

World Day Against Child Labour

12 June 2007



Cooperatives and elimination of child labour in agriculture

Cooperatives are member-owned and controlled enterprises that are guided in their activities by a series of universally recognised Cooperative Principles and values which lend themselves to tackle child labour. They have an important, but underused potential to tackle child labour in a wide variety of sectors including agriculture, artisanal production, consumer retailing, as well as housing and financial services and other service sectors. Members of cooperatives improve their lives through their cooperatives which provide jobs, income and reasonably priced goods and services. Cooperatives then combat poverty, one of the root causes of the use and spread of child labour.

Cooperatives are significant economic and social business enterprises, varying in size from small self-help neighbourhood organizations to large, multinational enterprises. At the global level, the top 300 cooperatives are responsible for 1 trillion USD in turnover, the equivalent of the Gross Domestic Product of the 10th. largest economy in the world. As much as 50 per cent of the global agricultural output is marketed through cooperatives. In addition, a large share of the markets for agricultural commodities is handled by cooperatives, particularly in grains, dairy, livestock and some export crops.

Cooperatives make development a reality for millions in today's world where poverty and hunger are still touching billions of people. They bring together 800 million people worldwide as cooperative members; they employ 100 million and a further three billion people benefit directly or indirectly from cooperatives.

The major contribution that cooperatives make to eliminating child labour is improving the livelihoods of their members and those in the communities that they serve. In the agricultural sector, cooperatives are a model of enterprise

that farmers can use to improve their incomes and better organise the market for sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, cooperatives are already taking on and can take further actions in the following areas:

- conducting basic awareness raising activities for their members and communities on the elimination of child labour, especially in agriculture;
- taking initiatives to eliminate the use of child labour by cooperatives or by cooperative members, e.g., farmers who supply cooperatives with agricultural produce;
- ensuring that their supply chains are free of child labour, for example, in the case of retail consumer cooperatives who market food, drink and fibres to their customers.

Some examples of current initiatives include the establishment of codes of conduct and policies regarding sound sourcing that strictly prohibit producers and suppliers from using child labour. All include verification and monitoring and foresee sanctions and or remedial actions to be taken in cases where child labour is found to be used. Major retail cooperatives including, but not limited to, Coop Italia (Italy), Coop Norden (Sweden, Denmark, and Norway), Migros (Switzerland), Cooperative Group – CWS - (UK) have these in place.

Agricultural cooperatives too have made commitments to abolish child labour. For example, the Indian Farmers' Fertiliser Cooperative, a large and successful fertiliser cooperative has committed to abolish child labour within its 37,000 cooperatives and their members. In the cocoa and coffee industries in particular, where over 80% of the fair trade products are produced by cooperatives, cooperative members have eliminated child

labour from their production chains. Many cooperative members report that, for the first time, farmers are able to send their children to school because of their association with the cooperative. Some cooperatives also provide scholarship programmes to assist farmers in providing education opportunities to their children.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

**International Programme on the Elimination of
Child Labour (IPEC)**

www.ilo.org/childlabour

