

[Brazil]

*"If it weren't for the money,
we'd go hungry."*

Children who work in the market

[2]



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's adoption; 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 know closely the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will have close relationships 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, 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 been suffering from exploitation through at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their country⁵ social assistance.
- It is common for families to be numerous⁶, as well as for women to be the heads of the households because of the father⁷ abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot do that because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of the maltreatment suffered⁸. Besides all that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working⁹ children and adolescents.
- Girls should add the housework to their work, which is why their workload is 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 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.

Interview

Daniel: I haul people's groceries in the Mercado de la Producción [the municipal market of Maceió]. I'm there with my brother, every day around five a.m.

Fabiano: When I'm on holiday, I'm always at the market. I get there around five and leave around five. When I'm in school, I'm there at noon.

Érica: Me, too. I sell there all day. I get there around five and take off just before dark. When school starts, everything changes. I get up at five, sweep the house, wash the dishes, and go to school. When I get home I do some other stuff, and then I head to the market!

Rafael: The best days for hauling stuff are from Wednesday to Sunday.

Alex: Saturdays are the best. That's when we make the most money.

Rafael: That's definitely the best day!

Leandro: It's only bad when we meet a regateador (a male customer who underpays). Sometimes I'm carrying a huge load on my head and he only wants to pay a real [about US\$1.94], which is nothin' for what I'm doin'.

Henrique: Yeah... but when it's a regateadora (a female customer), I just take the money and leave.

Leandro: Some customers pay like eight or ten reales*

Érica: I started working at the market when I was six. I sell green peppers, coriander, beans, onions, tangerines and other stuff, 'cuz I wanna help my mum.

Rafael: I don't remember when I started working. My dad is blind in one eye and he was hit by a car. So my brother and I started working.

Josenildo: I like goin' to the market. It's great when I can make 10 reales, but it's hard work. The most you get paid is one, two or maybe up to five reales. Some days I bring home between 10 and 15 reales. I hand it all over to my mum.

Érica: I give all my money to my mum, too. If it weren't for that, we'd be hungry.

Fabiano: I live with my father, brother and sister. My mother lives far away. At Christmas, I earned 21 reales. I gave it all to my father, and then he said we could buy a ticket to visit my mother. Man, that was great!

Daniel: Almost all the money I make goes to buy food. But one time my mum gave me enough to buy some shorts and another time to buy a shirt. It's so great to be able to buy stuff!

Érica: Sometimes I make enough to buy clothes. Sometimes it's not even enough to buy food. When we don't have anything to eat, we head over to the house of an aunt and eat with her family.

Rafael: Sometimes at home we're so hungry that mum puts us to bed early so we won't ask for food.

Érica: Yeah, if we don't work hard, we don't bring anything home and then there's nothin' to eat.

Fabiano: If it's a day like today, with a lot of rain, we don't make much. We go home almost empty-handed.

Josenildo: I get sad when a customer doesn't want to pay me for my work, or just gives me a little, 'cuz I could be workin' for somebody else!

Alex: I'm lucky. My mum doesn't get mad when I don't make enough money.

Érica: One day I cried 'cuz I didn't have nothin' to bring home. Everyone I tried to sell to said no.

Josenildo: I'm 16 and I'm in first grade. That's 'cuz I've had to repeat the grade. Actually, I stopped going. I never go until the year's almost over. I've worked in the market every year. Sometimes I get home and I'm worn out! I'm always pretty tired when I get home. It's hard to stay awake, but I try anyway. I wanna be a scientist. I don't know much about what they do, but I know they discover things.

Érica: I'm 13. Now I'm in the fourth grade. I can study in less time 'cuz I repeated some school years. When I grow up I wanna be a teacher.

Rafael: I'm 10 and I aint never been to school. But I'm gonna go 'cuz I want to be a policeman.

Daniel: Me too! I'm 13 and I'm in sixth grade. I like school a lot and when I grow up I'm gonna be a policeman too.

Rafael: Somebody should put the crooks in jail 'cuz they're always robbing us.

Givaldo: I'm thirteen and I'm in sixth grade. I study at night. Sometimes I come home so tired that the last thing I wanna do is go to school. But I still go. I usually go to bed early 'cuz I'm so tired. I wanna be a policeman too, when I grow up.

Fabiano: There's lots of violence where we live. A lotta people are scared all the time. We're always worried somebody's gonna take our wheelbarrows and other things. Two months ago, I went to a party with my uncle and he got stabbed. I was really sad.

Rafael: The other day they took my wheelbarrow. I cried a lot. I won't ever forget it.

Alex: My wheelbarrow got stolen too.

Leandro: I don't have a wheelbarrow. I carry everything on my head. Wheelbarrows cost too much -- about 60 reales. I still haven't been able to buy one. There are two kinds -- one's made from iron and the other's made from a refrigerator.

Rafael: I like to play jacks and marbles. But I like working best. If we don't work, what are we going to eat?

** According to the conversion rate for June 2007: R\$: 1,94*



Portrait

Maceió (population 555,400) is a coastal city in northeastern Brazil, and the capital of Brazil's poorest state, Alagoas.

From dawn to dusk, the city's Mercado de la Producción (Produce Market) bustles with the noise and activity of thousands of patrons who come for the bargain prices on a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, meats, seafood, medicinal roots and herbs.

But the market also has its inconveniences and unpleasantness. Frequent downpours flood the area with debris-strewn water, forcing shoppers to seek shelter under patchwork coverings of tin and plastic. Foul odours linger in the musty air, and bands of children swarm the aisles, aggressively peddling bags of produce.

One of them is Érica, age 13, who has worked here since she was six. Arriving to the market just after sunrise, Érica approaches the day's first shoppers with a netted sack of tangerines and her usual sales pitch. Érica is three years behind in primary school. A slow day at the market means her family may go without dinner. Érica forces a thin smile while chatting up the shoppers. They decline her offer and the smile vanishes. It's a disguise that Erica wears and discards without thinking, countless times during a single day.

Work in the market is predictably tedious. Some shoppers become annoyed when Érica pursues them, waving her off dismissively, or with harsh words that make her feel small and sad.

Unlike many other children who leave the market by late morning, Érica usually sticks around until the end of the day. The crowds thin out in the afternoon, as does the competition from other children trying to sell the same produce as her. The work may be monotonous, but at least she's helping her family.

In another corner of the market, ten-year-old Rafael leans against a post next to a battered wheelbarrow that he uses to load and carry heavy bags and boxes of produce out to customers' cars and into their houses.





Rafael has never been to school, and rarely has time for play. Instead, he works all day nearly every day, along with his father and a brother, making anywhere from 1.50 and 3 reales [*US\$0.70 to \$1.35] for every trip he makes with the wheelbarrow, depending on the distance covered.

Rafael's diminutive stature and thin frame belie his strength and stamina. He prides himself on being able to push loads weighing up to 50 kilos or more through narrow openings in the long lines of cars that slow to a crawl in front of the busy market.

Rafael is exceedingly polite and conscientious, always striving to gain and retain loyal customers. But his meagre earnings usually fall well short of covering the costs of food and other basic necessities for his struggling parents and six brothers and sisters. Rafael's father, Cícero Soares da Silva, is blind in one eye and in very poor health. The family lives in a two-room house, sharing two beds. The youngest boy, age four, sleeps in Cicero's wheelbarrow at night.

Rafael has been working in the market for longer than he can remember. At first he carried customers' purchases on his head. Then he tried using a wheelbarrow made with the scrap metal an old refrigerator. It belonged to his older brother, Henrique, and for a time it allowed Rafael to carry heavier loads and earn more money. But severe fatigue and back pains persuaded him to save up for a smaller wheelbarrow, which he was eventually able to purchase with cash. Made from scrap iron, it was his most precious and guarded possession – until the moment it suddenly vanished, stolen out from under him by one of the market's many thieves.

Now Rafael uses a rented wheelbarrow. He worries about losing it too, and how long it could take him to pay it off. Lately he's been getting strong migraines, toothaches and fevers. But he knows he won't get help from a doctor or dentist without the money to pay them.

Rafael tries to imagine a different life, far removed from the market. He says he dreams of working as a policeman or security guard when he grows up. But the market continues to control his life, as Rafael's dreams give way to reality.

Context

The Brazilian government is combating child labour through a range of public policies and social programmes that include providing housing and education subsidies to impoverished families. The largest subsidy programme, the Bolsa Familia, allocates up to 95 reais [US\$42] per family per month for children's schooling.¹

Currently, just 15.5% of children and youth between the ages of five and 17 are beneficiaries of the Bolsa Familia programme. Among beneficiaries, the rate of school attendance is 98.9%, as opposed to an attendance rate of 88.1%² among children and youth who are not enrolled in the programme.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the total number of children attending school has increased significantly between 1992 and 2001, while the total percentage of children and adolescents who work full-time outside their homes has dropped from 19.6% in 1992 to a current 12.7%. This roughly translates to 554,000 children and adolescents who currently work full-time, and a total of 4.5 million school-age children who are not attending school.

Studies show that the number of years that children stay in school is directly related to the level of their families' incomes. Brazilian children age 10 and older complete an average of 5.7 years of school³ -- failing to complete primary school (8 years of study), and falling well short of finishing secondary school (11 years of study).

Many common forms of child labour can be considered dangerous. Just over half of child workers (51.2%) use machines, tools or chemical products in their work. At least one third of them work 40 hours per week. Of child workers between the ages of five and nine, 83% work up to 20 hours weekly. Of those between ages 15 and 17, almost half (48.1%) work a 40-hour week.⁴

Brazil's unemployment rate is consistently high and stood at 8.3% in December of 2005 according to the IBGE. The percentage of Brazilians who are either under-employed or engaged in informal work has been increasing as well. Compounding this situation is a national illiteracy rate of 13.7% for children ages 15 and under.⁵

Social indicators Brazil

Human Development Index	69/177
Gender-focused Development Index	55/177
Life expectancy	70,8
Per capita GDP	8,195
Total population in millions	183,9
% Urban population	83,7
% Population under 15	28,1
% Consumption by the poorest 20%	2,6
% Consumption by the wealthiest 20%	62,1
% of population living under the poverty line	22
% of population living on less than US\$1/day	7,5
% of GDP spent by the State on education	4,1
% of GDP spent by the State on health	3,4
% of population w/access to essential drugs	0-49
% Illiterate (over age 15)	11,4

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

Source: 2006 Human Development Report, United Nations.

The exclusion of much of the nation's population from the benefits of the global economy, coupled with an increasing income gap between rich and poor, is arguably the greatest challenge facing Brazil today. Meanwhile, the reality of child labour, albeit diminishing, is a clear indicator of profound inequities and injustices that continue to challenge this vast country.

1 Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC – Ministerio de Educación y Cultura)

2 Idem.

3 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia y Estadística)

4 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia y Estadística)

5 Idem.

Conclusions

It was once thought that economic growth and modernisation would lead to the eradication of the worst forms of child labour in Brazil. But the reality today is that close to half a million Brazilian children are compelled to work in order to survive, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Some forms of labour have become increasingly hazardous and exploitive, and there is a persistent belief within Brazil that this is a problem that won't go away.

The Brazilian government has come under strong criticism in some quarters for its current proposal to invest nearly US\$300 million per year into programmes to combat child labour. In addition, there are those who argue for safer, less exploitive forms of child labour to be recognized and regulated by the government, for example by setting limits on the number of hours that children can work in specific jobs, the minimum wages they should be paid, and the types of tasks they should be permitted to do.

But what's really needed is the abolition of child labour, full stop.

There is a historic precedent for this statement namely, four centuries of legalized slavery in Brazil. During most of that period, the abolition of slavery was considered an economic and political impossibility.

Agricultural production depended heavily on slave labour, as did wealthy and powerful slave owners. Reformists and abolitionists were ridiculed for calling for the recognition and protection of specific rights for slaves, including the right of mothers to breastfeed their children, and the right of slave families to live and work together. Slavery flourished with society's acceptance, much the same way that child labour is tolerated and legitimized today.

Eventually, slavery came to be viewed as a grave injustice of profoundly immoral dimensions. After being condoned by Brazilian society for generations, it finally became condemned as a practice and abolished by the government in 1888.

Economic formulas and growth by themselves will not eliminate child labour (in fact, child labour has been growing along with the Brazil's economy). Piecemeal government measures won't be enough either. Only when child labour is seen by society for what it really is – a scourge and a shame – will children be protected from the worst forms of child labour and exploitation. Only then will their days as child labourers be numbered.

7 Marcelo Néri. *Trabalho Infantil e Desempenho Econômico [Child Labour and Economic Performance]*. *Conjuntura Econômica*. April 2001.



Interviews With Adults



EDSON MESSIAS

President of the Merchants' Association of the Maceió Produce Market (2003)

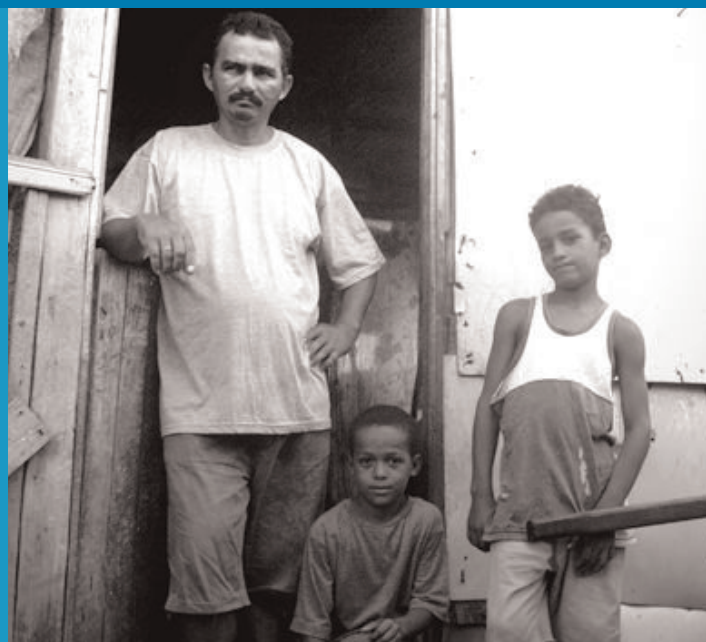
The children [who work in the market] are happy. But their parents are poor and can't support them at home when they're in school. So they send them here, to help them survive. But I also believe that the children would be better off be in school...

I'm not going to say that this market does anything good for the children – but it does do good things for their parents. This is a suitable environment for children to do work, but I suggest to their parents that they should seek help from the government, especially through the Bolsa Família.⁶

CÍCERO SOARES DA SILVA

Rafael's father and produce hauler in the Maceió market

I have six children. Before I began working in the market, I had a job as a security guard. I started getting this pain in my neck and the doctor told me that I had to have surgery. After the operation, I lost my sight in one eye. Then I was fired from my job and since I already had two children, there was nothing I could do except for hauling produce in the market. But it's really been difficult. I've been hit by cars and people get mad at me. Right after my surgery, I didn't know what to do. My children, my wife and I – we had nothing to eat. That's when I asked my two oldest sons to start working in the market. We didn't have any wheelbarrows then, but thank God my sister-in-law gave us here children's before she moved away from here. We were lucky.



RUTE OMENA DA SILVA

Coordinator of the World Vision's Area Development Programme in Brejal (the market is located inside this neighbourhood).

Working as a seller or hauler is unfair to a child. Children belong in school and with their families. They need to experience the normal stages of growth. But their parents oblige them to work so they'll have more income. They know their children get more sympathy from people in the market than they would themselves, so they stay at home while their children go to work. Lack of opportunities leads to parents' idleness. They can see that it's easy to get their children to haul people's purchases or sell vegetables.

On the other hand, it's also easy for the customers to pay less money to a child than they would to an adult.



⁶ Translator's Note: The Bolsa Escola is a government program that provides a stipend to families so that their children can go to school, provided that the family meets three main requirements each month.

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/ipece/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 child prostitution, 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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