

# [Colombia]

*"Some people get mad and  
tell us to leave 'em alone."*

**Children who sell in the streets**

**[ 4 ]**



# 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's adoption; however, the issue of child labour<sup>1</sup> continues to affect more than 200 million<sup>2</sup> 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 know closely the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will have close relationships 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, 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 lives<sup>3</sup>.
- 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 humiliate<sup>4</sup> them.
- They come from very poor families that have been suffering from exploitation through at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their country<sup>5</sup> social assistance.
- It is common for families to be numerous<sup>6</sup>, as well as for women to be the heads of the households because of the father<sup>7</sup> abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot do that because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of the maltreatment suffered<sup>8</sup>. Besides all that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working<sup>9</sup> children and adolescents.
- Girls should add the housework to their work, which is why their workload is 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 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.

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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.

# Interview

**Martha:** I started working after a neighbour suggested that I sell flowers to make some money. She saw what a hard time my family was having.

**John:** Our dad taught us how to do this. He also works in the open market, so he knows what fruit that's cheapest to buy. We started goin' with him to sell in the streets. That's how we learned. Now we give him the plante [money] so he can buy the best fruit for us to sell.

**Michael:** When the fruits aren't selling we switch to selling sweets.

**Brandon:** I remember the first day – it was pretty rough 'cuz I had to learn the [traffic] routes...and it was hard to try to sell to people who were mean to me.

**Michael:** I wanted to do somethin' else. I kept trying to get work on one of the buses... But I couldn't – so here I am.

**Martha:** One of my mum's friends used to sell roses. Her name is Rose and she was the one who told us how to make up the bouquets, and the best places to sell 'em.

**Brandon:** It was my sister who taught me, my oldest sister. She always sold roses.

**John:** We start working at about 10 in the morning and we usually end when it gets dark, at 7 or 8 pm.

**Michael:** We always sell in the south, along the motorway, near Kennedy in Bosa.

**Brandon:** Since we're all neighbours we always stick together, walking everywhere, no matter what time it is.

**Martha:** We start around five in the afternoon and keep going sometimes into the middle of the night.

**Michael:** The bigger sellers used to try to steal the stuff we were selling. They'd threaten us – sayin' that a corner belonged to them.

**Brandon:** Once, an older boy wanted to steal everything off me. He said the bus route was his and I said that was ridiculous, 'cuz no one owned it. He said if he saw me there again he would beat me up. I told my mum and she fixed the problem. The guy still makes trouble, but there's no way I'm gonna let him run me outta there.

**John:** The police are a big pain too, if you're not careful. They'll come after you, grab you and take everything you got.

**Martha:** It's the ñeros [homeless people] who pester you for money and stuff. Sometimes they chase us and we drop the flowers or they grab them from us.

**Brandon:** It's tough when you start the day with plante [money] and then somebody tries to take it from you.  
**Michael:** Some people won't even look at what you're selling. Others are nice and helpful. There are all kinds of people.

**Brandon:** One time some guy in a disco pushed me and threw me out the door. He was really pissed off [angry].

**Martha:** Some people get made and tell us to leave 'em alone.

**John:** I've tried to sell on the buses, but some drivers get pissed off and they stop the bus and tell me to get off.

**Martha:** Once me and another girl were trying to sell some roses in a bar and some man offered us 40,000 pesos\* to sleep with him. We said no. But he was so drunk he wouldn't stop. So we called my big sister who was there with us, and she defended us.

**Brandon:** "Once, on my route, I was going through the park near Ciudad Roma and a man came up and told me I was stupid for not selling drugs 'cuz the money's a lot better than what I was making. He said he'd help me get started, but I turned him down. Later on I saw him trying the same thing with other kids.

**Michael:** When you're working on the street you run into slang word in Spanish [homosexuals] – all kinds of people, making all kinds of offers.

**Brandon:** Sometimes when we're crossing bridges, the ñeros tell us to give 'em something or else they'll beat us up. We try to stay away from them.

**Martha:** Some ñeros got in our way once and told us to give 'em what we had. My sister was scared and gave them 2,000 pesos. They wanted more, but we ran away.

**John:** That's bad, even more for the girls, 'cuz they'll try to feel 'em up and everything.

**Martha:** The Spanish word drunks are horrible; they'll come right up to you and say stuff like "sweetie", and "you're lookin' good". They don't care if you're a child, or if you tell 'em to get lost.

**John:** The old men are the worst – them and their nasty friends.

**Martha:** It costs up to 20,000 pesos to buy the roses I can sell in one day for HOW MUCH?. That's on a day you know will be good.

**John:** We sometimes spend as much as 40,000 pesos for a day's worth of fruit. Or sometimes we only buy around 7,000 pesos worth.



**Michael:** We buy apples, pears, tangerines – it depends on the season and that my dad gets us at a good price.

**Brandon:** Sometimes you lose money when it's slow and the roses get old and wilt before you can sell 'em.

**Martha:** Sometimes we have to get the good roses the night before.

**John:** It's easier for the girls to sell, especially to men.

**Martha:** The men buy a rose to give to their girlfriend or the girl they're with.

**Brandon:** I have my customers and I do okay. People buy roses from me.

**Michael:** Me too. I'm doin' okay.

**Martha:** Sometimes they'll take a rose from you, and then not pay. Or they'll say it costs too much, or they'll only pay the price they want.

**John:** I like to work – I don't do it 'cuz I have to. And I help out at home. I wanna go to school, but want to keep working too.

**Brandon:** I do this for my mother. The most important thing for me is that she's well. We'll see what happens later. I'm gonna study hard 'cuz I wanna be somebody.

**Martha:** My dream is to go to university and help my mum, so she can live well like she deserves. If I have to work so we can eat, I'm happy to do it.

**Michael:** Like my dad says, it's better than doin' nothin' or picking up bad habits.

*\* Tipo de cambio*



# Portrait

Bosa is a down-and-out neighbourhood in south Bogotá. Here, in the middle of Bosa's busy streets, Martha, Brandon and Aidé Paola sell flowers and fruit to help their struggling families make ends meet.

The three children are well acquainted with Boca's darker side, characterized as it is by rampant crime, drugs and violence. Alcoholic bar patrons, aging prostitutes and aggressive strangers share the same streets where the children ply their trade with ever-present difficulties and dangers.

Martha, age 13, usually works alongside her 10-year-old sister, Aidé. Brandon, age 14, is almost always nearby. The children live in the same low-income neighbourhood about 40 minutes walking distance from Bosa. Conditions of extreme poverty compel them to return to Bosa each day.

Martha and Aidé live with their mother and eight other siblings. It was the death of their father and the loss of his income that led them to the mean streets of Boca. Brandon's family, also large and desperately poor, has similarly come to depend on his earnings to put food on their table.

The children's routine has remained unchanged since they first started working in Bosa. It starts with a long walk to the Paolquema market in the centre of Bogotá, where they purchase the cheapest flowers, near the end of their bloom. Then they expertly clean and prune the flowers to conceal their fading beauty. Or they purchase fruit on the verge of spoiling, or maybe sweets if the flowers and fruits aren't selling well.



That done, they head to Bosa and their real work begins. Selling on the street requires patience, concentration and a thick skin when faced with hustle and hasslers who frequent the area.

Not far away, at a busy traffic intersection, John, age 16, and Michael, age 12, are trying to sell bags of overripe fruit to drivers waiting for a green light. The pace of their work is largely dictated by traffic flow. Red lights giving them just enough time to make a hurried sale or two; green lights signalling the few seconds left to leave the intersection before passing cars reach high speeds.

John and Michael are half-brothers. Their father introduced them to their work on the streets. They do their best to steer clear of trouble and dangers that seem to wait around every corner – like the thugs and thieves who pick fights and try to rob them of their meagre earnings. By standing up to them, dodging cars, and surviving other daily rigours of their work, the boys have earned their street credentials and the respect of their peers.

The days are always long – any fruits or flowers that the children can't sell will have to be thrown or given away. Usually heading home after nightfall, the children stay on constant vigil for a potential threat, knowing. They know they can outrun most trouble if they can just see it coming.

# Context

According to the Ongoing Home Survey – Child Labour Module undertaken by Colombia’s National Statistics Department (DANE) in 2003, 1 in every 20 children between the ages of 5 and 9, and 1 in every 10 children between the ages of 10 and 12, are child labourers. In total, approximately 2.2 million children and adolescents work in Colombia.

The main labour activities of children and adolescents are domestic work, mining, agriculture and services (including prostitution and pornography). These industries are among the worst forms of labour. An estimated 750,531 children work as maids performing household tasks over 15 hours per week. According to Colombia’s National Mining Company (MINERCOL), over 200,000 children are employed in mining. The Ministry of Public Defence asserts that 200,000 boys and girls are involved in growing and processing illegal crops and 195,892 in manufacturing.

In Colombia, DANE reports that 187,744 boys and girls are working as street vendors. Many try to combine their work with school, but end up abandoning their studies due to physical and mental fatigue.

Armed conflict also destroys the aspirations of children and adolescents. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimates there are about 11,000 child soldiers in Colombia between the ages of 7 and 17. According to the Public Defence Ministry their average age is 13.8 years. Children and adolescents join the illegal armies for fear, protection, food or to escape domestic violence. Others are coerced, threatened or promised monetary rewards.

Sexual exploitation also shows devastating numbers. In 70% of reported cases of sexual abuse, the victim is a child. Nearly 30,000 girls and boys have become linked to the sex market. The Public Defence Ministry maintains that 25,000 boys and girls, younger than 18 years old, working as domestic servants, have suffered sexual abuses from their employers.

The Colombia’s Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar –ICBF) claims that 163,000 children have stopped working in Colombia from 2003 to 2006, thanks to NGO and government programs designed to incentive vulnerable children to stay in school.

Thanks to the support of the Ministry of Social Protection and the International Labour Organization (ILO), Colombia was able to persuade mayors to include projects that prevent and eradicate child labour in their development plans. In addition, these institutions implemented the third National Plan (for 2003-2006) for the Eradication of Child Labour and the Protection of Young Employee aiming to eradicate child labour and protect working adolescents.

ICBF estimates that Colombia has close to 30,000 children spending the majority of their lives on the street. About 75% of these children report having suffered maltreatment at home and 37% admits that abuse was the main reason why they left home. According to UNICEF, 87% of children who live on the street are using psychoactive substances (alcohol, drugs and inhalants in particular). Their addiction aggravates their social problem because these drugs further weaken their growth and reduce their capacity for learning, love, and socialization. Almost 40% of these children live in Bogotá.

Finally, it is important to notice that approximately 50% of child workers between the ages of 12 and 13 do not receive direct pay, but are remunerated in some other way. When they receive wages, children under age 18 receive from 25% to 80% of the legal minimum daily wage.

## Social Indicators Colombia

Human Development Index	70/177
Gender-focused Development Index	56/177
Life expectancy	72,6
Per capita GDP	7,256
Total population in millions	44,9
% Urban population	72,4
% Population under 15	31,4
% Consumption by the poorest 20%	2,5
% Consumption by the wealthiest 20%	62,7
% of population living under the poverty line	64
% of population living on less than US\$1/day	7
% of GDP spent by the State on education	4,9
% of GDP spent by the State on health	6,4
% of population w/access to essential drugs	80-94
% Illiterate (over age 15)	7,2

\* The World Health Organisation (WHO) specifies this percentage range as “intermediate access”.

Source: 2006 Human Development Report, United Nations.

# Conclusions

A combination of factors, derived from social and economic conditions in Colombia often forces boys and girls to work in sectors that are highly exploitive and where there are risks to their physical, social and psychological development. These factors are also abetted by a system of cultural values that considers boys and girls as objects owned by their families rather than as individuals with their own rights.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the Colombia government has modified the constitution in an attempt to rectify the problem of child labour. Some of these changes include:

Decree 859 from 1985, created a "Institutional Committee for the Eradication of Child Labour and the Protection of Young Employees"

Through Law 704 of 2001, Colombia approved Convention 182 concerning the "prohibition and immediate action to eliminate child labour," adopted by the 87th meeting of the General Conference of the International Labour Organization. The government also adopted the additional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child proposed by the UN, which seeks to raise the minimum age for serving in the armed forces from 15 to 18 years of age.

Law 548 enacted in 1999, explicitly prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 for obligatory military service

On May 17th 2005, Colombia publicized "the 182 Agreement prohibiting the worst forms of child labour and rallying immediate action for the its elimination". The covenant was adopted during the 87th General Conference for the International Work Organization (ILO) hosted in Geneva, Switzerland, June 17th 1999.

Resolution No. 4.448 in consultation with public opinion, workers and employers organizations established that no child or adolescent, younger than 18 years of age, could participate in risky or harmful activities as anticipated in paragraph 23 article 245 in the Agreement 2737 from 1989 proposed by the Public Defence Ministry, on December 2nd 2005,

Colombia has endorsed three "plans to prohibit and eradicate Child Labour", whose essence is to start new initiatives to prevent the early entailment of children into the labour force and to guarantee the fundamental rights of working children and adolescents, through which specific instruments will be defined to prevent and respond to this problem, including its worse forms; and to seek for alternatives so children and adolescents can enjoy their childhood, by participating in playful and recreational activities, and return to school to strengthen their human potential.

At last, Law 1098 from 2006, ratifies the Childhood and Youth Code, from October 2006, incited by government and non-government organizations (among them World Vision) who want to protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents, regarding specifically articles 20, 39 and 43 that reference the workforce minimum age and the right of protection for young employees authorized to work.

The visibility of child labour in Colombia constitutes a new and significant landmark, because never before had society demanded legal compliance to this type of laws. Currently, the authorities find themselves obliged to fulfil their legal and constitutional responsibilities and obligations toward the children of Colombia.

Certainly, these legislative developments represent a vital change for the country and its children, but it is necessary that they become a reality in the lives of children and adolescents, through the commitment of families, civil society and State, we can eliminate this problem that deeply affects Colombia's present and future. With this objective, World Vision Colombia is engaged, working in different fronts, for the creation of more adequate laws, visibility and incidence in power circles, through the ongoing implementation of the project for the Eradication of Child Labour (ETI) in the agriculture sector.

All the initiatives previously mentioned are very important but it is undeniable that the eradication of child labour depends on the creation of better and more dignified job opportunities for parents. For that reason, prohibitive policies have to be followed with compensatory mechanisms to reduce in the short or medium term an increase of poverty. In addition, it is necessary to continue working on the culture aspects, to guide our society to accept child labour as an educational and pedagogical issue. Although, traditionally, most Latin American cultures see this work as part of the education of children, it is absurd to maintain it as an extra-curricular activity, especially if we consider the levels of exploration and abuse suffered by children and adolescents; low salaries, bad working conditions and extensive hours of work, as obstructions for their development.

Finally, the most worrisome consequence of child labour is the disruption to the child's physical, psychological, emotional and social development. In addition, child labour also perpetuates the poverty cycle for children that are forced, through different circumstances to work, since employment limits their access to education and knowledge, and as adults condemned to unskilled and low income jobs. From a macroeconomic perspective, child labour prevents the growth and development of human capital therefore contributing to worse and upholds an unequal income distribution and social wealth.

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1 Geneva, Switzerland, June 17, 1999.

2 The Colombian government's National Development Plan for 2003-2006.

# Interviews with adults

## ALEX MILLÁN

*Former street vendor; currently in university*

*"I had to work as a child, because things were difficult at home. For awhile I sold candies on buses. Then I washed car windows at traffic lights, or painted gravestones at the cemetery.*

*The selling was hard, but I was strong and forced myself to continue. I learned how to fend for myself and value all the small things in my life. I believe that people are too quick to judge children who work on the street. Most of the time they can't conceive of the reasons, other than thinking that the children are being exploited by adults. I know of many cases like mine where children choose to work, knowing it's the only way they can help their families economically."*

## ALICIA BASTOS BOHÓRQUEZ

*Brandon's mother*

"I have seven children, and Brandon is the fourth. He's been working for about four years, along with his sisters, selling roses. They sell on the street and in the bars. We used to have a fruit stall in the open market, but the business fell through. So the children started selling roses, and things got better for us. They're learning how to make a living, and they don't have time to get into trouble.

Brandon can pay for his school and he buys his own clothing. Of course there are risks involved, but I always walk them home from work. I hope they'll find better work in the future, and also stay in school so they can get out of this poverty eventually."

## ANA CRISTINA BARÓN

*John's mother and Michael's stepmother*

"I have nine children. My husband left me a while ago. John started working when he was nine. At first he sold sweets on the buses, then fruit after that. I'm sad he has to work, but I'm not able to help them with their school or other things they need. It's very hard for a woman like me, with no husband around, to take care of her children. So I have to let them work. John missed school this year and I'm afraid he's going to pick up some bad habits. But at least he can meet his own needs, which is a big relief to me. Obviously, I'd prefer that he could get an education instead of spending his days on the street, but what can I do?... Just ask God to protect him, that's all."

# 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."<sup>1</sup>

- Worst forms of Child Labour according to ILO Convention 182<sup>2</sup>:
  - 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.<sup>3</sup>  
Occupation that denies children or adolescents their childhood, potential and dignity, and is damaging to their physical and mental development<sup>4</sup>
- 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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.<sup>6</sup>

## About Child Labour<sup>7</sup>

- 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](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](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 a lower quality of human capital in society

## **The Position of World Vision on the Issue of Child Labour<sup>8</sup>**

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 child prostitution, 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.

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<sup>8</sup> By Melanie Gow- Policy and Advocacy- World Vision Australia, 2000.



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