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About us

The Understanding Children's Work (UCW) project is an inter-agency research cooperation initiative involving the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF and the World Bank.

The Project is guided by the Agenda for Action adopted at the 1997 Oslo International Conference on Child Labour. The Oslo Agenda identified the need to improve data and information on child labour, and called for stronger international co-operation in efforts towards child labour elimination.

UCW research activities are designed to inform policies that impact upon the lives of child labourers in countries where they are prominent. Research efforts help provide a common understanding of child labour in specific national contexts, and a common basis for action against it. For further information on UCW, see the Project website at www.ucw-project.org.

Featured research

Give girls a chance: End child labour. *The World Day Against Child Labour (12th June 2009)*

The World Day Against Child Labour this year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark ILO Convention No. 182, which addresses the need for action to tackle the worst forms of child labour. Whilst celebrating progress made during the past ten years, the World Day will highlight the continuing challenges, with a focus on exploitation of girls in child labour.

According to ILO, an estimated 100 million girls are involved in child labour around the world. Many of these girls undertake similar types of work as boys, but often also endure additional hardships and face extra risks. Moreover, girls are all too often exposed to some of the worst forms of child labour, often in hidden work situations.

This issue of UCW newsletter is devoted to all the female children involved in work or exposed to some worst form of child labour.

1. Child labour in India and Bangladesh: an initial gender-based analysis. A working paper (UCW, 2009) looks at differences by sex in key dimensions of the child labour phenomenon – its extent, nature, and effect on education outcomes. The paper addresses what types of work are more common among girls, and the extent to which girls' work experience differs from that of boys in the two countries.

The findings indicate that that girls' and boys' work is dissimilar, but do not indicate that girls face a lower risk of work involvement, that work poses a lower threat to girls' welfare, or that girls log fewer working hours. Employment does not appear to have a greater impact on the ability of girls to attend school. In fact, in Bangladesh the opposite holds true; the attendance rate of working girls is higher than that of their male counterparts. In India, there are no large differences by sex in terms of the ability of working children to attend school.

Patterns of involvement in employment by sex differ in the two countries. In Bangladesh, boys are much more likely to be in employment; the gender gap is largest in rural areas. In India, by contrast, gender considerations appear to play a relatively minor role in household decisions concerning child labour; girls' involvement in employment approaches that of boys, especially in rural areas.

Boys' employment is heavily concentrated in the agriculture sector in Bangladesh, while girls' employment is more heterogeneous, distributed across commerce, services, manufacturing as well as agriculture. There appears to be little specialisation by sex in children's economic activities in India - both boys and girls work primarily in agriculture.

In both countries, girls are more likely to be assigned responsibility for household chores. This underscores the fact that involvement in employment alone is a misleading indicator of girls' total work involvement. Ignoring housework performed by girls in their own homes tends to underestimate the rate of girls' work relative to that of boys.

2. Child labour in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region: A gender-based analysis. An earlier UCW study (2006) examines the issue of sex-based disparities in children's involvement in employment in 12 LAC countries.

The proportion of 7-14 year-old boys in employment is more than double that of similarly-aged girls in nine of the 12 countries and is almost double that of similarly-aged girls in two others. Only in Bolivia does girls' level of employment approaches that of boys.

The overall gap by sex in employment is primarily the result of boys' greater involvement in rural work. Urban areas feature a lower overall level of child involvement in employment and a smaller difference in involvement by sex.

The fact that girls are less involved in employment does not translate into their being more involved in school. Indeed, only in Nicaragua and Colombia is there a significant enrolment gap favouring girls. In Guatemala and Bolivia, on the other hand, the enrolment gap favours boys, while in the remaining countries girls and boys attend school in roughly equal proportion.

Latin American households appear much more likely to assign responsibility for domestic chores to girls than to boys. The proportion of girls spending at least 14 hours per week on chores outstrips that of boys in all nine countries where data are available. Only in four countries (Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) do a substantial share of children performs chores beyond a higher weekly time threshold of 28 hours. In three of these four countries (Dominican Republic is the exception), the proportion of girls putting in at least this much time on housework substantially outstrips that of boys.

3. Measuring domestic child labour. A draft working paper (UCW, 2009) addresses the measurement of children's involvement in domestic child labour. This frequently hidden form of child labour leaves affected children at risk of sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking. The number of domestic child labourers (DCL) worldwide is not known, and the array of factors underlying the phenomenon remains insufficiently understood. Current estimates of domestic child labourers are frequently based on extrapolations from non-representative sample surveys or on assumptions based on the adult workforce. Relatively little empirical research has been done on the determinants pushing or pulling children into domestic service. These information gaps hamper advocacy efforts aimed at drawing attention to the DCL issue and impede the development of informed policy responses to it.

The draft working paper looks at how standard household survey instruments for measuring child labour can also be used in measuring the subset of child labourers working in domestic service. With specific reference to household surveys conducted in Paraguay, Uganda and Venezuela, different measures of DCL are constructed on the basis of three broad categories of questions. In the first two question categories, involvement in domestic child labour is reported explicitly in response to questions concerning relationship with household head (category 1) or concerning industry/occupation and employment status (category 2). These categories

of questions therefore permit the direct measurement of DCL. In the third category of questions, involvement in DCL is inferred through questions on domestic chores and relationship to household head. This category of questions yields an indirect measure of DCL, and can be useful for capturing the hidden portion of the DCL population, i.e., those cases disguised as fostering or as involvement household chores.

3. Child labour and access to basic services. Two earlier working papers (UCW, 2003 and 2004) look at how the availability of basic services (electricity and water) can affect the value of children's time and, concomitantly, household decisions concerning how this time is allocated between school and work.

Empirical results from Yemen indicate that improved access to safe water supplies has a crucial role in getting children, and especially girls, into school and out of work and water collection duties. Similar results are obtained from El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala and Morocco. Descriptive evidence confirms that households with access to water and electricity are more likely to send their female children to school and less likely to send them to work.

The conclusions point in particular to the need to ensure that child labour and gender considerations are mainstreamed into Government and donor policy in the water and electricity sectors.

Project news and events

1. Global Agenda Council on the Welfare of Children (11 May 2009). The UCW Program Coordinator participated in the third virtual meeting in order to share UCW expertise in the area of child labour. The meeting stressed the need to invest in human capital as an anti-cyclical instrument to support growth, rather than focus on traditional policy instruments.

2. World without child labor. Dream. Design. Deliver. (Washington, 20-23 April). UCW participated in the workshop organized by OCFT (Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking) to share lessons learnt and to present UCW activities. The grantee workshop included approximately 100 participants from 31 countries representing 35 USDOL-funded child labor elimination projects. The workshop reviewed OCFT reporting and policy guidelines and created a forum to share practical strategies, ideas, and lessons learned. Topics included innovative strategies for service delivery, performance monitoring, and increasing educational quality and access for children in need.

3. Mission to Cambodia (Phnom Penh, 1-4 June). The interagency report '*Towards assessing the resource requirements for eliminating the worst forms of child labour in Cambodia by 2016*' was presented to the Government and to other relevant stakeholders. The next issue of the newsletter will be devoted to provide a brief summary of the study.

4. Give girls a chance: End child labour. (Rome, 12 June 2009). The event, jointly organized by FAO and ILO (Rome), was designed to serve as a catalyst for the growing worldwide movement against child labour. Recent years have seen a sustained progress in the fight against child labour, but the current economic and financial crisis can potentially reverse the positive trends observed in several countries. Recent UCW findings by UCW on the impact of the financial crisis on child labour were presented.

5. Mission to Zambia (Lusaka, 15 -19 June 2009). The findings of the interagency report '*Understanding children's work in Zambia*' was presented to relevant stakeholders, as part of a broader discussion on accelerating progress towards child labour elimination. It concluded with a panel discussion on how education and social protection strategies can accommodate the aim of eliminating worst forms of child labour. A follow-up study on the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour in Zambia was launched during the mission.

6. Fourth European Forum on the Rights of the child (*Brussels, 18 June 2009*). The Forum provides a platform for relevant stakeholders to discuss efforts towards the objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, both within the EU and in the EU's external policy. The fight against child labour was chosen as the theme of the fourth Forum to underpin the ongoing discussions at the EU level on how to effectively address child labour using instruments the EU has at its disposal. Within the main theme of child labour, the Forum specifically focused on two policy areas: social protection and corporate social responsibility. A joint presentation by UCW and WB addressed policy options for combating child labour.

7. Assises Nationales de la Jeunesse (*National Youth Forum, Bamako, 6-8 July 2009*) The forum, organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Mali, aimed at identifying a national policy to promote youth employment, in the framework of broader national development efforts. UCW presented preliminary findings of the interagency report 'Understanding children's work and youth employment outcomes in Mali' and of the analysis of the impact of migration on child labour and youth employment.

8. Upcoming seminar on child labour, education and youth employment: change of dates (*Istanbul, 8-9 October 2009*). Due to organizational reasons, the IV UCW Seminar on child labour, education and youth employment outcomes will be moved forward by one week. The seminar will therefore take place in 8-9 October 2009. The two-day seminar will present recent research on child labour and its linkages with educational and youth employment outcomes. The seminar will also aim at identifying key information gaps relating to these themes, thereby helping to guide future research efforts.

Recently posted on www.ucw-project.org

1. Understanding children's work in Vietnam (UCW, 2009). The country report provides an overview of the child labour phenomenon in Vietnam – its extent and nature, its determinants, and its consequences on health and education. The report also addresses the policy options for its elimination. The analysis considers the economics as well as the social determinants of child labour and follows a cross-sectoral approach, especially in the identification of determinants and strategic options.

2. The impact of programs relating to child labor prevention and children's protection: a review of impact evaluations up to 2007 (Paruzzolo, 2009). This paper provides a review of impact evaluations of policies up to 2007 relating to child labor prevention and protection. The aim of this review is to provide a summary of these impact evaluations in an attempt to draw some best practice lessons, but also to assess the state of art in terms of the current use of rigorous impact evaluation and the actual 'evaluability' of policies with a direct and/or indirect effect on child labor.

References

UCW, *Child labour in India and Bangladesh: an initial gender-based analysis* (UCW, 2009)

UCW, *Child labour in Latin America and Caribbean Region: a gender-based analysis* (Guarcello et al., 2006)

UCW, *Towards the effective measurement of domestic child labour: building estimates using standard household survey instruments* (draft working paper, 2009)

Guarcello et al, *Child labour and access to basic services: evidence from five countries* (UCW, 2004)

Guarcello et al, *Children's work and water access in Yemen* (UCW, 2003)