

# [Costa Rica]

*"Sometimes I wish things were a little different... I feel worn out"*

**Girls in domestic work**

**[ 5 ]**



# Preamble

## **"In Exchange for My Childhood"**

### **Series on Child Labour and Exploitation in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes "the right of the child 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." At the same time, Article 36 states the need to protect "the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare." It has been more than 15 years since the Convention was adopted; however, the issue of child labour<sup>1</sup> continues to affect more than 200 million<sup>2</sup> children around the world. These children work under conditions that breach and put at risk the enjoyment of their fundamental rights, such as, their health, education and protection against any forms of exploitation and violence.

With this publication, World Vision wants to make a contribution in tackling child labor by making proposals and inviting the reader to learn about the life, family, feelings, experiences and context of the children who work in 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will build a close relationship with such children through a country context analysis, interviews, adult testimonies and portraits of the daily lives of working children and their families.

The stories are about different countries, with different protagonists who are devoted to different activities. Nevertheless, you will realize that the children who have allowed us to get into their lives have almost identical problems, aspirations and dreams:

- They work for the same reasons: Their families are in need, and they wish to contribute to family subsistence.
- They have the same dreams: To be able to study, help their families, make something useful and positive with their lives<sup>3</sup>.
- They experience the same physical and emotional pain, as a result of the work performed.
- They share the same fear: Adults – Once contact is established with adults, they maltreat, abuse and humiliate<sup>4</sup> them.
- They come from very poor families that have suffered exploitation for at least two or three generations.
- They have been abandoned by their national systems of social assistance systems<sup>5</sup>.
- It is common for families to be numerous<sup>6</sup>, as well as for women to be the head of the household because of the father<sup>7</sup> abandonment.
- They would love to study or attend school regularly, but they cannot go because they have to work, or they have actually lost their interest in school because of maltreatment<sup>8</sup>. Besides that, their school agenda is not adapted to their needs as working<sup>9</sup> children and adolescents.
- Girls have to do workhouse activities, which makes their workload heavier.
- In addition, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse.

"In Exchange for My Childhood" opens doors to the private lives of working children, urging us to commit – as an organization and personally – to the transformation of our society, so that life in all its fullness may finally be a reality for every child in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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1 It should be clarified that not all the work performed by children infringes their rights, but only that work which does not allow them to enjoy their rights. See "Definitions and basic concepts" at the end of the booklet.

2 The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6, page 233; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

3 The fact that there are many boys who want to be policemen and girls who want to be teachers attracts our attention here.

4 See the situation described by children in all booklets. Complementary reading: The United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children: Chapter 6; at: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r25>

5 See Brazil's booklet, situation described by Rafael

6 Example: Colombia's booklet, Alicia Bastos' testimony

7 Example: Bolivia's booklet, Margarita's testimony

8 Example: Guatemala's booklet, Rafael's testimony

9 Example: See the situation described in the Chile's booklet on children who work in the mountains and the influence of the seasons of the year on their educational process.

# Interviews / Focus group

## On work

### Yolanda (age 16):

I help my grandmother and my mum sell bread. I also bring the baby back and forth for my aunt. I take care of the baby sometimes.

### Rosita (age 14):

I help my mum with the housework: wash clothes, wash dishes, and cook meals. I also go out to sell pastries on Saturday, to the command post, the pier, and all over town. The most I make is 3,000 pesos [colones] per day [US\$5.81].

For the holidays, I went to help my sister's mother-in-law. I was helping her with the housework, washing, cleaning the house, and getting cobwebs down from the ceiling. I wanted to have some free time and not do anything, but I had to help because she was quite ill. So it was my duty to help her. My sister told me that I have to help her because she was feeding me, and I shouldn't be a freeloader.

All the work I have to do takes away any time that I might have for playing or studying. For example, I'll be studying, and my mum will tell me to do something, such as wash the dishes, serve food, and sweep the house if it's dirty, and that takes the little bit of time that I have for studying.

### Angie:

I don't work, not me. I only help my mum with the housework and when I go to my aunt's house, ay!, I help her clean and wash dishes, too. She feeds me; I'm not going to go without food.

Sometimes I wish things were a little different. One comes home from school, I don't know, very tired. I don't know, I feel worn out and I get home and have to do housework and clean, because my mum is working. She grows vegetables, so sometimes I'm the one who has to do the things. I don't know; I feel exhausted.

### Pamela (age 14):

On Saturday and Sunday, I help my mum with the housework and sometimes I take care of my nieces and nephews, the two-year-old baby, and the little girls who are in school. One is seven and the other is nine. Sometimes it's for an hour, two hours, sometimes for half a day. I prepare the baby's food. She eats everything. Sometimes my sister gives me something. I like to dance and ride bicycles. If I had to choose between watching the children and doing the things I like, I'd do the things I like.

### Carmen (age 17):

I help mummy with the housework. Well, these days we've been working at the school, cooking for the children. It's because there they grow yucca, corn, and that sort of thing and they cut it up and cook it. It's my job to cut up the vegetables or wash the dishes. My mum doesn't pay me anything for it. She gets the money and sometimes she buys me something.

When I go to the school kitchen, I come home tired. My feet hurt. It's because I'm standing the whole time, cutting things up, serving the *güilas*<sup>3</sup>, washing dishes, all that, and then I have to do the housework at home, or we do it at five in the morning. It's because my dad works in the fields, so he doesn't earn much.

I tell my mum that I feel tired, but she tells me we have to go on. [She laughs.]

### Tatiana (age 17):

Well, I used to go help a friend wash curtains or wash windows, but then I didn't go back. I would go help her, and every once in a while she would give me a pair of shoes, a watch, or a blouse. I feel good because, in any event, in my house I don't have to do something or go somewhere in particular. I don't have to do anything else now, just the work at home.

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3 A Costa Rican term for children.

## Education

### Pamela (age 14):

I'm doing so-so in my exams.

### Tatiana (age 17):

I'm not in school. I completed sixth grade and attended secondary for two months. Mum says I might go back to school next year, to get the alternative diploma.<sup>4</sup>

### Carmen (age 17):

I'm not in school. I didn't stay in secondary because they took me out. I'm going to get the alternative diploma. My friend Olga went to Limón with a baby, and Melissa already had her baby, about eight days ago.

### Ana (age 13):

I'm in sixth grade. Next year I won't enter secondary.

### Flor (age 11):

I'm in third.

### Yolanda (age 16):

I'm in seventh. At school, they don't talk to me. I stick to myself, since they keep teasing me. . . . The kids don't talk to me.

### Rosita (age 14):

I'm doing well at my exams. I want to stay in school until I reach my goal. I'm in sixth grade.



## Dreams

### Carmen (age 17):

My dream is to be a millionaire. [She laughs.] I'd like to have a little more money so life would be easier. Or at least that Dad would be paid more so I could study. My dream is to be a Bobby.

### Tatiana (age 17):

Maybe if we had a little more money so we could hire someone, maybe a labourer, to do the housework, fix the walls, or put in posts, and when the cows have to be washed and rid of lice. I say, if we had a little more money, I could have friends and spend time with my friends. It's just that at home it's only Mum and I. Well, even if I had time, maybe not, because my mum doesn't let me go out alone.

### Rosita (age 14):

I want to go to school and achieve my goal, to be a doctor, to help sick people, and I want to do surgery. Um...to continue studying and not stop until I reach that goal. I sometimes find a little time here and there to study.

### Ana (age 13):

I want to work as a teacher.

### Flor (age 11):

I want to work at the bank and serve people at the bank.

### Angie:

I want to continue studying, to be a professional. I want to be a Bobby. I can see myself saving lives, rescuing people who are kidnapped.

<sup>4</sup> An alternative system created by the Ministry of Education so that those who are far below their age level academically can complete their secondary education.



## Intimate portrait

One by one, drops run down the children's faces, but these are not teardrops. These children don't have time to cry, only time to work; the drops that run down their faces are drops of sweat. And even these will eventually evaporate under northern Costa Rica's harsh sun, whose rays bear down on them, drying up everything, even their hopes, which evaporate little by little. Their hopes die in silence, the silence that shrouds their life stories, that keeps secret the hardships, the sacrifices, the abuses, and above all, the near-total loss of their childhoods. There is no time for childhood here, no time to play, much less to have real friends. Their fathers and mothers tell their children that they have to contribute, that there isn't enough money to make ends meet. The crumbs of time left to these children, if any, are for studying.

This is life for Pamela, Flor, Ana, Rosita, Angie, Yolanda, Carmen, and many other girls and adolescents in Costa Rica's Los Chiles canton, situated near the Nicaraguan border. Los Chiles is one of the poorest cantons in the country. Poverty and a subsistence culture force the youth who live here to take responsibility for all the housework in their homes and sometimes in the homes of others, as well. Some of the older girls must also care for the smaller children and sometimes sell things in order to survive.

The United Nations uses a formula called the Human Development Index to assess the quality of life in numerous countries. Currently, Costa Rica has a relatively high HDI, ranking in the top third of the 177 countries monitored by the UN. The Human Development Index measures quality-of-life factors, such as life expectancy, literacy rates, and per-capita income. While Costa Rica "scores" well for a small country in Central America, there is no sign of the country's high Human Development Index in the lives of the young adolescent girls in Los Chiles. Too often a veil of silence obscures their stories. Sometimes it is their own families' silence which makes their stories invisible and therefore unknowable to others.

Their stories often begin with a common theme: having to live life adrift among many uncertainties. Los Chiles is an agricultural area where there is seasonal work only at harvest time. Sometimes there is no work at all. Opportunities are scarce. The possibility of going to school is like one more log floating by in a wide river of uncertainty. One must be very strong to be able to grasp this log and not let go in the midst of the turbulence of one's life. One must be as strong as Rosita, who despite her circumstances wants to become a doctor. Her mother is ill, suffering from a bone fever, and her father is much older and not very strong. They offer him very little work in the field these days.

### **Rosita and María**

Rosita, age 14, must get up very early to wash clothes, clean the house, and prepare lunch for her siblings. When her mother, Doña María, feels a little better, she will make empanadas (meat-filled pastries), or cornbread so that Rosita can sell them on the weekends. Meanwhile, Rosita's brother, Manuel, sells corn.

Doña Maria says that her daughter has never gone to work in someone else's house. She tells us proudly that Rosita is a hard-working girl. She loves to study. After completing all her household tasks, Rosita gets ready and leaves for school. She is in sixth grade. Her blue and white uniform, like those worn by every girl and boy in the country, helps to conceal her personal story by making her appear like all the other girls. But her story is not like all the others'. She must walk 30 minutes to school and 30 minutes back home each day. When she is very lucky, she can ride with her brother on the bar of his bicycle. The uniform also helps her keep the secret that she was working during her school holidays. Almost no one knows, and her mother doesn't tell anyone, but Rosita had to go to the home of her sister's mother-in-law. She admits that she wanted to rest, but she had to go "help" the lady with her housework.<sup>1</sup>

After she has completed primary school, Rosita wants to continue to secondary school. Her mother, however, doesn't want her to, because she says Rosita will be exposed to many vices and furthermore, the school charges many fees and Doña Maria has no money to pay them. "'How will I manage it?' I ask her, when she tells me she wants to go to secondary school," says Doña Maria, her voice broken with emotion and anguish. Doña Maria herself never completed primary school.

### **Yolanda**

Yolanda's small eyes clearly reveal her shyness, nervousness, and the uncertainty she feels in not knowing which direction to take, not knowing what will happen in her life. At age 16, she is the oldest of four siblings. They all live in a small house that doesn't even have a patio. The clothing that Yolanda has just washed hangs inside the house. For now, it is protected from the fierce rains, but soon enough she and others like her will be wearing these clothes as they work, and the rain will have its chance to pelt every fiber of the clothing that the sun has not yet deteriorated.

Yolanda's mother, Evangelina, receives a monthly pension of only 22,000 colones [£21.43, US\$43] per month from the father of Yolanda's five-year-old sister, Tatiana. They live on that and on what Evangelina earns when she can get work. Like many other boys and girls in the area, they have no father at home. Yolanda must do all the housework when her mother goes out to work. Evangelina's dream is to have a permanent job, but that is still only a dream.

Yolanda was going to school in an "open classroom". She liked attending secondary school, although it took a lot of effort on her part to go. Her brother had recently been the victim of a crime, something that should have inspired compassion in Yolanda's classmates, but became instead an excuse to tease and taunt her about her brother's misfortune. No one wanted to spend time or "hang out" with her, so she has not gone back.

Yolanda's mother has told her, for now, to sell pastries, empanadas, and homemade bread in town. "Since she isn't attending school this year, and won't be having to be out on the street, I've told her to look for work taking care of another child. I've given her permission," says Evangelina, who, like many mothers, believes that the dangers to a child worker exist only on the street.

Yet it is clear that dangers do indeed exist on the streets of Los Chiles. Yolanda recounts that, "Once, Luis from the municipal office touched me, and I got real angry and screamed, and he hasn't done it since. But another day when I was selling pastries, he told me he'd pay me 10,000 colones if I would let him touch me, and I told him no." Yolanda is currently taking care of a baby in her grandmother's home. Yolanda is thin, but finds the strength she needs when she lifts the baby. Her mother doesn't know if her "employers" are paying Yolanda well. She knows only that they pay her something and give her a meal.

"I tell her to study when she can. If she doesn't attend school, she won't be able to work at anything when she's grown. The third year [of secondary school] is essential. If she doesn't study, she won't be anybody," adds Doña Evangelina.

### **Ana**

Meanwhile, a few kilometres from Yolanda's house, Ana is sweeping a corridor. She also takes out the garbage, cleans the house, and dreams of being a teacher. She is very shy and hardly speaks at all. However, a drawing she did with some friends for a calendar speaks for her: an anguished face much like hers, steeped in suffering. Her tears are bottled up inside. Her mother, Doña Sonia, says that Ana won't work, that she is very lazy and that's why she does poorly at school. But the natural manner and skill with which Ana holds the broom, uses the mop, and sweeps beneath the chairs, belie her mother's words. Her nervous laugh is an attempt to hide the obvious: Ana has worked in the homes of others.

With her eyes on her small, eight-year-old daughter Marielos and with her boundless love for her daughters, 13-year-old Ana and 11-year-old Flor, Doña Sonia wonders what tomorrow will bring, what will become of her daughters. When asked what she dreams for Ana, how she would like to see Ana's life in the future, Sonia falls silent. She breathes deeply and maintains her silence. She was on the verge of saying many things, but a tear has won out over her words. She cannot tell us what dreams she has for Ana. Like all mothers, she must have many dreams for her daughters, but she remains silent. She looks at her own history. She was unable to attend school. She looks into the future and sees no answer on the horizon.

It's getting late, and an eight-year-old boy still selling *cajetas*<sup>2</sup> can be heard in the distance. It's a voice, like many others, that slips into oblivion, lost in despair, lost beyond the cane fields. In Los Chiles, the future is always uncertain; the only certainty is that life is hard, and the heat of the day never ceases to sap one's strength.

<sup>1</sup> The girls and their families say they only "help"—they don't "work".

<sup>2</sup> Homemade sweets.

# Context

Costa Rica is known for having built a democratic system in which social investment and economic growth have been priorities for the various government administrations, laying the foundations for significant social achievements and establishing one of the most equitable economies in the region. The country ranked 47 (out of 177) in the 2005 World Report on Human Development by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), placing it among the countries with a high human development index.\*

However, social investment has weakened during the most recent administrations, and state institutions are facing serious difficulties in meeting the population's needs, as seen in the country's obvious social deterioration. Presently, 21.7 percent of the nation's households live in poverty. Yet in rural areas, as many as 26 percent of households live in poverty, and 8 percent live in extreme poverty.<sup>5</sup>

A report prepared by the Ministry of Public Education states that "half of all young people who leave school do so to work. Forty percent of those who leave school do so because they can't pay for it and 10 percent because they can't pay for the transportation."<sup>6</sup> Poverty hinders education, and many underage children work to contribute to the family income, instead of studying.

Public education is one of the areas most impacted by poverty and the country's social deterioration. The limitations in infrastructure and quality of public education, combined with families' financial difficulties, complicate access to and completion of education for girls, boys, and adolescents. The system's inability to ensure that children remain in school has become a great national concern, especially within secondary education. In 2004, 11.7 percent of students in the third cycle (7th, 8th, and 9th year) dropped out of school before the end of the academic year.<sup>7</sup>

## Combating Child Labour

When Costa Rica ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, followed by ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the country initiated a process of adapting regulations and implementing programs aimed at protecting children. Chapter VII of the Code for Children and Adolescents establishes 15 as the minimum age at which children are allowed to work, protects the labour rights of adolescents, and imposes monetary fines on employers who violate those laws. Article 78 of the Code prohibits adolescents from working in jobs involving risk or danger to their development, and to their physical, mental, and emotional health, or jobs that hinder their attending school. In addition, Article 94 prohibits adolescents from working in unhealthy and dangerous environments that involve dangerous machinery, contaminating substances, and excessive noise, among other risks.

Efforts made by public institutions, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations include care and support for registered underage workers, academic scholarships, and programmes to raise awareness. Nevertheless, advances in regulations and scheduling have had a limited scope and have not entirely penetrated the informal economy, which is the sector with the greatest occurrences of child labour.

The Child Labour Survey included in the 2002 Multi-Purpose Household Survey, conducted by the National Statistics and Census Institute (with the collaboration of the Ministry of Labour and ILO-IPEC), estimates that 127,000 people in Costa Rica between the ages of 5 and 17 are working, 71.5 percent of whom are men and 28.5 percent are women. Among that working population, 39.43 percent are under age 15 (the legal minimum working age). Furthermore, 43.7 percent receive no pay for their work, and this figure reaches 68.1 percent for those under age 15 and 49.9 percent for children in rural areas. They work an average of 23 hours per week, with the older ones working longer hours than the younger ones. The school dropout rate is 44.1 percent for children who work; 51.7 percent of those who remain in school are academically below their age level.

5 Undécimo Informe "Estado de la Nación en Desarrollo Humano y Sostenible" [11th Report: State of the Nation in Sustainable Human Development], p. 367.

6 "Pobreza ahuyenta colegiales de las aulas" [Poverty banishes school children from the classroom], La Nación, January 23, 2004, El País section.

7 Undécimo Informe "Estado de la Nación en Desarrollo Humano y Sostenible" [11th Report: State of the Nation in Sustainable Human Development], p. 363.

## Costa Rica Social Indicators

Human Development Index	0.838
Total Population (millions) 1	4,248,481
% Urban/rural population	59 / 41
Unemployment rate 1	6.5
% of families below the poverty line 1	21.7
Population under age 15 1	1,230,203
% of underage children who work	10.7
% of child labour population in urban	
/rural areas	34 / 66

### Sources

1. 11th State of the Nation.
2. ILO IPEC.

Among underage workers, 43.4 percent work in agriculture, forestry, and hunting, and 21.7 percent are involved in commerce and repair of vehicles and household items. Among child and adolescent labourers, 68.5 percent live in rural areas and 31.5 percent in urban areas.

### Child and Adolescent Domestic Labour

As opposed to other forms of child and adolescent labour, domestic work is mostly unseen by society in general, because it is done in the privacy of a home.

It is socially acceptable for an underage person to help, at certain times, with his or her own family's housework as a training activity. However, the health and integrity of girls, boys, and adolescents are often placed at risk in homes, and their right to recreation and education is restricted.

Domestic work is further worrisome when it is done as a paid job in homes other than that of the child's nuclear family.

Studies specializing in this matter point out the high rate of and vulnerability to sexual abuse that young and adolescent girls face while employed as domestic workers, most of the time at the hands of the employers themselves or of persons close to them. Other forms of emotional and verbal abuse also occur regularly.

According to an ILO-IPEC study, more than 90 percent of child domestic workers in Central America and the Dominican Republic are girls,<sup>8</sup> which reveals the influence of gender socialization in this phenomenon.

While other areas of child labour primarily involve males, many families require their young and adolescent girls to work in order to contribute to the family income. Work in the homes of others is seen as one of the first options, without considering the enormous risks involved.

As with other forms of child labour, child and adolescent domestic workers face serious difficulties and violations of their rights. It is estimated that in Central America and the Dominican Republic, only 11 percent of these workers attend school regularly and 90 percent receive less than the legal minimum wage.<sup>9</sup> Also, the long workdays prevent the children from exercising their right to recreation.

8 ILO: *Trabajo Infantil Doméstico en América Central y República Dominicana – Síntesis Subregional* [Child Domestic Labour in Central America and the Dominican Republic – Subregional Synthesis Report], 2002. p. 56.  
9 *Idem*. p. 67.

## Conclusion

En Costa Rica, y en otros países, las personas menores de 18 años de edad, en su mayoría niñas y adolescentes, que realizan trabajos domésticos, enfrentan un problema doblemente peligroso; no solo ven violentarse sus derechos sino que la mayoría de las veces los riesgos físicos y psicológicos a los que están expuestas pasan inadvertidos. Por realizarse en el ámbito privado (en “la casa”), el trabajo doméstico infantil y adolescente es una actividad que suele ser invisible a estudios y estadísticas.

A esto habría que añadir toda la carga cultural que pesa sobre el denominado “papel de la mujer”, que indudablemente contribuye a que este trabajo sea socialmente aceptado y visto como una mera forma de “ayuda”. Esta percepción se acentúa aún más porque muchas veces esta labor se desempeña en casas de la misma comunidad o de personas relacionadas con la familia.

La frase típica de estas niñas, “Yo no trabajo, solo ayudo”, permite ver claramente lo que ellas y muchas otras personas sienten acerca del trabajo doméstico infantil y adolescente. Pero lo cierto es que se están violando derechos; uno de los más importantes: la posibilidad de recibir una educación. Las largas jornadas de trabajo o el horario en que laboran se convierten en un obstáculo para que ellas puedan asistir a la escuela o al colegio. Tal y como lo señala el OIT-IPEC<sup>16</sup>, a mayor cantidad de horas de trabajo, menores son las posibilidades de acceder a una educación.

Asimismo, al realizarse en un espacio tan privado como lo es una casa, las niñas y adolescentes se ven fácilmente expuestas a malos tratos y abusos (las largas jornadas mencionadas anteriormente son solo uno de ellos). La remuneración económica suele ser poco justa y difícilmente cuentan con otros derechos laborales, como el seguro social.

Por otro lado, entre las tareas que normalmente realiza una niña o adolescente trabajadora doméstica están: planchar, cocinar y cargar objetos pesados —lo que las expone al riesgo de sufrir quemaduras y lesiones—; lavar ropa, trastos, vehículos y otros utensilios— con lo que entran en contacto con sustancias que, mal empleadas, podrían ser un peligro—; cuidar la casa y hacer mandados —lo que las expone a ser víctimas de un asalto o a enfrentar a un delincuente—.

Pero, quizás una de las labores que más preocupan es la de cuidar a otros niños y niñas e incluso a adultos mayores, con lo que se violenta el Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia, que establece que ninguna persona menor de 18 años de edad deberá tener a su cargo el cuidado de otra persona. La inexperiencia y la incapacidad de una niña o adolescente “cuidadora” representan una seria amenaza para ambas partes.

Además, por la naturaleza del trabajo doméstico, estas niñas y adolescentes están expuestas a múltiples situaciones de abuso psicológico y sexual por parte de sus empleadores o de las personas allegadas a estos.

Los testimonios que aquí hemos recogido dejan entrever que este es un problema complejo, multicasual y en el que intervienen tanto factores económicos como factores sociales y culturales. Por ello, solo el trabajo integrado de organizaciones no gubernamentales, de instituciones gubernamentales, de organismos internacionales y de las propias familias puede ayudar a encontrar una solución que contribuya a mejorar las oportunidades que se les puedan entregar a estas niñas y adolescentes.

16 El TIAD en CR, yo no trabajo solo ayudo. 2003

# Adults' Opinions on the Subject



## GRACIELA MIRANDA

*Bobby in the Canton of Los Chiles*

*"Parents take their children to harvest coffee, to the cane fields, to all those harvests. They take them out of school, and it's a shame that they have to repeat the same grade year after year. By harvest season, the majority of the children have left school. One also sees girls who are being abused. Even family members abuse girls. It's common around here, because they are left alone."*

## AUXILIADORA CASTILLA

*Open Classroom Teacher at the Los Chiles School*

*"Because almost all the mothers are heads of the family, they put the eldest daughter in charge of the house, so the teenage girls in the open classroom are taking care of all their siblings, even when they go to the coffee, cane, or orange harvests. The older girls are responsible for all the children. They have to get them up, bathe them, cook over the fire, and bring water in buckets from the well."*

*"Child labour limits the children's education. When a girl is put in charge of her siblings (usually five or six instead of just one), she has to wash, cook, feed, and watch over them. And there's no one telling her to go study. So the only time the child gets to study is at school because at home she is doing all the housework, and after she watches the younger children, she has to go see to the garden. So then, there's not really any education at home for her. The only education she gets is what we give her here at school."*



## DOÑA MARÍA

*Rosita's Mother*

*"I prepare pastries or cornbread for Rosita to sell on the weekends. She earns 3,000 colones when she sells all the bags. Her brother, Manuel, is a boy and he's stronger. He goes out to sell a bucket full of cornbread. He doesn't like it; he's embarrassed and cries. I don't like to make him work because he's young. But there's no other way; he knows he has to go because his dad is old and doesn't get work, and I'm ill with bone fever."*

# Definitions and Basic Concepts

For the purposes of this publication, "child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."<sup>1</sup>

- Worst forms of Child Labour according to ILO Convention 182<sup>2</sup>:
  - a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
  - b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
  - c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
  - d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
- Child Labour  
Children's participation in economic activity that negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education. This means all children below 12 years of age working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 14 years engaged in harmful work, and all children engaged in the worst forms of child labour.<sup>3</sup>  
Occupation that denies children or adolescents their childhood, potential and dignity, and is damaging to their physical and mental development<sup>4</sup>
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation  
The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.<sup>5</sup>
- Work  
Human activities, paid or unpaid, that produce the goods or services in an economy, or supply the needs of a community, or provide a person's accustomed means of livelihood.<sup>6</sup>

## About Child Labour<sup>7</sup>

- Some Characteristics:
  - a) Children start working at an earlier age in rural areas rather than in cities
  - b) 80% of children work in an informal economy
  - c) Work prevents children from attending school or limits their academic performance
- Conditions:
  - a) Working hours are longer than the maximum limits established by many national laws for an adult worker
  - b) Low Income: 90% of child workers between the ages of 10 and 14, earn wages that are equal to or below the minimum wage, approximately 20% lower than the income of an adult with a 7th grade school level. Children are paid an even lower salary than that or are paid in kind.
  - c) Children do not have labour rights
  - d) Jobs are precarious
- Causes:
  - a) Poverty
  - b) Family violence
  - c) Social and cultural patterns
- Consequences of child labour at all levels:  
Social and Moral:
  - a) Encourages inequality
  - b) Violates the fundamental human rights of children and adolescents
  - c) Leads to a loss of self-esteem, problems of social adaptation and trauma

<sup>1</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1

<sup>2</sup> ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, article 3

<sup>3</sup> As opposed to Child Labour: Child work: Children's participation in economic activity - that does not negatively affect their health and development or interfere with education, can be positive. Work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 138. [http://www.unicef.org/protection/index\\_childlabour.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_childlabour.html)

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from: Guía Práctica para Parlamentarios, Número 3-2002, Erradicar las peores formas de Trabajo Infantil, Guía para implementar el convenio núm. 182 de la OIT

<sup>5</sup> The Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm, Sweden, 1996, [http://www.ecpat.net/eng/A4A02-03\\_online/ENG\\_A4A/Appendices\\_1\\_Stockholm.pdf](http://www.ecpat.net/eng/A4A02-03_online/ENG_A4A/Appendices_1_Stockholm.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ILO-Thesaurus/english/tr2454.htm>

<sup>7</sup> ILO, <http://www.oit.org.pe/ipec/pagina.php?pagina=156>

Physical and Psychic:

- d) Chronic diseases
- e) Dependence on medicines
- f) Physical and Psychic abuse

Economic:

- g) Working children fall behind in school by an average of 2 grades or 2 school years in the long-term which means a salary that is 20% lower during their adult lives
- h) Loss of buying power in the national market
- i) The lack of an education (loss of school years) translates into an lower quality of human capital in society

## The Position of World Vision on the Issue of Child Labour<sup>8</sup>

The experience of World Vision, given its work in developing countries among the most marginalized people, indicates that children will continue to work until there are feasible and sustainable alternatives for the family and communities. By ignoring this, we endanger the lives of children. In a world characterized by poverty and inequality among the rich and the poor, work is a reality and a need for many children.

Based on this perception, World Vision, is making efforts to abolish the most extreme and dangerous forms of child labour (exploitation), such as Sexual Commercial Exploitation, slavery, any form of work that involves very small children and any job that represents a danger for a child's physical, emotional or spiritual health.

World Vision has been a firsthand witness of the devastating results of attempting to eradicate all child labour immediately. In addition to recognizing the obvious problem represented by exploitative child labour, non-governmental organizations, governments and the corporate sector must avoid the automatic, though, comprehensible, temptation of demanding that child labour be immediately abolished. This may be a well-intentioned measure but may have disastrous consequences. For this reason, World Vision does not support punitive intervention, or boycotts of consumers or sanctions. Instead, World Vision defends a multi-disciplinary approach:

- To quickly eradicate the worst forms of child labour
- Convince the employer in the formal sector to improve conditions and shorten the number of work hours
- Establish alternate ways of generating income for families
- Improve access to good quality and adequate education
- Confront structural impediments that generate and aggravate poverty

These changes are possible only if long-term structural changes are introduced

The underlying causes of child labour are basically structural: generalized poverty, great inequality, deficient or inadequate education, malnutrition, the structure of the country's economy, consumption patterns and macroeconomic policy frameworks.

This does not mean that poverty automatically cause children to enter the workforce. However, it creates the conditions for this phenomenon to be more likely. In reality, the reasons for which child workers are preferred are not economic. Children are not as aware of their rights as adult workers are. Children are, therefore, easier to exploit.

When children are forced to work in order to survive, their interests may be better protected if employers are encouraged to cease exploitative practices. This type of transition focus requires the application of adequate health and safety conditions within the workplace, reasonable hours, meals, education and skills training.

Prevention, elimination and rehabilitation comprise the three columns of any strategy for eliminating exploitative child labour. Of these, prevention is the most difficult since it covers long-term solutions based on the family and the community in both a national and international environment.

## Is education the answer?

One of the keys for preventing and resolving child labour is education. Although, education alone is not enough to end child abuse, it is key to a larger program that seeks to diminish poverty and other pressures that push children into the workforce.

In order for education to be an effective weapon in the fight against child labour, it must be mandatory and allow equal access for both boys and girls. It must be high quality, pertinent, free of charge and realistically flexible, for example, taking into account the agricultural harvest seasons and related needs for families who work in agriculture.

In areas where there is a high index of child labour as well as elevated high school drop-out rates, it is often discovered that the education offered is low level. An inadequate education inadvertently pushes children into the workforce, since by working they can learn a trade and learn skills to earn income.

It is possible to eradicate child labour. In the short-term, we must force ourselves to eradicate the most extreme forms of child labour. In the medium and long-terms, governments, consumers, children's rights groups should combine efforts in order to guarantee that children have the opportunity to develop their potential and satisfy their needs and fundamental rights as human beings.

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<sup>8</sup> By Melanie Gow- Policy and Advocacy- Word Vision Australia, 2000.



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