



## CHILDREN'S CONTRIBUTION TO WORKING AND CARING FOR THE LAND:

The links between agriculture and children's rights



### Discussion Paper & Programming Tool

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The links between agriculture and children’s rights**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas and most of these people depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods. Children comprise more than half of the population in many countries, and they play a myriad of roles in both rural and urban agricultural settings. Many children actively participate in agriculture as a contribution to their family's income level or overall productivity. There are important considerations related to children's rights within agricultural programming in terms of children's health, environment issues, and child protection.

This paper seeks to outline some of the linkages that exist between the rights of children and agricultural programming in international development, guided by key CIDA policy documents, including CIDA's Action Plan on Child Protection (2001) and CIDA's Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Agriculture (2003). "Children's Contribution to Working and Caring for the Land" provides support to CIDA program officers and partner organizations during planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating agricultural initiatives. A list of guideline questions is included that will assist in ensuring that children's rights are being considered during all stages of the project cycle. The challenge of policy dialogue in new programming approaches is also raised. Additionally, the 'Good Practices' section highlights exemplary programming initiatives from within CIDA, its partners, and other development agencies.



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## CHILDREN AND AGRICULTURE: THE FACTS

Three quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas and most of these people depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) estimates that 800 million people worldwide are engaged in urban agriculture, and they are expected to contribute 33 percent of world food production by 2005.<sup>1</sup> Children<sup>2</sup> are often assumed to be beneficiaries of agricultural programming, yet they are rarely mentioned in agriculture programs or projects. Despite this, children comprise more than half of the population in many countries, and they play a myriad of roles in both rural and urban agricultural settings. There are numerous issues to explore when considering children and agriculture.



Of nearly 250 million children who work around the world, the vast majority—as many as 70 or 80 percent, or some 170 million—are working in agriculture. Many children actively participate in agriculture as a contribution to their family's income level or overall productivity. Home-based agricultural activities account for most of the unpaid labour of children in Africa, Asia and Latin America<sup>3</sup>, and children also migrate with families in search of seasonal agricultural employment. The

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is committed to preventing the exploitation of children, not to ending all children's work. It is important to make a distinction between children working in harmful situations and children doing work that is not harmful. Non-harmful child labour is often part-time and does not preclude educational opportunities. It can be beneficial to children by giving them an income, a sense of accomplishment, and useful work-related and social skills that will be of use to them in their future lives.

It is critical to consider how agricultural work can be made safe and rewarding for children. Some agricultural practices with negative health impacts can cause disabilities in children such as illness from exposure to dangerous chemicals and injury due to heavy

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<sup>1</sup> IDRC. "Cities Feeding People Phase Two, 2000-2004." International Development Research Centre, [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca), 2000.

<sup>2</sup> "Children" as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to every human being below the age of 18 years

<sup>3</sup> O'Donnell, O., E. Van Doorslaer and F. Rosati. "Child Labour and Health: Evidence and Research Issues." Understanding Children's Work: An Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project. ILO/UNICEF/World Bank, January 2002.

loads and dangerous machinery. Birth defects can also result from parental exposure to agrochemicals.<sup>4</sup>

UNICEF and others indicate that many mechanisms put in place to improve the efficiency of national economies and the agriculture sector have not always improved food security or child welfare.<sup>5</sup> “Despite improvements in global food and nutrition indicators, it is estimated that nearly 800 million people—one person in every five—continue to be chronically malnourished and that 200 million children suffer chronic protein and energy deficiencies.”<sup>6</sup>

Other key issues include:

- Armed conflict disrupts the social and economic lives of children in traditional farming communities and can force families and their children into extreme urban poverty<sup>7</sup>;
- The conditions of economic hardship experienced by families in agricultural communities have contributed to the phenomenon of street-involved children, children in conflict with the law, and sexually exploited children<sup>8</sup>; and
- Working and living in agricultural communities can contribute to a child’s sense of community and ethnic identity.

### Gender Equality

There are important gender equality considerations when looking at child protection and agriculture. Girls’ labour is more likely to be unpaid. It is often therefore unrecognized and valued less than the work of boys. Boys’ labour, particularly that which receives a wage, is seen as important for family survival. Because of social norms, as well as the threat of exploitation, girls have less mobility to search for better working conditions, and are therefore more likely to remain in unpaid labour and miss out on opportunities to learn skills that generate income. Girls face a higher risk of sexual exploitation in what may be already exploitative working conditions, and on those occasions when access to school is provided, many girls also find unsafe conditions there. Because of the reasons above and others, girls may not be reached equally by programming initiatives and all projects and programs need to evaluate what special measures are needed to support the realization of the rights of girls in the agriculture sector.

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<sup>4</sup> Institute for Children’s Environmental Health. “Children’s Environmental Health Basics.” [www.iceh.org](http://www.iceh.org) 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See: Van Vylder, Stefan. “A Macroeconomic Policy for Children in an Era of Globalization”, in Cornia, Giovanni Andrea (ed.). *Harnessing Globalization for Children: A Report to UNICEF*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> MacGillivray, Iain. “Helping Others Feed Themselves: Assessing CIDA’s Level of Effort in Agriculture, Food and Nutrition.” CIDA Policy Branch, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> CIDA. *CIDA’s Action Plan on Child Protection: Promoting the Rights of Children who need Special Protection Measures*. June 2001, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

**Potential Benefits***Working in agriculture:*

- positive rewards of contributing to the family livelihood
- opportunities to learn and practice useful livelihood skills
- earning money if working for employer/industrial agriculture
- stronger sense of cultural identity
- increased understanding of community's traditional knowledge

*Living in agricultural family or community:*

- improved food security
- less migration to cities
- maintain cultural identity

**Potential Risks***Harmful child labour:*

- occupational health and safety risks e.g. strenuous physical work that may be inappropriate for a younger worker, long hours especially at harvest time, exposure to dangerous pesticides without proper protection
- exploitative low pay if working for an employer
- lack of access to education due to irregular attendance

*Harmful effects on families and communities:*

- contamination of local ecosystem, food and water because of chemical overuse
- stress due to work-related illness or injury of parents working in agriculture
- increase in urban migration, when families can no longer afford to stay on the land

**AGRICULTURE, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CIDA: THE POLICY CONTEXT**

The Government of Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. CIDA investments support children's rights in a variety of ways, including for example, health and education programming. Children marginalized through exploitation, abuse, neglect and discrimination may need specific interventions or "special protection measures" to support their development and to ensure their rights are fulfilled.

Canada considers harmful child labour a violation of both the CRC and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (which includes forced, bonded or slave labour, sexual exploitation, and the use of children for illicit activities such as drug trafficking). Canada ratified Convention 182 in 2000.

Child protection is one of CIDA's four Social Development Priorities (2000). CIDA's approach to child protection is elaborated in CIDA's Action Plan on Child Protection (2001) and focuses on the special measures required to assist the most marginalized children to lead full and healthy lives free from exploitation, abuse, neglect and discrimination. These groups of children include child labourers, children affected by armed conflict, children with disabilities, sexually exploited children, street-involved children, children facing discrimination because of their ethnic or religious identity, and

children in conflict with the law or in institutional care. CIDA's Action Plan on Child Protection adopts a rights-based approach, which takes the CRC as a guiding framework. As a result, children are not viewed as objects of compassion and pity, but as subjects of human rights under international law. CIDA promotes the right of the child to participate in decisions that affect them, according to their age and maturity<sup>9</sup>.

CIDA is also committed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>10</sup>. Many of the MDGs relevant to children require effective programming in the agricultural sector. For example, improvements in agriculture are necessary to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and to improve maternal health and reduce child mortality. At the same time care must be taken to ensure environmental sustainability by preventing over-exploitation of land, and to reverse the loss of environmental resources such as soil and biodiversity. The MDG's reference to developing decent productive work for youth can also be achieved through initiatives in the agriculture sector.



CIDA has renewed its commitment to agriculture and rural development in its agriculture policy, *Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Agriculture* (2003). Agriculture is defined as the entire system that links the producers and consumers of food and non-food agricultural products.<sup>11</sup> CIDA's agriculture policy promotes an integrated approach reflecting the understanding that agriculture is not only economic in nature, but also fundamentally cultural and social with environmental dimensions, all of which has an impact on children. CIDA's agriculture policy also identifies key child protection issues, including for example,

Overexposing adults and children to dangerous chemicals and harmful forms of child labour in both family and commercial settings are significant problems. In addition to exposure to dangerous chemicals, children may suffer long working hours, lack of access to education, very low or no pay, and injury due to heavy loads and dangerous machinery. If children must work to support themselves or their families, they should be assisted with programs that reduce the physical risks they face and provide leisure time, flexible schooling and fair pay.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> CIDA. *CIDA's Action Plan on Child Protection: Promoting the Rights of Children who need Special Protection Measures*. June 2001, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org)

<sup>11</sup> CIDA. *Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Agriculture: Canada Making a Difference In The World*. CIDA, March 2003.

<sup>12</sup> CIDA op. cit.

CIDA recognizes the value in local knowledge and the key importance of participatory methods in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as highlighted in Canada Making a Difference in the World: A policy statement on Strengthening Aid Effectiveness (2002). These principles provide a strong base for CIDA's current agriculture policy framework, which recommends involving youth, and women, in program implementation (Annex 'A' of CIDA's policy document, Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Agriculture).

## GOOD PRACTICES

Agriculture and rural development initiatives that understand and incorporate a child rights-based approach recognize girls and boys as valid economic actors with rights related to leisure, education and protection from exploitation, discrimination, neglect or harm. Taking a child rights-based approach to agriculture and rural development means that good practices are participatory, non-discriminatory, holistic and foster accountability of states parties. The following examples highlight some good practices within agriculture, recognizing children's rights.



In Laos and Vietnam, poverty reduction projects work at the commune level with families, including ethnic minorities, to introduce new cropping systems and dairy production for income generation, supported by adult literacy training as well as savings and credit projects. These agriculture projects do not have an explicit focus on children but they reach children within the context

of beneficiary families and communities. It is instructive to note how a focus on small farmers can generate multiple child protection benefits in terms of direct assistance to youth as economic actors, while improving the quality of rural life, providing children with a choice to stay in their home communities and not migrate to urban areas for economic survival.

### **Child Protection in the West Africa Coffee-Cocoa Industry**

#### **Box: 2**

In West Africa, CIDA has focused considerable attention on the linked issues of harmful child labour and trafficking of children as agriculture workers. While these issues have attracted substantial international attention and have been the subjects of close non-government organization (NGO) study in recent years, they continue to be significant problems in the region.

Côte d'Ivoire, which produces 40 percent of the world's cocoa, is the main destination of poor children from countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin who hope to make a decent wage in the cocoa industry. A 2002 ILO study of child workers in Côte d'Ivoire found that 90 percent of workers under the age of 14 worked in agriculture.<sup>13</sup> In 1995, there were an estimated 467,000 working children in Côte d'Ivoire including migrants from neighboring countries. They found some gender differences—a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys among the 10 percent of working children self employed and involved in trade, and a slightly lower proportion of girls than boys involved in agriculture. While many children experience the positive rewards of contributing to the family livelihood and practicing useful skills, they face conditions of strenuous physical work, long hours especially at harvest time, exposure to dangerous pesticides without proper protection, and work without pay within the family unit. Foreign children who are trafficked may work in slave-like conditions on the cotton, cocoa and coffee plantations, suffering exploitation and abuse.

A child protection awareness-raising strategy has been incorporated into the Project to Support Coffee Cocoa Producers' cooperatives, implemented by the Société de coopération pour le développement international (SOCODEVI) in Côte d'Ivoire (supported by CIDA). Training of 10,000 farmers in 15 cooperatives pays particular attention to making a distinction between harmful and non-harmful child work, and the issue of workplace safety and protection of young people from pesticide exposure, carrying heavy loads and using dangerous tools. The project plan was delivered in July 2002, but due to renewed conflict and instability, the \$4.25 million project has been suspended since March 2003.

CIDA helped to establish Ecofondo in Colombia, a fund supported by debt conversion, focused on ecological agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, and urban environment. Working with a network of 150 environmental NGOs across Colombia over nine years Ecofondo has supported 172 projects, many of which involve child participation or directly benefit children, for example through education initiatives or youth mobilization for ecological restoration.

Through the Development Information Program<sup>14</sup> CIDA supports the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network in its efforts to assist radio broadcasters, including young people, in over 70 countries to fight poverty and food insecurity. Children benefit from, and in some cases produce, radio programs about successful, low-cost practices in sustainable agriculture, nutrition, health and community development. The network has developed a series of radio programs to encourage young people to remain in rural areas and build productive lives in their communities. The network is currently developing a new package of programs focused on children in agriculture, due for completion in 2003.

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<sup>13</sup> Francavilla, F. and S. Lyon. "Children's Work in Côte d'Ivoire: An Overview." Understanding Children's Work: An Inter-Agency Research Cooperation Project. ILO/UNICEF/World Bank, March 2002.

<sup>14</sup> This Program financially supports the development of mass media and educational initiatives aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of international development and cooperation issues among Canadians, see [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/dip](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/dip)

### **The Canada-Ecuador Development Fund**

**Box: 3**

The Fondo Ecuadoreano Canadiense de Desarrollo—Canada-Ecuador Development Fund (FECD) is a CIDA-funded project. The Fund has had a substantial impact on communities. Its effectiveness derives in part from both its child-friendly and ecologically-sound approaches.

The incidence of child labour is high in Ecuador, and particularly high in the rural sector. In 1998, a government survey indicated that 45 percent of children between the ages of ten and 17 work. In 1994 roughly 59 percent of working children between ages ten and 17, approximately 568,000 children, worked in the rural sector (paid or unpaid). Ecuadorian children, as young as eight, work in banana fields and packing plants, and are exposed to toxic chemicals; they handle insecticide-treated plastics; work under fungicide-spraying airplanes in the fields; and directly apply post-harvest pesticides in packing plants, using sharp tools and machetes.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, the projects supported by FECD emphasize alternative forms of agricultural development. The FECD's focus is on the agriculture sector as the entry point to improve income, food security, health, nutrition and employment stability of communities in rural poverty, while promoting sustainable use and management of natural resources. After ten years, the FECD has provided a successful model on which the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) now bases most of its work in Ecuador. In the 100 poorest rural districts of Ecuador, FECD provides both funding and technical support based on the requests of the implementing partners (90 percent local NGOs).

FECD interventions are with small-scale family farmers for the most part, not with big banana plantations. Its primary beneficiaries are small producer families farming coffee, cocoa, medicinal plants, edible cacti, cochineal, asparagus, bananas, the ancient grain quinoa (replacing less lucrative crops such as wheat and barley), guinea pigs, and handicrafts such as Panama hats. Partners report that the objectives of the fund are being achieved.

#### **Child Protection Dimensions and Issues**

Improvements in village health and education services, family reunification, reduction of family violence, improved nutrition, new family income which can provide for school fees and school supplies, and construction of playgrounds are among the reported results of FECD projects that are particularly significant for children.

Major child health benefits result from the replacement of chemical fertilizers and pesticides with organic methods, as this not only eliminates direct exposure of working children to poisonous substances but reduces toxic loading in family diets and the effects of toxins on the reproductive health of adults, especially pregnant women.

The Cities Feeding People initiative of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) promotes urban agriculture with an emphasis on policies, technologies and methods that improve productivity, accessibility and sustainability of urban production systems while addressing public health issues that arise with farming, particularly animal husbandry, in urban and peri-urban farming.

The TeleFood program of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supports innovative grassroots projects to help small farmers including school gardens in peri-

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<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch. 'Tainted Harvest: Child Labor and Obstacles to Organizing on Ecuador's Banana Plantations.' Human Rights Watch New York- Washington- London- Brussels, 2002

urban areas, for example with AIDS orphans in Zambia and children in shanty towns of migrant families outside Lima, Peru.<sup>16</sup>

## CORE PROGRAMMING ELEMENTS

Drawing upon the examples above and child rights work in other sectors, it is possible to identify several programming elements that illustrate ‘good practices’:

- Children actively participate in defining programming interventions, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of programming approaches, especially regarding direct interventions that affect them;
- Programs provide young people with learning opportunities or technical support, such as the provision of environmental management and agricultural skills training, technical support, access to credit, materials or land;
- Programs target girls and women and ensure their participation; and
- Educational opportunities are provided through formal or non-formal education at times and seasons compatible with work obligations.

### Guiding Principles:

- It is important to recognize the ways girls and boys work and contribute to their family, community, the economy and society at large. Programming reach should include a description of all beneficiaries, including girls and boys, by sex, age, ethnicity, rural/urban placement and socio-economic status.
- Gender analysis should be undertaken to determine needs and priorities of all stakeholders, including girls and boys, regarding both the development problem and proposed solution.
- When considering the differential impact and consequences of initiatives, it is important to include children in the assessment, and to evaluate the different impacts on girls and boys.
- Agricultural initiatives need long-term investment of resources and a long-term commitment to change. To measure results over the long-term, it is important to collect, where possible, baseline data on boys and girls that is disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, rural/urban placement and socio-economic status.
- Reflect the project’s commitment to children’s rights and participation in the Logical Framework Analysis. Set measurable targets for initiatives, and identify expected results and indicators, including indicators for children’s participation in program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation<sup>17</sup>.
- All stakeholders should be involved in performance measurement, including children.

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<sup>16</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). “Growing vegetables, cultivating minds: school garden in a poor community on Lima's outskirts improves children's nutrition while imparting skills and pride.” <http://www.fao.org/Food/english/stories/projects.htm>, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> CIDA. *RBM and Children's Participation: A Guide to Incorporating Child Participation Results into CIDA Programs*. February 2003.

Questions when planning agricultural initiatives:

- Who is the target (both direct and indirect) of the proposed policy, program or project? Who will benefit?
- What opportunities exist for implementing child protection programming that targets special protective measures for children who are particularly vulnerable?
- What is the best way to build on and strengthen local, national, and regional commitments to child protection and children's rights?
- How can the project design incorporate mechanisms to respond to the answers to these (and the following) questions?
- Are girls and boys participating in agriculture labour?
  - Are the effects negative, positive or both?
  - Are they handling dangerous chemicals or operating machinery and tools that are too heavy for them?
  - What hours do they work?
  - Do they attend a local school?
  - If not, are there educational resources, such as non-formal education, accessible to them?
  - Can education and training be adapted to their restricted schedules and needs?
  - Can education and training be adapted to integrate the knowledge and skills they bring from their work and life experiences?
- Will the agriculture program enable adult workers to earn enough to send girls and boys to school?
- How can alternative educational services be developed for children in agriculture labour? How can child protection issues and environmental issues be integrated into school curricula? Do schools provide a safe learning environment for girls and boys?
- What are the health needs of the community? Are services available to address these needs?
- How can non-harmful traditional ways of life be validated?
- How can boys and girls participate in fostering opportunities for child protection programming?

## CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, to be consistent with CIDA's Action Plan on Child Protection while strengthening effectiveness of other pertinent policies and support partner countries' implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, development cooperation programming needs to deal explicitly with child rights in agriculture project planning and implementation. Country development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), rural development plans and agricultural sector transformation strategies, within an overarching poverty reduction mandate, need to make an explicit commitment to:

- prevent the worst forms of child labour, including enforcement of legal protection of children from hazardous work conditions and all forms of exploitation and abuse

consistent with international and national human rights norms and standards, and labour legislation;

- support the participation of girls and boys in agricultural practices that reinforce their contribution to the needs of their families while ensuring the realization of their rights;
- protect the population, with explicit reference to children, from agricultural pollutants due to overuse and unsafe use of chemical inputs which expose workers, surrounding communities and ecosystems to toxins that undermine their health; and
- promote agroecological practices that regenerate and maintain the integrity of each local ecosystem (soil, water, biodiversity) for present and future generations.

Within CIDA, explicit attention to child protection and child rights related results in program and project planning would contribute to ensuring that the child labour, child health and environmental health dimensions of agriculture projects are captured in the Logical Framework Analysis for each project, addressed in implementation, and part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

In addition to programming opportunities, CIDA can also look for windows of opportunity in ongoing policy dialogue. Since some partner countries have not yet developed their PRSPs or their agriculture/rural sector plans, Canada has a chance to promote the interdependence of children's rights and agriculture. CIDA is increasingly engaged in program-based approaches with partner countries and other donors. CIDA is well-placed, with both agriculture and child protection policy frameworks, to advocate for the integration of these issues in a manner that supports partner countries' poverty reduction priorities consistent with obligations under the CRC.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS**

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## RECOMMENDED READING

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