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UNION VIEW

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Child Labour: Enough!

The ILO estimates at 215 million the number of children involved in child labour. Yet one of the Millennium Development Goals is to ensure primary education for all before 2015. There is no time to waste!

Trade unions, which have long been involved in the fight against child labour, are stepping up their campaigns, negotiations, advocacy work and action on the ground to help children find their way back into school. Concrete examples of trade union actions in these reports carried out in Colombia, India, Nepal and Morocco.

Combating child labour helps secure higher pay

In India and Nepal, several unions have seen a spectacular increase in membership levels following the creation of schools for children working in brick kilns. They have managed to negotiate better wages as a result.

In India, brick making is one of the hardest sectors to unionise. Their owners are usually powerful figures at local level; they have political connections, allowing themselves to disregard the laws and exploit the workers. Applying the usual unionisation techniques is often futile, if not a danger to the workers. Organisations affiliated to BWI (1) have tried a new way of approaching this milieu, through the fight against child labour. *"Our members start by visiting the brick kilns on the pretext of buying bricks. They get to know the workers little by little and then meet them in public places such as the markets. They propose projects for their children, rather than talking about trade unions straight away: in some places, our organisations have a bad reputation as many workers have been exploited in the past by trade union leaders who were, first and foremost, politicians,"* explains J. L. Srivastava, coordinator of the BWI project against child labour in India.

"If the BMS had not convinced me how important schooling is, I would have continued to make my 12-year-old daughter work. My wife, my older children and myself work more and more so that she can go to school. We get up at three in the morning and are at the brick kiln from four in the morning till nine at night, six days a week. It's nerve-racking, because if we don't reach the quota of 1,000 bricks we don't get the minimum wage."

Dilbagh Singh, aged 43, from the Mittal brick kiln in the village of Bhullar, Punjab



Given the lack of quality schools in the rural regions where the brick kilns are located, BWI offered to set up schools for the workers' children. The two first schools were opened in 1995, with the support of ILO-IPEC (2), in the states of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. After the first encouraging results, eight Indian BWI affiliates received funding from several foreign unions (in the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Australia and Canada) to multiply these projects. They are now running 15 schools in five Indian states. *"BWI's aim is not to take over from the public authorities in the running of schools,"* underlines Rajeev Sharma, the BWI coordinator for South Asia. *"Once our schools are fully developed and we are sure that the government can take responsibility for them and provide the same quality of education, we hand their management over to it, whilst continuing to check that they are being run properly."* Around ten schools have been transferred to the government in this way.

Trade union activists go from worker to worker to try to convince them to send their children to school. Shobat Masik, a trade unionist employed by the BMS construction union (3) explains: *"The children are not employed by the brick kiln owners, but start helping their parents as of age four or five, preparing the soil, turning over the bricks when they are cooked, piling them up, ... The workers are paid according to the number of bricks they produce. When I tell them about the adverse effects of child labour, they respond that their earnings will fall if their children go to school, and that they cannot afford to pay for several children to go to school. We have to talk to them at length to motivate them; we have to explain that by not letting their children go to school, the problems of poverty are passed on from one generation to the next. Many of the parents are not educated themselves. A great deal of patience is required to convince them that education is a good long-term family investment."*

Tens of thousands of new members

"Creating schools is a way of improving the image workers, employers and the authorities have of trade unions, which then helps us to develop other activities," explains J. L. Srivastava.



Like this six-year-old boy in Fatehabad (Uttar Pradesh), over 11,000 Indian children have left work to go to school thanks to the BWI projects.

"They are an excellent entry point into these communities. We can then provide the workers with other services, such as helping them to obtain the social assistance they are entitled to." These projects have helped trade unions to raise their membership levels. *"We have recruited 30,000 new members since the launch of the project to combat child labour in 1995,"* says Kulwant Singh Bawa, general secretary of the BMS, a building workers' union active in the state of Punjab. *"We now have 40,000 dues-paying members and 40,000 non-paying members."* The same enthusiasm can be found in Uttar Pradesh, where the UPGMS (4) has gone from having just 50 members in 1995 to over 48,000 today.

The revenue lost by taking a child out of work is compensated for by the wage rises secured by these unions, which have stronger bargaining power thanks to the increase in membership. *"In Punjab, BMS has managed to take the rate of pay from 160 to 286 rupees (3.50 to 6.40 dollars) over the last ten years,"* underlines J. L. Srivastava. A large pay increase has also been secured in Uttar Pradesh. Tula Ram Sharma, president of the UPGMS: *"Thanks to negotiations with the Brick Kiln Employers' Association, we have managed to raise pay, taking it from 70 rupees for 1,000 bricks*

in 1995 to 150 rupees today." The members of trade unions affiliated to BWI also help the women workers to form self-help groups through which they can secure microcredits, set up small income generating activities, etc.

Projects extended to Nepal

The success of the child labour projects in India motivated BWI to extend them to Nepal, where its two affiliates CUPPEC (5) and CAWUN (6) are now running three schools. CAWUN has set up a primary school in one of the 14 brick kilns of Sudal, not far from the city of Bhaktapur, with the support of the Finnish trade union solidarity centre SASK.

"We had 1,900 members in the Bhaktapur district when we opened the school in January 2008. It has helped us recruit between 200 and 400 new members per month," explains Rajendra Kumar Baniya, general secretary of CAWUN.

"Around half of the workers in Sudal's brick kilns are migrants from other areas of Nepal. Their children can follow the classes at our school and then take their exams in the schools in their home towns. As a result, 85% of the migrant pupils passed their exams last year."

Like in India, the trade unionists have to speak to the parents several times to convince them how important schooling is. In some instances, it is the workers who are already sending their children to school that manage to convince the others. The gradual unionisation of Sudal's workers has contributed to the negotiation of better wages, which compensate for the revenue lost when a child stops working. *"When I work with my wife, I manage to produce 1,000 bricks during an 11 hour day, but if I am helped by one of my daughters, aged nine, we can make 150 more,"* says Minbahadur Thapa, a worker in Sudal. *"Last year, the union managed to take wages from 270 to 410 Nepalese rupees (3.70 to 5.70*



Chattar Singh, a member of the UPGMS in Uttar Pradesh, is delighted that union activists managed to convince him to send his children to school: "They have other prospects than working in the quarry, which is the only employment on offer in my region. They can go to the city, set up a small business in a neighbouring village, ... Education is life changing. My youngest daughter, aged 18 months, will go to school too."

dollars) for 1,000 bricks. This increase in my family income finally convinced me to let my daughter attend the classes at the CAWUN school."

(1) Building and Wood Workers' International, www.bwint.org

(2) International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour

(3) Bhatha Mazdoor Sabha, affiliated to Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS)

(4) Uttar Pradesh Gramin Mazdoor Sangathan, affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)

(5) Central Union of Painters, Plumbers, Electro and Construction Workers, affiliated to the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)

(6) Construction & Allied Workers' Union of Nepal, affiliated to the Nepal Trade Union Congress - Independent (NTUC-I).

Whilst child labour is the result, in part, of poverty, it also perpetuates it, as it weakens the adults' collective bargaining power.

**Rajeev Sharma,
BWI coordinator in
South Asia.**

One hundred days' work to combat child labour

Over 70% of working children around the world are employed in agriculture. In India, the APVVU is using a law guaranteeing rural employment to convince parents to send their children to school.

The passing in 2005 of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a small revolution for India's poorest workers. It was approved following years of lobbying by civil society, including the trade unions. Under this law, all rural households have the right to receive at least 100 days' work a year from the government. They are manual tasks to be accomplished within the framework of projects requested by the local communities and approved by the authorities, such as cleaning water reservoirs, digging small irrigation channels, marking out land, building small roads, etc.

Whilst the NREGA is one of the most progressive legal instruments India has adopted in recent years, its application on the ground remains uneven. The APVVU (1), active in the state of Andhra Pradesh, is devoting every energy to ensuring that the workers can benefit from it. *"The workers had to register with the authorities before 2006 to signal their interest in jobs provided under the scheme, but they did not always receive the information in time,"* explains P. Chennaiah, APVVU secretary and coordinator. *"Thanks to our awareness-raising campaigns, 800,000 received a NREGA*

job seeker card. The red tape, corruption and the dishonest practices of certain influential people are also a barrier to the application of the law. In 2009, less than 5% of the villages in the state of Andhra Pradesh received the 100 days' work established (the average is 62 days), but this proportion goes up to 30% in areas where our trade union helps the workers to demand that the law be implemented."

Rising agricultural wages

Although the 100-ruppee wage (2.20 dollars) paid for jobs obtained under the NREGA scheme is below the minimum wage, it has forced employers to raise pay levels a little in the agricultural sector. *"The minimum wage in September 2008 was 126 rupees a day in irrigated areas, 123 rupees in semi-irrigated areas, and 119 rupees in the dry areas of Andhra Pradesh,"* explains P. Chennaiah. *"In practice, since the NREGA came into force, landowners are under pressure to increase wages as they have less labour at their disposal:*





the wages for work of the same value have gone from 30 to around 40 or 50 rupees a day (0.60 - 0.90 to 0.90 - 1.10 dollars) for women and 50 to 60 rupees for men. Where there is a union, we secure equal pay for men and women."

Before 2006, many rural workers used to migrate to the big cities, such as Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad, during the low season in agriculture. Some would take their children with them, who would miss out on their schooling due to the difficulty enrolling in a new establishment during the course of the school year, as well as the parents' lack of awareness regarding the importance of education. Most migrant workers' children would therefore end up working with their parents. Those who did not accompany their parents had to stay home to look after their younger brothers and sisters, their grandparents, the animals, etc. They did not attend school either.

The APVVU is using the NREGA to convince parents not to go to the cities. P. Chennaiah: *"We explain to them that if they stay here in their villages, although they have to settle for 100 rupees a day instead of 150 or 200 rupees as migrants, at least they have a place to live, whereas the living and working conditions in the cities are often quite appalling. And then here, they are in a family environment, which can help them if they have any major problems. We make an agreement with each household: we commit to enrolling them in the NREGA scheme and to help them obtain the payment of their wages by the authorities within fifteen days. But if their children do not go to school, we do not help them anymore. Applying this principle generates employment: in the type of agricultural work done in Andhra Pradesh, taking two*

children out of work creates a job for one adult on average."

Self monitoring by communities

APVVU has observed a radical change of mentality, including among workers who did not usually migrate during the low season in agriculture. *"We have been active for a long time in the fight against child labour,"* underlines P. Chennaiah. *"In the past, we used to show the workers its negative effects through small plays, trying to raise awareness by appealing to their emotions. The problem was that if a child no longer wanted to go to school, the parents would use this as an excuse not to send them anymore. Things are very different now: there is social monitoring in each unit; the members themselves decide that the children can and must go to school. As incomes have increased, they are less in need of the children's earnings."*

The APVVU's fight against child labour is now focused on cooperation between teachers and their trade unions, to improve school attendance rates among the most disadvantaged population groups, such as the Dalits (the "untouchables"). *"We contact teachers in public schools to raise their awareness, to help them understand the culture of people from lower castes,"* explains the APVVU coordinator. *"It is important, because many teachers are from higher castes and still think that children from low castes are not "made" for school. We lead a march, for example, twice a year, from village to village, to raise awareness among teachers and all workers about the importance of sending all children to school."*

The fight for the implementation of the NREGA and the eradication of child labour has allowed the APVVU to boost



Taking two children out of work creates a job for one adult.



**P. Chennaiah
(APVVU)**



The APVVU convinced these workers from Andhra Pradesh not to migrate to the city and to send their children to school to be able to benefit from a law guaranteeing 100 days' work in rural areas.

its membership. "Out of the 800,000 people our trade union has helped to enrol in the scheme, 154,000 became members between 2006 and 2009, taking our total membership to 574,500. Unlike political parties, our primary objective is to help the poorest workers, not to recruit them at all cost.

But an increase of almost 40% in our membership figures within three years is, nonetheless, a very encouraging result." concludes P. Chennaiah.

(1) Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union, affiliated to the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF, www.iuf.org).

A ray of hope for Colombian children

Work in mines, sexual exploitation, domestic labour, gang recruitment... Colombia's disadvantaged children run a high risk of being dragged into the worst forms of child labour. The national trade union confederation, CGT, is working to mitigate this risk through education and awareness raising.

The CGT general workers' confederation is one of the most experienced trade unions in the fight against child labour. In the seventies, it had already begun raising consciousness about the negative effects of child exploitation among all the members of their affiliate organisations. "During the trade union meetings held at weekends, some adults would come with their children who, for the most part, were child labourers," explains Myriam Luz Triana, CGT national finance secretary. "We started to organise games and to communicate with these children whilst their parents attended the meetings. We learnt a great deal about the home life and experiences of these children, about the conditions and types of work they were involved in, etc. Little by little, we brought together a group of around 150 of our members' children and their friends. We would take them once a week to the park in front of the CGT office in Bogota to eat and play a series of games aimed at raising their self-esteem and helping them to understand their rights as children, etc."

In 1996, the CGT decided to go a step further and offer the children catch-up courses. CGT members contacted school heads and teachers, asking which children were having difficulties, then went to meet them and tried to convince their parents to let them take part in these catch-up activities. They then asked the children enrolled if they knew of any children not attending school who would like to join them. Programmes of this kind are currently underway in Facatativa and Bojaca, two small towns not far from Bogota, and Ciudad Bolívar, one of the poorest areas of the capital. Between 25 and 40 children in Ciudad Bolívar go to school in the morning and then to the CGT office between 2.30 pm and 5.00 pm. They are all in school, as the office is located in the least disadvantaged part of Ciudad Bolívar, the part located at the lowest altitude. It would be too risky for the CGT to carry out these activities in the higher areas, where groups operating outside the law are present in large numbers and it is best to keep a low profile, especially as trade unionists.

The CGT's school catch-up programme is a "life project" response to the difficulties children have assimilating certain subjects during normal school hours (due to the excessive class numbers, which mean that teachers are unable to devote the necessary attention to weaker pupils). The level of education reached by their parents is another obstacle. "I wanted my son to take part in the CGT's activities as he was not doing very well at school, among other things because there was no one in the house to help him with his homework," explains 38-year-old Gloria, who lives in Ciudad



The children taking part in the CGT activities improve their school results and their social conduct.

Bolívar. "I would like to be able to help him, but I did not even reach secondary school level. He is doing much better at school since he has been receiving help from the CGT teachers and activists."

Improving children's behaviour

The confederation asked an educator, Luz Mila Triana, to develop games to facilitate understanding in certain subjects.

"In the case of maths, for example, we organise card games in which the children have to calculate," she explains. "To teach them reading and good values at the same time, we give the children texts to read and they have to reproduce what they have read in games." Aside from the better school results, the children's parents are delighted at the change in their behaviour towards other family members, friends, etc. "Before, my son had a tendency to be violent at times with other children, but there has been a huge improvement since he has been attending the CGT's classes," says Luz





Marina from Facatativa. "The educators and activists teach him respect for others, including older people."

These changes in day-to-day behaviour may seem surprising considering the short time spent with the CGT teachers and activists in Bojaca and Facatativa (three to four hours a week, whilst in Ciudad Bolívar in Bogotá, they spend three hours a day). It would seem that the influence of people outside the family circle and school plays an important role, all the more so thanks to the playful environment in which the activities take place. Luz Mila Triana: "We organise games that help children to distinguish between good and bad behaviour, etc. If, for example, a child mistreats one of his classmates, we create a game where the roles are reversed, so that they understand how the other person feels. We also try to help them understand the realities their parents and teachers, etc. are faced with..."

Keeping children out of bad company

In addition to these improvements, the programme plays a crucial role in preventing child labour. "Our activities prevent the risk of children being exposed to drugs and bad company (such as gangs), or being pushed into work by their families," notes Claudia Castro, coordinator of the CGT programme in Ciudad Bolívar. Claudia is one of the five people

employed by the CGT who are former child labourers and were part of the initial group of 150 children that benefitted from the trade union's activities. As a child, she worked in the production of fireworks and emerald mines.

The CGT estimates that some 5,000 children have been positively affected in its programmes to date. "But when we carry out our awareness raising in schools, we reach even more people," underlines Myriam Luz. "The teachers and children pass on what we say to their communities, even if not all of them join our school catch-up programmes. In addition, all of our informal economy trade unions continue to receive regular awareness raising about child labour."

A long-term investment

The CGT may not have recruited new members thanks to the programme but, as Myriam Luz points out, that is not the aim: "We may be mistaken not to think more about ourselves, but the most important thing is the children. We have received many thanks from their parents, who understand that the CGT goes beyond the usual trade union activities, and they speak to other workers about it." The CGT general secretary, Julio Roberto Gómez Esguerra, agrees entirely: "It all brings us recognition, even from the non-union community, families, etc. Creating a positive image of the CGT is a long-term investment, a seed that may grow."

Long-term commitment

"For the CGT, the fight against child labour is not a fad; it is something we do with or without international financial support. In Ciudad Bolívar, one of the poorest areas of Bogotá, the people living there were surprised to see us stay, as they were used to seeing "charity" organisations coming to help them, to advance their political aims, and then leaving when the elections were over."

Myriam Luz, CGT national finance secretary

"They put a weapon in my hand and a cigarette in my mouth"

Fifteen-year-old Jasbleidy escaped from the guerrillas and the worst forms of child labour. She is now a monitor for a CGT programme to help disadvantaged children.

I am originally from El Rubí, in the department of Santander. I started working at the age of eight: I did the housework and had to prepare food for my father and 16 coca workers. My mother and I wanted me to go to school, but my father would not allow it, as according him, "schooling is for donkeys". The situation was becoming dangerous in the region, a group of guerrillas tried to win me over, they placed a weapon in my hand and a cigarette in my mouth; they tried to get me to join them.



"Schooling is for donkeys"

I didn't start going to school until I was ten, when my mother left my father to come and live in Bojaca, not far from Bogotá, where it is safer. I am 15 now and am in the process of making up for the gap in my education relative to the other pupils of my age. The CGT's school catch-up programme has helped me in all the subjects I was having difficulties with, and has allowed me to pass all my exams. My dream is to be a singer, and also to continue with my education to become a teacher or a psychologist so that I can help children in difficulty.

I am only working on Sundays at the moment, from 6 am to 6 pm. I sell tickets in the car parks where tourists come to park, and fetch water from the wells for the toilets. I earn 15,000 pesos (7.70 dollars) a day. I used to sell rings before I got this job (I used to earn about 5,000 pesos for working from 7 am to 5 pm); I have also worked on the market, and as a domestic labourer, ...

Every Friday afternoon, I am one of the monitors at the CGT programme, and am in charge of the other monitors. I like teaching, being a leader. I know that some children are shy, but I get on easily with everyone. I try to talk to the children, to advise them not to work, telling them that they can get cut or burnt at the market, for example. I don't like telling them too much about my own experience, because it distresses me, but I like to show them affection and encourage them to go as far as they can with their studies.

Preventing school abandonment to combat child labour

In Morocco, the national teachers' union, SNE, is at the forefront of the fight against school abandonment, which is often the first step towards child labour. In Fez, an action programme aimed at keeping children in school has also helped the union create a positive image for itself, at the same time as boosting its membership figures.

Every year, around 250,000 children drop out of primary school in Morocco. The majority of them end up in some kind of work (agriculture, domestic work, crafts, forges, ...), compromising their chances of escaping poverty. In a bid to break this vicious circle, the national teachers' union, SNE (1), has been managing an action plan supported by three Dutch organisations (the FNV trade union federation, Oxfam Netherlands and teachers' union AOb) to prevent school abandonment. The programme initially focused on five primary schools in the poorest areas of Fez then, seeing its success, was extended to four other regions of Morocco.

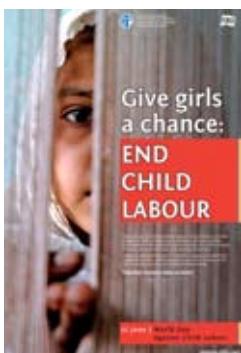
One of the key strategies of the SNE programme is to change teachers' attitudes towards children. *"Corporal punishment is still inflicted on children in many schools. Some children hate school because of the beatings, and risk giving up their education,"* explains Abdelaziz Mountassir, vice president of the SNE. The union offers teachers training, to change these habits. They include awareness raising about children's rights, for example. *"When the programme first started, the teachers didn't have a clue about children's rights, the international conventions and the Moroccan legislation on the matter. We also hold awareness-raising workshops on these themes for the parents,"* continues Abdelaziz Mountassir.

El Kasboui Boushat, the director of Al Quods, one of the schools in Fez involved in the first phase of the project, is delighted with the results: *"Eight out of the 35 teachers at my school took part in the training and then shared what they had learnt with the others. The aim is for pupils to feel a change in the school. With teachers who have been in the profession for 20 to 30 years, more time is needed to convince them to change their conduct, to stop hitting or insulting the pupils, but when they see the results, the fall in school drop-out rates, they adapt."*

The SNE programme also aims to improve communication between parents, teachers and directors. *"The teachers call the parents every month to talk to them about the children's problems at school or at home,"* explains El Kasboui Boushat. *"They try to address the underlying problems. If a child is always late or doesn't do his or her homework, it could be due to domestic violence, for example. Between 70 and 80% of my pupils' parents are illiterate. When I feel it is necessary, I call the parents into my office to remind them of the need to encourage their children to do their homework."* The trade union programme has also managed to convince school teachers and directors to do everything they can to contact the parents of children who drop out of school, even if it means going to their homes several times.



All the schools taking part in the SNE programme have seen a spectacular fall in school drop-out rates and a rise in the number of SNE members.



Paying for glasses can change a child's life

The SNE offers the poorest children material aid, such as school books and glasses. Thousands of Moroccan children lose interest at school due to eyesight problems that interfere with their ability to read, but their parents cannot afford to buy them glasses. The public authorities provide for the distribution of glasses to these children but, in practice, the numbers fall short of the needs. *"In June 2009, we distributed 33 pairs of glasses worth between 150 and 600 dirham (18 and 73 dollars),"* underlines Mohammed Eddakkar, director of the Bensouda 4 school in Fez. *"It's important, because wages are between 20 and 30 dirham a day for working from 6 am to 8 pm at the central market, for example, as a porter. And there are between eight and nine people in the average family in this neighbourhood. Many of the parents in difficulty are women on their own, women who have been widowed or whose husbands have left them."*

The SNE also sets great store by decorating the schools involved in the programme, to make them more attractive: cleaning up the playgrounds, bringing colour to the walls, etc. *"Cultural activities (dance, music, theatre, ...) are also organised so that the pupils and parents feel that the school is theirs, that it is a pleasant place to be,"* explains Mohammed Moufid, coordinator of the SNE programme at the Hay Chouhadae school in Fez. *"A library has been set up. We are also working with an NGO so that the pupils can go on school trips from time to time."* The SNE also funds support classes for children having difficulties. *"It's important because one of the reasons parents take their children out of*



school is because they do not have good marks," underlines Abdelaziz Mountassir. "Given their own ignorance, they do not see the point in spending money on education."

Spectacular fall in school drop-out rates

All the schools taking part in the programme have seen a spectacular fall in school drop-out rates at primary level. At the Al Quods school, for example, it went from 18 in 2003 to six in 2009. At the "18 novembre" school, the figure fell from 160 in 2004 to 24 in 2007. At the Bensouda 4 school, it went from 70 in 2008 to 30 in 2009, after just one year of activities under the SNE programme. The schools taking part in the project have also seen an increase in the number of enrolments, sometimes to the detriment of other schools in the neighbourhood.

The activities against child labour have also promoted greater collaboration between trade unions and the directors of the schools involved in the programme, as well as better dialogue with the education authorities at local and national level. They have allowed the SNE to recruit new members and create a better image for itself. *"Our union's image among teachers has improved,"* says Abdellah Hijazi, SNE programme coordinator at the Al Quods school. *"In Morocco, unions have always defended workers' interests, but they have now shown that they are also working for children. This motivates teachers to join us. At my school, the number of*

members has gone from 21 to 29 between 2003 and 2010, thanks to the programme." At the 18 novembre school, the SNE explains that membership has risen from 20 to 30 (out of 32 teachers in total) since the programme has been running. At the Hay Chouhadae school, 90 teachers have joined the SNE since the programme was launched in 2003.

The Moroccan government recently adopted an emergency plan to combat school abandonment. Whilst it cannot perhaps be claimed that the SNE programme directly inspired the plan, it can be said that political decision-makers visited the SNE's activities and the authorities are developing several aspects of the union's programme on a wide scale: making schools more attractive, giving teachers better training, improving school equipment and supporting the purchase of school materials, ...

For the SNE, whilst this government plan is welcome, it comes very late. *"Morocco guarantees a child's right to education until age 15, but the laws designed to enforce this right are very weak,"* says Abdelaziz Mountassir. *"The government has never sanctioned a parent for not putting their children in school, in the same way that employers hiring children are not sanctioned. The government is surprised that there are over 600,000 children working in the informal economy, in agriculture, etc., but it knows full well that 1.4 million children do not attend school; out of a population of 30 million, it's terrible!"*

(1) The SNE is affiliated to Education International (www.ei-ie.org)

A priority and a key role for trade unions

Education, social protection, trade union rights, development... for the ITUC, the fight against child labour requires a global approach.

According to the latest estimates of the International Labour Organisation, 215 million children are working throughout the world, including 115 million exposed to hazardous work. 60% of them work in agriculture, 26% in the service sector and around 7% in industry. 88 million of these children are girls, whose work is often hidden (domestic work, work in small agricultural concerns, small family workshops, ...).

Informing families and putting pressure on employers

For the ITUC, child labour is not a phenomenon that can be dealt with in isolation. It is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and insufficient social protection. Child workers, being a massive source of easily exploitable, cheap labour, contribute to forcing wages down. In addition, child labour weakens trade unions' power to negotiate better pay and working conditions. It also increases adult unemployment, especially among young workers, as children can be employed to do the same job for lower pay. With children denied an education and adults denied jobs, the future of society at large is under threat.

Trade unions are well placed to fight against child labour: during their contact with tens of thousands of adult workers, they can inform them of the negative effects of child labour and the importance of educating their children. Within workplaces, trade unions can put pressure on employers, to

guarantee the eradication of child labour.

At national level, they can campaign to urge governments to ratify and implement ILO Conventions 138 (minimum age for access to employment) and 182 (worst forms of child labour), and press employers to ensure respect for these standards at every level of their operations, including in their supply chain.

Thanks to the joint campaigns of the ITUC and its Global Union partners, as well as the agreements negotiated by the global union federations and national unions, progress has been made in removing child labour from global supply chains. Children are, however, still exploited, especially at subcontractor level.

Promoting compulsory education

For the ITUC and the global union federations, school is the only legitimate workplace for children. The ITUC is working with Education International (EI) to promote free and quality compulsory education for all, through education systems financed and regulated by the public authorities. If parents do not consider education to be of any use or if schooling is too costly, the risk of school abandonment is high; yet school abandonment is almost invariably the first step towards child labour. Primary education for all, moreover, is one of the Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015.