Eliminating child labour to build sustainable agrifood systems

Meeting the challenge

Child labour in agriculture is an extensive and critical problem in the world today. It hinders children’s education, health and future employability, perpetuating hunger and rural poverty. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, global progress stalled and the number of children engaged in child labour in agriculture rose, for the first time in decades. This complicates the possibility of reaching the SDG 8.7 target of eliminating all forms of child labour by 2030. A breakthrough is needed in agriculture to meet these goals and make progress.

FAO strives to eliminate child labour in agriculture by addressing its root causes and promoting quality education for children, thus ensuring their access to decent employment in the future. In turn, this benefits rural communities and agrifood systems. Thanks to FAO’s advocacy efforts, ending child labour in agriculture is a top priority in the Durban Call to Action, the landmark document from the Fifth Global Conference on Child Labour.

In action

FAO addresses the socio-economic drivers of child labour in agrifood systems, through an integrated and gender-sensitive approach. The Organization works to improve the school-to-work transition for older children in rural areas, in order for them to access decent work opportunities in agrifood systems. FAO also helps to diversify the livelihoods of rural households to reduce their dependency on child labour, as well as fostering safe work in agrifood systems for children and youth who have reached the legal working age. This implies the promotion of safe, labour-saving agricultural practices and sustainable alternatives to hazardous pesticides. FAO also raises awareness at the community level about the consequences of child labour – using communication for development approaches, such as the FAO Dimitra Listeners’ Clubs. To improve impact, the Organization fosters multi-stakeholder partnerships and South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

Looking at the evidence

70% of child labour is found in the agricultural sector.

Of the 160 mln engaged in child labour worldwide, 112 million boys and girls work in agriculture.

Amongst the youngest children subjected to child labour, aged 5-11, more than 75% work in agriculture.

Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls. However, rural girls’ work is often less visible: when household chores are considered, the gender gap narrows.
Comparative advantage

Given its extensive knowledge of the agriculture sector and its longstanding experience in promoting education, decent rural employment, and inclusive transformation processes, FAO is strategically positioned to address the main drivers of child labour: rural poverty and food insecurity. Leveraging its solid relationship with agrifood stakeholders, FAO mobilizes concerted actions and innovative solutions in rural communities who are reliant on child labour. The Organization also facilitates knowledge-sharing and cooperation through an integrated approach which involves mobilizing livelihoods support, decent employment, social protection, gender equality and the management of natural resources.

FAO’s relentless commitment to eliminating child labour is demonstrated in its Framework on Ending Child Labour in Agriculture, the launch of a dedicated prevention facility, and the systematic integration of child labour considerations in its programming and project implementation. Elimination of child labour in agriculture is an integral part of FAO’s Strategic Framework, directly contributing to the Better Life and Better Production aspirations, which aim at promoting inclusive economic growth, as well as sustainable consumption and production.

Best practices and results

1. FAO’s Global Solutions Forum mobilized over 1,000 participants to share concrete solutions to end child labour in agriculture. The event contributed to this topic being a top priority in the Durban Call to Action.

2. Through knowledge generation, awareness raising, capacity development and policy support, FAO has supported more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean to address child labour in agriculture.

3. Through the EU-funded CLEAR Cotton project, FAO reached more than 10,000 men, women, youth and children and helped sustainably improve the livelihoods of about 1,500 households in Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan.

Expected results

The overall objective is to reduce child labour at scale in agrifood systems and increase sustainability. This will be achieved by:

- Mainstreaming and integrating child labour considerations into national, regional and global agricultural and corporate due diligence policies and programmes, enhancing the knowledge and capacity of agriculture stakeholders.

- Implementing dedicated child labour prevention programmes to strengthen rural livelihoods and promote sustainable practices in agricultural sub-sectors.

- Ensuring that large-scale programmes implement tailored measures to prevent and to end child labour in agrifood systems, from rural investment to emergency and climate-smart programme.

- Strengthening cooperation to end child labour in agriculture by facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues and platforms and enhancing knowledge sharing on how to tackle child labour comprehensively.

- Supporting agrifood actors in meeting due diligence requirements, by addressing the structural drivers and characteristics of child labour along specific value chains – such as cotton, cocoa, and coffee.

Partnerships to scale up impact

- ministries of agriculture, labour, environment, and social affairs;
- the United Nations system (ILO, UNICEF, WFP);
- members of the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture;
- international financial institutions;
- workers and producers’ organizations;
- the private sector;
- academia; and
- non-governmental and civil society organizations.

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Read more about the Child Labour in Agriculture Prevention Facility, our flexible and impact-oriented programme:
fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0267en

"Now I understand better the negative effects of child labour and share my learnings with others in my village."
Kamitie Issouf Konate
Cotton farmer
Burkina Faso

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