

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Child Labour

UNICEF Nigeria, 2006

#### Background

A staggering 15 million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Many are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments, carrying too much responsibility for their age. Working in these hazardous conditions with little food, small pay, no education and no medical care establishes a cycle of child rights violations.

While children have always worked in Nigeria, the figures have significantly increased over the years. The end of the oil boom in the late 1970s coupled with mounting poverty has driven millions of children into labour.

Traditionally, children have worked with their families, learning skills they would need as adults, but today children are forced to work for their own and their family's survival. The money earned by child family members has become a significant part of poor families' income.

#### Millions are losing out on education

Generally, working children have no time, money or energy to go to school. About six million working children in Nigeria, equally split between boys and girls, do not attend school at all, while one million children are forced to drop out due to poverty or because of parents' demand to contribute to the family income.

Over eight million children manage, at least partly, to stay in school and work in their spare time to pay education fees. Due to high demands at work, these children often skip classes. Missing out on education makes it impossible to break the cycle of poverty and

exploitation and prevents children from having a better life and a safer future.

#### Childhood under threat

In Nigeria, child labour does mostly occur in semi-formal and informal businesses with hundreds of thousands young domestic servants, mainly working for prosperous urban families. Domestic servants are the least visible category and often sexually harassed. Among young domestic workers, one half of those employed in Lagos said they knew of sexually molested domestic servants.

Overall, hazardous work in fields, quarries, private households and on the streets exposes children to abuse and exploitation and poses serious threats to their health and development.

#### Where do children in Nigeria work?

##### Public places such as streets and markets

- street vendors (64%)
- beggars (13%)
- shoe shiners (4%)
- car washers/watchers (6%)
- scavengers (5%)
- feet washers (8%)

##### Semi-public settings such as cottage industries and mechanic workshops

- apprentice mechanic /vulcanisers (24%)
- bus conductors (17%)
- iron / metal workers (6%)
- carpenters (14%)
- tailors / weavers (14%)
- hairdressers / barbers (18%)
- caterers (8%)

##### Private households

- domestic servants

##### Agricultural plantation and quarries

- farm and quarry workers

UNICEF 1996

<sup>1</sup> ILO study

#### Protecting children

The Nigerian Government has formally adopted three International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions setting a minimum age for the employment of children at sea, in industry and underground. In addition, the country signed a Memorandum of Understanding in August 2003 in cooperation with ILO to launch a country programme under the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

The Government showed further commitment by implementing the West Africa Cocoa Agriculture Project (WACAP) and by passing the Child Rights Act Sections 28 and 29 into law. The Child Rights Act prohibits exploitative Labour and enforces sections 58 -64 of the Labour Decree of 1974, now the Labour Act. All legislation is designed to protecting children from exploitative work.

Some states, like Anambra State, have also banned children from working during school hours. While substantial legislation is now in place, legal enforcement remains another challenge to be met.

## UNICEF supported interventions

UNICEF Nigeria undertakes a mix of activities to raise awareness and combat child labour across the country, including:

- Advocating for the ratification and enforcement of international laws that protect children.
- Supporting the passage of the Child Rights Act at the State level.
- Supporting an inter-agency approach especially with ILO-IPEC on child Labour.
- Supporting a National Baseline Survey with government partners and ILO, which will include data on sexual exploitation, child violence and youth militia.
- Supporting the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) to develop child protection indicators and assessment tools which will assist with the monitoring of child

labour and other child protection issues in Nigeria.

- Signing a memorandum of understanding with the University of Lagos for the

establishment of a University Chair to oversee the compilation of relevant peer reviewed child protection research including child Labour.

- Supporting African Network for the Protection against Prevention of all Forms of Child Abuse, Nigerian Chapter (ANPPCAN) to establish two sentinel centers to monitor child protection abuse in Enugu and Port Harcourt.
- Continuous technical and supplies support for residential care institutions nation-wide caring for children who lack primary care givers.
- An institutional care study carried out in all four UNICEF zonal offices to make sure that vulnerable children in institutions like orphanages and care centres have access to their basic rights and are protected from exploitation.
- UNICEF in collaboration with Police, Immigration and NGOs supported the repatriation of almost 300 children rescued from quarries in Ogun State back to Cotonou, Benin Republic in 2003. efforts are being made to sensitize the affected communities on the rights of children and highlight the evils of child labour.

**For further information on UNICEF's work in Nigeria to counter child trafficking, please contact:**

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