

EDITORIAL

The International Labour Organisation estimates that there are 246 million working children aged between five and 17. Some would argue that not all work is detrimental to children – it can teach them discipline and self-reliance as well as important skills. It is the nature of the work which determines whether it is harmful. And for millions, such work is dangerous and destructive, depriving them of childhood, if not of life. A recent UNICEF Report states that “The most familiar example of adults exploiting children is hazardous labour. Adults often make children work long hours in homes, factories, in fields or on the streets, rather than sending them to school – denying them their fundamental rights to education and protection.”*

The forces behind such exploitation of children are powerful: greed, lust, war, poverty. The exploiters often see children as cheap and expendable. Poverty means that even caring families sometimes have to rely on child labour to survive. The realities of poverty were often behind children working in hazardous conditions in the past in many

western countries, and are behind much of the child labour which flourishes today. Simply banning such labour (if that were possible) could worsen the children's plight. But the terrible results are made clear in this newsletter. We hear about the dangers facing children working in Indian match-making factories or carrying heavy loads on the streets of Africa. Many miss out on education – reducing any chance of breaking out of the cycle of deprivation. It is not only poverty which must be tackled, but also the underlying attitudes which make education – particularly for girls – a lower priority for children than their labour. Also potentially harmful is the view that sees children as an investment for their parents' future rather than people in their own right.

A fundamental issue, as pointed out by the Children's Officer from ECUSA, is the question of how we value childhood. She argues that popular culture would have us regard it as just a mechanism to prepare for adulthood. Many use childhood as a tool, they do not value it. This is in sharp contrast to Our Lord's teaching. Jesus said “Suffer the little children to come unto me”. In a culture which did not value children, He gave them particular value and spoke of terrible

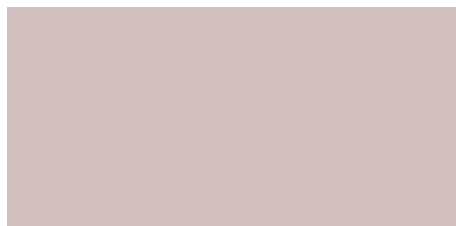
punishment for those who harm them.

The document “A World Fit for Children” was produced by the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children in May 2002. It stresses again the rights of children to education and the need to protect them from economic exploitation. This newsletter makes clear the amount of work which must be done to achieve this goal. But it also tells of practical projects which, even in a small way, are helping to alleviate the problems: cultivating pepper seeds in Ghana and so enabling parents to meet school fees; projects to help educate street children in Brazil; the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary working to raise awareness and bring some education and hope to child labourers in India. Christian organisations such as the Viva Network and Jubilee Action – and many others – focus their work on rescuing children from the worst forms of child labour. Despite the magnitude of the problems, there are things we, as members of the Anglican Communion and followers of Christ, can do.

*End Child Exploitation, UNICEF, January 2003

wastes from hospitals, discarded bottles of solvents and medicines. I also work in mines and work on electronic filaments through which my eyesight is getting damaged.

I am a child deprived of everything, deprived of physical, intellectual, social, spiritual and psychological growth. I have a malnourished body, scrawny hands, sagging shoulders, droopy eyes and chapped feet. I have never been to school. I am a stranger to the concept of three "R"s. I have had my experiences on exploitation, abuse, victimisation, injustice, oppression, cruelty and the like. I am not the future. My name is today.



SOUTH INDIA

Indian official declarations try to project that the country is almost free of child labour. But it is a very complex problem. When the bread winner of a family loses his/her mental or physical balance, the children are forced to work. Social securities are very limited. Efficient social structures such as family protection and community systems are also slowly breaking up.

According to official policy, any child below 15 years of age engaged to earn his/her livelihood for the family members is a child labourer. They are mostly involved in the unorganised production sectors such as woollen carpets, matches, crackers, domestic work. They do not get any education and their childhood is denied in many ways. Certain industries and factories are interested in child labour because they are cheap, easily controllable, easy to hire and fire and there is no fear about labour unrest.

Lakshmi (aged 15) was sent by her mother to a medical doctor's family as domestic help and was earning Rs.500/- per month. Her father was dead and her mother was already engaged in domestic work in another family. Lakshmi had no rest, no holidays. Her mother could only see her at the gate of the doctor's house. Lakshmi shared with her mother that she was tortured and one of the family members sexually abused her. One day, news came that Lakshmi had sprinkled kerosene on her body and set herself on fire. The mother and her relatives rushed to the spot. The mother saw only the half-burnt body of her daughter and cried loudly. Soon neighbours came and took

her to the hospital, but on the way she breathed her last. This story took place in an educated medical doctor's family.

The violence on a domestic worker by a medical doctor's family raises many questions. Is there any legal framework to employ domestic workers? Does not a doctor have the ethical sense to treat a domestic worker to save her life? Why did the police not take action – were they bribed by the doctor? What is the mystery behind the inaction of the state government? This is the story of many Lakshmis.

Murugan, an eight-year-old boy, was living with his parents and six brothers and sisters. As his father was not able to find work, the family was suffering. Agriculture was a total failure due to drought. One day, one of the agents of the match industries of Sivakasi came to Murugan's village, promising he would give Rs.500/- as advance money for child labour and would send a factory bus to that village if the number of children reached fifty. On hearing this, all parents were busy canvassing for more children and soon they reached the number. They received an advance amount and one fine morning, around 6a.m., a factory bus came to their village. All the children enthusiastically got in, not knowing of the hard exploitative labour that was their future.

The factory manager allotted these children to different units of match-making and crackers. They started their work playfully, but the supervisors were very strict, not allowing them to talk or turn round. They started working mechanically. Their fingers became misshapen and their happiness faded away – they felt they were in prison.

Murugan's family and the other families were able to sustain their life through the children's income. They were unhappy about their children's labour but there was no other way. One day Murugan's family heard that one cracker unit got blasted as a result of stray sparks. Murugan and his twelve friends were the victims. The factory owner tried to cover up everything and was able to dilute the seriousness of the human rights questions. The dream of many children, including Murugan, was lost in the ashes of their dead bodies.

At the local level, the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary (TTS) has been campaigning and responding to child labour issues, but there is a long way to go. Children's Rights Day was celebrated on November 25th by organising a painting competition. An educational tour took place for the working children who

My name is today. All of you believe and proclaim that we, the children, are the future of our society. But I work day and night just to survive. My childhood is maimed. I am living an un-seasonal adulthood. I see some children of my age at play, at school, in mother's lap and in father's arms. I wish I should have had them all. My dreams are unfulfilled. Resentments are bottled up and I cannot find an outlet to express them. My green childhood is cruelly replaced with the responsibility of supporting my very poor family.

If you look into my eyes, you cannot expect to see hope, innocence or trust. All these signs of childhood are replaced by betrayal, hunger and fear. My country, India, has earned the dubious distinction of having the highest number of child labourers like me.

You can find me in every nook and corner of our country. In Mirjapur Bhodhoi my name is Akram, where I work for a carpet industry along with my friends. My country is the world's largest maker of hand-knotted carpets and many children are involved in this industry.

I am Hussain in Firozabad, where I toil day and night in the glass industry. We make bulbs, bangles etc. We burn out our lives just for Rs.7 to Rs.8 per hour. Most of us stay on streets. At some place I am Raja and in another place I am Gopi. I heavily depend on my rag picking for my living. I even handle medical and radio-active

were denied childhood. There were also sports with the aim of highlighting play as an important component of affirming childhood and developing friendships. Furthermore the Children's Development Programme of TTS joined with a national campaign to urge the government to pass adequate laws and ensure basic education for all children. Another programme of TTS is the Day Care Centre. Through this, children – selected on the basis of low economic and social background – are encouraged to continue their education. Food, financial assistance and tuition are provided to free them from forced child labour. Their mothers and women in the locality are motivated to get skills-training like mushroom cultivation, jam, cake, candle making. The young mothers are motivated to start saving schemes and self-help groups to find local employment. The third programme is to send a few students to various parts of the Tamil Nadu state to involve and learn from the child labour eradication movements and organisations. Such students carry out these lessons in their future pastoral work.

The European market does not encourage child labour related products under the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Social clause. But there are many complex issues centred around child labour in Two-Thirds world countries. The policies of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the WTO indirectly push out traditional and artisan workers from their occupations, resulting in their children also becoming victims. These children are again deprived not having any work for their livelihood because child labour is treated as a social evil and against the principles of the WTO. Millions of children now at least get their livelihood through some sort of informal employment opportunities.

This is certainly not an attempt to justify child labour, but a plea to the world community to think how the children of the Two-Thirds world countries are robbed of their childhood and God's image. It is not just the responsibility of the state or national governments alone, but also of the global trading organisations which ultimately leave the dead body after sucking the blood of humans in the trading process. As long as unequal trading processes, unhealthy competition, dominating economic policies, and aggressive imperial attitudes are allowed to play in the world freely, we cannot dream of a child labour free world.

Sathya, from India, was 12 years old when his family had to borrow money for emergency medical expenses. When they could not repay the moneylender, Sathya was sold. He was forced to labour in the moneylender's factory – often 14 hours a day, six days a week – closing the ends of cigarettes.

Sathya was a victim of “bonded child labour”, in which children are forced into servitude to pay off a debt. Child labour is a complex issue and India has the highest number of working children in the world, including an estimated one million bonded child labourers. Sathya was paid only 20 rupees a week (approximately 50¢), with which his family was to repay the debt. Due to the exorbitant interest charged, he was destined to remain bonded to the moneylender for years.

Some people hearing Sathya's story would argue for an immediate ban on child labour. But in many societies, child labour is a way of life. While it can involve exploitation in hazardous conditions, it can also provide an essential boost to family income, for example allowing children to afford schooling. This sometimes makes it difficult to disentangle harm from benefit.

In Sathya's case, the situation was clear-cut. A local Christian children's project contacted the International Justice Mission (IJM), one of Viva Network's International Associates. The IJM is a Christian ministry helping people suffering from injustice. IJM investigators interviewed Sathya. They wrote down his story, read it to him and obtained his fingerprint on the document. It was then included in a report for the District Magistrate. Nine months later, Sathya was released and his moneylender arrested.

Sathya was fortunate but many other children are not. Bonded labour causes significant suffering and effective change requires governmental co-operation. As Human Rights Watch say, *“It is time for India's government to accept responsibility for the slavery in its midst... It is possible to end child servitude. The only thing lacking is will.”*

“The Small Hands of Slavery”, Human Rights Watch, 1996, ISBN 1-56432-172-X

For many years the school-going population of Malawi has been affected by child-labour. A current estimate is that perhaps 250,000 children (between the ages of 6 and 16) are involved – a figure which is dramatically increasing owing to the impact of AIDS, growing poverty and inadequate food.

In urban areas, particularly the two major cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, employment as domestic servants is engaging more and more young girls. Their remuneration is minimal and prostitution is an increasingly common alternative. Indeed, the local business community features in weekly newspaper “cartoons” over this notorious activity, carried out (apparently) in the belief that young girls are risk-free sexual partners. As for boys, they flood into the towns as street-vendors: today in Zomba three have been shot dead in a battle with the police. They can be seen loading and offloading trucks, frequently shifting weights that are far too heavy, and thus incurring injuries which may last a lifetime.

In the rural areas, available manpower is being eroded by malnutrition and disease, with statistics of (for example) TB and cholera seemingly ever on the increase. [Against this should be set Malawi's very impressive record for child immunisation, one of the best in Africa.] But “under-age”workers can still be found on tea or tobacco estates, while the many who are subsistence farmers of necessity use as many family members as possible in their fields, alongside more domestic duties. By Lake Malawi, boys often prefer to fish than to attend school – a not unnatural inclination! – but actually the only option at times for sheer survival, especially for

the growing number of orphans (now approaching 1 million).

While free primary education is in theory provided across the country, the reality is that only a proportion carry on as far as standard 8. Even fewer attend secondary school where fees range from 1000 kwacha (\$12) per term for day schools, to perhaps \$70 for those who board. The latter is good value for money, but few can afford it. Poverty precludes many from even thinking about such further studies, while the high incidence of AIDS-

related deaths among teachers means that the number actually available to be in schools is dropping far faster than those in training can replace them.

Malawi sometimes suffers a variable climate, with droughts or floods impacting in the growing season; But the efforts of many, including the churches, to promote development, life-skills and sustainable agriculture are too often thwarted by corruption within the government or civil service. "Ghost" teachers are found on pay rolls, and

considerable sums have been paid over for the construction of non-existent schools. Ministerial travel and parliamentary expense accounts still run at unaffordable levels of luxury, making the gap between rich and poor in Malawi as high as anywhere in the world.

UGANDA

Childhood is supposed to be the time of great adventures, for education and learning through playing. But in Uganda – as in many countries – childhood is likely to be spent working in often hard conditions for little or no pay. In Kabale, where there are families of perhaps nine or ten children, at an early age they are heavily relied on to perform tasks such as herding cattle, keeping shops, baby-sitting other children.

As with all aspects of Ugandan life, gender plays a big part in children's work allocation. While it used to be boys performing outdoor activities like digging, herding cattle and hunting, girls' duties were restricted to domestic/indoor activities like cleaning for the family and their male siblings. However, today girls do all the activities – outdoors and indoors – while the boy goes to school. The fact that children are considered for manual work encourages couples to produce more and more children to assist them. This results in more mouths to feed, more backs to clothe and more financial constraints. When these children are performing their agricultural and domestic

labours, they rarely attend school. The main reason for this is often lack of money for school fees. But the problem is accelerated by the lesser value pressed on education – particularly for girl children whose parents do not see the worth of education for her, as she will eventually be transferred to live with her husband's family. In rural areas especially, even for boys, schooling is not seen as a high priority. Instead they desire their boys to work hard to produce food for the ever-increasing families. Many people have not realised that education equips a child with the skills to increase their earning potential and to greatly improve their future lives. Until Ugandans realise that we must look to the future and educate our children, instead of using them as cheap labour, there will be little or no hope of continued successful development.

Some children work and pay some school fees in steps, and in holidays they have to work in order to pay the coming term's school fees and all in vain. The government of Uganda has imposed regulations for under-age people not to work for money and has introduced universal primary education but this has not been so successful because of headteachers who are so corrupt and have asked for school fees which has been a problem to so many children. But it has been good because some have attained more education with writing and reading.

However children working as house boys and girls has also been problematic because some employers have been so rude and sexy and involved them in sex. All this can increase the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases – hence decreasing the population.

It is therefore appropriate for boys and girls to start working when they have reached a maturity age of 18.

The issue of children working alongside their parents has different implications to different families in Ghana. Not long ago, in families where the head was an artisan, children working alongside the family head was regarded as a form of apprenticeship. It was accepted by society as a way of preparing the children towards the future and transferring the family trade from one generation to the other. However, in farming communities, child labour was regarded as such. The men marry many women to give birth to more children to help on the family farm, enabling them to farm big areas.

With the introduction of formal education, the idea of acquiring the family trade through apprenticeship in the family shop, or working alongside parents, was no longer tenable. The education system introduced many more vocational skills and professions for which the information required goes far beyond the parochial environments of a family. The modern education system, industrialisation, mechanisation and internal migration created a large number of hired labourers. These developments made the use of one's children as labourers on big farms unnecessary.

However, the two practices still exist to some extent among the urban poor, low-income groups, some rural communities and among the fisher folks. One major factor responsible for the working of children alongside their parents is the harsh economic conditions facing the average Ghanaian family. This forced some parents to make their children work alongside them in their various small-scale businesses.

Some parents do not use their own children but go to poorer communities outside their area to adopt children whom they use to help sell their wares. Sometimes, the biological parents of the children collect a little money and then offer the services of their children who could be as young as 12.

At the moment, there are some Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that are mounting education campaigns to educate parents who use their children to support them in their work to stop and send them to school. However, the greatest challenge is how the country could put in place a permanent system to support poor families and reduce

the tendency which forces parents to engage the labour of their children.

Helping to reduce school drop-out at Tinkong.

Tinkong is a small town near Koforidua. The area used to be one of major cocoa growing but over-exploitation of the forest resources and high illegal felling of trees destroyed the ecology.

Three years ago, one young teacher, Mr Fifi Out-Akuffo, decided to establish a NGO, Friends of the Environment, to help plant trees and educate the people of Tinkong about the need to protect the environment. The organisation depended a lot on school children who assisted in planting trees in schools and in the town and surrounding areas, and it got to know that many were dropping out of school because their parents could not afford to provide the uniforms and basic educational materials.

This made Friends of the Environment introduce a scheme to help the parents pay for the fees of their wards and provide them with their educational requirements. Normally parents in the area spend about 500 cedis daily on pepper. The Friends of the Environment decided it could give the school children some pepper seedlings to plant in their backyards. The children were expected, under the guidance of their parents, to nurture the plants to fruition.

Friends of the Environment then entered into an agreement with the parents to save the 500 cedis they

would have used daily to buy pepper, for their children when they start using the pepper from their farm. It was observed that, even allowing for the dry season when the pepper plants would not be fruiting, the scheme could yield 140,000 cedis (about 17 US dollars) which could pay for the fees and other requirements for two school children.

To start, 50 children were given 50 seedlings each to plant. At the end of the year, 34 of the beneficiaries used the money realised from the scheme to pay for the fees and educational needs of their wards. One of the problems was that some of the parents sold the extra harvest from their backyard farm and yet refused to use the proceeds to pay for the children's needs. Mr Out-Akuffo said the NGO had to invite these parents for discussions.

Last year, 154 children were selected for the scheme which is now attracting a lot of families from other farming communities nearby. It is also providing extra sources of income for the parents in the area.

The system, which was aimed at helping to reduce the rate of school drop-out in Tinkong, is now serving as a means of poverty alleviation in the area and surrounding communities.

TANZANIA

Tanzania is one of the poorest countries in the world. A large number of its population are peasants. In the country, schools are always very distant from homes. Children can walk three or more kilometres to school.

Many children help their parents on small farms before they go to school. They wake up early in the morning, go to a field to dig, then wash their face and rush to school. Sometimes, they reach schools very tired, and so learn nothing, but sleep in class. When they come back from school, they just take a cup of porridge and go to the field again.

Other children look after cattle. Such children are the number one victims of the problem of schooling. One said "I can go to school once or twice a week, the other days I usually look after my uncle's cattle." Normally, these children cannot understand the result of not going to school.

The outcome of this is that the rate of illiteracy increases among children of this new generation. The government has seen this and imposed a new policy of education. In January 2002, it decreed that any Tanzanian child who has reached the age of seven must go to school. Due to this policy, the schools have been overflowing. In some areas, a class can contain more than 50 children.

In order to overcome such problems, the Diocese of Mara, in conjunction with some NGOs, has helped in building classrooms in areas where many children were registered. It is not uncommon to meet children above 9 years old who do not know how to read

and write. This is due to bad attendance at school. Some parents and guardians have moved to areas close to schools to ensure good education for their children. To others, if a child does not go to school, it matters nothing to them. There is still lack of community awareness of the importance of school to children.

When children work apart from their families, things like early pregnancy, sexual abuse and harassment face them. They become disturbed. I have witnessed not less than 20 primary school children who have stopped school due to early pregnancy and harassment.

The time has come now for the Church to arise and set children free from hazardous work – not just children who work in their

homes and families, but also those who are hired to work for money. The Bishop of the Diocese of Mara has addressed the whole Diocese to regulate the lives of the Church members so that children too may have room in the community to speak about their rights.

Education is one of the children's rights; so parents, guardians and employers must ensure that children are protected from any kind of work that is likely to interfere with schooling. The Church should not keep quiet about this issue, it must help where it is possible.

ZAMBIA

I was shocked when I recently travelled to my home "town" Petauke. At the bus station, there were a number of children all scrambling to carry my bag. Each one asked for between one and twenty pence regardless of the distance. I offered the job to no one for I did not want to be party to child labour.

As I walked to my village, 8km away, I saw young children weeding in the fields. This was too much for me! In Luanshya, a town where I have just been transferred to, the situation is pathetic. Children do all kinds of chores to earn some food for the family.

In Zambia and the developing world, the above scenario is no different. As in Luanshya, we seem to have come to live with child labour. What has the Church to offer – in particular the Anglican Church? It is important to note that child labour is different from street children who have nowhere to go, as most of the children come from parents who are not able to feed their family or

have no alternative but to use child labour to weed the fields. The parents are also unable to provide school fees. (Though the government has scrapped school fees, these are charged in another form. The Parents Teachers Association (PTA) levy the children through sports fees etc.) In the end, many fall out of school and eventually become street children.

St. George's, where I am, has a programme which has seen a number of children rescued from child labour due to the present economic situation in Zambia and Luanshya in particular (the mines closed about four years ago). They have managed to continue to support four orphans with school requisites. As I am new in this place, I have taken the initiative of meeting the congregational committee and fellow Priests so that we can revive the integration of these children back to their families and educate the parents of the dangers of child labour. It will take some time I know, but to follow the African saying

"To finish the carcass of an elephant you need to eat its meat piece by piece."

Medrine Mwansa is 13 years old, a bright enthusiastic grade 7 pupil at Katuba Primary School in a rural part of Zambia. She says, with a smile, that her ambition is to be a teacher just like Mr Kamonje. Mr Kamonje beams proudly from the front of the class.

Yet Medrine has, statistically, a very slim chance of fulfilling her dream.

Most rural communities in Zambia practise labour-intensive subsistence farming as the main source of food and income. However, even in a year of reasonably reliable weather, most farms barely produce enough to feed the family. Everyone, children included, has to work in the fields to ensure that

enough food is grown and this can mean enormous disruption to schooling.

It is hardly surprising that so few children from villages go on to further education and qualifications, whatever their ability. Harvest Help, a UK-based charity founded by Christians and with wide church support, has been working in Zambia for a number of years to tackle the long-term causes of poverty that create the dilemma for Medrine's family. It has a programme of supporting school building and teacher training, but, says the Director "We firmly believe that only when we tackle the underlying problems of poverty in rural Zambia will pupils like Medrine have the opportunities they deserve. We concentrate most of our effort in helping farmers to improve their agricultural production. When farms like Medrine's produce a surplus then there will be spare money to pay for school and a reduced need to rely on everyone's labour just to survive the next few months."

A more recent emphasis in Harvest Help's work has been small-scale business loans, particularly for women, allowing financial independence and a chance to pay for the education of their children.

NIGERIA

Some of the reasons responsible for the perpetuation of child labour in Africa are: -

- Sociocultural: it is seen by many as part and parcel of child training and upbringing
- Economic: due to widespread poverty with parents often unemployed
- Familial: death of family head, generally the major breadwinner
- Conflict with parents: disintegration/breakdown of the African extended family system (which serves as a "shock absorber" for problems of family members)
- Ignorance/superstitious beliefs: certain individuals believe that children are likely to be pampered by their biological parents and are better off being trained outside their homes
- Peer group influence: some children get attracted to labour by the perceived material and physical independence (from parents) and the financial benefits of the work.

The chances for Medrine remain slim, but they are improving. It may take another generation, it may be sooner, but children like Medrine need a way out of the poverty trap, a chance to achieve their full potential. With one wage-earning teacher in the family, the Mwansas could afford to send more

children to school and the poverty cycle would be decisively and permanently broken.

IVORY COAST

When the British chocolate industry began more than 200 years ago, it was founded on a philosophy of doing good. For the Quaker Cadbury, Rowntree and Terry families, "exploitation" was a dirty word, while it was common place elsewhere. It seems incongruous to link present day practices with the chocolate that still carries those families' names.

David was fortunate. He managed to escape from the cocoa farm, after several attempts and several beatings. He forfeited his promised wages but he now works for a Christian employer who pays him fairly.

Many Christians are taking a stand against the illegal use of child labour. You too can make a difference to the lives of children like David by prayer, purchasing Fairtrade products and writing to chocolate manufacturers telling them you want to buy clearly labelled products that have not exploited children in their production.

This is an edited version of an article first published in the Christian Herald (www.christianherald.org.uk) reproduced with permission.

Most of us associate chocolate with good things... but things are far from good in the working practices on many of the cocoa plantations that produce the chocolate.

"David" (not his real name) was 14 years old when he was forced to work as a slave on a cocoa plantation in Cote d'Ivoire. Originally from neighbouring Mali, David was stolen from his parents, shipped to the Ivory Coast and sold as a slave to a cocoa farm. "When people eat chocolate, it's as if they are eating my flesh", he says.

David earned no money for his work. He stayed on the plantation in the hope that his long-promised wages would eventually materialise. He was barely fed and his back bears the scars from the beating that almost killed him.

Almost half the world's cocoa beans are grown in western Africa and almost half the world's chocolate production starts in the Ivory Coast. Most of the labourers in the industry are teenagers like David. Like him, they are bought and sold for as little as £20, having come from poorer countries looking for work. Most of them will never see their families again.

SRI LANKA

The ugly reality that characterises Sri Lanka over the last twenty years is the most terrible ethnic conflict between the Sinhala people of the south of the island and the Tamil people in the north. There are Christians in both communities, even though we constitute only about seven percent of the population. Of that number about eighty percent are Roman Catholics.

Our conflict has caused great hardship to both communities and to the country as a whole. The worst sufferers have been women and children. There are a large number of war widows and orphans in both communities and the Church has tried to help them mainly through relief work. Proper rehabilitation will be possible only with the dawn of peace. Children, both boys and girls – sometimes no more than 12 years old – are serving as armed cadres with the Tamil Tigers. They have been well taught who the enemy is and they have been

programmed to kill. It is most distressing to see children engaged in armed conflict, in some instances perhaps taken away from their parents without their consent. They carry guns and rifles taller than themselves. This problem has been addressed repeatedly by friendly foreign countries and by UNICEF. The Tigers have promised to stop recruiting children and to release those who are still among their cadres. But we still have not seen a significant change.

Poverty, both in the war-torn areas and among the community of tea estate workers, forces parents to send their children for domestic service in Colombo and the big cities. Living conditions among tea estate workers, first brought to our country as indentured labour by British planters, still remain very poor. Parents send their children to work as domestic servants in the homes of the rich, expecting that they will have a better life at least for a short time. Very rarely are such children sent to school, though they often accompany their employers' children, often older than themselves, to the school gates. We often hear of violence against these children and their abuse. Sometimes cases are filed against the offenders but since their employers are very powerful they are seldom punished under the law.

The employment of children as sex slaves is becoming increasingly common. In

addition to the paedophiles in our own country we attract paedophiles from many countries and Sri Lanka has become notorious for the sexual abuse of children, both boys and girls. It is very difficult to bring foreign paedophiles to book without the co-operation of the law enforcement authorities in their own countries. A concerted international effort is required to deal adequately with this vice.

We are happy that we now have a well-established National Child Protection Authority that actively seeks to deal with cases of child abuse in schools and homes. Their message is slowly getting across and people now know what child abuse means and that children in their care must be treated with love and understanding. However even this National Child Protection Authority has been powerless to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers by the Tigers.

Peace talks are now underway and we are all hopeful that soon peace will come, bringing with it better times for our children and the whole country.

CHINA

Official records of the People's Republic of China indicate that about 240 million people, out of a total population of approximately 1.3 billion, live in poverty. A more accurate figure may be between 350 and 400 million. These people reside mainly in the west, in mountainous and remote areas.

Whilst efforts are being made by provincial and county governments to improve the well-being and the conditions of people in these remote provinces, it is acknowledged that the extreme ruggedness of many areas makes the provision of infrastructure more costly. This is the case for provision of water, health services and also for the construction of schools and the staffing of them with appropriate teachers.

Many of the small schools do not have qualified teachers. The person in charge of the school invariably has had perhaps six years of education and with a grade 5 pass, has become eligible to become a "non-accredited teacher". The candidate will come from the local community because it is not possible to attract an outsider with adequate qualifications.

Many schools are overcrowded, with between 60 and 90 students per teacher, especially at single-teacher schools where the teacher may teach three or four different age groups.

The inability of parents to pay small fees, and even to purchase books and writing materials, creates the environment whereby young children are drawn into helping their subsistence farmer parents survive. They are entrusted with such duties as looking after goats or water buffalo, fetching water and firewood. Others might assist with ploughing or digging the fields and the carrying of human and animal excrement to remote parcels of land in order to provide organic fertiliser. These activities cannot be performed at night and so many child workers are deprived of the opportunity of going to school and mixing with their own age group and they are given tasks which develop their sense of responsibility at a very young age. They are deprived of an education and the opportunity to develop their potential in order to make a more significant contribution to their community and their culture.

The absence of sound role models in the form of adequately trained teachers, also deprives them of the opportunity to feel creatively about an ambition to which they might aspire. They respect the farming ability of their parents and other members of the community, and at age seven, eight or nine, their mates become farmers and contribute to the family income. In this way, the culture of child labour and child workers is reinforced.

This is not the case for all children in Western China. Many millions do have the opportunity to go to middle school and on to high school, if fees and time permit and if they live nearby. Girl children, however, are the first to leave when finances become short.

However, sponsorship schemes now exist (operated by many NGOs including The Salvation Army Hong Kong) whereby the fees and running costs of a boarding

school are paid for and children attend having travelled long distances from their mountain villages. At boarding school they don't have to work in the fields or do housework, or fetch water or coal. They enjoy being children at school.

USA

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many American children left their families to work in the dark, dangerous conditions of factories, refineries, and coal mines. Others peddled newspapers, collected junk, or shined shoes. Again, this labour helped to ensure their family's survival. It also ensured that obtaining an education became difficult, if not impossible. Finally, it ensured that hundreds of thousands of children suffered needlessly in the name of industrialised avarice, enduring conditions similar to those endured today by millions of children the world over.

In 1924, Congress proposed a constitutional amendment prohibiting child labour. Although that proposition ultimately failed, it exemplifies the progress made in the fight to provide children with rudimentary rights. Finally, in 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labour Standards Act (the "FLSA"). This did not prohibit child labour but constructed the legal foundation for America's regulation of children working.

Currently, over five million children between the ages of 12 and 17 engage in some type of work. Sometimes, employment affects these children positively. It may provide them with practical vocational training, communication skills, independence, and self-reliance. But many work in contravention of the rules laid out by the FLSA. Some are underage. Some engage in hazardous types of work. Some work impossibly long hours – hours that prevent them from going to school. Many others are injured or killed in work-related accidents. In spite of all applicable regulations, child labour remains a problem in the United States.

It is likely that the children who work as America's undocumented migrant and seasonal farmhands suffer the most. An estimated 800,000 such children work exhausting days (some fourteen to sixteen hours long) tending America's crops for as little as two dollars an hour. Eighty to almost ninety-nine percent of these children come from poor, immigrant, and minority backgrounds. Their labour exposes them to pesticides and other chemical poisons that impair their development. It causes them to

miss school, face physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their ruthless employers, and develop myriad physical ailments. Sadly, the FLSA does not protect them.

The plight of these children only emphasises that all American children still lack affirmative rights. Our ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (the "CRC") would do much to ameliorate this.* It would firmly declare American intentions to eradicate all of the (controllable) negative aspects of child labour and would oblige the United States to do so.

To hear the voice of America's child-labourers (particularly those exploited as migrant farm workers), along with the voice of child-labourers everywhere, is to enter into a reality that very few will recognise as a part of our greater, global society. To do nothing, to remain silent, is to be in complicit agreement with the abusers and exploiters who perpetuate their plight.

Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." If we want to walk in God's way, we must value childhood. We must protect children, embracing and valuing their joy and wonder. We must determine when is work a healthy, even necessary, way for children to learn and grow. More importantly, we must determine when it is cheap, easily exploitable, quasi-slave labour.

In order to make that determination properly, we must remain guided by our prayers, by our hope. Currently, that hope is incarnate in how we live out two important manifestos. First, it is incarnate in the way we in ECUSA live out our General Convention resolutions concerning children – including The Children's Charter for the Church, which advocates for the well-being of every child. Second, it is incarnate in the way we as the Anglican Communion respond to and live out "A World Fit For Children," – the millennium development goals set out by the United Nations Special Session on the Rights of the Child.

**Note. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has now been ratified by 191 countries. USA has not yet ratified it.*

Consider for a moment the abundance of wealth found in the United States. Nevertheless, over eleven million American children live without health care. One out of every five American children lives in poverty. The media markets a toxic cocktail of sex and cigarettes, violence and vulgarity – to our three year olds. Finally, hectic schedules, spawned by the dichotomy between a fragile economy and our own rapacity, leave many families with little time for valuing the joy, wonder, and contemplation that our youngest children regularly experience.

Valuing what we refer to collectively as a playful childhood is predominantly a modern phenomenon. In fact, many still debate its importance. During earlier centuries, most American children worked alongside their parents and this labour – primarily agricultural or domestic – helped to ensure their family's survival. Little more than their father's chattel, children did not possess rights as such. Colonial society expected stoicism, austerity, and unflinching obedience from its children who were to be seen, but never heard. And the children of slaves and indentured servants often fared much worse, enduring a life of extreme hardship and pain.

BRAZIL

Brazil? Lush green rain forests, the colourful splendour of Carnival, golden sandy beaches, and hot steamy cities, multitudes of people, cramped conditions, sprawling shanty towns, poverty, hunger, prostitution, drug gang warfare, fear, danger, murder.

Not very far from the centre of Rio de Janeiro, the splendour of the Copacabana beach with its fabulous high-rise apartments and hotels, nestled in an area world's apart in appearance but only miles in distance, is situated the Projeto Alcancando Vidas (The Reaching Lives Project) a Pre-school for 60 children between the ages of one and twelve. The area is a poor urban drug-trafficking neighbourhood, notorious for gang warfare and certain hillside shantytowns ruled by drug

leaders with police fearful of getting involved with such dangerous men.

Each child who attends the project represents a desperate family situation. Little ones of three and four years of age already are experiencing the psychological effects of neglect. At four years old, Lucas has to protect his mother from his violent father often high from the effects of drugs. All he can do in his frustration is to bite his father and therefore at school, when confronted with a threatening situation, he defends himself the only way he knows how – by biting others.

"Little aeroplanes that don't even exist"

The main threat to the children living in the neighbourhood is being caught up in carrying

drugs. The children found playing on the streets are targeted and picked up by adult traffickers to do their dirty work because there is no legal penalty for minors in Brazil. The financial rewards are high and the money can feed a family for a while.

These children are known as "aviezinhos" or "little aeroplanes". Their task is to retrieve and deliver the drugs. Often the police know who the children are although they legally cannot be touched. However nobody would know if some of them suddenly went missing, especially as some of these children have never been registered at birth and therefore do not even exist. A shocking corrupt reality and a real-life danger that the children living in the area and attending Projeto Alcancando Vidas face.

The Pre-School Project objective is to reveal to such children and their families the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who can change their desperate situation and give them hope. This objective is being achieved practically through the full-time day school where they receive meals, showers, love and an education with a strong spiritual emphasis. In conjunction with the school, a team visits their homes and works alongside their families. With their children safely in school, parents are helped to seek job opportunities. The children are off the streets and less likely to be a target for trafficking drugs.

ARGENTINA

The lights are red. The traffic screeches to a halt. The boys, clutching their wet rags, rush to find clients who will be glad to have clean windcreens and pay a few cents for the privilege. If they time it well, they will just manage to complete their task and get back to the pavement before the lights change. Around the city of Salta, others – some as young as four – mind cars, clean shoes, beg outside the supermarkets.

It is over a year since the collapse of the economy in Argentina, and half the population goes hungry. The situation is desperate. The tragedy is that Argentina has plenty of food but people cannot afford it. Years of political and economic instability and corruption have left the country bankrupt with a huge foreign debt. This has led to redundancies, wages falling in value, costs rising and many families below the poverty line. Seven out of ten children under 14 live under the breadline and four out of these seven are destitute. Over the last few years, according to UNICEF, there has been a 91% increase of children who work. There

are now deaths of children from malnutrition. Alternative ways of making a living have taken over, like collecting and recycling whatever is on offer, hawking or begging on the streets or from door to door, often in family groups. In Buenos Aires alone, about 100,000 adults, accompanied by at least one child, spend their time scavenging. Schooling has always been a priority – and still is if a meal is provided – but more and more children drop out, unable to afford the cost.

Does nobody care that these children drop out of school to live such a frenetic life, often punished if they have not brought enough money home?

Yes, some do care. Anglican congregations have started some form of free meals and help with homework. At San Andres Church in Salta, for nearly a year, boys have been invited for a day a week to the church premises and provided with a square meal. Professionals then train them in some trade or craft skill. They share their faith

and encourage them to start studying again. The craft items made are now being marketed. The project is prioritising the boys of 14 plus, not yet adults, but at a critical stage when they could get caught up in despair, drugs, glue sniffing, crime and prostitution. At present it is mainly boys who are on the streets.

Thanks to such encouraging projects, soup kitchens, clubs for exchanging barter vouchers or swapping products, and micro industries initiated and run by the churches backed by prayer, the situation looks more hopeful and lives are being changed. With more volunteers, sponsorship and grants for projects, much more could be done to enable more children to continue their education.

of Southern Madrid. Illegal factories have appeared making cheap clothes. Workshops are located at big homes where several families of illegal immigrants are forced to work in a semi-slavery situation. These families use children working sometimes for one or two years, until the factories are discovered by the police and the children are taken under State protection.

Another community of immigrants in Spain, in rural areas, with a huge number of children working, is the Latin American. As Spain has a Mediterranean agriculture, there is a system for collecting fruits and vegetables in season, which involves the whole family. One example is the collection of strawberries in the south west of Spain (Huelva). This begins in early February and no contracts are made. They are paid for each kilo of strawberries collected. The whole family take part in this hard work, including children. The same system is used for collecting grapes in central and south Spain, and apples and pears in the north east of the country. In all these agricultural duties, children and adults work together. The children do not attend school for about two months, and in some cases they never do. Spanish law is not very severe in these circumstances, and often just a call of attention is given by the judges, and the employer is fined a small amount.

Recently, as a result of the good economic situation, Spain has become an attractive place for immigrants. The largest immigrant communities are the Latin American, Chinese and North African. Probably the Chinese community is the one with most children working.

One kind of work is in the Chinese restaurants, led by the Mafia. The whole family, including children, work in these restaurants, with the children going there after school and working for about four more hours. Chinese children also work for the clothing factories in the suburbs

SCOTLAND

Unity Enterprise is a practical attempt by the churches to work together in response to issues of people being excluded from full participation in the life of their community. The Board of Directors consists of representatives from the Scottish Episcopal Church, Church of Scotland, Catholic Church, Evangelical Alliance and Scottish Churches Industrial Mission.

A Case History

John was referred to Unity Enterprise by the local Education Psychology Service and his guidance teacher at mainstream secondary school. He was frequently absent from his classes. The background report forwarded from school related to his attendance and no reference was made to any personal or family problems

that could be behind his staying away.

He joined the Unity Enterprise project in the August and a six-week review was held with his parents and a psychologist, together with a representative from the Education Department. It was during this review that some of the details of John's childhood were presented to us by his dad. Within the family household there was John's mum (a manic depressive) and his dad who was caring for her and trying to raise John and four smaller children on the basic state benefit, so John was expected to help with the smaller kids in the house and have a part-time milk round to assist financially. His training programme, including City & Guilds awards, could not be carried through due to non-attendance and John coming in late to sessions and falling asleep midway.

It became clear to the project leader that John was only interested in one career, so talks were held with Hamilton Dairies and a proper work placement started there for three days per week, and two days with Unity Enterprise where he learnt skills and was taught Health and Safety issues. After completing this programme and leaving school, John was given full-time employment with the Dairy.

John's story demonstrates the difficulties facing many young people today and the importance of programmes like Unity Enterprise to help individuals enter the world of work and become more fully included within their community.

Huro and Shiva were kidnapped when they were six years old and taken hundreds of miles from their village in north east India to weave carpets. They were held in a tiny dark room and forced to work 18 hours a day. They used a can for a toilet, ate the poorest rice and were paid nothing for the carpets they made which were shipped to the US and Europe. Their owner bribed the police, thereby keeping the children in pain, hunger and fear. In the heart of the world's largest democracy they were enslaved and tortured so that a few dozen carpets could be sold in the West for a few pounds less. Huro and Shiva were lucky. The South Asian Coalition Against Child Servitude (SACCS) intervened and was able to reunite the boys with their parents.

This account only became public because it had a happy ending. All around the world in developed and under-developed regions, children are used as the easiest and most malleable way to do the jobs that adults won't touch.

There are many horrific examples.

Today there are 300,000 children estimated to be involved in 30 conflicts worldwide, some as young as ten. I was recently in southern Sudan where I met for myself traumatised children, and heard first-hand accounts of the use of children in the front-line battle between the mainly Christian south and the Muslim North. Far from being used as a last resort, children were known to be particularly effective killers – willing to act without the constraint of their adult comrades. Many children lost their lives – almost all lost their childhood.

Two years ago, we started a "Back to School" project in Liberia for some of the thousands of children recovering from being embroiled in the devastating ten-year civil war. The project provides trauma counselling, and reintegration assistance as well as an education. The work has demonstrated that through education, the curse of the past is not preventing the children's hopes for the future.

Another iniquitous form of work is that

of child prostitution. Estimates suggest that around 1 million children become part of the world's sex trade each year. This is a scourge that is growing in parts of the world where the demand for virgins as a result of AIDS has led to the recruitment of ever-younger girls. Some children are so desperate that they choose to work as prostitutes to earn what they need to survive. Furthermore, direct links also exist between the commercial sexual exploitation of children and other forms of unacceptable child labour. Nepal's carpet factories, for example, are notorious for their use of child labourers and they also form centre points for sexual exploitation for employers.

Jubilee Action's Director became embroiled in this issue following the rescue of Asha who was about to be sold to a brothel by her father for £600. Working with others, he was able to prevent the sale and, deeply affected, he resolved to do something more permanent for the daughters of prostitutes like Asha.

Today there are two beautiful homes outside Bombay for over 70 girls, all of whom would have ended up in the sordid world of the sex industry.

It is an example of how, given resolve and determination, we can protect children from the worst forms of exploitative work.



IAFN International Anglican Family Network

NEW ADDRESS FOR IAFN OFFICE

The Family Network office has moved. The address is:
IAFN Office, PO Box 54,
Minehead, Somerset TA24 7WD
ENGLAND
Tel/Fax: (+44) (0) 1643 841 500
E-mail: mail@iafn.org.uk

PRAYER

HEAVENLY FATHER,

help us to glorify you in our work.

We thank you for opportunities of producing what we need, and of trading fairly with others.

May we seek to share the benefits of our work with the young and recognise and uphold their unsaleable worth and specialness.

Help us to encourage children in their particular skills and abilities, to protect them from exploitation or harsh treatment, to welcome them into the caring community of faith; and to be advocates for them in their growing years.

By your grace, assist those families without work or resources who face despair, and bless all those who seek to support and stand beside them. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Revd John Bradford.

THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter, to be published in September, is to be on the theme of **Violence and the Family**. This will draw on the discussions and experience of the regional consultation, to be held in Africa (Nairobi) in June. But we also hope to include articles from other parts of the world on issues of violence – domestic violence between partners, violence between parents and children, violence in the community and its effect on families. We are looking for articles (300-500 words long) which tell of practical projects to help as well as the problems, and we will need to receive them at the IAFN office (see new address) **as soon as possible**.

Visit the Family Network website: www.anglicancommunion.org/iafn/

The views of individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the International Anglican Family Network.