

[Dominican Republic]

*"My father says I gotta learn
this trade for my own good."*

Children who work in automotive repair shops

[6]



Preamble

“In Exchange for My Childhood”

Series on Child Labour and Exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes “the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.” At the same time, Article 36 states the need to protect “the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.” It has been more than 15 years since the Convention was adopted; however, the issue of child labour¹ continues to affect more than 200 million² children around the world. These children work under conditions that breach and put at risk the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, such as, their health, education and protection against any forms of exploitation and violence.

With this publication, World Vision wants to make a contribution in tackling child labor by making proposals and inviting the reader to learn about the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will build a close relationship with such children through a country context analysis, interviews, adult testimonies and portraits of the daily lives of working children and their families.

The stories are about different countries, with different protagonists who are devoted to different activities. Nevertheless, you will realize that the children who have allowed us to get into their lives have almost identical problems, aspirations and dreams:

- They work for the same reasons: Their families are in need, and they wish to contribute to family subsistence.
- They have the same dreams: To be able to study, help their families, make something useful and positive with their lives³.
- They experience the same physical and emotional pain, as a result of the work performed.
- They share the same fear: Adults – Once contact is established with adults, they maltreat, abuse and humiliate⁴ them.
- They come from very poor families that have suffered exploitation for at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their national systems of social assistance systems⁵.
- It is common for families to be numerous⁶, as well as for women to be the head of the household because of the father⁷ abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot go because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of maltreatment⁸. Besides that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working⁹ children and adolescents.
- Girls have to do workhouse activities, which makes their workload heavier.
- In addition, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse.

“In Exchange for My Childhood” opens doors to the private lives of working children, urging us to commit – as an organization and personally – to the transformation of our society, so that life in all its fullness may finally be a reality for every child in Latin America and the Caribbean.

1 It should be clarified that not all the work performed by children infringes their rights, but only that work which does not allow them to enjoy their rights. See “Definitions and basic concepts” at the end of the booklet.

2 The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6, page 233; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

3 The fact that there are many boys who want to be policemen and girls who want to be teachers attracts our attention here.

4 See the situation described by children in all booklets. Complementary reading: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

5 See Brazil's booklet, situation described by Rafael

6 Example: Colombia's booklet, Alicia Bastos' testimony

7 Example: Bolivia's booklet, Margarita's testimony

8 Example: Guatemala's booklet, Rafael's testimony

9 Example: See the situation described in the Chile's booklet on children who work in the mountains and the influence of the seasons of the year on their educational process.

Interviews

Sandy: I've been working here since I was eight; now I'm 11. I know how to take apart and put together engines, cylinder heads, pinions, tires, and axle tips. I've hit my hand with a hammer many times. My work is dangerous 'cuz I can get hurt, and I'm afraid to get under the cars 'cuz I might get crushed.

Pablo: I didn't want to come here. My dad made me. Every day I change brake belts and clean car parts with petrol and a brush. You gotta be careful that nothin' heavy falls on you.

Bienvenido: I'm afraid to test batteries since the acid can make you go blind.

Dionis: I've been here since I was 6 years old and now I'm 13. My dad owns the shop and makes me come. He says I gotta learn how to work. I go to school in the morning and work here in the afternoon.

Jonathan: I know that the petrol we use to clean stuff is bad for my lungs and kidneys. But I still like workin' here. I've been in this shop since I was 13. My uncle brought me -- he started working as a mechanic when he was 13.

Bienvenido: I work so I can help my mama. My father left us when we were little. He left my mama for another woman... Mama raised us alone. She says I'm the best one in the family. They need the money I bring home. I earn 100 pesos [approx. US\$2.27] a day here. I give my mama 50 pesos to buy food and I get to keep the rest for me.

Sandy: I always go to school without eating. I'm always hungry at school and sometimes when I have three pesos I buy an ice cream or corn on the cob. That's why I work, to pay for my food. Lots of days I don't wanna work. I'd rather stay home with my mother, watch TV or hang out with my friends. But my father says he'll beat me if I don't come to work. He says that I gotta learn this trade for my own good.

Anthony: On Saturdays I make 100 pesos at the repair shop. I give 50 to my dad so he can buy petrol for his taxi. I give the other 50 to my grandmother so that she can buy bread and milk. My mother left me with her a long time ago, then went to Panama to work. I'm 13 now and live with my father, his wife and my three brothers. My older brother Guillermo also works here. He is 16. He is at home because he broke his arm with a transmission.

Jonathan: I live with my grandmother. She made me come here to learn a trade so I wouldn't be out selling drugs or hangin' with a gang. I'm in seventh grade at a public school, but since I don't have a birth certificate, maybe I won't be able to graduate. Anyway, I work here to learn to be a mechanic.

Pablo: I go to school in the afternoon. I'm in fifth grade. If I didn't have to work, I would spend more time studying and learning something good.

Anthony: I used to go to school when I lived in San Juan de la Managua. But my father still hasn't enrolled me in school here in Santo Domingo. I really wanna go to school like my friends, and learn how to read and write my name.

* Un dólar americano equivale a 32.50 pesos dominicanos.



Portrait

An almost suffocating heat blankets the small automotive repair shop in Santo Domingo where Sandy and Anthony, ages 11 and 13 respectively, have wedged themselves between the floor and chassis of a battered and rusting car.

The back end of the car is perched precariously on a hydraulic jack, giving the boys just enough space to bang away on its undercarriage with heavy steel mallets.

The thumping, hip-hop beat of Caribbean-style “reggaeton” music blasts through a damaged and fuzz-filled speaker. It clashes with the boy’s persistent hammering, creating a headache-inducing cacaphony of noise.

A pungent whiff of leaded gasoline penetrates Sandy’s nostrils, provoking a sneeze. He stays focused on his work alongside Anthony, who drops his hammer and reaches for a wrench.

The repair shop is located in a marginal section of Santo Domingo, not far from the humble homes that Sandy and Anthony share with their large families. It is little more than a thatch-roofed hut with rusting vehicles and old car parts scattered across an oil-stained floor.

Both boys emerge from beneath the car a few minutes later, their faces, arms, hands and clothing caked with blackened layers of grease, oil and dirt. It doesn't matter. They still have a lot of work ahead of them before they can go home.

Sandy usually comes to the shop after attending school in the morning. He often arrives hungry. He has not eaten breakfast or lunch. Food can become a scarce commodity in the crowded, two-bedroom house that he shares with nine other family members. His sister, still an adolescent, is currently expecting her third child. The family needs his income, making it increasingly harder for him to stay in school, despite his strong wishes not to abandon his studies.

Anthony hasn't attended school for some time, nor does he expect to go back. Like Sandy, he turns over at least half or more of his weekly earnings to his father, who believes that the best thing for Anthony is to work hard and to learn an honest trade.

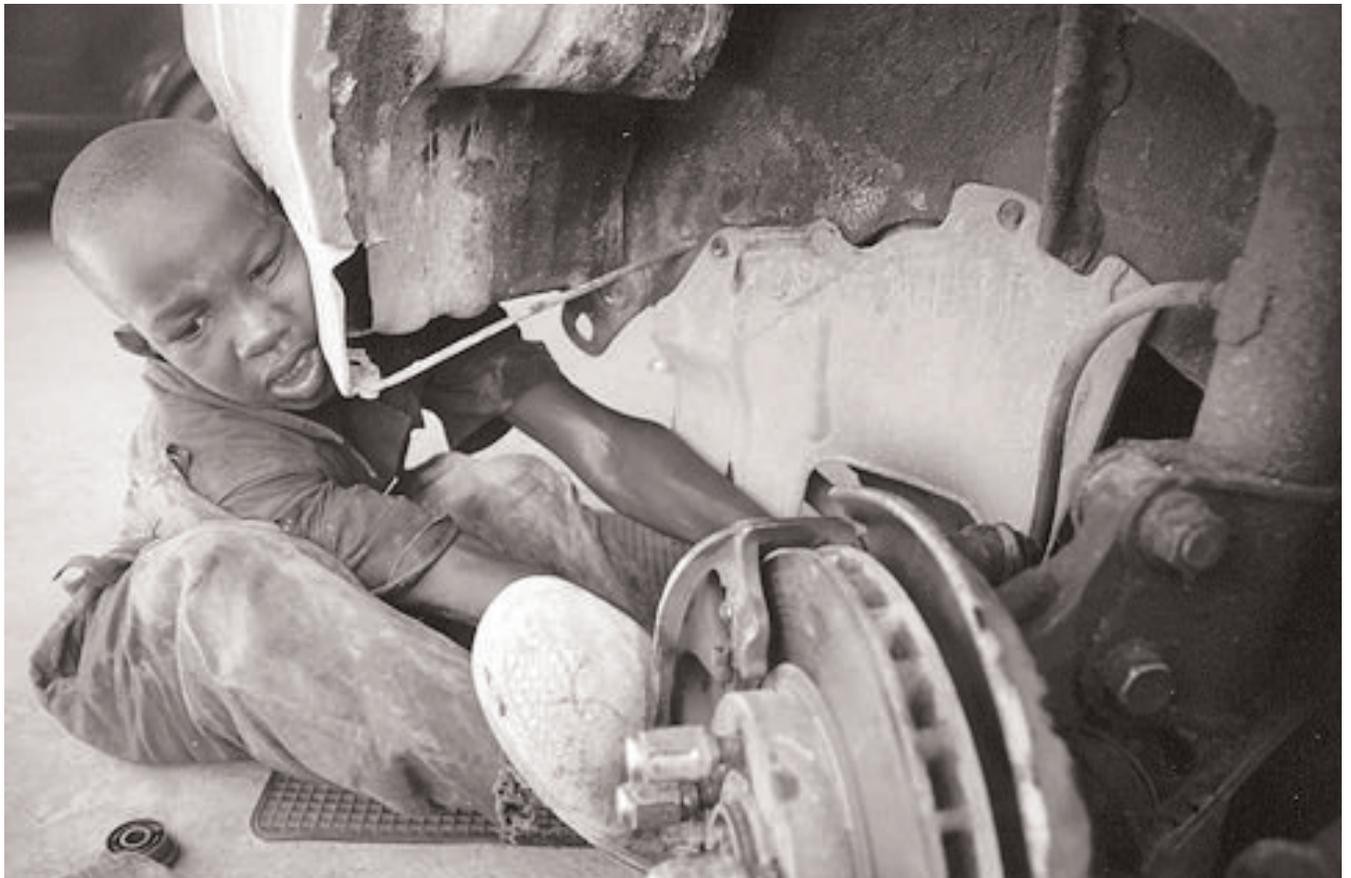
Anthony’s dreams are modest, barely extending beyond the physical boundaries of his place of work. They include watching a movie in a cinema for the first time.

Sandy and Anthony are working together with three other child mechanics – Jonathon and Beinvenido, both 14; and Dionis, 13.

All are at least vaguely aware of the significant hazards linked to their work – explosions and burns from batteries and acid; respiratory and lung infections from lead-laced fumes; injuries from shop tools and accidents; even death if crushed by a falling car.

The children have no labour contracts or rights to medical benefits. Nor do they earn fixed wages. Still they choose to stay in the shop, toiling their days away.





Context

In the Dominican Republic, an estimated 15,000 shops¹ of different varieties employ under-age children. Most of these businesses are located in urban centres, in or near poor neighbourhoods.

According to a survey from the Department of Labour carried out in 2002, nearly 430,000 Dominican children from ages 5 to 17 are part of the national workforce -- approximately 17.7% of the total population.¹ The study also reveals that rural areas and the poorer districts of urban centres have the greatest concentration of children engaged in exploitive forms of labour.

This same survey also revealed that approximately 28% of child labourers are employed in personal and domestic services – everything from cleaning houses to shining shoes. Some 21% of child labourers are engaged in commercial activities and sales, while about 18% work in the agricultural sector and 17% are involved in manufacturing and handicraft production. The remainder are involved in unspecified work.

Data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) indicates that only 25% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 who work in cities attend school. The percentage plummets to 15% with respect to child workers in rural areas who attend school. In both cases, not surprisingly, school dropout rates are highest in areas that have large concentrations of child labourers.

Widespread illiteracy is directly linked to low school attendance. The Dominican Republic has a national illiteracy rate of 18.6%, according to official statistics. Nearly 40% of all children between the ages of seven and nine are illiterate.

In 2000, the country ratified Convention 182 from the International Labour Organization by which nations commit to the progressive eradication of the worst forms of child labour. The national Department of Labour, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a variety of other public, private and community-based organizations are now working together to protect and remove children from exploitive workplaces and practices.

Yet many forms of child labour remain entirely accepted by popular culture, parents and social institutions alike who share the general position that such work prepares and equips children to lead respectable and productive lives as adults. From this viewpoint, it is easy to justify the incorporation of children into the workforce, while remaining ignorant or choosing to ignore the inconvenient truths of child labour and the threats that it poses to those who engage in it.

The story of Sandy and Anthony and their work in the automotive repair business exemplify this point. While it is true that this work can enable children to learn a viable trade while earning a modicum of income, it is safe to conclude upon closer examination that the negatives far outnumber any positive aspects of their work.

In addition to the significant threats that automotive repair work poses to children's lives and limbs, it also leaves them with little time for school activities and leisurely pursuits, in direct violation of their rights to education, health, relaxation and recreation. It therefore constitutes a form of economic exploitation that jeopardizes children's integral development.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency among employers, parents and the children to minimize the risks and impacts associated with child labour as means to justify their realities and attitudes.

¹ Commercial Inventory, Department of Industry and Commerce, 2002.

Social Indicators Dominican Republic

Human Development Index	94/177
Gender-focused Development Index	70/177
Life expectancy	67,5
Per capita GDP	7,449
Total population in millions	8,8
% Urban population	65,9
% Population under 15	33,1
% Consumption by the poorest 20%	3,9
% Consumption by the wealthiest 20%	56,8
% of population living under the poverty line	28,6
% of population living on less than US\$1/day	2,5
% of GDP spent by the State on education	1,1
% of GDP spent by the State on health	2,3
% of population w/access to essential drugs	50-79
% Illiterate (over age 15)	13

* The World Health Organisation (WHO) specifies this percentage range as "limited access".

Source: 2006 Human Development Report, United Nations.

Conclusions



Child labour is very widely accepted in the Dominican Republic as means of enabling children to help their families and learn a trade for their future. In reality, however, it weakens children's potential for healthy development while helping to perpetuate cycles of poverty within their households and communities.

Consequently, a strategy for the progressive eradication of child labour must combine educational programmes for vulnerable families with media campaigns to raise public awareness.

While child apprentices from marginal neighbourhoods working in automotive shops are perceived as being saved from "economic destiny" and juvenile delinquency, the underlying reality is quite different. To protect their children parents abandoning them in workplaces where they are exploited and end up with serious health risks.

There is also a tendency for programmes aimed at combating child labour to have a highly selective focus which fails to address the overall problem in a more comprehensive and systemic manner. In Dominican Republic most actions and programmes seek to eliminate only certain types of child labour, rather than addressing this injustice on a much wider scale, despite the existence of a legal framework to tackle child labour, based on the ratification of the labour code and relevant ILO conventions.

Interviews with adults



LETICIA DUMAS, TECHNICAL ADVISOR

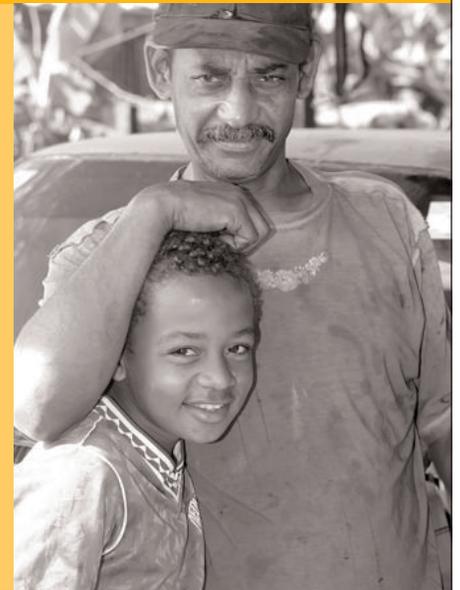
International Labour Organization (ILO), Dominican Republic

Child labour continues to be an indicator of poverty. One of the challenges in the fight against this problem is to keep it on the political agenda as to generate effective and budgeted actions to eradicate child labour. The agenda for future national policies should include four main issues: adapting legislation, strengthening the nation's capacity for response, generating knowledge and statistics and implementing a National Plan of Action against the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

NELSON

Automotive repair shop owner

These children are usually brought here by their parents so they won't become criminals or use drugs. The parents who bring their children are poor, destitute people. They're afraid their children will spend all their time out on the streets, so they ask us to give them work. The kids get motivated here -- I tell them to watch the adults so they can learn.. I have one boy who walks seven kilometres from La Victoria to here every day. Sometimes I give him 10 pesos so he can ride the bus.



MARTÍN BRETÓN

Undersecretary of Labour

Dominican Republic has a study that addresses the issue of child labour. A section of this study addresses the presence of children in automotive shops. We know that parents agree to have their children work at these shops in order to keep them away from drugs and delinquency. We attribute this to poverty and lack of information.

We have various publicity campaigns and projects to prevent child labour and raise awareness to stop children from working in the coffee, tomato and rice farming sectors, and to eradicate sexual and commercial exploitation of children in tourist areas. Our goal is to establish a National Plan for the eradication of Child labour along with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and public and private institutions that address this issue. We want to elaborate a 10-year plan to eradicate child labour in Dominican Republic.

Definitions and Basic Concepts

For the purposes of this publication, "child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."¹

- Worst forms of Child Labour according to ILO Convention 182²:
 - a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
 - b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
 - c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
 - d) 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.
- Child Labour
Children's participation in economic activity that negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education. This means all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 14 years engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.³
Occupation that denies children or adolescents their childhood, potential and dignity, and is damaging to their physical and mental development⁴
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation
The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.⁵
- Work
Human activities, paid or unpaid, that produce the goods or services in an economy, or supply the needs of a community, or provide a person's accustomed means of livelihood.⁶

About Child Labour⁷

- Some Characteristics:
 - a) Children start working at an earlier age in rural areas rather than in cities
 - b) 80% of children work in an informal economy
 - c) Work prevents children from attending school or limits their academic performance
- Conditions:
 - a) Working hours are longer than the maximum limits established by many national laws for an adult worker
 - b) Low Income: 90% of child workers between the ages of 10 and 14, earn wages that are equal to or below the minimum wage, approximately 20% lower than the income of an adult with a 7th grade school level. Children are paid an even lower salary than that or are paid in kind.
 - c) Children do not have labour rights
 - d) Jobs are precarious
- Causes:
 - a) Poverty
 - b) Family violence
 - c) Social and cultural patterns
- Consequences of child labour at all levels:
Social and Moral:
 - a) Encourages inequality
 - b) Violates the fundamental human rights of children and adolescents
 - c) Leads to a loss of self-esteem, problems of social adaptation and trauma

1 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1

2 ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, article 3

3 As opposed to Child Labour: Child work: Children's participation in economic activity - that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education, can be positive. Work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138. http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html

4 Extracted from: Guía Práctica para Parlamentarios, Número 3-2002, Erradicar las peores formas de Trabajo Infantil, Guía para implementar el convenio núm. 182 de la OIT

5 The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, 1996, http://www.ecpat.net/eng/A4A02-03_online/ENG_A4A/Appendices_1_Stockholm.pdf

6 <http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr2454.htm>

7 ILO, <http://www.oit.org.pe/ipec/pagina.php?pagina=156>

Physical and Psychic:

- d) Chronic diseases
- e) Dependence on medicines
- f) Physical and Psychic abuse

Economic:

- g) Working children fall behind in school by an average of 2 grades or 2 school years in the long-term which means a salary that is 20% lower during their adult lives
- h) Loss of buying power in the national market
- i) The lack of an education (loss of school years) translates into an lower quality of human capital in society

The Position of World Vision on the Issue of Child Labour⁸

The experience of World Vision, given its work in developing countries among the most marginalized people, indicates that children will continue to work until there are feasible and sustainable alternatives for the family and communities. By ignoring this, we endanger the lives of children. In a world characterized by poverty and inequality among the rich and the poor, work is a reality and a need for many children.

Based on this perception, World Vision, is making efforts to abolish the most extreme and dangerous forms of child labour (exploitation), such as Sexual Commercial Exploitation, slavery, any form of work that involves very small children and any job that represents a danger for a child's physical, emotional or spiritual health.

World Vision has been a firsthand witness of the devastating results of attempting to eradicate all child labour immediately. In addition to recognizing the obvious problem represented by exploitative child labour, non-governmental organizations, governments and the corporate sector must avoid the automatic, though, comprehensible, temptation of demanding that child labour be immediately abolished. This may be a well-intentioned measure but may have disastrous consequences. For this reason, World Vision does not support punitive intervention, or boycotts of consumers or sanctions. Instead, World Vision defends a multi-disciplinary approach:

- To quickly eradicate the worst forms of child labour
- Convince the employer in the formal sector to improve conditions and shorten the number of work hours
- Establish alternate ways of generating income for families
- Improve access to good quality and adequate education
- Confront structural impediments that generate and aggravate poverty

These changes are possible only if long-term structural changes are introduced

The underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: generalized poverty, great inequality, deficient or inadequate education, malnutrition, the structure of the country's economy, consumption patterns and macroeconomic policy frameworks.

This does not mean that poverty automatically cause children to enter the workforce. However, it creates the conditions for this phenomenon to be more likely. In reality, the reasons for which child workers are preferred are not economic. Children are not as aware of their rights as adult workers are. Children are, therefore, easier to exploit.

When children are forced to work in order to survive, their interests may be better protected if employers are encouraged to cease exploitative practices. This type of transition focus requires the application of adequate health and safety conditions within the workplace, reasonable hours, meals, education and skills training.

Prevention, elimination and rehabilitation comprise the three columns of any strategy for eliminating exploitative child labour. Of these, prevention is the most difficult since it covers long-term solutions based on the family and the community in both a national and international environment.

Is education the answer?

One of the keys for preventing and resolving child labour is education. Although, education alone is not enough to end child abuse, it is key to a larger program that seeks to diminish poverty and other pressures that push children into the workforce.

In order for education to be an effective weapon in the fight against child labour, it must be mandatory and allow equal access for both boys and girls. It must be high quality, pertinent, free of charge and realistically flexible, for example, taking into account the agricultural harvest seasons and related needs for families who work in agriculture.

In areas where there is a high index of child labour as well as elevated high school drop-out rates, it is often discovered that the education offered is low level. An inadequate education inadvertently pushes children into the workforce, since by working they can learn a trade and learn skills to earn income.

It is possible to eradicate child labour. In the short-term, we must force ourselves to eradicate the most extreme forms of child labour. In the medium and long-terms, governments, consumers, children's rights groups should combine efforts in order to guarantee that children have the opportunity to develop their potential and satisfy their needs and fundamental rights as human beings.

⁸ By Melanie Gow- Policy and Advocacy- Word Vision Australia, 2000.



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