

**“Stop Child Labour, School is the best place to work”, Africa Tour 2008 – Report  
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As a part of the campaign to promote the cause of total abolition of child labor and ensure that children enjoy their right to education, the international campaign “Stop Child Labour, School is the best place to work” (SCL) in cooperation with “Stichting Kinderpostzegels Netherland” has organized the Stop Child Labour Tour in Africa. The delegation of child rights defenders from India (me), Nepal (Ms. Radha Koirala) and Morocco (Mr. Driss Elyoubi) shared their experiences on withdrawing children from the labor force and mainstreaming them into formal schools.

The Stop Child Labour campaign is based on rights perspective and takes a non-negotiable stand that ‘no child must be engaged in any form of labor and all children must attend full time formal schools’. It sees schools as the best instruments to keep children out of the labor force.

The delegation visited five countries: Morocco (October 8-11), Ethiopia (October 12-17), Zimbabwe (October 18-24), Uganda (October 25-31) and is currently in Kenya (November 1-6). In each of the countries it met with a wide range of people from the government, civil society organizations and also the community leaders, school teachers, parents and children during field visits.

### **Common denominators**

While the countries were marked by diversity in terms of culture, political regimes and economic stability, there was also a remarkable likeness in the vocabulary of development programs related to children and the yearning for education among poor parents and local youth.

Further, it was also noticed that in all the countries the profile of children who are out of schools is very similar. In the rural areas many of them work on farms and also as cattle herders and shepherds, some of whom can be as young as three years of age.

Many children leave their villages in rural areas to work as domestic servants in the cities, more often than not ending up exploited and abused. In the urban slums the presence of street children who have been drawn into drug and other forms of substance abuse caught in illegal networks was quite apparent.

There are some brokers and middlemen who are involved in the child begging business. Many young children are also engaged in the traditional handicrafts production. It was especially in the town of Fes in Morocco where one heard stories of such children’s exploitation.

## Concrete cases

In Uganda, children from the Karamoja region, which lies in an underdeveloped northern part of the country, have migrated in large numbers to Kampala due to chronic violence in the region.

Also, an estimated number of 25,000 children have been abducted by the so called Lord's Resistance Army in the neighboring districts to the west of Karamoja. While a ceasefire between this armed group and the central government's troops has been holding for the last two years, we have been told by a local NGO that many of the kidnapped children have now been sold to other countries too.

The prevalence of child trafficking, child prostitution and child soldiers showed the increasing vulnerability of children in all the countries. There were stories of children who have become breadwinners in households in which both parents died of HIV/AIDS. We as the team felt that we needed to know more about high proportions of such children and their survival with dignity and access to all their entitlements. Undoubtedly, all these children could have been protected if only their education through full time formal schools was regarded as non-negotiable. The team felt that all children are to be given every support to complete school without any disruption.

There were some disturbing trends too in the actions of some well informed citizens like civil servants, government officials, educated families who actually employ children as domestic help, denying them their right to education. They were even offering justifications for the same.

There is a need to have a code of conduct for the staff of NGOs and the government officials who should officially declare that they do not employ children in their own homes and offices.

We also found that the Tanganda Tea Estates Company in Zimbabwe runs a scheme called 'Earn and Learn' where children work and study at the same time. However, it should be noted that for some of the students the hard work in the fields is difficult to cope with, so the school actually does report some drop-outs. This is unacceptable as it does not relieve children of the drudgery of work. The team felt that there is a need to give them rights-based perspective and train them to actually help children withdraw from work and prepare them through bridge courses to access formal schools.

In Morocco the delegation was struck by the positive role of school teachers in existing efforts to retain every child in school. Indeed, their self-esteem as teachers was very evident and undoubtedly, their endeavor to reach out to all out-of-school children and persuading child laborers to join schools has given them an extra credibility as pedagogues. The undertakings of these teachers are to be taken to scale in Morocco and also in all other countries.

In Ethiopia the delegation found the contributions made by parents and the community in some of the poorest of habitations for sustaining local schools very heartening. In the discussion that ensued with the community, it was evident that the local headmen were ready to take up the challenge of eliminating child labor in their community and ensuring that all children attend school. The civil society based organizations (CBOs) too were actively involved in a process of strengthening schools. It would be really worthwhile to map such initiatives of the local

population and consolidate all their endeavors through active support of the government and the donors.

In Zimbabwe the coming together of the trade unions, teachers' unions and the NGOs through the Coalition against Child Labour (CACLAZ) is a significant move. They have worked together to build awareness on the issue of abolition of child labor, linking it to the provision of school education. Their activities would require greater percolation to the field and given the support to this alliance it is possible to deepen their campaign with the communities. It must be mentioned that the delegation was moved by the demand for education even in a country which is currently going through deep crisis in the economy as well policy.

In Uganda, the work of Kids in Need (KIN) showed dedication and commitment to rehabilitating urban street children through multiple interventions and reintegrating them into formal schools.

The team felt that the programs aimed at addressing older children and giving them the opportunities to be prepared for formal school required further strengthening. It was also felt that an 'area based approach' of covering all children whether in school or outside the school net and protecting their rights would enable sustaining the efforts that have been put in.

The Minister for Youth and Children in a discussion with the delegation fully agreed with the notion that a child out of school means perpetuation of child exploitation and child labour. In order to protect children's rights he acknowledged the significance of enforcing the right to education. There was also a need to have a greater empowerment of the National Council for Children (NCC), an agency operating within the governmental structure but without the real power to implement programs and policies.

In Kenya the delegation visited two different non-formal schools in Nairobi's largest slum area, where up to a million people live and work so to speak in a grey zone, because in the eyes of the law their informal settlement does not exist. This has until very recently meant that the right to education of an overwhelming majority of the city's child population has in effect been denied. There are now hopes that the situation can be addressed through a cooperation of NGOs and government.

The delegation welcomes this development and uses this opportunity to urge the Kenyan government that it integrates all of the existing non-formal schools into formal system as it should be the responsibility of every government to provide free primary education to its citizens, not only on paper but in reality.

In sum, the delegation felt that the following issues are to be addressed by the Government in all the countries and taken up by the civil society organizations:

1. To introduce the perspective of having a 'child labor free zone' through an intensive social mobilization and covering of all children in the school going age. In this the international agencies such as the UNICEF and ILO as well as the donors have a major role to play. In our discussions with them a clear interest was shown on their part in the 'area based approach' of establishing child labor free zones. It is necessary that they give

support to the governments in developing a policy on child labor and education and create pilot programs to demonstrate the efficacy of the model for a total abolition of child labour and ensuring that every child is in school.

2. To introduce flexibility in the school governance system to accommodate school drop outs, non-enrolled children and older children back into the school system and prepare them for an age appropriate class; there is also a requirement of relaxation of procedures for admission, examinations and so on;
3. To make education free without charging school fees or any other payments; although in many countries education is free, it has been discovered that schools continue to collect fees through many methods leading to the exclusion of poor in schools. A campaign against school fee has to be taken up by the NGOs in this regard;
4. There has been a demand for lunch meals in schools, as it has been found that many children discontinue due to hunger, a campaign in this regard is necessary;
5. In almost every country there are zones of conflict. These zones have to be converted into child friendly zones and in the process efforts are to be made to ensure that the education of children is not disrupted.
6. To encourage involvement of private sector in democratizing schools, improving access and retention of children in formal schools and highlight the initiatives of the private sector as in the case of a telephone company in Zimbabwe that provides over 25,000 scholarships to poor children who are attending schools.
7. To integrate all of the existing non-formal/innovative models into formal education system.

The team witnessed an explosive demand among poor parents for education of their children. They are struggling against odds to support their children's education. They have not lost hope though. Let us not burden them any further. Let us all in the government, civil society, NGOs, international agencies, donor community and each one of us share the burden and make sure that they win their battle for education. Let us build an environment encouraging children's right to education and child labor free zones. Let us make sure that the State fulfils its obligation to provide for schools and protect children from exploitation.

Finally, I wish to thank the Stop Child Labour Campaign for giving me and my team from Morocco and Nepal and the journalists from Czech Republic this opportunity to visit Africa and for making all the arrangements for the same.

Nairobi  
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