



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR

MALAWI COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR MARKED AROUND THE WORLD

Local activities to include Open Day at Mchinji on 9th July 2004

NEW ILO REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PLIGHT OF CHILDREN IN DOMESTIC LABOUR

GENEVA (ILO News) – Child domestic labour is a widespread and growing global phenomenon that traps as many as ten million children or more – mostly girls – in hidden forms of exploitation, often involving abuse, health risks and violence, according to a new report issued today by the International Labour Office (ILO).

“Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it”^{*/2/} documents the exploitation of these children – some as young as 10 – for the first time on a global level.

Prepared by the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the report examines in detail the plight of children working in sometimes hazardous forms of domestic labour, and was issued last night, on the eve of the third World Day Against Child Labour (to be commemorated on 9th July 2004 in Malawi).

The ILO established the World Day in 2002 to highlight global efforts against child labour as a means of raising the visibility of the problem, particularly its worst forms. The ILO estimates that there are nearly 250 million child labourers worldwide, three-quarters of whom are trapped in the worst forms - conditions that are hazardous or otherwise damaging to their development and well-being.

However, children in domestic labour are usually “invisible” in their communities, toiling for long hours with little or no pay, frequently abused, and regularly deprived of the chance to play or go to school.

According to the new ILO report, some 700,000 children work in the Indonesian capital Jakarta alone, 300,000 in Dhaka, Bangladesh and 150,000 in Lima, Peru.

“Millions of children work night and day outside of their family homes, toiling as domestic child labourers. Nearly all are exploited, exposed to hazardous work and subject to abuse...this must stop now”, says ILO Director-General Juan Somavia.

The report defines child domestic labourers as all children in domestic service who are under the legal minimum working age, as well as those above the legal minimum age but under the age of 18 who are in an exploitative situation. Many of these working children are very young: 10 per cent of child labourers in Haiti were under 10 years of age and 70 per cent of children employed “by other households” in Morocco were under 12.

The report further notes that all domestic child labourers, without exception, are at risk because of the very nature of child domestic labour, which is not only widely accepted but often considered a “better” alternative for children from poor families.

“They are in a workplace – even if that workplace is someone else’s home – hidden from public view and labour inspection. The children are consequently at risk not only of exploitation but also of abuse and violence”, says Dr. June Kane, the author of the report. “It is vital that child domestic labour, so often neglected because the exploitation and abuse take place behind closed doors, receives attention.”

While acknowledging the difficulty of providing precise figures for the number of domestic child labourers worldwide, the report says that they comprise a substantial portion of the children working in the world today. The report cites numerous country estimates, including studies showing that more than two million children are to be found in domestic labour in the Republic of South Africa, 559,000 in Brazil, 250,000 in Haiti, 200,000 in Kenya, 264,000 in Pakistan and 100,000 in Sri Lanka.

Today, domestic child labour is widespread in the Global South. It is especially common in countries where there is widespread poverty, a deeply rooted social hierarchy, a rapidly changing society, a society recovering from conflict, few employment opportunities, and no free and compulsory education.

A typical working day for 14-year-old Augustina from Lima, Peru, starts at six when she goes out to buy food for the family's breakfast. She then cleans the house, goes shopping again and prepares lunch. Augustina's lament is painful:

“After that I have to wash clothes, so I do not eat until 3.00 pm. Then there is the ironing or something else. I go to school from 6.30 to 11.00 pm, but I have never done my homework and when I get back the boss yells at me. I still have to wash the dishes before I go to bed. I do not know what to do. How can I put up with this life? Is it like this for everyone, or just for me?” (From J. Ennew, *Maids of all work*, 1993)

Due to the hidden nature of domestic work and a lack of any substantial research into the issue it has been difficult to establish, with any accuracy, the precise number of children working as domestic servants in the world today, including Malawi.

However, the *Child Labour Baseline Study* draft final report produced last year by the University of Malawi’s Centre for Social Research, underscores the seriousness of domestic child labour, especially the vulnerability of young girls who are at a greater risk than boys. The report therefore goes on to recommend that it is important to legally open up homes for labour inspections since domestic workers are some of the most abused among workers.

Reads the report in part: “Women employ young girls because they think that if they employ women they would be sleeping with their husbands and later on the husbands will leave them and marry them (domestic workers).” (Women, Focus Group Discussion in Mangochi)

Furthermore, the results of another survey of tobacco estates conducted in 1998 indicate that as many as 34 percent of the children were absent from school for a period in order to assist their households or the estate. The same survey found that about 20 percent of all children up to 14 years of age were working with their parents on full time basis and a further 21 percent part time. **(Torres, 2000:84).**

However, on a positive note, *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it* report contends that not all child domestics end up without a future, as ILO experience in Asia, Central and South America and Africa shows that with strong social and national institutions, and income or credit options for the parents, children under the minimum working age can be successfully removed from domestic labour.

“Child domestic labour is a waste of human talent and potential. With the help of constructive and sustainable solutions from the ILO technical cooperation programme, governments, employers and

workers worldwide stand ready to put an end to this abuse”, says Frans Röselaers, Director of the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

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^{2/} *Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it*, International Labour Office, 2004, ISBN 92-2-115747-4. For a copy of the report go to www.ilo.org/childlabour or contact communication@ilo.org.