

Textile Industry

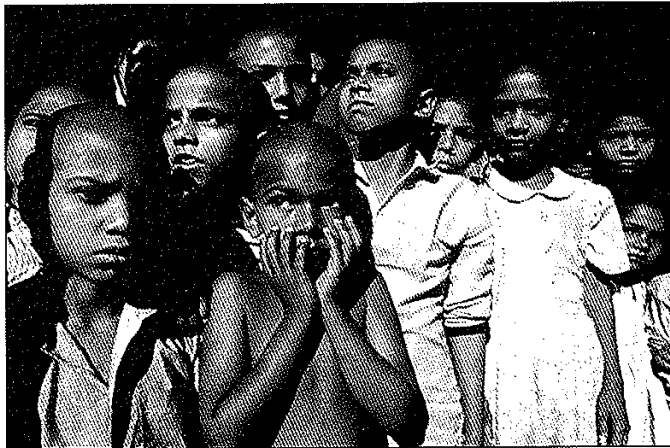
Its Role in Preventing Child Labour and Prostitution

The problem of child labour is constantly under scrutiny and discussion. Shocking horror stories are blown up in the press, pressure groups are constantly bringing situations to public attention and putting on pressure for boycotting of certain companies. But none of this actually helps the children themselves.

Contrary to the facts, the textile industry is often promoted as the main culprit, though the textile industry, through the KIDS Foundation, has found real practical measures to help the children, writes Niki Tait, Clothesline's European correspondent.

The ethical question of child labour is a controversial issue. The world's population of working children has yet to be counted accurately. Because it is often illegal and clandestine, child labour lies beyond the reach of conventional labour statistics. There are also differences in perception about what constitutes a child, or child work, or child labour. The International Labour

Office (ILO) estimates some 250 million children between the ages of five and fourteen are working in developing countries, equivalent to almost a quarter of the entire population of India or China - 120 million full time, 130 million part time. Some 61 per cent of this total, or nearly 153 million, are found in Asia; 32 per cent, or 80 million, are in Africa and 7 per cent, or 17.5 million, live in Latin America. Child labour also exists in many industrialized countries and is emerging in East European and Asian countries, which are in transition to a market economy.



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Country-wise percentage of child labour

According to UNICEF, throughout the developing world some 250 million children work. This is a quarter of all children between the ages of 5 and 14. Half work full-time and half combine work with school. The percentage of children working is 41% in Africa, 21% in Asia and 16% in Latin America and the

Caribbean. Though data varies by country and region, worldwide aggregate figures show that more than two-thirds of working children are engaged in agriculture and related activities, the rest in manufacturing, trade, hotel and restaurant, domestic service, transport, construction, mining and quarrying. As well, a large but unknown number of children work in the streets hawking goods, shining shoes, running errands and cleaning cars. Only some 5% of working children are to be found in the formal sector, including export industries. In some countries, up to 20% of economically active children in rural areas and up to 5% in

urban areas are under the age of 10 years. In all regions of the world, more boys than girls work (with an average ratio of 3 to 2). However, if domestic work in their own household were taken into account, the number of working girls would probably exceed that of boys.

Hazardous impact on children

Some survey results show the majority of children work for nine hours or more, every day of the week, often in hazardous occupations. A large number suffer injuries or



A large number of kids work in hazardous occupations which cause them injury and illness.

illnesses from their work – more than 20%, according to one national survey. Some 50-60 million children aged 5-11 years work in hazardous conditions. About a million children are forced or otherwise coerced to enter the sex trade each year for purposes of prostitution and pornography, many of them sold and trafficked across international borders. Currently, some 300,000-child soldiers, many of them forcibly recruited, are taking part in armed conflicts around the world. Most are adolescents, but some are as young as 10 years old. Their living and working conditions are harsh, and they are compelled to witness and participate in acts of brutality against civilian populations'.

The solution

The charity Save the Children is, like many, working to end exploitative child labour but as they explain: 'we don't believe a ban is the answer. If children were banned from mainstream jobs, many would turn to illegal, dangerous work'. Save the Children is cautioning campaigners against rushing in and taking ill-thought-out action. While children are very vulnerable to employer exploitation, work can be a way of children gaining skills and increasing their choices. 'If people want us to go to school instead of work, they must give us money to do so, and make schools better', a teenage girl told researchers. 'No

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parent wants to see their child work; it is because of economic pressure and poor standards of education.'

K.I.D.S Foundation- learn and earn strategy

The K.I.D.S (Kids in Deficient Situations) Foundation (www.K-I-D-S.com) organization funds schools and training centres in which not only the teachers, but also the students are paid for the time they spend studying and in training. As they explain: 'Paying the children in recompense for their time



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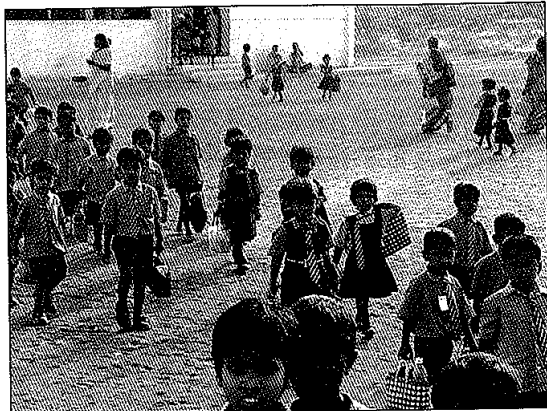
spent at school (time taken away from the jobs they would otherwise be sent to by their parents) is the only way to guarantee that the children of poverty-stricken areas are able to go to school on a regular basis. This is the only solution that gives them the chance to learn reading, writing and arithmetic, to learn a trade, and the chance to live decent lives'.

The first project, established in 1996 was the Migros-KIDS School. Migros is a very large family run retailer in Switzerland who buys much cotton knitwear from factories in Tirupur in South India. Concerned about child labour they provided initial set up money to establish a school, which would be jointly run and funded by them and their suppliers. For each piece of clothing sold by the suppliers, one cent is donated. The school currently provides free education for 456 of the locality's poorest children with meals and medical care

provided. These children are not only those of Migros suppliers' employees, it is open for all local children. The children continue to receive their full salaries while only working half days. The rest of their day is spent in school or job training. The school's new medical facility will not only

be available to staff and students, other children and adults from nearby villages will be also treated.

Badly paid teachers and a drastic lack of funds often make



Students of the KIDS School

an education impossible within public schools in the area. Those who cannot afford private education for their children often send them to work in a factory. The Migros-KIDS School offers an alternative providing good infrastructure, motivated teachers, educational materials, and free transport. By June 2003 the school is likely to have grown to 800 pupils housing 26 classrooms. Supplementary to the school, a day-care centre for 80 children is also planned to be built in 2003 facilitated through the financial support of Migros, a number of private donors and public funds,

Preventing prostitution

A further project has been involved with girls' rehabilitation in Cebu City in the Philippines.

Professional child traffickers within Mindanao, the poorest region of the Philippines, specifically target extremely impoverished families and offer training and work opportunities in the city to their underage daughters providing a generous advance payment. These girls, often as young as five or eight years old are taken to Cebu City, raped, drugged and turned into prostitutes serving their pimp's international clients. After two or three years the girls have lost their health and beauty. From then on, they are on offer at bargain price to local clients. Currently 4,500 young girls are prostituted in such a way. With drug addiction, unwanted pregnancies, venereal disease and aids, these girls are often driven to self-destruction.

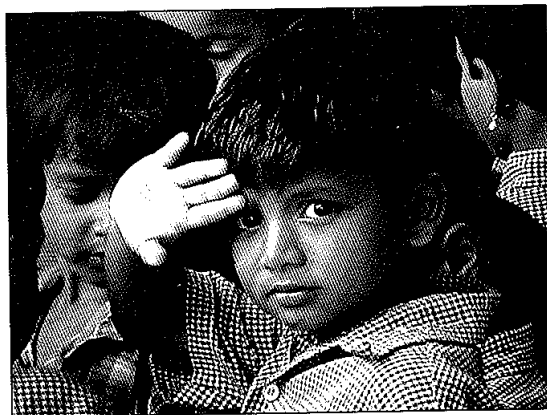
The local partner Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), supported by KIDS, works the streets building mutual trust between the girls and JPIC by providing help and support. Their drop-in centres provide a peaceful atmosphere where the children get the chance to learn, articulate their experiences or accept guidance in order to

change the direction in their lives without any form of obligation.

In cooperation with Oblates nuns and the local priest, JPIC has started a rehabilitation programme. In a newly erected building the girls are given the chance to find a new home, make use of educational opportunities which will prepare them for a different kind of professional life and take advantage of the integral health services.

More supporters required

Although KIDS originated as a project between Migros and the Tirupur cotton knit producers it is growing, and to undertake support of projects such as that in the Philippines it is expanding and looking for help from a much wider



KIDS has appealed people to donate for the good cause

section of the industry. Garment packaging labels advertising KIDS support have been produced for promoting the foundation to buyers, the industry and the public, and the foundation has launched an appeal to people who feel strongly against child labour to donate one cent for each hour they spend at work. In most cases that makes only twenty Euros or Dollars a year, not much sacrifice to help children be safe, educated and given a childhood. Larger donations are also welcome! Written into their charter, 85% of all membership fees and donations must be used for education and training. More information can be found on their web site: WWW.K-I-D-S.org.

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To put into context what even a relatively small donation can make possible, children picking forty kilograms of cotton a day in Egypt earn about 1.50 Euros a day, the cost of feeding and educating child workers in South-India is only about 0.45 Euros a day whilst rehabilitation of girls forced into prostitution costs 1,95 Euros a day. **CTA**