

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seminar and its Purpose

The seminar was held over three days in Jakarta, Indonesia, 12-14 July 2006, and was funded by the Government of Japan. Tripartite representatives from eleven countries attended the discussions, along with observers from international agencies, UNESCO, UNICEF, ASEAN and United States Department of Labour, and ILO specialists on legal issues, employers' and workers' organizations, and child labour.

In 2006, the ILO released its second Global Report on Child Labour under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The Report indicated that progress has been made against child labour with the total number of child labourers globally falling by 11% in the last four years. Also of note was the fact that there has been a particularly sharp decrease in the area of hazardous work by children, meaning that the more dangerous the work and the more vulnerable the children, the more rapid the reduction of child labourers. The total number of children in hazardous work decreased by 26% overall and by 33% in the 5-14 year age group.

Activity rates for child labour were down in all regions, with the most significant progress being made by the Caribbean and Latin America (from 16.1% - 5.1%). Progress had also been made in Asia, but it was below expectations with an overall drop in activity rates from 19.4% to 18.8%. This figure still represents a total of 122.3 million economically active children in the region. The least progress was made in Africa, which experienced a rise in absolute figures from 48% to 49.3%.

In its proposed Global Action Plan, the Global Report has set a goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016 and to this end encourages all countries to design and put in place appropriate time-bound measures by 2008. As a result, the purpose of this seminar was to bring together East and South East Asian countries to discuss their experiences, problems and achievements thus far, in their efforts to combat child labour, and as a corollary, to find more focused and effective approaches to meet the aim of eliminating child labour by 2016.

Results of the Seminar

There were a number of major themes and concerns which emerged from the seminar. Integrating child labour concerns into policy frameworks with high level leadership support was identified as one crucial factor for ensuring continued progress. Ideally child labour needs to be addressed within a range of related major policy areas such as Education and Training, Poverty Reduction and Economic policy, Health and Labour. Since the root causes of child labour can be various, including poverty and lack of access to basic education, approaching child labour concerns from a mixture of policy areas is likely to produce more rapid progress in tackling the problem. This approach also ensures that budgets are being allocated to child labour programmes through existing policies, whilst not requiring funds specific to child labour itself.

Mainstreaming is another important factor which is closely related to policy and high level support. Mainstreaming the issue of child labour incorporates both the inclusion of child

labour concerns into a range of national policies as well as developing national coordinating structures such as a National Action Committee and building awareness, knowledge and expertise. Through capacity building, the documentation of best practice and the development of guidelines, tools and resources are set in place which can promote and support efforts to combat child labour at a high leadership level in government, private enterprise and international agencies.

Alliance building and developing close collaboration and cooperation on various levels was also identified as an important factor in the elimination of child labour. This includes strengthening tripartite alliances, both at national and local levels, fostering relationships between countries and international agencies and developing inter-agency coordination at the international level. Within the tripartite alliance, the role of employers' and workers' groups was also highlighted. Employers' and workers' groups have access to extensive membership networks which allows them to access a wide range of the population, including the informal sector, where much child labour occurs. Through these networks they have the capacity to educate and build awareness within the community about child labour and its detriments. They are also well placed to identify targets, monitor activity and collect data on child labour. Their ongoing support and commitment is thereby an essential element in the fight against child labour.

The ILO has encouraged countries to put in place time-bound programmes as a means of reaching the target of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016. Time-bound programmes are a tool that help countries target a specific incidence of child labour and plan for its elimination within a set period. They emphasise country ownership and broad based participation. The programmes are based on solid data collection and analysis and include consultation and consensus building at both a local and national level. Time-bound programmes have the advantage of not only targeting a particular group of child labourers, but also building a strong foundation for the long term elimination of all forms of child labour.

A number of difficulties and challenges were also identified during the seminar. Data collection was raised as one such problem. Whilst some good data collection did exist, there were still gaps in some countries and particular sectors such as trafficking, migrant children, drugs and the informal sector. Strategies to reach the informal sector, where a significant proportion of child workers operate, were also discussed, as was the need to be mindful of marginalized groups, or children that were excluded from mainstream data collection programmes.

Asia remains the region with the highest absolute number of child labourers worldwide. In spite of this, Asian countries have made significant steps to combat child labour and have demonstrated their commitment to continue tackling the issue both at a policy level and a practical level. All the participant countries have ratified the two core ILO conventions on child labour, No.138 and No.182 and a number have already put in place targets or time-bound programmes to end the worst forms of child labour, including the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia. The seminar provided opportunities for country delegates to discuss their own experiences and obstacles and learn from examples of successful projects from member countries. By continuing to focus on effective data collection, target setting and the implementation of time bound programmes, countries will be well placed to meet the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016.