



United Nations Children's Fund INTERNATIONAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE Florence, Italy

# BETTER SCHOOLS: LESS CHILD WORK Child Work and Education in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru

by María Cristina Salazar and Walter Alarcón Glasinovich

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.

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Clearly the circumstances of children engaged in hazardous, disabling and exploitative labour, paid or unpaid, constitute a major obstacle to children's participation in education. On the other hand, the implementation of universal primary education is a critical strategy for combating child labour. An approach that ensures children's rights to education, helps to enforce child labour laws. provides incentives to poor families to educate their children, and helps change attitudes and social norms that tolerate exploitation of children would help achieve the [Universal Primary Education] eoals and improve children's well being.

Carol Bellamy<sup>1</sup>

Until relatively recently it was common to encounter studies on child labour<sup>2</sup> that barely mentioned education. Most educational research in developing countries, moreover, has grossly neglected the obvious link between not being in school, or performing poorly, and being a working child. Curiously, the link between child labour and basic education is recognized more consistently in international conventions and some national legislation than it has been in actual policy and practice. Historically, however, the motives lying behind the legislation have been complex. As the British historian Hugh Cunningham has pointed out, one of the main reasons for making primary schooling compulsory in England, in 1880, was not so much to deal with child labour but to compel children described as 'unemployed' to go to school - rather than to fall into the clutches of idleness and ominous vices (Cunningham and Viazzo 1996; 45).

The International Labour Convention of 1921 relied partly on compulsory education laws as a means of addressing the problem of the employment of children under the age of 14. As early as the 1930s, Recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) urged that States establish the legal minimum age of employment as the same age as the end of compulsory schooling. In Latin America most countries in fact have complied with that legal norm, and age 14 is the most common for both legal employment and completion of compulsory education.

Actual practice, however, is another issue, as the following essay amply illustrates on the basis of detailed studies conducted in five countries of the region.

Before shifting to the results of these studies, however, we would like to highlight a positive note reflecting recent developments bringing more closely together the objectives of combatting child labour while also extending the benefits of primary education to all children worldwide. One important step in that direction is clearly the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. That Convention, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, legally binding now in 187 nations, draws attention to the link between child labour and education in several ways. The most obvious is the provision in Article 32 that requires that children be protected not only from work which is 'hazardous' or 'harmful' in terms of the child's health or physical development, but also which is likely "to interfere with the child's education" or to be harmful to the child's "mental, spiritual, moral or social development".

Equally important is the fact that the 1989 Convention must be interpreted (and the official United Nations monitoring body of ten experts is vigorously pursuing this interpretation) in a manner which recognizes all the agreed rights of the child as well as the synergism involved in

<sup>1</sup> Statement to the UNICEF-UNESCO Joint Committee on Education, Paris, May 1996, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> No distinction is made here between 'child labour' and 'child work' since this distinction does not exist in Spanish.

advancing these rights in an integrated, holistic manner. Accordingly, other provisions besides the one explicitly dealing with child labour become important tools for combatting that form of exploitation as well as representing other rights that are important in and of themselves. Particularly relevant is the provision in Article 28 requiring that States Parties "make primary education compulsory and available free to all" — while also recognizing the need for "progressive" achievement of this right. The text of the most relevant articles of the Convention for our purposes is provided on page 13.

Somewhat independently from the Convention, international attention in recent years has been focused increasingly, though often separately, on both the issues of child labour and primary education. The reasons for the sudden surge of interest in child labour are partly related to the heated debate over 'social clauses' in international trade agreements, including pressures in Europe and North America to ban the import of products alleged to have been produced by children. The subject of primary education has attracted increased political visibility if not always enhanced political commitment as a result of a number of major international events, including the 1990 World Summit for Children (one of the agreed goals of which was a primary school completion rate of at least 80 per cent); the 1990 World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien, Thailand; and the 1995 Social Summit held in Copenhagen.

Gradually we are seeing more and more attention, among experts and policy makers, being directed to the interrelationship between the agreed goals of reducing and eventually eliminating child labour, on the one hand, and the extension of compulsory, free primary education, on the other. Among scholars, Myron Weiner drew considerable attention to the linkage in his influential book The Child and the State in India, published in 1991. On the basis of his review of the historical experience in Europe, the United States and Japan, as well as more contemporary data drawn from several Asian developing countries, Weiner boldly concluded that "Compulsory primary education is the policy instrument by which the state effectively removes children from the labor force," (p. 3) Many education experts note, however, that making education compulsory is not necessarily the most effective way to make it universal, which is in fact the goal. Experience in developing countries indicates that children are most likely to enter and remain in primary education when they have ready access to schools that are affordable, relevant and stimulating, especially for children from poor families and communities. Some experience also suggests that increasing school attendance rates does not so much remove children from work altogether — many still work after school and on weekends and vacations — as it impedes their falling into full-time work.

Cunningham and other historians have ascribed a much more complex array of factors - economic, technological, cultural and ideological - to the historical decline of child labour in the industrialized world. Several recent literature reviews have emphasized the complexity of the relationship between education and child labour, including the tendency for work (especially unpaid family-based chores) and schooling to be combined among children living in poverty, often at the expense not so much of enrolment but rather the successful completion of primary school. The problems of defining 'work' or 'labour' in a way which effectively distinguishes between exploitative or disabling activities as opposed to those which can actually contribute to a child's education, either substantively or financially, are receiving much more attention than they were just a few years ago. The importance of distinguishing among different age groups of children — especially the critical breakdown between primary and post-primary school age - is also now more widely recognized.

It is important, to be sure, to avoid any assertion that compulsory primary education is a 'panacea' for combatting child labour. Nor should we be lured into assuming that it will be easy to extend accessible, affordable and relevant primary education to all of Latin America's primary school age children, let alone those in other lower-income regions of the world. But it is refreshing to begin to encounter, in policy-making circles, recognition of the high degree of complementarity between the goals of eliminating child labour and achieving universal primary education. As stated in a recent joint ILO-

UNICEF publication entitled First Things First in Child Labour:

Probably the most widespread single risk children face when they work a substantial amount of time is the loss or undermining of a basic education necessary to equip them with fundamental skills necessary for success in life. Today. the lack of education is especially damaging, for prosperity increasinely accrues to intellectual competence, beginning with fundamental literacy, numeracy and critical thinking ability... Therefore, all children, without exception, should receive at least a basic education. Workplace participation that prevents them from attending school is in and of itself hazardous, and should be prohibited. (Bequele and Myers 1995: 119)

In a policy document on child labour presented to the ILO Governing Body in November 1995, three fundamental types of government action are identified:

(i) child labour legislation and appropriate enforcement mechanisms; (ii) a national child labour policy that sets public priorities and reaches out to engage all the important social actors; and (iii) a publicly funded system of basic education that ensures quality schooling that is physically and economically accessible to children of even the very poorest families. The last is the most important of all since, without it, whatever initiatives against child labour are undertaken will achieve very limited success.3

Latin America has a surprisingly long way to go on the path towards universal primary education. Although gross primary enrolment rates are similar to those in industrialized countries, the inefficiency (and inequity) of the primary school system in Latin America is evident from the fact that only about 74 per cent of children starting school complete even four years of education, compared with 98 per cent in industrialized countries and 87 per cent in the East Asia and Pacific region (UNICEF 1996a: 98). In two of the countries reviewed in this essay, Guatemala and Colombia, rates of completion of four years of schooling are only 41 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively (UNICEF 1996b: 53). Repetition rates remain a serious problem in most countries in the region. In Brazil, for example, 53 per cent of pupils repeat the first year, and first-year repetition rates for Colombia and Guatemala are also above 40 per cent.

Although in Latin America, as a region, public sector expenditure on education is a reasonably high percentage of GNP (about 4.2 per cent, compared with 5.5 per cent in the industrialized countries), that percentage lags significantly for several of the countries reviewed here: Guatemala (1.4 per cent); Ecuador (2.8 per cent); and Colombia (2.9 per cent) (UNDP 1995: 174). The inadequate public sector commitment to primary education in Latin America is a special problem. In the industrialized countries, on average, the expenditure per student at the university level is three times the rate at the primary school level. In Latin America, that ratio is six or seven times as high (UNESCO 1993: 33-35). During the 1980s in Latin America (as real incomes fell significantly in the region while the costs of education continued to rise), the percentage of total public sector education expenditure devoted to primary schooling fell from 49 per cent to 43 per cent, while spending at the university level increased from 25 to 29 per cent of the total.

These and many other weaknesses of the public school system in Latin America have multiple consequences, especially for the poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of society. Among the consequences is the weakening of education as a viable alternative to child labour. Over time, the continued reliance of poor families on the paid or unpaid work of their children, as opposed to investing in their education, becomes one of the most vicious and powerful channels for the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

Improving education in the region, qualitatively as well as in terms of enrolment and reten-

tion, will not in and of itself resolve the problems of child work and other forms of economic exploitation of children. Nevertheless, in terms of UNICEF's expanded mandate under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and our ongoing concern for the development of all children's full potential, it is difficult to imagine a more appropriate first priority for UNICEF than the strengthening of primary education, in terms

of quality as well as access, with a special concern for effectively reaching those children least well served by the current system.

Better schools surely imply less child work; but most importantly, improving education is a crucial precondition for genuine citizenship for children and adolescents and an essential element in the fulfilment of their legitimate rights.

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This publication presents a synthesis of the main results of five case-studies on child work and education carried out in Brazil, Colombia. Ecuador. Guatemala and Peru. These studies, both for the documentation collected and the insights gained, constitute a valuable contribution to knowledge of the topic in Latin America. Careful statistical analysis of census information and household surveys undertaken in the five countries has enabled greater precision in determining the magnitude of the problem of child and adolescent work. It has also allowed clearer identification of the limitations and underestimations inherent to such information. The qualitative information generated by the case-studies has increased our understanding of the complex relationship between children, work and education, making it possible to advance realistic strategies and policies. Indeed, proposals drawn up by UNICEF for the progressive elimination of child work and for the protection of adolescents and the enhancement of professional training opportunities have been accepted by several influential institutions, including the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL) (CEPAL 1995: 39). Also widely accepted in the region today, both in analyses of child and adolescent work and in initiatives to combat the problem, is the classification of age groups used in the overall study.2

Each of the five case-studies highlights the frequent incompatibility between child work and formal education, the effects of which are inevi-

tably most keenly felt by the poorest population groups. Country-level information shows considerable variations in the proportions of children engaged in work activities, particularly for those who manage to combine study and work. Some of these diversities, however, may relate to some extent to the use of different definitions in data collection and to the invisibility of certain types of work.3 The low percentages given for child workers also attending school in Colombia, for instance, reflect the very restricted definition of 'employment' used in household surveys on the labour force. The definition of work should include all the economic activities that children are engaged in, whether they be full- or parttime, seasonal or year-round, inside or outside the home, legal or illegal. The incidence of children's work in family production, both domestic and agricultural, is frequently underestimated, particularly for children in rural areas. Yet this type of work negatively influences both school attendance and performance. Official statistics contain only very limited data on child and adolescent work, which thus hinders the identification of children engaged in physically or psychologically damaging work and the formulation of protective measures. Some kinds of work, especially those involving long working hours, are detrimental to school performance, even though school enrolment figures often fail to indicate the problem. Indeed, census data and household sur-

The ILO is currently in the process of finalizing a manual for statisticians. There is a strong need for all countries to improve or establish extensive child work data collection systems.

I The studies and their respective authors are:

Walter Alarcón Glasinovich, Trabajo y Educación de niños y adolescentes en el Perú.

Mauricio García Moreno, El trabajo y la educación de los niños en el Ecuador.

Carlos Antonio Rodríguez L., Guatemala: el trabajo y la educación de los niños, niñas y adolescentes.

Catalina Turbay Restrepo and Elvia Acuña Vargas, Trabajo infantoljuvenil y educación básica en Colombia. Irene Rizzini, Irma Rizzini and Fernanda Rosa Borges, La fuerza de la infancia no está en el trabajo.

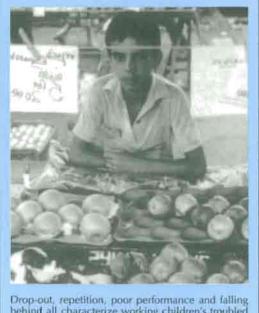
<sup>2</sup> The age groups, devised by Emilio García Méndez, are: (a) under-12 year olds; (b) 12-13 year olds; and (c) 14-18 year olds (see García Méndez and Araldsen 1994).

<sup>3</sup> As noted by the International Labour Organisation (1995), the lack of detailed and reliable data severely hinders the setting of realistic targets and the design of effective initiatives against exploitative child work. National statistical surveys which provide an accurate and broad view of the child work situation at the macroeconomic level are essential for a thorough qualitative analysis of the specific groups of child workers, including their working and living conditions. In general, an action programme targeting working children can only be successful if it is based on an accurate assessment of their needs, constraints and opportunities. In-depth information is also a powerful tool for raising awareness as a precursor to action.

veys seriously underestimate the proportion of children who both work and go to school because only the 'first activity', i.e. school attendance, is recorded. It is worth noting in this context that just as data on child work in the region tend to underestimate the phenomenon, those on school enrolment lean towards overestimations.

Although large differences in primary education can be observed in the region, both across and within countries, the generally poor quality of the school system rebounds on children's chances of success. Despite increased opportunities and coverage, repetition and drop-out rates remain high and the proportion of those who manage to complete the primary cycle of education continues to be very low, especially for a region with such high initial enrolment rates (BID 1993). In Brazil, for instance, only 34 per cent of children complete primary school, while the corresponding figure for Guatemala is 59 per cent. Information on reasons for not enrolling children in primary school as well as for school desertion points to factors related to the school system itself - costs, distance from home, lack of transport, insufficient coverage. Also frequently mentioned are 'economic reasons' and the need for child workers. If the opportunity cost of school attendance is very high in relation to a household's income, there will be a greater need for the children to work.

Based on household surveys in 10 countries of the region, CEPAL's recent study on the advantages of early investment in education in the Latin American region asserts that 13-17 year-old males who work complete 1-2 fewer years of education than those who do not work; for girl workers in the same age group the difference is between 0.5 and 1.5 years of schooling. These children generally accumulate an educational deficit of more than two years of education compared with those who enter the work force between the ages of 18 and 24 years. The study goes on to affirm that two years less education means 20 per cent less monthly income for the duration of a person's working life. Therefore, the loss of income that working children later experience during their adult lives is equivalent to between four and six times the income they would forfeit if they devoted their time to acquiring two additional years of schooling (CEPAL



behind all characterize working children's troubled efforts to gain an education,

photo UNICEF/Claudio Edinger

1995: 51). Thus, while the association between work and low school attendance is clear, the patterns of causality are obscure and most likely quite complex; educational and income levels of parents are interdependent factors, but are not measured in the CEPAL analysis.

The tendency to drop out of school, repeat grades, perform poorly, be removed from school or fall behind all characterize the troubled efforts of working children to gain an education. Each of the case-studies refers to the backward, often disastrous, conditions of primary education in the countries; the Brazil study refers to the "failed school". They stress the urgent need to transform the education system, to increase government investment in schooling, to improve teachers' skills and qualifications, and to introduce new methodologies and curricula to ensure that schools become, as the Peru study calls it, a magnet for children. Emphasis is placed on the need for explicit and clear political determination to retain children in school as the first objective on the way to achieving the goal of eradication of child work. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of finding ways to reintegrate children who drop out of school for economic reasons, particularly due to the system's failure to relate to the labour market. The Ecuadorian study emphasizes this idea by referring to the need to promote a process of collective responsibility for the school system. Schooling needs to be transformed into a genuinely public good, thereby developing the social capacity to raise problems, propose solutions and generate shared responsibilities.

These studies also shed light upon the complex relationship between child work and poverty. While no conclusive evidence has yet shown that child work is the exclusive determining factor of the intergenerational transmission of poverty, there does not seem to be any doubt that it maintains poverty levels within certain strata of the population. It is also clear that the need for children to work derives mainly, although not exclusively, from poverty, and that early entry into the labour market often contributes to the future poverty of working boys and girls. The studies document the inverse relationship between family income and participation in the work force. Although there are exceptions to the rule, it may clearly be asserted that the lower the per capita family income, the greater the proportion of children who work in order to contribute to the family budget.

In addition to family poverty, there are also cultural factors underlying the early entrance of children and adolescents into income-producing activities. In most countries of the region, arguments in favour of child work, including as a means to develop children's potential as social subjects or to prevent them from falling into the delinquency that results from idleness, as some parents put it, are not uncommon. These values are transmitted to boys and girls themselves through socialization processes. For Ecuador, an analysis is presented of the relationship between attitudes and the household's needs in terms of work or income, to school failure, socialization and identity-building. Nevertheless, given that many parents continue to believe in schooling as the motor of social mobility, they view their children's work as a complication or impediment to formal schooling.

Employers also tend to believe that they are being helpful to children and adolescents by offering them work - an attitude which, however, leads many of them to offer levels of remuneration that are much more helpful to them than to the young workers. Attitudes towards work as a means of 'saving' children tend to legitimize the income-earning activities of poor children and adolescents. At the same time, however, this type of reasoning makes the possibility of eradication of child labour more remote as it removes the debate from the sphere of rights and places it within the sphere of ideology or of philanthropy, thereby concealing the buying/selling and employer/employee relationships that are inherent to the labour force (Rodríguez dos Santos 1995).



Schools must become a central axis of children's lives, thereby ensuring their fundamental right to education.

photo UNICEF TACRO

The five case-studies dispel the notion that child work is of a sporadic nature, as workloads endured by children equal to or greater than those of adults are found in all of the countries. Furthermore, the studies recognize the heterogeneity of child work; differences among and within countries are marked. The Colombia study, for instance, points to considerable variations in the levels and types of child work; even in rural areas, the kinds of work children are engaged in depends on whether the area is dominated by commercial agriculture or by medium-sized and small farms worked by the peasants or by paid workers.

Work situations that are especially hazardous for children and adolescents are given particular attention in the case-studies. In fact, the substantial documentation generated by the studies reveals that children face very similar health and safety risks in unprotected and largely uncontrolled work activities in all of the five countries. They work in coal and gold mining; in sugar cane, onion, hemp and tobacco plantations; and in the flower-production industry. Examples are given of accidents caused by heavy, hard-tohandle tools like the machete and of adolescents distributing agrochemical products without adequate protection. In cities, vending and other street activities place children in situations of physical danger. So too, disadvantaged children are easily influenced by illegal traders and common delinquents, with all the physical and legal risks that such relations entail. Involvement in hazardous occupations inevitably hinders children's healthy and full development, including their chances for an adequate education. While laws have been enacted in these countries to prevent the participation of children in dangerous work situations, there are still no efficient means of control or investigation to enable enforcement by the government. Special efforts must be made to bring about the complete elimination of hazardous and exploitative work for children and adolescents.

The data and analyses generated by the casestudies have enabled general objectives of intervention in the area of child work to be identified:

- Eradication of dangerous, unhealthy, harmful, or taxing jobs for all children and adolescents.
- Progressive elimination of child work for all children below 12 years of age (or 14 years,

depending on country legislation). This goal can only be achieved through an ongoing, determined and vigorous struggle by all social actors, and requires the strong political will of the government. If school is compulsory for all children up to 14 years of age, the minimum legal age for entry into the work force should be the same, according to ILO conventions and country legislation.

- Enforcement of legislative norms concerning work carried out by adolescents, including their labour rights.
- Development of public and popular policies for the provision of professional training for 12-14 year olds, and job-creation initiatives for those who have completed the basic school cycle.
   Work opportunities which do not interfere with schooling should be encouraged.
- Formulation and implementation of policies to ensure that 14-18 year olds have access to 'option-expanding' professional training opportunities and receive appropriate occupational benefits and protection, particularly from hazardous occupations. Complementary educational measures are also urgently needed to enable adolescents to combine education with paid employment.
- Introduction of socio-economic policies aimed at alleviating poverty, including recuperation and increases in the minimum wage; social policies should promote a democratization of access to income.
- Mobilization and organization of adolescents and young workers in defence of their rights, both as workers and as citizens.
- Enforcement of effective social and governmental systems of inspection and control of illegal child and adolescent employment, with national and international pressure.

It is our hope that the information and recommendations contained in this publication will speak loudly and clearly of the urgent need for action at all levels of society — from the decision-making levels of government to universities, non-governmental organizations and other social forces, including trade unions and social movements — with the aim of enabling all children to build their lives on the foundations of a sound education.

# The Language of Child Work: A Glossary

Work: The concept of work is generally narrowly interpreted as a contractual relationship between employer and employer, with the latter receiving payment for activities performed. This definition is small for delite and adolescent work, as young workers do not usually sign contracts and are recreatly not registered as workers. Museuver, a great number of children uto out receiver any payment for their work. I for that of adults, however, child and adolescent work has three defining characteristics:

it it requires advoical or mental effort.

III it involves regularity or routine (implying sustained actions, commission or responsibility).

iii) it is an economic activity (producing money, goods or food, or substituting for the work of others that would have to be purchased with crossey, goods or food. Work thus includes activities performed inside and potable the forms, whether removariated or not.

Child work. On the have of Aroda 12 of the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child, shill work can be interpreted as any economic activity performed to boys and girls below the age of 12 which interferes with their full development and their formal education.

Adolescent work. Work activities performed by adolescent between the ages of 13.18 years condition accelerant work. In this study, this distinction between child and adolescent work is made especially to employ size the importance of differentiating between working clubber of animary, and post-primary age.

Hamily or Nazyrdoux work: Included in this category are all work activities which cause observation or long term ham, either physical or psychological, to children and adolescents, or which present their control physical, psychological or cognitive steretopisem:

Domestic work: Activities performed by chiliften and adolescents inside or possible their own home, with or without remarkation, which contribute to the social expendiction of the landy are defined as domestic work. Ugite work glosses that do not extend over long hours, and which do not interfere with childhen's school absolute and performance or with their radius over and play are not taggeted for read-values.

Higgs jobs. These include activities such as prestayion, drug-dealing and begging, for which involvement brings the worker or conflict with the law. Some analysis include them in the categories of child and advises on workers.

Education: Education in the study, takes otherwise specified, letter awards to the level of compulsory primary activishing. In terms of the same of education, Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides:

"State Parties agree that the education of the child should be altered as:

to the development of the child's personably, takens and mental and physical abilities to they halfest potential;

do the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles architected in the Charter of the United Nations.

sc) the development of respect for the child's parents. His or tax own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living. The country from which he or she may unigrape, and for childrations different from his or her own.

iiii the preparation of the clubt for responsible life in a free society, in the speit of understanding, present between executive of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and migrous groups and persons of indigenous origin.

init the development of respect for the natural environment."

Convention on the Rights of the Child. The 1989 UN horsen rights treaty has now been satisfied by 187 States. New articles of concern for this study see:

Article 3, providing that "In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Article 28, requiring that States Parison

(a) Make primary education compuliting and available been to all.

Its Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in page of seed.

set Take measures to encourage regular attendance at enhance and the reduction of drop-cut case."

Article 32, recognizing that "the right of the child to be protected from economic explicitation and form performing any work that is likely to be nazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be formful to the child's bealth or physical, mental, sprittial, manal or social development."

### 1. Economy, Culture and Child Work

The cities and streets of Latin America are full of children vending their wares amidst the traffic and market places or bent over workbenches in back-alley, clandestine workshops. Only a small proportion (almost always over 14 years of age) are regularly employed in formalsector activities, while the great majority of child and adolescent workers attempt to earn a meagre income in all kinds of inventive, but too often exploitative, activities in the fast-growing informal sector. In rural areas, children as young as five or six years of age help out with agricultural chores, often too far away from school and other children. Young girls and adolescents are swept away into domestic services, their childhoods lost to endless unpaid or badly paid household chores. Invisible to society, the government and trade unions, these children and adolescents continue to work in unhealthy, often harmful, conditions, without adequate remuneration, protection or knowledge of their rights.

The working world of children and adolescents is broadly heterogeneous, and so too are the reasons pushing youngsters to take on such responsibilities. The idea that children work as a result of parental irresponsibility is still widespread. This perspective sees the cause of child work in lazy parents who exploit their children. However, the ideological bias of this notion is evident, with its assumption that exploitation or irresponsibility lies exclusively on the side of the poor; in contrast, the implication is that the middle classes and the wealthy recognize their obligations and their children thus do not have to work.

The problem is clearly much more complex. It does not lie in the individual qualities of parents — though this may be an important factor in some cases — but in the conditions of poverty burdening the countries of Latin America. The scenario framing the phenomenon of child and adolescent work is one of poverty and disadvantage. At the same time, it would be mistaken to let this indisputable statement lead us to an eco-

nomic and therefore simplistic vision of the problem. There are more poor families than working children; indeed, if family poverty could provide sufficient explanation for child work, one would have to ask why more children are not involved in such activities. In other words, poverty is a necessary factor underlying the existence of child work, but it is not sufficient to explain the appearance and persistence of the problem.

Data collected in several Latin American countries indicate that a segment of the childworker population comes from non-poor families, that is, from families whose incomes are above the poverty line. The Peruvian case-study, for instance, reports that 30 per cent of working children and adolescents belong to 'non-poor' families. This finding, however, requires clarification. The children of the upper classes do not work. Instead, this statistic expresses the reality of hard-pressed families of the so-called middle classes who, despite the fact that they have risen above the poverty line, are forced to live in conditions bearing much greater resemblances to those of the poor than to the very small affluent strata of these societies. Further study is needed of the labour market structure, its trends and links to different stages of economic and social development, and to the conditions of supply and demand for children's labour.

Economics is never enough to explain social dynamics. Cultural factors inevitably affect the incidence of child and adolescent work. Very little empirical research has been carried out to date with a view to uncovering the cultural determinants of child work. More research is needed to help shed light on the reasons why children in one out of every two poor families work. It is of vital importance that more information is gained on parents' attitudes to children's work and formal education. It is also essential to further our understanding of the perceptions of childhood held by the parents of working children. While the five case-studies make initial inroads into these areas, the questions, as in many other

areas relating to child work, still outnumber the answers.

The Brazilian study notes that some parents see developmental benefits in their children's participation in the work force, from this perspective, work is perceived as a sort of school for life. Parents thus believe that the workplace can serve to promote values of responsibility and discipline, thus helping children to "prepare for life". Many poor parents also look to work activities as a way of preventing idliness in their children. Here, the low value attached by impoverished families to play activities for children may readily be seen. Play is considered a waste of time by many who are not aware of its importance for healthy child development.

The presence of pre-modern notions of childhood is emphasized in the Colombian study, particularly in rural areas where boys and girls are simply considered "miniature adults". This attitude, also commonly held in the rural regions of other countries of Latin America, "naturally" results in children being burdened with chores as they constitute a normal part of their roles as little adults. Another motive encouraging parents to send their children off to work is the desire to prevent them from genting into trouble with the law. As the case study on Peru points out, in areas where high levels of delinquency are found, parents often view work as a form of protection for their children against potential negative influences.

Demographic variables, as underlined in the Brazil study, are also associated with the early incorporation of children into the labour market. Households headed by women almost invariably fall into relatively deeper poverty, with consequently greater probabilities of the children of such families dropping out of school and heading into the work force at an early age.

Similarly, though with specific characteristics of its own, the study on Guatemala reports that female-headed households are linked not so much with child work but with children dropping out of school. It is possible that these children, deprived of educational opportunities, are occupied with domestic activities in the home in a bid to help the family survive. They are also at risk of becoming involved in illegal activities.



Poverty likely to not the sale discontrolled to child work. California and other factors affect its conference

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In short, the five country reports demonstrate that poverty is a necessary, but not the only, factor underlying the early entrance of children and adolescents into paul or unpaid work situations. Additionally, cultural and demographic factors constitute supportant influences. It is these factors that provide more immediate and complete explanation for the fact that some children of poor families manage to avoid the compromising, often damaging, effects of too much work and too intile education.

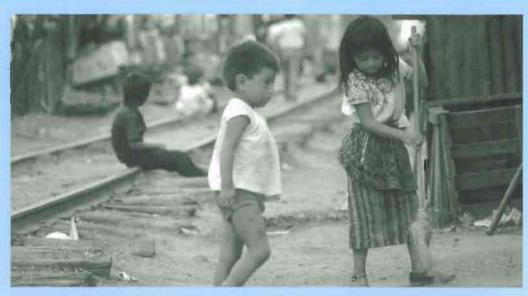
### Who are the Working Children and Adolescents?

It is important to note from the outset that the term 'child work' can be somewhat misleading if used in a broad and indistruct master as emperical information, while taking sito account the many problems and deformation in data collection, indicates that working adolescents, i.e., those aged 13-18, far outsumber child workers in the precise sense in which these categories are defined.

The Gusternala study found that 7-12 yearold children make up 27 per cent of the total number of children at work. In Ecuador, only 12 per cent of the economically active children are between 10 and 11 years of age. Child workers ov the 6-11 age group represent 16 per cent of the total number of 6-17 year-old workers in Peru-While the Colombia case study reseated a more extensive profilest of work among under-12 year-old children, especially in rural ureas, the proportions were still found to lean towards older children. Nevertheless, among the younger children, one out of every three 10-11 year olds and one out of every four 6-9 year olds were working in secondary activities.9 While the probtern is not an overwhelming in the large cities, as shown by Flores et al. (1995, 198), it is stiff course for altern) one out of see 10-11 year-old children and one in ten 6-9 year olds participate in the labour market.

During the 1980s, 18.9 per cent of 10-14 year-old children in Brazil were working, by

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For many girls, the daily grind of domestic chores leaves little time or energy for school.

photo UNICEF/Dennis Budd Grav

1990 this figure had decreased to 17.2 per cent. Almost 40 per cent of all 10-17 year-old workers (7,500,000) were in the 10-14 age group. In absolute numbers, this means that nearly 3 million girls and boys of this age group were engaged in economic activities. Rural areas showed strong gender differences, with 44.8 per cent of boys and 17.9 per cent of girls working.<sup>5</sup>

While emphasizing once again the caution needed in examining survey results on child work, especially for young children, it does appear that working under-12 year olds make up a much smaller part of the overall working child population than adolescents for the five countries of the region under study. However, this conclusion should not in any way reduce the social and political importance of acting to eliminate the harmful and wasteful phenomenon of child work. For tens or hundreds of thousands of children, the vital early years of childhood slip away in exertion and fatigue. In adolescence, a larger contingent joins these youngsters in the labour market, as a result of which the bulk of young

workers in the countries of Latin America is to be found in the 15-18 age group.

Geographical location is evidently an important factor in determining children's work. While work in rural areas begins at the tender age of five or six years, city children tend to enter the labour force at somewhat older ages. Clearly, technological backwardness in rural areas and the continuing importance of traditional culture need to be considered in analysing the incorporation of children into the labour market.

With the exception of Peru and Brazil, the other countries included in this study found that child work, as defined in most surveys, is heavily concentrated in rural areas. Again, however, it is important to bear in mind that methodological deficiencies in such surveys result in underestimations of both domestic and informal employment among children. Nevertheless, the greater availability of schools in urban areas and the fact that they are more a part of the 'urban culture' makes school enrolment more of an option for city children.

In Ecuador, 60 per cent of 10-17 year-old workers are found in rural areas; in Guatemala, the corresponding figure for 7-17 year olds rises to 76 per cent; and in Colombia the rural working population of 12-17 year olds makes up 65

<sup>5</sup> Rizzini et al. (1995) indicate that the labour participation rate of girls and women is underestimated because domestic work is considered as 'help' and because the work carried out by 'abandoned girls' is not recorded in employment statistics.

per cent of the total. As noted, however, the picture for Peru and Brazil is somewhat different: a smaller 46 per cent of 6-17 year-old workers are found in rural areas in Peru and, similarly, rural 10-17 year-old Brazilian workers account for 43 per cent of the total.

Thus, while no clear geographical tendency can be detected on the basis of the most recent quantitative information, it is nonetheless worth recalling that the accelerated process of urbanization of Latin American societies will no doubt promote a trend towards an urbanized labour force of children and adolescents.

Gender is a further variable of evident importance in examining the mechanisms of child work. Available data suggest that there are more males than females in the ranks of child workers. Information from Guatemala shows that 84 per cent of workers in the 7-17 age group are male. Boys make up 64 per cent of the 10-17 year-old workers in Ecuador. Brazilian boys in the 10-14 age group constitute 63 per cent of the total and this tendency is corroborated by the data on Colombia and Peru. Statistics show that Colombian boys make up 70 per cent of the 12-17 year-old working population. Finally, 60 per cent of the 6-17 year-old workers in Peru are males.

Statistics, however, do not tell the whole story. Most statistics on the work activities of under-12 year-old and adolescent girls represent substantial underestimations, since these girls who spend endless hours on domestic chores in their own homes are not registered as workers. For many of these girls, however, these tasks inevitably involve excessive working hours and far too often lead to school desertion.

In some countries, census information indicates that the proportion of under-age youth who 'do not work and do not study' reaches significant dimensions. Each of the country casestudies called attention to this group, which largely comprises girl children and adolescents who stay at home while their parents go out to work. Given the exhausting nature of the domestic chores performed day after day by these girls in their own homes, their right to an education or even to adequate rest and recreation is clearly violated. Nevertheless, official statistics fail to recognize domestic tasks as work.

A large proportion of girl children and adolescents carry a double workload. Before or after

a full day's work, another job awaits them at home with the domestic chores that help keep the family running. The Guatemala study indicates that an average of 21 hours of household chores should be added to the 40-hour week worked by many adolescent girls, making a total workload of 61 hours per week.

In Brazil a comparison of groups of girls who 'do not work' with those who 'do work' pointed to higher school attendance among the former. As the Ecuador study notes, however, these domestic activities play a central role in the functioning of the family and are as necessary to its survival as paid work.

Summing up, the five case-studies indicate that the involvement of girl children and adolescents in excessive domestic work in their own homes is more widespread than previous analyses have concluded. The negative consequences of these early and taxing responsibilities, particularly the difficulty of combining school with long hours of physical labour, is certainly one of the areas of the overall problem of child work that merits far greater attention.

#### 3. Occupational Structure

The occupational structure of child work shows considerable variation, depending fundamentally on geographical location, gender and age. National-level statistics on the involvement of children and adolescents in agricultural activities place the figure for Guatemala at 65 per cent; for Ecuador, 48 per cent; and for Peru, 40 per cent. Although aggregate national-level figures are not available for Brazil and Colombia, the case-studies tend to confirm a similar tendency in these two countries.

In addition to the prelevance of children in agricultural occupations in rural areas, there is also quite a large presence of child and adolescent workers in handicrafts production and in coal mines (Brazil and Colombia) as well as in fireworks factories and cereal-processing plants (Guatemala).

In rural parts of these countries, as noted, children as young as five years of age help their parents by tending flocks of small animals; as they grow older, children take on other tasks during planting and harvesting times. When they reach adolescence, their work also becomes

more differentiated along gender lines. Boys take charge of the tasks requiring greater physical effort, while the girls' world tends to become more and more restricted to the domestic sphere. Reliable data on child work in rural areas, however, are still grossly inadequate. Any conclusions therefore should be tested in future studies.

The structure of child and adolescent work in urban areas shows greater diversification than is the case for rural regions. In the cities, the largest proportions of young workers are to be found in the trade and service sectors. Participation in entrepreneurial activities or in the modern sector is practically out of their reach. The majority of children and adolescents work in the most technologically undeveloped sectors of the economy, and are therefore among the most badly paid. Those employed in the industrial sectors are usually in support roles, not directly operating the machines. As the Peru case-study notes, in contexts of over-supply of adult labour, there is no incentive for employers to place adolescents, much less children, behind their machines, given the additional degree of risk to their own

Many young children accompany their parents to work, not for the help they can give 'on the job' but because, in their parents'view, they are safer.

photo UNICEF/Dennis Budd Gray

machinery and to possible sanctions by government authorities.

The inability of the industrial sector to absorb the growing labour force has resulted in recent years in a rapidly expanding informal sector in Latin America. Vendors vie for business out on the crowded streets, while repair shops and clandestine workshops (often in some kind of arrangement with formal-sector commercial and production enterprises) generate a living for thousands of workers. The impetus created by this sort of economic feedback has clearly resulted in increased demand for both male and female child workers.

It has become increasingly common for family well-being in the countries of Latin America to depend on the economic contributions of more than one family member. Even if the head of household is employed, his or her earnings are very often far from sufficient to meet the needs of the entire family. Parents, especially those engaged in street-selling activities, often take their small children with them when they go out to work. This is not so much because they rely on their children's help, but simply because they have no safe place to leave them. Nevertheless, these children gradually take on tasks that are complementary to their parents' work, until such time as they can actually take charge of the stand or workplace. Considerable evidence is now available which shows that families involved in street-vending work tend to spread out over a particular area in order to extend their radius of action, thus reaching larger numbers of potential clients. Boys are usually allowed to move farther away than girls, who generally work with or very close to their parents.

Within the general framework of the urban economy, much greater attention has been given to the study of children working on the streets. In contrast, little is known of the production activities performed by children, unprotected in their invisibility, in workshops and small factories. This too is an area deserving more focused attention.

#### 4. Working Conditions

Much of the work of children and adolescents is basically categorized as 'non-paid family work': the percentage is higher for children than for adolescents, as well as for rural areas in comparison to urban ones. In Ecuador, 57 per cent of the overall child worker population is classified as non-paid family workers, while the corresponding figure for Peru is 44 per cent. In Colombia, 44.2 per cent of 12-13 year-old workers and 26.8 per cent of those between 14 and 17 years of age are family workers who do not receive any payment for their labours (Flórez *et al.*, 1995: Table 8.1).

Children very often begin their working lives with their parents, and tend to acquire greater autonomy as they grow older. Generally, as children reach adolescence they start to work more independently; large numbers of older children find work in the informal-sector workshops and some gain regular employment in a small number of formal-sector businesses. Therefore, children's monetary contributions to the family income usually come from working adolescents rather than under-12 year olds.

Although measuring the incomes of child and adolescent workers is a particularly difficult and uncertain enterprise, most estimates suggest that monetary remuneration is invariably low, generally ranging from about half the minimum wage to the legal minimum at most.

As indicated in the Ecuador study, children's incomes are generally a function of age, working hours, gender and geographic location. Male adolescents living in urban areas and those who work long hours are in a relatively better economic position. On the other hand, the Brazil study did not find a link between working hours and income in urban areas. It would appear that there are considerable variations in the degree of correspondence between income and the abovementioned variables, both within and across countries.

All of the case-studies point out that children and adolescents often work more than 40 hours a week, thereby making their work week equal to or greater than that of adult workers. Such long hours of labour, as the studies emphasize, take an unavoidably negative toll on children's school attendance and academic performance.

In Brazil, it was found that the proportion of children who manage to work and study at the same time is higher than in the other four countries: the proportion reaches over half of all children in urban areas. Indeed, the highest child work rates in metropolitan areas are not always associated with low school attendance. However, there is evidence that as children grow up they are more likely to drop out of school: at the age of 12 approximately half of Brazilian children are out of school. In addition, over-aged school students are usually those who have worked or are still working. In a national-level survey, Levison (1993) ascertained that school performance is better for non-working 10 year olds, and that 19 per cent of 14 year-olds not working managed to complete seven years of schooling compared with only 10 per cent of workers of the same age.

Working conditions in the diverse situations in which children and adolescents labour very often compromise their health and safety. In rural areas children's work is carried out in harsh climatic conditions, from the overpowering heat of some valleys to the freezing temperatures and snow common to high-altitude areas. The rudimentary methods used in harvesting makes this work particularly taxing for children. In addition, the risks involved in handling pesticides and chemical fertilizers, especially when the proper protective equipment is lacking, are almost always ignored.

The reality of the lives of peasants and their children lies in stark contrast to the idyllic picture often presented in the literature. As described in the Peru study, poor landless peasants and owners of tiny plots can be found living next to large landholdings. These peasants may be forced to work as hired hands for wealthy landowners, at times involving seasonal migrations and at times including adolescents. The glaring social stratification of rural areas clearly affects the lives of children and adolescents.

As already reported, children and adolescents in urban areas predominantly work in the vast informal economies in the streets and small back-street workshops. Amid the pollution and physical dangers of traffic, the lack of light, air and space in the enclosed workplaces, the moral risks of frequent contact with illegal activities and delinquency, thousands of children and adolescents eke out a living. While more needs to be known about children's working conditions, it is evident that they do not favour healthy growth and development.



Education is the sword in the fight against the involvement of children and adolescents in harmful work. National plans to eradicate intolerable forms of child work must be formulated without delay.

photo UNICEF/Dennis Budd Gray

### 5. Highly Hazardous Child Work Requires Immediate Attention

Too many children continue to be exposed to the harmful, hazardous and damaging effects of exploitative work situations in the countries of Latin America. The Brazil study reports on the risks faced by children and adolescents working in the sugar cane plantations where the swipe of a misplaced machete can cause fatal injury; in the tobacco plantations where snake bites and insect stings are constant dangers; in the coal mines where they toil under loads far beyond their capacity; in domestic service where they are hidden away from the world in conditions of semi-slavery; in garbage collecting where the filth brings infection and the broken bottles cut; in the earthenware and porcelain factories where the air is filled with harmful silica dust; and in the brick-making kilns where they labour through long, back-breaking days.

In Colombia large numbers of adolescents work in the flower-growing industry that is notorious for exposing children to toxic substances without even the minimum safety equipment; in coal mines that clog their lungs with coal dust and poisonous gases and that are constantly at risk of caving in; and in the *chircales*, as the rustic brick factories are called, that strain children's still-developing bodies beyond exhaustion.

The labour of children and adolescents is exploited in Peru in the unregulated and unprotected gold industry; the search for this precious metal involves the use of mercury, an extremely dangerous substance, and requires that children dig until they find a vein of pumice stone to cut and extract, inhaling the fine volcanic dust that covers these stones in the process. Peruvian children as young as eight years of age also sweat away their childhoods in the rudimentary brickmaking businesses. The Guatemala study provides information on child work in the fireworks industry where youngsters are constantly exposed not only to the danger of explosions but also to the toxic risks of gunpowder materials.

Not only do many work situations place children in physical danger, they may also severely compromise their psychological health. Children working as domestic servants, for instance, labour for long, thankless hours, under extreme pressure, among unloving — often tyrannical adults — and in almost complete isolation from family and friends. In Colombia, Knaul (1995) found that domestic servants under the age of 15 worked an

average of 50 hours per week, a work-week longer than any other occupational group of child dren. Female domestic servants made up the majority of all child workers labouring over 60 hours a week. There is also evidence of wide-spread physical, mental and sexual abuse of young girls employed in other people's homes.

In all of these occupations — and the examples given are far from exhaustive — children risk their lives, they risk their childhoods, their chance for healthy and complete development, their chance for a future. All forms of hazardous, debilitating and exploitative child work must be eliminated.

#### 6. Contribution to the Family Economy

The work of children and adolescents is rarely an individual strategy; instead, it is much more commonly part of a broader family survival strategy. Children contribute to the household economy in a variety of ways. Most frequently their help is given in the form of non-paid domestic work in the flome, which makes it easier for the parents, especially for mothers, to take on paid jobs. This type of work has particularly detrimental effects on girls who, with little time and energy left over after hours of

domestic chores, often give up on their homework and too often give up on school.

Children may contribute directly to the family budget by giving all or part of their earnings or they may help more indirectly by using their profits to buy items, such as school books and clothing, that their parents would otherwise have had to purchase. In many cases children's support is twofold: they may hand over part of their earnings to their parents and use the rest to cover basic needs as well as personal spending.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the contribution made by children and adolescents to the family economy, particularly because of this diversity in modes of support. The five country case-studies, however, do concur in emphasizing the need to differentiate between the contribution of children and that of adolescents.

As pointed out above, young children very often work close to or with their parents, usually only receiving a tip, or indeed nothing, for their work. They begin to become more autonomous as they grow older, and they are more likely to be remunerated for their labours. Therefore, adolescents are more likely and more able to make a direct financial contribution to the family economy.



Children's work it commonly part of a tamely autoisal strategy, but their is existence to mage as that children a mad contribution to family income is overestimated.

> photo UNICEF/ Claudio Fringer

For Brazil no clear association was found between the number of working hours and income earned by child and adolescent workers. Minimal differences in earnings were found between those working up to 20 hours a week and those working 21-39 hours. Only those children working 40 hours or more per week received higher pay (1.2 minimum wages). whereas these working up to 39 hours ramed 0.6 of the minimum wage. The average earnings received by children engaged in agricultural activities amounted to around one third of the minimum wage, while girls employed as domestic servants received two thirds of the minimum wage. Children's contribution became more significant in relation to the families" level of poverry, the deeper a family descends into poverty, the more it relies on children's contributions.

The Colombia study indicates that children's work does not generally constitute a significant contribution to the family's income. A research finding cited in the Penu case-study shows that child work accounts for 10 per cent of the total income for poor families of Lima. Data presented in the Gusternala study indicate that this contribution reaches 15 per cent of the total income of poor and indigent families.

Some analysts have argued in favour of child work on the grounds that families would samply not be able to subsist without this support. However, some available evidence indicates that estimations lend to exaggerate children's contribution. This is a key insig, an understanding of which requires accurate surveys on family income, including draggregated data according to age. Since this influentation is not correctly available, the only reliable statement that can be made on the topic as that children's contribution to family income is linked printarily to use. The data suggest that the contribution of under 12. year olds is considerably lower than that of ado-Inscents. We have no way of knowing at present whether children's monetary contribution is vital to the very survival of poor families. There is tome evidence, however, that the income generated by children and adolescents generally amounts to only half that made by 35-54 yearold wage earners with little formal education (seven years of schooling) (CEPAL 1995).

Finally, the recent CEPAL study on education and the socio-economic implications of child labour in Latin America found that child and adolescent labour has a low impact on overall levels of indigence and poverty, while impacting heavily on the specific category of households



with working children and adolescents. It thus concludes that there is a dual justification for initiating programmes to alleviate the immediate needs of this latter category of households in order to postpone the entry of young family members into the work force (*Ibid.*: 54, 55).

#### 7. Child Work and Education

Preschool: Off to a Good Start?

The education system in all the countries of the region incorporates a preschool level, though coverage remains low; only 14 per cent of the appropriate child cohorts attend and marked inequality of access persists. Coverage oscillates between a meagre 7 per cent in Central America and 32 per cent in the English-speaking Caribbean countries. Greater opportunities for preschool attendance exist in urban areas, favouring the middle and upper classes; working children are excluded. Facilities do not exist in rural areas where the greatest numbers of children are concentrated, nor do they extend to indigenous groups. In some countries, including Colombia and Guatemala, private-sector services exceed public education facilities, once again privileging higher-income groups. Failure to get off to a good educational start in preschool increases disadvantaged children's chances of later failure, repetition and school drop-out. Greater attention to more equitable, accessible and adequate preschool facilities constitutes an indispensable basis for improving primary education (UNICEF 1992a).

Primary School: Still a Long Way to Go

The high correlation between government investment in primary education and economic growth is well-known. A recent evaluation undertaken in 14 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean demonstrated that the average rate of social return on primary education exceeded 17 per cent (BID 1993). Yet although governments have recognized the importance of investing in education, the economic and human resource allocations are still inadequate, as are the policies. Studies have shown that the academic quality of primary schools is poor (inferior to that found in many Asian nations); the school day is short (4-5 hours, often less than 31/2 hours in many urban schools); the actual number of days of school (often as few as 120) does not correspond to the official calendar (180 days);6 and textbook provision remains grossly inadequate.

Relatively high coverage has been achieved at the primary-school level in Latin America as a result of policies instituted since the 1950s to promote the expansion of the school system. According to the latest available data, most countries of the region have succeeded in making primary school accessible to nearly all school-age boys and girls: on average, 92 per cent of the child population enrol in primary school at some point during the school period (UNICEF 1992a). An estimated 20 per cent, however, begin school late in relation to the entrance age set for each country. Sharp differences also persist according to income level and between urban and rural areas with respect to both enrolment and attendance in formal education. In only four countries of the region (Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador) does enrolment continue to lag with rates below 80 per cent. In countries with large indigenous populations, such as Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru, enrolments are substantially lower for the children of these groups. On a more positive note, differences by gender have diminished.

Limitations rooted in the failure to achieve more efficient uses of available capacity explain to some extent the shortcomings of the process of universalization of primary-school education. UNICEF (1992a) calculations estimate that gross primary-school enrolment rates for the six years of formal education reach 108 per cent, thus indicating that almost all the countries of Latin America already have sufficient installed capacity to respond to the demand for primary-school education among the school-age population.

Failing: Children or the System?

If the school systems of Latin America are examined on the basis of outcomes, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they are failing. Analysts refer to the 'failed school', and educational indexes explain why. Repetition rates continue to be high, starting in the first years of primary school, academic levels continue to be low, and

<sup>6</sup> In European countries, the average school year is 220 six-hour days. In Japan and some of the recently industrialized countries of Asia, the school year averages 220 days with nine hours of lessons per day.



Innovative and creative initiatives, like the Escuela Nueva programme in Colombia, are bringing education into the reach of thousands of disadvantaged children.

photo UNICEF TACRO

alarmingly large numbers of children continue to give up on school, deserting the classrooms even though they have not — or perhaps because they have not — acquired the necessary skills to ensure them a reasonable job and livelihood.

A review of the literature on factors affecting primary-school achievement in Latin America and the Caribbean shows that urban, non-coeducational and full-time schools tend to obtain the best results. In schools that have a double schedule, "the students attending the morning program tend to be better, perhaps due to the fact that students from lower-income families work in the morning and attend school in the afternoon" (Vélez et al., 1994; 4).

Studies and evaluations undertaken by the World Bank and other institutions emphasize the poor quality of the school system as the main barrier to a useful education for Latin American children. Inadequate management capacity, lack of efficiency, unequal access, and insufficient resource allocations are some of the factors which combine to make schools irrelevant to many children. The outcome is that Latin American workers record an average of 5.2 years of formal education, falling short of the compulsory level of schooling by two or more years. There is

thus a pressing need to examine the problem of child and adolescent work not only from the perspective of how work impedes school attendance, but also from the angle of how Latin American schools fail to satisfy the needs, demands and expectations of students.

Research findings for the seven principal cities of Colombia, based on the opinions of working children themselves, established that the severe limitations of school constitute the main cause of desertion; only 2 per cent of the children mentioned work as the reason. The need to work, however, does become a more decisive factor for older children: it was found that desertion at the secondary-school level was due to the need to work for 21 per cent of male students and 11 per cent of girl students, although it is worth pointing out that 40 per cent of the boys and 28 per cent of the girls did not want to stay in school — statistics that once again point all too clearly to the poor quality of secondary schools.<sup>7</sup> With

<sup>7</sup> Indirect means of measuring these aspects are the indexes of repetition, desertion and promotion. In Peru, 18 out of every 100 children repeat at least one grade in primary school and just over 30 per cent repeat the first grade; in Guatemala and Brazil this percentage rises to almost 55

regard to gender, it is important to note that more males are not enrolled in school because of the need to work, while for girls over the age of 15 the reason for non-attendance is more likely to relate to responsibilities for household chores.

In Guatemala, a 1994 survey of 600 children who had left school showed that their decision to drop out was based on: deficiencies of the school (irresponsible teachers, insufficient resources, uselessness of curricula) (40 per cent); economic motives (28 per cent) and the need to work (24 per cent). Thus, the results of this survey also indicate that the need to work is often not the main cause of desertion from school. Nevertheless, the determining nature of economic factors in decisions to drop out of school has been underestimated in child work studies, not so much in terms of children's necessary contribution to household income, but because of the high costs of schooling and because of the higher value awarded to alternative uses of their time. even when it is not remunerated. Much more needs to be known about the attitudes of parents to education. Given that parents' thinking on their children's schooling appears to be a crucial factor in child work in every country of the region, it is vital that a greater understanding, leading to positive interventions, be gained.

Finally, a cause for serious concern is the fact that there are still substantial numbers of children in the countries of Latin America who never go to school. Research studies on 10-14 year-old street-working children in the two Brazilian cities of São Paulo and Recife found that high proportions of these children had never attended school: 56 and 76 per cent respectively.

Work and Study: Can the Twain Meet?

The documentation gathered and analysed for the five countries under study clearly demonstrates that the majority of children and adolescents who work, or at least a significant proportion, do not attend school with any regularity. It would certainly be misleading to conclude, as the previous section has shown, that work is the only factor preventing children from attending school. Yet, the evidence does alert us to the fact that child work by and large competes with, rather than facilitates, schooling.

While variations exist both across countries and within, according to factors such as age,

location, gender and family income, all the studies reveal a disturbing degree of exclusion between work and school. The Peru report found that only 33 per cent of the total number of 6-17 year-old child workers attended any educational centre. The remaining 67 per cent of working children remained outside the margins of formal education. Although it was found that more than half the working children in Brazil managed to combine work and school, the study also showed that the higher the rate of labour activity among 10-17 year-old workers, the lower their level of formal education. In Colombia, available data demonstrate that within the total working-child population the proportion of those able to combine work with study always falls short of those who only work. Only 29.6 per cent of 12-13 year-old workers also go to school compared with 89.5 per cent of children in the same age group who do not work. A similar tendency may be observed for 14-17 year olds; only 20.3 per cent of those who work also attend school, while the proportion rises to 80.4 per cent for those who do not work (Flórez et al. 1995: Table A5.1). The research from Ecuador reports that the proportion of children and adolescents enrolled in educational centres is much higher among those who do not work (89 per cent) than among those who do (58 per cent), and the gap between these percentages increases with the children's age.

Data presented in the five case-studies also speak loudly and clearly of the difficulties working children face in staying on at school. In Peru, 61 per cent of working 6-14 year-old students fall behind in school compared with 39 per cent of non-working children. Similarly, the drop-out rate for the same age group of child workers stands at 47 per cent, as opposed to a much lower 8 per cent of non-working students. The Brazil study notes that 73 per cent of 10-17 year olds who do not work have fallen behind in school, whereas for working students the figure rises to 86 per cent. The case-studies for Colombia, Guatemala and Ecuador concur in linking child work with poor educational achievement and desertion from school.

The gap between the available educational opportunities and the real needs of families is most evident in rural areas. The country studies suggest that a sizeable proportion of rural parents



The funder of work makes a burden of school arbiform and adolescents often have a binger working week than trade adults.

photo LINICEEN, McCor-

perceive education as irrelevant to their children's future, and thus prefer them to work. There is also a deep rift between the possibilities of future social mobility offered by the school and the urgent needs of the present. The children of the poorest rural dwellers, particularly the children of impoverished peasants, are the most vulnerable to the harsh demands of family survival.

Rural children may have more possibilities than city children for combining labour activities with school because of the greater flexibility involved in working with the family. Urban working children's schedules are more likely to depend on an employer. However, the very nature of the work that occupies much of poor rural children's days is hardly conducive to successful study. Children often get to school late. after having risen early to clean, wash, tend animals, look after younger children - any number of domestic chores. They usually have to fight exhaustion to concentrate in class, and they rarely have time to study or do their homework, In short, the burden of work makes a burden of school, compromising children's motivation and performance. Furthermore, conflicts between the agricultural calendar and the school calendar often cause students to drop out of school temporarrly, as a result of which they tend to fall all too easily behind in their studies. The degree to which children's work affects their classroom performance is fundamentally related to age, length of the work day and the types of labour performed.

Each of the five studies makes the point that increased and improved access to education for working children and adolescents would result in better employment opportunities, higher productive capacity, improved quality of life, and greater opportunities for social mobility and equality. Yet, the reality is that scores of children continue their daily struggle to reconcile work with schooling - all too often giving up or falling behind, and nearly always performing badly. Immediate action and positive interventions are needed. This reality should, at the very minimum, provoke strong social indignation since the future lives of thousands or millions of children throughout the Latin American region are at stake. Their education and their options compromised, working children are condemned to compete from a disadvantaged position in the labour market. Thus, as the Peru study points out, child work becomes a factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

#### Investing in Education

Structural adjustment policies have led to the privatization of many government services and to reductions in social spending, which in turn have resulted in rising education costs for families. More expensive tuition, fees, uniforms, school-bus transport, books and other supplies have created additional pressures on large numbers of already overburdened families, particularly those headed by women. The children of poor families are often forced to work to help cover these costs.

The education budget in Ecuador, for instance, has decreased constantly over the last 15 years, dropping from 33 per cent of public expenditure in 1980 to 22 per cent in 1985, continuing its downward path to 17 per cent in 1990 and 16 per cent in 1995. Ninety per cent of this allocation covers teachers' salaries, with only 10 per cent remaining for development and maintenance of infrastructure, training, educational research, and so on. Nevertheless, the Ecuador study describes current efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in both rural and urban areas.

The Guatemala case-study highlights the fact that education spending has not once exceeded 2 per cent of GNP during the last 20 years. Operating expenditures absorb between 90 and 97 per cent of the resource allocation. Government spending per student (in current quetsals) was decreased in 1991 at the preschool, primary and secondary levels; costs per student at the secondary-school level are almost three times higher than at the primary-school level.

In Colombia, government spending on primary and secondary education represented 2.8 per cent of GNP in 1993, and the present government has promised to boost it to 3.8 per cent of GNP by 1998. While government investment has increased at both the primary and secondary levels over the past 20 years, there are nonetheless symptoms of stagnation and decreased per student spending. Government subsidies do make some attempt, however, to help children of the poorest households by covering more than 15 per cent of the costs of their enrolment and tuition.

Between 1980 and 1989, public spending on primary education per student per year for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole dropped from \$US 164 to \$US 118. It is, however, important to note that marked variations exist across countries: while the percentage of GNP allocated to education in Brazil fell from 3.5 to 2.7 per cent between 1980 and 1988, the percentage rose from 3.1 to 3.4 per cent for the 1980-1987 period in Peru.

The five country case-studies argue that a viable and effective financial effort on the part of Latin American governments could result in the attainment of nine years of education for the labour force as a whole in less than two decades.

The adoption of dynamic policies to promote the development of human capital, which would represent considerable savings for families if accompanied by global policies to stimulate growth and innovation in the economy as a whole, could substantially accelerate economic growth and improve the standard of living of 70 per cent of the poor in Latin America.

#### Successful Programmes

The need for innovative and effective programmes that bring education into the reach of the many thousands of disadvantaged children in Latin America is both self-evident and urgent. Attempts are being made to make education relevant and accessible, and children are being reached. One of the most interesting examples of such educational initiatives is the Escuela Nueva (New School), a modern programme of rural primary education that is functioning successfully in 10,000 schools in Colombia.8 With its innovative and creative approach, including flexible promotion mechanisms and multi-grade teaching, it has managed to keep almost 80 per cent of children in school in the country's vast coffeegrowing areas where their help during harvest time is essential.

Since 1988, the Escuela Nueva programme has been broadened to include basic secondary education, currently functioning in 43 schools distributed among 29 townships in the department of Caldas. Evaluations of the Escuela Nueva highlight significant progress in reducing desertion and repetition rates, in improving job satisfaction among teachers, in increasing primary school completion rates and in generally

<sup>8</sup> An excellent qualitative evaluation of the Escuela Nueva programme, which examines both its positive and negative aspects, can be found in Parra Sandoval (1996).



The generally prior faulthy of the achool system in Lattin America and he is determined a study and an incentive to tom the labour force:

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bettering the quality of education in underprivileged areas. The benefits offered by this highly original programme are far greater than the costs and, importantly, many of the principles underlying its creative approach can be incorporated into educational programmes in different contexts (Instituto Ser de Investigación 1992; 8-10).

Fe y Alegria (Faith and Joy), a system of Catholic schools designed especially for children of the poor, has also achieved significant educational improvements at reasonable costs in 11 countries of the region." These programmes are built on solid management, integrated use of effective teaching materials and in-service teacher training, motivational strategies, curricula that are sensitive to local needs and reality, and close links with the community (BID 1993). Coverage presently extends to more than 500 schools in these countries. Evaluations carried

out in Venezuela, for instance, demonstrate considerable reductions in drop-out rates and substantial improvements in children's reading comprehension.

Promising examples of targeting Chile's poorest and most vulnerable children (children in rural areas, members of indigenous groups and underprivileged urban children), whose repetition rates normally double the national average, are the '900' Schools' and 'pedagogical decentralization' programmes (Ibid.).

In Guatemala, the New Unitary School project, based on Escuela Nueva, is currently being developed in 4(X) schools. School achievement levels, including for bilingualism, have improved, relations between teachers and students have become more positive, as have parents' opinions of the school; and the drop-out rate has decreased for the first two grades.

<sup>4</sup> The countries are Bolivia. Brasil. Colombia. Bouador. El Salvador, Guaternala. Nicaragus, Panama. Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

#### 1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Legal and Ethical Framework for Policies on Child Work

Condensed into the 54 articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an ethical philosophy of respect for children based on a "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the inalienable rights of all members of the human family". Founded upon a conception of the child as the subject of rights, the Convention encapsulates the most advanced thinking of this century concerning children and adolescents. In recognizing children as legal subjects, the Convention identifies, for the first time, their right to citizenship. In the past, children as a social category existed basically only as the object of legal guardianship measures; no legal recognition was given to children's rights. With the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and adolescents have gained a voice and a 'vote' in their own lives.

One of the core principles upon which the Convention is based is that of "the best interests of the child". Families and governments are called upon to ensure children the protection and care necessary for their healthy and complete development.

Thus, it is within this perspective that Article 32 of the Convention sets down that:

States Parties recognize 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.

The Convention requires governments to establish a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment, as well as to make provisions for appropriate regulations concerning work conditions and for penalties and sanctions to guarantee effective enforcement of the article.

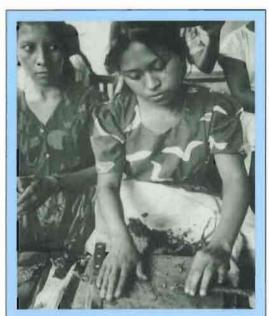
Thus, all forms of work that are harmful or unsafe for children, that compromise their full development in any way are singled out in the Convention as requiring legal measures to ensure children's protection. Work activities which do not represent a threat to children's development, which may be integrated into the child's day without disrupting his or her education and needs for rest and play, which may be carried out as a means of socialization or for the transmission of skills do not constitute cause for concern.

Within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is not 'family survival' that lies at its core, but the best interests of the child. Thus, the Convention leaves no 'loophole' through which exploitative child work may be legitimated by the claim that it is essential to family subsistence. The child always comes first. It should not be up to children to fill in the often gaping holes in family welfare which, in the ultimate analysis, should be the responsibility of governments and the society at large. Effective economic and social policies are urgently needed to combat the crippling effects of poverty. It is the responsibility of governments to provide such measures and of society to demand them. Family survival should never be left up to children, at the cost of their present well-being and their future possibilities.

It is therefore necessary to break radically with arguments that vindicate child work as a sphere for the construction of childhood and adolescence. Such a thesis, in practical terms, leaves us completely disarmed in the struggle to eradicate work situations which compromise, and often destroy, the future lives of millions of children and adolescents in Latin America.

# 2. The Progressive Eradication of Child Work: An Achievable Goal

Proposals for the 'abolition' of child work have been put forward at the international level since the turn of the century. Although such a legal remedy corresponds with the ultimate goal — the elimination of child work — arguments for this type of initiative have long caused con-



Policies should be aimed at the progressive eradication of child work.

photo UNICEF TACRO

troversy. Child work cannot be abolished by the sweep of a president's signature or an act of Parliament. Experience has amply demonstrated that prohibitive laws are insufficient on their own to bring about the end of exploitative child and adolescent work. While they are necessary, the history of this century teaches us that laws are not enough if they are not firmly rooted in society.

Children and adolescents should clearly not be engaged in forms of work which may harm or jeopardize their welfare and/or hinder their formal schooling. There is increasing agreement, however, among those working in the field that sound social policies aiming at the **progressive** eradication of child work will more effectively lead to a future in which childhood truly signifies a time of healthy and complete development for all children.

Achievement of this goal will require specific policies targeting working children and adolescents, including major efforts to increase the accessibility, quality and affordability of primary education. It will also require a more global approach, with the formulation and implementation of economic and social policies directed at a rapid reduction of the alarming levels of poverty in the countries of this region.

#### 3. Guidelines for a Strategy

The eradication of harmful work for children and adolescents — understanding 'harmful work' to mean any labour activity, paid or unpaid, that interferes with a child's full development and particularly with his or her education — will require the development of both longand short-term policies.

Long-term economic and social policies should aim towards the building of societies in which child work is neither needed nor accepted. Innovative economic policies to reduce the levels of adult unemployment and underemployment are a first vital step. Their positive rebounding effects on family welfare will eventually help to create a socio-economic framework in which the economic contributions of children and adolescents are unnecessary. Working children and adolescents live in poverty. While it has indeed been noted that poverty itself is not the sole determinant of child work, efforts to improve the economic situation of the large and growing numbers of impoverished families are an important determinant of the reduction of child work. Without such efforts, more immediate and direct policies addressing the problem of child work will be short-lived. Intrinsic to such policies is the need to formulate more humane and equitable models of development, hopefully incorporating a more equitable distribution of social wealth.

Changing attitudes to child work — another essential front on which to fight the battle of eradication - involves promoting a culture of childhood based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The right of children to healthy growth and development must no longer be pushed far down the list of family and social priorities. At present, everyday life is virtually plagued with customs and attitudes that imply just this. Of particular importance in this regard is the development of programmes to promote greater knowledge and awareness on the part of parents of the negative consequences of sending their children out to work (or keeping their children home to work). The fostering of attitudes which recognize the importance of childhood, the importance of education and the importance of healthy development will go a long way towards removing children from harmful work situations.

Clearly, however, all efforts cannot be focused on the distant hopes of long-term poli-

cies. Action is needed now to bring about change in the lives of millions of working children and to prevent others from joining them in long days of labour and toil. In this sense, policies aimed at making education a viable and rewarding option for all children are urgently needed. Education is the sword in the fight against the involvement of children and adolescents in harmful work. And efficient, affordable, relevant and universal primary education forms the sharp end of its blade.

Schools must become a magnet for children. Crucial steps toward this end include the development of curricula relevant to local needs and cultural diversity; improved teacher training, incorporating modern teaching methodologies to foster creative and critical thinking; and the construction of schools even in the most remote areas to enable all children to attend.

Policies for the progressive eradication of child work must be linked to structural changes in the education system, requiring:

- increased government spending on education, especially primary schooling
- provision of school books and essential materials for children
- greater attention to adequate space, furniture and other physical facilities in schools
- provision of improved training for teachers which enables them to introduce innovations, including more interactive teaching methods
- greater flexibility in curricula, promotion requirements and non-repetition
- promotion of family participation in school processes
- introduction of subsidies, scholarships and other mechanisms to substitute children's incomes and to make schooling affordable for very low-income families
- abolition of inefficient forms of education (such as night school)
- transformation of schools into learning centres founded on principles of children as citizens.

Quantitative indicators of good performance should be established by governments and monitored carefully over time. Among the most important are:

- public spending on education
- investments per student at each level of education, especially the primary level
- proportion of investment in infrastructure and essential facilities

· investments in textbooks and teaching aids.

In addition, goals and strategies need to be developed for the short, medium and longer terms for the different groups of children and adolescents:

- · those who work and attend school
- · those who work and do not attend school
- those who 'don't do anything' (neither work or study)
- · those who have never attended school
- those who dropped out and are over-age.

Improvements in educational systems will take time, of course, to produce the desired effects on child labour. Accordingly, it is necessary to develop parallel policies of special protection in the short term. These must include immediate measures to eradicate hazardous child work. It is simply inadmissible that children should have to endanger their health, their welfare, and often their lives in soul-breaking labour. Children must be rescued from the sugar cane plantations, the coal and gold mines, the garbage dumps, and the fireworks and brick factories, to mention just some of the types of work situations in which children's lives are daily under threat. National plans to eradicate intolerable forms of child labour must be formulated. including in terms of required resources.

The elimination of hazardous and harmful jobs for children can be achieved through efficient social control (teachers, parents, grassroots organizations, churches, employers, community leaders), as well as through stricter governmental control (specialized labour inspection of the children's working conditions). Ministries of Labour should also improve procedures for the inspection of working conditions of adolescents, at least in the formal sector, a duty that is still poorly fulfilled.

The link between child work and primary education is clearly of fundamental importance. Institutional and social measures are urgently needed to ensure that children under the age of 12 have the chance to receive an appropriate education. Primary education should not be subjected to direct fees, and incidental and indirect costs should be reduced as much as possible for low-income families. Many young children accompany their parents to work, not for the help they can give 'on the job' but because, in their parents' view, they are safer. In most cases, their



Changing attitudes to child work will involve promoting a culture of childhood based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

photo UNICEF/Patricio Baeza

economic contribution is negligible. Educational campaigns are needed to foster awareness among parents of the life-long importance of schooling. Education should be completely free of charge for these children.

Equally important, particularly in light of the fact that some time will inevitably elapse before social policies have an impact, are programmes to develop a greater awareness among children and adolescents of the risks and negative effects of early entrance into the workforce.

In summary, the following goals and strategies for their achievement emerged from the five case-studies on child work and education in Latin America:

- eradication of all harmful or hazardous work for children and adolescents;
- progressive eradication of work by children under 12 years of age (or under 14, depending on the legislation of each country), including all activities that may interfere with children's normal development and their formal education;
- protection of working adolescents (13-17 years) against all forms of labour exploitation;
- improvement in the quality of and access to public services and facilities for children in the areas of education, health, culture and recreation, which are both essential for their healthy development and for broadening their possibilities in the adult world; particular attention should be paid to ethnic, gender, regional and

cultural dimensions in the development of programmes and services;

- vocational training opportunities for adolescents (15-18 year olds), with greater attention to education and training than to production-related activities;
- improvement in the income level of poor families through targeted policies in order to ensure children's access to, and completion of primary school:
- dissemination of national and international legislation concerning child and adolescent work, including Convention 138 and Recommendation 146 of the ILO, as well as the relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- awareness-building for the population in general and for those involved in the struggle against child work in particular (governments, employers' and workers' organizations, nongovernmental organizations) on the dangers of child work and on the benefits of education, using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework;
- fostering the participation of child workers in initiatives for the realization of their rights; working adolescents should particularly be encouraged to become involved in the fight to defend their rights, increase the value of their work and eliminate exploitative work situations;
- transformation of the school into a central axis of children's lives, thereby ensuring their fundamental right to education.

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