



International
Labour
Organization

World Day Against Child Labour 2017: Namibia

Interview with Hopolang Phororo, ILO Director for Zimbabwe and Namibia



Ms Hopolang Phororo, ILO Director for Zimbabwe and Namibia

What is child labour?

The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, interferes with their schooling, forces them to leave school prematurely or combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets. For “work” to be called “child labour” it depends on the child’s age, the type and hours of work. The answer varies from country to country, and different sectors within countries.

What is the relationship between child labour, conflict and disaster?

A third of 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by conflict, violence and fragility and around 200 million affected by disasters every year are children. Conflicts and disasters kill, maim, injure, force people to flee their homes, destroy livelihoods, push people into poverty and starvation and trap people in inhumane situations. Children are amongst the worst affected as basic services are disrupted. Displaced, many children become vulnerable to trafficking and child labour.

What is being done to combat child labour?

Child labour is a complex problem, rooted in poverty and lack of decent work for adults. Multi-pronged approaches through communities, governments, employers, trade unions, civil society and children themselves to change social attitudes and promote ratification and effective implementation of ILO child labour conventions have been pursued. In addition, substantial research, policy and legal analysis, programme evaluations and monitoring, to build a knowledge base on statistical data, thematic studies, good practices, guidelines and training materials have been done. Since the first World Day Against Child Labour observance on 12 June 2002, different themes have been adopted yearly to focus on different sectors.

Child Labour world-wide: 2013 figures (new statistics expected in November 2017)

- Global number of children in child labour has declined by one third since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million children. More than half (85 million) are in hazardous work (down from 171 million in 2000).
- Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the region with the highest incidence of child labour (59 million, over 21%).
- Agriculture remains the most important sector where child labourers can be found (98 million, or 59%) and mostly in the informal economy.
- Child labour, among girls fell by 40% since 2000, compared to 25% for boys.

What is the status of child labour in Namibia?

Studies undertaken by the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 2010 and 2012 confirmed high prevalence of child labour in Namibia. The child labourers are in the agricultural sector and in private homes, as domestic workers working for long hours, meagre wages, with no contract of employment.

What are ILO's priorities in Namibia, specifically in terms of child labour?

Through IPEC, the ILO supported the Government of Namibia, employers' and workers' organizations to develop models of intervention for the elimination of child labour. IPEC support has been a phased and multi-sector strategy, included strengthening national capacities to improve legislation, enforcement and policy coordination on child labour and forced labour, increased access to quality education and sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations, improved the knowledge base, raised awareness, social mobilization, and piloting of demonstrative models of intervention to remove children from child labour and offering their families appropriate alternatives.

The Ministry of Labour inspectorate's capacities on enforcing the Labour Act and the Domestic Wage Order are being strengthened to include children at work.

What more needs to be done in order to eradicate child labour in Namibia and the world at large?

To combat child labour, multi-faceted approaches such as adopting and enforcing *laws* that safeguard children; good quality *education and training* for them to acquire the requisite skills for the labour market and *social protection*, which enables access to education, health care and nutrition play a critical role in the fight against child labour. Moreover, Namibia's efforts are guided by international protocols it is signatory to such as, the ILO Conventions No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment (1973) and No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour (1999), among others.