

The purpose of these *Key Sheets* is to provide decision-makers with an easy and up-to-date point of reference on issues relating to the provision of support for sustainable livelihoods.

The sheets are designed for those who are managing change and who are concerned to make well-informed implementation decisions. They aim to distil theoretical debate and field experience so that it becomes easily accessible and useful across a range of situations. Their purpose is to assist in the process of decision-making rather than to provide definitive answers.

The sheets address three broad sets of issues:

- Service Delivery
- Resource Management
- Policy Planning and Implementation

A list of contact details for organisations is provided for each sub-series.

Overview of the debate

In many poor families children's capacity to work is an essential asset for their livelihoods. Programmes that support sustainable livelihoods thus need to consider current debates surrounding child labour and best practice in this area.

Child labour is a much debated and emotionally charged area of development policy. Over the past five years the debate has focused on:

- whether the emphasis should be on all forms of child work or the worst forms, e.g. should the eradication of child work in any form be the ultimate goal
- the impact of child employment on adult employment and wages
- whether work and school are incompatible in the lives of children
- what are the most effective interventions against harmful forms of child work, e.g. labour legislation, compulsory education, poverty reduction, social mobilisation
- pros and cons of trade sanctions against and consumer boycotts of the products of child labour
- whether (and if so how) children should participate in decision making processes
- key alliances needed for effective policy implementation
- links between poor health, mortality and child labour – particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS

Key issues in decision making

ILO estimates that 250 million children under the age of 15 are working in developing countries. The vast majority work in the agricultural and informal sectors; although the export/sweatshop industries receive much attention they account for less than 5% of child employment.

There is disagreement on the appropriate definition of child labour for policy purposes. Some notions reflect Western perspectives, which lead to a condemnation of all child work. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour (1999), promote a clearer distinction between child work, a general term including work which is unlikely to damage educational opportunities, and child labour, which refers to harmful forms of work which deny children opportunities to fulfil their other rights, such as education.

The 'worst forms of labour' as defined in ILO Convention 182 include prostitution, all forms of slavery, sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced labour, as well as work likely to harm their 'health, safety and morals'. All signatories are required to identify these forms and develop a national plan of action to eliminate them. Underlying these Conventions is a commitment to promote the 'best interests' of the child, although interpretations of these interests can differ considerably.

Successful policy implementation is most likely under national programmes, which address the key questions:

- are the relevant stakeholders sufficiently involved in the programme, and is the division of responsibilities among them clear?
- is the provision of accessible, good quality education included in the programme?
- does an adequate regulatory framework exist?
- does the programme include awareness raising at the appropriate levels?
- are new initiatives based on sound information and understanding of the child labour problem, and of activities already undertaken to address it?
- what criteria have been used to define the best interests of the child?
- does the programme give priority to the most harmful and most urgent situations?

The challenge lies in creating an institutional framework that can promote consensus among all concerned, namely children, parents, governments, international agencies, labour unions, employers, NGOs and donor agencies. International goals and national plans of action require alliances of these key stakeholders in different national and local contexts. Specific institutional responsibilities should be clearly defined and will vary according to relative strengths, competencies and likely effectiveness.

Emerging areas of interest, hitherto neglected and now receiving more attention, include:

- the relationship between the quality of education and child work. In many places the failure



DFID experience

Support for:

- ILO/IPEC India
- ILO Project for reducing labour exploitation of children and women: combating trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region
- the Sialkot Child Labour Project
- SCF Project Towards Effective Implementation of the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour

The Netherlands' experience

- Debt Bondage (ILO/IPEC),
- More jobs for women (ILO/IPEC),
- Bangladesh: Country Programme (IPEC)
- Global Programme Child Labour (UNICEF),
- Child Labour and sexual abuse, (Dutch NGOs)

Expertise

- Dr. Rachel Yates, SCF UK
- Fiona King, Social Development, DFID
- Sheena Crawford, University of Edinburgh
- Ben White, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, www.iss.nl
- W.E. Myers, SCF UK
- Save the Children www.savethechildren.org.uk
- ILO/IPEC, www.ilo.org
- Child Workers in Asia (CWA), Bangkok www.cwa.tnet.co.th/
- Jonathan Blagbrough, Anti-Slavery International (ASI), London www.antislavery.org
- Anita Bloom, Ministry of Social Affairs, The Hague

Child Labour *continued*

- of school systems rivals or surpasses poverty as the main impetus driving children to work;
- hidden forms of child work, especially domestic service, a predominantly female activity;
- the realisation that responsible policy encompasses not just removing children from work, but promoting appropriate forms of work for those approaching the minimum age; also providing access to education and social protection for under-age workers;
- the relationship between child and adult employment, e.g. child employment can reduce adult wages and may increase the supply of adult women;
- the needs and interests of the child in development programming, e.g. revising education timetables to enable more children to attend;
- implications of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In some sub-Saharan African countries children have become the main breadwinners. More research and programming is needed to identify and respond to their needs and to develop appropriate support programmes.

Some of the lessons learnt for the effective reduction of child labour are:

- the need to address poverty as a root cause of child work;
- the necessity of compulsory, free, flexible and good quality education as a pre-requisite for sustainable integrated actions and policies;
- the necessity of active involvement of all stakeholders;
- the need for concerted and consistent strategies at all levels;
- the need for informed debate in all countries on whether trade sanctions and boycott campaigns can improve child welfare;
- legislation and planning alone have limited effects. Rights awareness and actions to strengthen social capital are also important;
- children's participation makes a difference, making interventions more effective;
- participatory, holistic, gendered analysis of the causes of harmful child labour, child vulnerability and resilience improves identification of needs and effectiveness of interventions.

Key Literature

- R. Baker (2001) *The Sexual Exploitation of Working Children: Guidelines for action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour*. Social Guidance. UK: DFID.
- J. Boyden, B. Ling & W. Myers (1998) *What Works for Working Children*. Stockholm: Radda Barnen/UNICEF.
- S. Crawford (2000) *The Worst Forms of Child Labour - A guide to understanding and using the new convention*. Social Guidance. UK: DFID.
- R. Ebdon (1999) *Working Children's Futures: Child labour, poverty and education*. UK: Save the Children.
- C. Grootaert & H. A. Patrinos (1999) *The Policy Analysis of Child Labour: A comparative study*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- PEC at a Glance* (1999) Geneva: ILO.
- P. Miljeteig, C. Williams & B. White (eds) (1999) 'Understanding Child Labour. Special Issue'. *Childhood* 6 no. 1.
- D. Tolfree (1998) *Old Enough to Work, Old Enough to Have a Say - Different approaches to supporting working children*. Stockholm: Radda Barnen.

Key Sheets are available on the Internet at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/keysheets/> or through the websites of DFID and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs



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