

World Day Against Child Labour

12 June 2007



Rural education and child labour in agriculture

The agricultural sector, based in rural areas, is often characterised by lack of schools, schools of variable quality, problems of retaining teachers in remote rural areas, lack of accessible education for children, poor and variable rates of rural school attendance, and lower standards of educational performance and achievement.

Additional complicating factors in rural areas can be the seasonal demand for children's labour (which might conflict with the school calendar), and in some countries the difficulties of educating children from families which regularly move from area to area to manage herds or crops.

Even in countries that provide children with access to elementary education, once children complete elementary school, and if they wish to continue education, the nearest secondary school may be a long distance away. This can make the journey to school impossible, either because of the cost of transport or the time required to travel to school, especially if the child has to walk there and back. Long distances to school can be a particular problem for girls, with their security at risk.

As children drop out of school, they invariably begin to enter the workforce, often at a very early age, and often exposed to dangers.

How to improve the standards of education in rural areas is one of the major challenges facing national governments in efforts to achieve education for all children.

The most recent Education For All Global Monitoring Report states that out-of-school children are mostly poor, rural and with uneducated mothers. It indicates that 82% of out-of-school primary age children live in rural areas. Further, "Because of the large size of rural populations, inequalities in access result

in the vast majority of out-of-school children being from rural households". The share in some individual countries is even higher: Ethiopia (96%), Burkina Faso (95%) Malawi (94%), India (84%).

Quality education is needed

Whilst it is important to focus on giving all children an opportunity for education it is also important to ensure that children have good quality education. Providing an education of good quality means teachers must be recruited in adequate numbers, and receive the training required to make them effective. Pupil to teacher ratios have to be such to ensure that teachers are able to provide children with the education they deserve.

Some commercial farms and plantations have their own schools, which are largely farmer owned and run. The quality of education on such establishments can vary greatly. Farm schools are often the only accessible sites of education for many children who live with their parents or relatives on commercial farms or plantations.

In South Africa, the Government has taken the decision to convert schools on commercial farms from largely farmer-controlled institutions to ordinary Government-managed public schools with limited farmer/owner responsibility.

Among the important educational issues which countries need to address are:

- The need for schooling close to where people live;
- To consider flexibility in the schooling pattern if significant numbers of children are absent due to work in the fields;
- Improving use of existing elementary school facilities to provide, where possible,

schooling for older children who may have no access to education;

- The need for special measures to attract teachers to rural areas;
- The need for effective monitoring of education standards in rural areas.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)

www.ilo.org/childlabour

