

[Ecuador]

"I want to be the person I was before..."

Children who sell drugs

[7]



Preamble

"In Exchange for My Childhood"

Series on Child Labour and Exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes "the right of the child to be protected 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." At the same time, Article 36 states the need to protect "the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare." It has been more than 15 years since the Convention was adopted; however, the issue of child labour¹ continues to affect more than 200 million² children around the world. These children work under conditions that breach and put at risk the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, such as, their health, education and protection against any forms of exploitation and violence.

With this publication, World Vision wants to make a contribution in tackling child labor by making proposals and inviting the reader to learn about the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will build a close relationship with such children through a country context analysis, interviews, adult testimonies and portraits of the daily lives of working children and their families.

The stories are about different countries, with different protagonists who are devoted to different activities. Nevertheless, you will realize that the children who have allowed us to get into their lives have almost identical problems, aspirations and dreams:

- They work for the same reasons: Their families are in need, and they wish to contribute to family subsistence.
- They have the same dreams: To be able to study, help their families, make something useful and positive with their lives³.
- They experience the same physical and emotional pain, as a result of the work performed.
- They share the same fear: Adults – Once contact is established with adults, they maltreat, abuse and humiliate⁴ them.
- They come from very poor families that have suffered exploitation for at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their national systems of social assistance systems⁵.
- It is common for families to be numerous⁶, as well as for women to be the head of the household because of the father⁷ abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot go because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of maltreatment⁸. Besides that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working⁹ children and adolescents.
- Girls have to do workhouse activities, which makes their workload heavier.
- In addition, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse.

"In Exchange for My Childhood" opens doors to the private lives of working children, urging us to commit – as an organization and personally – to the transformation of our society, so that life in all its fullness may finally be a reality for every child in Latin America and the Caribbean.

1 It should be clarified that not all the work performed by children infringes their rights, but only that work which does not allow them to enjoy their rights. See "Definitions and basic concepts" at the end of the booklet.

2 The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6, page 233; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

3 The fact that there are many boys who want to be policemen and girls who want to be teachers attracts our attention here.

4 See the situation described by children in all booklets. Complementary reading: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

5 See Brazil's booklet, situation described by Rafael

6 Example: Colombia's booklet, Alicia Bastos' testimony

7 Example: Bolivia's booklet, Margarita's testimony

8 Example: Guatemala's booklet, Rafael's testimony

9 Example: See the situation described in the Chile's booklet on children who work in the mountains and the influence of the seasons of the year on their educational process.

Interviews

Note: These interviews were conducted in two different juvenile drug rehabilitation centres in Quito in 2005.

Sara Milagros: My mother died. I don't know anything about my father. He lives in Colombia. I'm the youngest in the family and most of my brothers and sisters are married. Before I came here I was living with my brother.

Marcelo: I didn't like living with my mother and my stepfather 'cuz they were always fighting. When I came to Quito about a year ago, I didn't know anyone. So I started walking the streets and begging for money. Then I started with the drugs.

Sara Milagros: I left Esmeraldas [a town on Ecuador's Pacific coast] a few months back, when I was still 17. I met up with some friends here in Quito. I started dealing drugs and partying. None of us thought we were hurting ourselves or anybody else by selling and doing drugs... Then I was arrested. I was carrying drugs... The police took my picture, examined me and made me sign a lotta different documents that I couldn't even read. Then they took me to the prosecutor's office. I signed more papers and was brought here [to the rehabilitation centre]. That was four months ago.

Marcelo: I learned about drugs on the street when I went to Riobamba with my mother. I began to use and sell drugs - glue, pot and coke (slang name for a drug) -- in the Mariscal section of Amazonas, here in Quito. The people who sold me the drugs are called brujos (literally translated as "male witches" or "warlocks"). I began selling drugs for brujos so that I would have enough money to buy my own stash (drugs) and maybe a little food.

Luis: I used to work painting cars. I was making about 150 dollars (US) a month. Nine months ago I started selling marihuana and cocaine and could make more than \$100 in just one week... I met people who gave me the drugs to sell at clubs. I always knew I was doing something wrong, but I never thought I'd be arrested for it.

Sara Milagros: In the drug world, you gotta hide, run -- do anything to sell drugs... Other girls I knew who pushed drugs wound up getting raped or killed. Man, I was so scared. I don't know what was wrong with me -- why I didn't leave it all.

Marcelo: I was dealing drugs just so I could get high. I wouldn't sell 'em to no women, though, 'cuz I remembered I had a sister and wouldn't want her to get into drugs. The brujos would get mad at me for not selling to women. Sometimes they'd give me fake drugs to sell -- talcum or lime powder, maybe some white tablets they'd grind up. Then we'd do the same thing -- like selling wall scrapings that looked like cocaine. Or if someone was buying grass for the first time, we'd just sell 'em any old dried weed... The brujos would protect us from angry customers, but they'd always disappear whenever the police showed up. We'd be taken to jail and beaten for refusing to talk. See, if you say anything to the police about the brujos, once you're out and back on the street, they'll beat the hell outta you -- maybe even kill you.

Luis: A matchbox (approx. 3 x 5 cm) of coke filled sells for \$15. A pound of weed sells for \$25... The drugs were brought to my house and I made a commission on whatever I sold. The guys who ran everything -- they can't ever be found. Everything is very well organized by them.

Sara Milagros: A lotta people say that that drugs are easy to get into and tough to leave. But I'll get outta this mess one day. I know I can do it if I really want to.

Marcelo: I want to be the person I was before. I gotta go home and show my family that I'm a good person.

Luis: When I get out of here, I'm gonna get another job, work hard, and become somebody important. I want to be honest, and I want my kids to go to school and be proud of me.



Portrait

It's Friday night in Quito. Amazonas Avenue, a major artery that runs through the city's upscale Mariscal District, is packed with people drawn its bright lights, trendy stores and restaurants, and boisterous nightlife.

Office workers, tourists, students and families stroll along the broad and elegant boulevard. Its busy sidewalks attract the well-heeled and smartly dressed, together with street beggars and homeless persons whose rough appearance and tattered clothes point to contrasting lives of hardship and despair.

A number of children and adolescents also shuffle along the busy street. Most are homeless or moving in that direction due to poverty, broken homes and substance abuse, coupled with the seductive pull of the street. Some congregate on the sidewalks or in alleyways behind the stores and restaurants where they forage through rubbish bins for food or any discarded objects they might be able to sell or trade for a few cents or a drug high. Their dirty faces and dazed expressions peer out from the shadows and recesses of buildings and alleyways. They keep a constant lookout for the police, as well as approaching customers for the drugs they are peddling -- mostly low-grade marijuana and crack cocaine, or substances that look like them.

Most children work alone, in specific locations assigned to them by *brujos* – the drug bosses who recruit them to sell their product while reaping all but a tiny portion of the profits.

Business is brisk tonight, like most Friday nights. Drug consumers from around the city and all walks are prowling the Amazonas on foot and in cars, knowing that their “score” is a brief transaction away.

A white late-model car pulls up to the curb near a busy intersection of Amazonas. The passenger window is lowered and the driver, wearing sunglasses, tilts his head towards a teenage boy wearing red jogging pants who is standing on the adjacent sidewalk. He signals the boy over to his car and asks him for two 10-dollar bags. The boy quickly pulls two tiny envelopes of crack from his oversized shoes and hands them to the driver, who is a regular customer. The boy tucks two \$10 bills into a shirt pocket as the driver eases into traffic and speeds away.

It's the boy's first sale of the night, accomplished in well under one minute.

He heads down Amazonas with two friends to hand the cash over to his *brujo*, for which he will receive a word of encouragement and one dollar in return. It's a good start for the boy, on what will be a profitable night for the *brujo*.

For now, at least, the drug business offers a relatively easy and stable means of income for this child and numerous others on Amazonas Avenue. But it's only a matter of time – tonight, tomorrow or some months in the future – until they are apprehended, convicted and incarcerated in one of Quito's bleak reformatories or penal institutions for juvenile drug offenders.

That's if their luck – or their lives – don't run out before the law catches up to them.





Context

Child labour and exploitation flourishes in Ecuador for many reasons, almost all of them poverty-related. Children constitute half of Ecuador's poor,¹ who make up just over half of the country's population of 2,149,203 million². Eight out of 10 indigenous Ecuadorians are classified as poor, while 20% of the overall population is reported to live in extreme poverty.

Despite the poverty afflicting the majority of Ecuadorians, each year the State invests less in meeting needs required by the health and education sector as well as provide basic infrastructure for marginal sectors. This type of investment is not on the priority list of the successive presidential administrations in Ecuador. Payment of the nation's foreign debt receives an entirely different treatment; this country allocates almost 50% of its national budget to meeting its commitments to international banks and other national governments, essentially debts for funds that were never used to benefit or contribute to the development of the country's most vulnerable population.

As a result of escalating poverty, approximately 1 million Ecuadorian children and adolescents are forced to work and find ways to contribute to their family's survival, many of them highly dysfunctional.

Children who belong to the poorest 10% of Ecuadorian households are most likely to engage in work activities outside their homes -- including about half of all children between the ages of 10 and 11 from poorest households.

Approximately 14% of all Ecuadorian children between the ages of 6 and 17 are currently engaged in work outside their own homes. This number includes about 21% of all children age 6 to 17 who live in rural areas (totalling nearly 300,000), and around 9% of all children age 6 to 17 who live in urban centres (totalling about 200,000).³

By age 12, about three out of every 10 girls and five out of every 10 boys are part of the rural workforce.⁴ Over 50% of these children do not attend school, 65% work on farms, and 17% in other households.⁵

Most of the child labourers in Ecuador's cities are indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian or mestizo migrants from rural areas. Some 43% of them -- approximately 80,000 children -- do not attend school. Most work in stores or companies, while a slightly lesser number work as domestic servants or street vendors.

Although Ecuadorian legislation prohibits hazardous and exploitive forms of child labour, the unfortunate fact is that many adults are driven by a desire for fast and unscrupulous profits at the expense of children's welfare. While a relatively small number of Ecuadorian children and adolescents are involved in drug peddling, it is nevertheless an attractive trade for those who abuse drugs themselves or whose lives are characterized by extreme poverty, domestic abuse, broken families and inadequate schooling.

A range of research undertaken within Ecuador has revealed that the majority of children and adolescents involved in drug trafficking (of marijuana and cocaine, in particular)

abandoned their homes and have lost all contact with their families. Consequently, the friends they make and live with on the street become their main source of affection and provide them with a sense of belonging.

For such children and adolescents, the drug trade seems to offer a convenient if not adventurous escape route from abuse and poverty towards a freer and better life. Yet most will find that more of the same hardships, or worse ones including sexual abuse, prostitution and addiction, will ensnare them eventually as they become easy prey for unscrupulous brujos (drug traffickers) who pull them deeper and deeper into the illicit and highly dangerous trade.

Pursued by the police, despised by society and exploited by their brujos, these children will be fortunate to escape a premature death. Arrest and incarceration is a far better prospect than beatings, rapes or murder.

It is imperative, in this context, that society commits itself to defending the rights of children and adolescents. More opportunities must be created to foster their personal development and provide them with positive learning experiences needed to resist the treacherous allure of the drug trade.

1 <http://www.frentesocial.gov.ec/siise/Publicaciones/boletines/publica1.pdf>

2 Direction of General Services -Telecommunications (Dirección General de Servicios de Telecomunicaciones).

3 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

4 Consejo del Observatorio Ciudadano de los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia, Estado de los derechos de la niñez y la adolescencia en el Ecuador [Council for Citizen Oversight of Child and Adolescent Rights, status of the rights of the child and adolescent in Ecuador], Quito, 2003, p. 108,109 & 140.

5 Juan Ponce Jarrín, El trabajo infantil [Child Labour]. Quito, Sistema Integrado de Indicadores sociales del Ecuador [Integrated System of Social Indicators of Ecuador], SIISE – Frente Social, 2001. Documento de trabajo del SIISE, p. 7.

Social Indicators Ecuador

Human Development Index	83/177
Gender-focused Development Index	-
Life expectancy	74,5
Per capita GDP	3,963
Total population in millions	13
% Urban population	62,3
% Population under 15	32,8
% Consumption by the poorest 20%	3,3
% Consumption by the wealthiest 20%	58
% of population living under the poverty line	46
% of population living on less than US\$1/day	15,8
% of GDP spent by the State on education	-
% of GDP spent by the State on health	2
% of population w/access to essential drugs	0-49
% Illiterate (over age 15)	9

*The World Health Organisation (WHO) specifies this percentage range as "very limited access".

Source: 2006 Human Development Report, United Nations.

Conclusions

On 7 March 1990, Ecuador became the first Latin American country to ratify the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nevertheless, nearly two decades later, the country is still lacking in policies that enhance the integral welfare of its children and adolescents. Child labour and exploitation are the offspring of an unjust system with an unbalanced political, economic, and social structure. Only one law exists at the national level – the 2003 Child and Adolescent Code – to protect children's rights.

However, legal instruments alone cannot guarantee that children's rights are respected when society, the family, and even the State also fail to share the responsibility. These institutions continue to violate the right to survival, integral development, protection, and participation of children and adolescent.

The Child and Adolescent Code allows adolescents to work from the age of 15, provided they have all the guarantees that their other rights will not be violated. The Code establishes that adolescents may not be employed in any work that might exploit and endanger them on a physical, emotional or intellectual level. It expressly

prohibits children from working in mines, rubbish dumps; slaughterhouses; quarries or extractive industries; activities involving the handling of explosives, psychotropic, toxic or harmful substances; brothels; gambling establishments; places that sell alcoholic beverages; and others locations that would hinder their moral and social development. They are also not allowed to work with dangerous machinery or in places where they would be exposed to noise, activities that could aggravate a disability, and areas prohibited by other legislation, including international instruments; and in homes where family members have a history as perpetrators of abuse or mistreatment.⁶

Poverty must not deny children and adolescents an environment of affection and protection that promotes their healthy growth. The State is not the only institution responsible for caring for the interests of our nation's children and adolescents; every individual member of society must bear the weight of the responsibility as well.

⁶ Art. 87, *Código de la Niñez y Adolescencia [Child and Adolescent Code]*, Quito, 2003.



Interviews with adults



EDUARDO DELGADO

Founder Casa de la Niñez

"When one addresses the issue of child drug dealers, it must be reiterated that they are not involved in this because they want to be, but rather due to their desire to make a profit and earn an income just like any other person. However, in these cases, children are mere victims of the adults who sell and buy drugs or depend on drug trafficking. If one considers that drug trafficking is a 500 billion dollar business worldwide and 700 billion dollars are spent on weapons and armies throughout the globe, these areas annihilate the rights of the child. If we add to this the concentration of wealth in a few hands, we will understand why extreme poverty has grown in Latin America."

ROSA JIMENEZ

Lieutenant-Colonel, DINAPEN (Police Specialized in Children) Sub-Director

"There are no specific cases of children or adolescents who travel abroad with drugs. Yet there are many cases of drugs transported by children within the country. However, these cases are not able to be processed in criminal court since the perpetrators are children under the age 12. At that age, they do not understand the implications of their actions."

These children are constantly at risk of harassment from drug purchasers, and other dealers who steal their product from them and beat them up.

There are also cases of children and adolescents who are addicts and sell drugs in order to obtain more drugs for their own use. The brujos or drug suppliers prefer to "hire" children who are dependent on drugs. This situation is more profitable for the suppliers since they are aware that youngsters realize that the more they sell the more drugs they will obtain for themselves."



MARTIN ESTRELLA

Sociologist, La Dolorosa National Orientation Centre

"Children who commit offences and brought to rehabilitation centres have a very low, almost non-existent self-esteem. These youngsters are school drop outs and have grown up in highly promiscuous, unstable, and disorganized environments lacking affection most with families who have expelled them. We are dealing with young people who attempted to mature in a deficient environment."

There aren't many places where youngsters can truly grow, participate directly and say: "I exist. I do not only breathe. I can also decide for myself and achieve what I want".

These children have found a place to belong within a well-organized adult network which is run by people who can never be found with a focus that is always on the weakest link, in this case, the adolescent who has become a drug dealer."



Definitions and Basic Concepts

For the purposes of this publication, "child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."¹

- Worst forms of Child Labour according to ILO Convention 182²:
 - a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
 - b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
 - c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
 - d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
- Child Labour
Children's participation in economic activity that negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education. This means all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 14 years engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.³
Occupation that denies children or adolescents their childhood, potential and dignity, and is damaging to their physical and mental development⁴
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation
The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.⁵
- Work
Human activities, paid or unpaid, that produce the goods or services in an economy, or supply the needs of a community, or provide a person's accustomed means of livelihood.⁶

About Child Labour⁷

- Some Characteristics:
 - a) Children start working at an earlier age in rural areas rather than in cities
 - b) 80% of children work in an informal economy
 - c) Work prevents children from attending school or limits their academic performance
- Conditions:
 - a) Working hours are longer than the maximum limits established by many national laws for an adult worker
 - b) Low Income: 90% of child workers between the ages of 10 and 14, earn wages that are equal to or below the minimum wage, approximately 20% lower than the income of an adult with a 7th grade school level. Children are paid an even lower salary than that or are paid in kind.
 - c) Children do not have labour rights
 - d) Jobs are precarious
- Causes:
 - a) Poverty
 - b) Family violence
 - c) Social and cultural patterns
- Consequences of child labour at all levels:
Social and Moral:
 - a) Encourages inequality
 - b) Violates the fundamental human rights of children and adolescents
 - c) Leads to a loss of self-esteem, problems of social adaptation and trauma

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1

2 ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, article 3

3 As opposed to Child Labour: Child work: Children's participation in economic activity - that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education, can be positive. Work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138. http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html

4 Extracted from: Guía Práctica para Parlamentarios, Número 3-2002, Erradicar las peores formas de Trabajo Infantil, Guía para implementar el convenio núm. 182 de la OIT

5 The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, 1996, http://www.ecpat.net/eng/A4A02-03_online/ENG_A4A/Appendices_1_Stockholm.pdf

6 <http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr2454.htm>

7 ILO, <http://www.oit.org.pe/ipec/pagina.php?pagina=156>

Physical and Psychic:

- d) Chronic diseases
- e) Dependence on medicines
- f) Physical and Psychic abuse

Economic:

- g) Working children fall behind in school by an average of 2 grades or 2 school years in the long-term which means a salary that is 20% lower during their adult lives
- h) Loss of buying power in the national market
- i) The lack of an education (loss of school years) translates into an lower quality of human capital in society

The Position of World Vision on the Issue of Child Labour⁸

The experience of World Vision, given its work in developing countries among the most marginalized people, indicates that children will continue to work until there are feasible and sustainable alternatives for the family and communities. By ignoring this, we endanger the lives of children. In a world characterized by poverty and inequality among the rich and the poor, work is a reality and a need for many children.

Based on this perception, World Vision, is making efforts to abolish the most extreme and dangerous forms of child labour (exploitation), such as Sexual Commercial Exploitation, slavery, any form of work that involves very small children and any job that represents a danger for a child's physical, emotional or spiritual health.

World Vision has been a firsthand witness of the devastating results of attempting to eradicate all child labour immediately. In addition to recognizing the obvious problem represented by exploitative child labour, non-governmental organizations, governments and the corporate sector must avoid the automatic, though, comprehensible, temptation of demanding that child labour be immediately abolished. This may be a well-intentioned measure but may have disastrous consequences. For this reason, World Vision does not support punitive intervention, or boycotts of consumers or sanctions. Instead, World Vision defends a multi-disciplinary approach:

- To quickly eradicate the worst forms of child labour
- Convince the employer in the formal sector to improve conditions and shorten the number of work hours
- Establish alternate ways of generating income for families
- Improve access to good quality and adequate education
- Confront structural impediments that generate and aggravate poverty

These changes are possible only if long-term structural changes are introduced

The underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: generalized poverty, great inequality, deficient or inadequate education, malnutrition, the structure of the country's economy, consumption patterns and macroeconomic policy frameworks.

This does not mean that poverty automatically cause children to enter the workforce. However, it creates the conditions for this phenomenon to be more likely. In reality, the reasons for which child workers are preferred are not economic. Children are not as aware of their rights as adult workers are. Children are, therefore, easier to exploit.

When children are forced to work in order to survive, their interests may be better protected if employers are encouraged to cease exploitative practices. This type of transition focus requires the application of adequate health and safety conditions within the workplace, reasonable hours, meals, education and skills training.

Prevention, elimination and rehabilitation comprise the three columns of any strategy for eliminating exploitative child labour. Of these, prevention is the most difficult since it covers long-term solutions based on the family and the community in both a national and international environment.

Is education the answer?

One of the keys for preventing and resolving child labour is education. Although, education alone is not enough to end child abuse, it is key to a larger program that seeks to diminish poverty and other pressures that push children into the workforce.

In order for education to be an effective weapon in the fight against child labour, it must be mandatory and allow equal access for both boys and girls. It must be high quality, pertinent, free of charge and realistically flexible, for example, taking into account the agricultural harvest seasons and related needs for families who work in agriculture.

In areas where there is a high index of child labour as well as elevated high school drop-out rates, it is often discovered that the education offered is low level. An inadequate education inadvertently pushes children into the workforce, since by working they can learn a trade and learn skills to earn income.

It is possible to eradicate child labour. In the short-term, we must force ourselves to eradicate the most extreme forms of child labour. In the medium and long-terms, governments, consumers, children's rights groups should combine efforts in order to guarantee that children have the opportunity to develop their potential and satisfy their needs and fundamental rights as human beings.

⁸ By Melanie Gow- Policy and Advocacy- Word Vision Australia, 2000.



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