– It's Time to Talk! – Children's Views on Children's Work

Executive summary

Executive summary

kinder not hilfe

Terre des Hommes
International Federation

Introduction

'It's Time to Talk! – Children's Views on Children's Work' (hereinafter: Time to Talk) was launched by Kindernothilfe, Save the Children Canada, and Terre des Hommes International Federation in March 2016. The goal of Time to Talk is that of enabling working children to have their views heard in local, national and global decision-making processes, including in the run-up to the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour in Argentina in November 2017.

more than **50** civil society partners

1,822 children
(52% girls, 48% boys)

aged **5** to **18** years
were consulted about their work

across **36** countries
around the world

Through collaboration with more than 50 civil society partners, 1 822 children (52% girls, 48% boys) aged 5 to 18 were consulted about their working lives in 36 countries across the world. Time to Talk provided neutral spaces in which to listen to the perspectives of girls and boys working in diverse settings, in order to gain increased understanding of: the different motivations and reasons for children's work; children's likes and dislikes about their work and working conditions; and their messages for different stakeholders on how best to support them.

Methodology

A commitment to children's rights shaped the research design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and follow-up. Seventeen children's advisory committees (CACs) were formed, involving working children in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe. They enabled children to assume an active role throughout the research process as advisers, analysts, and advocates. The research used mixed methods, but was primarily qualitative and exploratory using focus group discussions and participatory activities with small groups of girls and boys. Individual questionnaire-based interviews also allowed the collection of background data concerning each child, their family situation, their work, and school attendance. The data sample was purposeful and was not representative of any particular country, region, or specific type of work. 43% of the children consulted had regular contact with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 23% had occasional contact, and 34% had rare or no contact with NGOs prior to the consultation.

134 consultations with girls and boys aged 5 to 18 were organized across 36 countries between April 2016 and May 2017. 32% of the children consulted were from Asia; 29% from Latin America; 27% from Africa; 8% from the Middle East; and just 4% from Europe. The children consulted were engaged in a diverse range of paid and unpaid work in urban and rural settings, including: unpaid household and agricultural work; paid domestic work; paid agricultural work; small-scale vending; work in gold mines and stone mines; construction work; brick or stone making; waste collection; shop work; work in the weaving and textile industry; factory work; shoe-shining; hotel and restaurant work; making deliveries and transporting; carpentry; work in the fishing industry; cutting hair and styling; cleaning buses/cars; begging; work in massage and dance parlours; and sex work[1].

76% of the children consulted were studying (including formal, informal, or non-formal education), 22% were out of school, and 2% sometimes attended school. The majority of children consulted, 59%, worked before and/or after school, 10% only worked in the school holidays, and 5% worked at other times (for example, occasional seasonal work). 22% of the children consulted worked full-time, and 4% were former child workers. The children consulted included: children living with different caregivers; children from ethnic and indigenous minorities; 271 children from migrant families; 133 child refugees; 98 children who were internally displaced; 89 children with disabilities; and 17 children who were stateless. 19% of the children consulted were members of organised working children's associations, particularly in Latin America and Africa.

Application of the basic requirements for effective and ethical children's participation (CRC/C/GC/12, 2009) and additional guidance on ethical research with children (Feinstein & O'Kane, 2008b; Hart & Tyrer, 2006) was used to inform an ethical approach throughout the Time to Talk project. Findings from each of the consultations with children and from the children's advisory committee meetings were transcribed in English, French or Spanish. Template analysis was applied to support systematic thematic analysis, while seeking to balance flexibility and structure (King & Brooks, 2017). NVivo 11 was used as a tool to support systematic analysis of the qualitative data and Excel to support quantitative analysis. ●

Key findings

Diverse working realities:

Children are involved in diverse types of work, in the informal and formal sectors, some of which are paid and some of which are unpaid. Many children combine paid work with unpaid work and study. They work before or after school, at the weekends, or during school holidays. Some children have stopped attending school and are working full-time or part-time. The majority of girls and boys consulted, emphasised their responsibilities to undertake household tasks to support their families. In many socio-cultural and religious contexts, both girls and boys are undertaking household work. However, in many countries, there are increased expectations on girls to help their mothers with housework, while there are sometimes increased expectations on boys to look after the livestock, to help with agricultural work, or to earn a living. Children living in rural settings tend to have more agricultural and animal husbandry work compared with children in urban settings or in camps. What's more, work in rural settings is more often influenced by seasonal changes. Elder siblings, both boys and girls, tend to have more responsibilities to support their families and to take care of their younger siblings. Conflict and disaster have multiple negative impacts on children and their families, and contribute to changes in work allocations based on gender and age, both inside and outside of households.

12-year-old boy drawing his working reality, Peru

Motivations and reasons for children's work:

Children shared different motivations and reasons for their work. The top eight reasons were[2]:

1. *to help their parents or family members*
2. *due to poverty and family struggles (e.g., poor health of a family member, conflict, migration, family debt) they need to earn money to meet their basic needs*
3. *a desire to earn money to purchase non-basic needs and to be more independent*
4. *to continue their education*
5. *for enjoyment*
6. *to learn skills*
7. *a desire for a better future*
8. *for health and sanitation*

Helping parents or family members was the top reason provided by both girls and boys across all regions, except the Middle East, where poverty and family struggles was the top reason[3]. For the second reason, there were interesting nuances with children from Africa and Latin America more frequently mentioning work to meet their basic needs, and children from Asia more frequently emphasising poverty and family struggles. In Latin America enjoyment for work was the third reason; while in Africa and Europe[4] the third reason was a desire to earn money to spend on themselves.

While some children felt obliged or compelled to work, other children were active in taking decisions concerning their work. In response to a question about how much say they have in decision-making about their work 26.5% of children reported having no say; 18.5% of children had very little say; 31.5% had some say; and 23.5% of children had a lot of say. Proportionately, more children in Latin America felt that they had a say in decisions about their work compared with children from other regions other regions, especially among organised working children who valued their work. There were similar results for girls and boys, except in Asia, where girls have slightly less say than boys. As children get older they have slightly more say: adolescents aged

2 All the aspects mentioned by children are ordered in terms of frequency.
3 In the Middle East the sample was small (63). The majority of children consulted in the Middle East were Syrian refugees or internally displaced persons (IDP) within Iraq.
4 Europe was a small sample (57) so findings from this region are tentative.

13 to18 years old have slightly more say than children under the age of 12.

Children's likes and dislikes about their work:

Children reflected on both the positive and negative aspects of their work. The most common recurrent themes expressed by children when talking about what they like about their work were:

- *good working conditions, which were characterised especially by respectful communication with their employers / parents / customers*
- *being praised and appreciated by family members, employers, and others*
- *feeling proud and responsible*
- *earning an income*
- *learning skills*
- *helping and spending time with families*
- *Experiencing support, solidarity and protection from friends, parents and other adults*
- *seeing and playing with friends while working*
- *working outside and appreciating nature*

The aspects that children like and dislike about their work reflect some of the reasons and motivations for their work.

The most common recurrent themes expressed by children when sharing what they dislike about their work were:

- *risk of violence (scolding, or emotional, physical and sexual violence) faced by both girls and boys. Girls faced an increased risk of sexual violence*
- *risk or experience of harm, injury and accidents*
- *poor working conditions: heavy work, too much responsibility or work pressure, not enough time to rest, and paid too little or too late*
- *frustrations relating to their work efforts and the way they are treated*
- *fatigue*
- *being negatively judged and discriminated by others due to their work*
- *feeling sad and isolated when they have insufficient care and love from their family and when people do not listen to them*
- *negative impact of work on their studies*

Recurrent themes for likes and dislikes were very similar across every region, and each theme was emphasised by both girls and boys. However, children who were engaged in paid work placed more emphasis on the advantages of earning money than children who were involved in unpaid work. Furthermore, girls highlighted increased concerns related to sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, and en route to and from work.

The consultations revealed how many girls and boys combine work and studies. In some contexts, children were able to balance unpaid work or paid work and study, rest and play, particularly when their parents and caregivers prioritised time for children's studies. In contrast, some children struggled to balance work and studies with play and rest, due to long working hours. This negatively affected their studies and left them with insufficient time to play or rest. Many children expressed a desire to have more time to study and to be able to continue their education. However, a few children, particularly those who had already dropped out of school, felt that work was more useful to them to meet their current and future needs.

A group of 15 to 17 year-old boys reflecting on likes and dislikes about their work, Kyrgyztan
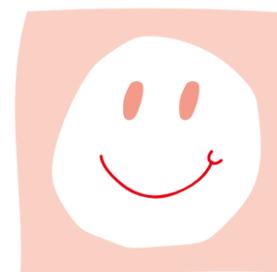
*Work or working conditions that **help** children to fulfil their aspirations*

*Work or working conditions that **hinder** children from fulfilling their aspirations*

Work that allows them to continue their studies
when their work helps to pay school costs and when light workloads do not hamper studies

●

Learning skills from work
including household, agricultural, trade or business skills that will help them in current and future occupations

●

Earning money
that helps them meet their current and future needs

Work that hampers their education
when there is not enough time to study, when they are too tired to study, when they attend school irregularly or drop out

●

Manual work without skill development
or work that they have not chosen or prefer to do

●

Violence and hardships experienced while working
are harmful to their current and future well-being

Work children think they can and cannot do:

Children discussed and identified work they could and could not do, and any necessary conditions or reasons that informed their opinions. Many children suggested that they could do work that: is light and easy to do; does not harm them and is in a safe environment; is near to, or in their home; or is supported by family or peers. In addition, the work should not interfere with their education, should allow enough time to play and rest, and be paid fairly. Some types of work that were suggested as suitable by both girls' and boys' groups, included: housework; cooking; agricultural work and gardening; fetching water; smallscale vending; working in a shop; washing clothes; and collecting wood. More girls' groups suggested that they could cook, wash dishes, fetch water, look after younger siblings, tailor or sew clothing and style or cut hair. In contrast, more boys' groups suggested they could be involved in agricultural work and gardening, mechanics or repair work. Thus, children's suggestions for work they could do reflected efforts by girls and boys to fulfil prevalent gender expectations.

There were different types of work that girls and boys felt they could not do including: carrying heavy things; construction work; selling goods on the street; difficult agricultural work (e.g. ploughing); driving; stealing; prostitution; producing or selling alcohol, and selling drugs; working in mines; and heavy digging. Boys' groups more frequently suggested that they could not do construction work, steal, sell drugs or do heavy digging. In contrast, more girls' groups suggested they could not be involved in prostitution, wood collection, mine work, or paid domestic work. Some groups of children had differing views regarding the appropriateness and safety of some types of work, such as smallscale vending, wood collection, or waste collection. For example, girls particularly emphasized the dangers of sexual harassment when searching for wood.

The most frequently mentioned, key reasons for work not being suitable for children included work that: is harmful, e.g. unhealthy, unsafe, or risks causing pain, injury or accident; is too difficult or heavy for their age or ability; is illegal or increases the risk of being in conflict with the law; increased risk of abuse and violence; has a negative impact on their studies; is exploitative, for example, involves working long working hours; and/or is against their religion or culture.

Protection and risk factors:

In order to develop and implement policies and practices that enhance the protection, well-being, and development of children, it is important to identify and reduce risk factors that increase the likelihood of harmful outcomes, and to identify and strengthen protection factors that contribute to positive results of children's work. Children's advisory committee members were actively engaged in activities to analyse risk and protection factors.

Key risk factors included
- *the child being requested to do heavy or hazardous work*
- *the child being forced to work*
- *the child working late at night*
- *the child working on the street*
- *the child not living with their parents*
- *the child having long working hours*
- *the child/family being affected by conflict or disaster (especially if they are refugees or stateless)*
- *the child's parents or caregivers not having stable employment*
- *the child's family being affected by poverty*
- *the child working for someone outside of their family*
- *the child/family migrating*
- *being a girl*

Key protection factors included:
- *the child regularly going to school or studying*
- *the child being a member of a working children's association*
- *the child's views being heard in decisions about their work*
- *the child being asked to only do light work*
- *the child experiencing love, care and guidance from their family*
- *the child's parents having good employment opportunities in their own villages and towns*
- *availability of government investments in school infrastructure and other basic services*

Children's messages to governments, parents / caregivers, NGOs, and others:

CAC members and some children in broader consultations analysed the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and practices concerning working children. As an integral part of the consultation process, in 93 consultations children developed key messages to share with different groups of people whom they thought could help improve their lives. Local and/or national action and advocacy events were organised by children to share their messages in more than 12 countries.

Children identified the limitations of existing policies which did not adequately respond to the complex reasons underlying children's work, including children's motivations to help families, family poverty, poor access to quality education, conflict and violence. Children recognised policies that supported free and compulsory education for children, while desiring increased investments in school infrastructure and quality teaching practices (especially in remote and rural communities) as well as increased investments in inclusive education for children with disabilities. Some children expressed appreciation of child labour laws that protect children from harmful work, but described how these laws and policies are often poorly implemented and monitored. Organised working children from Bolivia and Peru critiqued policies which criminalise children's work and sought recognition for dignified work.

Children developed key messages for governments; parents and caregivers; national and international NGOs; other children; teachers and head-teachers; employers; police; community and religious elders; UN agencies; and others, including the media. There were differences in perspectives among working children on the type of policies and laws that would support them. Overall, children emphasised the need for improved policies and practices to:
- *reduce family poverty to ensure that their parents and caregivers have access to decent work, good livelihoods, services, and assistance*
- *ensure free, quality, safe and inclusive education for every child and non-discriminatory access to other basic services (including birth registration)*
- *protect children from hazardous and harmful work and monitor implementation of the laws*
- *improve working conditions, and support vocational training*
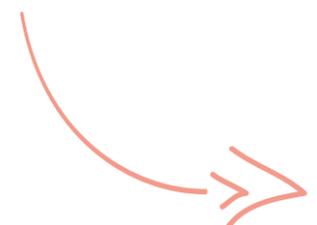- *listen to working children and involve them in practice*

Key messages of a group of 9-year-old girls, Indonesia

- *and policy decisions affecting them*
- *prevent and protect children from violence.*

Conclusions:

The Time to Talk project provided crucial spaces in which to listen to the views, experiences and suggestions of girls and boys who are working in different settings around the world. The findings revealed the diversity of children's working lives and thus the complexities ofcreating and implementing policies and practices which support children's development, wellbeing and protection. The concluding chapter provides a more detailed socio-ecological framework that can be applied as a practical tool to shape the assessment, planning, and monitoring of actions which will be in the best interests of working children. Drawing upon children's own experiences and messages, 12 key policy and practice recommendations to enhance children's protection, well-being and development are also presented. Governments, international agencies (the ILO, and other UN agencies, etc.), civil society organisations, Alliance 8.7, donors, and other key actors should implement 12 key recommendations:

Key actors should

Do you know what key actors should do?

1
Increase dialogue to agree on a common terminology relating to children's work, child labour, youth employment, and decent work for young people, to better shape data collection, and policy and practice developments

2
Ensure co-ordinated, child-focused, gender-sensitive, policy and practice developments that are locally relevant, flexible, and responsive to the needs, rights, and aspirations of children and families in their contexts

3
Increase investments in child-focused, family-strengthening strategies, schemes and interventions including: poverty reduction; decent work and livelihood schemes for parents, caregivers and youth; child-sensitive social protection; improved infrastructure in remote, rural, urban poor, and camp settings; and access to family support services

4
Strengthen realisation of children's rights to information, expression, and participation and association, to ensure genuine opportunities for decision-makers to listen to and take into account the views of working children in families, schools, work places, communities, and the policy and practice developments that concern them

5
Strengthen the development and participatory monitoring of education systems that provide inclusive, free, safe, relevant, quality education to all children in remote, rural, urban and camp localities

6
Refine, implement, monitor and enforce laws, policies and programmes to: protect children from hazardous, harmful, and/or forced work; and support safe and dignified work (taking into account the views of working children and their best interests)

7
Increase investments in human and financial resources for child-protection case management to ensure co-ordinated, multi-sectoral responses to exploitation and violence based on children's best interests (informed by the views of the child and family members)

8
Strengthen child protection systems to prevent and protect children from violence in families, work places, schools, streets, communities, and wider society

9
Increase investments in gender and disability-sensitive, vocational-skill training and on-the-job mentoring schemes for adolescents, while also promoting and supporting non-discriminatory access to formal education

10
Engage employers and businesses to respect children's rights and improve working conditions (taking into account the views of the child and their best interests)

11
Increase humanitarian support for children and families affected by conflict, disaster or other shocks. Increase government investments in emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction to strengthen families resilience and to reduce vulnerability

12
Support ongoing, formative dialogue research, and participatory monitoring and evaluation to inform and assess the impact of child labour laws, policies and programmes

TIME TO TALK!

#talkaboutchildwork

kinder not hilfe

Terre des Hommes
International Federation