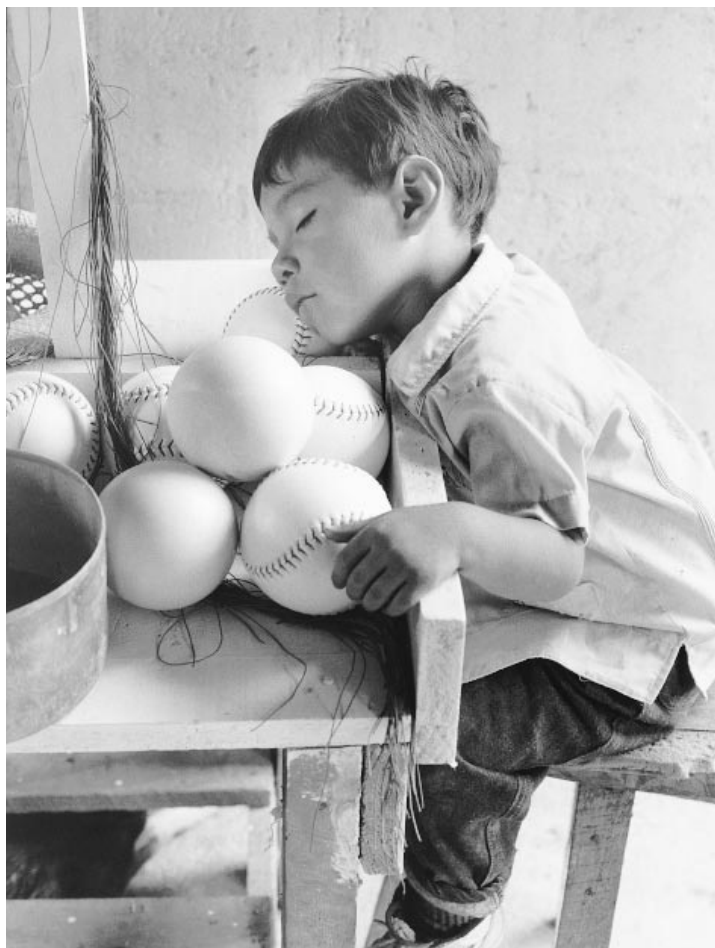


THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1997



Carol Bellamy
Executive Director
United Nations Children's Fund



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1997

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CHILDREN
1997

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director,
United Nations Children's Fund



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Chapter I

The Convention on the Rights of the Child: A new era for children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is at the core of a revolutionary shift in the world's approach to children. The idea that children have special needs, which sparked the founding of UNICEF 50 years ago, has now given way to the conviction that children have the same spectrum of rights as adults: civil and political, social, cultural and economic. The Convention, nearing universal ratification, is setting in motion profound changes in laws, policies, institutions and practices. UNICEF itself has adopted a mission statement that looks to the Convention as its guiding force.

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This chapter shows how the world's course towards peace, equality, development and justice can be hastened and helped by the energies the Convention is generating. The year 2000 goals, established at the World Summit for Children in 1990, must now be pursued in the context of the Convention. Progress towards those goals, according to a report in late 1996 by the UN Secretary-General, shows great strides made, with millions of children's lives saved since 1990. But much remains to be done. The Convention expands the scope of action now under way and calls for continuing commitments of both political will and resources.

Chapter II

Children at risk: Ending hazardous and exploitative child labour

Over 250 million children around the world — in countries rich and poor — work and many of them are at risk from hazardous and exploitative labour. Denied education and trapped in cycles of poverty, their most basic rights, their health and even their lives are in jeopardy. This chapter examines the issue of child labour in all its complexity, exposing the common myths about it and exploring the causes. The contributing factors are multiple and overlapping, including the exploitation of poverty, lack of access to education, and traditional restrictions, particularly for girls. Compounding the problem is the paucity of statistics about the number of children working, especially those in hazardous conditions. More data are urgently needed in order to better monitor and prevent child labour violations, particularly since the vast majority of children labour in invisibility.

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Because the causes of child labour are complex, the solution must be comprehensive. The report calls for the immediate end to hazardous child labour and proposes strategies to help eliminate and prevent it including: access to education; wider legal protection; birth registration for all children; collection of information; and mobilization of the widest possible coalition of partners among governments, communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), employers and trade unions. The single most effective way to protect children from hazardous and exploitative labour, the report argues, is to extend and improve education so that it will attract them and inspire their lives.

Chapter III

Statistical tables

Statistics provide an essential foundation for gauging children's well-being and the level of care, nurture and resources they receive. Statistics such as those on child mortality, immunization, maternal mortality, malnutrition and school enrolment chart countries' progress towards achieving the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Despite significant gains, more than 12 million children under five still die each year, mainly from preventable diseases and malnutrition. The tables cover basic indicators, health, nutrition, education, demographics, economic progress and the situation of women, plus indicators on less populous countries, rates of progress and regional summaries. Countries are listed in descending order of their estimated 1995 under-five mortality rates, the first basic indicator in table 1.

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Foreword

The well-being of children has been the inspiration and the driving purpose of the United Nations Children's Fund for 50 years. It is from this unique perspective and experience that UNICEF adds its voice, concern and expertise to the debate about child labour, the primary focus of *The State of the World's Children 1997* report.

Child labour is a controversial and emotional issue. It is also a complex and challenging one that defies simple solutions. The thoughtful and comprehensive approaches required must be guided by the best interests of the child and by a commitment to children's human rights, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In this report, UNICEF 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.

The State of the World's Children emphasizes the need for such collective action to deal with child labour. By working together, as the report makes clear, governments, international and national organizations and all members of the world community can help protect children from the economic exploitation so graphically described in this report. Ending hazardous child labour, a priority concern of the International Labour Organization and of UNICEF, now needs to become the world's shared and urgent goal. The United Nations system must take the lead.



Boutros Boutros-Ghali
United Nations Secretary-General

Chapter I

The Convention on the Rights of the Child



UNICEF/5391/saac

A girl in a non-formal school programme run by community volunteers in Pakistan.



A new era for children

Fifty years ago, in the aftermath of the most devastating war in history, UNICEF was created on 11 December 1946 to provide succour to children. Its establishment stemmed from the concern that children would not be adequately protected in the overall relief effort under way in Europe. The international recognition that children required special attention was revolutionary at the time.

At the end of the postwar reconstruction period, developing countries emerging from the colonial era invoked the same principle to demand that children be given specific attention in international cooperation. UNICEF's initial relief mandate was enlarged to include the survival and development of children.

Now, the international approach to children has changed dramatically once again. 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 conviction, expressed as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, entered into international law on 2 September 1990, nine months after the Convention's adoption by the

United Nations General Assembly. Since then, the Convention has been ratified (as of mid-September 1996) by all countries except the Cook Islands, Oman, Somalia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, making it the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

The Convention has produced a profound change that is already beginning to have substantive effects on the world's attitude towards its children. Once a country ratifies, it is obliged in law to undertake all appropriate measures to assist parents and other responsible parties in fulfilling their obligations to children under the Convention. Now, 96 per cent of the world's children live in States that are legally obligated to protect children's rights.

Those rights are comprehensive. The Convention defines children as people below the age of 18 (article 1) whose "best interests" must be taken into account in all situations (article 3). It protects children's right to survive and develop (article 6) to their full potential, and among its provisions are those affirming children's right to the highest attainable standard of health care (article 24), and to express views (article 12) and receive information (article 13). Children have a right to be registered immedi-

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.

A young girl in Beirut.

Children's rights, children's voices

"We need more bridges over the road so we can get to the park," says an eight-year-old from Bristol (United Kingdom). Across the Irish Sea, a seven-year-old says: "You need a see-saw and you need a big aeroplane and you need a wee rubber duck for your bath. You need somewhere to play."

Reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child by States that have ratified the Convention are the vital centre-pieces of the monitoring process. However carefully and completely they may be done, nevertheless, official reports can rarely capture the fullest picture of children's rights in a given country. That is ideally drawn from a variety of sources and voices.

Alternative reports are important complements to official reports, providing depth, details and perspective. The words quoted above come from the *UK Agenda for Children*, produced by the Children's Rights Development Unit, a small British organization supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the UK Committee for UNICEF. Conceived as an alternative report and issued in July 1994, the *Agenda* has earned wide praise for its immediacy, relevance and comprehensiveness.

It manages to be thorough and substantive, as lively as a personal diary, as pertinent as a morning's headline and as urgent as a cry for help. Committee member Hoda Badran has called the *Agenda* "a major innovative contribution" to the methodology of monitoring child rights in an individual country.

The innovations are several. The document is the culmination of two years of research on the part of the Unit and some 183 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Such broad participation allows the report not only to review the UK's legislation and administrative procedures for compli-

ance with the Convention, but also to examine what is actually happening in practice.

Moreover, it includes the input of children, another innovation that illustrates the extent to which the Unit and participating NGOs were inspired by the Convention's directives to let the views of children be heard and make the Convention provisions widely known to adults and children alike.

The voices of children echo throughout: "Parents shouldn't have the right to hit children," says a 13-year-old from Lincolnshire. "It just makes children grow up to be violent."

"At the age of 13, I was looking after the house, looking after my mum, shielding my mum from attacks from my dad — which is a hell of a lot for a 13-year-old to take on," says a 17-year-old from Merseyside.

"Kids can't play where I live; needles everywhere, stolen cars, no one cares," laments a 14-year-old from Manchester. School club members, children in jail, those in institutions, the homeless, those caring for sick or disabled parents, abused children and others were all heard in an effort to reflect the wide and often difficult realities of children's lives. The Unit set up more than 40 consultation sessions with children, who ranged in age from 6 to 18 years.

Their words strengthen the study, which analyses the Convention's articles grouped in 12 key policy areas: personal freedoms, care of children, physical and personal integrity; an adequate standard of living; health and health care services; environment; education; play and

leisure; youth justice; child labour; immigration and nationality; children and violent conflict (Northern Ireland); abduction; and international obligations. Within each area, the UK's compliance with all relevant articles is examined, along with compliance with three general principles or 'umbrella' articles: non-discrimination (article 2), the best interests of the child (article 3) and the right of children to express views and have them taken seriously in all decisions affecting them (article 12).

Thus, an 18-year-old from Northern Ireland, quoted in the chapter on the "adequate standard of living" policy area, makes the impact of changes in the social security system come alive: "We have to lock the door, turn off the lights and pretend we are not in every time we see the rent man or the milkman."

Such contributions help bring to life an exhaustive study of children's rights for which no issue is too small for attention — school uniforms, the opening of mail in children's homes — or too large — for instance, the chapter on children and violent conflict, which is devoted exclusively to Northern Ireland. Transport policy, housing codes, environmental regulations are all put under the microscope.

Nor does any problem defy solution. Sections on Actions Required for Compliance appear within chapters, and the suggestions made are summarized at each chapter end. The Committee on the Rights of the Child could hardly have a clearer picture of the status of children's rights in the UK, nor a more systematic, constructive and eloquent guide to what needs to be done.

ately after birth and to have a name and nationality (article 7), a right to play (article 31) and to protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (article 34).

The Convention recognizes that not all governments have the resources necessary to ensure all economic, social and cultural rights immediately. But it commits them to make those rights a priority and to ensure them to the maximum extent of available resources.

Fulfilling their obligations sometimes requires States to make fundamental changes in national laws, institutions, plans, policies and practices to bring them into line with the principles of the Convention.

The first priority must be to generate the political will to do this. As the drafters of the Convention recognized, real change in the lives of children will come about only when social attitudes and ethics progressively change to conform with laws and principles. And when, as actors in the process, children themselves know enough about their rights to claim them.

The official monitor of this process of change is the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Governments are obliged to report to the Committee within two years of ratification, and every five years thereafter, specifying the steps taken to change national laws and formulate policies and actions.

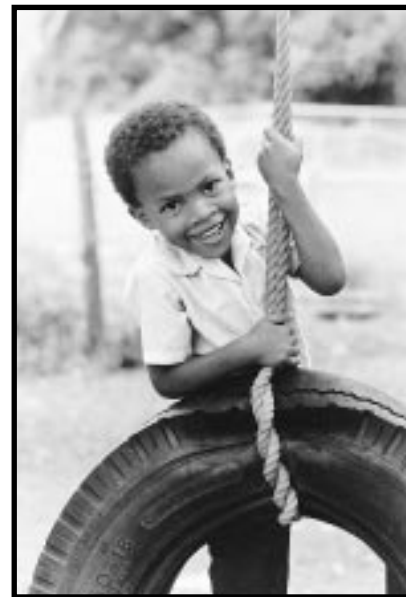
The Committee, made up of 10 experts, gathers evidence from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations, including UNICEF, and these groups may prepare alternative reports to that of a government (Panel 1). The Committee and the government then meet to discuss the country's child rights efforts and the steps necessary to overcome difficulties.

The reporting process has proved dynamic and constructive, with the dialogue established helping to advance children's rights. Unfortunately, however, many countries have missed their reporting deadlines, 28 of them by as much as three years, as of September 1996.

The process of implementing the Convention still remains in its infancy but, as we have noted, the international treaty for children is already beginning to make an impact. As reported in 1996 in UNICEF's annual publication, *The Progress of Nations*, of the 43 countries whose reports had been reviewed at the time, 14 had incorporated the principles of the Convention into their constitutions and 35 had passed new laws or amended existing laws to conform to the Convention. And 13 had built the Convention into curricula or courses to begin the key process of educating children about their rights.¹

Around the world, teachers, lawyers, police officials, judges and caregivers are being trained in the principles and the application of the Convention. Inspired by the Convention, Sierra Leone has demobilized child soldiers. In Rwanda, UNICEF, under the Convention's aegis, has been working to move children held in adult detention centres for alleged war offences to special juvenile institutions and has hired lawyers to defend them. And reforms, changes and improvements continue to accumulate around the world (Panel 2).

The monitoring of the Convention and media coverage of the issues have promoted international awareness of gross violations of children's rights. Major initiatives such as the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, and the International Conference on Child



Among the rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the right to play. A boy on a rope-swing in Barbados, where the Convention was ratified in 1990.

UNICEF/37103/Rotner

Bringing the Convention to life



UNICEF/95-0071/Shadiq

Some of the most significant changes sparked by the Convention on the Rights of the Child are those now occurring in the legal systems of countries.

The measures range from broad endorsements of children's rights to the revision of laws and changes in national constitutions. Togo, for instance, has incorporated all operative articles of the Convention into its new Constitution. Other African countries that have introduced elements of the Convention into their Constitutions include Angola, Ethiopia, Namibia and Uganda. For example, Ethiopia's Constitution establishes the best interests of the child as a primary consideration.

South Africa's proposed Constitution recognizes, among others, the rights of children to a name, to basic nutrition, to education, to health and social services and to protection from exploitative labour practices. Eritrea's

proposed Constitution also contains protections for children and families. Angola's Family Code sets out the equal responsibility of mothers and fathers for their children; the country's Family Tracing Law is the legal foundation for the efforts to reunite children and families separated by years of civil conflict.

In Honduras, the country's governing body unanimously approved a new detailed Children's Rights Code based on the Convention. The new Code, drafted over three years by members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government ministries, came into force in September 1996, on Honduras' National Day for the Child. To implement the Code, training is being provided for 75 judges, 293 mayors and 300 staff of government institutions and NGOs.

In Uganda, the new Children's Statute, signed by President Yoweri Museveni in April 1996, is regarded by

child rights advocates as a pioneering and historic step for Africa. Guided by the Convention, the Statute affirms the country's commitment to meeting the needs of its youngest citizens. Among other measures, it empowers local authorities to establish Family and Children Courts in every district, spells out foster care and adoption procedures, and establishes humane processes for the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

Tunisia's Code for the Protection of Children, adopted in October 1995, contains 123 articles that bring national laws into harmony with the Convention.

Nepal has also adopted comprehensive child rights legislation in its Children's Act. Child welfare boards, consisting of representatives of government ministries, NGOs and professional groups, are being created at both district and national levels to implement the Act.

Other countries that have passed legislation on child rights concerns include China, which enacted a law in 1995 that states that Chinese citizens, regardless of ethnic group, race, sex, age, occupation, property status or religious belief, have the right and obligation to receive education. St. Kitts and Nevis passed a law in 1994 establishing an agency to formulate policy and deliver services benefiting children. In Burkina Faso, a law has made child rights part of both primary and secondary curricula, and the country is establishing courts and appointing judges for children.

A schoolroom in Burkina Faso.

Labour, scheduled for October 1997 in Oslo, derive their impetus from the Convention. Highlighting the problems in this way is an essential first step towards their elimination.

In a positive initiative to involve the media in educating children about their rights, the Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media, held in Manila in July 1996, included a wide range of participants in four days of discussions on how to educate, inform and entertain children while also taking into account their best interests.

UNICEF itself is at a turning-point. In its 50th year, the organization has adopted a mission statement that looks to the Convention as its guiding force.

This new mandate has important implications for the work of the organization. Its efforts for children in the past two decades, including the year 2000 goals established by the international community at the World Summit for Children in 1990, are designed to alleviate the worst aspects of poverty for the majority of the world's children. These goals and agreements must now be pursued in the context of the Convention.

In September 1996, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, reported to the General Assembly on the progress made in meeting the Summit's year 2000 goals for children as the decade for action passed the halfway mark. Much of the news is good, with millions of children's lives having been saved since 1990.

But much remains to be done. More than 12.5 million children under five in developing countries continue to die each year, 9 million of them from causes for which inexpensive solutions and measures such as immunization and antibiotics have been routinely applied in the industrialized world for 50 years.²

As long as preventable death and suffering continue on a large scale in the developing world, child survival must remain an urgent priority. But now, within the context of the Convention, UNICEF and the world community must not only maintain the commitment to the year 2000 goals but also look beyond them to social protection and other important needs and rights not expressly contained in the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. The Convention, by expressing and protecting all the rights of children, expands the scope of action required for children and throws a clear shaft of light on paths that extend beyond the year 2000.

Some of these will involve protecting children and youth in conflict with the criminal justice system; others will ensure the development of the young child, support families, end the use of land-mines and continue to try to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources.

It is in this context that *The State of the World's Children 1997* report explores the subject of child labour and its impact on children's development.

The Convention requires families, societies, governments and the international community to take action designed to fulfil the rights of all children in a sustainable, participatory and non-discriminatory manner. In practical terms, this means that the poorest, most vulnerable and often the most neglected children in all societies, rich and poor, must have first call on resources and efforts.

The endeavours to touch their lives will be complex and will require a sustained attack on the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment.

In a world where technology and knowledge are available and easy to share, and per capita income has tripled in the past quarter of a century,³

The world community must not only maintain the commitment to the year 2000 goals but also look beyond them to social protection and other important needs and rights.

Redirecting just one quarter of the developing world's military expenditure — or \$30 billion of \$125 billion — for example, could provide enough additional resources to reach most of the goals for the year 2000.

there can be no excuses: the rights of all children, including those who are most disadvantaged, can be fulfilled.

The international community has tried in this last decade of the 20th century to arrive at a consensus on the way forward on a number of fronts: on human rights, on protection of the environment, on reduction of uncontrolled population growth and on eliminating gender inequality. The avowed aim is sustainable development for all on the basis of social justice and human fulfilment.

Good intentions will now have to be matched with the political will to act and fortified by changes in individual and national attitudes and priorities. An additional \$40 billion a year could ensure access for all the world's people to basic social services such as health care, education and safe water.⁴

Two thirds of this amount could be found by developing countries if they realigned their own budget priorities. Redirecting just one quarter of the developing world's military expenditure — or \$30 billion of \$125 billion⁵ — for example, could provide enough additional resources to reach most of the goals for the year 2000. A similar shift in the targeting of development aid by donor countries could generate much of the rest.

This premise is set out in the 20/20 initiative, which calls for developing countries to increase government

spending on basic social services from the current average of approximately 13 per cent to 20 per cent, and for donor countries to earmark 20 per cent of official development assistance (ODA).

This kind of shift in the way the world uses its resources is no longer an appeal to the charity of those with the power and the purse-strings but is a matter of rights and obligations. The new era in child rights will still need underpinning by attitudinal change, popular pressure and public demands.

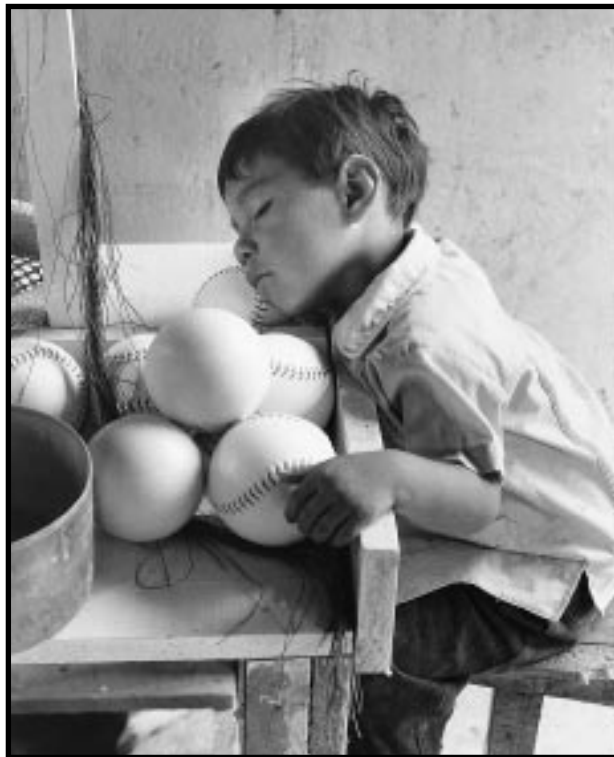
Wherever opinion polls have been undertaken they have shown that people support the ideas and ideals of human rights, child rights and international solidarity. Part of the task, then, is to channel this support into action.

For the past 15 years, *The State of the World's Children* has mobilized public and political support for child survival and development. UNICEF will continue to mobilize, now with the added power and legitimacy of the Convention, because the need for passionate advocacy on behalf of the world's children has not diminished, even now, half a century after the need for UNICEF was internationally acknowledged.

As Philip Alston, a leading child rights lawyer and activist, states: "In the final analysis, appropriate policies will be adopted... only in response to widespread and insistent public outrage."

Chapter II

Children at risk: Ending hazardous and exploitative child labour



UNICEF/89-0627 Vauclair

In cottage industries throughout the world, all family members contribute. In Honduras, a young boy sleeps at the work table where he stitches softballs in his home.



Myth and reality

“Dust from the chemical powders and strong vapours in both the storeroom and the boiler room were obvious.... We found 250 children, mostly below 10 years of age, working in a long hall filling in a slotted frame with sticks. Row upon row of children, some barely five years old, were involved in the work.”¹

The description could come from an observer appalled at the working conditions endured by children in the 19th century in British mills and factories.

The world, you feel, must surely have banished such obscenities to the distant past. But the quote is from a report on the matchstick-making industry of modern-day Sivakasi, in India.

And similar descriptions of children at work in hazardous conditions can be gathered from countries across the world. In Malaysia, children may work up to 17-hour days on rubber plantations, exposed to insect and snake bites. In the United Republic of Tanzania, they pick coffee, inhaling pesticides. In Portugal, children as young as 12 are subject to the heavy labour and myriad dangers of the construction industry. In Morocco, they hunch at looms for long hours and lit-

tle pay, knotting the strands of luxury carpets for export. In the United States, children are exploited in garment industry sweatshops. In the Philippines, young boys dive in dangerous conditions to help set nets for deep-sea fishing.

The world should, indeed, have outgrown the many forms of abuse labouring children endure. But it hasn't, although not for lack of effort. Child labour was one of the first and most important issues addressed by the international community, resulting in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 1919 Minimum Age Convention (Panel 3).

Early efforts were hobbled, in part, because campaigners struggling to end child labour appealed to morality and ethics, values easily sidelined by the drive for profit and the hard realities of commercial life. Child labourers were objects of charity or humanitarian concern but they had no legal rights.

Today's world is different at least in this respect. Children have rights established in international laws, not least in the Convention on the Rights

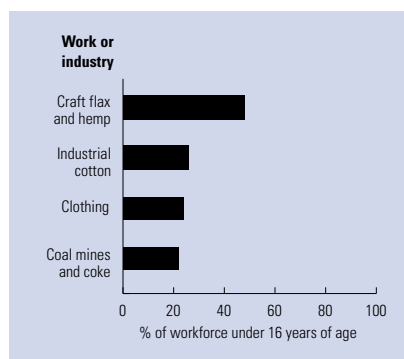
The world should, indeed, have outgrown the many forms of abuse labouring children endure. But it hasn't.

Among the most hazardous of jobs is scavenging. Children, like this boy in Brazil, collect used paper, plastics, rags and bottles from garbage dumps, selling them to retailers for recycling.

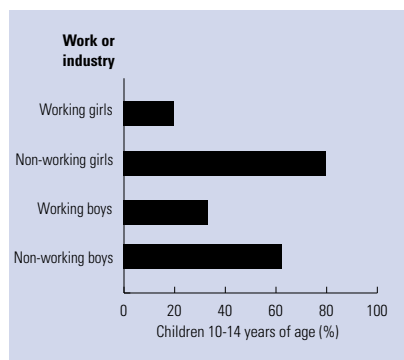
Fig. 1 Child labour: A look at the past

The industrialized world had significant numbers of children working, as recently as 100 years ago. The following charts show the composition of the workforce, in some cases approaching 50 per cent children. Working hours were often long. For instance, in Ghent industries in 1847, a child's work week was generally the same as an adult's: 13 hours per day, 78 hours per week. The charts do not reflect the unpaid work done by children at home.

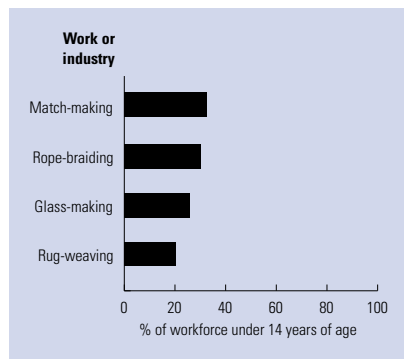
Belgium, ca. 1850



England and Wales, ca. 1850



Japan, 1900



Source: H. Cunningham, and P.P. Viazzo (eds.), *Child Labour in Historical Perspective, 1800-1985: Case studies from Europe, Japan and Colombia*, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, 1996, pp. 27, 42, 78.

of the Child, which has now been ratified by all but a few countries. Ratification specifically obligates governments — in article 32 — 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.”

But beyond that article, children’s exploitation in work contravenes many more of the rights enshrined in the Convention, among them children’s rights to care by their parents, to compulsory and free primary education, to the highest attainable standard of health, to social security, and to provisions for rest and recreation. The rights of those children whose primary activity is work are, without question, in jeopardy.

Looking at children’s work through the lens of children’s rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as this *State of the World’s Children* report seeks to do, offers not only new ways of understanding the problem of child labour but also provides new impetus and direction to the movement against it.

As we will see, child labour is often a complex issue. Powerful forces sustain it, including many employers, vested interest groups and economists proposing that the market must be free at all costs, and traditionalists believing the caste or class of certain children denudes them of rights.

Our lodestar must always be the best interests of the child. It can never be in the best interests of a child to be exploited or to perform heavy and dangerous forms of work. No child should labour in hazardous and exploitative conditions, just as no child should die of preventable illnesses.

On this point there can be no doubt. Work that endangers children’s

physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development must end. Hazardous child labour is a betrayal of every child’s rights as a human being and is an offence against our civilization.

Four myths about child labour

The recent surge of interest in child labour has too often been founded upon — and contributed to — four myths about child labour that it is vital to confront. The first is that child labour is uniquely a problem of the developing world. The second is that child labour emerges inevitably and naturally out of poverty and thus will always be with us. The third is that most child labourers are at work in sweatshops producing cheap goods for export to the stores of the rich world. And the fourth is that there is a simple solution to the child labour problem — a ‘trade sanction’ or ‘boycott’ — that will end it once and for all.

Myth One

Child labour only happens in the poor world — While the vast majority of working children are found in developing countries, children routinely work in all countries. In every country, rich and poor, it is the nature of the work children do that determines whether or not they are harmed by it — not the plain fact of their working. Few people in the industrialized world, for example, would look upon the employment of a child to deliver newspapers for an hour or two before school as an exploitative form of child labour, despite the fact that the child will certainly be paid less than normal adult rates for the job. Often such a job will be encouraged in the interest of the child’s gaining experience of the ‘real world’ of work and commerce.

Legislative landmarks

From the first international child labour convention (1919), which saw working children in terms of wage employment in formal-sector manufacturing, the world's position on child labour has evolved and expanded over the years. It has come to address non-industrial work by children, and most recently, to prohibit any kind of work, paid or unpaid, that is injurious to children, and to set out safeguards and protections for children who work. States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, are required to provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment "having regard to the relevant provisions of other international instruments" (article 32). The laws outlined below are international landmarks in protecting children.

1919: Minimum Age (Industry) Convention No. 5. Adopted at the first session of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and ratified by 72 countries, the Convention established 14 years as the minimum age for children to be employed in industry. It was the first international effort to regulate children's participation in the workplace and was followed by numerous ILO instruments applicable to other economic sectors.

1930: ILO Forced Labour Convention No. 29 provides for the suppression of the use of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms. The term "forced or compulsory labour" is considered to mean all work or service exacted from any people under the threat of penalty and for which they have not offered themselves voluntarily. Ratifications: 139 States as of mid-September 1996.

1966: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and entered into force in 1976, it reaffirms the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) with regard to civil and political rights and commits States parties to take action to realize these rights. Article 8 states that no one should be kept in slavery or servitude or be required to perform forced or compulsory labour. Ratifications: 135 States as of mid-September 1996.

1966: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and entered into force in 1976, it reaffirms the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with regard to economic, social and cultural rights. Article 10 enjoins States parties to protect young people from economic exploitation and from employment in work harmful to their morals, their health or their lives, or likely to hamper their normal development. It also commits States parties to set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law. Ratifications: 135 States as of mid-September 1996.

1973: ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138 supersedes prior instruments applicable to limited economic sectors. The Convention obliges member States to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour. In this connection, it establishes that no child can be employed in any economic sector below the age designated for the completion of compulsory schooling — and not less than 15 years. The minimum age for admission to any work likely to jeopardize health, safety or morals is 18 years. Ratifications: 49 States as of mid-September 1996.

Minimum Age Recommendation No. 146 calls on States to raise the minimum age of employment to 16 years. While not legally obligating, it nonetheless is a strong call to action on the part of member States. Convention No. 138 and this Recommendation are regarded as the most comprehensive international instruments and statements on child labour.

1989: Convention on the Rights of the Child. Enshrines as interdependent and indivisible the full range of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all children that are vital to their survival, development, protection and participation in the lives of their societies. Because of this connection between children's rights and their survival and development, virtually all the Convention's articles address issues — such as education, health, nutrition, rest and relaxation, social security, the responsibilities of parents — that are related to child labour and its effects on children. One of the tenets of the Convention is that in all actions concerning children, their best interests should be taken fully into account. Article 32 recognizes children's right to be protected from work that threatens their health, education or development and enjoins States parties to set minimum ages for employment and to regulate working conditions. Ratifications: 187 States as of mid-September 1996.

1996: ILO proposes for discussion a new convention on hazardous child labour or the elimination of the most intolerable forms of child labour.



UNICEF/55301/saac

The long hours and strains of carpet-weaving cause muscular diseases and deformities, and the inhalation of carpet fibre and chemicals leads to respiratory infections. A boy in Afghanistan works at a loom.

This is also how children's work is regarded by many families in the developing world — with the difference that these families are often in dire need of the income or help their children can provide, whereas children in industrialized countries are often working for pocket money.

When all forms of work are considered, the percentage of children working in industrialized countries can be surprisingly high. In the United Kingdom, for example, the most reliable estimates available show that between 15 and 26 per cent of 11-year-olds and between 36 and 66 per cent of 15-year-olds are working.²

Most of these child workers in industrialized countries also attend school. But there is a naïvety in the assumption that the only kind of work undertaken by children in the West is on the 'pocket money' model. Industrialized nations tend to see themselves as having completely eradicated the harsher forms of child labour and thus preach that poorer countries should follow their example.

Yet hazardous forms of child labour can be found in most rich countries. Usually, the exploited children come from ethnic minorities or immigrant groups, as with the Gypsy and Albanian communities in Greece. In the US, for example, the majority of child workers are employed in agriculture, and a high proportion of them are from immigrant or ethnic-minority families. A study by the US General Accounting Office showed a 250 per cent increase in child labour violations between 1983 and 1990. In a three-day sting operation in 1990, the US Department of Labor discovered more than 11,000 children working illegally.³ The same year, a survey of Mexican-American children working on New York state farms showed that almost half had worked in fields still wet with pesticides and more than

a third had themselves been sprayed, either directly or indirectly.⁴

Myth Two

Child labour will never be eliminated until poverty disappears — It is true that the poorest, most disadvantaged sectors of society supply the vast majority of child labourers. The conclusion often drawn from this is that child labour and poverty are inseparable and that calls for an immediate end to hazardous child labour are unrealistic. We are told we must tolerate the intolerable until world poverty is ended.

This is very convenient for all those who benefit from the status quo. But it is also untrue. The fact remains that when a child is engaged in hazardous labour, someone — an employer, a customer or a parent — benefits from that labour. It is this element of exploitation that is overlooked by those who see child labour as inseparable from poverty. However poor their families may be, children would not be harmed by work if there were not people prepared and able to exploit them. And child labour, in fact, can actually perpetuate poverty, as a working child grows into an adult trapped in unskilled and badly paid jobs.

Of course, poverty must be reduced. Its reduction by economic growth, by employment generation and by investment, by better distribution of income, by changes in the global economy, as well as by better allocation of government budgets and better targeting of aid flows will reduce the potential pool of child labourers.

But hazardous child labour can and must be eliminated independently of wider measures aimed at poverty reduction.

At the highest level, governments have begun to move on the issue, to make good the commitments they assumed in ratifying the Convention

on the Rights of the Child. In New Delhi in 1996, for example, labour ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement agreed that “exploitative child labour wherever it is practised is a moral outrage and an affront to human dignity.” They resolved to give “immediate priority for total and de facto elimination of child labour in hazardous employments.”⁵ At the local level, activists’ groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are exploring ways to remove children from dangerous work situations and provide alternatives for them. And in August 1996, the third South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Ministerial Conference on the Children of South Asia committed member States to ending bonded labour by the year 2000 and to “eliminate the evil of child labour” by 2010.

The end of hazardous child labour does not have to — and must not — wait for the end of poverty. World poverty cannot be eliminated by the end of the decade. But hazardous child labour — and the grave violation of the rights of the children involved — can be.

Myth Three

Child labour primarily occurs in export industries — Export industries are the most visible sector in which children work. Soccer balls made by children in Pakistan for use by children in industrialized countries may be a compelling symbol. But we must not lose sight of the tens of millions of children all around the world who work in non-export areas, often in hazardous or exploitative conditions. In fact, only a very small percentage of all child workers are employed in export-sector industries — probably less than 5 per cent.⁶

A 1995 study in Bangladesh, for example, revealed that children were

active in more than 300 different kinds of jobs outside the export sector. These ranged from household work to brick-making, from stone-breaking to selling in shops and on streets, from bike-repairing to garbage-collecting and rag-picking.⁷ What is more, this assessment took into account only jobs done in cities. Most children work on farms and plantations or houses, far from the reach of labour inspectors and from media scrutiny.

If we allow the notion that the most exploited child workers are **all** in the industrial export sector to take hold, we would do a grave disservice to that great majority of children who labour in virtual invisibility.

Myth Four

The only way to make headway against child labour is for consumers and governments to apply pressure through sanctions and boycotts —

This is incorrect on two counts. First, it implies that all the momentum for action on child labour is generated by Western pressure — and that people, NGOs, the media and governments in developing countries have been ignoring or condoning the problem. In fact, activists and organizations, both local and international, have been diligently at work in developing countries for years, exposing child labour abuses, developing local and national programmes and promoting consumer awareness in their own countries and in the West through international campaigns.

The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour is one important example. Launched in 1991 to help children in six countries, it now works with NGO and government partners in 19 countries (Panel 4). To cite just two others, in a UNICEF-assisted programme in the Philippines, teams composed of gov-

The end of hazardous child labour does not have to — and must not — wait for the end of poverty.

IPEC partnerships for children



UNICEF/Halevi

In Brazil, trade unions have publicized the problems of child labour and have managed to secure child labour clauses in contracts with employers in 88 municipalities in 8 federal states. In northern Thailand, the Daughters' Education Programme is helping young girls in 70 communities with basic non-formal education, counselling and skills training and alerting them, their families, their teachers and the leaders of their communities to the dangers that prostitution poses.

These are only two examples of how the International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is working to end hazardous and exploitative child labour. IPEC has distinguished itself with its creative and flexible approach, tailored to fit children's needs and countries' capacities. It has also earned respect for reinforcing the national commitment and structures on which permanent improvements depend.

Launched in 1991 with a grant from

the German Government, IPEC currently has 19 participating countries — Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand and Turkey. Another 10 countries are preparing to launch the programme.

An IPEC programme begins with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the government and ILO, detailing areas of cooperation. Studies and surveys define the nature and magnitude of child labour problems in a country, and together with consultations, form the base on which the national plan of action is created.

Once a country's plan is developed, government agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, NGOs, universities and the media carry it out. Since no single organization or strategy can offer a complete solution to the problem of child labour, partnerships and alliances are vital. A country establishes a

committee to coordinate the various participating groups and oversee the programme's management. This involvement of many partners both strengthens a nation's capacity to effect change and builds a sense of country ownership of IPEC programmes.

Another essential element of the IPEC approach is to create awareness of the dangers and extent of child labour. The message is spread in various ways, such as radio programming, which has proven to be a powerful and cost-effective tool, particularly in rural areas. In Thailand, cartoon and picture books describe the dangers of child labour.

IPEC also helps countries strengthen legislation and enforcement and monitoring capacities. Many countries have started training labour inspectors as they are often the only ones who can gain access to 'invisible' child workers. A field-tested labour inspection manual developed by IPEC is now available in several languages. Programmes also focus on other broader legislative issues, such as reconciling labour and education laws to ensure that the minimum age for employment in a country is higher than the age at which a child completes compulsory education.

Education and awareness-raising are often complementary components of programmes. In India, for example, when the Centre for Rural Education and Development Association (CREDA), supported by the Indian Government and IPEC, conducted a wide awareness campaign among community members, loom owners and children, more than 4,500 child workers left the carpet industry. The 68 centres for non-formal learning that CREDA has set up in the area give the children a basic grounding in life skills and vocational training, nutrition, health and child rights. As a result of

strong parental and community support, many other children were released from looms; an additional 1,500 at-risk children were admitted to government schools.

The needs of children who combine work with school are also addressed by IPEC. In Indonesia, for example, learning materials have been developed for use in a large government-funded non-formal education programme. The curriculum includes subjects such as literacy, numeracy, basic housekeeping, hygiene and life skills set out in a teacher's guide and trainee booklets. Several ILO-IPEC implementing agencies have started to use the materials.

None of these innovations would be possible without the support of IPEC's donors, which include Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway and the United States. Last year, the Government of Spain provided a grant to expand IPEC to 13 countries in Latin America.

The IPEC budget is small, and programme costs seem especially low when weighed against the benefits: better lives and futures for children.

Photo: Vocational training is a part of many IPEC programmes. In Thailand, a boy sews garments.

ernment inspectors, social workers, police, NGOs, prosecutors and the media regularly investigate working children's conditions, removing those in danger. And in Bangladesh, where primary education is a high priority, a joint NGO/government non-formal education programme for 1.4 million poor urban children was designed in late 1995.

Second, this myth implies that there is one clear highway, usually involving trade sanctions and consumer boycotts, speeding a newly impassioned global society all the way to the resolution of the problem.

International commitment and pressure are undoubtedly important. But sanctions affect only export industries, which, as we have seen, exploit a relatively small percentage of child labourers. And sanctions are also blunt instruments with long-term consequences that may not be foreseen, with the result that they harm, instead of help, children.

The Harkin Bill, which was introduced into the US Congress in 1992 with the laudable aim of prohibiting the import of products made by children under 15, is a case in point. As of September 1996, the Bill had yet to find its way onto the statute books. But the mere threat of such a measure panicked the garment industry of Bangladesh, 60 per cent of whose products — some \$900 million in value — were exported to the US in 1994.⁸ Child workers, most of them girls, were summarily dismissed from the garment factories. A study sponsored by international organizations took the unusual step of tracing some of these children to see what happened to them after their dismissal. Some were found working in more hazardous situations, in unsafe workshops where they were paid less, or in prostitution.

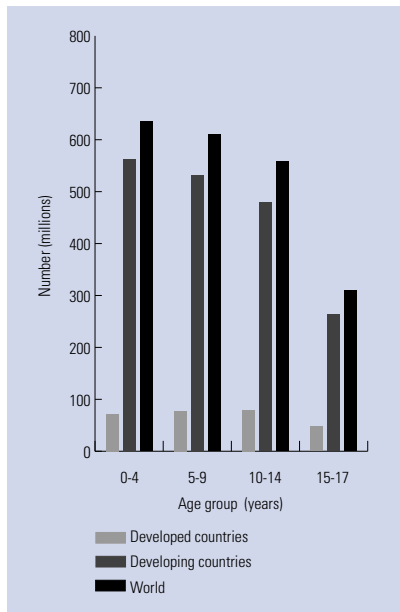


A boy feeds a charcoal furnace in Mato Grosso do Sul (Brazil).

Iolanda Huzak

Fig. 2 The world's children: How many, how old?

The world's children (0-18 years) number over 2 billion. Nearly 9 out of 10 of them (87 per cent) live in developing countries.



Source: UN Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 1994 revision, United Nations, New York, 1995.

This, then, was a classic case of good motives gone wrong. However, not all was lost. A ground-breaking agreement was reached to protect the affected children (Panel 12).

A clear lesson can be learned in all of this. Because of their potential to do harm, in any situation where sanctions are contemplated, a child-impact assessment would need to be made at the point of application, and constant monitoring would be needed thereafter to gauge the long-term effects on children.

What is child labour?

It is time to define terms. The phrase 'child labour' conjures up a particular image: we see children chained to looms in dark mills and sweatshops, as if in a long and nightmarish line running from Lancashire in the 1830s right through to the South Asia of the 1990s.

In reality, 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. There are vast areas of activity between these two poles, including work that need not impact negatively on the child's development.

At the most destructive end, no one would publicly argue that exploiting children as prostitutes is acceptable in any circumstances. The same can be said about 'bonded child labour', the term widely used for the virtual enslavement of children to repay debts incurred by their parents or grandparents. This also applies to industries notorious for the dire health and

safety hazards they present: for example, the charcoal furnaces in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul, or the glass-bangle factories of Firozabad in India. Hazardous work is simply intolerable for all children.

But 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 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 and sexual exploitation;
- ▶ work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development.⁹

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 — includ-

ing adequate self-esteem, family attachment, feelings of love and acceptance;

- social and moral development — including a sense of group identity, the ability to cooperate with others and the capacity to distinguish right from wrong.¹⁰

The physical harm is, of course, 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 per cent of their biological potential, as they expend stores of stamina that should last into adulthood.¹¹

Children are also vulnerable psychologically: they can 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 is one of the keys that will unlock the prison cell of hazardous labour in which so many children are confined. It is almost impossible to overemphasize this point.

Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially, and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour. Work can interfere 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;
- some occupations, especially seasonal agricultural work, cause children to miss too many days of class even though they are enrolled in school;
- the social environment of work sometimes undermines the value children place on education, something to

which street children 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.¹²

How old is a child?

All cultures share the view that the younger the children, the more vulnerable they are physically and psychologically and the less they are able to fend for themselves. Age limits are a formal reflection of society's judgement about the evolution of children's capacities and responsibilities.

Almost everywhere, age limits formally regulate children's activities: when they can leave school; when they can marry; when they can vote; when they can be treated as adults by the criminal-justice system; when they can join the armed forces — and when they can work.

But age limits differ from activity to activity and from country to country. The legal minimum age for all work in Egypt, for example, is 12, in the Philippines 14, in Hong Kong 15. Peru adopts a variety of standards: the minimum age is 14 in agriculture; 15 in industry; 16 in deep-sea fishing; and 18 for work in ports and seafaring.¹³

Many countries make a distinction between light and hazardous work, with the minimum age for the former generally being 12, for the latter usually varying between 16 and 18.¹⁴ The ILO Minimum Age Convention also broadly adopts this approach, allowing light work at age 12 or 13, but hazardous work not before 18.¹⁵

Nevertheless, ILO also establishes a general minimum age of 15 years — provided 15 is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling. This is the most widely used yardstick

Fig. 3 The working child: 1 out of every 4 in the developing world

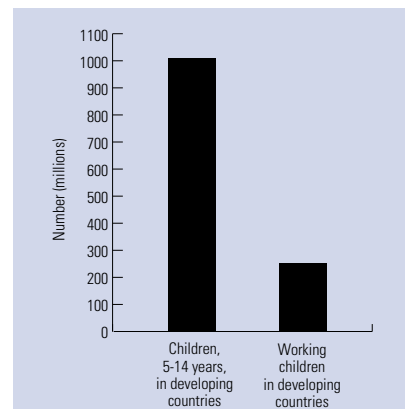
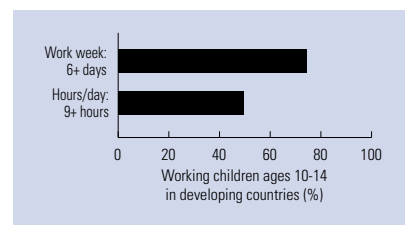


Fig. 4 Long days, long weeks

Of the projected 190 million working children in the 10-14 age group in the developing world, three quarters of them work six days a week or more and one half work nine hours a day or more.



Note: Because of the scarcity of data on child labour, Figs. 3 and 4 represent projections of the numbers of the developing world's working children and of their hours, based on ILO surveys in specific countries.

when establishing how many children are currently working around the world.

How many children work?

Nobody knows for sure. ILO, one authority on the subject, considers the existing statistics vastly inadequate and unreliable and the process of data collection fraught with complications. A recent ILO limited survey, which indicated that 73 million of the world's children are employed — equivalent to 13 per cent of those aged 10 to 14¹⁶ — helps illustrate some of the problems.

The survey was limited for many reasons. Many national governments did not respond. It did not include children at work in industrialized nations. It did not count the millions of child workers believed to be under 10 years of age, nor those employed in the informal sector, or attending school who might also be working. Nor did it include the biggest group of invisible workers: all those children — mainly girls — who are engaged in domestic labour, whether for their own families or as servants.

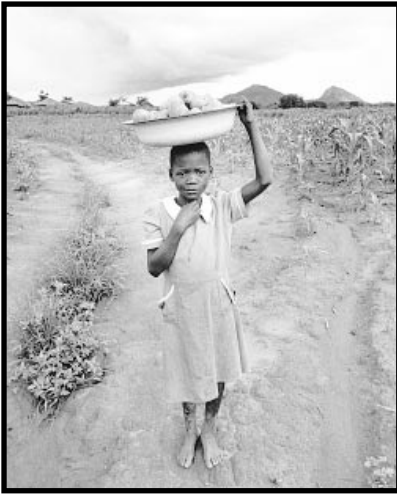
The collection of solid and reliable data regarding child labour is limited also by the fact that, in certain instances, it is presumed officially not to exist and therefore is not included in surveys or covered by official statistics. Further uncounted child labourers can be discovered if we surmise that children currently not enrolled in or attending school are working in some form or another. In India alone that would add some 90 million children, most of them girls, to the total. So, while it is impossible to cite a single authoritative figure, it is clear that the number of child workers worldwide runs into hundreds of millions (Fig. 3).

ILO, to better quantify the problem, recently launched experimental surveys in Ghana, India, Indonesia and Senegal, which employed local statisticians to study a sample of about 4,000 households and 200 businesses in each country. The results showed that the average percentage of economically active children aged between 5 and 14 was 25 per cent, and in Senegal it was as high as 40 per cent.¹⁷

Worldwide, the big picture looks something like this: the vast majority of all child labourers live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Half of them can be found in Asia alone, although their proportion may be declining in South-East Asia as per capita income increases, basic education spreads and family size decreases. Africa has an average of one in three children working.¹⁸ In Latin America, one child in five works.¹⁹ These proportions have increased partly due to the economic crisis of the 1980s and, in Africa, because of the lack of public investment in education as well as because of armed conflict. In both Africa and Latin America, only a tiny proportion of child workers are involved in the formal sector. The vast majority work for their families, in homes, in the fields and on the streets.

Child labour has increased substantially in Central and Eastern European countries as a result of the abrupt switch from centrally planned to market economies. In industrialized countries, such as the UK and the US, meanwhile, the growth of the service sector and the quest for a more flexible workforce have contributed to an expansion of child labour. Political unrest and HIV/AIDS in African countries have resulted in increased reliance on child labour.

To see behind this big picture, the need for reliable measurements of the



UNICEF/98-1226/Andrew

HIV/AIDS has resulted in greater numbers of children as heads of household who must fend for themselves. A girl in Malawi, one of nine children in a family orphaned by AIDS, carries a bowl full of mangoes.

prevalence of child labour, according to internationally agreed definitions, is paramount. Governments, NGOs and international institutions need to work together on this massive task.

Above all, we need to know how many children are involved in detrimental work, at the worst end of the continuum. This is the group of children that policies and programmes need to reach most urgently.

Without this clearer information, the true scale of the problem will remain unknown. What has long hidden in the shadows will only emerge into the light, fully and finally, when we can measure it, and thus systematically move to eradicate it.

The roots of child labour

Most children who work do not have the power of free choice. They are not choosing between career options with varying advantages, drawbacks and levels of pay. A fortunate minority have sufficient material means behind them to be pulled towards work as an attractive option offering them even more economic advantages. But the vast majority are pushed into work that is often damaging to their development by three key factors: the exploitation of poverty; the absence of education; and the restrictions of tradition.

The exploitation of poverty

The most powerful force driving children into hazardous, debilitating labour is the exploitation of poverty. Where society is characterized by poverty and inequity, the incidence of child labour is likely to increase, as does the risk that it is exploitative.

For poor families, the small contribution of a child's income or assistance at home that allows the parents to work can make the difference be-

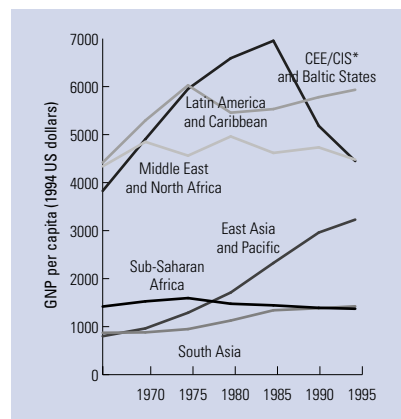
tween hunger and a bare sufficiency. Survey after survey makes this clear. A high proportion of child employees give their entire wages to their parents. Children's work is considered essential to maintaining the economic level of the household (Figs. 5 and 6). A review of nine Latin American countries has shown that without the income of working children aged 13-17, the incidence of poverty would rise by between 10 and 20 per cent.²⁰

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 not they but their children who are offered the jobs. Why? Because children can be paid less, of course. (In Latin America, for example, children aged 13-17 earn on average half the pay of a wage-earning adult with 7 years of education.²¹) Because children are more malleable: they will do what they are told without questioning authority. Because children are more powerless: they are less likely to organize against oppression and can be physically abused without striking back.

Put simply, children are employed because they are easier to exploit. Many employers, if challenged, will plead their own relative poverty and their need to pay the lowest wages in order to compete and survive. Others are more unashamed about their role, seeing the exploitation of children's work as a natural and necessary part of the existing social order. Owners of bonded labourers quoted by an Indian researcher, for example, believed that low-caste children should work rather than go to school. "Once they are allowed to come up to an equal level, nobody will go to the fields. Fields will be left uncultivated everywhere. We have to keep them under our

Fig. 5 Family purchasing power falls in many regions

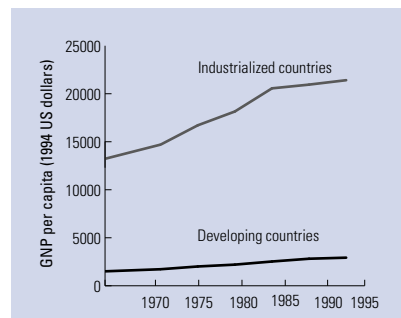
Children can be forced into hazardous labour when family income and purchasing power decrease and parents cannot provide for their needs. The drop in purchasing power since 1990 has been dramatic in the Russian Federation and in some neighbouring countries in Asia. Families are growing poorer in sub-Saharan Africa and have lost economic ground recently in the Middle East and North Africa also.



* Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States

Fig. 6 Purchasing power: Industrialized vs. developing countries

The gap continues to widen between strong industrialized economies and those in the developing world.



Note: These charts reflect local purchasing power in constant 1994 prices based on per capita gross national product (GNP). South Africa's GNP is not included in the sub-Saharan data.

Source for both figures: World Bank 1995 data.

In half of 14 countries surveyed, classrooms for grade 1 have sitting places for only 4 in 10 pupils. Half the pupils have no textbooks. Half the classrooms have no chalkboards.

strong thumb in order to get work done.”²²

Exploitation of the poor and the powerless not only means that adults are denied jobs that could better have sustained their families. It not only means that children are required to work in arduous, dangerous conditions. It also means a life of unskilled work and ignorance not only for the child but often for the children of generations to come. Any small, short-term financial gain for the family is at the cost of an incalculable long-term loss. Poverty begets child labour begets lack of education begets poverty.

Yet, poverty is not an eternal verity. It is sustained or diminished by political and economic policies and opportunities. Unfortunately, both national and international economic developments in recent decades have served to increase inequality and poverty.

The 1980s marked a serious downturn in the fortunes of many developing countries, as government indebtedness, unwise internal economic policies and recession resulted in economic crisis. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) responded by imposing on indebted nations, in return for loan guarantees, a package of policy prescriptions known as structural adjustment programmes. These sweeping economic reforms aimed to orient countries towards the needs of the global economy, promoting export crops and offering incentives to foreign investors while at the same time slashing government expenditure. All too often, the cuts in expenditure fell on health and education, on food subsidies and on social services, all needed most by the poor.

Firsthand experience in most countries shows that the real cost of adjustment is being paid disproportionately by the poor and by their children. It is also being paid by increas-

ing numbers of child labourers. In Zimbabwe, for example, both government and ILO reports have linked the explosion of child labour directly to the impact of the country’s structural adjustment programme.²³

Gradually, structural adjustment programmes have been modified in an attempt to mitigate their effects on the vulnerable. In new agreements being concluded between governments and the international financial institutions, public expenditure on primary education and other basic social services is increasingly being protected from budget cuts. But most developing countries are still living with the policies of the recent past: unmodified adjustment packages still impact heavily on their poorest citizens. And it is in this state that they must now face the implications of the worldwide scramble for competitiveness associated with ‘globalization’.

And many still concentrate scarce resources on military rather than social priorities. Sub-Saharan Africa now spends around \$8 billion annually on the military, despite the fact that 216 million people in the region live in poverty. Similarly, South Asia — with 562 million in poverty — spent \$14 billion on the military in 1994.²⁴

A serious attack on poverty will reduce the number of children vulnerable to exploitation at work. Social safety nets are essential for the poor, as are access to credit and income-generating schemes, technology, education and basic health services. Budgetary priorities need to be re-examined and redirected in this light.

Tackling the exploitation itself does not have to wait until some future day when world poverty has been brought to an end. Hazardous child labour provides the most powerful of arguments for equality and social justice. It can and must be abolished here and now.

The lack of relevant education

Cuts in social spending have hit education — the most important single step in ending child labour — particularly hard.

In all regions, spending per student for higher education fell during the 1980s, and in Africa and Latin America, spending per pupil also fell for primary education.

A pilot survey, sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF and carried out in 1994 in 14 of the world's least developed countries, reinforced concerns about the actual conditions of primary schools. In half of these countries, classrooms for grade 1 have sitting places for only 4 in 10 pupils. Half the pupils have no textbooks and half the classrooms have no chalkboards. Teachers commonly have to attempt to handle huge classes — an average of 67 pupils per teacher in Bangladesh and nearly 90 per teacher in Equatorial Guinea. In 10 of the 14 countries, most children are taught in a language not spoken at home. And most homes, of course, have no books or magazines in any language.²⁵

Education is clearly underfunded, but the school system as it stands in most developing countries is blighted by more than just a lack of resources. It is too often rigid and uninspiring in approach, promoting a curriculum that is irrelevant to and remote from children's lives.

The quality of teaching is frequently abysmal and the discipline violent, as 11-year-old Sudhir from Kone in India can testify: "In school, teachers would not teach well. If we ask them to teach us alphabets, they would beat us. They would sleep in the class. If we asked them about a small doubt, they would beat us and send us out. Even if we did not under-

stand, they would not teach us. So I dropped out of school."

Sudhir's decision to drop out of school is hardly surprising. And that decision — often made by parents — is mirrored worldwide. Overall, 30 per cent of children in developing countries who enrol in primary school do not complete it.²⁶ The figure rises to 60 per cent in some countries. In Latin America, enrolment in school is comparatively high, yet only half those who enter school finish it, broadly the same proportion as in Africa with its much lower levels of enrolment. Even Brazil, one of the richest countries in the region, has a primary school completion rate of only 40 per cent.²⁷

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

Traditional expectations

The economic forces that propel children into hazardous work may be the most powerful of all. But traditions and entrenched social patterns play a part, too.

In industrialized countries, it is now almost universally accepted that if children are to develop normally and healthily, 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 relatively recently. In the early decades of industrialization, work was thought to be the most effective way of teaching children about life and the world. Some residue of this notion remains in the widespread expectation that teenage children should take on casual jobs alongside school, both to gain an understanding of the way the world functions and to earn spending money of their own.



A girl in Niger goes about her chores.

UNICEF/83-1956/Pirozzi

Child domestic work: Hidden exploitation



UNICEF/95-0647/Outounji

Worldwide, millions of children toil in obscurity in private homes, behind closed doors, as domestic workers. One of the most widespread and least researched forms of child exploitation, domestic work holds many risks for the children — 9 out of 10 of them are girls — who are trapped in a cycle of dreary tasks amounting often to virtual slavery.

Because such work is largely hidden, its true extent is difficult to gauge, but recent studies have helped define the problem more clearly. In Jakarta (Indonesia), a survey discovered that almost one third of all domestic workers — about 400,000 — are under 15. Haiti has an estimated 250,000 child domestics, 20 per cent of whom are 7 to 10 years old.

Children work as domestics in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of southern Europe. Several factors are believed to have precipitated increasing numbers of children into this form of labour over

the past decade or so. The entry of more women into formal and informal labour markets, together with cut-backs in social services in many countries, has created a larger demand for domestic workers, and women and more and more children from impoverished families, including those families driven by poverty from rural to urban areas seeking employment, are a ready source of such workers. Once seen by many as an arrangement of 'patronage', child domestic work should be acknowledged for what it has become: the exploitation of child labour.

Children are employed by wealthy families and by families of modest income also, but living and work conditions are inappropriate in either case. The children are often expected to sleep where they can, on the kitchen floor or in the corner of a child's room. They may live for days on bread and tea and they endure scoldings and beatings. In Togo, for instance, an overwhelming majority of children

surveyed left previous domestic jobs because of a "cruel boss." Child domestics are exposed to emotional and sexual abuse by household members, deprived of their parents' affection and support, and exposed to humiliation by the children of their employers, all of which can deeply affect their self-esteem.

The hours are long. Child domestics in Jakarta work 12 to 15 hours a day. In Dhaka (Bangladesh), half the children interviewed in one study work even longer — 15 to 18 hours. Along with regular chores, like laundry, cooking, cleaning, and minding their employers' children, they are often on call into the night, bringing refreshments and polishing shoes, at the whim of all household members.

They earn little, and girls consistently earn less than boys. Sometimes the only remuneration is leftover food and discarded clothing. A recent survey in Kenya showed that 78 per cent of child domestics report payment "in kind," usually in the form of the occasional new dress or shoes. Only 17 per cent say they are paid in cash.

Few ever attend school. In Benin, for example, only 10 per cent received any formal education, leaving them trapped without skills or options. By drawing on and thus helping sustain a reservoir of uneducated young girls, domestic service in turn perpetuates the problems of poverty and lack of opportunity so deeply associated with the gender gap. In Dhaka, for example, only about 10 per cent of girl domestics are interested in education.

In the Dominican Republic, a child domestic is known as a '*puerta cerrada*', or 'closed door' servant. In Bangladesh, they are the 'tied down'. Their isolation can be almost complete, enduring as they do separation from parents, often for months at a time. In Dhaka, over half of those sur-

veyed see their parents once every nine months or even less often. According to a worker at the Maurice Sixto Shelter for child domestic workers in Port-au-Prince (Haiti), 80 per cent of the children she sees suffer illnesses — upset stomachs, headaches — from emotional trauma.

Few programmes address the multiple developmental risks that child domestic workers face. The Maurice Sixto Shelter is one such programme, aiding 300 child domestics working in a Port-au-Prince suburb. Shelter workers gain the employers' consent to unite child domestics as often as possible with their natural families. The child workers attend non-formal classes with other children in the afternoon.

Another programme is the Sinaga Women and Child Labour Resource Centre in Nairobi (Kenya). Opened in 1994, it hopes to better the lives of some of Kenya's estimated 200,000 child domestic workers by providing basic education classes and skills training (Panel 6).

Domestic work represents grave risks and potential damage to children's development. The world is obliged to recognize and acknowledge these risks and ensure that these invisible workers are allowed to enjoy their childhood and their rights.

Photo: Two girls in the courtyard of the Maurice Sixto Shelter in Haiti, where young domestic workers receive basic education and psychological counselling.

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 example, 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 lower-caste children failing to enrol 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.²⁸

The rigidity of the caste system in India only dramatizes 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 people from racial, ethnic or economic minorities do it. In northern Europe, for example, child labourers are likely to be African or Turkish. In the US, they are Asian or Latin American; in Canada, they are Asian. In Brazil, they tend to be the descendants of slaves or the children of indigenous people with no political clout. In Argentina, many are Bolivian and Paraguayan. In Thailand's fishing industry, many are from Myanmar.

And as traditional forces push children into work in many parts of the world, the situation is worsened by the growing culture of consumerism.

Understanding all the various cultural factors that lead children into work is essential. But deference to tradition is often cited as a reason for not acting against intolerable forms of child labour. Children have an absolute, unnegotiable right to freedom from hazardous child labour — a right now established in international law and accepted by every country that

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.

Child domestic workers are very often cut off from the community, denied rest and play. In Lima (Peru), a survey estimated that nearly a third of domestic workers never leave the home where they work.

has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Respect for diverse cultures should not deflect us from using all the means at our disposal to make every society, every economy, every corporation, regard the exploitation of children as unthinkable.

The shapes of child labour

The many manifestations of child labour can be broken down into seven main types, none of which are 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, work for the family and girls' work.

Domestic service

Child domestic workers are the world's most forgotten children, which is why it is worth considering their plight before that of other, more familiar groups of child workers (Panel 5). Although domestic service need not be hazardous, most of the time it is just that. Children in domestic servitude may well be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, as well as the most difficult to protect. They are often extremely poorly paid or not paid at all; their terms and conditions are very often entirely at the whim of the employers and take no account of their legal rights; they are deprived of schooling, play and social activity, and of emotional support from family and friends. They are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. What more miserable situation could there be for a child — sometimes as young as age five — than to experience such conditions among often hostile strangers?

Consider, for example, a day in the life of seven-year-old Marie, from

Haiti. She is a *restavek* — Creole for *rester avec* — the local term for a type of child domestic found all over the world, one who has been handed over by a poor rural family to live with and provide domestic 'help' for a usually urban, wealthier family. She gets up at five in the morning and begins her day by fetching water from a nearby well, balancing the heavy jug on her head as she returns. She prepares breakfast and serves it to the members of the household. Then she walks the family's five-year-old son to school; later, at noon, she brings him home and helps him change clothes.

Next, she helps prepare and serve the family's lunch before returning the boy to school. In between meal times she must buy food in the market and run errands, tend the charcoal fire, sweep the yard, wash clothes and dishes, clean the kitchen and — at least once a day — wash her female boss's feet. She is given leftovers or cornmeal to eat, has ragged clothes and no shoes and sleeps outdoors or on the floor. She is not allowed to bathe in the water she brings to the household. She is regularly beaten with a leather strap if she is slow to respond to a request or is considered disrespectful. Needless to say, she is not allowed to attend school.²⁹

The very nature of domestic work means that those doing it are shut away from the eyes of the world, unprotected from abuse. As we have seen, this isolation also makes it difficult to establish reliable estimates of the number of children involved. Some idea of the scale of the problem can, however, be gleaned from local surveys.

A survey of middle-income households in Colombo (Sri Lanka) showed that one in three had a child under 14 years of age as a domestic worker. A study of a lower-middle-class residential area in Nairobi (Kenya) found that

20 per cent of households employed children in 1982, though by 1991 this had dropped to 12 per cent, perhaps due to falling living standards. A survey of domestic workers in Uruguay found that 34 per cent had begun working before they were 14.³⁰ A survey in India, noting that 17 per cent of domestic workers were under 15 years old, reported that girls aged 12 to 15 were the preferred choice of 90 per cent of employing households.³¹ Children are often preferred to adults precisely because they can be dominated more easily and, of course, paid less.

The impact of a life like Marie's on a child's development is profound. An obvious negative is poor nutrition, since it is rare that child domestics share equally in the family meals. A Peruvian girl says: "They would give us two rolls to eat with tea. After that I used to go to bed. Meanwhile they were eating buttered toast, coffee with milk, steak, and on top of that, grapes, pears, apples and peaches."³² The evidence is not just anecdotal: a study of 15-year-old *restaveks* in Haiti compared them with other local children and found them on average 4 centimetres shorter and 18 kilograms lighter.³³

Sexual abuse is often regarded by the employer as part of the employment terms. Jeanne, a 15-year-old working in Cotonou (Benin), has the normal heavy workload, is unpaid and is beaten when her employers are dissatisfied with her work. But her greatest problem is the family's 23-year-old son, who rapes her regularly. If she resists, he creates situations that lead to her being beaten.³⁴

Even when not sexually abused, child domestics can suffer severe damage in terms of their psychological and social development. They are very often cut off from the community, denied rest and play. In Lima (Peru), a survey estimated that nearly

a third of domestic workers never leave the home where they work.³⁵ Haitian psychologists who have worked with *restaveks* describe conditions of depression, passivity, sleep and eating disorders, as well as chronic fear and anxiety.³⁶ Among the most common adjectives used to describe child domestic workers are 'timid' and 'listless'. Childhood has been stolen from these children.

Research in this field is still in its infancy. But to promote it, early in 1996 Anti-Slavery International organized a seminar at Charney Manor, Oxfordshire (UK) for NGOs and institutes that have investigated the situation of children in domestic service. Supported financially by ILO-IPEC and by UNICEF, participants came from Bangladesh and Nepal in South Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines in South-East Asia, Kenya in East Africa, Senegal and Togo in West Africa, Haiti in the Caribbean and Guatemala in Central America — eloquent testimony to the extent of the problem. Several major common themes emerged:

► "There is no problem." In virtually all countries where children carry the burdens of household work, society does not regard it as a reprehensible practice. Even some of the activists at the seminar were not convinced that the practice itself — as opposed to its most exploitative forms — was damaging.

► Access to children working in homes is very difficult. Several researchers reported obstruction from employers. Even where access was obtained, it was difficult to conduct meaningful interviews with children when employers insisted on remaining present.

► The need for accurate estimates of the numbers of child domestics and the conditions under which they work was emphasized. Information about



UNICEF/93-0032/Murray-Lee

Family work, the most common of all labour done by children, may be beneficial and give children a sense of self-worth. But it may demand too much of children, even keeping them from school. A girl, 12 years old, in Bangladesh, helps with the household chores.

Kenyan girls find hope at Sinaga



UNICEF/ESARO/Pirozzi

Christine, age 11, cheeks flushed with heat, gingerly lifts a hot tray from the oven and displays her baking — a dozen glistening buns, Christine’s first success in her first cooking lesson. They are also an important part of Christine’s job training.

Christine is one of the thousands of domestic child workers who provide the labour in the urban households of Kenya, allowing the wife or female head of the household to work for income outside the home.

Very often these girl workers are related to the employer, children of brothers, sisters and cousins in the rural areas. The rural family is only too glad to be relieved of the responsibility of feeding a child. And usually, the relative undertakes to educate the child.

Once in the city, however, no one is there to check whether this promise is fulfilled — or to note the long hours of drudgery, discrimination and isolation that are often the lot of these children.

Sinaga is the name of a town in western Kenya. To Christine and the other girls, the name has become synonymous with relief from the loneliness and neglect that characterize their

typical day. It is also a source of hope for the future.

Housed in a two-storey, white-painted concrete block building in Nairobi’s industrial area, the NGO Sinaga offers basic education and training courses — including cooking classes — as well as comfort to young domestic workers. Barely two years old, its full title is Women and Child Labour Resource Centre, and it is funded by the International Labour Organization’s International Programme to Eliminate Child Labour (ILO/IPEC).

Nearly 100 girls are currently enrolled in a six-month course that includes basic literacy, cooking, and introduction to skills such as tailoring and typing. The girls attend classes either in the morning or the afternoon, an arrangement negotiated with their employers by the Centre’s field worker, Mary Musungu.

There is no charge to the employer. Ms. Musungu notes, “Once they realize that the child will get some education and that their work will still get done, they agree. But we have instances when girls are prevented from attending if they start to be too assertive, or question how they are treated in the home.”

Few of the girls are assertive, though. “A child of 12 who’s been labouring in a home since she was 7, cut off from contacts, often undernourished, bullied and abused by the woman employer, sometimes violated by the male, is usually very cowed,” comments Sinaga’s coordinator, Jane Ong’olo. The Centre, although functioning to an extent as a refuge for the girls, has as its main objective to equip them for the time when their usefulness to the employer is exhausted. Mrs. Ong’olo explains, “Very often these girls are pregnant at 14 or 15. Once that happens, they are put out on the streets, and their options for survival are extremely limited.”

Having started out providing basic literacy for the youngest girls, and setting up the skills courses for the teenagers, Sinaga is finding that there is a demand for continuous service to assist the in-between-age girls. “We’re not equipped to provide a school but the need is indicated. We would also like to offer counselling and legal advice for girls who are battered or abused. Sometimes they run away and come here — but we don’t have the resources to act as a shelter,” says Ms. Musungu.

As the sole centre of its kind in Kenya that offers both skills training and basic literacy to girls who are domestic workers, Sinaga has a ground-breaking role to play in sensitizing and informing the general public and authorities alike about conditions for domestic child workers and ways to improve them. Mrs. Ong’olo says, “This sort of work for children will not disappear overnight, but we can ensure that better conditions and working hours are mandatory.”

Photo: Reaching child domestic workers with training and support programmes is a major challenge. A child in Uganda prepares a family’s vegetables.

how many suffer physical or emotional damage, and to what degree, is even more hidden behind closed doors.³⁷

Accurate information can be put to good use. In Kenya, for example, evidence of psychological and emotional damage has helped convince parents and society at large that the problem must be tackled (Panel 6). Both there and in Senegal, community drama projects have raised awareness, particularly in the rural areas likely to be the source of future domestic workers. A different approach has been taken in Sri Lanka, where the Government has targeted employers with large newspaper advertisements stressing that employing child domestics is illegal.³⁸

Forced and bonded labour

Many of the forms of child labour practised around the world are 'forced' in the sense that children are taught to accept the conditions of their lives and not to challenge them.

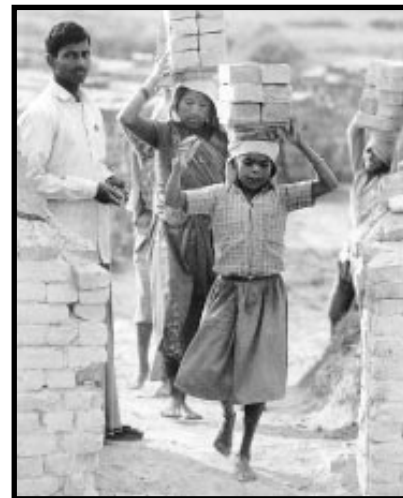
But the situation of some children goes far beyond the acceptance of poor conditions. They find themselves in effective slavery. In South Asia, this has taken on a quasi-institutional form known as 'bonded' child labour. Under this system, children, often only eight or nine years old, are pledged by their parents to factory owners or their agents in exchange for small loans. Their lifelong servitude never succeeds in even reducing the debt.

In India, this type of transaction is widespread in agriculture, as well as in industries such as cigarette-rolling, carpet-making, matchstick-making, slate and silk. The most notorious of these is the carpet industry of Mirzapur-Bhadohi-Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. According to a recent study, the thousands of children in the carpet industry are "kidnapped or lured away

or pledged by their parents for paltry sums of money. Most of them are kept in captivity, tortured and made to work for 20 hours a day 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. Social activists in the area find it hard to work because of the strong mafia-like control that the carpet loom owners have on the area."³⁹

Of course, most worst-exploited children belong to the most marginalized segments of society. As in other countries, these ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups are routinely seen as having no rights whatsoever. Often they themselves have come to believe that they deserve no rights.

This kind of virtual child slavery is usually associated only with India, Nepal and Pakistan. But it exists in other parts of the world, too. In Brazil, for example, forced labour is found from the charcoal-burning projects of Minas Gerais and Bahia to the sugarcane estates of Espírito Santo and the north-east. While most such labour is performed by adults, children are inevitably involved also. In 1993, a British Member of Parliament reported having seen children working to cool down charcoal kilns with mud in Açailândia.⁴⁰ Also in 1993, children as young as four were said to be at work in the cotton harvest in Paraná.⁴¹ In Mauritania, thousands of children are still born each year into effective slavery. A tradition for generations, servitude was officially outlawed in 1980, but 400,000 black Africans serve as slaves, either formally or informally, to their Berber masters.⁴² Another example is in Myanmar, where hundreds of thousands of people, including children, work on construction projects aimed at fostering tourism and economic expansion, often in appalling conditions.



In Nepal, children and women carry bricks on their heads from the brick field to a truck. They earn \$0.25 for every 100 trips.

UNICEF/93-1257/Noranti

Village loan-sharks often act as procurers for city brothels, lending money to the family that the daughter's work must pay off.

Governments of countries where forced child labour exists must redouble their efforts to stamp out the practice and challenge the vested interests that so immorally maintain and benefit from it.

Commercial sexual exploitation

The underground nature of the multi-billion-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 1 million girls worldwide are lured or forced into this form of hazardous labour, which can verge on slavery. Boys are also often exploited.

When scandals about child prostitution in developing countries break in the international media, it is usually a story about the phenomenon called sex tourism in which holiday-makers from the rich world, mainly, though not exclusively, men, travel to locations such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Thailand and elsewhere in search of sex with children.

But we should not lose sight of the fact that many thousands of young girls in numerous countries serve the sexual appetites of local men from all social and economic backgrounds. And widespread child prostitution exists in industrialized countries. In the US alone, at least 100,000 children are believed to be involved.

Direct links between the commercial sexual exploitation of children and other forms of exploitative labour are numerous. Notorious in their own right for appalling working conditions, Nepalese carpet factories, where 50 per cent of the workers are estimated to be children, are common sites of sexual exploitation by employers as well as recruitment centres for Indian brothels. Children are especially powerless to refuse abuse by

employers, either as perpetrators or intermediaries.

Village loan-sharks often act as procurers for city brothels, lending money to the family that the daughter's work must pay off. However it happens, almost all such children are betrayed by those they trust and may end up trafficked long distances and across borders. Rescue and rehabilitation is complicated for children. They often end up being prosecuted by the very legal system that should be protecting them. Even if they make it home, perhaps having been deported as illegal immigrants, they may face stigma and rejection by their families and communities. Shunned, ignored and invisible, they often have little choice but to return to the brothel or the streets.

The physical and psychosocial damage inflicted by commercial sexual exploitation makes it one of the most hazardous forms of child labour. No matter how high the wages or how few the hours, the children involved have to confront serious health risks every day, including respiratory diseases, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and drug addiction. But they are also plunged into a distorted reality in which violence and distrust, shame and rejection are the norms. "We have the same place that bums do in society," said a 15-year-old Senegalese girl exploited through prostitution. "No one wants to know us or be seen with us."

It is crucial that the international public should understand the layers of complicity that envelop this area of child exploitation. Although it is always easier and more comfortable to blame the exploiting 'pimps' or 'perverts' or even the victims themselves, no social sector can escape responsibility for the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Families — entrusted with the care, nurture and development of children — may be

complicit in allowing the child's sexual exploitation. Research has consistently indicated that child abuse and incest are common precursors of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Then, in addition to the people who actually buy sex, there are the traffickers, agents and intermediaries who profit from the sale of children. There are the professional criminals and syndicates that run brothels. There are the entrepreneurs who organize sex tours or who produce tourist brochures encouraging the notion that young girls or boys are sexually available. And there are all the people, including corrupt or apathetic officials, who look the other way.

Beyond even these actors are more elusive and impersonal influences that contribute to the child sex trade, such as a deeply rooted gender discrimination that blunts the perception of violence committed against girls. Global market forces have also contributed to the problem by widening the gap between rich and poor — encouraging migration, destabilizing families, destroying support systems and safety nets. Conflicts and wars, dozens of which are occurring around the world, also create conditions in which children are sexually exploited.

The problem is out in the open now, after decades of what has amounted to a cross-cultural conspiracy of silence. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Sweden in August 1996, put the issue on the world's agenda for the first time. The Agenda for Action agreed upon by participants will guide governments in developing programmes to address the problem.

Industrial and plantation work

“Children work on all types of jobs, such as carrying molten loams of

glass stuck on the tips of iron rods, which are just two feet away from their bodies; drawing molten glass from tank furnaces in which the temperature is between 1,500 and 1,800 degrees centigrade and the arm is almost touching the furnace because the arm of a child is so small; joining and annealing the glass bangles where the work is done over a small kerosene flame in a room with little or no ventilation because a whiff of air can blow out the flame. The whole factory floor is strewn with broken glass and the children run to and fro carrying this burning hot glass with no shoes to protect their feet. Naked electric wires are to be seen dangling everywhere because the factory owners could not be bothered to install insulated internal wiring.” This is a description of the glass-bangle industry in Firozabad (India), in which one quarter of the workforce — around 50,000 — are children under 14.⁴³

All over the world, children work in hazardous conditions. The industries are manifold, from leather-working in the Naples region of Italy to the pre-industrial brick-making of Colombia and Peru, which can involve children as young as eight.

Children are sometimes exploited in mining operations that would be considered too risky for adults in the industrialized world — for example, in the diamond and gold mines of Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa, and in Colombian coal mines. Typically, the children work with the barest minimum of safety equipment and constantly breathe in coal dust.

The respiratory problems faced by child miners are also common in other industries. Many suffer from tuberculosis, bronchitis and asthma. Children working in earthenware and porcelain factories, for example, are often unprotected from the silica dust. In the lock industry, they inhale noxious



Iolanda Huzak

Nearly a third of the agricultural workforce in some developing countries is made up of children, according to a recent ILO report. This young cane cutter is one of millions of children under the age of 14 working in Brazil.

Agricultural labour: A harsh harvest



UNICEF/96-0461/Bataguer

From a distance, the scene has a bucolic beauty, with deep green tea plants massed against the hillside and figures moving slowly through the rows. The sun is barely up, and the early morning mist clings low on the ground. Distance, however, masks reality.

Those who pick the tea or coffee — or cut cane or sisal, or harvest rubber and cocoa — know the harshness of agricultural work firsthand. The backbone of countless societies is back-breaking labour, done with little help from mechanization, under gruelling conditions. And in this planting and plucking, hoeing and raking, children play a large — and largely invisible — role.

No comprehensive data exist on how many children work the world's fields. But a recent report from the International Labour Organization (ILO) says that in some developing countries, nearly a third of the agricultural workforce is comprised of children. Only relatively recently have specific ILO country studies shown how much children contribute to

world food and agricultural commodity production.

In Bangladesh, fully 82 per cent of the country's 6.1 million economically active children work in agriculture, according to a 1989 survey. As many as 3 million children, age 10 to 14, are estimated to work in Brazil's sisal, tea, sugar-cane and tobacco plantations.

In Turkey, a 1989 study found that 60 per cent of workers involved in cotton cultivation were 20 years old or younger. Children are believed to comprise one fourth of all agricultural workers in Kenya. And a 1993 study in Malawi found that the majority of children living on tobacco estates were working full- or part-time (78 per cent of 10- to 14-year-olds and 55 per cent of 7- to 9-year-olds). The situation is by no means restricted to the developing world. Entire families of migrant labourers, including children, help plant and harvest the industrialized world's fruits and vegetables.

The risks are multiple. Children pick crops still dripping with pesticides or spray the chemicals themselves. They

face poisonous snakes and insects and cut themselves on tough stems and on the tools they use. Rising early to work in the damp and cold, often barefoot and dressed in inadequate clothes, they develop chronic coughs and pneumonia. The hours in the fields are long — 8- to 10-hour days are not uncommon — and spent far from running water or other simple comforts.

Skin, eye, respiratory or neurological problems occur in children exposed to agrochemicals or involved in processing crops like sisal. Children harvesting tobacco in Tanzania experience the nausea, vomiting and faintness of nicotine poisoning. Frequent heavy lifting and repetitive strains can permanently injure growing spines. And fatigue plagues those lucky enough to attend school after their work.

Because children have traditionally helped on family farms and in fields, legislation designed to protect children from damaging work — in factories, mines and other industries — usually does not apply to agriculture, making agricultural workers among the least protected of all.

But such work has always had the potential to harm children's development. Some societies make provisions for children's help in the fields — long summer holidays in the northern hemisphere for instance, so children's school work doesn't suffer. Many others do not.

And commercial agriculture — removed from sight, on remote farmlands and plantations and with its quotas, high use of chemicals and profit pressures — has more in common with industrial sweatshops than with an ideal family farm.

Legal, social, economic and educational initiatives are all needed to protect children from the dangers they face, especially since agricultural workers are among the world's poorest.

The Child Welfare Association of Thailand, in collaboration with the country's Ministry of Agriculture and

Cooperatives, studied child workers in sugar-cane and rubber plantations and proposed that the same labour laws for the industrial sector be applied, with appropriate exceptions, to the agricultural sector. They recommended that laws provide for: minimum age for workers because of hazardous working conditions; written employment contracts; and days off and paid leave for all workers. A minimum wage rate of at least 80 per cent of the adult minimum wage was urged for children who had reached the age of legal employment. To ensure compliance with the legal provisions, a special government body should oversee a trained inspectorate, with exclusive responsibility for child agricultural labour.

The study also recommended that public education campaigns be conducted and that government officials, NGO workers, employers, children and their families be made thoroughly familiar with the meaning and ramifications of child labour laws. Greater educational opportunities and skills training were also called for.

Children who live in poor, rural communities face the greatest risks from hazardous and exploitative agricultural labour. Improving the infrastructure of rural areas through better roads and power supplies can boost agricultural productivity and help protect the rights of children and families. Broader family participation in credit and income-enhancing schemes are other invaluable measures.

Photo: Commercial agriculture with its quotas, use of chemicals and profit pressures has more in common with industrial sweatshops than with an ideal family farm. A child in Peru helps carry grasses.

fumes given off by dangerous chemicals. In the brassware industry, children work at high-temperature furnaces and inhale the dust produced in polishing.⁴⁴

The numbers of children exploited by plantation agriculture across the world may be just as great — and the dangers associated with much of their work are no less appalling (Panel 7). In Brazil's sugar plantations, for example, children cut cane with machetes, a punishing task putting them at constant risk of mutilation. They make up a third of the workforce in some areas and are involved in over 40 per cent of the work-related accidents. Brazilian children are also exposed to snakebites and insect stings on tobacco plantations, and carry loads far beyond their capacities. In Colombia, young people who work on flower-export farms are exposed to pesticides banned in industrialized countries.

In Africa, meanwhile, children work on the plantations that grow the export crops on which the continent's economies rely — from the cocoa and coffee estates of Côte d'Ivoire to the tea, coffee and sisal plantations of Tanzania. In Zimbabwe, children work a 60-hour week picking cotton or coffee for about \$1. An ILO study on child labour in Zimbabwe found that the most significant exploiters of child labour seemed to be the large-scale commercial farmers who have used children in their fields for decades, especially during planting and harvesting.⁴⁵ These commercial farmers campaigned against the Government's draft child labour regulations in 1995, on the grounds that they would interfere with children's right to work. The same year, farmers asked a District Education Officer to close down the schools to allow children to help bring in the tea and coffee crops. The request, which was

In the brassware industry, children work at high-temperature furnaces and inhale the dust produced in polishing.

reported in the local press, was turned down.

In Indonesia, children — most of them girls — work on tobacco plantations for \$0.60 a day, well below the legal minimum wage.⁴⁶ In Nepal, children work on tea estates for wages so low that they often need to work 14 hours a day. Children are also employed on the tea plantations of Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka,⁴⁷ while child labourers in the sugarcane and rubber plantations of Thailand are at constant risk of injury from dangerous equipment.⁴⁸

While much of this industrial and plantation work is carried out by national subcontractors, some of it is overseen by transnational corporations whose products find their way into the ordinary stores and homes of the West. The *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) of Central America and Mexico are a case in point. Large corporations based in rich countries have transferred their assembly functions to poorer countries to take advantage of their lower wage and benefit costs. In a much publicized case in Honduras, for example, 12- and 13-year-old girls working for a US-based transnational were locked inside a textile factory. Hours were long, wages pitiable, the temperature hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit and there was no safe drinking water.⁴⁹

Such cases have led activists both in the home and the host countries of these transnationals to pressure them to establish codes of conduct not only for their operations but also for those of the subcontractors they use. All corporations should adopt such codes of conduct as an essential step towards eliminating hazardous child labour.

But most child labour in the formal economy cannot be tied so directly to the operation of transnationals. This is why national as well as transnational

companies need to adopt codes of conduct that bar hazardous child labour.

Street work

In contrast with child domestic workers, some children work in the most visible places possible — on the streets of developing world cities and towns (Panel 8). They are everywhere: hawking in markets and darting in and out of traffic jams, plying their trade at bus and train stations, in front of hotels and shopping malls. They share the streets with millions of adults, many of whom regard them as nuisances, if not as dangerous minicriminals. What most of these children actually do on the streets is, of course, work.

The street is a cruel and hazardous workplace, often jeopardizing even children's lives. They can be murdered by organized crime, by other young people or even by the police. The world reacted in horror in 1993 when Rio de Janeiro police officers massacred six street children. In 1996, a Rio police officer confessed and became the first-ever police officer to be convicted of the murder of street children. But the killings of street youth had already started in Rio by 1990. A report from the state juvenile court stated that, on average, three street children are killed every day in Rio, many by police at the request of merchants who consider the begging, thieving and glue-sniffing a major nuisance.⁵⁰

Many children do pursue these activities. But many more struggle at legitimate work on the street for their own or their family's survival. Children who work on the streets often come from slums and squatter settlements, where poverty and precarious family situations are common, where schools are overcrowded and poor, and where safe places to play



The numbers of children working on the streets have grown in recent years in certain areas. A girl sells brown sugar cones on a city street in Egypt.

simply do not exist. Their numbers have increased in places experiencing armed conflict, like Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Monrovia (Liberia), as caretakers have been killed, the economy disrupted and family and community ties severed.

Street child labour, virtually unheard of prior to the transition to a market economy, is now a growing problem in the Russian Federation. In Kyrgyzstan, in Central Asia, the numbers of children working on the streets, selling food and other products, have increased dramatically over the last three years. Many have dropped out of school or never attended classes.

On the streets, they shine shoes, wash and guard cars, carry luggage, hawk flowers and trinkets, collect recyclables and find a myriad other ingenious ways to make money. The amount they earn may be small but is sometimes more than they would receive from formal-sector work.

The large majority of these children return home each night. They are children on the streets, not of them. Still, life is often precarious and violent, unhealthy and unfair. Some are able to combine some schooling with their street work, but nevertheless many are exploited and cheated by adults and peers and must spend many hours earning their survival. Many suffer from malnutrition and from illnesses including tuberculosis. Self-esteem is often low, despite the superficial air of exaggerated self-confidence they may assume to appear street-smart.

For about 1 in 10, the street does become home. Inevitably these children become more prone to engage in marginal and illegal work, such as begging and petty thieving. Many are led into the illicit, thrilling and dangerous world of crime syndicates that run rings for pickpocketing, burglary,

drug trafficking and prostitution. The subculture that envelops the lives of these children is marked by aggression and abuse, exposing them to extreme hazards.

Scavenging is one example of the extreme risks children face in street work. In cities across the developing world, young children spend their days picking up used paper, plastics, rags, bottles, tin and metal pieces from the street, garbage dumps and waste bins, and selling them to retailers for recycling.

“The nature of their work is... most unhygienic, dangerous, demeaning.... They develop several kinds of skin disease like ulcers, scabies, etc. While collecting rusted iron pieces, they usually receive cuts on their hands and become susceptible to tetanus. The broken glass lying hidden in the garbage may injure their bare feet, which may develop into festering wounds. Many other sicknesses arise from exposure to extreme weather conditions, like cases of sunstroke, pneumonia, influenza and malaria. Carrying heavy loads under the arms or on their back adversely affects the height, weight, strength and stamina. Added to these hazards is the lure of eating thrown away or leftover food...[leading] to digestive disorders and food poisoning.”⁵¹

Attempts are being made in many countries to wean children off the streets and to protect them while they are on the streets. One inspiring example of action is in Brazil, long a country identified with the ‘problem’ of street children. The National Children’s Movement — a partnership between the children and voluntary ‘educators’, themselves from poor backgrounds — was established in 1985, and its first meeting in 1986 caused a national sensation, helping to enshrine child rights in the fledgling democracy. Each of its national



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Most children working on the street struggle at legitimate jobs for their own or their family’s survival. In Tanzania, a boy washes cars.

The streets are their workplace



UNICEF/96-0046/Chariton

Ten-year-old Shireen, a professional scavenger, has never been to school. But she is well versed in the economics of survival: if she sells 30 to 50 cents' worth of waste paper and plastic bags, she eats lunch; if she earns less, she goes without food. Such is the cruel but practical calculus of work and life on the streets.

Shireen is one of hundreds of thousands of children who work day to day on city streets, sometimes making their homes there as well. Whether raking through garbage dumps, shining shoes outside hotels or begging at busy intersections, they are living barometers of societies in stress. Largely found in the developing world — but also in affluent countries — children working on the streets are the progeny of some of the most disturbing social phenomena in the world today: rapid urban-

ization, runaway population growth and increasing disparities in wealth. Their rising numbers also indicate a constellation of other trends, such as cut-backs in government social and educational budgets, as well as the breakdown of traditional family and community structures, which leaves children unprotected.

In Zaire, they are called *moineaux* or 'sparrows'. In Peru, *pájaros fruteros* or 'fruitbirds'. But everywhere, children working on the streets are scorned, mistreated and misunderstood. "People don't love us," says Tigiste, a 12-year-old girl, who sells roasted barley and begs for change at stop lights in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa.

Often fleeing abuse and neglect at home, children find further abuse and exploitation on the street. In many cases, without legal identity, they are

manipulated by organized crime, street gangs, pimps and unscrupulous employers, sometimes dealing drugs or working in prostitution. In the words of Josie, 10, who has been selling candy on Manila thoroughfares since she was four: "Every day I pray not to end up in evil hands."

Less commonly known is the finding that children who work the streets provide critical financial support for their families, as well as paying for their own education when they can. Their hallmarks are ingenuity, practical intelligence and a relentless will to survive — whether that means hunting scraps of metal for the mattress-makers in the markets of Dakar, or, as in the Philippines, praying in churches on behalf of customers.

In a striking contrast to the largely throw-away cultures of the industrialized world, in the developing world, many children subsist as waste-heap recyclers. Plastic bags, blown-out tyres, junked car parts, empty bottles and tins, even scrap paper — all are collected diligently by children who scour the urban landscape. Pre-teens in the Philippines comb city streets, collecting everything from bronze wire to old newspapers. In a country where the per capita gross national product (GNP) is about \$900, these children earn up to \$3 a day from their scavenging, supplying their families with necessities like rice, firewood, gas and mosquito repellent. Similarly, six hours on Manila's immense 'Smoky Mountain' garbage dump can earn a child more than an adult earns for a 10-hour shift at a nearby factory.

Regardless of what it can pay, though, scavenging is hazardous work, also considered so degrading by the children themselves that many quit, even turning to prostitution. "The nature of their work and work environment is most unhygienic, dangerous,

demeaning and destructive of self-worth," writes one social scientist who has studied the rag-pickers of Bangalore (India). Tramping through garbage heaps in every kind of weather exposes children to skin infections, tetanus and other diseases. Back-breaking loads stunt growth, and eating discarded food often brings sickness. Furthermore, the life of trash collecting offers no hope for a better future.

Organizations like Reach Up in the Philippines and the Bosco Yuvodaya Street Children Project of Bangalore have begun helping children to band together and collectively defend their interests. Opportunities for formal and non-formal education and apprenticeship training, such as those offered by Uganda's Africa Foundation and the Undugu Society of Kenya, offer hope for a better future.

Children living on the street, without homes or families, pose the greatest challenge in terms of rehabilitation, often needing long-term one-on-one counselling. Preventive measures are, therefore, vital to protect children from the risk of full exposure to life on the street.

Photo: At a large refuse dump in Cambodia, a girl collects waste she can sell for recycling.

congresses — the fourth was held in 1995 — has heralded a new advance in thinking about children's problems. Just as important, the Movement bases its organization on small groups (*nucleos de base*) of working children who meet to discuss common problems and to take joint action. This model of organization seeks to empower children. "What would I do if there was no *nucleo de base*?" an 11-year-old delegate to last year's congress responded to a reporter. "I would go right out and start one."⁵²

Work for the family

Of all the work children do, the most common is agricultural or domestic work within their own families. Most families around the world expect their children to help in the household, whether preparing food, fetching water or groceries, herding animals, caring for younger siblings or more arduous work in the fields. This kind of work can be beneficial. Children learn from a reasonable level of participation in household chores, subsistence food-growing and income-generating activities. They also derive a sense of self-worth from their work within their families.

But it is by no means always beneficial. On the contrary, work for the family may demand too much of children, requiring them to labour long hours that keep them from school and take too great a toll on their developing bodies (Panel 9). Such work can prevent children from exercising their rights and developing to their full potential.

One powerful testimony to the rigours of work in the rural home comes from a group of Nepalese children now working in a Kathmandu carpet factory. They were attracted by stories of the excitement of the city and by the idea of earning wages both for themselves and to send back to

Of all the work children do, the most common is agricultural or domestic work within their own families.

Girls and women routinely bear burdens and endure treatment that reflect their unequal status. Working girls are often invisible, treated as if they did not exist.

their parents. But most of all, they said, they had come to the factory because life at home was so difficult: climbing up steep slopes to get fodder, risking leeches; having to labour endlessly to feed the family.⁵³ To avoid these lives, they had ended up in carpet-making, an industry notorious for its exploitation.

In rural Africa and in South Asia, children begin helping with domestic chores well before school age. Girls must fetch the household's water and fuelwood. Children of both sexes help with farm work, looking after animals and performing all tasks to do with water, jobs often physically taxing in the extreme. They also work in the informal sector of the rural economy, including traditional crafts and small trades essential to village life, especially shopkeeping.

Similar patterns of early labour are reported in a survey of five Latin American countries.⁵⁴ In rural Colombia, for instance, one in four children aged 6 to 9 and one in three aged 10 and 11 work, either in the home, tending the family vegetable garden, caring for animals, or helping in a grocery store or small business. In the country's large cities, one in six of 10- and 11-year-old children and one in ten of 6- to 9-year-olds participate in the labour market in some way.

Much of this work, particularly by girls within their homes, is invisible to the statistician aiming to measure the scale of child labour. It is also excluded from child labour legislation, partly because of the difficulty of policing child labour within the family. Yet to accept that such work cannot be regulated is to accept that hundreds of millions of children can have no legal protection.

Legislation must be made more inclusive, but this will not of itself protect these children. The difficulties of enforcement will remain. But at the

very least it will spread the message that there are strict limits as to what can be expected of a child's labour in the home. It may also make affirmative action more possible, and open social discussions involving parents and community members on what is considered to be good for a child.

Girls' work

"Nearly all our girls work as sweepers," says a mother from India, herself a sweeper or latrine-cleaner. "Why should I waste my time and money on sending my daughter to school where she will learn nothing of use?... So why not put my girl to work so that she will learn something about our profession? My elder girl who is 15 years old will be married soon. Her mother-in-law will put her to cleaning latrines somewhere. Too much schooling will only give girls big ideas, and then they will be beaten up by their husbands or abused by their in-laws."⁵⁵

Most of the hazards faced by boy labourers are faced by girls, too. Yet girls have extra problems of their own: from the sexual pressures of employers to exclusion from education. No strategy to combat child labour can begin to be successful unless these special dangers facing girls are systematically taken into account.

In virtually every area of life and in every country, as these annual *State of the World's Children* reports have long noted, girls and women routinely bear burdens and endure treatment that reflect their unequal status. So it is with child labour. Working girls are often invisible, treated as if they did not exist.

According to ILO, 56 per cent of the 10- to 14-year-olds currently estimated to be working in the developing world are boys. Yet, if we were able to measure the numbers of girls doing unregistered work as domestic help, or working at home to enable

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, carrying a double workload — a job outside the home and domestic duties on their return.

In Guatemala, working girls spend an average of 21 hours a week on household duties on top of a 40-hour working week outside. And in five Latin American countries surveyed, domestic work by girls in their own home was widespread, with many failing to attend school.⁵⁶

All over the world, more girls than boys are denied their fundamental right to primary schooling. In some regions, including the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and especially South Asia, the gender gap is still enormous.⁵⁷ Educational equality between the sexes is being approached in East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, but elsewhere little progress has been recorded.

Gender bias is not simply a question of attitudes — it is enshrined in all the main institutions of society. Nepal illustrates the point only too well. Women's socio-economic status is often deplorable. And while the proportion of men who can read and

write — 37 per cent — is extremely low, the 11 per cent figure for female literacy is appalling.⁵⁸ The overwhelming majority of girls either have never gone to school or have dropped out to work. Discrimination soon becomes exploitation. Lack of education, early arranged marriages, stark poverty and lack of power make girls enormously vulnerable. Long before they are physically prepared for it, many are forced to work, most of them ending up, if not in domestic service then in the carpet industry, on tea estates or in brick-making.

The gender gap becomes a vicious circle for girls all over the developing world. Unable to attend school because of their low social status or their domestic responsibilities, they are denied the extra power and wider horizons that education would bring. If they seek work outside the home, their opportunities are limited to the most menial tasks. Their low status is reinforced and passed on to the next generation.

Both the individual and the society suffer. It is well established that the more schooling a girl has, the fewer children she will bear. The more children a poor family has, the more child workers there will be.⁵⁹



Two young girls threshing rice in Indonesia.

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