



***Mainstreaming responses for improvement of the girl child  
in agriculture***

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## *Mainstreaming responses for improvement of the employment conditions of the girl child in agriculture*

### **Abstract**

The number of child labourers in the agricultural sector is nearly ten times higher than the number of child labourers in other sectors (e.g in manufacturing, mining, etc) (ILO, 2006). Yet, there has been less research to understand, develop and deepen strategies for combating child labour in agriculture and rural employment, when compared to other sectors. It would seem that research and activities focussing on the girl child labourer in agriculture are neglected. However, it is well known why gender equality is important in the general context of combating child labour. Key factors include discrimination faced by girl child labourers; the vulnerability of girls to sexual exploitation; and the fact that girls often face a double burden of economic work and unpaid household chores. Amongst the many actors involved in efforts to eliminate child labour, the argument that child labour concerns should be better integrated into mainstream policy has gained momentum in order to ensure more “joined-up thinking” amongst all involved in efforts to combat child labour. This paper reviews some current thinking on approaches to mainstream responses to child labour, focusing on agriculture and the rural girl-child.

**Key words:** child labour; agriculture; girl child; mainstreaming; hazardous work; child labour

## 1. Introduction

The goal set by governments (and the international community) is the progressive elimination of all forms of child labour worldwide, with priority given to eliminate without delay what are termed 'the worst forms of child labour' (WFCL). The WFCL, as defined in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 182 include all forms of slavery, trafficking of children, use of child soldiers, commercial sexual exploitation, the use of children in illicit activities, and hazardous child labour. The latter category is particularly relevant to agriculture.

According to the ILO (2006a), an estimated 70 per cent of the world's child labourers<sup>1</sup> are agricultural workers. The number of child labourers in the agricultural sector is considered to be nearly ten times higher than the number of child labourers in other sectors (such as in factories, mining, etc) (ILO, 2006a). As a result both boys and girls work in a sector with a poor health and safety record. Yet, there has been less research to understand and develop strategies for combating child labour in agriculture and rural employment, (especially the worst/most hazardous forms of child labour) when compared to other sectors<sup>2</sup>. The agricultural workforce remains one of the largest workforce sectors in the world and indications are that this workforce is being increasingly feminised with self-employed women farmers, waged agriculture women workers and sadly, girl child labourers. Yet, evidence of specific research focussed on girl child labour in agriculture is scant, although some reports do exist on this topic.

The reason for focussing on gender equality issues in child labour relates to the issue of whether boys and girls are being given equal rights and opportunities from an early age. In some countries and cultures, indicators demonstrate that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, throughout her childhood and into adulthood. Unfortunately, girls' work in agriculture (like their female relatives) can often be invisible, and their work is typically not given the same value as boys. Girls also face a double burden of domestic work on top of agricultural work. Agricultural work for girls and boys often results in less opportunities for obtaining an education. Investing in the education of girls is important from a number of equity and efficiency reasons.

It must be stressed that not all work that boys and girls undertake in agriculture is harmful for them. Age-appropriate tasks that are of lower risk and do not interfere with a child's schooling and right to leisure time can be normal part of growing up in a rural environment, and provide valuable work experience as a basis for future employment. Such age appropriate tasks are not in question here. However with much agricultural work, boys and girls are at greater risk from the same hazards than adult workers encounter. This is because of a combination of physical, psychological and social reasons based on the reality that the bodies, minds and personalities of children are still growing and developing (ILO-IPEC 2009; Doorman, 2008).

An integrated approach to tackling child labour in agriculture requires a focus across a number of sectors (education, poverty reduction, agriculture, employment). The argument that child labour concerns should become more 'integrated' into policy with more mainstream responses has gained momentum (in order to ensure joined-up thinking amongst all responsible agencies and rural communities). In order to support

the elimination of child labour in agriculture, a new International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture has been established<sup>3</sup>. This paper aims to contribute to help focus the work of the Partnership, review some current thinking on gender issues in agriculture, and to highlight that an integrated response to child labour in agriculture is necessary.

Section 1 outlines the effects of child labour in agriculture on children generally, and links between child labour and education. Section 2 presents the results of some existing studies on the girl child and agricultural work, as well the girl child bearing the burden of domestic work. Section 3 outlines issues around responding to child labour in agriculture, and focuses on the need for a broad range of responses. Finally section 4 provides some conclusions.

### ***Methodology and data sources***

This paper is influenced by ongoing research and policy work in collaboration with the International Labour Organisations' *International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour* (ILO-IPEC) on mainstreaming child labour concerns into national policy processes, such as national poverty reduction strategies. Through interviews with key individuals working on child labour, opportunities and challenges for mainstreaming child labour issues are being systematically documented.

This paper also draws on recent collaboration between FAO and ILO to investigate how issues relating to child labour in agriculture could be better placed on the agenda at the field level in rural areas. To this end, a training module for FAO field facilitators of Junior Farmer Field and Life Skills Schools (JFFLS), based on ILO training material on elimination of child labour in agriculture, has been prepared and is undergoing field testing in 2009. The JFFLS provide practical skills-based training for youth affected by HIV/AIDS in African partner countries and have a strong focus on gender issues in agriculture and employment in agriculture. This paper also draws upon comparative analysis on girl child labour in agriculture in Ghana, Ecuador and the Philippines. The paper refers to ILO IPEC's main policy publication on child labour in this sector, *Tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture: Guidance on policy and practice*.

Policy recommendations are also derived from the *FAO Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development* expert meetings, in particular the Slovakia meeting on *Rural Development Policies and Programmes to Generate Jobs and Incomes* (2007)<sup>4</sup>. Some of the specific examples cited in this paper are derived from ILO-IPEC programmes on child labour in agriculture, in particular the views of stakeholder representatives (ILO-IPEC staff, government officials, and representatives of employer organizations, trade unions and NGOs) from countries in West Africa from a child labour in cocoa programme (WACAP) and an East African child labour in agriculture programme (COMAGRI). Lessons learnt regarding vocational training were drawn from a gender review of ILO SKILLS programmes to support gender sensitive skills development initiatives (Murray, forthcoming). Other concepts are drawn from a review of good practices in gender mainstreaming and child labour (Murray, 2003). In collaboration with Irish Task Force on Child Labour, research on how donors could

mainstream child labour in their typical aid programmes generated a policy brief (June 2008) for donors and this paper draws also on that work<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Effects of child labour in agriculture on girls & boys

According to the ILO (2006a) an estimated 70 per cent of the world's ~218 million child labourers are agricultural workers. An estimated 132 million of all of the children who work in agriculture are girls and boys aged between 5-14 years old. About 126 million of these 218 million boys and girls are engaged in hazardous work, though the precise figures in agriculture are not known (ILO, 2006a).

It is difficult to obtain accurate figures on the total number of children engaged in child labour in agriculture, let alone the gender breakdown between girls and boys. Many working children may be perceived as helping their parents or employers rather than labouring and so they are not counted in the total number of workers.

### 2.1 Benefits from children helping with agriculture work

The agriculture and rural employment sector is not a homogenous basket with many differences relating to farming systems, farm sizes, farm incomes (on-farm versus off-farm), livelihood strategies, employment relationships, extent of modernisation, markets, household structure, land tenure, extent of migrant or seasonal workers and so on. Households involved in farming (either their own land or the land of others) are likely to involve both boys and girls in the farming work they are engaged in.

Children's participation in family farm activities helps them learn valuable skills for future employment, build self-esteem and contribute to the generation of household income, which has a positive impact on their own livelihoods. For many poorer families, the contribution of children is very important for family livelihoods and coping strategies. Age-appropriate tasks that do not interfere with a child's schooling and right to leisure time can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment.

The law in most countries indicates that children must not work full time in agriculture if they are under the minimum age for employment. However, young persons who have attained the minimum legal age for work (14-16 years of age depending on the country) should be encouraged to enter agricultural work as a means of promoting youth employment. It is important to ensure that older children receive proper training, have good levels of health and safety protection, and work under decent conditions. Under no circumstances should any child, under 18 years of age carry out "*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*" as this is hazardous child labour in breach of the law.<sup>6</sup> The unfortunate reality is that due to a range of factors, including poverty, a demand for cheap labour in agricultural and rural enterprises, family indebtedness, household shocks, many girls and boys end up working in exploitative child labour in the agricultural sector.

## **2.2 Children are at greater risk to hazards in agriculture than adults**

Agriculture can be one of the worst forms of child labour when the circumstance in which agricultural work is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children<sup>7</sup>. ILO highlights that agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work in terms of the numbers of work-related deaths, non-fatal accidents, and cases of occupational diseases and ill health. Half of all fatal accidents occur in agriculture (ILO, 2000 pg 3).

The potential hazards are numerous and levels of risk high. Boys and girls often work for extremely long periods at a time, which is physically demanding, often under extreme temperatures. Cutting tools are frequently used in agriculture, toxic pesticides substances may be used and children are exposed to high levels of dust and fibres that can cause respiratory and skin problems. Children can be injured by animals (both farm and wild) as well as agricultural machinery and equipment, particularly if such machinery and equipment has been specifically designed for operation by adults and not children. Working (often barefoot) in fields or around livestock exposes children to cuts, bites, injuries, skin disorders or water-borne diseases. The lack of clean drinking water and washing facilities in agricultural fields compounds many of these health and safety issues in agriculture. Children often suffer physical and/or sexual harassment, especially girls, and psychological abuse and stress (ILO, 2009).

In many instances, the health consequences of working as a child labour in agriculture may not develop or become significant until the child is an adult. Not all illness or even injury can be immediately diagnosed. Health hazards are often slow acting, cumulative, irreversible and complicated by non-occupational factors like malnutrition and disease. Examples include the effects of carrying heavy loads as a child resulting in incurable musculoskeletal damage in later life; or cancer or reproductive problems as a result of exposure to toxic chemical compounds (ILO, 2009).

## **2.3 Agricultural work, girls and education**

A more immediate problem is that too much work in agriculture hinders the attendance of boys and girls at school or does not allow older children to participate in rural employment training opportunities. It is widely agreed that education should be a better option than work for boys and girls under the minimum age for work<sup>8</sup>.

The links between child labour and education are well documented indicating that child labour can have negative consequences for the education of boys and girls (e.g. Rosati 2008, Heady 2003, Blanco & Hagemann 2008, UNGEI 2006). Indeed, the progress reports from the UN on reaching education for all children goals, specify many gender related difficulties. Children from rural agricultural areas are by definition less likely to live close to a school (and the route to the school may be considered dangerous for girls) and more likely to be employed on a local farm. Girls also face traditional attitudes in some cultures, which do not allow girls to continue schooling after puberty, and many children experience gender based discrimination in school (as well as ethnic

or religious) (UCW, 2008). The school calendar may be incompatible with agricultural work scheduling for boys and girls. If children are attempting to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy agricultural work, and for girls domestic responsibilities (including cooking, washing, fetching firewood and water, and childcare), their schooling will be interfered with, or they leave school prematurely.

Educating girls has enormous repercussions for future prosperity of families and societies. Empirical evidence from a range of countries has shown that educating girls is one of the most effective ways of fighting poverty<sup>9</sup>. However, globally 55% of the children currently denied an education are girls (ILO, 2006b). Parents may invest more in their sons' education than their daughters'. In many cultures, boys are valued more than girls, and girls are socialized to accept a lower status. A lower social status can lead girls to have lower self-esteem and fewer opportunities. Leaving school prematurely impairs girls' future job opportunities and long-term livelihood prospects. This in turn perpetuates the cycle of poverty and exploitation from one generation of women to the next. One of the objectives of the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture is to overcome the gender gap in rural education.

Econometric studies on child labour datasets increasingly also factor in gender as a variable, which facilitates an analysis of the effects of the sexual division of labour in society and the different roles assigned to women and men. For example, while a sex-disaggregated study in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed that education is crucial for the transition from unemployment to employment for both young women and men (Gurbuzer & Koseleci 2008), the results also indicate that education is more critical for young women than for young men. Society's ability to accept new economic roles for older girls, and the economy's ability to create the jobs to accommodate older girls are key however. A study in Pakistan found that education promotes entry into the more highly remunerated occupations for men. For women, however, it did so only beyond 10 years education. Indeed, the earnings increments from an extra year of education are substantially greater for women than men in all occupations except agriculture (World Bank, 2008). This may indicate that the employment prospects of women are more sensitive to education, but wages in agriculture do not increase substantially.

A range of country specific studies have shed light on how gender related factors affect educational attainment levels<sup>10</sup>. In Turkey, the factors that affect the demand for education from both boys and girls were studied (Goksel, 2008). Household income growth, improvement in parents' education and fertility control contributed positively to school attainment for all children, and the positive effect was higher for girls than it was for boys. A change in legislation which raised the minimum years of compulsory education for all children from a 5 to 8 year duration also acted as a catalyst for improved education for both boys and girls.

In summary, studies are also underway to shed light on the household decision making processes regarding sending children to work or school. Such studies are providing indications that birth order and sex can be critical factors regarding the likelihood that a child receives access to education (Hirata 2008).

## 2.4 Conditional cash transfers and girls' education

In rural areas, attempting to get boys and girls into schools in tandem with implementing the national minimum age for employment is a very demanding task. Unfortunately, because agriculture is fundamental to livelihood strategies of poorer social groups, regulatory approaches (even through applied less stringently) are unlikely to be effective on their own. Financial incentives including food for school programmes have proved successful in some countries to provide incentives for both boys and girls to attend school instead of work.

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes provide an example of resources being used to target children and education. Money is only transferred to persons who meet certain criteria. These criteria may include children attending school regularly or family members visiting health centres and immunising their children. CCTs have become widespread in Latin America (e.g. in Brazil; Mexico; Honduras; Nicaragua; Ecuador). CCTs have generally been reported to have a positive effect on girls education. In Bangladesh the Female Secondary School Stipend programme gives money directly to girls and their families conditional upon their enrolment in secondary school and remaining unmarried until age 18. By 2005, girls accounted for 56 per cent of secondary enrolments in areas covered by the programme, compared to 33 per cent in 1991. Girls attendance rate actually surpassed boys' attendance rate (Raynor, 2006). The CCT *Oportunidades* in Mexico pays a higher stipend for girls' school attendance than boys.

## 3. What do we know about the girl child in agricultural work?

*Gender* is a central organising factor around which work and production are organised. Gender and labour issues in the agricultural sector have long been highlighted, most recently for instance by publications from the World Bank, FAO and IFAD<sup>11</sup>. The problems of addressing gender inequalities and child labour in rural areas mirrors overall gender in agriculture problems, but merit a particular focus because of the known long-term benefits of education for girls and the 'double burden' girls face (see 2.4 below).

### 3.1 Gender roles for girls in agriculture are diverse

Many rural children tend to begin work young, sometimes between 5 to 7, often accompanying their mother or father. As children grow older, they take on other agricultural tasks during seasonal planting and harvesting. Depending on the region, at adolescence their agricultural work tends to become more differentiated according to gender roles. In some countries cultural traditions and taboos dictate what tasks (agricultural and domestic) girls, women, boys and men undertake within farming and rural enterprise systems. For example in some ethnic groups or cultures it is not appropriate for women to handle cattle, or in many countries taking care of poultry is only the women's or girl's responsibility. However, gender roles in agriculture are not static and change.



A traditionalist perception that women and girls produce for the household rather than the market prevailed for many years. However it is now fully acknowledged that a high proportion of rural women and girls are regularly wage-dependent, taking on seasonal or casual work to supplement low incomes with paid work on other farms or plantations (ILO, 2003). In some places, children’s ‘waged’ work in agriculture can be absorbed into ‘piece work based on family work units (ILO, 2006 pg 37-38). However, the evidence would indicate that children can often begin work as young as 11 years on banana, sugarcane or tea plantations (Cook, 2008). If hired as a child worker, some studies have found that, on average, girls (like their older sisters and mothers) are often paid less than boys for doing the same job suggesting that gender inequities in waged employment span all age groups.

Sector specific studies and other research provide evidence of the extent and conditions of girl child labour in for example certain agricultural commodities. Some such studies on cotton, coffee and tea are summarised below.

### **3.2 Girls and cotton cultivation**

A ten-country review by the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) highlights gender and girl child labour issues in cotton cultivation (ICAC, 2008). In the Indian review for instance, female labour demand has peaks of demand at weeding and harvesting time. Several reports mentioned by the ICAC focus on the use of bonded young female labourers (7-14 years) for F1 hybrid cottonseed production, as the seed production process requires hand emasculation and cross-pollination of cotton flowers. Apart from being denied their freedom, a basic human right, this activity can expose girls to pesticides of different toxicity classes, which are extensively used in cotton growing systems. Depending on the safety class and dose exposure of the chemical pesticide, such exposure can result in immediate and long-term effects and may be most critical for the reproductive systems of pre-pubescent girls (ILO, 2009). The ICAC cite reports suggesting that women and children are most vulnerable to pesticide exposure<sup>12</sup>. The ICAC also highlight a study by Mancini et al (2005) which noted that the typical female task in cotton farming included mixing concentrated chemicals and refilling spraying tanks. Mancini’s study concluded that these preparatory tasks are as hazardous as direct application of the pesticide. The participation of girls in cotton harvesting is also commonplace in cotton-growing regions of Punjab in Pakistan. In some instances rural schools may close during the cotton-harvesting season. During the harvesting season, female piece-rate cotton pickers often bring their younger children, especially female children, to help in the fields (ICAC, 2008). Such intermittent child labour is a common feature of child labour in agriculture and rural areas, and arguments are often put forward for rural schools to adjust timetables in order to accommodate seasonal agricultural work in particular localities<sup>13</sup>.

A study by an NGO, the India Committee of the Netherlands noted that the introduction of F1 hybrid cottonseeds production in the early 1970s in India, contributed to the rise in productivity and quality of cotton, and also generated a substantial amount of additional employment in the agricultural sector. However, much of the extra employment generated was the hiring of female children as bonded labourers. As many as an estimated 450,000 children, in the age group of 6 to 14 years, were employed in

cottonseed fields in India, with about 248,000 of them in Andhra Pradesh alone. Local seed farmers, who cultivate hybrid cottonseeds for seed organisers (who in turn are contracted to national and multinational enterprise seed companies), secure the labour of girls by offering loans to their parents in advance of cultivation, compelling the girls to work at the terms set by the employer for the entire season, and, in practice, for several years. These girls work long days, are paid very little, are deprived of an education and are exposed for long periods to dangerous agricultural chemicals (Venkateswarlu, undated).

Highlighting of the prevalence of child labour in the F1 hybrid cottonseed industry has led to documented efforts by some of the multinational enterprises to reduce the numbers of child labourers in F1 cottonseed production through technological (i.e. labour substitution technologies such as male sterility in cotton plants which can reduce by half labour requirement of one task in the process for making F1 hybrid seeds) or supply-chain interventions (e.g. requiring that those contracted to the multinational enterprises adhere to child labour legislation) (Venkateswarlu, undated). For instance, one company inserted a special clause in written agreements, which it makes with seed organizers stating that `children should not be used in cultivation of seeds` (Venkateswarlu, undated). In April 2006 another multinational company adopted a human rights policy covering issues such as child labour<sup>14</sup>. According to this company, from 2005 onwards, clauses prohibiting child labour were included in contracts with all of their suppliers of direct goods in the Indian hybrid cottonseed business. This company indicated that all hybrid cotton business partners and about 2,500 farmers received training and materials, in addition to incentives whereby cottonseed farmers were to benefit by \$160 an acre for complying with the no-child-labour program. The company claimed that this approach permitted cottonseed farmers to afford adult labour. They also claim that this reduced the percentage of children working in their direct-goods suppliers from 20 percent in 2004 to 5 percent in 2006. No figures are presented by the company for more recent years<sup>15</sup>. Long-term monitoring and evaluations would be necessary to assess the impact on the displaced girls (e.g. whether they returned to school, or whether they ended up in other forms of child labour) and to determine whether child labour can affectively eliminated from such supply chains by such approaches.

Harvesting of cotton is also a major source of child labour. Often there is a strong financial incentive for mothers to involve their daughters (and indeed sons) in harvesting cotton. An ILO study in Andhra Pradesh (India) indicated that an adult female labourer earns about 40 rupees per day and her child will add about 20-30 rupees per day. This study noted that employers who try to put an end to children's involvement in cotton harvesting face difficulties because female labourers may refuse to work if their child cannot accompany them (ILO, 2006d).

### 3.3 Sector studies on coffee and tea

An ILO IPEC rapid assessment study of child labour in coffee growing in Tanzania showed that child workers are regularly recruited in coffee growing areas during the picking season. The majority were aged 10-13 years old, and girls constituted the majority (60 per cent) (ILO, 2002).

The main tasks performed by the children were picking coffee berries, pruning, weeding and pesticide spraying, without any protective clothing or equipment. Some children sprayed pesticides for three hours per day on average. The children were exposed to tough and strenuous activities irrespective of their age. Other hazards included snake and insect bites, and attacks by wild animals. Children worked on average between eight and 10 hours per day, depending on the season.

An ILO IPEC baseline survey in three tea growing districts - Korogwe, Lushoto, Muheza – in Tanzania concluded that hazardous child labour existed both on small and large-scale tea growing farms (plantations). Most of the 1,000 children in the study were 11-14 years old, with girls in the majority. The children interviewed were engaged in plucking and carrying the tea leaves. They worked on average eight hours per day, usually without a lunch break as they continued plucking to earn more money (ILO, 2002).

### **3.4 Girls bear the burden of domestic work**

From a gender perspective, one of the key issues not fully addressed in many studies covering girl child labour in agriculture is how girls combine work in agriculture with domestic chores (ILO, 2006c). By mimicking and supporting the roles of their mothers or female relatives, girls take on more domestic tasks than boys, along with agricultural tasks – therefore for girls there is the danger of a double burden in agricultural societies, which negatively impacts on their education possibilities. In households with a large number of younger siblings, girls from the age of 5 years often care for their younger siblings so their mothers can work.

The Tanzanian trade union, the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic and Allied Workers' Union (CHODAWU), has found that the types of work carried out by child domestic workers in rural areas typically include washing clothes, dishes, babysitting, fetching water, collecting firewood, gardening, taking care of poultry and animals on the premises, (including milking cows) and harvesting crops. In other words, child domestic workers frequently carry out agricultural tasks as part of their "domestic" duties<sup>16</sup>.

In Nepal, under the Kamalhari practice of bonded labour, 8-16 year-old girls of the Kamaiya worked in the house of their landlords as domestic servants. Some of the "domestic" duties involved agricultural activities, such as collecting grass for cattle, cleaning out cowsheds, taking care of livestock and so on. Following the Bonded Labour Prohibition Act, 2001, the Kamaiyas were legally free from the landlords. However, many Kamaiyas became homeless as a result with no stable source of income after their freedom. Some resorted to earning a living through sharecropping arrangements with their former landlords, receiving land for sharecropping in return for agreeing that their children work as domestic servants in their landlords' houses<sup>17</sup>.

The custom of children on farms combining domestic and agricultural chores appears to have consequences beyond the farm as well. Child domestic labour in urban areas is, in many cases, the result of migration from the rural areas to the cities. Girls who work as domestics in urban areas often come from farming families. For example,

a 1997 survey of child domestic labour in Sri Lanka, reported that one third of the domestic labour force was children and that 44 per cent of child domestic workers came from families working in the plantation sector. In such instances, trade unions that work in rural areas, including agricultural workers' unions, can play a special role in helping protect child domestic workers. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), which organizes agricultural plantation workers, is active in helping protect child domestic workers who are from plantation families. They also help prevent children under the minimum working age from entering child domestic labour (De Silva, 1997)<sup>18</sup>.

Girls domestic burden takes many hours of their day and affects their schooling (ILO, 2004). Similarly, as domestic labour is often not viewed as work per se, the fact that girl child labourers engage in domestic chores on top of other child labour needs to be factored in when considering their total workloads. An Indian report on female child labour in rural areas noted that, *"In addition to employment for wages, girls are invariably seen collecting firewood or fetching water for households in rural villages and participating in other domestic and non-domestic work, for example, engaged in cottage industry."* The report also mentioned many similar studies that *"...indicate that the burden of household duties, from looking after younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, to fetching, carrying water over long distances fall upon the girl child. Performing such household chores is not considered as being "work", either by the family and definitely not by women and girls themselves"* (Somasundaram, 2003).

A project focusing on eliminating child labour in cocoa in Guinea acknowledged that it was difficult to reach girls, and to document their views on their work in cocoa production, as they were always busy with domestic chores - it was subsequently recognised that different strategies were required to encourage girls to go to school than boys (Khan & Murray, 2007).

Thus a common thread is that rural girls engage in agricultural work and are often more likely to be kept at home from school, often combining domestic work with agriculture work. How communities value boys' and girls' access to education and the opportunity cost of sending either of the two to school, are fundamental considerations. The different values placed by communities on the girl child, in comparison to the boy child, is a highly significant factor in some cultures.

Although non-economic domestic work is receiving increasing attention in recent debates concerning child labour measurement<sup>19</sup>, in the past, studies of child labour tended to neglect the link between domestic work (often carried out by girls but not measured) and child labour (Levison et. al. 2007). Recent work by ILO-IPEC and others provide evidence that girls appear to have a higher likelihood of working than boys, once household chores are taken into consideration (ILO forthcoming and Huebler, 2008). However the possible effect of the age and sex of the household head is not always so clear and more research in this area is needed (Cópez-Calva & Mijamoto, 2004).

### **3.5 Research and sex disaggregated data on the extent of the child labour in agriculture problem**

Having sex disaggregated empirical evidence of the extent of child labour in agriculture, its forms and regularity is helpful, but often not available. Statistics can be used to illustrate or analyse if there are negative or positive social and employment impacts of agrarian reform on child labour. However, methodological guidelines may have to be adopted to allow a fresh look at the concepts and definitions used in agricultural censuses in the light of incorporating gender issues. For example questions on unpaid work should always be included in surveys; questions that pick up information on illegal types of work, or multiple tasks that girls may be engaged in, must be emphasized in agricultural statistical reports.

Even when sex-disaggregated data are systematically collected, this is not an end in itself. Analysing sex-disaggregated data should go beyond the simple differences in percentages by sex and include analyses of causes, consequences, patterns and different outcomes for boys and girls. For example it may be important to predict who tends to migrate from rural areas and why, and the consequences for those left behind in terms of labour.

Data is important when presented along with the consequences for both national social and economic interests, including perhaps impacts on export markets and the benefits of investing in girls education. Cost/benefit analyses on the impact on child labour in agriculture are thus particularly useful, especially where the longer-term negative effects of child labour on human capital development can be highlighted. In Central America, two economic studies of the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour overall provided such useful information for those advocating against child labour (Sauma, 2005). Available data on the involvement of boys and girls in the processing or marketing of agricultural produce, or in agro-industries is useful also. Thus it is necessary to be able to succinctly and convincingly present the realities of boy and girl child labour in agriculture and how it is linked to national interests.

## **4. Responding to child labour in agriculture in policies and planning**

### **4.1 The scale of child labour in agriculture merits a mainstream response**

There is a strong awareness that prevention of rural child labour will be preferable and more efficient than post-hoc approaches to treat the symptoms of rural child labour (ILO, 2006a:53).

Compulsory and affordable schools in rural areas is key to addressing child labour in agriculture. Poverty reduction strategies along with educating children and families; providing support services; raising awareness on the hazards of agricultural work; legislating on and regulating child labour and are other strategies put forward to date to address child labour. In most instances, different targeted sensitisation messages must be put in place for rural girls than boys, because of the significant impacts of family situations, tradition and gender roles in the likelihood of programme success.

Statements and guidance of intergovernmental development bodies suggests that integrated mainstreaming-type approaches for combating child labour are required. Many intergovernmental responses also highlight that special attention should be paid to girls. The reasons given for a focus on girls is that they often face additional risks of exploitation and sexual abuse, or that they are sometimes forgotten about, or it is assumed that the same strategies to eliminate hazardous child labour will work for both boys and girls<sup>20</sup>. It is important that the hidden work of the girl child (such as domestic work) is not forgotten, or at the very least all actions proposed, ensure that the situation of the girl child is not made any worse.

#### **4.2 Mainstreaming child labour within the ministry of agriculture**

In terms of mainstreaming a gender-sensitive response to child labour in agriculture at the national level, a ministry, a legislative body, an organisation, a unit within an organisation, a thematic group, an NGO, a trade union, or a producers organisation, must continue to carry out their core business, but in ways that are measurably better at addressing both boy and girl child labour in agriculture and rural areas.

Starting with the government, focusing on the ministry of agriculture – bureaucrats and officials should, before decisions are taken, make an analysis of the likely effects of their actions on the child labour in agriculture situation. This would be in contrast to responding to impacts as they unfold such as labour shortages due to more girls going to school or mass rural migration to cities partly because young women (and men) are not offered appropriate training in agriculture related areas.

The Ministry of Agriculture’s extension officers may require sensitisation on national child labour policy, legal issues, and what can be done about child labour in areas they service. Other questions include whether there is potential for contradictory impacts of initiatives that target women’s greater participation in agriculture in rural areas? E.g. will a focus on growth sectors such as floriculture, or certain agri-processing industries lead indirectly to reduced care time for children, resulting in women bringing children with them to the workplace, or greater pressures on girls to shoulder domestic responsibilities. Linkages between ministries is important (e.g. the ministry of agriculture and the ministry that deals with enterprise) Types of questions to ask include:

- Does national legislation cover hazardous activities in agriculture? How can agricultural workplaces be improved in terms of safety and health? How will such information reach small-scale farmers?
- What attention and resources are earmarked for informal agricultural sector enterprise and small-scale farms?
- If there is a reliance on traditional non-technological methods of agriculture, is there an assumption of plentiful labour, and typically is it male or female labour?
- If there is a focus on changing crop patterns, would this imply less demand for children’s work? E.g. would a move less labour intensive crops instead of more labour intensive crops change the size of operational units and change the intensity of labour required (less weeding and picking)? Is it likely that a move

to less labour intensive crops will affect casual employment of boys and girls differently? How is this likely to affect rural employment overall?

- How will growth led by increases in labour productivity, (as opposed to being driven only by technical factors and inputs) increase employment, and reduce or increase child labour?
- Will the encouragement of technological innovations for poorer households have direct benefits in reducing child domestic labour? (for example freeing up girls in terms of their traditional tasks).

However, mainstreaming child labour responses from a top down perspective alone will be impossible due to the cross-cutting nature and challenge of the child labour in agriculture. Once legislative bodies have set child labour standards, rural communities and enterprises are expected to accept these standards. Judicial and regulatory bodies are expected to monitor the performance of agricultural supply chains in meeting those standards, even if such bodies are not convinced, or supply chains are difficult to follow due to family farm production. In many cases, child labour standards in agriculture are notoriously difficult to monitor because much child labour in agriculture is on family farms and domestic work in rural areas is hidden. A further problem is that women and girls' role in agriculture production is much wider than generally recognised by extension services, who are predominantly run by and composed of men.

Such a top-down approach is also very bureaucratic and can ignore the causes and consequences of child labour in agriculture, most notably poverty and the value placed on education or on the girl child. The hardest to reach boys and girls will always be most excluded. In any case, many field programmes indicate that parents may view their girls and boys differently and can have different values around girls and boys need for education. In such scenarios, the value systems of the parents and guardians of child labourers will perpetuate the problem. Thus sensitisation on the hazards of child labour, the importance of education, and gender equality must take place at the community and district levels.

### **4.3 Child labour, adult employment and poverty reduction**

In 2008, the ILO's report on the promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction states that the prevalence of rural child labour, especially in agriculture, undermines decent work and employment for adults and weakens rural labour markets as it maintains a cycle where household income for both farmers and waged workers is insufficient to meet the economic needs of their families. The report also adds that child labour undermines efforts to promote rural youth employment under decent conditions of work, because older children must continue to work in exploitative conditions, with poor future job and economic prospects. It is now widely acknowledged that child labour cannot be tackled in isolation from addressing the problem of ending rural poverty" (ILO, 2008).

While economic growth and stability are necessary for poverty reduction, others argue that economic growth is not a panacea for a reduction in child labour

(Kambhampati & Rajan, 2006). As many critics of gender and poverty reduction strategies stress (see for example Zukerman, 2008), it is becoming more evident that the effects of economic growth must be measured in terms of measuring who actually benefits. The 'poor' are not a homogenous group. For instance the rural poor could include self-employed individuals with land who produce for the market, yet rely on their children's labour. In fact, there are counter-intuitive findings that marginal farm size increases in some regions may result in more requirements for family labour (including sons and daughters)<sup>21</sup> for this category of farmers. Children affected by HIV/AIDS often have even less chance to take up the opportunities offered by economic growth. ILO-IPEC call for social protection and financial support systems along with broad economic growth.

The national policy level is where policies relevant to the future well being of poorer men, women, boys and girls are formulated and decisions regarding major resource allocations are made. National policy and planning documents dictate how resources will be distributed to address different needs of the government and country. Hence, if child labour issues (and a significant focus on the rural girl child) are integrated into the national development plan or poverty reduction strategy in the section dealing with agriculture or education, there is a higher chance of sectoral support with budget allocations. There is increasing interest in social protection measures such as school feeding programmes in rural areas, or cash transfers for families who sent their girls to school because of the evidence of more girls attending school with such incentives.

Nevertheless economic growth is an important factor influencing poverty, which in turn affects poor people's ability to send their children to school. Policies that improve the distribution of income and assets within a society, such as land reform, pro-poor public expenditure and measures to increase poor people's access to financial markets are also key and must be implemented in a gender sensitive manner. Policy agendas could query whether for example:

- Transport sector policy and programmes could help improve journeys for domestic duties (firewood, water collection often undertaken by women and girls) and allow more time for other activities? Likewise, for water and sanitation programmes.
- Government vocational education programmes in agriculture related areas gender sensitive and targeted at both males and females?
- The ministry of education could ensure that there are adequate quality schools in areas where child labour is prevalent and how can girls attendance be encouraged?

#### **4.4 The concern about agricultural supply chains**

The possibility that child labour in agriculture will be used as a protectionist measure to ban the import of primary products from a country has been highlighted by some authors (e.g. Dasgupta, 2000). Large agricultural buyers and processing firms source from small producers further up the supply chain (out-growers). Some supermarket may put pressure on their supply chains to affirm that their food, drink and fibres were produced without the use of child labour (Hazel et. al, 2007). Media coverage and the



fear of export bans is often considered a real threat by those involved in agri-food supply chains. In Côte d’Ivoire, where forty-five percent of the Ivorian economy depends on cocoa production and exports, a task force on child labour within the Prime Minister’s office acted rapidly in response to the media coverage around allegations of child slavery in the cocoa industry. Because of the importance of cocoa to the economy, high prominence was given to addressing allegations of child trafficking and child labour.

Gupta (2002) analysed the effects of policies such as trade sanctions on the issue of child labour and concluded that trade sanctions may be counterproductive and in fact lead to even worst forms of child labour. He argued that trade sanctions could reduce prices for exportable goods which in turn will have negative effects on the economy and increase the supply of child labourers as a survival mechanism. Admassie (2002) also argues that trade sanctions may not be effective instruments to curtail the problem of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa where most child labour is found in the informal subsistence sector, rather than in exported goods. Trade bans do not address the double burden of girls in rural areas, combining agricultural work with domestic work.

Regardless of what is the best trade and fiscal course of action, the prevalence of child labour can be ‘perceived’ to have negative impacts on the success of export-oriented agricultural models and this perception may lead to greater government action on the topic. Extensive details regarding labour standards have already been negotiated by governments and agreed internationally<sup>22</sup>. Eliminating child labour in the agricultural supply chain is good for business. Getting girls out of work and into school contributes to agreed goals such as Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2 & 3. It can be argued that for government, putting resources towards reducing hazards in agriculture, and reducing child labour is in the country’s best interest.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Child labour in agriculture and the plight of the rural girl child is a difficult issue to tackle for a number of reasons. Because agriculture is so geographically dispersed by its nature, it poses challenges for regulation because of the high regulatory and transaction costs that would be necessary for comprehensive regulatory systems. Regulation on child labour can be easily ignored particularly for farming and rural employment systems plagued by poverty and subsistence-oriented livelihood strategies. Work on family farms is often excluded from legislation. Hence, agriculture is under-regulated all over the world compared to other sectors making the work of boys and girls invisible and unacknowledged.

Apart from the sheer magnitude of the problem, there has traditionally been resistance across cultures and regions of the world to the idea that “helping out” on the farm, particularly on family farms, can qualify as child labour. More than almost any other sector, agriculture is considered a way of life where boys and girls work to learn their future trade. This “family farm” element in agriculture that is so bound-up with culture and tradition makes it difficult to acknowledge that children can be exploited in such a setting and difficult to reach for child labour action.

Unfortunately, “helping out” (in some countries or communities) begins at about the age that a child should be entering primary school. Many poverty-stricken rural children in developing countries, girls in particular, become farm labourers while still very young – even as young as 5 years. In some countries, children under 10 are estimated to account for 20 per cent of rural child labour (ILO, 1996b).

If we overlook gender differences in child labour, we may miss some forms of child labour and unintentionally make life harder for one sex over the other (often girls). However, gender equality does not mean only focusing on girls, but rather implies equal opportunities for both sexes so that all have rural employment options.

When expecting that agricultural and rural employment will lead to a pathway out of poverty, the affects and effects of child labour in agriculture should be considered as an important area of focus. A “gender lens” will help us see more clearly any inequalities or differences that may exist between the treatment or expectations of boys and girls in agricultural and rural employment. Working to combat child labour requires a concerted effort to understand the gender roles of rural boys and rural girls, and the social relations embedded in societies, which influence these choices.

In all assessments of the extent and dynamics of child labour in agricultural work, it is important to ensure that domestic labour is included as an important variable. There is a need for culturally-sensitive strategies to entice rural girls into school. Education is key in terms of expanding the horizons of boys and girls regarding employment possibilities. Broadening the training skills offered to older girls to complement agriculture work is important as well as ensuring that older boys also opt for agricultural related skills training. Without training, it becomes difficult to build a new generation of farmers and rural workers who can increase local agricultural productivity and profitability. There is an overall need to focus on agri-market oriented training alternatives for both young women and men.

Mainstreaming requires partnership with many actors: different sections of government; trade unions; employers associations; farmers’/agricultural producer organisations; women’s groups; vocational associations; youth representative organisations; and local, provincial and issue-based groups; as well as NGOs, UN agencies and donors to name but a few. Many of these actors require capacity building on how to address the child labour in agriculture problem, how to address gender issues and child labour, and they require information on how child labour links with other development priorities.

The girl child working in agriculture is a cross-cutting issue, that presents many challenges for those attempting to do something about it, particularly because many girls are also struggling with domestic labour. Decisions that can best benefit such girls and avoid negative impacts on them is the goal. Before any decisions are taken in the agricultural sector, boys and girls views should be taken on board, so that an analysis should be first made on the probable effects of the action on the child labour situation and on the girl child in particular.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term “child labour” reflects the engagement of children in prohibited work and activities, that is, work and activities by *children to be eliminated as socially and morally undesirable*. ILO-IPEC (2009) (*International Labour Organization - International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour*). *Training resource pack on the elimination of hazardous child labour in agriculture. Book 1, A trainer’s guide. Revised edition, 2009, p 8.*

<sup>2</sup> See for example the number of entries in UNESCO (2004) *Exploitative work- Child Labour, An Annotated Bibliography of Research and Related Literature (1998-2003)*.

<sup>3</sup> This partnership is between the: ILO, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Food Policy Research Institute/Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (IFPRI/CGIAR), International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF).

<sup>4</sup> A full report from this workshop is available at:

[http://www.fao.org/world/regional/REU/resource/more/wpw/wpw\\_20\\_1.pdf](http://www.fao.org/world/regional/REU/resource/more/wpw/wpw_20_1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The Irish Task Force Against Child Labour includes: Action Aid Ireland, ACLAIM, Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), Christian Aid, Concern, Creative Connections, Global Campaign for Education (GCE), Gorta, Hope Foundation, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), Plan International, Poetry Ireland, Sightsavers, Skillshare, Sports Against Racism Ireland and Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI).

<sup>6</sup> ILO Convention No. 182, Worst Forms of Child labour, Article 3(d).

<sup>7</sup> See Article 3 in ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999. <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>

<sup>8</sup> ILO Convention 138 Minimum Age Convention: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>

<sup>9</sup> In summary, educated girls are more likely to marry later, have fewer and healthier children, have opportunities for earning better income, and have stronger decision-making power. They are also more likely to send their own children to school, avoiding future child labour ILO 2008 (Gender Bureau & IPEC)

<sup>10</sup> ILO-IPEC have a series of studies on gender, education and child labour (Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey) [http://www.ilo.org/gender/Events/Campaign2008-2009/lang--en/WCMS\\_093756/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Events/Campaign2008-2009/lang--en/WCMS_093756/index.htm)

<sup>11</sup> For example see Module 2 & Module 8 Gender and Agriculture Source Book, The World Bank, FAO and IFAD See also Hurst (2005) and Murray (2006) for the ITCILO.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the impact on health of pesticide exposure depends on a variety of factors including the type of pesticide involved, its toxicity (i.e. its safety class), the dose/concentration, the timing and length of exposure, and the way in which exposure occurs.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Omokhodion et. al (2005)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/human\\_rights.asp](http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/human_rights.asp)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our\\_pledge/stronger\\_society/child\\_labor.asp](http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our_pledge/stronger_society/child_labor.asp)

<sup>16</sup> Source: Presentation by Vicky Kanyoka of the Conservation, Hotels and Domestic and Allied Workers’ Union (CHODAWU), Tanzania to the ILO IPEC Child Domestic Labour and Trade Unions Workshop, Geneva, 1-3 February 2006.

<sup>17</sup> IPEC: *Sustainable elimination of child bonded labour in Nepal* (Project document). (Geneva, ILO, 2005)

<sup>18</sup> Source: Communication between Peter Hursts and Betsy Selvaratnam of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), Sri Lanka and Gerald Lodwick, National Workers’ Congress (NWC), Sri Lanka, 3 February.2006,

<sup>19</sup> See for example Section 7.2 in Report III Child labour statistics, 18<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva December 2008. [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_099577.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_099577.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60\\_16/pdf/res\\_social\\_committee\\_child\\_labour\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_16/pdf/res_social_committee_child_labour_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> See for example Johnston & Le Roux (2007)

<sup>22</sup> For example Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Convention 138 on minimum age for work.