non governmental organisations including fair trade, SA8000 standardisation and the United Nations Global Compact. The social criteria for the certified company imposes that the company should respect all ILO conventions ratified by the country in which they operate. For those issues for which the ILO conventions are not ratified the certification standards apply directly. These also include no child labour below 14, occupational health and safety and maximum allowed working hours.

It must be stressed, however, that not all activities that children undertake in agriculture are bad for them or would qualify as work to be eliminated under the ILO Convention No. 138 or Convention No. 182. Age-appropriate tasks that do not present hazards and do not interfere with a child's schooling and right to leisure can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment. Indeed, many types of contributions to the household's livelihoods can be positive for children, providing them with practical and social skills for work as adults. Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and work skills are attributes often found in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work. But the prevalence of hazardous child labour⁹ in comparison to the above described, educative household help, is alarmingly high in agriculture and as such it severely undermines decent work, sustainable agriculture and food security principles.

Low family incomes, the absence of schools and quality education, the lack of regulations and enforcement, and ingrained attitudes and perceptions about the roles of children in rural areas are only some of the numerous factors which make child labour in agriculture particularly difficult to tackle and eliminate. Thus, eliminating child labour in agriculture remains a challenge. Unless a concerted effort is made to address this problem, especially its root causes such as poverty and food insecurity, it will be impossible to achieve the goal of eliminating all worst forms of child labour. A complex and holistic approach, that also addresses its root causes such as poverty and food insecurity, is needed to successfully eliminate child labour in agriculture.

2. Partnership for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Agriculture

A reinforced and global effort is underway to eliminate child labour in agriculture, especially hazardous child labour, in which both ILO and FAO are playing leading roles. To strengthen the worldwide movement on the elimination of child labour, a *Declaration of intent on cooperation on eliminating the worst forms of child labour in agriculture*¹⁰ was signed as part of the World Day Against Child Labour in Agriculture on 12 June 2007. Through the signing of the Declaration of Intent, these organizations have pledged to work together to:

- Promote cooperation and achieve policy coherence on child labour among the Partners, and to develop policy and programme links especially at the field level;

⁹ Subparagraph (d) of Article 3 of the ILO Convention No.182. describes what is popularly referred to as “hazardous child labour (HCL)”. HCL is work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed, or injured (often permanently) and/or made ill (often permanently) as a consequence of poor safety and health standards and working arrangements. Hazardous child labour is the largest category of child labour with an estimated 126 million children out of 218 million child labourers working in dangerous conditions. *This is the type of child labour where cooperatives can be most effective in terms of their business operations.* Both ILO Conventions 138 and 182 state that hazardous work should not be carried out by anyone under 18 with certain qualifications concerning young workers.

¹⁰ The Declaration of Intent has been signed between the following partners: International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF).

- Create awareness of and mainstream child labour concerns into existing activities, programmes and projects of agricultural organizations and help agricultural agencies and bodies to understand how the elimination of child labour in agriculture, especially hazardous child labour, contributes to achieving organizational mandates;
- Promote action and cooperation in operational activities aimed at improving rural livelihoods, creating alternative income-generating activities;
- Promote action and cooperation in operational activities to ensure that children do not carry out hazardous work in agriculture;
- Promote opportunities for decent youth employment in agriculture and in rural areas.

3. FAO's Work on Eliminating Child Labour in Agriculture since June 2007¹¹

Since the signing of the partnership declaration a wide range of activities relevant to child labour elimination have been continued and new activities have been carried out or initiated.

3.1 Awareness raising and increasing knowledge on child labour elimination

- **Joint ILO/FAO training course on Child Labour in Agriculture**

A joint training course on Child Labour in Agriculture was conducted for some 40 FAO staff members at FAO Headquarters on 17th – 18th October 2007.

- **Study on Child Labour in Agriculture in Ghana**

In 2007/2008 a country study was carried out in Ghana in collaboration with the Humboldt University Berlin, on *Child Labour and Children's Economic Activities in Agriculture*. In close collaboration with national partners and ILO, a methodology was designed and field research was undertaken. This resulted in a report, policy briefs and a national workshop which was attended by over 70 experts and stakeholders. The study focuses on relatively under-studied sectors of artisanal fisheries and livestock keeping, but also builds on lessons learned on child labour in the cocoa sector. The report contains recommendations for FAO and its partners on how to address child labour in agriculture. The Ghanaian Ministry of Food and Agriculture is currently creating awareness on the issue of child labour in agriculture among its extension staff; FAO supports this wherever possible. <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/al001e/al001e00.pdf>

- **Newsletter on Participatory Approaches and Child Labour in Agriculture**

The FAO Participation Website Team produced in September 2009 a Newsletter focusing on Participatory Approaches and Eliminating Child Labour in Agriculture. <http://www.fao.org/Participation/Web%20Newsletter/No18/Newsletter18En.htm>

¹¹ Activities reported on are those in which the Rural Employment Team was or is directly involved in and is therefore not an inclusive report, even though it clearly covers the majority of FAO activities directly dealing with child labour elimination.

- **Workshop Gender and Rural Employment**

Child labour in agriculture and in particular its gender aspects was one of the topics discussed at the FAO/ILO/IFAD workshop on Gender and Rural Employment, held in Rome in March 2009. The Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW) contributed with a paper on gender dimensions of child labour in agriculture. Outcomes of the workshop will be captured in a respective publication and a series of policy briefs including one policy brief in child labour. <http://www.fao-ilo.org/more/workshop>

- **Conference on Child and Youth Migration in West Africa**

FAO (Regional office for Africa/ESW) co-organized a panel on child labour in agriculture during the Conference on **Child and Youth Migration in West Africa: Research Progress and Implications for Policy** (organized by University of Sussex and University of Ghana) held in June 2009 in Accra.

- **Celebrating and promoting the World Day Against Child Labour (WDACL)**

Since 2007, a joint event is organized by FAO Headquarters and the ILO Representation in Rome on the occasion of the WDACL, to serve as a catalyst for the growing worldwide movement against child labour. In 2009, FAO Ghana also organized an event to give attention to the WDACL.

As a recent example of this commitment, FAO hosted in June 2009 a special joint event entitled “Give a girl a chance”, according to the ILO focus for this year. After watching and discussing the film “The challenge to make chocolate child labour free” (ILO 2008), a presentation about the impact of the global financial crisis on child labour was made by Furio Rosati (Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project on Child Labour / Understanding Children’s Work Project).

3.2. Mainstreaming Child Labour concerns and providing technical advisory services on child labour

- **Children in the crab value chain in Benin**

Mainstreaming child labour concerns in FAO’s programmes, projects and activities is an important work area, in particular in situations when it is found that production involves children. An example of this was the technical support provided to a FAO project supporting the crab value chain in Benin. In a study on employment in the sector, it was found that much of the crab collection was done by minors. Advisory services from ESW (through the Regional Office for Africa) have resulted in child-specific (pilot) interventions in the crab value chain, such as income generating activities in crab production within the formal schools.

- **Regional Initiative Child Labour in Cocoa**

FAO (through its Sub-Regional office for West-Africa) is part of the Regional Initiative “Combating worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms” and has contributed to the project’s first joint position paper. This initiative is coordinated by the

secretariat of the Sahel and West-Africa club/OECD and Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

- **FLIP Ghana (Farming and Livelihood Improvement Programme)**

FAO collaborates with Dutch and Ghanaian NGOs in a joint project which aims to promote organic farming among youth in deprived communities and teach life and farming skills to vulnerable children. Awareness-raising on child labour in agriculture is part of the life skills curriculum. FAO shares expertise and materials on the JFFLS (Junior Farmer Field and Life School) approach and provides support to the project design, monitoring and evaluation. The aim of the project is to build capacity on rural youth employment within both civil society and government in Ghana. Funding has been provided from SOS Kinderdorpen and the Dutch Government Schokland Fund. FAO provided staff time and training materials.

- **Expert consultation on child labour in fisheries**

ESW and the Fisheries Department of FAO are organizing in collaboration with the ILO a three days expert consultation on child labour in fisheries which will be hosted at FAO headquarters in mid April 2010. The expert meeting will seek to address issues of child labour and youth employment in fisheries and aquaculture and the broader issue of the hazardous nature of many fishing activities in order to provide more detailed, strategic and coherent policy guidance on how to address child labour in fisheries and aquaculture. The expert consultation will also provide technical inputs into a joint **FAO/ILO publication on policy guidance for eliminating child labour in fisheries**. The FAO portion of the funding of the meeting will largely be provided through the FMPP 2009 Programme.

3.3 Promoting opportunities for decent youth employment in agriculture and in rural areas

- **Rural Youth Employment Paper and positioning FAO's work on youth employment**

Promoting decent work for rural youth can be a way to fight child labour in agriculture, especially for girls and boys aged 15-18. FAO has started a first documentation of the employment situation of rural youth in developing countries, through the analysis of data on their employment status (quality and quantity of work) and reflections on the youth's prospects in and outside agriculture. The data and analysis has been brought together in a web environment and will be made accessible to the wider public. Building on the knowledge of this paper as second paper is currently being prepared on youth employment aiming to provide recommendations to FAO on how to position FAO's work on youth employment in view of global youth employment market trends, both on the demand and supply side, and considering good practices as well as needs for and comparative advantages of FAO services. This work will directly feed into the finalization of FAO's corporate Rural Employment Strategy.

- **Integration of child labour in the Junior Farmer Fields and Life Schools (JFFLS)**

Over recent years ESW has been promoting JFFLS in 17 countries and some 18,000 students benefited from this life skills oriented learning approach. The prevention and mitigation of child labour has always been an implicit element of the JFFLS approach through its emphasis

on child protection as a guiding principle as well as through its aim to promote decent work in agriculture for youth. Furthermore, through the linkages to formal school, the focus on achieving food security and by providing better decision making skills for participants, the JFFLS can reduce vulnerability to exploitation, including child labour.

Awareness-raising on the harmful effects of child labour and stimulating the debate about the topic among children and their communities, however, had so far not been part of the JFFLS approach. ESW has therefore within the framework of FMPP 2009 expanded previous conceptual and operational activities under (FNOP 2008) in the area of child labour prevention and legal empowerment of the poor in Kenya and Mozambique. A **child labour prevention training module** has been finalized and field tested in the two countries. The module is intended to be used within the JFFLS programme in various countries and with a set of practical exercises sensitize the JFFLS students and their parents or guardians on child labour and its harmful effects on children.

- **Promoting decent youth employment at country level**

ESW provides technical support services and lead technical unit services to a growing number of UN Joint programmes in which FAO is promoting together with other UN agencies and other partners decent youth employment. The list of countries and projects currently covered include:

- 1) **Nepal** - UNJP/NEP/004/UNJ Jobs for Peace
- 2) **Honduras** - UNJP/HON/038/SPA Human Development for Youth: Overcoming the Challenges of Migration through Employment
- 3) **Tunesia** - UNJP/TUN/034/SPA Engaging Tunisian Youth to Achieve the MDGs
- 4) **Mozambique** - UNJP/MOZ/094/UNJ Promotion of Youth Employment
- 5) **Gaza & West Bank** UNJP/GAZ/003/SPA Culture and Development in the Occupied Territories and OSRO/GAZ/901/QAC and OSRO/GAZ/909/SPA Enhancing Livelihoods and Entrepreneurship Skills through JFFLS
- 6) **Sudan** - UNJP/SUD/063/SPA Creating Opportunities for Youth Employment in Sudan
- 7) **Malawi** - UNJP/MLW/034/ED Promoting Rural Youth Employment and Empowerment

4. Way Forward

For 2010 – 2011 the Rural Employment Team is developing a **conceptual and operational country approach to promoting decent rural employment**. This work will consider in particular four main thematic pillars, namely: Youth Employment, Child Labour, Migration and Institution Building. The Child Labour component will largely build on results and experiences from the activities described in this note. Regular Programme funds will be used to initiate this work in one African country. Additional extra-budgetary funds could be used to strengthen this work to ensure that the provided advisory services and knowledge products can indeed cover the necessary complexities of decent rural employment promotion, including child labour which needs to be addressed through a combination of political, labour markets, educational, economical, human-rights and development instruments.