



Traidcraft and child labour

Enforced child labour is an infringement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Traidcraft is totally opposed to such exploitative practices as children working due to debt bondage, for long hours or in hazardous working conditions.

However, child labour is a complex and emotive issue, and sometimes knee-jerk reactions to the discovery of child labour in a supply chain can do more harm than good to vulnerable producer communities.

Poverty

Working to eradicate child labour is clearly an important process. Child labour is both a cause and an effect of poverty, in a reinforcing cycle. When children work instead of being educated, their chances as an adult of getting a better job or being able to press for their rights as workers are minimal. Children's work also replaces the need to pay an adult, so increasing poverty in the older generations. If the adults in a family cannot earn enough by their work, children's labour will be needed to help feed and clothe them. So initiatives which help workers to organise for better pay and other rights are important to break the cycle of poverty. If adults - especially women - are paid fairly for their work, children will benefit through being able to afford to go to school.

However, until fairer conditions have been established, it may be unrealistic or even undesirable to expect children not to be involved in economic processes. In situations of extreme poverty, everyone needs to work to survive – and education may not be available as an alternative for children. The impact of HIV/Aids can mean that in some families parents are unable to work and children need to work to support their parents and younger siblings.

Even in less extreme situations, it is important to distinguish between children working in ways which can bring benefits and enforced child labour, which can affect their health and development and exclude children from educational opportunities.

Much craft work, for example, is home-based or undertaken in small family-run workshops. In these circumstances helping out part-time, alongside attending schools, is often a normal part of growing up. In many cases this is a way for youngsters to learn traditional skills which will help provide them with an income as adults. So abolishing children's work completely may even have negative effects. For example, one of our suppliers, **Tara Projects** in India, sells products sourced from a number of different craft producers. Initially Tara advised their producers against any work by children. However, this led to some children starting to look down on their parents' craft, and Tara realised that as well as getting schooling, children should be encouraged to learn craft skills that would increase their job prospects. At the same time they should also grow up aware of how to protect their interests better than previous generations had been able to do.

Similarly, small-scale farmers will often involve all family members at busy times like harvest, and parents will want to pass on agricultural skills to their children.

Our products

Whilst Traidcraft works to ensure that there is no exploitation of children in its supply chains, we know that children will have been involved in helping to make some of our products. But the impact of our work is to reduce the need for children to continue doing such work. Traidcraft suppliers around the world tell us again and again that by getting a fair wage/price for their goods they are able to educate their children, rather than having to send them out to work. So family life is better now and there is hope for the future.

How fair trade helps to beat child labour

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Malawi

Switching from subsistence farming to growing sugar cane has helped farmer Alfred Butao build a more secure future for his children. He sells his sugar through **Kasinthula Cane Growers** and the Fairtrade premium means he can educate his six children – and put food on the family table. *Before I was growing sugar my family could only manage to have one type of vegetable. Now we are able to buy cooking oil and meat so we have a balanced diet. I am able to feed my children.* In Malawi, primary education is free but parents try to send their children to private schools to get a better education. *My elder one (12) goes to private school and I have to pay for him. It would be impossible without growing sugar.*

Bangladesh

In the UK, many teenagers have week-end or part-time jobs as a way of earning extra pocket money. For 15-year-old Taslima, working at **Swajan** is, quite simply, a way of helping to put food on the table for her two sisters, her brother and her parents. In Bangladesh, education for girls is compulsory up to Grade 8 and is free, so Taslima is still going to school while working for Swajan. She got her job there after Parveen, Swajan's workshop supervisor, found her on the streets and offered her training. *I want to study but I also want to work here because we need money for our food. My father is a green chilli seller. He is handicapped so he can't do a bigger job and he doesn't earn enough money.* Taslima says she wants to continue working at Swajan when she has completed her education.

Working for change

Traidcraft campaigns actively to encourage UK and other companies to understand their supply chains better, so they become aware of where child labour may be involved and the conditions in which this is undertaken. Where child labour is exploitative or preventing children from accessing education, then companies need to work with others in their supply chains to address such issues. Dropping suppliers altogether may be necessary if there is no willingness to change, but knee-jerk reactions to withdraw from difficult situations can do more harm than good, by depriving vulnerable producer communities of income on which they rely. Responsible Purchasing should be about more than companies keeping their hands clean, companies need to use their resources and influence to work for positive change and support economic development that will make child labour unnecessary. To learn more about our work in this field, visit www.responsible-purchasing.org

Traidcraft 2008

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