Chapter IV
ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION
AND UNICEF IN COMBATING CHILD LABOUR

At the dawn of the 21st Century, in the age of computers and robots on production lines, society still accepts that millions of children sacrifice their childhood, their health and their future, working at jobs they are not strong enough to do. Since the proclamation in 1979 as the "International year of the child" by the United Nations General Assembly, the call for action and study was picked up by many people and organisations all over the world. Some organisations studied child nutrition, others on child education and still others on child welfare in general. The International Labour Organisation made its special contribution by studying child labour and is widely viewed as the lead international agency concerned with child labour.

From the beginning, the International Labour Organisation has devoted an important part of its standard-setting activity to the abolition of child labour. Several months after its foundation in 1919, the ILO adopted a convention prohibiting work by children under 14 years of age in industrial undertakings. Other conventions followed, outlawing child work at sea, in fishing, agriculture, non-industrial enterprises and mines.

Children who are working all over the world are engaged in activities permitted by national and international standards, many more are working in violation of these standards. Such is the case, for example, of:

- young girls working in small industrial enterprises in tasks that involve handling microscopically fine wires, finally resulting in loss of eye sight within five to eight years;
- shepherd boys subcontracted to owners of large estates to work for as long as 15 hours a day;
- children working underground in mines;
- bonded children;
- children employed as seasonal and cheap labour in pesticide-soaked fields;


Ibid.

children working in numerous small industrial workshops and service establishments;

children in street trades practically found everywhere in the developing world.

This is child labour. Not teenagers working for a few hours to earn additional pocket money; not children helping on family farms; not youngsters doing household chores. But children prematurely leading adult lives, working long hours for low wages, sometimes separated from their families, frequently deprived of meaningful educational and training opportunities that could open up for them a better future. Child labour of this kind is the object of national and international concern.

CHILD LABOUR: THE ILO PERSPECTIVE

The International Labour Organisation is not opposed to all forms of child work. In fact, it distinguishes between child work and child labour in the following manner:

"When work by children is truly a part of the socialisation process and a means of transmitting skills from parent to child, it is hardly meaningful to speak of child labour".¹

"Rather, the ILO is concerned about those situations where children are compelled to work on a regular or continuous basis to earn a living for themselves or for their families and as a result are disadvantaged educationally and socially".²

The ILO has followed a dual policy vis-a-vis child labour. The first objective is the effective abolition of child labour. However, it believes that the attainment of this objective is easier said than done as it requires countries to carry out a series of legal and socio-economic measures, e.g., improvement of living standards, fuller or higher levels of adult employment.

But the ILO believes that the adoption and successful implementation of such measures will take time and hence, its second policy objective is the protection of children at work. It therefore encourages countries to regulate the conditions in which children work, (e.g) shorter hours of work, improved wages and remuneration, safer and less hazardous working conditions etc.


In the long run, the progressive elimination of child labour requires a general improvement of living standards, a reinforcement of the educational infrastructure and, perhaps most basically, a greater consciousness of the need for change. In the long run, the protection of working children requires practical measures that can improve their working and living conditions.\(^6\)

Thus, the ILO affirms that laws and regulations, if they are to be effective, must be backed by effective enforcement machinery. Such action must also be realistic. Thus, elimination of child labour and the progressive raising of the minimum age for admission to employment must be regarded as objectives to be attained gradually and as an integral part of a process of development designed to overcome the scourges of unemployment and destitution. The ILO also believes that formal measures alone will not work, if applied in isolation from overall measures to improve the economic and social context and especially in the absence of alternatives to work. They may even be harmful. Long term development policies can be complemented by immediate measures aimed at regulating and humanising work by children, so as to protect them against practices or conditions that jeopardise their normal, physical and mental development, deny them the possibility of acquiring knowledge and skills and block their opportunities for the future.

The ILO is opposed to work carried out by children, either as paid or independent labour. When this work has become a daily necessity which inevitably deprives the child at the educational and social levels: When this work may harm the child’s safety and health, such as the work in the coal mines, in tanneries where chemical products are used, in glass-making works, in carpet factories, on farms where insecticides or pesticides are used. The ILO also opposes all forms of work which can offend children’s morality, such as prostitution, or their dignity, such as the forced labour and debt bondage. In short, ILO combats all forms of work which deprive the child of its right to childhood.\(^7\)

OBJECTIVE OF ILO

The prime objective of ILO activities is the abolition of child labour. But it will take a long time to attain. For children who cannot avoid having to work, there must be guarantees that, they are adequately protected. It is understood that, this is merely part of a policy of gradual abolition.


\(^7\) Ibid, p.7.
ILO technical co-operation is aimed above all at helping state members define and develop such a policy at national level. This includes three types of measures:

- measures which attempt urgently to put an end to what is intolerable: the employment of children who are very young, or in hazardous occupations.
- measures attempting to change attitudes and behavioural patterns.
- measures which, without explicitly aiming at child labour, act on the causes of it.

There have been three distinct stages in the activities the organisation has undertaken to combat child labour. From 1919 to 1973, there was the legislative phase when ILO was completing their standards upto Convention 138 and Recommendation 146, which constitute the present doctrine in this area. Then, through their publications and meetings ILO exposed the problem publicly by denouncing abuses committed and highlighting the results of certain positive actions. More recently, ILO have been involved in a technical assistance phase to help member states who ask for it.

ILO convinces the member state that, they could do this without loss of face, then enlarge their very limited financial resources. The generous donations made by many countries has helped ILO build a world wide assistance programme. This programme aims to create a climate conducive to action, followed by the development of domestic institutional capacity, and to encourage pilot activities, evaluate them, and promote similar programmes elsewhere. For too many years, ILO had placed excessive confidence in economic growth as the panacea for problems such as those relating to child labour and poverty.

ILO ACTIVITIES TO COMBAT CHILD LABOUR

Many people in developed countries think of child labour as something belonging to an unsavoury past, an episode in the Industrial Revolution now happily over. The ILO's research shows that this is not the case, even in the most developed countries, and that tens of millions of children are working in the developing countries. It has also found that child labour is almost universally recognised as being undesirable, harmful for the children themselves and harmful to the future of the nations. Why, then, does it persist and what is being done about it? It persist not only because of poverty but also because of several other factors, which compels the children to work in order to survive. The answer to the second question is the subject of this chapter.

One of the principal ways in which the ILO has tried to combat child labour is through the adoption and application of international labour standards and secondly through IPEC programmes. A number of activities on child labour, including studies and publications and technical assistance projects have also been undertaken. But this chapter discusses only the International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). With the launching of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), operational since the beginning of the year 1992, the ILO embarks on a course of action without precedent, to put an end to this tragic waste of human resources.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR (IPEC)

IPEC is a global initiative of the ILO launched in 1992 with the funding from Germany to support participating member countries in their national efforts to combat and eliminate child labour progressively, while simultaneously creating a world wide movement against it. It is now financed also by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Commission, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. The ILO-IPEC programme is flexible in responding to the country's needs in addressing their specific child labour situation." Its strategy rests on the commitment of individual governments to address child labour in co-operation with employers' and workers' organizations, non-governmental organizations and the media, in a broad social alliance. A government's will and commitment to do so, are expressed in its signing of a memorandum of understanding with the ILO."10

One of the merits of a new ILO convention would be to consolidate the legal underpinnings of the IPEC. Aptly described as the ILO’s "operational arm" in the fight against child labour, IPEC gives priority to the eradication of the most abusive and exploitative types of child labour. It is now active with varying degrees of intensity in some fifty countries.

IPEC became fully operational in late 1992 when Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Thailand and Turkey signed up. In 1994, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania followed suit. And the list of participating countries continued to grow with the addition of Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Equador, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Srilanka and Venezuela in 1996-97.


IPEC's Aim\textsuperscript{11}: The aim of IPEC is the phased elimination of child labour by strengthening the capability of countries to deal with the problem and by promoting a worldwide movement to combat child labour. In the long term it can be solved only from within the countries themselves. That is why ILO-IPEC strives to:

- **Support national efforts:** to combat child labour and to build up a permanent capacity to tackle the problem.
- give priority to the eradication of the most hazardous and exploitative types of child labour.
- insist on preventive measures.

The experience of IPEC in the field has confirmed that, it is unrealistic to believe that this problem, which has existed for such a long time, can be eliminated overnight. While the achievement of this ultimate goal is in progress, ILO-IPEC's most pressing obligation is to assist in halting the intolerable. It has, therefore, established **three priority target groups:**

- children working under forced labour conditions and in bondage.
- children in hazardous working conditions and occupations.
- very young working children (under 12 years of age).

Within these groups, special attention is given to working girls, who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Objectives of IPEC\textsuperscript{12}: The work carried out by IPEC was expected to be complementary to and interdependent with the other child labour activities carried out by the ILO and was to be part of a single conceptual framework and strategy. The programme was to be integrated with headquarters and the ILO's field structure in an effective and efficient way.

The objectives of IPEC were to:

a) contribute substantially in the long term to the elimination of child labour in a selected group of countries;

\textsuperscript{11} IPEC Filer, International Labour Office, Geneva.

b) enhance the capability of the member states to design and implement policies and programmes to effectively protect working children and combat child labour;

c) increase awareness of member states and the international community as a whole as to the dimensions and consequences of child labour and national obligations under international law.

Activities were set in the wider context of the objective of the elimination of child labour balanced with and linked to the transitional process of regulation and protection of working children. This came down to a two-track approach: providing support where the political will to act existed and helping to mobilize and exert pressure within countries where this was not the case. It was recognised that, there was a compelling need to promote a broad social movement that could support, and if need be, stimulate government policy and action. NGOs were expected to play a leading role in national campaigns alongside employers' and workers organizations. The world wide movement was to use and build on the experience of the national programmes.

THE WORKING OF IPEC PROGRAMME

IPEC pursues a phased, multi-sectoral strategy, beginning with a "situational analysis" of the nature and magnitude of child labour in a given country. Subsequent steps in its strategy include assistance in policy design, institution building, awareness raising, development and application of protective legislation and support to direct action.

FIGURE 11
ILO - IPEC Programme distribution by means of action


IPEC thus strives to support, rather than supplant national efforts to combat child labour. It emphasizes preventive measures and tries to build sustainability into demonstration programmes, while assessing their potential for integration into the regular programmes of the partner organisations. These organisations are helped to adopt measures aimed at preventing child labour, withdrawing children from hazardous work and providing alternatives, and improving working conditions as a transitional measure towards the elimination of child labour.

IPEC's STRATEGY

The work carried out under IPEC was intended to impact on working children through practical action and wider public awareness of their conditions and needs and of the adverse effects of child labour on economic and social development. In ILO-IPEC's thinking the best way to strengthen the capacity of partner organizations is to apply a phased and multi-sectional strategy, against child labour so as to establish an international climate conducive to action. This would encompass: the collection and dissemination of statistical information, the networking of government agencies, social partners and NGOs, advocacy through mass media and targeted at policy-makers, improved co-ordination with international agencies, and an international exchange of views and experiences.14

IPEC was implemented in a highly decentralized manner. The execution of Action Programmes was subcontracted mainly to NGOs as part of the framework set out in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of participating countries. The development of national programmes under IPEC was delegated to National Steering committees. A National programme coordinator, under the supervision of the Director of the ILO Area office and under technical guidance of IPEC at headquarters, provided day-to-day assistance to the implementation of the national programme and prepare information for the National Steering Committee.

A programme Steering Committee (PSC) reviews the general strategy of IPEC and of national programmes. It also examines a workplan and budget for a two-year period. The PSC receives annual reports submitted by the office and suggest priorities for the programme. The PSC has a selective membership: one representative of the ILO and the donors, one representative of participating countries, one employer and worker representative and observers from UNICEF and UNESCO.

These were the original intentions of IPEC. The programme gave the ILO operational capability for the first time. But this meant having to navigate largely unchartered waters, for there was little experience of working with NGOs on such a large scale. Neither was it clear how action at the national level could be integrated with global activities.

ILO-IPEC has set itself a time-frame of around ten years for the provision of assistance to a given country. This time period is, of course, flexible; some countries may need less or more time depending on their stage of development, the nature and extent of child labour in the country, and the political and public resolve to combat it.

IPEC's partners

In all ILO-IPEC countries the Ministries of Labour are actively involved in the programmes. There is also fruitful co-operation with other Ministries concerned, especially the Ministries of Education, Ministries and Departments dealing with youth, the family, the media, health and social welfare and central co-ordinating units, such as national planning commissions and Prime Minister's Office. In all countries, efforts have been made to involve local government at the State, Provincial and District levels.

The cooperation of employers is absolutely crucial in the combat against child labour. Concrete plans of action carried out by individual employers or by employers' organizations have succeeded in preventing child labour, withdrawing children from hazardous work and improving children's working conditions.

Worker's organizations have become active IPEC partners. They play an important role in raising awareness among their members and child workers, in waging media campaigns and in monitoring children's working conditions. In some countries, they have also succeeded in including child labour issues in their collective agreements.

A wide variety of NGOs are major partners in combating child labour. They are often a suitable channel for developing concrete activities which meet the needs of working children, their families and communities because of their knowledge of and proximity of these groups. They also tend to succeed in promoting self-organisation and in involving these groups in planning and implementing the action programme. Many other partners have joined IPEC in the fight against child labour, among them being the media and the judiciary, health institutions, universities and parliamentarians.

---


16 Ibid.
IPEC Priorities

Since it is obvious that the problem of child labour cannot be eliminated immediately and that children cannot be removed from all types of work, ILO-IPEC's most pressing obligation is to support measures which aim to halt the intolerable. The priority target groups are children who are particularly vulnerable: Children working under forced labour conditions and in bondage; children working in hazardous occupations, very young children (under the age of 12) and working girls.  

A significant number of partner organisations have succeeded in withdrawing children from these types of work or, failing that, in improving their working conditions. However, the eradication of these forms of child labour presupposes measures to "rescue" children from work and rehabilitate them, which would require investment far beyond the resources available to IPEC. Children who work under the most exploitative and hazardous conditions are difficult to reach owing both to obstruction by those benefiting from their work and to the feelings of powerlessness of the children themselves. Compounded by the sheer numbers of children involved and the infrastructure needed to accommodate them, this poses a formidable challenge that few partner organisations are equipped to meet.

Some 46 percent of IPEC programmes are therefore geared to prevention which has proved to be more cost effective than remedial action. This means identifying the geographical areas, social groups and conditions that favour child labour; identifying the industry - specific or occupational factors that determine demand for and supply of child labour; and lastly, intervening at both the policy and the grass-roots levels. However, IPEC continues to work towards the immediate rescue of children in bondage or forced labour and those working in extremely hazardous conditions. This means continuing to assist partner organisations in offering viable alternatives to such work and in taking protective measures, provided that, these are transitional and linked to the removal of children from work.

IPEC has further sharpened its focus on priorities by launching a new programme for "Action against the most intolerable" forms of child labour (AMIC) over the period 1997-2001. AMIC specifically supports programmes aimed at the immediate eradication of bonded child labour; the commercial sexual exploitation of and trafficking in children; child labour in domestic service; child labour in dangerous industries, occupations and working conditions.

NATURE AND DISTRIBUTION OF IPEC PROGRAMMES

IPEC programmes falls into 2 categories: "action programmes", dealing with specific issues and "mini programmes" which typically help partner organisations to carry out preparatory activities (surveys, training or meetings) for possible future action programmes, awareness-raising activities and evaluation and audits of IPEC activities.

Most of the Action programmes were implemented through NGOs. The programmes provided education (part-time or full-time) in non-formal education centres. This was envisaged as a prelude to enrolment into formal schools. They were all designed to illustrate to the local communities that child labour is not inevitable.18

Action programmes are aimed at strengthening the capabilities of institutions and partner groups so that they could sustain efforts towards the elimination of child labour. Direct support action programmes implemented by IPEC in India have been given in Appendix (IX).

The data in the following Figures relate to 802 programmes implemented in eleven countries.

Figure 12

ILO - IPEC Programme distribution by Targeted Categories of Child Labour

As shown in Figure 12, 77 percent of IPEC programmes focus on forms of child labour in the "intolerable" category. Within this category "hazardous work" cover exposure to chemicals, extreme temperatures, dangerous tools, machines and/or work place, heavy loads, and STD/AIDS. "Hazardous working conditions" cover physical hazards (physical violence), Psycho-social hazards (intimidation, isolation, no contact with family or peers), night work and excessively long working hours. Most of the programmes targeting the "intolerable" forms of child labour are geared either to prevention (41 percent) or to withdrawal from work and provision of alternatives (40 percent). The remainder are concerned with the improvement of working conditions as a transitional measures.

Programmes in support of basic education as a preventive measure constitute a major form of intervention by IPEC, with strong emphasis on non-formal education, apprenticeship and skill-development programmes for working children. Figure 13 shows that, although the overall focus of IPEC activity has so far been on services and manufacturing, about one fifth of the programmes involved children working in agriculture and related activities. However, among programmes specifically concerned with the "intolerable" forms of child labour, that proportion rises to roughly one-third, nearly half these programmes being rural based. Over 60 percent of the programmes targeting the intolerable are in the informal sector.

**MARKET-BASED INITIATIVES TO COMBAT CHILD LABOUR**

Market-based initiatives, driven by or playing on the growing awareness and ethical concern of the public, particularly in industrialised countries, are the third broad category of action to combat child labour. They include a variety of product labelling schemes and or corporate codes of conduct designed to inform consumers that the goods they are buying are not made or processed by children.

CONCLUSION

All this does not mean that the battle against child labour does not serve any purpose. Only that there remains an enormous amount to do, and that the phenomenon will persist for many years to come. However, the fact that children are working and are suffering because of it, is too important a problem to be set aside wholly, until economic conditions can be improved to the point where it will no longer be necessary or profitable for children to work. The ILO realised that child labour could not be abolished or controlled all at once. This must remain an objective for many years to come. But governments should begin to take measures immediately, and should increase the efforts already begun, in order to halt the practice which is universally recognised as unacceptable.

UNICEF's APPROACH ON CHILD LABOUR

The well-being of children has been the inspiration and the driving purpose of the United Nations Children’s Fund for fifty years. It is from this unique perspective and experience that UNICEF adds its voice, concern and expertise to the debate about child labour. UNICEF also urges that priority be given to efforts for the immediate end of hazardous and exploitative child labour and to urgent support for education, so that children may acquire the knowledge and skills that can enable them to improve their lives. It also stresses the need for basic services, social development strategies, income-generation measures and legal protection for children, their families and communities.

The United Nations and its related agencies have a long history of collaborative action on challenging questions concerning human development and human rights, the environment and global health. It is a record of which the world can be justly proud. UNICEF emphasizes that collective action is needed to deal with child labour. By working together, governments, international and national organisations and all members of the world community can help protect children from the economic exploitation. Ending hazardous child labour, a priority concern of the ILO and of UNICEF, now needs to become the world’s shared and urgent goal.

The international approach to children has now changed dramatically. The idea that children have special needs has given way to the conviction that children have rights, the same full spectrum of rights as adults: Civil and political, social, cultural and economic. This belief was expressed as the convention on the rights of the child, which has now been

ratified by all except a few countries. Ratification specifically obligates governments to protect children "from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

The convention on the rights of the child is a landmark document, at the national and international level, which has facilitated conversion of the basic needs of the children into their normative rights. It is as important for tackling the children as the constitution is for the country. In a sense, it is a means of empowering children and creating an environment in which all children are able to live securely and realise their full potential. While the convention obligates the Government to ensure observance of its provisions, the responsibility of implementing the convention lies with all those concerned with children. In fact, all the Articles of the convention do not require the intervention of judiciary or government delivery system to give the children their rights. Most of them are social and cultural commitments, where the community and the parents have a very important role to play. Therefore, in order to arouse public consciousness and political will in support of the child's rights, it is all the more necessary to raise awareness about the convention and the provisions made therein.

The most important task before the government is to initiate a plan for creating awareness and disseminating information contained in the convention to every citizen of the country in the manner in which he can understand the children's rights as a judicial law. People from various walks of life (ie) policy-makers, administrators, teachers, lawyers, professionals, medical practitioners, editors, journalists, social workers, opinion leaders, folk artists etc. must know the details of the convention and its implication, so that they can willingly participate in the development programmes for children.

To an organization born among the detritus of war, it sometimes seems as if the historical wheel has come to a full circle.

The twin movements on behalf of children - one based on 'rights', the other on 'needs' have come together and formed one whole. The rights approach focuses on those who are disadvantaged by denial of specific legally constituted rights. But reaching children with 'basic needs' - under the terms of the convention on the rights of the child - target a virtually identical group. Those who are disadvantaged by unmet rights and those who are disadvantaged by unmet needs are ultimately the same children.

UNICEF and its many partners in the children's movement have played a vital part. Without their championing, the children's cause could not have been propelled to its current high levels of visibility and policy commitment. In the years ahead, UNICEF's challenge is to sustain that visibility - and put it to work on behalf of future generations.

Children do a variety of work in widely divergent conditions. This work takes place along a continuum. At one end of the continuum, the work is beneficial, promoting or enhancing a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest. At the other end, it is palpably destructive or exploitative. To treat all work by children as equally unacceptable is to confuse and trivialize the issue and to make it more difficult to end the abuses. This is why it is important to distinguish between beneficial and intolerable work and to recognize that, much child labour falls into a grey area between these two extremes.

A decade ago, UNICEF determined that child labour is exploitative\(^{21}\), if it involves:

- Full-time work at too early an age;
- Too many hours spent working;
- Work that exerts undue physical, social or psychological stress;
- Work and life on the streets in bad conditions;
- Inadequate pay;
- Too much responsibility;
- Work that hampers access to education;
- Work that undermines children's dignity and self-esteem, such as slavery or bonded labour;
- Work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development.

The impact of work on a child's development is the key to determining when such work becomes a problem. Work that is harmless to adults can be extremely harmful to children. Among the aspects of a child's development that can be endangered by work are:

- Physical development - including overall health, coordination, strength, vision and hearing;
- Cognitive development - including literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of knowledge necessary to normal life;
- Emotional development - including adequate self-esteem, family attachment, feelings of love and acceptance;

• Social and moral development - including a sense of group identity, the ability to co-operate with others and the capacity to distinguish right from wrong.  

The physical harm is the easiest to see: carrying heavy loads or sitting for long periods in unnatural positions can permanently disable growing bodies. Hard physical labour over a period of years can stunt children’s physical stature by up to 30 percent of their biological potential, as they expend stores of stamina that should last into adulthood.

Children are also vulnerable psychologically: they suffer devastating psychological damage from being in an environment in which they are demeaned or oppressed. Self-esteem is as important for children as it is for adults.

Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially, and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour. Work interferes with education in the following ways:

• It frequently absorbs so much time that school attendance is impossible;
• It often leaves children so exhausted that they lack the energy to attend school or cannot study effectively when in class;
• The social environment of work sometimes undermines the value children place on education, something to which working children living on the street are particularly vulnerable;
• Children mistreated in the workplace may be so traumatized that they cannot concentrate on school work or are rejected by teachers as disruptive.

UNICEF believes that education can be taken to child workers more directly. The idea of the ‘Street educator’ pioneered in Latin America, is now being usefully imitated all over the world. The educators make contact with children, helping them back into schools, assisting them in obtaining medical care and supporting attempts to reintegrate them with their families.

---


THE ROOTS OF CHILD LABOUR

Children are pushed into work that is often damaging to their development by three key factors: the exploitation of poverty, the absence of relevant education, and restrictions of tradition.

Poverty drives children into hazardous labour. Yet if employers were not prepared to exploit children, there would be no child labour. The parents of child labourers are often unemployed or underemployed, desperate for secure employment and income. Yet it is their children - more powerless and paid less - who are offered the jobs. In other words, children are employed because they are easier to exploit.

Children that can be exploited in this way have increased because of International Economic developments over the last decade and a half. Structural adjustment programmes imposed on the economies of developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have meant cuts in social spending that have hit the poor disproportionately. Cuts in social spending have hit education - the alternative to child labour - particularly hard. In the countries experiencing economic hardship in the last decade, per capita spending on education has declined significantly. In all regions, spending per student for higher education fell during the 1980's and in Africa and Latin America, spending per pupil also fell for primary education.

Education is under-funded and in decline. But the school system in most developing countries is hampered by more than just a lack of resources. It is too often rigid and uninspiring in approach, with a curriculum that is irrelevant to and remote from children's lives. As a result, keeping children in school is proving to be even more difficult than enrolling them in the first place: 30 percent of children in developing countries who enroll in primary school do not complete it, and this figure rises to 60 percent in some countries.

"Education has become part of the problem. It has to be reborn as part of the solution".

Tradition and entrenched social patterns also play a part in propelling children into hazardous labour. In industrialized countries, it is now almost universally accepted that if children are to develop normally and healthy, then they must not perform disabling work. In theory at least, education, play, and leisure, friends, good health and proper rest must all have an important place in their lives. This idea emerged only recently. In the early

---

decades, work was thought to be the most effective way of teaching children about life and the world. But today, there is a darker side to the expectations about children's work. The harder and more hazardous the jobs become, the more they are likely to be considered traditionally the province of the poor and disadvantaged, the lower classes and ethnic minorities. In India, for (eg), the view has been that some people are born to rule and to work with their minds while others, the vast majority, are born to work with their bodies. Many traditionalists have been unperturbed about children failing to enroll in or dropping out of school. And if those children end up doing hazardous labour, it is likely to be seen as their lot in life.26

The rigidity of the caste system in India only dramatises what is true in most of the world, including the west. The dominant cultural group may not wish its own children to do hazardous labour, but it will not be so concerned if young child from racial, ethnic or economic minorities do it.

THE FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR27

The many manifestation of child labour can be broken down into six main types, none of which is unique to any one region of the world. These are domestic service, forced and bonded labour, commercial sexual exploitation, Industrial and plantation work, street work and work for the family. The most vulnerable and exploited children of all -as well as the most difficult to protect - may well be those in domestic service. They are often poorly paid or not paid at all, their terms and conditions are entirely at the whim of their employers and take no account of their legal rights, and they are deprived of schooling, play and social activity. They are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. The isolation of children in domestic service also makes it difficult to establish reliable estimates of their numbers around the world.

Bonded child labour occurs mainly, though not exclusively in South Asia, where children, often only eight or nine years old, are pledged by their parents to factory owners or their agents in exchange for very small loans. Their life long servitude never succeeds in even reducing the debt.

In India, this type of transaction is widespread in industries such as beedi rolling, carpet-making, match-making, slate and silk. The most notorious of these is the carpet industry of Mirzapur - Bhadohi-Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh State. These children are kept

In captivity, tortured and made to work for long hours without a break. Little children are made to crouch on their toes, from dawn to dusk every day, severely stunting their growth during formative years.

The underground nature of the multibillion-dollar illegal industry in the commercial sexual exploitation of children makes it difficult to gather reliable data. But NGOs in the field estimate that each year at least one million girls worldwide are lured or forced into this form of hazardous work, which can often verge on slavery. Boys are also often exploited.

The physical and psychosocial damage inflicted by commercial sexual exploitation makes it one of the most hazardous forms of child labour. Children involved have to confront serious health risks every day, including respiratory diseases, HIV and drug addictions.

All over the world, children are to be found doing industrial or plantation labour in hazardous conditions. The physical risks to these children - from dangerous chemicals or from faulty machinery, for (eg) - are often more evident than the hazards to their emotional or social development, which are nonetheless profound.

Children working in the street also face cruel and hazardous environment thereby, endangering their physical and psychosocial development. Most of these children struggle at work on the street for their own or their families' survival. They shine shoes, wash and guard cars, carry luggages, hawk flowers, collect recyclable junk and find a thousand other ingenious ways to make a little money. The vast majority of them return to their homes in squatter settlements or slums each night: these are children who work on the streets.

The most common kind of child labour is domestic work for a family. While children can benefit from a reasonable level of participation in household chores and activities and derive a sense of self-worth from their work on behalf of their families, all too often work for the family demands far too much of them. It requires them to work excessively long hours that keep them from school and can take too great a toll on their developing physiques.

Much of the work for the family within the home is done by girls, and UNICEF focuses on the special situation of girls' work worldwide. Most of the hazards faced by working boys are faced by girls too. Yet girls have extra problems of their own to face: from the sexual pressures of employers to exclusions from education. According to ILO, 56 percent of the 10-14 years old currently estimated to be working in the developing world are boys. Yet, if one were able to measure the number of girls doing unregistered work as
domestic servants, or work at home that liberates other family members to take up paid employment, the figures would show more female child labourers than male. Girls also work longer hours on average than boys. This is especially true of girls who carry a double work load who hold down a job outside the home and also fulfil their domestic duties on their return.

UNICEF'S VIEW ON CAUSES OF CHILD WORK

Child work, lack of schooling and nutritional facilities are co-related. In calculating the rates of illiteracy, school enrollment and malnutrition. a UN report states that "the countries with highest illiteracy rates and the most backwardness in school enrollment are in general those that suffer from malnutrition and have the greatest child labour problems".

UNICEF points out that child exploitation is not an accident. Children are not hired at the same rates as adults for the same work, but at much lower rates. They are preferred to adults because their smaller bodies require less food and they can be paid proportionately less. In certain industries, like the carpet industry and in electronic assemblies, employers prefer child labour because of the dexterity of their small fingers.

UNICEF has evolved certain approaches towards improving the lives of working children viz.

a) using legal instruments to limit and define the conditions under which children work and
b) transforming the nature of work itself.

The legal instrument which has been used to limit or prohibit child labour is the adoption of Minimum Age Convention which fixed the minimum age of work at 14 years. The comprehensive Minimum Age Convention of 1973 aimed at the total abolition of child labour. Many countries have laws and regulations prohibiting, limiting or regulating child labour as it is notorious, though these laws are implemented more in their breach.

Organisations who work for child labour realise that legal restrictions may actually tend to increase exploitation because children work out of economic compulsion or are forced to work for small unregistered enterprises which escape government inspection and control. Further, once a legislation is passed, under age workers simply disappear from the official labour force statistics.

Another type of legal approach seeks to improve the working conditions such as providing equal pay for equal work, regulating the weekly rest day, etc.

The second approach aims at improving the basic services, health care, nutrition and education being made available to the community as a whole, as well as special programmes directed specially to working children. Education forms an important component of this approach.

UNICEF INDIA'S POSITION OF CHILD LABOUR

UNICEF India is developing a strong stand against child labour with the aim of its abolition within a specified period of time in a phased manner by 2000 AD. Basically, UNICEF, India policy on child labour is stated as follows:

- All forms of child labour should be eliminated to comply with agreed child rights.
- As seen in other countries, the enactment and enforcement of legislation to make primary education compulsory is a pre-requisite for the elimination of child labour.
- While poverty alleviation is clearly relevant, it is not necessary nor desirable to await economic development as a means of eliminating child labour.
- The modification and enforcement of existing legislation on child labour is a necessary, supportive measure for the elimination of child labour.
- In addition to continuing support for government programmes on child labour, UNICEF seeks to strengthen non-governmental alliances which are effective in drawing public attention to the issue and generating social mobilisation for the elimination of child labour.
- While advocating for an end to child labour, UNICEF focuses on programmes to rehabilitate children released from labour into the educational system and to improve the livelihoods of their families through support from anti-poverty programmes.29

OBJECTIVES OF UNICEF INDIA WORK ON CHILD LABOUR

General

The general objective of UNICEF is its collaboration with its government, NGOs, legal experts, international agencies and private industry, to promote the elimination of child labour and integration of children released from labour into the educational system in line with the requirements of Convention on the Rights of the Child. The specific objectives of UNICEF are as follows:

1. To promote compulsory primary education as the fundamental strategy for elimination and prevention of child labour by enrolling and retaining children in schools.
2. To advocate for revision and enforcement of legislation to prohibit child labour, particularly in hazardous occupations and industries.
3. To assist central and state governments to develop and implement programmes and action plans for the release and rehabilitation of children from labour in various industries and occupations.
4. To promote convergence of all sectoral and development programmes on "at-risk" families for prevention of child labour.
5. To strengthen monitoring systems on child labour.
6. To strengthen alliances between NGOs, media, industry and the legal sector for social mobilisation in support of elimination of child labour.

At New Delhi in 1995, Labour Ministers condemned exploitative child labour as "a moral outrage" and resolved to make its "total and defacto elimination" an "immediate priority". UNICEF also urges its immediate elimination, so that by the end of the decade the world will be free of this crime. For so many of the world's children, it cannot happen soon enough.

Not all labour however is hazardous. It is the nature of the work children do and the conditions in which they labour, not the fact that they work - that determines how they are affected. UNICEF advocates a comprehensive strategy against hazardous child labour including compulsory education for children and employment for parents.

Strategy

The overall strategy of UNICEF is based upon advocacy for government to adopt and pursue firmer policies to eliminate child labour and promote compulsory primary education and for industry itself to respond constructively to pressures to replace child with adult labour. In addition, the strategy seeks to develop and strengthen new alliances (NGOs, industry, external agencies, media, academics and advocates) which may bring innovative approaches to bear on the removal of children from the workplace. It is also recognised that more reliable data are required to assist advocacy and monitoring in the context of child labour.

NGOs are of the view that UNICEF ought to be the principal agency for child labour because of its specific responsibility for child welfare. In looking ahead to the adoption of a UN convention on the rights of the child, some NGOs saw UNICEF as the chief regulatory agency for this instrument 41.

UNICEF views that some specific actions are urgently needed on the following: 72

Education

Universalisation of primary education is considered a critical and effective strategy for elimination and prevention of child labour. UNICEF is willing to support the initiatives of State Governments to enforce compulsory primary education in districts of concentration of child labour drawing support from the enabling constitutional provision of compulsory primary education. UNICEF promotes inter-sectoral interventions, with special emphasis on collaboration between the Ministries and Departments of Labour and Education for a joint strategy towards the elimination of child labour. UNICEF also facilitate the dissemination of successful NGO experiences in removing children from the work place and integrating them into the school system, through training, workshops and field visits.

Legislation

The role of legislation in removing children from the workforce has been important in the past. There is, however, some ambivalence in Indian legislation on the matter, since it seeks to regulate child labour but does not consider it entirely unacceptable. The practice is prohibited in certain identified, mainly hazardous industries but not in others. Moreover,


while part of the Child Labour Act asserts that no child shall be permitted to work in these processes or occupations, there are clauses which offer exemption to any establishment in which the work is undertaken by the owner's family. Loopholes, therefore, exist which make enforcement difficult. Further revision of the Act is, therefore, warranted and UNICEF advocates for government's attention to this as well as more rigorous enforcement procedures. UNICEF works closely with ILO, UNESCO, the National Labour Institute, NGO networks and professional groups, particularly the legal profession in the area of the legislation.

State Based Programmes

Through UNICEF State Offices, assistance is provided in key states for the development of inter-sectoral programmes for the release and rehabilitation of child labourers. A start has been made in Tamil Nadu where a joint committee convened by the Chief Minister conducted research and developed an integrated strategy for combating child labour in the fireworks and match industries of Sivakasi. Action has been initiated by the introduction of compulsory primary education in the State. The strategy also involves rural development and income generation schemes targeted to the children's families.

This approach to integrated planning should be replicated in other States, employing UNICEF's presence in the field and comparative advantage in being able to link different sectors in a common objective. Initially, planning may best be targeted to the more visible industries employing children in the State.

UNICEF, within the context of existing programmes of support and in co-operation with other agencies, should advocate and support the progressive abolition of child exploitation, the protection of working children, the amelioration of working conditions and the analysis of the impact of national policies on these children. While the underlying causes are basically structural - widespread poverty, under development and gross inequality - society must do more than wait for the long-term results of structural changes that it may be seeking to effect. Through extending the child survival and development strategy in response to the special needs of these children, families and communities can be strengthened to decrease and/or prevent the exploitation of child work.

These pragmatic projects and programmes recognize the need for children to work. But to change that reality, to eliminate the necessity for children to work, is a radical shift which requires a long term integrated international effort, and virtually everyone agrees that public education campaigns are the first necessary, but not sufficient steps along a very long road.
The role of information gathering and dissemination in raising public awareness of the evils of child labour and in exposing the sectors of activities where it is prevalent should not be underestimated. In many developing countries there is a surprisingly high degree of ignorance about the consequences of child labour in general and the ill-effects of unsafe working conditions in particular. Child work is often accepted as part of the national state of affairs, and the rights and needs of the child are not always fully appreciated. A great deal of effort, therefore, needs to be made to generate and promote public awareness of the consequences of child labour and the rights of the working child and to expose unacceptable conditions wherever they exist.

Advocacy and Public Awareness

There has been growing press coverage on the plight of child labourer both in India and overseas. UNICEF has recently made its position on child labour public and will continue to provide reliable information to the media. A parallel initiative has been established to promote national awareness and action on the Child Rights Convention through information disseminations, NGO activities, State-wise schemes and activities to mobilize children. Child labour will undoubtedly become a key, is a focus for the advocacy work on child rights.

Monitoring, Research and Documentation

There is a clear need for more data on number and circumstances of child labourers in different sectors and geographical areas and on the economic implications of substituting child by adult labour. Sound economic, as well as ethical arguments would considerably strengthen advocacy on the issue. Monitoring systems for child labour require detailed review and further elaboration. Given the difficulties of acquiring accurate data, proxy indicators, such as number of children out of school, should be considered. Monitoring is presently the responsibility of the Child Labour Cell, functioning at the National Labour Institute. UNICEF supports the cell for monitoring and research activities and explores ways of generally strengthening the monitoring function at national, state and district levels.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the convention on the rights of the child is a landmark document and is the first legally binding global prescription to give to the children the best they deserve. Hence, creating awareness about the convention, is a necessity and calls for a joint effort of all concerned with children. Communication media can be a powerful tool for advocacy and awareness creation provided it is used in a planned manner. National child labour laws must accord with both the spirit and letter of the convention and with relevant ILO convention. Such legislation must encompass the vast majority of child work in the informal sector of the economy including work on the streets and farms, domestic work or work within the child’s own household. Data on child labour in informal sector are scarce. National and International system must be put in place to gather and analyse globally comparable data on child labour if the problem is to be addressed effectively. Special attention must be paid to the forgotten or invisible areas of child labour such as the informal sector.