



**GLOBAL MARCH**  
Against Child Labour  
Contra el Trabajo Infantil  
Contre le Travail des Enfants



Education International  
Internationale de l'Éducation  
Internacional de la Educación  
Bildungsinternationale



# Civil Society Position Paper on Child Labour in Africa: Urgent Priorities from the Continent



We, a Group of CSOs, are ***committed and working towards the eradication of child labour in the Global South and Global North since over two decades***. This CSO Group is led by the Global March Against Child Labour, Work: No Child's Business (WNCB, Alliance of the Stop Child Labour coalition, Save the Children the Netherlands and UNICEF the Netherlands), and Education International, and others. We represent the voices, concerns and aspirations of national and local civil society organisations, trade unions, communities and children across the world including Africa. The CSO Group members have been working for years, ***towards ensuring that children and families have a life of respect and dignity, where all human rights are enjoyed and realised***.

The CSO Group welcomes the convening of the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour this year in May in South Africa. The Conference being organised against the backdrop of the slowed reduction of child labour, with COVID-19 threatening to further derail progress made so far, and less than 4 years left for the SDG 8.7 target of 2025, is timely.

We share our vision and call for urgent action ***towards ensuring that the children of Africa are able to enjoy their childhood, free from exploitation, and are able to tap their full potential through education and learning*** to create value for themselves, their communities and society upon adulthood.

## **ACCELERATE THE ERADICATION OF CHILD LABOUR IN AFRICA: WHAT MUST HAPPEN**

These 3 key asks are based on the key issues on child labour emerging from the African continent:

- 1) **Call to action for qualitative, formal and safe education**, i.e., investing in quality, formal, full-time education for all children up to the age of 15 across the world. In addition, all children from 15 to 18 years old should be supported to continue formal, full-time quality education.

This means governments, donors and stakeholders should invest:

- a) In **increased allocation of budget on child labour and education portfolio**, with at least 20% of the national budget or 6% of the GDP in quality public education and ensuring strong synergies between education and adequately resourced child protection and social protection systems.
- b) In the **safe reopening of schools** closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or other crises, for all children but with priority on the younger children as they are most at risk as per ILO data.
- c) In **quality training, recruitment and decent working conditions for teachers**, and in ensuring that teachers still receive their salaries in the event of school closure due to COVID-19 and/or other crises.
- d) In **adequately responding to displacement/migration and child labour as a result of climate and insecurity crises**, with the development and implementation of **safe**

**learning environment policies**, through ensuring IDP<sup>1</sup>s and migrant children's **right to quality education**, and through investing in **social protection measures** for children and families threatened by climate and insecurity crises.

- 2) Call to action to **increase inclusive strategies and policies** to eliminate child labour, including:
  - a) Increase **gender equality and promote inclusive strategies** - without distinctions of caste, religion, disability or any other forms of discrimination and exclusion – and develop and implement safe learning policies to protect and support all children to enrol and stay in school.
  - b) Invest in **social protection measures** (such as cash allowances/grants, VSLAs<sup>2</sup>, support to set up IGAs<sup>3</sup>, school feeding programmes, etc.) targeting families with children at risk of child labour for children to access and remain in school, at least till primary education as a first step and priority.
- 3) Call to action towards scaling up efforts to **eliminate child labour beyond global supply chains**, especially in **agriculture** - including sub-sectors such as subsistence farming, fisheries and aquaculture, and other sectors such as **domestic work**, which are largely part of the informal economy where bulk of child labour is prevalent.

This means governments, donors and stakeholders should:

- a) Promote **measures to address child labour in family farming** such as increasing the incomes of smallholder and family farms in agriculture in order to end their functional dependence on child labour and risk for these children to enter child labour at an early age.
- b) Promote decent working conditions for adults, including living wages, and ensure adequate labour inspection and monitoring systems are put in place towards **formalising the informal economy**.

## 1. KEY AND URGENT ISSUES FROM THE CONTINENT

### 1.1 Overall context: situation in Africa on child labour

The prevalence of child labour in Africa has consistently been high, hovering around 20% of all child labour globally (refer to the table below). However, as per the latest data, Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as the region with the highest prevalence and largest number of children in child labour, 23.9% or 86.6 million children between 5 to 17 years. In fact, there are now more children in child labour in sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined. It is evident that the global child labour goals will not be achieved without a breakthrough in this region.

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<sup>1</sup> Internally Displaced Person

<sup>2</sup> Village Savings and Loan Association

<sup>3</sup> Income Generating Activities

Year of child labour data	Total child labour (globally)	Total child labour (in Africa)	Percentage of child labour in Africa
2008	215 million	65 million	25.3%
2012	168 million	59 million	21.4%
2016	151 million	70 million	22.4%
2020	160 million	87 million	23.9%

An overview of the issue of child labour in the continent:

- Official figures state that there are **more boys than girls in child labour, i.e, 56.1% vis-a-vis 43.9%, however girls' work is often undercounted**. Paid /unpaid domestic work in third party house mostly engages young girls, though either such work is not recognised as child labour in national legislations or/and if recognised, there is limited implementation and impact of such legislation/s.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest share of young children in child labour, i.e, 60% of child labour in Africa is from the 5-11 years age group (~52 million)**. Implying that millions of children in the continent are entering child labour at a very young age, which will have negative implications for their development and well-being. Combining this with the 12-14 years age group, ~73 million children are in child labour, pointing to **serious concerns and inadequacies with regard to the universal primary education legislation, policies and efforts in the continent**. This point is further re-iterated by the data that nearly 30% of child labour from 5-14 age group in the continent are not in school.
- **Child labour is a rural phenomenon** in Africa, with number of child labour in rural areas being 4.5 times the number of child labour in urban areas. This data also correlates with the sectoral data, wherein one finds that nearly **80% of child labour in Africa is found in the agricultural sector**. Also, **more than 80% of all child labour takes place as family work**, further implying that maximum child labour takes place in agro-rural sector/areas as unpaid family work. **Further, agricultural work in Africa serves as a major entry point for the youngest children**.

## 1.2 Key issues from the continent

### *Limited efforts with respect to ensuring good quality public education*

Providing access to formal quality public education for all children is one of the most effective strategies for eradicating child labour and alleviating poverty. Child labour research has solidly documented the relationship between child labour and schooling. For example, children's work is associated with both lower school intake and late school entry signalling that good quality public education is also considered an effective vaccine against child labour.

An example from Kolwezi area, the copper and cobalt belt of Democratic Republic of Congo indicates how lack of access and provision of good quality public education is a key driver of

child labour. In the Kolwezi area, there are inadequate schools to provide education to all children. The few schools that are there have a high fees structure, making them unaffordable and unattractive to children from poor families, thus making work in mines an accessible alternative that also puts food on the table.

Despite universal primary education efforts by governments in most countries in the continent, millions of children of primary school-going age are out of school, at risk of child labour, i.e. 32 million (2018). An example from Kaliro district of Uganda can be cited here. As per the District Education Officer in a study conducted by NGO on child labour in sugarcane growing, despite there being UPE in Uganda where education is considered free and compulsory, additional payments are required by primary schools ranging from UGX 20,000 - 100,000. Children from poor families who cannot afford it, are forced to drop-out.

Factors responsible for high out of school and drop-out rates include rural disadvantage to education access especially at secondary level, the existence of important quality gaps in relation to infrastructure, teaching/learning materials, and teaching and learning outcomes, negligible/limited social protection measure that support/enable school enrolment and retention, and affordability (education/school related fees), all of which affect perceptions about expected returns to schooling. In spite of the large school-going child population, public spending on education had stagnated at about 4% of GDP, even before the pandemic and is lower than that of other regions.

COVID-19 and prolonged school closure had furthered education exclusion amongst children from the vulnerable communities, leading to school dropouts and learning gaps, but government efforts to ensure continuity of education for all children have been limited. 69 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa alone are not in school due to COVID-19 and pre-pandemic drivers. In Ghana among other countries, during the pandemic while the government provided distance learning programs, it was found that children without access to televisions, mobile devices, and internet were unable to access the programs.

According to an estimate of UNESCO, before the pandemic, nearly 69 million teachers needed to be recruited. The pandemic has worsened the situation. In sub-Saharan Africa, the shortage is already at a crisis stage.

Clearly, children in Africa need more support to return to schools safely and catch up on missed education as soon as possible.

### ***Low coverage of social protection initiatives that support children and families at risk of child labour***

More than 40 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still lives in extreme poverty and rates of inequality remain at persistently high levels in many sub-Saharan African countries. In such a scenario, social protection measures can help families in reducing vulnerability and poverty, and also the likelihood of resorting to child labour. However, the region as a whole, still has much lower coverage than other regions, i.e., only 17% of the population in Africa is covered by at least one social protection benefit. Over the last decade or two, more and more African countries have been introducing social protection schemes

targeting vulnerable population groups, including children and families, but effective coverage rates are low in most countries.

Lapses in social protection systems and low coverage in rural areas have been seen in Liberia and Tanzania to respectively fuel child labour. A study on child labour and COVID-19, covering Ghana and Uganda noted that despite being pathfinder countries under Alliance 8.7, both countries lagged behind its regional peers in utilising cash transfer programs to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, which serve as a safety net protecting families living on the margins, from increased vulnerability, including pushing children from school to work.

An example of how social protection policies can support education and reduce probability of child labour is from Niger. In Niger, school meal programmes within the adolescent girls' strategy resulted in improved graduation rate of female students' education from 32 per cent in the 2013-14 school year to 68 per cent in the 2014-2015 school year.

### ***The deplorable situation of girls in light of COVID aftermath, and the need to put special attention to it***

School closures amidst COVID-19 has put more girls in the continent vulnerable to child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Teenage pregnancies have risen 60% in part of South Africa, alone<sup>4</sup>. Combining it with policies and practices in some countries across sub-Saharan Africa that do not allow pregnant girls or young mothers to continue their education, it is estimated to keep 1 million girls at home even once school reopen<sup>5</sup>, and vulnerable to child labour and gender-based abuse. Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zambia are some countries that have seen a surge in teenage pregnancy amidst COVID-19.

Amid the pandemic, it is also expected and likely that more girls will find themselves being pushed into domestic work, which is normally considered acceptable for girls though often hidden, child labour in domestic work goes unrecognised or under-regulation in national legislation.

### ***Inadequate resource allocation on child labour, indicative of low priority to child labour portfolio in social and development plans and policies***

While countries have brought child labour within national legislation, national programmes on child labour have tended to receive low attention within national development and social priorities. For example, Child Labour Units and National Steering Committees charged with implementation of national action plan on child labour continue to be understaffed and under-resourced. Child Labour Units riddled with shortage of labour inspectorates and limited resources for inspection, translates into limited enforcement of child labour legal-policy framework.

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<sup>4</sup><https://news-decoder.com/teenage-pregnancies-soar-in-africa-as-schools-shut-for-covid/>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.wvi.org/opinion/view/nearly-one-million-pregnant-sub-saharan-african-girls-may-be-blocked-returning-school>

An example of child labour being an unfunded priority is from Jinja, Uganda. In Jinja, the labour department receives zero funds from the central government. It is only from the district revenue that UGX 2 million (USD 571) is allocated for labour activities. This amount is distributed for use over 12 months by the 2 member staff of the labour department.

***Challenges with regard to addressing child labour in agriculture, and domestic work, largely part of the informal economy***

Despite the pervasiveness of child labour in agriculture sector in the continent, addressing child labour in this sector has been fraught with challenges and efforts have either been inadequate and/or inefficient.

Legislation has had little impact in the agriculture sector as they remain limited, non-applicable, unenforced or only poorly enforced in many countries. For example, in Uganda while growing, planting, harvesting and transporting sugarcane are among hazardous activities in national law, not permitted for employment of children, child labour in this sub-sector is common in the Eastern region, indicating gaps in law enforcement. A key reason for weak enforcement is that government labour inspection services in agriculture and rural areas are either absent or weak. Also, as majority of children in agriculture are working or rather “helping out” in farms/fields as part of family work, making family child labour in agriculture invisible, hidden, unacknowledged and even more difficult to tackle. There is also the aspect of undue focus on selected popular crops and global supply chain such as cocoa, coffee, palm-oil and tobacco to name a few, whereas majority of child labour takes place for domestic consumption.

Child labour in domestic work continues to be another challenging yet neglected area. Child labour in this sector is often considered acceptable, a norm for girls, normally hidden from public view and beyond the scope of labour inspectorates, leaving children more vulnerable. The hidden nature and difficulty of detection of this type of child labour, has also led to gross underestimation in the prevalence figures of child labour in domestic work. This sector has also received less attention in child labour policy and programming vis-a-vis child labour in agro-sector. As mentioned earlier, with increased vulnerability of girls, child labour in domestic sector is expected to rise due to the pandemic. An example is from Malawi where an NGO in a span of 3 months alone in 2020, rescued 33 girls from domestic work. Rise in children engaged in domestic work has also been observed in Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>6</sup> and Uganda<sup>7</sup>.

The issue of child labour in agriculture and domestic work described above, clearly point out to the large prevalence of child labour in the informal economy. Though widespread addressing child labour in informal economy has been challenging with weak or missing legislation and its enforcement, and high vulnerabilities of people working compounded by social protection measures.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-childlabour-idUSKCN2D70WC>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.newvision.co.ug/articledetails/111603>

## ***Climate and insecurity crises contributing to population displacement/migration and child labour***

The continent has a majority of fragile and conflict-affected countries. Conflict-related insecurity, together with climate change have been a major source of school closures, population displacement, increased vulnerability, food crisis and child labour in large parts of Africa. Examples include the case of increasing drought in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan, which due to global warming is causing food crises with 1 in 4 people lacking enough food. This climate crisis is also increasing the threat of violent conflict. Multiple seasons of drought plus ongoing conflict in parts of Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan will likely result in extreme hunger<sup>8</sup>. All this is likely to affect populations already living on the margins, pushing children out of school and into work as coping mechanisms.

## **2. OUR EXPECTATIONS AND VALUES**

### **2.1 Our expectations from 5th Global Conference on Child Labour**

The CSO Group welcomes the convening of the 5th Global Conference on Child Labour this year in May in South Africa. The Conference being organised against the backdrop of the slowed reduction of child labour, with COVID-19 threatening to further derail progress made so far, and less than 4 years left for the SDG 8.7 target of 2025, is timely. Hosting the Conference for the first time in Africa signals a strong message and hope in particular for the 87 million children engaged in child labour in the continent of Africa. **Given this context, the CSO Group's expectation is that the Conference's conclusions and Call to Action effect real progress on the ground.** Key expectations of the CSO Group and the broader anti-child labour civil society network and movement from the 5th Conference are :

- **Priority focus and attention is given to the issue in Africa** towards making a breakthrough in the continent
- The Conference **outcomes go beyond an outcome document to instead include a concrete and practical agenda and action plan** with resource commitments and timelines towards the acceleration of the eradication of child labour
- **Intentional effort is made to ensure meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society actors** working on the issue of child labour, particularly from the Global South in all stages of the 5th Conference (agenda preparation, at the Conference and Conference follow-up)

### **2.2 Our joint values**

As a CSO Group we believe in the following :

- Child labour is a **universal human rights violation** and must be eradicated.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rescue.org/article/climate-crisis-here-what-it-looks-numbers>

- Child labour is an **impediment to social, economic, political and sustainable human development**.
- The elimination of child labour is a **core responsibility of the state** and is achievable if governments mobilise the political will and available resources.
- It is the **responsibility of all stakeholders** including government, business, trade unions and civil society organisations to work together to eradicate child labour, i.e., for the international community and individual governments, employers' and workers' organisations and the private sector to recognise the problem, take responsibility, and protect children as per their obligations under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the ILO Conventions 138 and 182.
- Sustainable eradication of child labour will require **concerted efforts towards tackling the root causes** of child labour.
- Among other strategies, **ensuring access to equitable and good quality public education to all children is fundamental** to addressing child labour, where right to education is a human right, a public good and the primary responsibility of the state.

This position paper is endorsed by and reflects the position and voices of the following organisations working towards eliminating child labour in Africa:

[Global March Against Child Labour](#), [Work: No Child's Business](#) (an Alliance of the Stop Child Labour Coalition, Save the Children Netherlands and UNICEF Netherlands), and [Education International](#).