

# **Mainstreaming action against child labour in development and poverty reduction strategies**

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**Summary:** Child labour is a failure of development. Its elimination must be an explicit objective of development efforts that is pursued deliberately, with perseverance, and as a matter of priority. In the absence of a development perspective, action against child labour is likely to remain on a small scale, partial and fragmented, and hence ultimately ineffective in coming to grips with the complexity of withdrawing children already in the labour market, and preventing those still outside from entering it. The focus of this paper is on mainstreaming action against child labour in development and poverty reduction strategies, notably the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Measures are proposed in the areas of improving the knowledge base, advocacy, capacity building, and policy development and coordination. These do not constitute a blueprint for mainstreaming and may have to be adapted and supplemented to take account of the specific circumstances of each country. The proposals are expected to evolve in due course into guidelines on mainstreaming child labour action as the existing experiences are documented and good practices are identified.

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## 1. Introduction

Child labour is not a new phenomenon. It has existed throughout history and in all types of economies. What is rather new is the unprecedented surge in concern about the issue over the past decade. There are diverse views as to the reasons for this development. The emergence of the rights-based approach to development, the growing emphasis on poverty reduction, the intensifying competition due to globalization of trade and investment flows, and the perceived implications of the latter for unskilled workers in developed countries, are among reasons often noted by observers. Whatever the reasons however, the rise of child labour to global prominence is a welcome development that offers a window of opportunity to address the plight of the most vulnerable segment of the population in any society, namely the labouring children.

The numbers involved are huge. According to recent ILO estimates, some 352 million of the world's children (up to 18 years of age) are economically active. Of these, 246 million are regarded as "child labourers", with most of them, i.e. 179 million, being engaged in the "worst forms" of child labour (ILO, 2002). While such estimates may be subject to interpretation and qualification, they do convey the massive scale of the problem and, crucially, the fact that projects and programmes targeted at limited categories of child labourers, however necessary and beneficial, are too little and far between to bring about the effective abolition of child labour, which is a declared objective of the international community.<sup>2</sup> Both the size and nature of the problem call for more comprehensive and holistic approaches founded on an explicit integration of child labour concerns in mainstream policy processes and development efforts, nationally and internationally.

This paper is concerned with possible approaches to the mainstreaming of action against child labour in development and poverty reduction strategies.<sup>3</sup> It is an early contribution towards the development of guidelines on how major policies at the macro and sectoral levels may be influenced, designed and implemented so as to have the most beneficial impact on child labour. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly explains the concept of mainstreaming in the present context. Section 3 dwells on the rationale for mainstreaming and sets the stage for the subsequent discussion by reviewing the major perspectives on child labour and its links to poverty and education. Section 4 identifies several policy processes and frameworks into which child labour action may be usefully mainstreamed, most notably the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Section 5 highlights some options for mainstreaming child labour concerns in broader policies by proposing concrete measures that may be taken in the areas of improving the knowledge base, advocacy, capacity building, and policy development and coordination. Section 6 concludes.

## 2. What is mainstreaming?

Broadly speaking, the term "mainstreaming" refers to concerted efforts to influence processes, policies and programmes that have a significant bearing on child labour, with the aim of making them more "child friendly". It is in some ways analogous to the concept of gender mainstreaming that has evolved over the years and witnessed considerable successes. Adapting an official definition of gender mainstreaming by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC),<sup>4</sup> child labour mainstreaming may be more formally defined thus:

- Mainstreaming child labour is the process of assessing the implications for child labourers, or those at the risk of becoming child labourers, of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in any area and at all levels.

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<sup>2</sup> See the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

<sup>3</sup> This objective falls within the ILO's broader efforts to promote the links between its Decent Work Agenda and broader national and international policies, notably the poverty reduction strategies.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC), Agreed Conclusions E/1997/L.30, 1997, p. 2, as quoted in ILO/IPEC (2003).

- It a strategy for making the concerns about child labour an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres, so as to reduce both the supply of and demand for child labour, especially in its worst forms.
- The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve the total elimination of child labour as soon as possible.

### **3. Why mainstream?**

The rationale for mainstreaming is rooted in the fact that, given the large scale of the problem, child labour is intimately linked to the pace and pattern of economic growth, the structure of the economy, the prevalence of poverty, the inadequacies in social infrastructure and protection, the functioning of the labour market, population growth and dynamics, cultural factors and attitudes, etc. The existence of child labour is a manifestation of inadequate and improper socio-economic development and the problem cannot be effectively addressed in isolation from the broader context of the development process. While a “welfare approach” involving direct action projects and programmes aimed at the withdrawal and rehabilitation of specific groups of children from the labour market has its place in efforts to eliminate child labour, this is only part of the solution. Equally important is the prevention aspect to ensure that a development environment is created in which there would be neither a demand for nor a supply of child labourers, or at least less of them. A more sustainable and comprehensive approach would have to place the concern with child labour in the broader framework of a country’s development and poverty reduction strategy. This is true regardless of one’s perspective on child labour.

#### **3.1. Perspectives on child labour**

The rationale for combating child labour derives from two distinct perspectives. The first is rooted in the universal conception of the rights of children. This child-centred, rights-based approach received international recognition with the adoption in 1989 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been ratified by virtually all countries. Article 32 of the CRC recognizes the right of the child (under 18) “to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”. These concerns also underlie the ILO’s 1973 Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, henceforth C138) that defines a range of minimum ages – depending on the country’s level of development and the type of employment and work – below which no child should work. In 1999, these international instruments were complemented with the adoption by the ILO of the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (C182). The C182, which has witnessed the most rapid rate of ratification of any ILO Convention, obligates member States to “take immediate and effective measures” to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. C138 and C182 are the principal international labour standards defining the ILO’s mandate in the child labour field, and the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is the major ILO programme charged with facilitating their implementation worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

The rights-based approach, while by no means new, has gained international prominence only recently. Historically, the dominant perspective has been the development perspective, which lays emphasis on the adverse consequences of child labour for economic development and the labour market, as well as for the development of children as “human capital” contributing to future economic development. Among the key issues from this perspective are the contribution of child labour to family income and survival, its effects on wage rates and adult unemployment, its implications for

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<sup>5</sup> For the latest reports on IPEC activities see ILO/IPEC (2001 and 2002).

investment – particularly foreign investment – and hence economic growth, consequences for poverty and income distribution, etc.<sup>6</sup>

The rights-based and development perspectives are conceptually distinct and their policy implications may not always be identical; indeed they may at times conflict, particularly in the short run. But they are best seen not so much as alternative perspectives but as complementary ones. Without seeking to elaborate on the issue here, it may be noted that the most important policy implications of each are virtually identical. Thus while our focus in this paper is primarily on the development side, the justification for combating child labour and the policy approaches taken respond to the concerns emerging from both perspectives.

### 3.2 *Child labour, poverty and education*

Economic development tends to reduce child labour over the long run. This has been the historical experience of all currently industrialized countries. There is a substantial literature analysing the relative importance of various factors in this decline (economic versus non-economic, supply versus demand, etc.) and a range of issues having to do with timing and sequencing of various policies and measures. This literature is rich with valuable lessons for the developing countries of today, where almost all child labour is found. But there are also useful, perhaps even more pertinent lessons to be drawn from the experiences of many of the developing countries themselves where the labour force participation of children has declined sharply over the past few decades (ILO, 1997).<sup>7</sup>

Among the most important of these lessons are two that are seemingly contradictory: (i), sustained economic development is always accompanied by a steady decline in child labour; and (ii) the incidence of child labour can be relatively low even at fairly low levels of national income (as in Sri Lanka for instance). It is this apparent paradox that underlies the diverse views as to the feasibility of eliminating child labour in the absence of substantial progress on the development front, and it is its resolution that provides the rationale for deliberate efforts at the reduction and elimination of child labour. The fundamental point is that the relationship between development and child labour is not necessarily linear. Patterns of income growth and development are as significant in this relationship as are their levels. Furthermore, while economic development facilitates the reduction of child labour, the reduction of child labour itself contributes to development through its effects on human resources. The links thus run both ways.

Further evidence testifying to the complexity of the relationship between development and child labour may be found in the fact that not even the most advanced economies of today are yet entirely free from the labour of children. The objective of eliminating child labour may thus not be attainable in a literal sense anytime soon, but it is one towards which great strides can be made.<sup>8</sup> The pace of progress towards the goal of reducing child labour is a function in part of the priority, and hence attention and resources, accorded to it. There is much that can be done if child labour were to command higher priority on the national agenda.

Household poverty is widely regarded as *the* prime cause of child labour. This is not necessarily true of all forms of child labour and other factors may be at work as well, but the survival needs of the

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<sup>6</sup> For a useful classification of various perspectives on child labour, see Myers (2001).

<sup>7</sup> There are unfortunately few case studies that examine developing country experiences from a historical perspective.

<sup>8</sup> There is indeed a school of thought that does not favour the elimination of child labour on the grounds that it may be necessary to enable children and their families to survive, pay for educational expenses, learn life skills and gain experience, or indeed exercise an inherent “right to work”. The latter two argument aside, acknowledging the causes of child labour provides no ground for allowing it to continue; only that efforts at elimination should address the underlying reasons for its existence as well. It should also be pointed out that it is universally agreed that the worst forms of child labour should be abolished regardless.

household are often the determining influence. Income from child labour typically accounts for some 10-40 per cent of household income, which may be of critical importance when household income is so low that it is spent mostly on food. Indeed, some proximate causes of child labour that may appear at first sight to be unrelated to poverty – such as parents' low regard for the education of children, particularly girls – may themselves be manifestations of attitudes acquired over the long run as chronic poverty passes from one generation to the next.

But while child labour may increase household income and contribute to its survival in the short run, it tends to have the opposite effect over the longer term. It deprives children of educational and vocational opportunities that impart the knowledge and skills they need to land more remunerative jobs as adults. Their poverty as parents in turn may compel them to send their own children into the labour market prematurely, thereby jeopardizing their future. The perpetuation of poverty from one generation to the next constitutes a poverty trap from which it is difficult to escape. Most models of poverty trap highlight the adverse impact of child labour on the acquisition of human capital and the resulting low productivity and incomes in the future. Some also bring out other channels through which child labour perpetuates poverty over time, for example through increased fertility which may be induced by the lower cost of having children if they work.

Any attempt to break the poverty trap by the elimination of child labour should thus be cognisant of the need not only to provide adequate educational opportunities for children, but also to remove the pressures and incentives that influence a family's decision to send their children into the labour market. As these pressures and incentives are largely economic in nature, the provision of income opportunities and economic incentives to families should be a significant element of a strategy to prevent or eliminate child labour. National poverty reduction strategies are particularly well suited to meeting this requirement on a significant scale. The typical elements of an anti-poverty strategy – promotion of productive employment for the unemployed and the underemployed, rural and agricultural development, expansion of social services and the like – tend to address the key constraints facing poorer households from which the bulk of child labour originates. They can however be devised in ways that would accentuate their beneficial impact so far as the child labour problem is concerned. This may be done through targeting of child labour households, and areas and sectors where child labour is prevalent. Equally important is to ensure that educational facilities are not only available to provide an alternative to child labour, but also affordable. The provision of income incentives tied to regular school attendance is a promising option that is being tried with success in a number of countries.

Although of fairly recent vintage, the use of such incentives has been on the rise in the fight against child labour and there is now some, albeit limited, evidence documenting their effects. An ILO survey covering a large number of projects and programmes in some 20 developing countries finds that school lunches, subsidies, income-generating activities, etc. have generally made a positive contribution towards the reduction of child labour, particularly when they were part of a package of complementary measures, including improved access to better quality education (Anker and Melkas, 1996). Similarly, a recent review of several targeted human development programmes offering grants conditional on school/health centre attendance or academic performance in a number of countries such as Bangladesh, Colombia, Brazil and Mexico show significant effects in reducing child labour. The effect on school enrolment was positive as well (Henschel, 2002). A typical concern, however, is the prospects for sustainability and expansion of such interventions in view of the limited resources committed. More research is needed to assess the impact and cost effectiveness of various types of economic incentives in promoting schooling and reducing child labour if interventions are to be scaled up to cover much larger populations of actual and potential child labourers and their families. But the prospects are encouraging enough to lead the ILO and UNCTAD to propose such schemes for even the lowest income countries (see Box 1).

The recognition of income constraints faced by families should not detract from the fact that a major reason why children end up in the labour market rather than in school is the inadequate supply of schools and quality education. Even if poverty did not push children into the labour market, the sheer

unavailability of educational and vocational training facilities would leave little choice in the matter. The issue is of particular relevance in rural areas where the absence of schools or the poor quality and relevance of education on offer go hand in hand with the much higher incidence of child labour than in urban areas.

#### **4. Mainstream into what?**

##### **4.1 Policy frameworks**

The development process in developing countries is typically guided by national policy frameworks that define the country's objectives and the strategies, programmes and projects designed to achieve them. These may be concerned with the country's overall development taking the form of national development plans covering a period of several years, sectoral plans for agriculture, education, health, etc., and those of a thematic nature aimed at such national objectives as poverty reduction, employment promotion, social security, among others. Most of these involve policy areas where there are substantive links with child labour and thus potential targets for the integration of child labour concerns. The national development plan has to come to grips with child labour as a development problem with its elimination as a national objective. A national policy aimed at ensuring the achievement of Education for All (EFA) objectives must be cognisant of the need to address child labour to enable all children to benefit from it. A poverty reduction strategy should comprise policies that deal effectively with the survival needs of households having to rely on child labour, or running that risk. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process in each country is another example.

Because of their nature and importance, the World Bank/IMF-inspired Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) represent an ideal vehicle for mainstreaming child labour into the development agenda. This point is developed below. But it is important to emphasize that mainstreaming efforts should not be limited to the PRSPs, which concern at the moment only the low-income countries seeking assistance from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Similar processes for the formulation of national development and poverty strategies in other countries may also be targeted for child labour mainstreaming efforts, as could be sectoral and other policies relating to labour and employment, education, health, social safety nets, etc.

##### **4.2 The PRSPs**

Many developing countries identify poverty reduction as one of their key development objectives. While the motivations underlying this objective and the seriousness with which it is pursued vary, a good many countries have produced major policy documents setting out their strategies for poverty reduction. In some cases, these are produced on the country's own initiative without much external prompting or involvement. In most low-income countries however, the initiative has been prompted by the decision of the World Bank and the IMF in September 1999 to require the preparation of national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that would serve as a basis for all their concessional lending and debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. In a significant departure from past practices that relied more on input from the Bretton Woods institutions themselves and external consultants, the PRSPs are to be developed by the government following nationwide consultations through a participatory process to ensure national ownership and political commitment to implementation. Although not meant to be a constraining factor, extensive guidance for the preparation and assessment of the PRSPs is provided by the World Bank/IMF in various documents, most notably a two-volume *Sourcebook* (World Bank/IMF, 2001). The process has advanced with remarkable speed. As of April 2003, 26 low-income countries (15 in

Africa) had prepared their full PRSPs and another 45 (25 in Africa) their interim PRSPs (I-PRSPs).<sup>9 10</sup> Some other countries are also gearing up to initiate the same process.

The PRSPs have all the hallmarks of national development strategies with poverty alleviation as the overarching objective. Indeed, in a growing number of countries they are replacing national development plans altogether. In Nepal, for instance, the Tenth Five-Year Plan itself will serve as the full PRSP (Nepal, National Planning Commission, 2002, p. 2), a telling example of the exceptional importance of the PRSPs. This is not entirely due to external pressure. There is little doubt that the PRSP process has also struck a cord in developing countries as well. With its emphasis on social concerns along with economic imperatives, on country ownership, and on a participatory approach, not to mention the financial backing it is likely to receive, the process enjoys significant support. There is of course much that needs improving as experience accumulates but there is a growing perception that, unlike in the days of structural adjustment, this time around the development community is at least on the right track.

Since poverty is both a cause and a consequence of child labour, it might be expected that poverty reduction strategies would address the question of child labour head on, for example by assessing the implications for child labour of various policies, or designating child labourers as a particularly vulnerable target group. This would be especially apposite in the case of the worst forms of child labour whose elimination has now become a high priority for the international community. But, rather surprisingly, the PRSP process pays scant explicit attention to the issue of child labour. The PRSP *Sourcebook* makes little mention of it at all, and much the same holds for many national PRSPs and I-PRSPs that have so far been prepared.<sup>11</sup>

It must be noted that, notwithstanding the absence of explicit attention to child labour issues in the principal PRSP documents of the World Bank and the IMF, certain national PRSPs do give attention to child labour to varying degrees. The participatory process in the context of which PRSP priorities and policies are defined, offers an excellent opportunity for opponents of child labour to influence key policy makers and institutions, as has happened in Kenya, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania for example (see Rossi, 2001, on the latter). What is more, the lack of explicit attention to child labour in the PRSPs does not imply that the poverty reduction strategies adopted do not comprise major components of fundamental importance in any effort to reduce child labour. They do indeed, most notably in the context of the reform of the educational system to expand facilities and improve quality, population control, and of course the emphasis on poverty reduction itself, a key requirement for a reduction in child labour. The emphasis on agriculture in many PRSPs is also very important as most child labour is rural. The same goes for the priority accorded the health sector, given the widespread hazards child labourers face.

But the lack of an explicit consideration of child labour issues tends to weaken the impact of such macro and sectoral interventions and possibly jeopardize certain PRSP objectives themselves. The expansion of educational opportunities, for example, may not benefit child labourers if they are not in a position to take advantage of them due to constraints that may not have been addressed. A comprehensive attack on child labour calls for a recognition of its prevention, reduction and eventual elimination as an explicit development objective of the highest priority. This recognition in turn implies measures to mainstream child labour concerns in a nation's overall socio-economic

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<sup>9</sup> Interim PRSPs were introduced to avoid delays in receiving assistance. They include a stock-take of a country's current poverty reduction strategy and lay out a road map of how the country is going to develop its full PRSP.

<sup>10</sup> Data accessed at <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/boardlist.pdf> on 22 May 2003.

<sup>11</sup> The scant explicit attention to child labour in the PRSP *Sourcebook* is only a facet of the larger problem of inadequate consideration of the employment dimensions in the PRSP process. The issue of mainstreaming the employment or "decent work" dimension in the PRSP is a subject of collaboration between the ILO and the World Bank, in particular at the national level in several countries.

development and poverty reduction strategies, as well as of sectoral planning processes relevant to child labour, such as the reform of the educational system.

## 5. The “how” and “who” of mainstreaming

We have so far been concerned with *what* mainstreaming is, *why* child labour should be mainstreamed, and *into what*. This section extends the discussion by dwelling on the “*how*” and “*who*” of mainstreaming (mostly the “*how*” as the “*who*” is often obvious). It suggests measures that may be taken in different areas to contribute to the integration of child labour concerns in policy processes, notably the PRSP process. The suggestions draw on existing experience, particularly that of IPEC, and represent an initial step towards the development of guidelines on mainstreaming child labour action that would comprise various approaches, techniques and tools. This is the key objective of a new IPEC initiative – the formation of a Development Policy Network for the Elimination of Child Labour (DPNet) – designed to promote networking, both nationally and internationally, among leading research institutes, influential bodies and high-level policy makers concerned with development, poverty, labour markets and child labour issues in a collective effort to share and expand the knowledge base, engage in advocacy work, build up capacity and institutions, and influence policies in favour of the elimination of child labour (Box 2).

### 5.1 Improving the knowledge base

Empirical evidence on child labour and the analysis of its links to other aspects of development are crucial in informing discussions about mainstreaming efforts, broadening the support base for the integration of child labour concerns in policy formulation, and facilitating this integration. It is when new knowledge and tools are brought to bear on the subject that mainstreaming efforts are likely to be the most effective.

The main reason for the relative paucity of statistical data and analysis on child labour is the low priority it has tended to receive so far. If the reduction of child labour were to become a serious development objective, it would attract the necessary resources to fill the gap. To some extent this is already happening. A number of countries have already carried out child labour surveys on their own or, in most cases, with the assistance of international organizations such as the ILO. A variety of other types of surveys are also being carried out that provide relevant information for child labour analysis, such as the Multiple Indicator Clustering Surveys (MICS) of UNICEF and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) surveys of the World Bank. Furthermore, the data sets from these surveys are in most cases made available through the Internet to encourage their use and further analysis. The number of such surveys however is still limited and few countries dispose of more than one to allow for assessment of changes over time. In addition, available results are often based on criteria and choices that are nationally specific, making cross-country comparisons and analysis difficult. Some of the priority areas for the improvement of the state of information on child labour are:

- provision of more and better statistical data and information on child labour, its nature, extent, and trends through child labour surveys, or incorporation of child labour modules in routine data collection mechanisms (labour force surveys, household budget surveys, health and demographic surveys, censuses, etc.);
- development of child labour databases and ready access to them by researchers to encourage and facilitate further analysis;
- development of proxy indicators of child labour, based on its correlates and putative causes, that are available on a more frequent and regular basis; and
- the use of definitions and criteria that would facilitate cross-country comparison and analysis

In regard to analytical work, the first priority should be to highlight the links, often running both ways, between child labour and the principal objectives of the policy processes into which it is to be integrated, for example the PRSP. These include poverty reduction of course, but also the

development of human resources, universal primary education, economic growth, labour productivity, wage policy, income distribution, population growth and dynamics, as well as the more “intangible” objectives such as improving the country’s image abroad. The results of such work would not only improve the knowledge base on child labour, they would also serve as a powerful means of convincing policy makers of the importance of greater attention to child labour.

Another important priority in analytical work should be to assess the implications for child labour of the principal policy measures proposed and how their impact may be made more positive from the child labour standpoint. For example, where a PRSP or I-PRSP exists, the following issues may, *inter alia*, be investigated:

- Is the proposed strategy able to reach child labour households, easing their income constraints through provision of greater opportunities for productive employment and income-generating activities? Are these households targeted in any way as a priority group?
- Will the proposed reforms of the education system ensure affordable access to quality schooling to *all* children, in particular child labourers? Are adequate economic incentives envisaged and budgeted for to encourage parents to send their children to school and keep them there?
- Is the proposed strategy compatible with existing child labour legislation, policies and programmes? Is there any coordination with existing interventions, such as a time-bound programme for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and do they complement each other?

## 5.2 *Advocacy*

As noted earlier, there is hardly any mention of child labour in the key World Bank/IMF documents that guide the preparation of national PRSPs. The same is true of national development plans in most countries. These are symptomatic of the low profile of child labour in the policy process, national or international. Advocacy efforts may be undertaken in three areas: raising awareness about child labour issues and its importance, building alliances, and strengthening dialogue with the international financial institutions.

### *Raising awareness*

There is a need to raise awareness about child labour, its nature and extent, its determinants, links to poverty and the labour market, education, economic and social implications, population structure and dynamics, and its potential to act as an obstacle to and retard long-term development. It is also necessary to promote child labour as an explicit development objective, a part and parcel of a poverty reduction strategy. Among the concrete objectives that may be pursued and actions that may be taken are:

- regular (perhaps annual or biennial) reports on the state of child labour in the country, along the lines of the UNDP’s *National Human Development Reports*;
- incorporation of *child labour topics* as chapters in major reports such as the national human development report, and as special issues of important regular reports or of reputable social science journals;
- promoting the reduction of child labour as an explicit development objective;
- promoting the use of *child labour indicators as indicators of social development*;
- workshops for high-level policy makers in various sectors of the government, employers’ and workers’ representatives, parliamentarians, opinion leaders, community leaders, academics, NGOs, journalists, donors, etc.

### *Building alliances*

The growing prominence of child labour concerns has now created an environment where the formation of child labour constituencies is made easier than in the past. There is a need to take advantage of the current momentum to build such constituencies where they don't exist and strengthen them where they do, through:

- active involvement in existing participatory processes (e.g. PRSP, UNDAF, etc.);
- building alliances with opinion makers and influential individuals in the media; and
- identification of social groups gaining or losing from a reduction in child labour, as a means of identifying potential alliance partners.

### ***Strengthening dialogue with international financial institutions***

For evident reasons, the primary efforts for the integration of child labour issues in the PRSP process must be made at the national level. Nonetheless, these efforts are likely to be considerably facilitated if the main World Bank/IMF documents providing guidelines for the preparation of national PRSPs, in particular the *Sourcebook*, were to adequately cover child labour and its links to poverty, education, and human capital formation. There are indications that some voices at the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and perhaps other major development institutions advocate greater attention to child labour in the activities of these institutions.<sup>12</sup> Interagency collaboration, at both national and international levels, may be strengthened further to facilitate such a process.

### **5.3 Capacity building**

#### ***Strengthening stakeholders***

The formulation of national strategies for development and poverty reduction and the integration of child labour concerns in them involve many technical issues that draw on the expertise of economists, planners, educationists, statisticians, etc. but they are fundamentally political processes through which competing objectives, approaches and interests are resolved before national priorities are identified. Objectives and approaches that do not enjoy the support of sufficiently strong constituencies are bound to receive lower priority in the national agenda. One reason why child labour is not high on the development agenda is that such constituencies have so far been largely lacking or weak, both at the national and international level. Within the government, the ministry(ies) responsible for child labour issues are often among the weakest politically, and as a consequence technically as well. Such weakness may also be a reason why they themselves may not be pursuing their mandate with enough drive, vigour and conviction. Similarly, the fact that the PRSP documents (*Sourcebook*, etc.) do not adequately accommodate child labour concerns is a reflection in part of the relative weakness of international agencies with such a mandate, as it is of the voices within the international financial institutions that advocate greater attention to child labour in their activities.<sup>13</sup> There is need to strengthen the capacity of child labour constituencies and pressure groups through upgrading their technical expertise and the promotion of alliances among them. Among the initiatives that may be taken to bring this about are:

- strengthening the role and capacity of institutions concerned with child labour, in particular of the Ministry(ies) responsible, employers' organizations and trade unions;
- workshops/training involving key actors and decision makers (senior government officials, employers' and workers' representatives, academics, parliamentarians, media, religious figures, influential individuals, etc.) where child labour issues are debated and ways of addressing them identified;
- establishment of child labour research programmes at universities and research institutes; and

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<sup>12</sup> See, in addition to Fallon and Tzannatos (1998), Lim (2001) for the Asian Development Bank.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Fallon and Tzannatos (1998) for the World Bank.

- promoting networking among stakeholders concerned with child labour issues, both at the national and international level.

### ***Developing tools***

Another approach to enhancing capacity for mainstreaming is to develop appropriate tools that facilitate regular assessment of policies and programmes and help maintain and strengthen interest in child labour issues. Among the possibilities are:

- promoting the systematic preparation of *child labour impact assessments* of major public policies and programmes that are likely to have a bearing on the subject;
- developing *child budgets* based on methodologies for the assessment of levels and trends in budget allocations and budget shares that directly (and indirectly) affect the development and welfare of children;
- developing *child labour indicators*, including composite indicators, which could capture the incidence, intensity and nature (for example, worst forms or not) of child labour;
- developing *websites devoted to child labour issues*, to facilitate access to available information and material on child labour; and
- integrating child labour indicators in *monitoring and evaluation systems*, notably of the PRSP, to permit regular assessment of impact.

### **5.4 Policy development and coordination**

Comprehensive action against child labour involves a broad range of policies, programmes and projects, and thus many stakeholders in the public and private sectors. This poses a major challenge in terms of policy development and effective coordination among various actors.

Mainstreaming efforts would be considerably helped if comprehensive national child labour policies and action programmes already existed. Unfortunately few developing countries have so far developed such policy frameworks, although many are moving in that direction. This trend is acquiring momentum due to the rapid ratification of ILO's two child labour Conventions, C138 and C182, which obligate ratifying countries to take a variety of significant steps to address the problem of child labour. The need for coordination of policies and actions too would be considerably helped if a national child labour policy and a corresponding action programme were adopted that would define the country's strategy in tackling the problem and policies and programmes that are designed to put them into effect. A key ingredient would be to define the role of various actors involved and to secure their commitment to fulfil their respective roles.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the 1980s and 1990s were the decades of structural adjustment, the first decade of this century will be the decade of the PRSPs. It should also be the decade of the virtual elimination of the worst forms of child labour. About four-fifths of the ILO member States have already ratified the C182 and most of the remaining countries are expected to do so soon. This Convention requires ratifying States to take "immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency". With the assistance of ILO, El Salvador, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania have already formulated and begun the implementation of Time-Bound Programmes (TBP) for this purpose and many more countries are in the process of doing so now or in the near future. In view of the extreme vulnerability of its target group, its multisectoral nature, and its intention to address the root causes of the problem, the TBPs are eminently suitable for integration into the PRSP and similar programmes. Efforts need to be made to integrate, or at least link the TBP with the PRSP where they both exist – and where they do not, similar programmes and processes – to

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<sup>14</sup> For a remarkable example of the formulation of a national child labour policy and action programme, see South Africa, Department of Labour (2002) and related material on the Department's website (<http://www.labour.gov.za>).

ensure better synergy, complementarity and coordination. Such efforts are already underway in Nepal and Tanzania and, to a lesser degree, in a few other countries where TBPs and PRSPs are under preparation. In most cases however, the TBPs are not or will not be comprehensive enough to cover all worst forms of child labour, a shortcoming that needs to be addressed in the context of a more comprehensive national plan such as the PRSP if the country's obligations vis-à-vis C182 are to be fulfilled.

In the area of policy development and coordination, the following measures suggest themselves:

- promoting the development of a *national policy on child labour* as a priority;
- identifying child labourers as a particularly vulnerable *target group* that should command greater resource allocation;
- linking the national TBPs with the PRSP or similar processes; and
- mobilising local resources, both as a means of increasing resources available for combating child labour and as a way of improving the ownership and sustainability of child labour action.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

This paper is an early contribution toward the development of guidelines for mainstreaming child labour in development and poverty reduction strategies. Practical experience with mainstreaming child labour is still limited although various initiatives are underway in different countries that need to be documented and synthesized. The measures proposed in this paper are thus indicative of approaches that may be taken to promote the mainstreaming of action against child labour in policy processes, in particular the PRSP process. With the benefit of practical experience under different settings, it is hoped that they would gradually evolve into guidelines on child labour mainstreaming in the near future.

### **Box. 1: The MISA Initiative**

Poverty is one of the most important reasons why millions of children of school-going age across the world fail to attend school. In recent years, several Latin American countries have followed the pioneering example of Brazil's *Bolsa-Escola* programme and developed minimum income support schemes linked to school attendance by the children of recipient households. Although taking a variety of forms in the numerous cities where they have been introduced, these schemes have become increasingly popular, and have excited interest from other parts of the world. Various assessments suggest that such schemes – which the ILO and UNCTAD call MISA (Minimum Income for School Attendance) schemes – can contribute towards the development of human resources, reduction of poverty in short and long runs, the elimination of child labour, and the provision of a potential safety net to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

MISA schemes address only the demand side of the problem; they would be ineffective in the absence of adequate supply of educational facilities to absorb the increased demand for schooling. The financial resources required for their implementation may also be prohibitive, particularly for the least developed countries, unless external resources were available. The evidence is also insufficient as yet to substantiate a positive impact on child labour. They are thus not meant to be considered in isolation, or as stand-alone solutions to the poverty and education problems. Rather, they should be seen in the context of the existing development and poverty eradication strategies of the country.

Source: ILO/UNCTAD (2001).

## **Box 2. Development Policy Network for the Elimination of Child Labour (DPNet)**

With support from DFID, IPEC launched a project in 2002 to exploit the potential of networking among public and private institutions in the pursuit of the goal of progressive elimination of child labour throughout the world. The project represents a new strategic direction for IPEC that aims to complement its downstream activities by extending the concern with child labour upstream to the policy-making level and shifting the responsibility and initiative for action increasingly to national institutions.

Under this project, IPEC is establishing a **Development Policy Network for the Elimination of Child Labour (DPNet)** with the overall objective of mainstreaming child labour concerns in national strategies for development and poverty reduction.

The DPNet is evolving from the “bottom up”, from the national to, eventually, the global level. At the national level, the network brings together leading research institutes, influential bodies and high-level policy makers concerned with development, poverty and child labour issues in a joint effort to share and expand the knowledge base, build up capacity and institutions, engage in advocacy work and influence policies in favour of the progressive elimination of child labour, particularly its worst forms. In each country, one or two leading institutions will be commissioned to undertake initial policy studies, identify potential partners, organize meetings and form a national network and coordinate its activities. Once in place, the national networks will determine their own priorities in the light of the specific circumstances of the country and in the context of a long-term plan of work that they will formulate.

Initially, the DPNet is starting with the participation of leading research institutes in ten countries (others may join in due course):

### **Africa**

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Egypt        | Center for Economic and Financial Research and Studies (CEFRS), Cairo University |
| Ghana        | Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA)                 |
| Malawi       | Centre for Social Research (CSR), University of Malawi                           |
| Nigeria      | Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER)                       |
| South Africa | Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU), University of Cape Town                 |

### **Asia**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Bangladesh  | Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)                                     |
| Indonesia   | Demographic Institute, Faculty of Economics, University of Indonesia |
| Nepal       | Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS)                  |
| Pakistan    | Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)                   |
| Philippines | Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)                  |

Activities currently initiated at the country level include the preparation of annotated bibliographies of national literature on child labour, national policy studies addressing a core set of issues, high-level symposia to discuss the findings and recommendations of policy studies, and networking activities. These will be followed in October 2003 by an international meeting of DPNet partner institutes to share their knowledge and experience, form partnerships, and elaborate the modalities for future collaboration among DPNet members. A DPNet website is now operational. The main findings and recommendations of national policy studies, as well as those of the regional and inter-regional network meetings, will be synthesized for publication in early 2003.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For further information on the DPNet, its implementation strategy and current status, see IPEC/DPNet (2003).

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