



Community-based approach to child labour gets support at global conference in Argentina

On the 16th of November the thousands of participants in the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour in Argentina adopted the *Buenos Aires Declaration on Child Labour, Forced Labour and Youth Employment*.¹ The declaration had been in the making during various meetings of the tripartite partners of the ILO: the governments, employers and union. While NGOs are not directly involved in this process, Stop Child Labour was able to bring forward its recommendations during meetings with the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Netherlands. Our focus has been on the role of civil society, the area- or community-based approach to child labour, the importance of quality education and the need for supply chains that are free of child labour and other labour rights violations.

The conference and the role of NGOs

The conference in Argentina brought together representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organisations, as well as civil society organisations from around the world to discuss the problems of child labour and forced labour, as well as possible solutions. The conference consisted of plenary sessions and side events on specific themes, including child labour in rural areas, supply chains, conflict and crisis situations etc. Stop Child Labour partners from the Netherlands, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nicaragua as well as from Education International participated in some of the sessions.

We widely shared our position paper and participated in discussions, especially in the civil society working group, in order to bring our message across and to discuss possible new alliances. It was widely felt by the civil society participants that they were not adequately recognised as a 'fourth force' in tackling child labour, next to the role of the tripartite partners (governments, employers and unions) that are also the constituents of the ILO.

Stop Child Labour's recommendation in its own position paper for 'Buenos Aires' said about this: *"Civil society organisations should be more explicitly recognised as essential partners in the fight against child labour. The ILO can consider more systematically involving and making use of their experiences. Their roles vary from implementing area and sector based approaches, lobbying with governments to improve and implement legislation, and researching on and engaging with the private sector on child labour. A more formalised recognition of these roles by the ILO – without calling the tripartite structure of the ILO into question - as well as more cooperation at various levels, would be very useful."*

Recognition of support needed for a community-based approach

Stop Child Labour was happy to see in the Declaration the recognition of the *"importance of rural poverty reduction, the extension of social protection and access to public, free, complete, universal, quality primary and secondary education, affordable, quality technical vocational and tertiary education and life-long learning, and of area-based and community interventions for eradicating child labour and forced labour"*.

The Declaration also calls for *'strengthening the organisational capacity of local communities, as appropriate, in their efforts to prevent, detect and eliminate child labour and forced labour; to ensure that relevant authorities are aware of and replicate these efforts'*. This is a very welcome emphasis

¹ See Buenos Aires Declaration: http://www.childlabour2017.org/sites/default/files/declaracion_bs_as-eng.pdf

A red square with the word "STOP" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.A black rectangular banner with the words "CHILD LABOUR" in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

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on the role that local organisations can not only play in their communities, but also in inspiring and involving (local and national) governments in those efforts. This statement is reinforced in the Declaration by stating the need to *'strengthen the capacity of and involve public authorities, social partners, civil society, local communities and enterprises to develop and implement such policies, strategies and action plans at all relevant levels'*.

This might sound all like a 'matter of course' but it is relatively new that the 'bottom-up approach' of local communities and civil society (including non-governmental organisations or NGOs) is recognised in this way. It is also in line with the position paper of Stop Child Labour for the conference which says:

*"Alongside the crucial role of national governments in combating child labour, the role of and cooperation with international stakeholders – governments from importing countries, trade unions, companies, CSR initiatives and aid agencies – is also essential for creating a global and systemic impact. These stakeholders are increasingly, though still not sufficiently, interested in a community-based approach to tackle issues in 'deeper supply chains'. They are looking for effective strategies to complement their own policies and efforts to implement human rights, including child rights."*²

It is crucial to mention the role of teachers in the community-based approach. *"Projects aimed at combating child labour implemented by teachers' unions show that quality schools that pay attention to children's needs are the first step towards considerably reducing the exploitation of children," said Hillary Yuba, the delegate of the Progressive Teachers Union Zimbabwe. "Child labour cannot be eliminated without properly trained teachers, without attractive schools. In our projects, the teachers raise awareness among local populations about the importance of education, with the support of the local authorities. This community-based approach makes everyone responsible for ensuring that all children are in school. We manage to convey the message that any child not in school is a child who is a victim of exploitation through labour."*³

ILO report 'Ending Child Labour by 2025': the community-based approach

In this context it is important to note that the ILO report *'Ending Child Labour by 2025 – A review of policies and programmes'*,⁴ published just before the IV Global Conference, describes the community-based approach as follows under the chapter on supply chains:

"A recognition that there is a common set of root causes of child labour is the logic behind area-based approaches for addressing child labour in supply chains. Rather than focus specifically on supply chains, area-based approaches address factors driving all types of child labour in a given geographic area. This broader approach helps prevent children simply moving from one supply chain to another, or into a more hidden form of child labour. It is also consistent with government policies and commitments under ILO child labour Conventions, which are not limited to child labour within a specific sector."

The report also recognises that *"the number of industries and enterprises adopting an area-based approach is on the rise, and this is a positive sign for the future. While individual enterprises and groups of enterprises may start from particular concerns they have about the use of child labour in specific products in their supply chains, there is nonetheless increasing recognition that child labour*

² See 'Getting Children Out of work and Into School – Combining Bottom-Up and Top Down Strategies to Stop Child Labour: <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/getting-children-out-of-work-and-into-school-combining-bottom-up-and-top-down-strategies-to-stop-child-labour/>

³ See Education International: <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/detail/15528/properly-trained-teachers-a-prerequisite-for-eliminating-child-labour>

⁴ See: http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_29875/lang--en/index.htm



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should not be displaced from one type of work or product to another and that sustainable solutions require the deployment of integrated area-based approaches in which the goal is to support the creation of child labour free communities.”

While the description of child labour free communities as a way of combating child labour is very relevant, it is rather strange and certainly one-sided that this section - except for the last few additional sentences - is described solely as an effort by multinational companies. Though no examples are given, one probably has to think of efforts by both cocoa and tobacco multinationals in various African countries to tackle child labour in communities. However, also in cases where multinationals have taken such initiatives, often after pressure of civil society and other actors, local communities, unions and other civil society organisations also play a crucial role in its shaping and implementation. Without them a community-based approach would not be possible.

Then at the end of the chapter it says: *“The child labour free community approach is not restricted to the global supply chains of multinational enterprises. It has been deployed through similar strategies with other names such “child-friendly villages’ in Africa and South Asia and could be replicated on a wider scale.”* The recommendation that these efforts should be replicated on a wider scale is commendable. However, in terms of a description of policies and programmes that work, it is an extremely meagre recognition of the tremendous work that has been done by local organisations to create these child labour free communities or zones. For example Stop Child Labour and its partners in India and various African countries, have helped to create 122 Child Labour Free Zones. It is disappointing to see that the large range of reports, evaluations, handbooks etc. that are published on the implementation of this way to combat child labour are not even in the long bibliography of the report *‘Ending Child Labour by 2025’*.

Pledges to end child labour and forced labour

The conference in Buenos Aires ended with a large number of pledges made by countries, sometimes together with employer’s organisations and trade unions and by civil society organisations. Stop Child Labour’s own pledge is to:

“support and enable initiatives of local communities and civil society organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America to tackle child labour through community-based approaches as an effective method to get all children in a certain area out of work and (back) into school. This enables the creation of child labour free zones. And inspires and enriches top down policies and their implementation. Together we continue working towards a child labour free world”.

How we are doing that, in addition to working on supply chains free of child labour, can be found in a short [overview of our work](#)⁵ and our new plans under the programme *‘Getting down to business’*.

We were happy to see that also the Dutch government, together with the employers’ organisations and the trade unions said in their pledge: *“The Netherlands will support, together with the appropriate parties, other community-based and multi-stakeholder projects, like the Child Labour Free Zones in which the trade unions have an important role.”* The role of the trade unions in these projects is absolutely important as they often work together with civil society and often local governments on e.g. Child Labour Free Zones in Africa and sectoral multi-stakeholder agreements in the Netherlands.

⁵ See: <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/out-of-work-and-into-school-what-we-have-accomplished/>



On the issue of business and human rights “the Dutch government and social partners will continue to initiate their multi-stakeholder initiatives, in particular the Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) sector agreements and the Fund Against Child Labour, to eliminate child labour and forced labour.’. The government of the Netherlands also promised “to make a contribution to a follow-up event of the ILO, focused on the progress to reach Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 and based on the agreements made here in Buenos Aires.”

All pledges will be attached to the Buenos Aires Declaration. The Declaration and the in total 91 pledges will guide all efforts over the next four years, in order to make firm progress towards Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour in all its forms by 2025.

At the moment all the pledges are being translated in a few languages and will be published on the website of the global conference: <http://childlabour2017.org/>. It will be important to monitor to what extent these pledges will be implemented and show a considerable positive impact on both reducing child and forced labour. The ILO itself will base its next work programme on child labour and forced labour to a large extent on the Declaration adopted in Argentina.