

FORUM:	Human Rights Council
ISSUE:	Measures to Combat Exploitative Child Labor in Developing Nations
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Introduction

Exploitative child labor remains one of the most pressing human rights concerns of the 21st century, depriving millions of children of their rights to education, mental well-being, and healthy development. With the continuation of industrialization and expanding multinational businesses, industries increased not only heavier demands in the job market, but also inhumane exploitation of the children engaged in illegal labor. As UNICEF – world’s leading international organization – reports in 2024, near 138 million children engaged in child labor every year globally.

Despite a decrease in child labor over the last two decades, millions of children continue to work in hazardous environments that places serious risks to their physical and psychological development. Current situation extends beyond individual countries because of globalization and complex supply



Children engaged in mining in a developing nation

chains are strongly connected to industries that are highly dependent on child labor, particularly in developing nations. Therefore, solving exploitative child labor requires coordinated international cooperation that solves not only child labor itself but also its underlying causes including poverty, limited education resources, weak labor law enforcement, and economic inequality.

Background

Child labor has existed for centuries, extending its timeframe from the early British industrialization to modern child labor. Though occurring in different historical periods, both timeframe views children as a power source that are widely employed in factories, mines and agriculture for their low labor costs. Although many developed nations gradually increased awareness of child welfare and introduced labor protection regulations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, exploitative child labor continues to persist in many developing countries. Poverty and conflict, inadequate education systems,



and minimal governance disrupt children's health and safety as well as social and social development of the nation.

Although the problem may initially appear less severe, available data demonstrates that exploitative child labor remains a significant global concern with pressing social and human rights implications. International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF announce that approximately 138 million children between the age of 5 and 17 are engaged in child labor, which represents 7.8% of the global child population. Moreover, approximately one-third of these children - around 54 million children - are engaged in hazardous work that places them at risk of health and safety while facing unfair treatment. A large portion of these children undergoes unfair treatments, unpaid wages, and coercion into physically demanding labors, yet child laborers and their families still tolerate inequalities due to economic pressures.



Children engaged in agricultural labor

Child labor remains concentrated in sectors that are difficult to regulate and operate stable monitoring systems. Agriculture accounts for approximately 61% of all child labor globally, partly because agriculture is often informal, rural, and difficult to monitor and inspect. The service sectors accounts for 27% while industry portions for 13% out of global total. Many children are involved in producing internationally traded goods such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, cobalt and gold, allowing exploitative labor practices to become imbedded into global supply chains.

Problems Raised

Limited Education Accessibility and Poverty Cycle



Children engaged in agricultural labor

One of the largest consequences of exploitative child labor is the deprivation of education due to excessive work hours impeding children to attend school regularly. Low education not only result in low literacy level but also limits children's opportunities to learn skills necessary for

stable employment in their adulthood. Low literacy levels, minimal job experiences, adding the lack of formal education can generates obstacles for employment in adulthood. This not only traps children in a cycle of poverty but also perpetuate intergenerational poverty as children who lack education and skills may have limited chance for stable employment as adult to support family economy.



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Violation of Children's Human Rights and Health Risks

Inhumane labor hours for the little or no wages and coerced labor that expose the children to dangerous machinery, toxic environments, and physically demanding tasks disrupt children's rights as individuals and their well-being. Such conditions can lead to permanent handicaps, chronic illnesses, malnutrition, developmental disorders, and mental health impacts.



Adolescents working in manufacture sectors without protection to the toxic environment

Exploitation within Global Supply Chain

Many multinational companies import raw materials or base products from developing nations where child laborers exist in the low tiers of the supply chain. Businesses involving such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, and textiles have been documented and criticized for overly depended on suppliers that employ children. For reference, the OECD reports that approximately 90% of cocoa is produced by smallholder farms, representing the difficulty of conducting regular inspections and complex supply networks. The weak supply chain transparency makes monitoring more difficult as well as acts to eliminate exploitative practices.

Weak Governance and Law Enforcement

Though many developing nations have established laws prohibiting child labor and have authorized international regulations, weak law enforcement remains inconsistent due to limited financial resources, corruption, and insufficient inspection systems. As a result, employers can evade responsibility, allowing illegal child labor to persist despite ratified legislation.



Official logo of the International Labour Organization

International Actions

ILO Convention No. 138

Adopted by the ILO in 1973, Convention No. 138 establishes a general minimum employment age of 15, preventing children from entering the workforce prematurely. Moreover, it also stipulates that hazardous work -defined as work likely to risk child's health and safety – must not be performed by anyone under the age of 18. This regulation still remains one of the fundamental



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international labor standards on child labor that acts towards preventing children to enter work force prematurely, but its effectiveness depends on governments' ability to enforce national legislations.

International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)

ICI was established in 2002, targeting to combat child labor in cocoa-manufacturing countries such as Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. This initiative monitors cocoa-growing communities, addresses at-risk children, and strengthens their access to education and safety protections. Simultaneously, the ICI also trains local farmers in sustainable agricultural practices and supports household income diversification to reduce household dependence on children's labor income.



Cocoa production in a rural community

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC)

Established by the ILO in 1992, IPEC has operated in more than 90 countries and is dedicated to eliminating child labor. The program promotes collaborations with governments for stricter labor legislation, improvement of school attendance, providing vocational training and economic diversification to create stable employment opportunities. IPEC also supports regular labor inspections and community awareness campaigns to prevent children from entering hazardous work and help break the cycle of child labor and poverty.

Key Players

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Labor Organization is the United Nation's sector responsible for establishing global labor standards. It combats against child labor through multiple ratified legislations such as Conventions No.138 and 182 stating clear international standards for legal labor. ILO strongly calls upon stronger labor legislation, effective enforcement systems, and international cooperation to eliminate exploitative child labor worldwide.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is the primary UN agency dedicated to protecting children's rights and protecting children's health. The association views exploitative child labor as a serious violation of children's rights,





particularly on their rights to be educated, safety protection, well-being maintenance and healthy development. UNICEF is one of the leading organizations that collaborates with national governments, local schools, and communities to address the root causes of child labor.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a developing country that is severely impacted by exploitative child labor, particularly in their mining sector. Though DRC has adopted legislation that prohibits child labor and cooperates with international organizations including ILO, UNICEF and local NGOs, weak law enforcement and widespread poverty keeping its eradication a complex challenge.

Ghana

Ghana is known for being one of the world's largest cocoa producers, supplying a large portion of the global cocoa market and global supply chain. The Ghanaian government acknowledges child labor as a major concern and has partnered with international organizations to strengthen regulation, improve school enrollment systems and child protection program.

Possible Solutions

Develop National Labor Laws and Enforcement

National governments can strengthen legislation to prohibit exploitative child labor while raising funding for regular labor inspections and clearer standards to be spread worldwide. ILO and other associated organizations have established frameworks such as convention No. 138, creating clear minimum-age standards and protections against child labor. Higher frequency in regular workplace inspections, stricter penalties for violations and specialized monitoring of informal sectors can reduce the prevalence of illegal child labor.

Access to Education and Communal Protection

Accessible community-based education, school meal programs, scholarships, and financial assistance should be provided to vulnerable families in order to reduce economic dependence



A student at CLEAR cotton project center in Mali



on children's income. Further promotions on social protection measures such as conditional cash transfer programs and encourage school attendance while alleviating household poverty, can help mitigate primary drivers of child labor: education accessibility and social and economic vulnerability. It is also important to note that on average, 83% of young population with post-secondary education were in stable employment in 27 low-to-upper-middle income countries examined by ILO, highlighting the importance of education on stable employment among young people.

Improving Corporate Responsibility and Supply Chain Transparency

National governments and multinational enterprises should strengthen human rights due diligence by requiring companies to monitor, identify and prevent or eliminate child labor throughout their supply chains and address hidden risks of child labor. In addition, encouraging businesses to source materials regarding independent audits, public reporting requirements, and certification programs can increase supply chain transparency.



Image demonstrating Global supply chains, how resources are shared across the world

Enhancing International Cooperation and Community Awareness

Urging world's leading associations and related communities such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and local communities to collaborate with UN agencies for sharing expertise, reliable funding and initiate combat towards child labor. Community awareness

campaigns, vocational training for parents, partnerships between international organizations and local authorities can address the root causes of exploitative child labor while ensuring long-term, sustainable solutions.

Glossary

Child labor

“Employment that deprives children of their childhood, education, dignity, or healthy physical and mental development - as defined by ILO. Child labor includes work that is mentally, physically, socially and morally harmful for children's growth while interfering with their expected schooling.

Exploitation

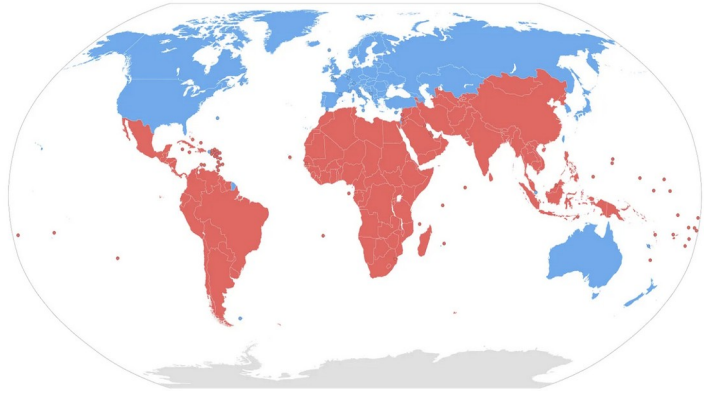


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The action or fact of treating an individual unethically in order to gain economic or personal benefit from their work, often due to coercion, abuse or power dynamics. In the context of child labor, exploitation refers to practices that endanger children's well-being, violating their rights and deprives them of opportunities and freedom.

Developing nations

Countries featured of relatively lower levels of industrialization, income, and average standards of living per individual compared to developed nations. Many developing nations face structural issues such as poverty, weak law enforcement and limited education resources, increasing children's vulnerability to exploitative labor.



World map with developed countries shaded in blue, developing countries shaded in red

Global Supply Chain

The international network of businesses and industries involved in producing and distributing resources from raw materials to consumers. Child labor often occurs in the low tiers of these multinational supply chains, particularly in agriculture, mining, textiles, and manufacturing.

Poverty Cycle

An emphasized self-perpetuating pattern where poverty-driven child labor limits children's access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities, resulting in continuous economic hardship across generations. This phenomenon is highlighted as children who work instead of attending school remain trapped in low-income employment in adulthoods.

Vocational training

Vocational training is learning opportunities for individuals to develop their practical skills and education for specific occupations or trades, aiming to enhance their employment chances. For less-educated adolescents who have reached the legal working age, access to vocational training allows them to strengthen employment opportunities and reduce dependence on low-skilled and potentially exploitative labor.

Informal Sectors



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Parts of the industries that operates outside of government regulations such as small-scale agriculture, street vending, domestic work, and informal mining. Child labor is particularly difficult to monitor in these sectors because workers often lack legal protections and workplaces may be less regularly inspected compared to larger, known businesses.

Due Diligence

The process of investigating and identifying potential risks of child labor within a company's operations and supply chains. Companies can use due diligence to monitor suppliers, identify exploitative practices, and take corrective action to prevent child labor.



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