



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



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ISSUE Ending Child Labour in Africa

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Introduction

The term “child labour” means the employment of children of less than a legally specified age. According to recently registered data from the International Labour Organisation and UNICEF, almost 1 in 10 juveniles are involved in child labour worldwide. They noted down 63 million girls and 97 million boys, which adds up to about 160 million present cases of the issue. Children may be driven into work for various reasons, such as their families facing financial challenges, uncertainty, unemployment, poor access to decent work or lack of understanding of the detriments of child labour. In addition, receiving insufficient support from their parents motivates children to start working at a young age, while lacking skills and proper education. Moreover, living circumstances play a major role as well; for instance, natural disasters and climate change, political conflicts and mass migration. A few further causes are: limited access to compulsory and free education and the widely held view that girls are less in need of schooling than boys. We cannot fail to mention the grave violations of laws or codes of conduct, the repression of workers’ rights, and that unscrupulous employers are taking advantage of the vulnerability of juveniles. Several popular perceptions and local customs and traditions trigger the issue; for example, the view that work is good for character-building and skill-development and that children are expected to follow in their parents' footsteps in a particular trade at a very early age.

As a result of the factors mentioned, an immense amount of children enter early into the unskilled labour market and in most cases they lack the basic educational grounding which would enable them to acquire skills and to improve their chances for a decent adult working life. The consequences are shockingly cruel. Child labour can result in extreme physical and mental harm, even in death. Nevertheless, often it is not the labour task itself that makes it potentially harmful, but the social setting, the circumstances, the lack of security, and the fact whether the work is driven by fear of non-survival. Furthermore, it can lead to slavery and sexual, economic or social exploitation and restricts the fundamental rights of children. On top of that, it robs them of their childhood and threatens their future by cutting them off from schooling and healthcare.

Definition of Key Terms

African Union Commission: Represents the AU and defends its interests.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF): It is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

International Labour Organization (ILO): A U.N. agency, the goal of which is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards.

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO): The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is an international organisation that leads efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security.

General Overview

Africa has the largest number of child labourers, which is about 72.1 million, and 31.5 million of it is considered to be a case of hazardous work. The 2016 Global Estimates of Child Labour indicates that this means that one-fifth of the underaged population of Africa is involved, which is a proportion more than twice as high as in any other region. Agriculture, for example farming, herding, fishing, and forestry or working with raw materials, such as cotton, coffee, and cacao, makes up most of child employment on the continent with utilising 85% of all child labour. In numbers that is 61.4 million underaged people. The second largest factor is the services sector, including domestic work and prostitution with 11 %, meaning 8.1 million children. The remaining 4 %, equalling 2.7 million in numbers, can be found toiling in industry. However, in several cases they work on family farms or in family enterprises.

Some factors make the situation in Africa different from those in other places. A few examples are: demography, overpopulation, and the ratio of underaged citizens. In several cases, young children are given shelter in their own families, but neither food nor clothes, therefore they have to provide for themselves and potentially for more members of the family as well. Moreover, the AIDS epidemic plays an enormous part. Despite the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa contains only about 11 percent of the Earth's population, the region is the world's epicentre of HIV/AIDS and this has significant economic and social effects.

Even when it had been declared illegal, child labour continues to be present and much of it is invisible. It is frequently surrounded by a wall of silence. Nevertheless, globalisation and the development of modern means of communication have made the situation of working children a major issue on the agenda of the international community.

Major Parties Involved

- **Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa** are hugely involved as the number of child workers here is among the highest ones worldwide. One in five juveniles of these nations are working under difficult conditions.
- **Somalia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Nigeria, Burundi, Eritrea, South Sudan, Chad, Mozambique and the Central African Republic** are some of the countries where the situation is the most devastating.
- Until the 19th century, child labour used to be persistent in the **UK**, yet it has been made to disappear by legislation.
- **The Netherlands** actively fights against and condemns child labour. An example for that is their Child Labor Due Diligence Act, which introduces a duty of care for companies to prevent the supply of goods or services, which have come into existence using child labour. Furthermore, they fund the ILO regional project under the name “Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa” (the ACCEL Africa Project).
- **Nigeria and Mali** have created action pledges in order to tackle this issue.
- **Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia and Uganda** have been identified as pathfinder countries under the UNODC Target 8.7.
- **Ethiopia** gives home to the headquarters of the AU.
- **The European Union** joined fighting the issue through several projects and ideas. For instance, through the Clear Cotton project, working together with the ILO and the FAO to eliminate child labour in all its forms in the cotton, textile, and garment industry in target producing countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Pakistan and Peru. Furthermore, they engaged in partnership with Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire and launched the EU Sustainable Cocoa Initiative. In addition, it is worth to highlight that the European Commission has set out a zero tolerance policy on child labour for every new trade agreement.

Timeline of Events

The movement to regulate child labour began in Great Britain at the end of the **18th century**, when the rapid development of large-scale manufacturing brought about the exploitation of young children in mining and industrial work. This is the time period from which child labour originates.

The campaign against child labour culminated in two important pieces of legislation. These are the Factory Act (**1833**) and the Mines Act (**1842**). The Factory Act prohibited the employment of children younger than 9 years of age and limited the hours that people aged between 9 and 13 could work. The Mines Act raised the starting age of colliery employees to 10 years. Consequently, these two acts brought an end to the systematic labour of young children.

Organized international efforts to regulate child labour began after the first International Labour Conference in Berlin, which was held in **1890**.

Europeans began colonising Africa **in the late 19th and early 20th centuries** and one of their primary goals was the exploitation of African mineral and agricultural resources. To maximise profits, Europeans had sought a cheap labour source which they have found in children.

The **1920s** brought growing efforts to protect children's rights around the world. The first example for that is the League of Nations Geneva Declaration of the Rights of Children, created **in 1924**. In **1959**, the United Nations passed an extended version called the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which stated that all children had the right to protection against abuse, exploitation, and underaged labour.

According to the ILO's global estimates on child labour, published **in 2017**, Sub-Saharan Africa witnessed a rise in it from **2012 to 2016**; in contrast to other regions, where child labour continued to decline.

Between 2016-2020, the level of child labour increased because of population growth, extreme poverty, economic shocks, and school closures due to Covid-19.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Several conventions and agreements have been created aimed to support and strengthen the rights of underaged people and to end child labour. Some instances are: the League of Nations Geneva Declaration of the Rights of Children and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which stated that all children had the right to protection against abuse, exploitation and underaged labour; furthermore, the Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (MAC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (CRC) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention of 1999 have been set up. The CRC is one of the most comprehensive international laws concerning the rights of people under the age of 18 and is one of the most widely ratified international human rights treaties.

The work of ILO as a whole has had an extremely significant impact on the issue. For example, ILO Convention No. 182 calls for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, which includes: slavery, forced labour, and trafficking. It forbids the use of children under the age of 18 in armed conflict, prostitution, pornography, illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, and in hazardous labour. In addition, regional work is notable as well, as the issue is constantly discussed on the board of the African Union. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was set up, which is similar to the CRC and is ratified by 41 out of 56 states of the AU.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

Not only the countries in Africa are determined, but the whole international community is committed to accelerate actions favouring the elimination of child labour in the continent. It is reckoned by many, that the basis of the eradication of the worst forms of child labour, within a relatively short time-frame, must be legislation which keeps the total disappearance of child labour as the main goal. One of the currently set up initiatives regarding this belief is Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UNODC. The aims of it are: to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst and all forms of child labour by 2025. A further solution to demotivating using child labour might be setting up a zero tolerance policy. Moreover, many believe that we ought to go even further above legislation and must also provide adequate sanctions for violators and sufficient compensation for victims.

Further goals may be focusing on the effective implementation of the ILO Conventions, such as number 182, and already existing programmes like the ILO's International Programme on the

Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). It is paramount that more attention ought to be paid to the affected labour sectors. In addition, addressing the root causes of child labour could be a progressive method to tackle the issue by focusing on for instance: decent employment, the position of families in need, social perspectives, economic viewpoints, and last but not least, proper and available education. In emphasis, the work and the development of NGOs, relating programmes, and further already existing initiatives should be encouraged and supported.

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