

## News

### Surveys to inform child labour response

BY INDI MCLYMONT Observer staff reporter  
Sunday, August 18, 2002



Keith Russell of the National Works Agency shows a display of the work done to clean up Newport West to (from left) Ruel Gibson, chairman of the Newport West Corporate Citizens Association; Pauline Grey, general manager, Shipping Association of Jamaica and Alston Stewart, chairman of Metropolitan Parks and Markets (MPM). The clean-up work was done on August 9 and was a joint effort of the Shipping Association of Jamaica, Newport West Citizens Association and MPM.

JAMAICA is doing surveys to determine the full dimensions of the problem as it begins to map a co-ordinated response to the issue of child labour, including prostitution, on the island, labour ministry officials say.

"We are now conducting a national child labour survey to ascertain the magnitude, causes and consequences of the problem," said Daniel Gordon, national programme manager of the International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC). "We have already done a rapid assessment and baseline surveys of child labour situations in the areas of prostitution,

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the fishing industry, tourism and the informal sector."

It is estimated that there are 23,000 child labour workers in Jamaica and many of them are in the sex trade and were subject to a 2000 study for the ILO/IPEC project by Jamaican researcher Dr Leith Dunn.

Dunn found a substantial level of child prostitution in Jamaica, much of it in tourist resort towns and generally linked to economic circumstances.

"The study did not find any evidence of children who were physically forced into prostitution, although there was ample evidence of several who felt forced by their economic circumstances to engage in prostitution or other forms of sexual activity to survive economically," she reported.

Dunn urged urgent reform, including the strengthening of legislation to protect children from child labour; public education about the problem; special support mechanisms for at-risk children; and Jamaica's ratification of ILO conventions 182 and 138 which list prostitution among the worst forms of child labour.

According to Gordon, some of the measures now being worked on were based on recommendations from Dunn's study and all these will go into a strategic plan for national implementation. Data from surveys were now being analysed.

"The plan of action will be formulated based on the findings of this national youth activity survey -- as we call it," Gordon said. "We are hoping that the plan will be out by the end of the year or early next year."

He also explained that a national steering committee on the elimination of child labour had been established in October last year.

"The committee has representatives from the Ministry of Health's Child Support Unit, the Ministry of Labour, the Bureau of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture and several other concerned entities including children involved in these activities," Gordon said.

Jamaica's programme falls under a wider initiative by the ILO to eliminate child labour, particularly its worst forms -- prostitution, hazardous work, and illicit activities.

Gordon last Tuesday said that Jamaica's country

programme had been launched to strengthen the capacity of partner agencies to deal with the issue.

"Part of the country programme is to examine the role of the labour officers," he said. "It will look at expanding their role to include the monitoring of child labour as part of their portfolio."

Formerly labour officers operated under the Factories Act, reviewing general conditions in factories but not the specific situation of juveniles.

The role of the labour officers will now be covered in a wider Occupational Safety and Health Act -- now being discussed in Parliament, Gordon said.

Additionally, Jamaica has a child protection law before Parliament, which Dunn had said needed to move faster through the legislature.

Passage of this Child Care and Protection Act, Gordon noted, would "facilitate the ratification of ILO conventions 182 and 138".

Upon ratification of convention 182, for example, a country is required to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour as a matter of urgency.

But according to Gordon, his agency was already working with other agencies to raise awareness on child labour in Jamaica so that more steps could be taken towards its elimination.

"We have been doing public awareness seminars. Right now we are working with the Joint Confederation of Trade Unions (JCTU) and the Jamaica Employers Federation (JEF) to have a seminar in September," he said. "We will look at the child labour issue and try to discourage persons from hiring children to do jobs that will impede their educational and emotional growth."

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