

'THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION UNIONS TO THE WORK TO ERADICATE CHILD LABOUR'

**WEBINAR, THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER, 2020
SUMMARY REPORT**

Welcome and presentation of speakers: Pedi Anawi, Regional Coordinator, Education International Africa Region (EIRAF)

Pedi Anawi welcomed the participants, noting that there were many activities taking place at national, regional and international level to eradicate child labour. He cited the relevant international conventions including ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour as well as the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted in 1990, and its Article 11 states that every child should have the right to education. He also referenced the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the international community in 2015. SDG 4.1 and 4.2 refer to quality primary and secondary education for all girls and boys.

EI's defines child labour as any work that harms children and interferes in their education or obliges them to abandon school. The ILO statistics show that in Africa one out of five children is working and 59 million are employed in dangerous work. He noted that a child who is working now will most likely grow up to be an unemployed person tomorrow. He explained that the webinar would be an opportunity to exchange and discuss the different good practices of education unions in the region in their projects to stop child labour and attract and retain children in school.

Introduction: Dr Dennis Sinyolo, Chief Regional Coordinator, Education International, Africa Region

Dennis Sinyolo welcomed participants, stating how pleased he was that so many union leaders and project coordinators were taking part. He sent greetings from the EI President, Susan Hopgood, the General Secretary, David Edwards, and the Regional Committee Chairperson, Christian Adai Poku. He also welcomed Haldis Holst, the EI Deputy General Secretary and EI's development cooperation partners.

He stated that child labour was a scourge and the current COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated the situation. A recent EI Africa study launched on the occasion of World Teachers' Day showed that many children may not return to school after the health crisis has abated. However, there has been some progress. In August 2020 the ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour reached universal ratification, the first time any ILO Convention has been ratified by all 187 Member States. Now it is important for unions to put pressure on governments to domesticate and fully implement the Convention.

He noted that there is a broad consensus that the single most effective way to eradicate child labour is to ensure access to equitable inclusive quality education for all. It is a very important issue for the EI Africa region. Most of EI's child labour projects began as part of a wider initiative to address child labour in supply chains as part of a multi-stakeholder partnership. The impact of the projects has been impressive. The programmes have contributed to the quality of teaching and learning; made the schools more attractive through extra-curricular activities such as sports and drama; made schools safe and secure by supporting teachers to end corporal punishment and in particular for girls through a range of measures; and lobbied for better infrastructure and resources.

The projects have also enhanced the legitimacy and agency of unions in local, district levels and national level. So the webinar is an opportunity to hear in more detail about different aspects of the child labour projects and to celebrate achievements and reflect on challenges to strengthen work in the future. In 2022, South Africa will host the Fifth Global Conference on Child Labour and EI members will have an opportunity to showcase best practices from African education unions at that time.

Reducing school dropout rates/child labour in the context of the COVID pandemic by Pilirani Kamaliza, Programme Coordinator, Teachers' Union of Malawi (TUM), Malawi

Pilirani Kamaliza explained that when the schools were closed in March because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the child labour free zone projects were affected. As anticipated, the incidence of child labour increased, especially in tobacco farms, vending, domestic work and prostitution. The number of child marriages and teenage pregnancy also increased as well as the incidence of drug and substance abuse among children. During the period the union held a number of activities aimed at safeguarding the lives of the children. The two unions, TUM and the Private School Employees Union of Malawi (PSEUM), held community-based social dialogue sessions with parents, teachers, head teachers and representatives of the child protection committees. The meetings were to discuss how to ensure the safety of the children and to set up a child labour monitoring system; as well as to promote the education programmes that the government was disseminating over the radio. They also discussed how to strengthen by-laws to protect children from abuse. The union also broadcast child labour messages on the national radio to create awareness about child labour.

When the schools reopened in October, the unions conducted a back-to-school campaign to broadcast messages. They used loudspeakers on the tops of vehicles and toured the surrounding villages to encourage parents to send their children back to school. They held other meetings with the village chiefs and parents to highlight the importance of going back to school. The union also placed signposts against child labour in strategic positions. When schools reopened, registration in the districts where the union had focused attention, in Kabwinja area, was much higher than in other districts. Now the teachers are following up on children to find out why they are coming late and the focus is on retention of children.

This work has also benefitted union visibility at district and national level and improved the working relations with the Ministry of Education. Also the union has realised its lobbying is more effective and the teachers have become very highly motivated.

Good practices in relation to preventing girls from dropping out of school Mme Marième Sakho, EI Executive Board Member and General Secretary of Syndicat des Professeurs du Sénégal (SYPROS), Senegal

Marième Sakho explained how the projects have been successful in raising awareness about the value of girls' education and the dangers of early marriage and pregnancy. The projects have placed emphasis on ensuring the safety and security of girls. In Uganda, the union has managed to ensure there is at least one senior woman teacher in each school. In Mali, a village in the project zone, following an attempted attack on a girl child, organised to escort the children on their ways to school. The projects have lobbied for separate toilets for girls, carried out training on menstrual management, have provided extra school uniforms and sanitary pads, and have organized sensitisation sessions for both boys and girls on menstruation.

The Associations of Mothers of Students in Mali, the Parents' Associations in Morocco and the Anti-Child Labour Community Committees in Uganda, which even include the local police in the case of Uganda, have all helped lift barriers and taboos. If a girl child marries, or becomes pregnant, there is a stigma attached but now because of the work of the projects, there have been cases, in Uganda and Zimbabwe for example, where young mothers or young widows have been allowed to finish their education. Schools have invited women leaders to come to the schools so girls have role models for their futures. Schools have become much more inclusive as well, and the children of migrant workers have been able to go to school.

Gender issues have been integrated into the professional development programmes. The projects have also insisted on the equal participation of women teachers in the training. The courses teach how to ensure girls' participation in class and to avoid abusive language and stereotypes as well as how to ensure girls' safety at school and on the way to school. All this work has led to a real change of attitudes towards the girl child and child labour in general.

Impact of projects on union strengthening, with particular reference to social dialogue, Mme Diarra Traoré, President of the Women's Network, Syndicat National de l'Éducation et de la Culture (SNEC) Mali

Mme Diarra Traoré explained that SNEC started child labour projects in 2014 and they have observed many results. In the first place there has been a notable increase in the number of teachers joining the union, because of two main factors: the union has involved all teachers in the project and also because the union has been able to resolve many of the teachers' issues, such as integrating community teachers into the teaching profession as public employees. Secondly, members have become much more active and this is because the union has put considerable emphasis on training to strengthen their professional competences.

The projects have also greatly improved relations between the union and the education authorities. This is because the union has involved all stakeholders in the activities. There is now good cooperation and synergies with all education stakeholders. Lastly the project has set up structures to promote a community-based social dialogue to eradicate child labour. The structures include the education authorities, the Mayors, the school management

committees, the women's organisations, youth organisations, and the village chief and the elders. Through dialogue, it has been possible to avoid conflict and create an understanding about child labour and the need to promote quality education. In these ways, there have been many positive achievements and concrete results, such as school buildings that before were only made of thatch are now built in brick; and in other villages, the hunters' association (*les chasseurs*) has arranged to accompany children so they are safe on the journey to school. The project has also helped reduce the incidence of early marriages as parents agree that their girls continue their education.

Changing teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment, Filbert Baguma, General Secretary, Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU), Uganda

Filbert Baguma explained the work of his union in two districts in West Nile region where there is a high incidence of child labour. Many teachers have been teaching for up to 15 years without benefitting from a refresher course. There is a saying in Uganda: 'spare the rod, spoil the child'. Corporal punishment used to be common in schools, which is unfortunate as it harms the children both mentally and physically. The government produced a handbook in 2006 on alternatives to corporal punishment and in 2016 the Children's Act was amended to prohibit its use. Corporal punishment is one of the major push factors and once it is no longer in use enrolment and retention improves. So the union helped teachers through professional development courses and they could get to know the changing trends. In this way, they learnt how to use alternative discipline methods without harming the child. Teachers also became more motivated and enjoyed their teaching and relations with children and parents more. Performance increased and teachers sensitised the parents, who have also begun to realise it is better for the child.

UNATU has also benefited because many stakeholders used to think the union was only there to talk about the teachers' salaries but now they see it is also concerned about the future of children and the union image has improved. Coffee growers, the business community and the local government have also come on board as partners. Schools are full to capacity and children want to attend as they know otherwise they will miss out. UNATU is proud to be part of this fight.

Discussion and comments

A number of participants contributed in the discussion that followed. **Soumeila H. Maiga (SNEC Mali)** emphasised the importance of a community-based approach as well as the crucial role of the Association of Mothers of Students (the AME). The union helped create the Associations in all the villages of the zones where the projects were working to help make sure that girls go to school and do not abandon their studies. This was because it is the mothers who are closest to the girls and their role is very important. The Associations have carried out awareness-raising and have been very effective in encouraging girls to remain at school.

Sénon Hounsime, Fédération des Syndicats de l'Éducation Nationale (FESEN) Togo explained that their union had benefited from a study tour to Mali and on return had decided to carry out a similar strategy. The work has increased the union's visibility both with the authorities

and with the parents. The union carried out training programmes with the teachers on the causes of school dropout, including on the negative impacts of corporal punishment and the gender dimensions. There are State regulations but the union must also play a part. The union is working in the Central region where child labour is most widespread. When schools re-opened, the union visited the region to distribute materials and encourage parents to send children back to school.

Nahhass Hamid, Syndicat National de l'Éducation (SNE-FDT) Morocco explained that previously, child labour had been a taboo subject. SNE-FDT carried out a study in 2000 and found that over 600,000 children drop out of primary school every year and 800,000 boys and girls do not go to school. So in 2004 the union began a project with EI partners to address the issue of school dropout. The union set objectives and carried out information sessions about the rights of children with parents. Another focus was on the professional development of teachers and to train them to observe and understand the situation of their students. The project also focused on schools in rural areas and how to make them attractive to children. The union found that some children did not go to school because they were short-sighted. So the union carried out advocacy with the local authorities to obtain eye glasses. Now the union is continuing its projects with the support of its partners.

Angelina Lunga, Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA), Zimbabwe and Hillary Yuba, Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) gave a joint contribution as the two unions carry out the project together. Angelina Lunga explained that among the highlights of the projects were increased academic performance and pass rates, as well as the active participation of the parents. The project emphasises visual and performing arts. The unions also work with the tea companies and out growers and the local authorities. Hilary Yuba explained how they found it useful to have a social contract between the community and the school. They drew up a list of do's and don'ts and in that way the community created their own rules to govern how they behave with children and to promote children's education. She stated it has been a really interesting initiative.

Marie-Jeanne Kombo, Syndicat national des enseignants d'éducation permanente de Côte d'Ivoire (SYNADEEPCI) explained that child labour in cacao production is very prevalent although the government has ratified the relevant ILO Conventions and there is a law prohibiting child labour. The union is supporting the government by training teachers on the rights of children and the dangers of child labour and how to encourage parents to keep their children at school. The union has helped form local community committees to defend the rights of children and to make sure they are not working in the plantations. This work is carried out in collaboration with the local authorities which are now more aware of the importance of trade unions.

Next Steps, Samuel Grumiau, Consultant coordinator of child labour projects, Education International

Samuel Grumiau explained there are seven countries participating in the social dialogue projects which are due to finalise in December 2020. EI is fortunate to count on partners that have provided stable funding: the Dutch teachers' union, AOb, FNV Mondiaal and the Stop

Child Labour Coalition in the Netherlands; and the Fair Childhood Foundation of the German teachers' union, GEW in Germany. The partners have expressed interest in continuing their support in the coming years.

Apart from the importance of timely and high quality narrative and financial reports, he emphasised the value of providing personal stories about children, teachers or the impact of projects on unions. Recently, a story about two children who had returned to school in Mali was posted on the [EI Facebook page "Educators Against Child Labour"](#) and it received over 5900 likes. Good news and human interest stories are very motivating and help build support for the child labour projects.

Closing Remarks, Haldis Holst, Deputy General Secretary, Education International stated the webinar had been very positive and showed how unions were dealing with a complex problem in a very constructive way. Unions had adopted both push and pull strategies, by making schools attractive for children and empowering teachers, as well as with practical steps to make buildings and paths to school safe. The projects are based on a methodology of cooperation with local communities and authorities and a rights-based, whole school, whole community approach. Furthermore, the projects have benefitted the trade unions as their role and image is enhanced as well as their acceptance in society.

At the last EI Congress, two child labour resolutions were adopted and so EI, through the Executive Board and strategic plan, has a mandate to continue this work. EI is a member of the Global Campaign for Education, a civil society alliance, the Global Partnership for Education, which is the largest global fund in support of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, as well as the Alliance 8.7 on the worst forms of child labour. Child labour will continue to be an important focus for EI as next year is the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour and probably in 2022 there will be a global conference in South Africa to mobilise towards. Even if unions do not have an externally funded project, they can still carry out advocacy, share good experiences and help create change. In concluding, Haldis thanked the development partners for their continuing support and applauded all the participating unions for their good work and inspiring stories.