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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.

Special feature

Inter-agency report for The Hague Global Child Labour Conference of 2010

This special edition of the Newsletter provides a brief overview of the just-released report entitled *Joining Forces Against Child Labour*. This first-ever inter-agency global report on child labour was produced for The Hague Global Child Labour Conference of 2010. The English version of the report is available for free download at the Programme website. The French and Spanish versions will be posted shortly.

Much has evolved in terms of our knowledge surrounding the child labour problem since the last major conferences on child labour held in Amsterdam and Oslo in 1997. The inter-agency report makes use of advances in research to assess key remaining obstacles to child labour elimination to identify strategies for addressing them.

The report presents evidence of country-specific child labour situations and trends, of reasons why child labour matters from a child rights and national development perspective, and of the policies holding greatest potential for combating it. It also identifies areas where information gaps constitute an impediment to policy formulation.

The report highlights the close linkages between child labour and broader development objectives, and the consequent need to address child labour as an important component of national development strategies. It also illustrates the wide array of factors contributing to child labour, and the resulting importance of a broad, integrated policy response to it.

Finally, the report underscores the importance of concerted action by international development agencies in support of Government efforts in the fight against child labour. International development agencies have a support role to play both in the development of integrated national strategies against child labour, and in the implementation of such strategies, in accordance with the relative strengths of each agency.

Towards a world without child labour – Mapping the road to 2016

The year 2010 is 10 years after the coming into force of ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL), and it is 6 years ahead of the global target of eliminating the WFCL. While the global movement has achieved much progress in reducing the incidence of child labour, efforts must be stepped up if we are to deliver the commitment of a world free of the worst forms of child labour by 2016. In order to meet that challenge, the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, in close collaboration with the ILO (and in cooperation with UNICEF and the World Bank), organized a global conference on child labour held in The Hague (The Netherlands) on 10 and 11 May 2010.

Four over-arching messages emerge from the report that are of relevance to the efforts of the international community against child labour.

(1) Despite progress, there is a need to scale up efforts against child labour, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the most recent ILO global estimates suggest that overall progress against child labour continues, country-specific evidence tells us that behind global and regional averages there are many countries where progress has stagnated or is even negative, and where accelerated action is therefore needed.

Some of the countries looked at in this report in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, experienced significant rises in child labour rates in recent years. There are also important pockets of stagnated progress within many countries; indigenous children, and children affected by HIV and/or AIDS, for example, often lag significantly behind national progress in reducing child labour.

(2) Child labour has a very high human cost and important implications for the achievement of broader national development goals.

Evidence presented in Part II of the report underscores that the conditions faced by children in the workplace can seriously jeopardize their immediate health and safety, as well as their health status later in life. This is particularly the case for the large number of children in hazardous work. Child labour is also associated with greater difficulties in entering and remaining in school, and learning effectively in the classroom. The educational and developmental toll associated with child labour, in turn, makes it much less likely that children are able to successfully transition to gainful employment upon entering adulthood.

These adverse consequences of child labour not only constitute serious violations of the rights of the children concerned, but also have broader consequences for national development. Children who grow up compromised educationally and developmentally by early involvement in work will be in a poor position to contribute to their country's growth as adults.

(3) There is a need for a comprehensive policy response to child labour built on an adequate legal foundation.

Progress in expanding the knowledge base on child labour has also improved understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon and of the consequent need for a comprehensive response. For too long, child labour has been seen as an isolated issue. But, in reality, it is a phenomenon that cuts across policy boundaries – schooling, health care, labour market conditions, enforcement of core labour standards and legislation, social protection, basic services access, income distribution, social norms, cultural practices, inter alia; all can play a role.

Consequently, child labour requires a policy response that is cross-sectoral in nature and that involves actors both inside and outside government. There is a need to “mainstream” child labour concerns into overall national development agendas and plans, including poverty reduction efforts, and into decisions concerning budgetary resource allocations. There is also a need for governments to collaborate more closely with social partners in the area of child labour. Employers’ and workers’ organizations have a critical role to play in mobilizing civil society and businesses in the fight against child labour.

(4) Remaining barriers to understanding child labour impede policy formulation.

A lack of information is not an excuse for inaction. But at the same time, continuing to build the knowledge base on child labour is indispensable to refining policy responses and to ensuring that resources are targeted to where they are most needed. The ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank have an important role to play in this area, building on the policy-oriented research already undertaken under the umbrella of the UCW programme, as well as on agency-specific research programmes. Inter-agency research collaboration is also important in building a shared vision of child labour and common strategies for addressing it.