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The Incidence of Child
Labour in Africa with
Empirical Evidence from
Rural Ethiopia

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Abstract

There has been a growing interest in the subject of child labour in Africa in recent years among academics, professionals and the media primarily for two reasons: Firstly, because the number of children affected is growing, and secondly because of the negative repercussions that work at an early age may have on the personal development of children and the economic and social development of countries concerned. The main intent of this paper was to examine the incidence of child labour in Africa with the help of empirical data from rural Ethiopia, since it is one of the countries with a high incidence of child labour in Africa. The analysis showed that the incidence of child labour is indeed very high in Africa, where children's participation rate in economic activities could be as high as forty percent. If present trends continue, Africa could be faced with more than 100 million child labourers in the year 2015. The empirical data from Ethiopia, although it may not be representative of the whole continent, showed that children as young as five years old are made to participate in farm and household work activities, some of which could be totally incompatible with schooling. Child labour has also been one of the main reasons for low school enrolment in rural Ethiopia. In order to mitigate the problem of child labour in Africa, there is a need to adopt serious poverty reduction strategies, compulsory but flexible primary education and training policies, appropriate community awareness programs, and enforceable legal measures. In addition, more research on the push and pull or demand and supply factors on child labour are needed if progress is to be made on the efforts to curtail child labour in Africa.

Kurzfassung

In den letzten Jahren erfuhr das Thema Kinderarbeit bei Akademikern, Fachleuten und in den Medien hauptsächlich aus zwei Gründen ein wachsendes Interesse: Erstens, wegen der steigenden Zahl der betroffenen Kinder und zweitens wegen der negativen Auswirkungen, die die Arbeit im Kindesalter auf die persönliche Entwicklung von Kindern und auf die ökonomische und soziale Entwicklung der betroffenen Länder hat. Die Hauptabsicht der Studie ist, das Ausmaß von Kinderarbeit in Afrika mit Hilfe einer beispielhaften empirischen Untersuchung für den ländlichen Raum Äthiopiens darzustellen. Die Analyse zeigt, dass Kinderarbeit in Afrika sehr häufig vorkommt. Die Beteiligungsrate von Kindern an den ökonomischen Aktivitäten beträgt in einzelnen Fällen bis zu vierzig Prozent. Wenn der derzeitige Trend anhält, könnte Afrika im Jahre 2015 mit über 100 Millionen arbeitenden Kindern konfrontiert sein. Die empirischen Daten aus Äthiopien zeigen, dass schon fünfjährige Kinder zu Arbeiten in der arbeitsintensiven Landwirtschaft und im Haushalt angehalten werden, von denen manche jedoch völlig inkompatibel mit dem Schulbesuch sind. In Äthiopien ist Kinderarbeit im ländlichen Raum einer der Hauptgründe für die geringe Anzahl von Schulanmeldungen. Um das Problem der Kinderarbeit in Afrika zu mindern, besteht die Notwendigkeit zur Einführung wirksamerer Strategien der Armutsbekämpfung, obligatorischer aber flexibler Grundschulbildung und von entsprechenden Fortbildungsprogrammen, der Entwicklung eines öffentlichen Problembewusstseins gegenüber dem Phänomen Kinderarbeit sowie durchsetzbarer Rechtsmittel, mit denen Kinderarbeit unterbunden werden kann. Um Fortschritte im Kampf gegen Kinderarbeit in Afrika zu machen, wird eine intensivere wissenschaftliche Untersuchung der 'Push- und Pull-Faktoren' beziehungsweise von Angebots- und Nachfragedeterminanten der Kinderarbeit notwendig sein.

1 Introduction

Child labour is a complex problem whose roots are deeply embodied in cultural, social, political, and economic structures and traditions of societies. Although the Convention on the “Right of the Child” clearly underscores the need to protect the child from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous, child employment still continues to prevail in many developing countries¹. Many children are still forced to work under hazardous and unhygienic conditions often for long hours. Moreover, more than half of the school-aged children world-wide receive no primary education suggesting that they might be in the labour market due to a number of push and pull factors. Child labour is of course, not a new phenomenon. Historical evidence indicates that some of the worst forms of child labour occurred in Europe during the industrial revolution². Children have also been part of the economic life in America. What is new today is the increased awareness of, and concern for children who work as labourers as a result of the globalisation process (Basu, 1999). Today child labour has emerged as one of the most important issues on the global agenda and a subject of heated debates³. Private agencies, NGOs, government and international organisations including the ILO and the UNICEF have, therefore, been logged into seeking ways to reduce the incidence of child labour. But even today there are no simple and easy short term solutions to the problem. More than 99 percent of the incidence of child labour is found in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America where children are contributing as high as one third of the family income (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos, 1997)⁴.

There may be several reasons why the issue of child labour should be an important social and economic concern. But, at least two are worth serious consideration. In the first place, child labour is actually a violation of children's human rights. It implies that young children are forced to undertake work that may be abusive and beyond their physical capability. Child labour is often significantly undervalued in the labour market⁵. They also work the longest hours. Apart from being a violation of children's human rights, child labour is also a dis-investment in human

¹ Estimates show that about 80,000 new children are recruited into child labour every day (Grimsrud and Stokke, 1997)

² For instance, more than 36.6 percent of the boys aged between 10 and 14 years and some 20 percent of the girls in the same age category were working in England and Wales in 1851 (Basu and Van, 1998). Even today there are some isolated cases of child labour in the developed world (see Appendix Table A1).

³ For instance, the recent international conferences on child labour in Amsterdam in February 1997 and in Oslo in October 1997 as well as the different regional consultation meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America most of them also in 1997 are clear manifestations of the growing conviction that this global problem needs a global solution. Child labour was also one the main agenda items of the ILO conference in June 1999.

⁴ Prohibiting children from all kinds of work without first raising family real income from other sources might therefore, have tragic consequences for the poor creating even more destitute children (Myers, 1991).

⁵ Children's earnings are consistently lower than those of adults, even where the two groups are engaged in the same tasks and they receive no fringe benefits, insurance or social security payments (Bequelle and Boyden, 1988).

capital formation as it has a detrimental effect on the subsequent private and social returns from it. Child labourers are deprived of freedom, childhood, education, fun and play, and natural development. In principle, childhood should be a period of school learning, of recreation, of physical, mental and social development. Thus, understanding child labour is important not only because young children are made to undertake work obligations that may be beyond their physical capability but also because of its long term effect on human capital formation and on the children's future welfare (Ravallion and Wodon, 1999). The perpetuation of child labour is neither in the best interest of the children and their families; nor is it in the best interest of the social and economic wealth of nations (UNICEF, 1997a).

Child labour is particularly exploitative and of a hazardous nature in Sub Saharan Africa due to the region's unique socio economic, cultural, and developmental circumstances. Africa is characterized by frequent natural disasters, armed conflicts, famine and hunger, all of which are fertile grounds for child labour (see Appendix table A2). Schooling, which is believed to be the best alternative to child labour is also not widespread in Sub Saharan Africa. Sub Saharan Africa has generally the lowest school enrolment ratios (see Appendix table A3 and Figure 1). Child labour may have diverse causes stemming from cultural, historical, social and economic circumstances. Child labour is sometimes perceived as unavoidable and a necessary part of the child's socialisation process in many developing countries. Cultural and societal considerations commonly require children to participate in domestic work and/or in manual work on the fields in these countries.

Unfortunately, our understanding of the demand and supply forces and their implication on the child's normal development in Africa is limited. Very little is known about the magnitude, nature and distribution of child labour, about the conditions under which children work, and about the effects of work on their physical, intellectual, moral or social development. So there is a need for careful analyses of the nature and extent of child labour within the context of a given social and cultural framework. The main aim of this study is to reflect on the incidence of child labour in Africa by using empirical evidence from rural Ethiopia. Any program aimed at improving the welfare of children cannot be successful unless it is based on relatively accurate knowledge of the magnitude, nature, and effects of child labour and the needs, constraints, and opportunities of the children and their families. As clearly stated by Grote et al (1998) intervention to curb the problem of child labour should be based on the type or types of child labour arrangements and the institutional and administrative capacity of the country in question.

The study is expected to stimulate debate on the subject and also contribute to the empirical literature on the subject. The importance of such a study is also warranted because it helps to identify possible intervention areas to combat child labour and enable policy makers, NGOs and other groups to design realistic plans of action. As Basu (1999) stressed policy interventions towards child labour should be context specific. Identifying the extent of child labour could serve as an effective instrument for informing the public and creating awareness of the intensity of the problem. The paper is organised into eight sections. Section two takes up

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some of the controversies on the definition of child labour while section three presents a typology of child labour. The incidence of child labour in Africa and the rationale for expecting a high incidence in Ethiopia are contained in the next two sections. Section six looks at the extent and nature of child labour in rural Ethiopia on the basis of empirical evidence and section seven examines the policy environment with regard to child labour. The last section concludes by reflecting on some policy implications and pointing out some areas for further research on topic.

2 Defining and Understanding Child Labour

Child labour covers a wide range of ethical, economic, and legal issues and hence may have different meanings in different societies. It can range from acceptable and constructive work that make children less marginalized, to the most exploitative conditions that constrain the mental and physical development of children. It can range from any help within the household and/or on the farm to wage work, trading, or heavy physical work (BMZ, 1997). Whether all kinds of economic activities including unpaid work - a family farm, household enterprise and domestic work, which are detrimental to the health, education and normal development of the child should be taken as child labour or whether it should be viewed only as wage employment are still controversial issues. What constitutes child labour, therefore, lacks a uniform definition the result of which may lead to different estimates of the number of working children⁶. In fact, one of the main reasons for the continued prevalence of child labour even during the 21st century arises from the lack of a uniform understanding of the problem.

Often two major conventions, the ILO Convention 138 and the UN Convention on the Right of the Child are used as benchmarks for providing a working definition for child labour. The overriding principle in these Conventions is that work should not interfere with the education and the fullest mental and physical development of the child. Accordingly, the main criteria for determining child labour are the age of the child and the nature of the work. Age is a crucial factor because up to a certain age the primary occupation of children should be obtaining an education and other activities which are appropriate for their healthy development, including play. But age alone may not always be a sufficient base for defining child labour (Blanc 1994)⁷. The ILO's Convention 138 on minimum age for employment which states that the minimum age should not be less than the age of compulsory education (schooling) and in any case shall not be less than 15 years (ILO, 1973)⁸ is implicitly or explicitly used as the benchmark and blue print for defining child labour and for formulating national policies and practices⁹. Hence a person below 15 years is often treated as a child and international labour standards have established a

⁶ For instance, a study in an Indian district showed that if the definition of the ILO is used 13 percent of the five to 14 aged children were labourers in 1983 while a more liberal definition increased the rate to 33 percent (Jayaraj and Subramanian, 1997).

⁷ For instance, in the western societies childhood is defined on the basis of chronological age, and economic activities performed by children below a certain minimum age are usually treated as child labour activities. On the other hand, in many developing countries childhood is considered as a socialisation phase that introduces the child into work activities and survival skills (Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995).

⁸ Convention 138 allows countries whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed to initially specify the minimum age of 14 and reduce from 13 years to 12 years the minimum age for light work. This convention seems to be the basis for several countries for defining a child (see Appendix table A4).

⁹ Some, however, argue that this definition is rather broad. For instance, Anker and Melkus (1996) argue that the definition is broad as it includes all forms of work- for example harmless as well as hazardous work, part time or full time work and it is too narrow because it excludes full time unpaid work for family maintenance such as childcare and housework which occupies the time of many children especially young girls.

set of minimum acceptable ages for different types of employment¹⁰. Some even believe that any kind of activity performed by a child below the age of 15 is illegal and should be banned. On the other hand UNICEF considers all those below the age of 18 as children and argues that unless the work endangers children's physical, cognitive, social and psychological development it may not necessarily be bad (UNICEF, 1997a). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also defines a child as every human being below the age of 18 years¹¹.

The transition from childhood to adulthood usually depends on the cultural and social composition of society and hence, the definition of child labour may differ from country to country, or within a country from society to society. As Rodgers and Standing (1981) stressed, the definition of child labour must be related to a particular social framework as well as to chronological age. But although age plays an important role in defining the period of childhood, it may not be a sufficient criteria for defining child labour. Some people argue that child work will contribute towards socialisation, training and self esteem if it is conducted under appropriate protection and supervision¹². Under such perspectives, child work could even be meaningful and constructive and can have some learning value (Bequelle and Boyden, 1988; ILO, 1995). According to this view only regular participation of children in the labour force to earn a living or supplement household income should be considered as child labour. In other words a child could be classified as a "labourer" if he or she is economically actively engaged in work done on a regular basis for which he or she is remunerated.

On the other hand, several other people argue that all forms of child work that might have negative implications on the normal development of the child could be considered as exploitative and should be banned. If children are unable to attend schools and have insufficient time for play and recreation their mental and physical development could be seriously hampered. As indicated by WHO (1988) the participation of children in work activities could deprive them of the opportunity for a meaningful relationship with family members, peers and others, deprive them of the time for play, exploration spontaneity, rest and even moments of irresponsibility and thus deprive them of their childhood.

In spite of the controversies surrounding the definition of child labour, it seems that there is general agreement that work becomes unacceptable when children are made to work at very

¹⁰ Recently the ILO has issued Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour which consider all children below the age of 18 years as children and calls for the abolition of all forms of slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution, forced or compulsory labour including recruitment of children into armed conflicts, and any work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (ILO, 1999a).

¹¹ Article fifteen of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states that every child (less than 18 years) shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development (OAU, 1990).

¹² Thus, where work is really part of the socialisation process and where it is a means of transmitting skills from parent to child it may even be difficult to speak of child labour. It is argued that parents impart simple traditional skills that are often passed on from one generation to the next through child work, which can increase children's sense of responsibility, build their self esteem and self confidence, enhance children's status in the family, provide them with an opportunity to learn the skills of their parents and neighbours, make children less marginalized, and provide an opportunity for the initiation into adulthood (Blanc, 1994).

young ages for long hours, work for too little pay and work under hazardous conditions (Bequelle 1991; Fyfe 1993). And as Bequelle and Myers (1995) stressed, the concept of work hazard needs to be child centred, focusing not only on factors of immediate jeopardy but also those that menace child development over the long term. Thus, it is essential to understand child labour in its broadest sense in order to capture its different forms. Considering only the participation of children in paid work could be too restrictive ignoring the plight of millions of children toiling in the informal sector. Work in the informal sector is usually a serious burden and a risk to children since the relationship between work, learning and play is often out of balance.

Therefore, child work, be it in the form of unpaid domestic work or in the form of paid work, can be exploitative when a child works either full time at too early an age, or works too many hours and endures undue mental physical, social, or psychological stress as a result of the work. It can also be exploitative when children live and work on the streets or work for inadequate pay, or work in jobs with too much responsibility, or are denied access to education. Moreover it may not be work per se that is bad, but the long term effect of work on the child that determines whether work is exploitative or not. It is now clear that several aspects of child labour put excessive physical, social and psychological strains on the child and hamper the child's physical, social and psychological development (UNICEF, 1986, ILO, 1992)¹³. So children should be protected from work that compromises their future, that threatens their safety, health and welfare; is detrimental to their education and training; deprives them of their childhood; and jeopardises their right to education, physical, and psychological development. The question is, therefore, not whether children should work or not, but from what age and doing what, are the issues that need to be addressed.

In the context of this study, child labour is taken as any activity, paid or unpaid, other than school attendance that compromises the normal physical and/or educational development that non-working children under the age of 15 years would be expected to attain. It is understood as a situation where the healthy development of the child is endangered by the lack of education, play and recreation due to work demands¹⁴. Any form of children's work (and not just hazardous work) which limits their capabilities to lead a "worth-while" life as children or in future as adults, should be seen as intolerable¹⁵.

¹³ The most important dimensions of child development that could be affected by child labour include; physical development (overall health, co-ordination, strength, vision, hearing, etc), cognitive development (literacy, numeracy, basic cultural knowledge, vocational skills, etc), emotional development (adequate self esteem, family attachment, feeling of love and acceptance, etc) and social and moral development such as sense of group identity, ability to co-operate with others, respect of the law, etc.

¹⁴ A similar definition is provided by Andvig (1997) who indicated child labour should be seen as any activity which the child undertakes to help the family in its subsistence efforts or to help himself/herself in his/her own subsistence efforts whether paid or unpaid, legal or illegal, but which will have negative implications on the normal physical, mental, psychological and social development of the child.

¹⁵ Sen (1981) had argued that development is a process that expands the "entitlement" and the capabilities of the people to live in a way they have reason to value. So child labour is an important development issue.

3 Typology of Child Labour

The forms in which child labour manifests itself are complex and differ from place to place and from time to time. The range of different employment relations may vary from wage labourers in the formal sector to self-employment and unpaid family workers. Child work could also be classified on the basis of whether children are working on a part time or full time basis. Some receive part of their wage in kind while others are paid on piece rate basis. A difference in the typology of child labour may also arise partly because of disagreements on what constitute child labour. So it may be difficult to come up with a common classification list on the types and forms of child employment. Different people have used different classification criteria. Here, only the most common types of child labour are discussed. Child labour can be categorised into wage earners and unpaid work on the basis of remuneration. It can also be classified on the basis of the economic activity or sectors, or according to the type of employment relationship into formal and informal. The level of openness or its transparency (visible or invisible) could also be another basis for classifying child labour.

On the basis of employment relationships, child labour can be categorised into five major groups (Fyfe, 1985). These are domestic work, non-domestic and non-paid farm work, wage labour, employment in the informal sector and bonded or tied labour. A similar classification has been proposed by Hemmer et al (1996) and BMZ (1997) who classified child labour into seven categories. According to them, child labour can be either in the form of wage employment in which children are paid wages on the basis of time rate or piece rate; or in the form of unpaid work in a family enterprise and/or in the form of domestic or household work. Domestic work includes cleaning, cooking, and looking after younger brothers and sisters at home, which is one of the most dominant forms of child labour in African countries. It can also be manifested in the form of assistantship where a child is required to assist a worker who is employed by others. Different forms of apprenticeship programs (children on a training programme), forced and bonded child labour (bondage labour, slavery, etc.) and self-employment (children who work on their own) are other forms of child labour.

Mendelievich (1979) classified working children into - children who work on their own account, wage earners paid on the basis of time and piece rate, apprentices children who assist an adult worker who in turn works for an employer, and children who work with their family without any direct remuneration. Mendelievich's classification has disregarded the most exploitative form of child labour, i.e., bonded child labour. Child labour can also be classified into full time and part time labour as suggested by Grote et al (1999). Children who are in the full time labour category will not be able to attend schools. On the other hand those in the part time child labour category may either be attending full school time or are attending a constrained school time. Child labour can also be grouped into two on the basis of who makes the decision to

put the child into work, i.e., employment on the basis of a family decision or employment on the basis of a child's decision (Hemmer et al, 1996). In the case of a family decision a child may work within the family economy, or could be employed in the labour market as a wage labourer or may be put under forced labour. If child work is on the basis of the child's decision the child may either be self employed or become a wage earner in the labour market. Non-paid farm work is predominant in the rural areas where children, both male and female start working on their parents' farms at a very early age. Farm work in the form of ploughing, weeding or harvesting which can often be beyond children's physical strength are common activities of children in the rural sector. Part of the demand for more children or large family sizes emanates from the desire to maximise children's labour contribution particularly in the agricultural sector.

Bonded or tied child labour is an arrangement where children are forced to work for others to settle off debts of their parents. This is the most intolerable and exploitative form, a kind of forced labour in which children enter servitude as a result of some prior financial transactions that took place between their parents and a lender. Children from landless families and from migrant labourer families are particularly victims of this type of child labour. Wage labour is a type of arrangement in which the child receives some remuneration though much less than what an adult worker would have received for the work. Children are employed as wage labourers sometimes legally and at other times illegally in the construction, manufacturing, and mining sectors, in agro industries, in the service sector. The form of the employment contract can either be casual or regular. All kinds of work activities which are informal and which may be difficult to quantify fall under the informal child labour category where entry is relatively easy. Shoe shining, watching and washing cars, selling newspapers, rubbish collection, shop keeping, traditional weaving, making of agricultural tools, begging and various forms of trading, are some examples of this type of child labour.

4 Trends in the Incidence of Child Labour in Africa

Although no one exactly knows how many children are at work in the world at present since labour force surveys usually do not capture activities of children below the age of 15 years, the problem is more pronounced in Africa than anywhere else. Factors which accentuate child labour (including rapid population growth, reduced standards of living resulting from economic crises, insufficient public investment in essential economic and social services especially in education, wars, civil strife, the breakdown of family structures and an increase in female headed households, and the AIDS epidemics) are predominant in Sub Saharan Africa as compared to other regions (see Appendix Table A2 and A3). So one could safely conclude that child labour should be a cause for serious concern in Africa. In Sub Saharan Africa, many children often participate in work activities usually under exploitative and hazardous conditions with serious implications on their physical, moral, social, and psychological development. Poor economic and social conditions coupled with the failure of the education system has forced parents to involve their children in economic activities.

Although child labour is found in all regions of the world, it is overwhelmingly a developing country phenomenon (see Appendix table A1). Recent, ILO estimates show that some 250 million (140 million boys and 110 million girls) children between the ages of five to 14 are obliged to work either full time or part time mostly in developing countries with 61 percent (152 million) in Asia, 32 percent (80 million) in Africa, and seven percent (18 million) in Latin America (Kebebew, 1998). Close to one half of them work full time while the remaining half combine economic activities and non-economic activities such as schooling. However, these estimates have to be interpreted with caution since they exclude whole categories of children working in the invisible domestic services, subsistence agriculture and the informal sector usually taking place in the form of unpaid work.

Table 1: Regional distribution of economically active children below 15 years.

Region	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
World (estimates in millions)	140	110	250
<i>Regional Distribution in Percent:</i>			
Africa	56	44	32
Asia excluding Japan	54	46	61
Latin America and Caribbean	67	33	7
Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand	57	43	0.2
Sex Ratio (world estimate)	56	44	100

Source: ILO 1998

If those invisible child workers are included then the estimates of child labour could increase significantly. In addition, such figures could also be deficient because of the likelihood of high under-reporting since employment of children is generally prohibited by law in many countries. Moreover, the magnitude of the problem cannot be captured only with numbers alone since the conditions of child labour may vary between countries. In percentage terms, more than 99 percent of working children are found in less developed regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Asia has the highest rate of child labour in absolute terms but Africa is on top of the list in terms of the labour force participation rates. Asia accounts for more than 60 percent of child workers in the world while some 32 percent of the working children world-wide are Africans.

Some estimates show that the overall number of child workers in Africa between the age of five and 14 years could reach some 80 million and the number is on the rise (ILO, 1997a). Given current trends, the potential number of child workers in Africa is projected to increase to more than 100 million over the next ten to 15 years (see also Appendix Table A5). According to the ILO estimates it appears that more boys (56%) participate in economic activities than girls (44%). But it should be remembered that the number of girls working is often underestimated by statistical surveys since these surveys usually do not take into account unpaid economic activities usually carried out by girls in and around the household¹⁶. Boys are employed more commonly in visible types of employment while girls work mostly in unpaid household work. Furthermore, girls work longer hours on average than boys. Child labour force participation rates are much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. And about 90 percent of the working children in rural

¹⁶ In fact, more girls perform full time housework of non-economic nature than boys, e.g. housekeeping in their own household in order to enable their parents to go to work, or take care of sick or handicapped members in the household. If such full time household work were taken into account, there would be little or no difference between the sexes in the total number of working children, and the number of girls might even exceed the number of boys.

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areas are engaged in agricultural activities while their urban counterparts are found mostly in the trade and service sector. Some five percent of child labourers may be employed in the manufacturing or mining sectors (World Bank, 1997).

In order to get a better picture of the magnitude of the problem in different parts of the world it is useful to examine the percentage of children of the relevant age group who participate in work activities, which is presented in Table 2. As expected, more than 40 percent of all children between the age of five and 14 in Africa are participating in economic activities while the corresponding figures for Asia and Latin America are 21 and 17 percent respectively. That means the incidence of child labour in Africa is more than twice the level in Asia. Within the African continent Eastern Africa ranks top in the rate of children's participation in the labour force with 33 percent while West Africa and Middle Africa account for 24 percent and 22 percent respectively (Kebebew, 1998). Estimates suggest that in Benin 27 percent of the children between 10 and 14 years work, in Burkina Faso 51 percent and in Burundi 49 percent. In Kenya, Ethiopia, Niger, Uganda, and Tanzania the estimated rates are between 40 and 46 percent. In the case of Mali 54 percent of the children are estimated to be working. The participation rates of children in economic activities is estimated to be less than six percent in Mauritius and South Africa (ILO, 1997b). These figures clearly demonstrate the intensity of the problem particularly in Eastern and Western Africa.

Table 2: Participation rates of children aged 5 to 14 in economic activities (%)

Regions	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
World	27	22	25
<i>Regions:</i>			
Africa	45	37	41
Asia	22	20	21
Latin America and Caribbean	46	11	17
Oceania	22	9	10

Source: ILO, 1998.

It should, however, be remembered that the majority of children in Sub Saharan Africa participate in work activities either in the form of unpaid family workers, and/or in the form of family farm workers. Only some three percent of the child labourers in Sub Saharan Africa are wage workers, the majority of which are in urban areas and are boys (Kebebew, 1993; ILO, 1996a). Some 77 percent of the economically active children under the age of 15 are working in the agricultural sector with some 38 percent in paid employment (ILO, 1998)¹⁷. Commercial

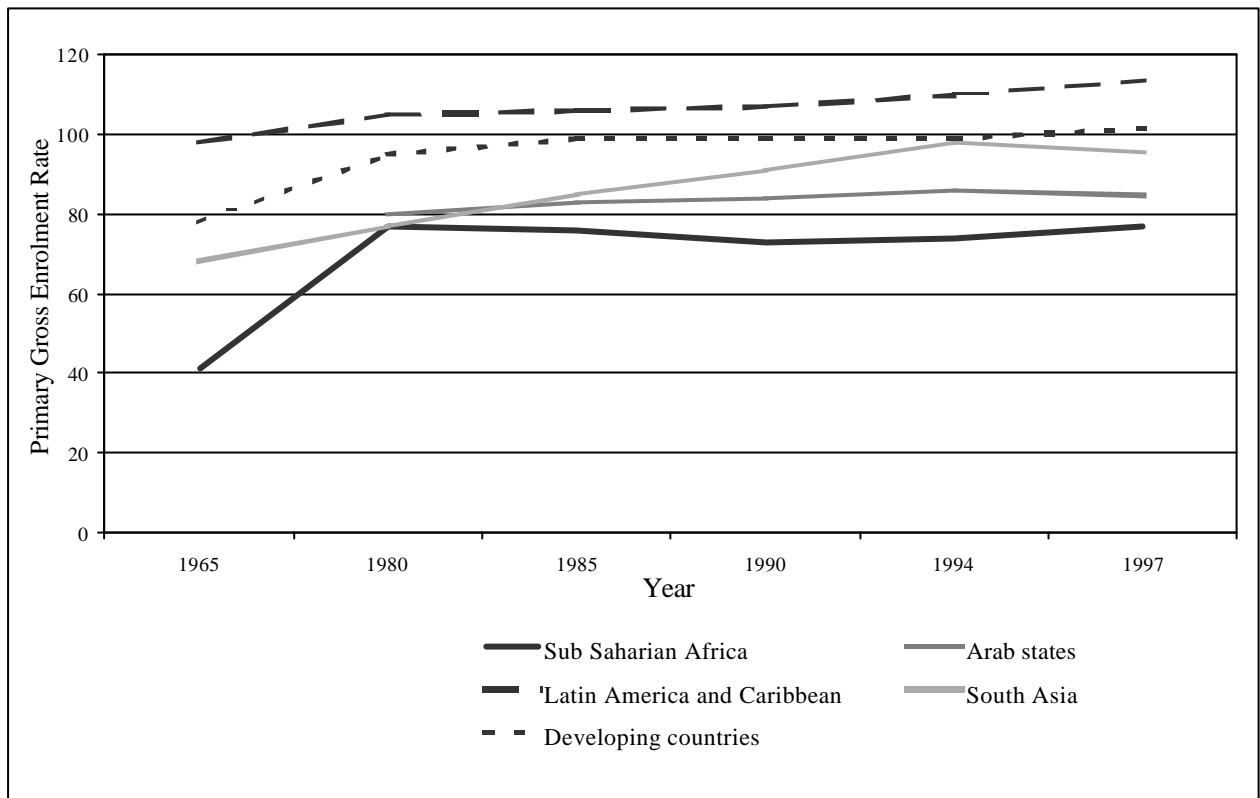
¹⁷ The majority of working children in South Asian countries is found in the manufacturing sector while in Africa the majority are found in the agricultural and informal sector (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997).

agriculture in Africa also harbours some child labour. A study in Kenya estimated that children constitute roughly 20 to 30 percent of the casual labour force for all types of plantations (ILO, 1997b). Next to agriculture, domestic work is the most common form of child labour in Africa, although it is impossible to calculate accurately the number of children because of the hidden and dispersed nature of the work and the informal nature of the job arrangements. Domestic workers usually come from extremely poor families and work up to 18 hours per day. They are the first to rise and the last to go to bed, with no time to go to school, to go out, or to play (ILO, 1996b).

Several children are also found working in marginal economic activities like street trade in Africa, which exposes them to car accidents and excessive heat. Many children are also trapped in slavery and slavery like bondage practices in many African countries, which are similar to slavery except that the markets are not open. Economic pressures and persistent poverty are causing a resurgence of child slaves in many countries of West Africa (BBC, 1999). Informal bondage agreements under which impoverished parents surrender their children to outsiders simply to work in exchange for their upbringing are common in Africa.

Though many countries in Africa have regulations concerning minimum compulsory education and work ages their enforcement is inadequate and often limited to the formal sectors. The problem of child labour will continue to grow in Africa at least in absolute terms in the coming future. It is expected that the number of working children in Africa aged 10 – 14 will grow by about 340, 000 to 400,000 per year over the next 15 years. And, although net school enrolment rates might be increasing high population growth will offset any relative progress if present trends continue. Moreover, at least some 400, 000 children will remain out of school in Sub Saharan Africa and will, in all likelihood, join the pool of child labourers over the next few years. So, over the next ten to fifteen years there will be at least one million new child workers per year in Sub Saharan Africa, as a result of a demographic explosion of impoverished people and poor or inadequate levels of economic growth across much of the continent. This clearly demonstrates the need for an urgent preventive action to avoid the projected growth of child labour in Africa. Figure 1 shows that trend in primary school enrolment over the last three decades in Sub Saharan Africa in comparison to other regions. Sub Saharan Africa has the least growth rates in gross primary enrolment rates than any other region.

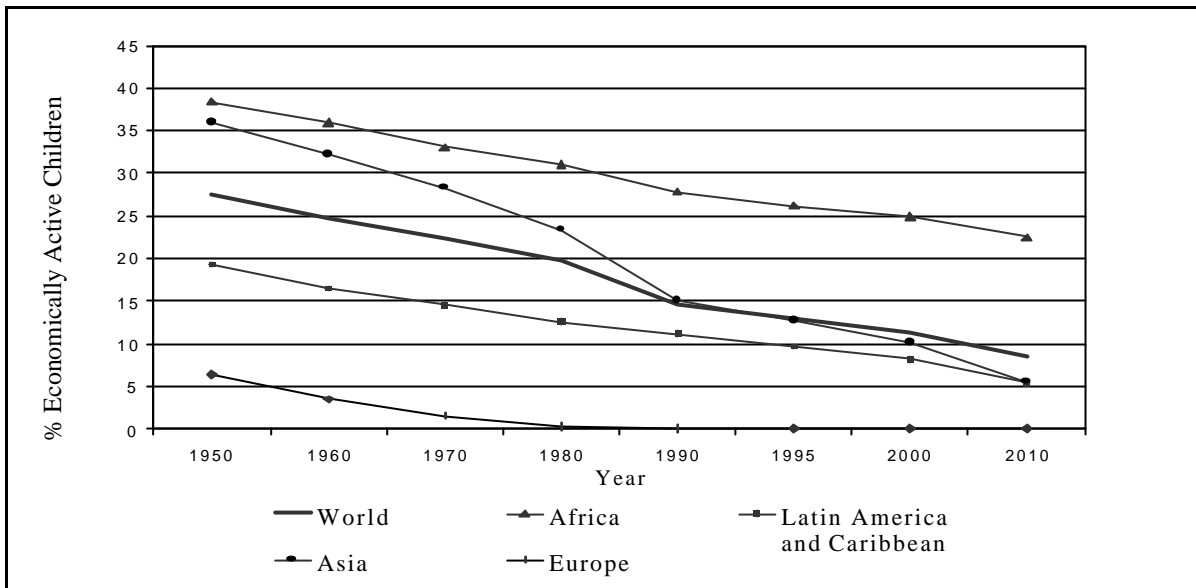
Figure 1: Trends in primary gross enrolment rates by region 1965 – 96



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999

The ILO projections show that, in general, there is a declining trend in the incidence of child labour in the world. But the rate of decline differs across regions (see Figure 2). The decline for some countries has been rather rapid and significant particularly in South East Asia primarily due to rising per capita income, the spread of basic education, and a reduction in family size. Even in Sub Saharan Africa where the problem is particularly acute the trend shows a downward decline due to increased public awareness, enforcement of labour laws, expansion of education, etc. But, although the trend in the participation rate shows a declining trend the absolute number of working children in Africa is expected to rise as shown above.

Figure 2: Trends in the participation rate of children, 10-14 years, in economic activities



Source: ILO, Economically Active Population, 1997.

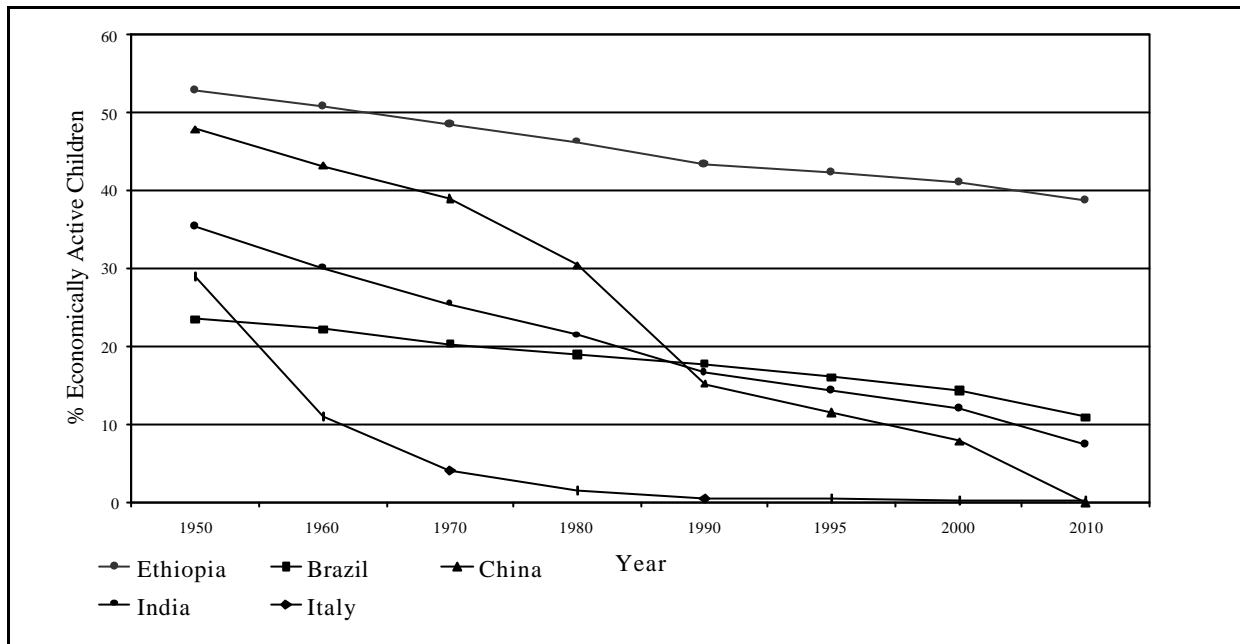
There are, therefore, adequate reasons to be concerned with the problem of child labour in Africa. As stated earlier child labour often jeopardises children's physical and intellectual development and hinders their possibilities of becoming productive adults in the future. Although the complete abolition of child labour in Africa will take a long time, there is a need to ensure that a start is made. Any intervention policy on child labour should be based on careful analysis and research rather than just emotion and impulse. The frequently proposed measures of trade sanctions will not be effective to bring child labour to an end at least in Africa since the proportion of child workers employed in the export sector is rather marginal with a world-wide estimate of not more than five percent (UNICEF, 1997a; Chaudhri, 1997).

5 Reasons for Expecting a High Incidence of Child Labour in Ethiopia

While the incidence of child labour may vary greatly from country to country and even possibly within countries, it is however clear that the number of child workers is so high that the issue of child labour deserves to be a matter of priority concern for many African countries including Ethiopia. Child labour also poses an enormous challenge in Ethiopia just as in many other developing countries. Hundreds of under age children are engaged in work activities, often deprived of any form of education and other ingredients necessary for their proper growth. A large proportion of the Ethiopian children find themselves as victims of famine, disease, poverty, civil war, family displacement and social instability, all of which are contributing factors for a high incidence of child labour. The number of street children is growing every day (Addis Tribune, 1999) and there is no clear cut long term government policy on child labour. Despite the significance of the problem it is one of the least researched areas in Ethiopia and has often been given little attention either in the media or in the academic circles. The ILO estimates show that Ethiopia is one of those Sub Saharan African countries where the participation rate of children in economic activities is very high¹⁸ (Figure 3). There could be several social, economic and cultural reasons why one should theoretically expect a high incidence of child labour in Ethiopia.

¹⁸ The participation rate of children between the age of 10 and 14 in economic activities in the world in 1995 was around 13 percent while the corresponding figure for Ethiopia was more than 42 percent. And although there is a declining trend in the incidence of child labour globally by the year 2010 still more than 40 percent of the children between the age of 10 and 14 years could be participating in economic activities.

Figure 3: Trends in the participation rates of children in selected countries, 10-14 years



Source: ILO, Economically active population, 1997.

Ethiopia is the second largest country in Sub Saharan Africa with an estimated population of over 60 million. The annual growth rate of the population is estimated to be around three percent. More than 50 percent of the total population is reported to be below the age of 14 years (CSA, 1994). The economically active population is growing at a rate of three percent per annum. Due to this rapid increase in population a growing proportion of the population including children are entering into the labour force at a faster rate and at an early age. Absorbing the ever increasing labour force into productive employment has, therefore, become a major challenge for policy makers in the country. Agriculture is the main stay of the economy accounting for more than 45 percent of the GDP, 90 percent of the foreign exchange earnings and employing more than 85 percent of the population. The sector is characterised by subsistence production and low technological development both of which lead to a high incidence of child labour. Less than 15 percent of the total population lives in the urban areas.

The literature indicates that poverty is the root cause of child labour in developing countries. Ethiopia is one of the least developed and poorest countries on earth with a per capita income of less than US\$ 110. About two thirds of the Ethiopian population live on an income below that required to meet the minimum basic needs (UNICEF, 1992; Appendix Table A6). The fertility rate is among the highest in Africa and the world with about seven children per woman. So the high population growth coupled with the predisposing poverty puts Ethiopia as one of the candidates for a high incidence of child labour. The contribution by children to the family income is well recognised from other studies. Children in Ethiopia also make significant contributions to the family income. A recent survey in Ethiopia showed that more than three

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quarters of working children work for more than nine hours a day and gave all the money they earned to their families (WIC, 1999).

As argued earlier, education could be one of the best and probably most effective instruments for combating child labour. Despite the universal declaration that children should have the right to free primary education a quarter of the primary school age children in developing countries are not attending school. In the case of Ethiopia, most rural children herd livestock and completely miss any form of education. When these children grow older and finish herding they face difficulty in finding work because they have few skills other than herding and fall back in an environment where there is already high unemployment. There is no compulsory education system in place in Ethiopia. School enrolment rates both in rural and urban areas and at all levels are among the lowest in the world (see Appendix Table A7). The gross enrolment rate in primary schools in 1996/97 was 35 percent suggesting that more than 60 percent of Ethiopia's children may be in paid or unpaid work in one sector or another (see Table 3). About a third of those students enrolled in grade one drop out and some 20 percent repeat the grade (MOE, 1994). The drop out rates for junior secondary and secondary schools¹⁹ stand at 10 and 17 percent respectively.

Table 3: Gross enrolment ratios by education level and region (1996/97)

Regional States	Grades 1 – 8			Grades 9 – 12		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Tigray	49	41	45	7	4	5
Afar	10	7	8	2	1	2
Amhara	30	26	28	7	5	6
Oromiya	41	20	31	8	5	6
Somali	16	7	12	1	0	1
Benshangul Gumuz	67	29	49	6	3	5
SNNP	60	28	44	10	5	8
Gambella	82	49	66	16	4	10
Harari	74	57	66	40	32	36
Dire Dawa	54	47	51	22	18	20
Addis Ababa	80	81	80	47	38	42
Ethiopia	43	26	35	10	7	8

Source: Ministry of Education, Education statistics: annual abstracts, May 1998

¹⁹ The education system in Ethiopia is organised into primary level, consisting of grades 1 to 6, junior secondary referring to grades 7 and 8 and secondary levels consisting of grades 9 to 12.

Evidence from other developing countries also shows that there is a lot of gender disparity in school enrolment. While school enrolment is much lower for girls, school drop out rates are much higher for girls than boys (Bequelle and Boyden, 1988). For instance, in middle and Sub Saharan Africa, 20 and 25 percent fewer girls than boys are attending schools (Murard, 1998). As Table 3 shows, the primary gross enrolment rate for boys was over 40 percent; the corresponding rate for female students was less than 30 percent in 1996/97 in Ethiopia (see Table 3). Enrolment of girls declines particularly as the level of education increases. Rural parents in Ethiopia would prefer their boys to stay in schools than the girls and feel that school attendance is more essential for boys than for girls (ILO, 1995).

Children may not be attending school or drop out of school and resort to work also for school related reasons. Some of the school related reasons include the non-availability of an educational infrastructure, irrelevant curriculum, overcrowding, inflexibility, poor private return on education, and exorbitant costs. The inability of the academic structure to accept everyone of the school age population and the costs associated with schooling lead poor households to send their children to work and try their luck in the informal sector instead of schooling. When children are not attending schools it is not only the welfare of the child that is endangered but the welfare of the nation as a whole since education is an investment into the future. Full time working children could not acquire the necessary human capital which allows them to have a fair chance in the labour market when they grow up. This translates at the national level into a labour force which is ill equipped to compete in the global economy where successful development will be increasingly based on skills and competition (Anker and Melkus, 1996). So in the absence of an adequate and appropriate system of education, initiatives against child labour will achieve very limited success. Schools in Ethiopia suffer from over-crowding and inadequate sanitation. The failure of the education system to meet academic and job aspirations could lead to increased incidences of child labour. Parents often think that children could learn a skill (for example agriculture) through work and at the same time supplement family income. As the majority of the Ethiopian population are illiterate they may not be able to visualise the long term benefits of education and invest in their children's schooling.

The structure and level of technology in production could be an important factor contributing to the increased supply of child labour. Other studies show that the higher the share of agriculture in the GDP, the higher the incidence of child labour will be ²⁰. Since Ethiopia is an agrarian country there are adequate reasons to expect a high incidence of child labour. Current estimates show that more than 57 percent of total child employment in Ethiopia is found in rural areas. Agricultural production is backward and labour intensive with high participation of children.

Child labour is more prevalent in rural areas also because the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking. The restrictions that are contained

²⁰ More than 70 percent of the children in the 10 to 14 age category world-wide are working in the agricultural sector (ILO, 1997).

in the labour legislation are not usually applicable to the agricultural and informal sectors. The level of enforcement is also very weak, on the one hand, since the law covers only undertakings where a formal employment relationship exists leaving out the agricultural sector in which several children are found to be engaged and on the other, due to the limited organisational capacity. The labour inspection unit of the public agency entrusted to implement the labour law is also poorly staffed which makes it difficult to closely monitor child labour.

Economic stagnation and civil war, which characterise the recent Ethiopian history also contribute to the rise in child labour. Demobilisation of ex-soldiers, return of refugees, displacement of families due to ethnic conflict etc., all contribute to the problem of child labour. Many children work in the informal sector and many more have become homeless living on the street. Some reports indicate that there are more than 150,000 street children in Ethiopia at present (Addis Tribune, 1999). The problem will continue to persist as economic conditions deteriorate and expenditure in social development, especially in the area of health and education declines. The AIDS epidemic is also potentially a big threat since under-aged orphaned children may be increasingly pushed into work to support themselves.

6 Child Labour in the Rural Economy of Ethiopia: Empirical Evidence

Child labour is overwhelmingly a rural phenomenon, with as many as 70 percent of the child labourers involved in agricultural production world-wide (ILO, 1999a; BMZ, 1997)²¹. It has already been indicated that child labour is usually used in activities that are technically simple. The low technological capability required for rural economic activities increases the propensity of child labour in rural areas as compared with urban centers. Many children particularly girls are also engaged in domestic tasks such as the preparation of meals, washing clothes, child care, cleaning, feeding and milking domestic animals, fetching water and fire wood, farm work, family business work as well as the sale of grain and livestock at local markets or in various kinds of combinations of these activities. There are differences of perception whether some of these activities could be considered as normal family obligations or whether they could give rise to exploitation and abuse. As we have argued earlier whether work has a detrimental effect on children's development depends on the working conditions (hours of work, exposure to physical hazards, etc.), age of the child, and other risks and abuses (psychological and social adjustment risks, prostitution, child slavery, etc). Rural children in Ethiopia begin participating in economic activities on the farm and in domestic work at an early age. They usually start participating in work activities first by looking after the animals, collecting firewood and fodder, fetching water, and taking on more strenuous tasks as they grow up.

Agricultural work in Ethiopia, includes activities like ploughing, weeding, harvesting, transporting, threshing, post harvest and marketing activities. Work in the agricultural sector is repetitive and labour intensive. Herding of cattle is also a major activity for rural children. Some children are also hired out as labourers to other households particularly if the family does not have adequate farm land. With the introduction of new and advanced farming techniques, new technologies and chemicals, agricultural work has become more hazardous. Climatic exposure or working under extreme weather conditions, work that is too long and too heavy for young children, work that exposes children to snake bites and cuts from sharpened tools, working barefooted for long hours, and lifting heavy loads are some of the health hazards children may face in an agricultural occupation.

Domestic work is also one of the most common and traditional forms of child labour in rural Ethiopia. Domestic chores include activities like fetching of water and firewood, minding of small children, preparation of food, cleaning etc. It also includes work in the rural informal sector including activities like shop keeping, traditional weaving, making of agricultural tools,

²¹ For instance, an ILO (1994) study in Indonesia indicated that 75 to 85 percent of the agricultural labour force consists of children of which more than 20 percent could be below the age of ten years.

trading, etc. Domestic services can cause serious psychological and social adjustment problems like premature ageing, depression, and low self esteem. Domestic child workers typically live away from home and may routinely work for long hours. Girls are particularly affected because it is considered to be an essential component of a girl's upbringing exercise. Many believe that girls should be prepared for their future roles as mothers and wives²². In general, while boys participate more in farm work, girls primarily work more in domestic activities.

6.1 Child labour in the subsistence farming sector

The rural economy of Ethiopia is dominated by a subsistence oriented agriculture. In a subsistence oriented environment, communities feel that it is important to involve children in economic activities and equip them with the basic life skills for their future survival. Thus, the subsistence nature of economic life, tradition, and cultural values force rural communities in Ethiopia to involve their children in economic activities thereby perpetuating child labour. These practices lead rural children into exploitative and hazardous work conditions and thereby limit their ability and right to grow up in a healthy and conducive environment. Children's participation in work activities, for whatever reasons, could only be considered as acceptable if it does not hinder the child's normal physical, psychological, social, mental, and behavioural development.

The incidence of child labour within the rural subsistence economy is examined using data from rural household surveys that were undertaken by the Department of Economics – Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the Centre for African Economies (Oxford). Detailed socio economic data were collected in three rounds between 1994 and 1995 from a total of 15 peasant associations (*Kebeles*) spread over four major regions. A total of 1477 households, which were selected randomly and proportional to size from each survey area, were interviewed using structured questionnaires. The four regions constitute almost 90 percent of the total population and occupy more than three quarters of the country. Although the data may not be representative for the whole country the different agro-ecological zones²³ were captured by these 15 survey sites (Dercon and Krishnan, 1996). Some of the salient features of the 15 survey sites are presented in Table 4.

While cereal production dominates the northern and central regions *chat*²⁴, coffee and *enset*²⁵ crops prevail most in the south. Some of the survey sites belong to the poorest regions of the country where frequent famine is observed while some are better off. There were about three

²² For instance, more than 35 percent of all the girls between the age of 10 and 14 in rural Brazil work as domestic workers compared to a national average of only 20 percent. In Ecuador the proportion of working girls in the rural areas could go as high as 44 percent (ILO, 1999a).

²³ The three major traditional agro-ecological zones in Ethiopia are the Woyena Dega, which refers to the mid altitude where the temperature is temperate, the Kola, which is the equivalent to an arid and semi arid zone, and the Dega, which is the high altitude zone where the temperature is rather cool.

²⁴ Chat is a kind of stimulant crop whose leaves are mostly consumed in the horn of Africa and in the Arabian peninsula and widely grown in Eastern Ethiopia.

²⁵ Enset is a root crop that is mostly used as food in most parts of southern Ethiopia.

children below the age of 18 years per family on average for all the survey sites. Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples State (SNNPS) having the highest number of children per family with Tigray and Amhara regions having fewer children. All three traditional climatic zones have been fairly represented in the survey.

6.1.1 Main types of work activities performed by rural children

The significant labour contribution of children even at an early age in agriculturally based societies has always been recognised. It is, therefore, essential to have a stock of the type of activities performed by rural children in order to identify the implications of work on the normal development of the child. Although the data did not distinguish between employment in economic and non-economic activities, respondents were asked to identify the primary, secondary and tertiary occupations for every member of the household including children. Table 5 presents the primary responsibilities of rural children expressed as a proportion of the surveyed children of the relevant age group. All rural children, except the inactive category which consists of the very young and disabled children, participate in work activities in rural Ethiopia. They participate in domestic work, in informal sector activities and on farm work, usually depending on the gender of the child.

While many children participate in a multiple of work activities including farm work, domestic work, cattle herding and work in the informal sector, only very few children attended schools during the time of the survey. Some children also combine work with schooling. But by all accounts domestic work and farm work are the main or primary work responsibilities for most of the rural children below the age of 15 years after controlling for the inactive group. According to the information presented in the table, the number of children who had been working²⁶ either on the farm or in the household was about three times the number of children going to school. Schooling is the main occupation for only a little more than ten percent of the surveyed children in the same age category. Even pre-school children, who are normally too young to work, often participate in domestic and farm work activities. Moreover, the participation rates of children in domestic and farm activities increases with age. For instance, while the participation rates for children between the age of seven and 10 were 55 and 60 percent for boys and girls respectively, the rates increased to 62 and 76 percent respectively for the next higher age group, i.e., the 11 to 14 age group.

²⁶ This category of working children includes all those children whose primary activity was indicated to be farm work, domestic work such as helping in the family, work in the informal sector, etc. Only children whose main responsibility was schooling, those who were labelled as too young to work, and those who were disabled and unable to work have been excluded from the working children category.

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Table 5: Primary responsibilities for rural children by age group and sex (%)

Type of work	Pre-School Children ²⁷		Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Student	1.8	1.2	18.0	11.8	30.4	18.1	15.6	9.6
Domestic and farm work	10.0	9.7	54.8	59.5	62.3	75.5	40.8	45.6
Too young to work	88.1	89.1	26.6	28.1	5.3	4.2	42.8	44.0
Others*	0.2	--	0.7	0.7	2.1	2.1	0.9	0.8
Sub-Total	570.0	586.0	579.0	595.0	438.0	425.0	1587.0	1606.0

* Others include those children looking for a job, the disabled, and those not in the labour force as well as those engaged in informal activities.

Source: Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

An important issue when dealing with the incidence of child labour is the need to make gender differentiation. Experience from other regions or countries show that girls' participation in household activities is extremely high as compared to boys' participation rates. In the process of preparing the girls to become good wives in the future they are required to learn cooking and other skills from their mothers or from their older sisters through increased participation in household activities. This situation will lead to high school non-attendance and dropouts for girls. Due to early marriage practices more girls usually stay out of schools than boys. Similar trends have been observed in this study. Female children were participating more in household activities such as looking after younger siblings, preparing and cooking food, cleaning the house and fetching water and fire wood. Boys' participation was higher in farm work, ploughing and harvesting of crops, looking after livestock, and fetching fire wood. While the school participation rate for girls was lower by about 10 percent than that for boys, their participation in the labour force was greater than for boys by the same margin. Only a little more than 10 percent of the girls in the seven to 10 age group and about 20 percent of the girls in the 11 to 14 age category reported that their primary responsibility is schooling. The corresponding figures for boys were 20 percent and 30 percent for the seven to 10 and 11 to 14 age categories respectively. This evidence indicates that there is a clear gender bias in work-related activities and schooling in rural Ethiopia. Moreover, the bias increases as children get older with more girls working than boys and more boys going to school than girls.

²⁷ Pre-school children consists of mainly the inactive category. Primary schooling begins at the age of 7 years in Ethiopia. Children below seven years may normally be enrolled either in traditional or religious schools in rural areas and in kindergartens in urban areas where children learn basic literacy and numeracy.

6.1.2 Average work starting age

The issue of child labour should be a concern to policy makers not only because children do participate in economic activities but also because of the early age at which they start to participate in work-related activities. Studies from other countries show that in general the poorer the household is, the lower would be the age at which children start to participate in work activities. Table 6 provides the age at which rural children start to participate in domestic or household work activities as a percentage of rural children who begin work related activities at the indicated age. Children in rural Ethiopia start assuming household or farm responsibilities as early as four years of age. Some 15 percent of the boys and about 20 percent of the girls started participating in work activities before they celebrate their fifth birthday. Early age work participation is more prevalent particularly among girls. The average work starting age is about six years and is slightly lower for girls. By the age of seven years, which is the school starting age in Ethiopia about 80 percent of the rural children have started to work. Almost everyone starts to participate in household and farm activities by the age of 10 years.

Table 6: Household work starting age for rural children by sex (%)

Work Starting Age	Percent of Children		Cumulative	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
≤ 4 year	14.4	18.3	14.4	18.3
5 – 7	63.7	60.9	78.1	79.3
8 – 10	19.8	18.9	98.0	98.1
11 – 13	1.8	1.3	99.7	99.5
≥ 14 years	0.3	0.4	100	100
Total count	1075	1129	2204	
Average work starting age	6.37	6.27		

Source: Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

The very early age at which children start to participate in labour activities is an important aspect of child labour since the younger the child starts to work the more vulnerable he/she becomes to workplace hazards, exploitation and ill treatment. The physical and mental development of very young children could be seriously affected through long hours of work, climatic exposure, work that is too heavy for young bodies, and accidents. These children are also usually staying out of school, or even if they are going to school, they will not be motivated to study well. Today, subsistence farming is also increasingly making use of toxic chemicals and motorised equipment, thereby increasing the health hazard for child workers. So children's participation in work related activities at an early age could bring undesirable effects on the normal development of the child.

6.1.3 Work participation and schooling

The relationship between school attendance and child labour is in general negative. Education and child labour are believed to be mutually incompatible. If a child is not going to school then he/she is most likely engaged in some kind of work activity, which may have long-term impact on the mental development of the child. On the other hand uninterrupted school attendance reduces the time the child has for work at home or in the labour market. The highest grade completed by rural children including participation in traditional and religious schools and in literacy programs is reported in Table 7, which gives the percentage of children who have completed a particular educational level.

Table 7: Highest level of school attained by rural children by age and sex (%)

Highest Level of Schooling	Pre-School Children		Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
None(Never any schooling)	93.1	96.9	71.9	85.1	42.2	66.5	72.9	82.6
Some nursery school	0.2	0.2	2.4	1.8	1.6	1.2	1.4	1.1
Primary education	4.0	1.8	16.9	13.9	35.2	24.6	17.5	12.4
Junior secondary school	--	--	--	--	2.7	1.7	0.8	0.5
Adult literacy program certificate	0.4	--	0.9	0.4	1.6	2.5	0.9	0.8
Attended traditional or religious school	2.4	1.1	7.5	3.3	8.8	2.7	6.1	2.4
Other literacy programs	--	--	0.5	0.4	1.6	0.7	0.6	0.3
Total	549	545	587	570	443	403	1579	1518

Source: The Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

Although children in Ethiopia are expected to start going to school at the age of seven more than 70 percent of the boys and 85 percent of the girls had not been enrolled in any school (formal or informal) during the time of the survey. So as many as 80 percent of the rural children in Ethiopia remain illiterate and will be unable to take advantage of human capital formation in the future. The gender bias in school attendance is reflected by the higher proportion of girls who are out of school for all age categories. More boys were enrolled both in formal schools as well as in traditional or religious schools.

In order to gain a much broader picture of the implications of work on education it might also be important to examine past school attendance, a proxy for school dropout rates. School dropout rate is very high in rural Ethiopia as observed by the proportion of children who have

attended school in the past and who were not in schools at the time of the survey²⁸. About four percent of the children between the age of seven and 10 years and some 10 percent of those between 11 and 14 years have discontinued their education most of whom are working (see Table 8). Even those who were enrolled in schools at the time of the survey were likely to dropout as can be seen by their delayed enrolment age. More than 50 percent of the children aged between seven and 10 years who were participating in domestic and farm work and more than 60 percent of children between the ages of 11 and 14 years engaged in similar activities had never been to schools even in the past. It is not only that school enrolment rates have been generally very low in rural Ethiopia but also biased. Boys had higher enrolment rates than girls for all age groups during or before the survey. The percentage of girls who have never been enrolled in schools is also much higher than the percentage of boys who have never been to schools.

Table 8: Past and current school enrolment status of rural children (%)

Activity	Aged 7 to 10			Aged 11 to 14			Total		
	attending	attended	never	attending	attended	never	attending	attended	never
Student at present	14.1	--	--	23.7	--	--	12.1	--	--
Domestic/ farm work	0.9	3.4	52.8	0.8	7.8	60.2	0.5	3.5	39.2
Too young to work	0.3	0.3	26.7	--	0.2	4.5	0.2	0.6	42.4
Others**	0.01	0.3	1.3	--	1.0	1.7	0.03	0.5	1.0
Sub Total	15.3	3.9	80.8	24.5	9.0	66.4	12.9	4.5	82.6
Total	1175			864			3193		

* 'never' refers to children who have never been to schools.

** Others include children looking for work, disabled children, children participating in informal activities, etc.

Source. Rural Households Survey, 1994.

²⁸ A recent report indicated that more than 10 percent of the female students drop out of school per year due to responsibilities at home, early marriage, fear of abduction, and several other reasons (WIC, 2000).

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It may not be sufficient to merely know that a large proportion of rural children do not go to school. From a policy perspective, it might also be useful to identify the main reasons why children are not attending school since children might be staying away from schools also for non-work related reasons. There may be several reasons why children do not attend schools. Many children fail to enrol in schools simply because subsistence households cannot afford to do without the labour of these children either for domestic work or for farm work. Child employment interferes with schooling by absorbing too much of the child's time. Work also requires a lot of energy so that children cannot have the necessary energy for school attendance or for effective study. Even for those children who might be able to combine farm work or domestic work with schooling, long hours of work will leave them exhausted. Faced with fatigue these children will have very little mental stimulation, the results of which will be a neglect of their studies. In the case of seasonal work children may be required to miss classes altogether even though they may be enrolled in schools. Children mistreated in the work place could also be psychologically disturbed and may not concentrate fully on their education. The primary reasons for not attending school by age and gender have been presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Primary reasons for not attending schools by age group and sex (%)

Reason	Pre-School Children		Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Both Sexes
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Too young for work/school	89.5	91.4	46.1	45.0	10.8	9.3	57.7
Required for farm activity	2.9	1.9	22.3	7.8	42.2	12.2	11.6
Required for domestic work activities	0.6	1.5	7.8	18.9	9.0	37.6	10.8
Required to take care of the sick and/or elderly	--	--	1.2	0.2	--	1.1	0.4
Required to work for wages	--	--	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.7	0.2
Total work related reasons	2.6	3.4	31.8	27.2	51.6	51.6	23.0
School too expensive	3.2	2.1	10.9	12.4	22.4	19.7	9.8
School too far/no places	1.8	1.7	4.3	6.7	5.8	8.2	4.3
Total reasons related to direct costs of schooling	5.0	3.8	15.2	19.1	28.2	27.9	14.1
Other reasons	3.0	1.4	6.9	8.7	9.4	11.2	6.0
Total number of valid cases	507	526	421	460	223	279	2406

Source: Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

Work related reasons are among the most important factors hindering school enrolment in rural Ethiopia. On the average, work related reasons have been identified as the primary reasons for non-school attendance in about 23 percent of the cases and become increasingly important as the child's age increases. For instance, more than half of the surveyed children between the ages of 11 and 14 years identified work related reasons as the primary causes for school non-attendance. These results imply that children's work obligations could be in direct conflict with school attendance. Reasons linked to the direct costs of schooling as proxied by the distance to school and school expenses also contribute significantly to the low school enrolment rate in rural Ethiopia. Some 15 percent of the surveyed children indicated that schooling is either too expensive or far away from their homes prohibiting them from attending. But compared to work related reasons direct costs of schooling have a relatively lower effect on school attendance.

In rural communities, whether a child should be going to school or should be engaged in work obligations is primarily a family decision. Parental attitude towards investment in human capital is an important determinant of school enrolment. The decision to send a child to school is partly influenced by the labour requirement of the family, social norms like marriage practices, and on the expected financial return from schooling. If families felt that the present or expected return from schooling (relative to the perceived cost of so doing) is rather low they would prefer to send the child to work instead of sending him/her to school. The education offered may sometimes be too academic having very little relation to their daily needs and thus even when they send their children to school they withdraw them after few years. In particular, parents' attitudes towards girls' education is a critical factor determining the level of girls' school enrolment. Family decisions also explain part of the high school dropout rates. Parental attitude towards the education of their children in general and their opinion on the relative importance of schooling for boys and girls have been reported in Table 10.

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Table 10: Parents' attitude towards the (relative) importance of education (%)

Attitude of parents about education	Yes		Both Sexes
	Male	Female	
a) Opinion about the usefulness of sending boys to school			
Useful to send boys to school	98.6	98.8	98.7
Not useful to send boys to school	0.8	0.5	0.6
Don't know	0.6	0.8	0.7
Total respondents	1438	1066	2504
b) Opinion on the usefulness of sending girls to school			
Useful to send girls to school	93.3	92.7	93.0
Not useful to send girls to school	5.8	6.7	6.2
Don't know	0.8	0.7	0.8
Total respondents	1437	1064	2501
c) Opinion on the relative importance of education			
Education is more important for girls than boys	6.7	7.5	7.0
Education is more important for boys than for girls.	19.3	23.1	20.9
Education is equally important for both boys and girls	73.8	69.2	71.7
Others	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total respondents	1438	1061	2499

Source: The Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

Most of the respondents believe in the importance of schooling for both male and female children (about 70 percent believe that education is equally important for both boys and girls). About 99 percent believe that boys should be sent to school while 93 percent felt that schooling is important for girls as well. In other words, while less than one percent of the respondents indicated that it is not useful to send boys to school some seven percent of the respondents believed that schooling is not appropriate for girls. However, there are significant response variations on the relative importance of schooling for boys and girls. More than 20 percent of the respondents believe that boys' education should be given priority to that of girls.

Parents' perception of the benefits of schooling is linked to the expectations of the child's role when he/she grows up. Most perceive that their own return on an investment in a son's education is greater than for a daughter because the son remains at home after marriage whereas

the daughter is expected to move away, and therefore, the investment in her education is lost to her family. Boys in most cases inherit the family assets and continue to support their parents in old age, whereas female children become a part of their husbands' families after marriage. Thus, investing in girls' education might be perceived as not being beneficial to her own family, because any benefits of her education will go to her future husband's family, rather than her own (USAID, 1994). Examples from Togo showed that parents prefer to send girls into domestic services because a girl's income helps to support the schooling of her brothers (Black, 1997).

Although indicated earlier that domestic work and farm work are the primary responsibilities for rural children, many children participate in more than one activity. Many of them also combine schooling with work. Some work activities may be more compatible with schooling than others. If any work activity is incompatible with schooling then intervention is surely needed. Hence, the type of household work activities performed by school going (in-school) and non-school going children have been identified in the study. Table 11 presents the different types of work activities and the proportion of school going children who are at the same time participating in these work activities.

Table 11: Compatibility of schooling* and primary work responsibilities

Primary Responsibility	Work Participation Rates for School Going Children					
	Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fetching firewood/water	50.0	36.4	55.6	36.0	47.4	34.7
Farm work	14.7	18.2	5.6	16.0	12.8	17.3
Family business work	2.9	--	--	--	2.6	1.3
Domestic work such as cooking and cleaning	7.1	9.1	16.7	24.0	11.5	14.7
Cattle herding	23.5	36.4	11.1	24.0	20.5	29.3
Minding small children	--	--	--	--	1.3	1.3
None i.e. no work responsibility	2.9	--	11.1	--	3.8	1.3

*Schooling defined in terms of whether the child was attending school during the last four months of the survey

** None indicates no household work responsibility for school going children.

Source: Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

Combining work activities like cattle herding and collection of firewood and/or water with schooling is very common for rural Ethiopian children. Around 50 percent of school going

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boys and some 35 percent of girls under the age of 15 years have also been participating in firewood and/or water fetching. School going children could fetch water or fire wood before and/or after school hours or even on the way to and back from school. Similarly, about 30 percent of the in-school girls and 20 percent of the school going boys have been participating in cattle herding. This activity absorbs much of the time of rural children and becomes an important responsibility for children particularly during the rainy season during which schools are closed in most parts of Ethiopia. As the school system operates in shifts in most places, school going children may also participate in cattle herding and other activities during the time when they are out of school. School going children (boys' participation rates being lower than girls') also make a significant contribution to farm and domestic activities.

On the other hand the participation of school going children in child minding activities has been relatively low. Taking care of younger siblings is the most incompatible activity with school attendance. On the basis of these observations we can generally conclude that farm work, cattle herding, and fetching of water and/or firewood seem to be relatively more adapted to schooling than other forms of work activities like child minding. Nevertheless this does not mean that children's work participation does not have negative implications on the scholastic achievement of these children. If school going children are made to work very long hours then they will be exhausted from the work and will have less time to concentrate on their studies.

Table 12: Work participation rates for non-school going (out-of-school) children (%)

Primary responsibility	Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fetching firewood/water	29.5	31.4	23.5	25.2	25.0	30.2
Farm work	7.6	11.4	9.2	9.2	8.5	11.6
Family business work	3.0	2.1	3.1	3.4	3.1	2.1
Domestic work such as cooking and cleaning	15.2	12.1	9.2	11.8	12.2	11.6
Cattle herding	22.7	27.9	29.6	28.6	28.4	27.3
Minding small children	12.9	6.4	17.3	13.4	14.2	9.3
None**	9.1	8.6	6.1	8.4	8.5	8.0

Source: The Ethiopian Rural Household Survey, 1994

Examining the type of work activities of school going children alone may not provide a complete picture of the compatibility of child work and schooling. For a complete picture of the

effect of child work on school attendance we need to examine the type of work activities performed by non-school going children. If there is a significant difference between the type of activities performed by school going and non-school going children then that may be an indication of the compatibility or non-compatibility of the work with schooling. The type of work activities undertaken by non-school going (out-of-school) rural children have been reported in Table 12.

For all categories of non-school going children, fetching of firewood and/or water, cattle herding as well as looking after younger children have been the main work responsibilities. But they participate relatively more in childcare activities and less in fetching of firewood and water, farm work, and domestic work than school going children. Minding of younger children was the main responsibility for about 15 percent of the non-school going male children and for about 10 percent of the out-of-school female children. The corresponding figures for the in-school children was less than two percent. There was no significant difference between the participation rates of school going and non-school going children in family based business activities.

Knowing the primary household responsibilities of children might not indicate the scale of the problem with respect to the implication of work activities on the scholastic performance of the children. In fact, the issue may not be whether school going children also participate in work activities or not, but also whether work has negative implications on their education and health, particularly if they are forced to work long hours. Long hours of child employment will have an adverse effect not only on the child's physical development but also on his/her mental and psychological development. The fact that a child is obliged to work long hours has a detrimental effect on the private and the social return from education (Psacharopoulos, 1997). If children who are attending school have to work excessively long hours after school and over the weekends then there is no leisure or playing time available for them. Long working hours are often responsible for fatigue that can cause accidents and impair intellectual development. Thus, the number of hours children are made to work each day before or after school could be additional indicators of the scale of the problem. In order to identify the likely effect of work on the academic performance of rural children, information on the duration of work activities for school going children in the surveyed areas is reported in Table 13.

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Table 13: Duration of work related activities for school going children (%)

Duration of work	Aged 7 to 10		Aged 11 to 14		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average number of weeks taken out of school to help with farm work	0.86 (1.47)	0.36 (0.93)	0.66 (1.15)	0.55 (1.06)	0.74 (1.29)	0.46 (0.99)
Average number of hours worked after/before school by school going children per school day	3.28 (2.04)	3.40 (1.95)	3.05 (1.83)	3.72 (1.81)	3.13 (1.93)	3.57 (1.89)
Average number of hours worked by school going children per weekend	10.42 (7.14)	10.83 (6.21)	9.07 (6.70)	12.60 (8.20)	9.45 (6.88)	11.81 (7.29)

Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Source: The Ethiopian Rural Households Survey, 1994

The table shows that school going (in-school) children are often required to work from two to four hours every day before or after school and up to 20 hours over the weekends and on holidays. So, the risk of poor intellectual development for rural children in Ethiopia is very high as a result of the excessive working hours. Poor education or poor training could seriously hinder the welfare of these children and the society at large, since opportunities for future employment increasingly depends on literacy and possession of other skills and technical progress. Fatigue as a result of long hours of work can also impair intellectual development and increase the school dropout rates.

For most working children the daily working hours are usually in excess of any reasonable threshold. In particular, cattle herding occupies more than one third of their whole available time. In particular, child shepherds who are contracted out to other families are subjugated to long hours of work and are denied any form of education (Hachallu, 1998). Usually girls work more hours than boys on average since they are mostly engaged in domestic services which demand longer hours of work. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that it is very difficult to measure accurately the duration of work either within or outside the household since children usually perform a multiple of activities.

6.2 Child labour in the plantation sector

Child employment in commercial agriculture is a widespread phenomenon in many developing countries. For instance, in Southern Africa at least one in every three child workers in the 10 to 14 age category is working in commercial agriculture. Children account for some 15 percent of the labour force in the rubber plantation in Tanzania half of which were school drop outs (ILO, 1997b). The empirical literature suggests that the incidence of child labour can partly be explained by the high demand for such labour by employers since child workers on

plantations could not become members of trade unions and are not covered by any form of collective agreement between the unions and the employer. Children working on plantations are usually exposed to long hours of physically strenuous work, to injuries caused by tools, to shouldering heavy loads, to the hazards of insect and snake bites and to the hazards linked to the handling of agro chemicals.

A recent study undertaken by the Ethiopian Farm Federation has also shown that child employment in the plantation sub-sector is common in Ethiopia. Data collected from six major state-owned farms, which spread over the main traditional agro ecological zones and which represent the coffee, tea, horticultural, sugarcane and cotton plantations indicated that there were up to 700 working children in each of the farms during the time of the survey. The coffee plantations are located in the Dega zones while the tea plantations are found in the Woyena Dega zone. The cotton and sugar cane plantations are located in the Kolla zone where children could be exposed more to diseases like malaria and yellow fever, snake bites and the like. Table 14 presents the number of working children in each of the six farms disaggregated by age.

Table 14: Working children by age and plantation type

Age group	Coffee				Cotton		Sugar		Horticulture		Tea	
	Bebeka		Limu kossa		Melka Werer		Methara		Nura Erra		Wushwush	
	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%
7 – 9	4	4.0	8	7.9	13	13.0	7	4.8	10	8.3	--	--
10–12	36	36.0	51	50.5	62	62.0	34	23.1	21	17.4	59	48.8
13–14	37	37.0	41	40.5	25	25.0	91	61.9	84	69.4	62	51.2
≥ 15	23	23.0	1	0.1	-		15	10.2	10	8.3	--	--
Total	100	100	101	100	100	100	147	100	125	100	121	100

Source: Ethiopian Farm Federation, 1998

There were three categories of working children on the surveyed farms: seasonal working children; full time working children and part time working children. The seasonal working children usually work on the farms during specific seasons such as during a harvest. When coffee is ready to be picked they leave school and go to work. Most of the full time working children are either children of widowed mothers or who have left their home due to psychological problems or physical abuse, many of whom are also addicted to drugs such as “*Chat*”. Part time working children usually attend school, which operates in morning and afternoon shifts. Between 70 and 80 percent of the working children in the plantation sub sector were between the age of 10 and 14 years on average. In spite of the existence of legislation which prohibits employing children below the age of 14 years, children are officially employed

on the plantations. Child labour is therefore not only a problem of the informal sector in rural Ethiopia. The number of working boys is slightly higher than the number of working girls (61 percent boys and 37 percent girls) mainly because girls are responsible more for household or domestic activities like child minding, preparing food for the family, selling goods at a market, etc.

6.2.1 Duration of daily working hours for children in the plantation sector

Long hours of hard work are often considered as a denial of children's rights since work makes them physically weak and unhealthy. The average daily working hours on the plantations exceeded more than eight for more than 60 percent of working children (see Table 15). Some even indicated that they work for more than 12 hours a day. The children will therefore be very exhausted after such long hours of work on the farm and unable to cope with the demand that the school system might require. On top of that, work is not a matter of choice for almost all of the working children but rather a means of survival. More than 85 percent of working children indicated that they were forced to work because of economic reasons.

Table 15: Average daily working hours for children on plantations

Daily working hour	Number	Percent	Cum. Percent*
< 8 hours	128	18.4	20.2
8 hours	204	29.4	52.3
8 – 10 hours	203	29.3	84.3
≥ 11 hours	100	14.4	100
Not reported	59	8.5	--
Total	694	100	100

* Only on the reporting cases

Source: Ethiopian Farm Federation, 1998

Apart from the long hours children were made to work on the plantations they were paid low wages. It was reported that 60 percent of working children on the six farms were getting 19.25 Birr²⁹ per week which is below the minimum weekly wage set by law (the minimum weekly wage rate set by law is Birr 26.25 i.e. Birr 105 per month). About 18 percent of the surveyed children reported that they were getting Birr 22 per week which is closer to the minimum wage rate and 16 percent of the working children interviewed were getting Birr 16.50 per week which is lower than the minimum wage rate by 40 percent. When remuneration for workers is particularly on the basis of piece rates it encourages parents to use the labour of accompanying children to increase output, and hence income. It was reported that in one of the

²⁹ Birr is the legal tender in Ethiopia and is currently exchanged at a rate of about 8.25 Birr for one US Dollar.

plantations some 46 percent of the child labourers had some type of bodily injury caused by activities related to work.

6.2.2 Education level of working children

As argued earlier, work becomes intolerable if it hampers children’s access to education and affects the normal development of the child. Full time working children and those seasonal child workers who are forced to abandon their education due to work opportunities at the plantations will be unable to improve their rational capacity due to lack of education. Nevertheless, more than 60 percent of the surveyed children working on the plantations were primary school dropouts. Over 32 percent of the working children interviewed have never attended school and are thus likely to remain illiterate. As stated earlier, part time child workers work on the plantations before and after schools, but even for those working and attending school, work is a potential hazard to their normal development since the long working hours leave these children exhausted. Family background and parental education level could be important determinants of a child’s access to education. If the parents themselves are illiterate then they might not appreciate the value of schooling and hence make their children work. There were not any non-formal vocational training facilities around the farms during the time of the survey and the nearest school was about 10 kilometres away from the children’s home.

Table 16: Education level of working children on plantations

Education level	Number of Working Children	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Illiterate	52	7.5	7.5
1 – 4	387	55.8	63.3
5 – 8	84	12.1	75.4
9 – 10	16	2.3	77.7
≥ 11	1	0.1	77.8
Not reported	154	22.2	100.0
Total	694	100.0	

Source: Ethiopian Farm Federation, 1998

According to the survey more than 70 percent of boys and nearly 80 percent of girls discontinued their studies due to the lack of material and financial support. They had very little financial support from the government, other relatives or their parents since they were poor.

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Other means of survival for these children did not exist. There were no alternative educational programs destined for working children in the areas. More than 80 percent of the dropouts indicated that they would like to continue their education if circumstances allowed it.

7 The Policy Framework with Respect to Child Labour in Ethiopia

The policy response to child labour will vary depending upon which type of child labour is prevalent at a particular time and upon the institutional and administrative capacity of the country under consideration. There is no one single model of intervention to combat the problem of child labour. According to Basu (1999), legal interventions to deal with the problem of child labour can be discussed at three levels: at the intra – national, the supra – national and the extra – national levels. The intra – national efforts consist of laws and interventions that a country enacts to control child labour. The supra – national interventions include all attempts to curb the problem by international organisations such as the ILO, WTO and UNICEF by establishing conventions, while the extra – national approach refers to the actions or legislations that are enacted by a country on other countries to curb the problem of child labour. Here, the intra national efforts are discussed. The main thrust for eliminating child labour in a particular country should primarily come from within the country. It should be the duty of national governments to protect a child from all forms of exploitation. But given the complexity of the problem and the multiple causes of child labour, no single intervention may be sufficient in itself. So, actions against child labour have to proceed along various levels including legislation, poverty alleviating growth strategies, education, community or social awareness and mobilisation, and the development of preventive, protective and rehabilitative programmes.

Although the issue of child labour is, without doubt, a great challenge for Ethiopia, no long range government policy on the issue has been put in place. There is no clear strategy or policy to protect children from abuse and exploitation and no systematic co-operation and co-ordination between NGOs and governmental organisations. The problem of child labour is not yet well appreciated nor understood among the society at large. There is also a general information gap on the situation of child labour in the country. The country ratified the UN Convention on the Right of the Child in 1991, although much has not been done in reality because of a lack of facilities and services which the Convention demands. The Minimum Age Convention (Convention No. 138 of 1973) has also been ratified by the Parliament since 1999. But only very few people know about the issue of child labour and its implications on the normal physical, psychological and social development of the child, about the Conventions on the rights of the child, and their implications. Of course, the country at this stage of development does not have the capacity nor the resources to effect a quick end to child labour. But efforts to reduce at least the most intolerable forms of child labour and to protect working children from exploitation could be intensified by promulgating appropriate policy instruments.

7.1 Constitutional arrangements with respect to children

Since the Constitution of a country lays the basic foundation for all laws and regulations within that country, it is necessary to reflect on the important clauses concerning children's rights. The present Constitution of Ethiopia has more or less stipulated the ideals of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and has put due considerations on the rights and welfare of children. One article of the Constitution enumerates the basic elements with regard to the affairs of children including the right to life, the right to attain name and nationality, the right to access the knowledge of his/her parents or those authorised by law for his/her upbringing and set the necessary care thereof, the right to receive protection from traditions that exploit his/her labour, and not to be forced to undertake but be protected from work that jeopardises his/her education, health and safety and the right to be free from bodily harm or cruel and inhumane punishment in school and at home.

To realise the objectives prescribed in the Constitution, an implementing agency called "Child and Youth Affairs Organisation" has been established within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to handle matters pertaining to children. Unfortunately this organisation has not been seriously engaged with child labour issues. In addition to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, other ministries that deal with child labour indirectly include the Ministry of Education, which is concerned with the provision of schooling to children in the country and the Ministry of Health which sets programmes with regard to the promotion of children's health. On the basis of the Constitution some policy instruments have been put in place.

7.2 The labour law and its enforcement

A labour law is defined as the law regulating labour relations. The adoption of legislation has been historically the single most important and common approach to the problem of child labour. Legislation specifying the minimum age for entry into employment will help to establish labour standards and norms to which society can aspire and which can serve as a framework for policy formulations. It can serve as a yardstick for measuring performance and progress. It should, however, be acknowledged that child labour can hardly be prevented or abolished through legislation and law enforcement. Child labour still remains a social phenomenon, particularly in the unorganised sectors like agriculture, industry and services, despite national legislations prohibiting it because of wide gaps between the law and practice in many countries. Although the age threshold varies, many countries have introduced regulations or legislation prohibiting the employment of children below a specified age. For instance, in Egypt the basic minimum age for entry to employment is 12 years while it is 14 and 15 in the Philippines and Hong Kong respectively. In India it is 14 and in Peru it varies between 14 and 18 (Bequelle and Boyden, 1988). Most child labour legislation excludes work in family enterprises, domestic work, work in agriculture, and work in educational and training institutions.

The Labour Proclamation number 42/93 (TGE, 1993) issued in 1993 laid down the principles which govern labour relations and working conditions of children in Ethiopia. According to the law, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is empowered to prescribe the list of activities from which child labour must be prohibited. Article 89/4 of the Proclamation stated the following to be among the activities from which young workers below the age of 18 years should be prohibited.

- Work in the transport of passengers and goods by railway, road, air and internal waterway, dockyards and warehouses involving heavy weight lifting, pulling or pushing or other related type of labour
- Work connected with electric power generation plants, transformers or transmission lines
- Underground work, such as mines quarries and other similar works
- Work in sewers and digging tunnels

The law also stipulates a minimum age of 14 years for admission to any employment and allows employment of young workers between 14 and 18 years of age only as apprentices and under a number of restrictions, such as a maximum of seven working hours per day. Moreover, under any circumstances, it is prohibited to assign them to overtime work, night work between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. and on weekly rest days and public holidays. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is given the power to issue directives on the standards of working conditions (light work, heavy tasks, hazardous operations), classifications of dangerous trades/activities, duration of apprenticeship, and prepare list of occupational diseases. A Labour Inspection Service Unit whose mandate is to ensure the implementation of the provision of the Proclamation has been established within the Ministry³⁰.

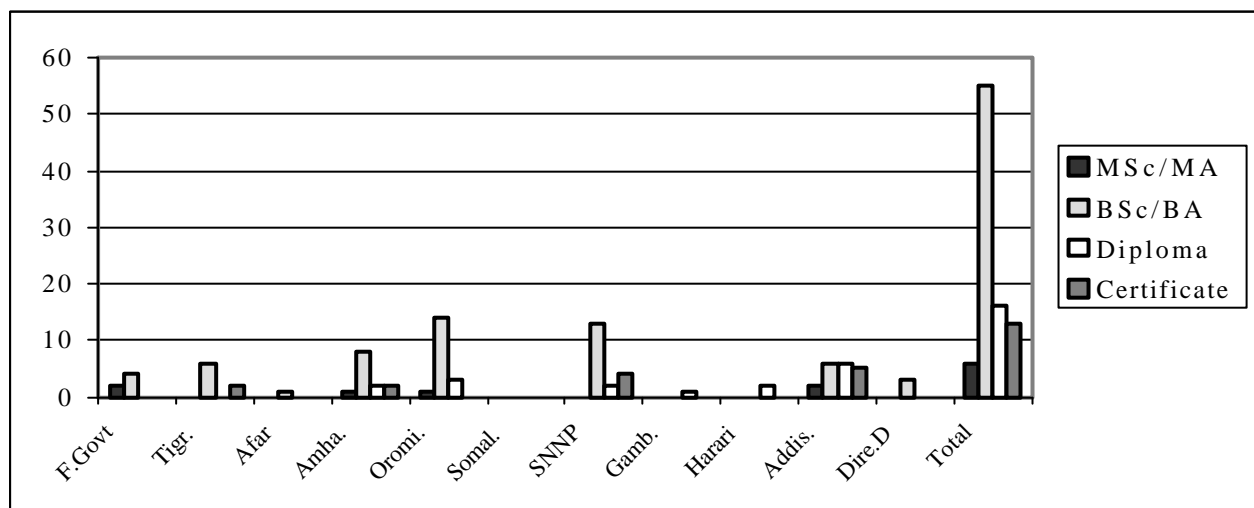
The Inspection Department is supposed to undertake different types of inspections throughout the entire country. However, the legislation has failed to bring significant positive results in the fight against child labour because of the lack of enforcement machinery to monitor and regulate labour standards. The Department's ability to enforce the law is very much limited due to lack of qualified staff, transport facilities as well as a financial budget. An inspector may have the capacity to inspect on average only 25 to 30 establishments per year. Moreover, the quality of the existing staff is not satisfactory since most of these labour inspectors do not have specialised training (see Figure 4). In addition, absence of a work place registry system in the country makes the tasks of the labour inspectors difficult.

³⁰ The most important responsibilities of this institution include, to regulate, supervise and direct labour relation matters, register collective agreements and execute decisions and orders given by authorities responsible to determine labour disputes; inspect, train conduct surveys and carry out research regarding working conditions, occupational safety, health and work environment; compile statistical data relating to working conditions and occupational injuries; and take administrative and prosecutive measures as a consequence of breaching of the law.

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While the formulation and adoption of legislation is the first step and is pivotal to deal with child labour it can play a catalytic role, only if it is backed by effective enforcement mechanisms, is based on the socio economic realities, and is flexible enough to facilitate actions by the government and other actors. Besides, it appears that the labour law in Ethiopia entirely focuses on the manufacturing sector and completely disregards the rural economy. This could explain why only a small proportion of the working children are found in formal employment. Seasonal and casual labourers such as under aged children are often excluded and self-employed farmers are rarely covered under national laws (ILO, 1999b). Similarly the Ethiopian labour law does not make any reference to the problem of child labour in the agricultural sector as if agriculture and household employment were exempt from the law. The legal position of many agricultural workers including children under the labour law is uncertain. Thus an estimated 80 percent of the national economic activity falls outside the protection of the labour code as it consists of small scale and subsistence farming. Above all as we saw earlier the labour law has not even been able to protect children from being employed in the formal plantation sector.

Figure 4: Manpower distribution of the Labour Inspectorate Unit (1994).



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

7.3 The education policy and child labour

The conventional policy approach to the child labour problem has been focused on the demand side where firms have been persuaded to reduce the demand for child labour by legislation (Grootaert, 1998). But this approach has not been very successful particularly in countries where the share of the informal sector is high. Therefore, there has been a need to expand the range of policy options aimed primarily at the supply side factors. Compulsory schooling has been one of such policy instruments. Empirical studies have shown that schooling and child labour may generally be incompatible. But there may also be important complementarities between them (Psacharopoulos, 1997).

Although modern education in Ethiopia has a history of about 100 years the achievements so far both in terms of equity and quality are not impressive. The pre 1974 education policy was limited in scope as it has mainly emphasised academic training. The 1975 – 1991 education policy of the military regime was primarily geared towards creating the socialist man and nurturing the socialist outlook and was characterised by regional and urban rural inequalities, and lower female participation. The allocation of funds to the education sector has also been minimal during this period. Since 1991, a New Education Policy, which aims at achieving equity in the long run through the provision of basic education to the rural population, has been adopted by the government.

The New Education Policy stipulates that basic education should be free to all but not compulsory. It also attaches considerable emphasis to gender equity. The policy aims at improving and providing good quality primary education with the aim of achieving universal primary education over a period of 20 years. The new educational strategy shall have different levels: the basic (grades 1-4), general (5-8), higher (9-10), and specialised education. In addition, a kindergarten system for children between the ages of four and six is also envisaged. During the first cycle of primary education, students will be able to attain literacy, numeracy as well as basic awareness of oneself and of one's surroundings. The new policy is different from past policies in that it emphasises decentralised management of the system, and the medium of instruction for the primary duration will be in the local language.

Nevertheless, school participation rates at all levels are still very low with disproportionate female representation, particularly at the higher levels. School enrolment is low particularly amongst the poor families because schooling competes with labour intensive jobs for children (wage labour, employment in family enterprises, or collection activities). The fact that primary education is not compulsory suggests that rural children could be subjected to work obligations at the cost of their schooling. Our empirical evidence has shown that many rural children remain illiterate because their parents are not forced to send them to school. This, coupled with the scarcity of instructional materials like textbooks, the overcrowding of schools, and declining quality of teachers, has important implications on the quality and standards of education. There is a general high unsatisfied demand requiring massive investment.

8 Conclusions

Despite the paucity of reliable data, there is ample evidence which suggests that the problem of child labour poses a major challenge in Africa. Supply - related factors like high population growth, high incidence of poverty, significant rural urban migration and demand related factors such as the existence of a cheap and easily disposable workforce as well as social attitudes prevailing in the society of child labour being a normal phenomenon even if it is detrimental to the normal development of the child are prevalent in much of Africa. Issues like the special vulnerability of children, the lack of protection, damage to education, health and development, and the involvement of children in illegal and dangerous work have not been given full attention and recognition by policy makers in Sub Saharan Africa. The labour laws in many African countries do not explicitly cover work in the informal family based business or domestic work leading to high incidences of invisible child workers. The empirical data from Ethiopia also indicate that the problem of child labour has been a serious problem with wide implications on children's physical and moral development. It has been shown that children in rural Ethiopia undertake a multiple of activities which could be beyond their physical capabilities at the expense of their education. Although children below the age of 15 years are supposed to have free and uninterrupted access to primary education only less than 20 percent of rural children in Ethiopia have the opportunity to attend schools. So, the lack of educational opportunities and the poor quality of the education system have also contributed to the rise in the incidence of child labour in Ethiopia. As in other African countries, the labour law and its enforcement have totally excluded work in the domestic chores and in the agricultural sector.

The problem of child labour cuts across all aspects of activities: economic, social, political, cultural and legal issues. So it can only be solved by considering a broad range of issues. It calls for an integrated approach, encompassing legal, economic and social measures including advocacy, raising of public awareness, and community mobilisation and empowerment. Given the complexity of the problem and the multiple factors contributing to child labour no single intervention may be sufficient in itself. Any attack on child labour must be comprehensive. Prevention, removal and rehabilitation should be the main cornerstones of a broad strategy, which a comprehensive action program for child labour should contain. Some policy implications could be forwarded on the basis of our empirical study.

Poverty Alleviation Measures: By far, the most effective and sustainable instruments for reducing the incidence of child labour lie in the progresses made to reduce poverty and bring about sustainable development. In an environment where family income cannot provide children with the basic necessities like food, shelter, health care and clothing, child labour will persist out of sheer necessity. Some even argue that legislation whether for compulsory education or a direct ban on child labour cannot be effective in the absence of economic progress and the right policy

is to wait for economic progress (Nardinelli, 1990 cited in Basu 1998). Therefore, any strategy to combat the problem of child labour should be combined with anti-poverty measures. Anti-poverty actions in the form of promoting income generating schemes or direct cash transfer for families and child workers could be important intervention mechanisms. Provision and expansion of health services and welfare support schemes need to be considered. A sort of social security system for working children might also have to be contemplated.

Education and Training: One way of keeping children out of work is to find an alternative way of passing their time effectively. The provision of free, universal and compulsory primary education of good quality should, therefore, be the centrepiece of any strategy to combat child labour. Education is probably the most important and powerful tool to combat the problem of child labour. Some people even argue that it is more effective to legislate for compulsory education instead of banning child labour since children's presence in schools would be easier to monitor and thus ensure a child's absence from work (Weiner, 1991). Education for children is an investment with higher returns than current employment. So, in order to reduce the incidence of child labour in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular, the idea of compulsory and free education should be reaffirmed and applied. Where education is compulsory, and where attendance and enrolment are effectively enforced children are no longer available for work, at least during school hours, and exploitation of children could be reduced and even eliminated. Access to education especially for girls is of paramount importance and needs to be enhanced. Measures to reduce the direct and indirect costs of schooling for low income families in the form of subsidised books, uniforms, and other educational materials should be put in place. Targeted enrolment subsidy (cash or kind transfers targeted at poor families) on the condition that their children remain in school with the aim of reducing current and future poverty could be effective as demonstrated in other studies. Back to school programmes either in the form of non-formal education or through other means should be introduced to school dropouts. Adequate support for non-formal education and enlarged access to non-formal education is important. Schools should be provided within reasonable distance from the homes of the children in order to allow them to attend and be retained.

Legislation and Enforcement of the Labour Law: While the problem of child labour cannot be solved through legislation alone, on the other hand, it cannot be fought without it. Legislation must form the backbone of any strategy against child labour. Often effective legal protection does not extend beyond urban areas and the formal sector. Legislation exempts some work activities from coverage in which children are engaged (agriculture, family undertakings, small workshops, domestic services). There is therefore a need to ensure that legislation does cover those areas where some of the worst forms of child labour are observed. The lack of law enforcement at household, small enterprise and scattered work sites is also a major impediment to effective legal protection against child labour. Effective enforcement can be extended to small enterprises, farms and homes outside the formal system through the participation of the local communities in monitoring the working conditions of children.

Community Mobilisation and Awareness Creation: Any program to eradicate child labour could only be successful if accompanied by the support and involvement of the society at large. Lack of awareness of the negative implications of child labour has been an important impediment to the abolition of child labour. Thus, the continued prevalence of child labour is partly explained by the tolerant nature of society towards child labour. Thus, nation-wide awareness raising programs are needed to deal with the problem of child labour. There is a need to create a sensitisation program to raise the awareness and change the attitude and ideas of the community towards child labour. The content of the labour law, the UN Convention on the rights of the child, the ILO Convention on the minimum age for work, etc. should be clearly disseminated to the public. The core message of the awareness raising campaign should be to show that every society has the moral duty and obligation to recognise, promote and protect the rights of children, including the right to education.

Population Policy and Birth Registration: One of the reasons for the high incidence of child labour is the high population growth. An appropriate population policy could curtail child labour at least in the long term. There is a need to have a population policy that will slow down the rate of population growth. Family planning measures need to be promoted to raise the awareness of families of child labour. Moreover, there is no system of birth registration in most African countries including Ethiopia. This means there is no definite way of knowing the exact age of a child. There is an urgent need for birth registration which is vital to ensure that the problem of child labour is not exacerbated any further than it is already.

Finding More about Child Labour: There is insufficient information on the issue of child labour in Africa. Little information exists on the exact magnitude, nature and effects of child labour. So one important step to provide information to be used in planning and implementation of projects is to carry out research. Research provides information and direction for designing child labour programmes, for assessing on going child labour programmes, identifying gaps as well as strengths and for mobilising additional resources. The lack of reliable statistical evidence hinders the setting of realistic targets and the design of effective plans of action against child labour. Without a clear picture on the needs, constraints and opportunities, combating child labour cannot be successful. Thus, more research should be carried out to:

- determine the exact nature, extent, causes and impact of child labour according to the social and economic framework across Africa by undertaking a time allocation study for children;
- assess and evaluate on-going child labour programmes and identify gaps as well as strength and for mobilising additional resources;
- provide information on the trade-offs between child labour and schooling in Africa and the kind of incentives needed for schooling at the community and local levels;
- examine similarities and differences between child labour in Asia, Latin America and Africa with the aim of learning from experiences; and
- identify the impact of poverty reduction measures on the incidence of child labour.

Appendix

Table A1: Proportion of working children, aged 10-14, in selected countries of the world

Country	Percent	Continent
Bangladesh	30.1	Asia
China	11.6	Asia
India	14.4	Asia
Pakistan	17.7	Asia
Turkey	24.0	Asia
Cote d'Ivoire	20.5	Africa
Egypt	11.3	Africa
Kenya	41.3	Africa
Nigeria	25.8	Africa
Senegal	31.4	Africa
Argentina	4.5	Latin America
Brazil	16.1	Latin America
Mexico	6.7	Central America
Italy	0.4	Europe
Portugal	1.8	Europe

Source: ILO, Child labour Today: Facts and Figures, Geneva, ILO 1996

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Table A2: Indicators of Poverty in Sub Saharan Africa

	Under Five Mortality Rate (per 1000 Live)	GNP per Capita (US\$)	HDI	Position According to HDI
<i>Eastern and Horn of Africa</i>				
Ethiopia	175	110	0.298	172
Kenya	112	340	0.519	136
Madagascar	158	250	0.453	147
Mauritius	23	3870	0.764	59
Somalia	205.2	nm	Nn	nm
Sudan	115	290	0.475	142
Tanzania	136	210	0.421	156
Uganda	162.1	330	0.404	158
<i>Southern Africa</i>				
Botswana	88.3	33100	0.609	122
Lesotho	137	680	0.582	127
Malawi	223.8	210	0.399	159
Mozambique	201	140	0.341	169
Namibia	100.5	2110	0.638	115
Zambia	188.5	370	0.431	151
Zimbabwe	107.7	720	0.56	130
<i>Central Africa</i>				
Angola	209	260	0.398	160
Burundi	199.5	140	0.324	170
Cameroon	78.2	620	0.536	134
Central African Rep.	160.1	320	0.378	165
Chad	182	230	0.393	162

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Table A2 (continued): Indicators of Poverty in Sub Saharan Africa

	Under Five Mortality Rate (per 1000 Live)	GNP per Capita (US\$)	HDI	Position According to HDI
<i>Central Africa cont'd.</i>				
Congo, Rep.	145.3	670	0.533	135
Congo, Dem. Rep.	148	110	0.479	141
Gabon	136.4	4120	0.607	124
Rwanda	208.9	210	0.379	164
<i>Western Africa</i>				
Benin	149	380	0.421	155
Burkina Faso	169	250	0.304	171
Cote d'Ivoire	140	710	0.422	154
Ghana	102.4	390	0.544	133
Guinea	182.3	550	0.398	161
Guinea Bissau	220	230	0.343	168
Liberia	194	nn	Nn	nn
Mali	235	260	0.375	166
Mauritania	149	440	0.447	149
Niger	nn	200	0.298	173
Nigeria	121.9	280	0.456	146
Senegal	110	540	0.426	153
Sierra Leone	286	160	0.254	173
Togo	138.1	340	0.469	143

Source: World Bank, World Development Report 1999; UNDP, Human Development Report 1999

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Table A3: Statistics on Education Indicators in Sub Saharan Africa

	Gross Enrolment Rate (Primary)	% of Primary Entrants Reaching Grade 5	% of Total Population below 15 Years Male	% of Total Population below 15 Years Female
	1996	1990-95	1997	1997
<i>Eastern and Horn of Africa</i>				
Ethiopia	42.9	51	23.03	22.96
Kenya	84.9*	68	22.69	22.22
Madagascar	91.6*	28	22.87	22.54
Mauritius	106.7	99	13.29	12.94
Somalia	nn	nn	23.94	23.78
Sudan	50.9	94	20.37	19.87
Tanzania	66.1	83	22.96	22.76
Uganda	74.3*	55	24.40	24.26
<i>Southern Africa</i>				
Botswana	107.8	89	21.45	21.23
Lesotho	107.7	79	20.32	19.96
Malawi	133.5*	94	23.20	23.08
Mozambique	60.2*	47	22.89	22.12
Namibia	131.3	82	21.14	20.73
Zambia	88.5*	84	23.25	22.88
Zimbabwe	113.0	76	21.13	21.06
<i>Central Africa</i>				
Angola	nn	34	23.77	23.73
Burundi	50.6*	74	23.02	22.95
Cameroon	85.4	60	22.20	22.95
Central African Rep.	nn	24	21.36	21.41
Chad	57.5	28	26.15	24.28

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Table A3 (continued): Statistics on Education Indicators in Sub Saharan Africa

	Gross Enrolment Rate (Primary)	% of Primary Entrants Reaching Grade 5	% of Total Population below 15 Years Male	% of Total Population below 15 Years Female
	1996	1990-95	1997	1997
<i>Central Africa cont'd.</i>				
Congo, Rep.	114.3*	54	22.91	23.11
Congo, Dem. Rep.	nn	64	23.74	23.61
Gabon	162.3*	50x	19.64	19.29
Rwanda	nn	60	20.74	20.76
<i>Western Africa</i>				
Benin	77.6	61	23.54	23.34
Burkina Faso	39.6*	79	23.64	23.34
Cote d'Ivoire	71.3	73	21.98	21.85
Ghana	nn	80	22.15	21.94
Guinea	52.6	80	22.94	22.69
Guinea Bissau	nn	20x	21.27	21.29
Liberia	nn	nn	22.55	22.55
Mali	45.1	72	23.60	23.46
Mauritania	79.0	63	22.10	21.87
Niger	29.00	77	24.32	24.28
Nigeria	nn	80	22.41	22.25
Senegal	68.2	81	22.74	22.38
Sierra Leone	nn	nn	22.75	22.85
Togo	119.6	71	22.89	22.77

* = 1995

x = Indicates data that refer to years or periods other than those specified in the column heading, differ from the standard definition, or relate to only part of a country

Source: UNICEF, The state of the world's children 2000, World Bank, World Development Report 1999

Table A4 : Minimum acceptable ages for different types of employment

	General Minimum Age	Light Work	Hazardous Work
In normal circumstances	15 years or more (not less than compulsory school age)	13 years	18 years (16 years conditionally)
Where economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed	14 years	12 years	18 years (16 years conditionally)

Source: ILO Fact-sheets: Abolishing Extreme forms of child labour, Geneva, 1998.

Table A5: Estimated percentage of economically active children, 10-14 years of age (%)

Country	1995	2000
Burkina Faso	51.05	43.50
Burundi	48.97	48.50
Cameroon	25.25	23.00
Central African Republic	31.20	28.60
Chad	38.30	36.60
Cote d'Ivoire	20.46	18.65
Ethiopia	42.30	41.10
Ghana	13.27	12.00
Kenya	41.27	39.17
Madagascar	35.83	34.10
Mali	54.53	51.13
Malawi	35.20	31.50
Mauritius	3.00	2.00
Mozambique	33.80	32.40
Niger	45.17	43.57
Nigeria	25.75	23.91
Rwanda	41.70	41.40
Senegal	31.36	27.30
Tanzania	39.50	36.90
Togo	28.60	26.82
Uganda	45.31	43.80
Zambia	16.27	15.61
Zimbabwe	29.44	27.10

Source: ILO, Economically active population 1950 – 2010, 1997

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Table A6: Socio Economic Indicators for Ethiopia, SSA and low income countries

Region	GNP pc US\$ (1997)	Life Expectancy at Birth	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live Births)	Adult Illiteracy (1996)	Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation Facilities (%)	
					Drinking water	Sanitation facilities
Ethiopia	110	43	107	65	26	8
SSA	510	51	91	47	47	47
Low income countries	350	59	82	48	69	29

Source: World Development Report, 1999

Table A7: Gross enrolment ratios for Ethiopia and some selected regions (1996)

Region	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
World	105.4	95.0	62.6	55.0	17.3	16.1	65.6	58.7
Africa	85.3	71.2	35.8	29.5	7.8	4.7	50.4	41.5
Asia	110.1	98.3	61.5	49.6	12.1	8.6	64.4	54.9
Developing countries	105.8	93.8	55.1	45.1	11.1	8.1	62.1	53.3
Sub Saharan Africa	81.3	67.2	27.9	22.4	4.7	2.5	46.0	37.4
Ethiopia	43.0	26.0	9.9	7.0	na	na	32	22

Source: UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, 1998

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Table 4: Some salient features of the survey areas

Survey site	Location	Number of households interviewed	Number of children < 18 years of age	Number of Children/ household	Main crops	Agro-ecology
Harresaw	Tigray	84	211	2.5	Barely, wheat, lentils	Woyena dega
Geblen	Tigray	66	182	2.8	Barely, maize, Teff ¹	Dega
Adele Keke	Oromiya	97	345	3.6	Millet, maize, <i>chat</i> , coffee	Woyena dega
S. Godeti	Oromiya	98	351	3.6	Teff	Woyena dega
T. Kecheme	Oromiya	102	404	4.0	Wheat, barely, Teff, potato	Woyena dega
Korodegaga	Oromiya	109	422	3.9	Maize, Teff, barely, beans	Kola
Yetmen	Amhara	61	149	2.4	Teff, wheat, beans	Woyena dega
Shumsheha	Amhara	149	347	2.3	Teff, lentils, peas, sorghum	Kola
Dinki	Amhara	87	186	2.1	Millet, teff	Kola
Debre Birhan	Amhara	184	555	3.0	Teff, barley beans	Dega, W.dega
Adado	SNNPS	132	440	3.3	Coffee, <i>Enset</i> , maize,	Woyena dega
Aze debo	SNNPS	75	322	4.3	Enset, coffee, maize, Teff	Woyena dega
Imdibir	SNNPS	67	227	3.4	Enset, chat, maize, coffee	Woyena dega
Domaa	SNNPS	74	267	3.6	Enset, maize	Kola
Gara Goda	SNNPS	96	393	4.1	Enset, maize, barely, teff	Woyena dega
Total	1477	4801	3.3			

Source: Rural Household Survey and Bevan and Bereket, 1996.

¹ Teff is a very small domestic cereal and staple crop mainly in the central highlands of Ethiopia.

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