



A Different Kind of Future

As child labour remains a vexed topic for many apparel brands and retailers, Niki Tate explores one industry-funded initiative that is trying to making a difference

Child labour is a controversial ethical 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.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 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. Of these,

it is thought that 120 million work full-time, and 130 million part-time.

Some 61 per cent of this total, or nearly 153 million, are to be found in Asia; 32 per cent, or 80 million, in Africa; and 7 per cent, or 17.5 million, in Latin America. Child labour also exists in many industrialised countries and is emerging in East European and Asian countries that are in transition to a market economy.

According to UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund: "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.

UNICEF says that, 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. In addition, 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," says UNICEF. "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."

The organisation says 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 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 charity Save the Children is, like many, working to end exploitative

child labour, but its attitude may come as a surprise to apparel brands that have been caught up in the media war over this issue, or that moved to preempt the issue by banning all child labour in their supplier factories:

"We don't believe a ban is the answer," says the charity. "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 them 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 parent wants to see their child work; it is because of economic pressure and poor standards of education."

The KIDS (Kids in Deficient Situations) Foundation does just this. It 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 the organisation explains: "Paying the children in recompense for their time 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



poorest children, with meals and medical care provided. The children are not only those of Migros' suppliers' employees; it is open for all local children. They 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 is

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PRINCIPAL

B.ED. ASSISTANTS : 6
TEACHING ASSISTANTS : 9
DRIVERS : 3
CONDUCTORS : 3
GARDENER : 1
AYAHS : 2

STRENGTH AS ON 14.08.2002

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
LKGA	19	16	35
B	23	12	35
C	13	15	28
UKGA	17	22	39
B	19	18	37
C	27	12	39
I STDA	20	18	38
B	24	15	39
II STDA	18	18	36
B	19	18	37
III STDA	14	24	38
IV STDA	16	18	34
TOTAL	229	206	435

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, which buys large volumes of cotton knitwear from factories in Tirapur, in South India. Concerned about child labour, it provided initial set-up money to establish a school, which would be jointly run and funded by itself and its 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

also developing a new medical facility, which will treat children and adults from nearby villages, as well as staff and students.

Badly paid teachers and a drastic lack of funds often make 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 was expected to have grown to 800 pupils, housed in 26 classrooms. Ancillary to the school, a day care centre for 80 children is also scheduled for construction in 2003, facilitated through the financial support of Migros, a number of private donors and public funds,

At Cebu City in the Philippines, a further project has been focused on the rehabilitation of girls 'sold' or coerced into prostitution.

Professional child traffickers in 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.

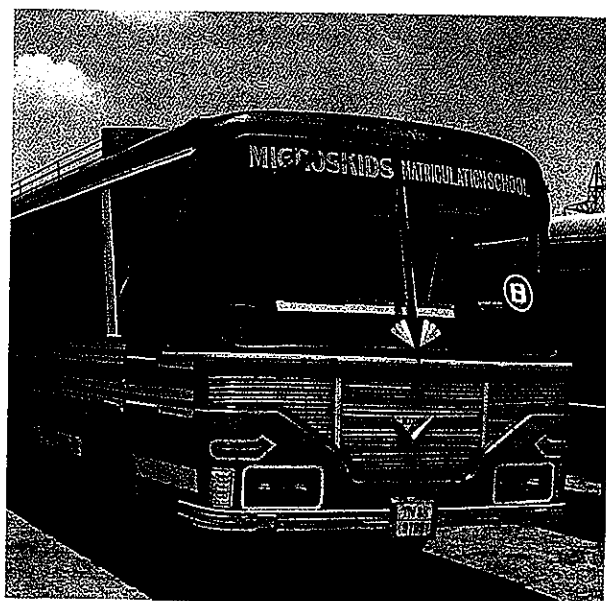
After two or three years the girls have lost their health and beauty. From then on, they are on offer at a bargain price to local clients. Currently 4,500 young girls are prostituted in such a way. With drug addiction, unwanted pregnancies, venereal disease and Aids, these girls are often driven to self destruction.

A 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. Its 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 co-operation with Oblate 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 that

will prepare them for a different kind of professional life, and take advantage of the integral health services.

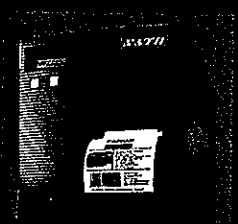
Although KIDS (www.K-I-D-S.org) originated as a project between Migros and the Tirapur cotton-knit producers, it is growing and - in order to undertake support of projects such as that in the Philippines - it is expanding and looking for help from a much wider section of the industry. Garment-packaging labels, advertising KIDS activities, have been produced, in order to promote the foundation to buyers, the industry and the public. 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 about



twenty euros or dollars a year. Written into the KIDS charter is the stipulation that 85% of all membership fees and donations must be used for education and training. The cost of feeding and educating child workers in South India is about €0.45 a day, while rehabilitation of girls in the Philippines costs €1.95 a day.

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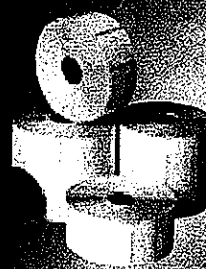
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- ◆ Tickets
- ◆ Design Services
- ◆ Printed Labels



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