

**Child labour here seen as significant
-poverty fuelling problem, Yankana tells seminar**

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"Unless we deal with poverty, we would not be able to deal with the eradication of child labour," Executive Director of the Consultative Association of Guyanese Industry (CAGI), David Yankana, said yesterday.

Speaking at a one-day seminar on the prevention and eradication of Child Labour in Guyana held at the Ocean View International Hotel, Yankana said the worst types of child labour occurred in countries with a high incidence of poverty. Studies done in Guyana have revealed child labour to be a growing national phenomenon.

"Create employment, [encourage] new investments in the country," Yankana said.

He said the private sector could be mobilised to increase access to education and training to help fight against child labour.

The UNICEF-sponsored Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MISC) of Guyana completed in July 2001 found that 27 per cent of children between five and 14 years of age were economically active. The survey found that the remote interior regions of Guyana had almost twice the population of working children (45 per cent) compared with the urban coast (22 per cent) and the rural coast (26 per cent). The proportion of working boys (29 per cent) was found to be higher than girls (25 per cent).

Project Manager of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Leslie Bowrin said that as the Caribbean society pursues its social and economic strategies to remain competitive in this era of globalization, a major challenge it faces is the reproduction of an adequately trained and prepared labour force. And it is confronted by rising incidences of youth involvement in violent and illicit activities. "In fact, Caribbean society must pay very close attention to the depletion of this vital resource and implement urgent policies and programmes to arrest this threat to its future work force," Bowrin said.

According to him, child labour can be defined as work that deprives children of an education or other developmental activities. And an ILO report states that not all work performed under the age of 18 is necessarily child labour. Millions of young people undertake work, paid or unpaid, that is appropriate for their age and

maturity. By doing so, they gain skills, add to their family's or their own income and well-being and contribute to their countries' economy.

The child labour slated for abolition falls into three categories: hazardous work which jeopardizes the physical, mental or moral well-being of a child; unconditional or worst forms of child labour which are internationally defined as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour and labour performed by a child who is under the age specified for that kind of work, which is thus likely to impede the child's education and full development.

The ILO recently launched the International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), to contribute to the progressive elimination of child labour around the world. In collaboration with IPEC and the Canadian Government, the ILO sub-regional Office for the Caribbean initiated a regional child labour project in six countries of the region: the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

The project has published rapid assessment and baseline survey research on child labour in these countries. The project has also recently completed a review of legislation to protect children from economic abuse in these six countries.

Bowrin is working with governments, employers, workers and other stakeholders to build capacity within each country to identify and rehabilitate child labourers. The project has also been building awareness about the negative consequences of this form of child abuse and exploitation within communities and throughout the societies as a whole.

Guyana's child

labourers

According to the UNICEF MICS, in Guyana, 25 per cent to 40 per cent of the children in Charity and its environs are child labourers, in Parika it is more than 20 per cent, in Georgetown 30 per cent, Corriverton 15-20 per cent, Bartica 15-25 per cent, St Cuthbert's Mission 50 per cent and Black Bush Polder 35-75 per cent.

The majority of child labourers start working between the ages of ten and 14 years old.

Child labourers in Guyana for the most part, are not involved in the worst forms of child labour. Guyanese children work predominantly as vendors 32%, labourers 18%, salespersons/shop and store attendants 14%, porters 10% and bus conductors 4%. They also work as farm hands, waitresses, sawmill and agricultural machinery operators, boat hands, miners, loggers, garbage scavengers, mechanics and apprentices and in commercial sexual activity.

Female child labourers work mainly as vendors, salesgirls, domestic servants, babysitters and in commercial sexual activity.

Only three percent of the child labourers were involved in commercial sexual activity and this type of activity was found to exist in Corriverton, Bartica, Charity, Parika, Georgetown and Linden.

A 1996 UNICEF study: 'Child Prostitution and Child Sexual Exploitation in Guyana' estimated that just over one out of every ten persons engaged in commercial sexual activity in Guyana were children.

Most of the children who worked as miners, loggers and operators of sawmill machinery were from Bartica, the focal point for mining, logging, sawmilling and quarrying activities for the regions.

The survey revealed that the use of child labourers as drug couriers, runners and pushers was emerging.

In addition, it found that child labourers received much less than the minimum wage and some did not receive any wage at all.

Meanwhile, 61% of child labourers got paid for work done, 26% did not get paid and five per cent received "in kind" payment only.

In order to improve the situation of children, the Government of Guyana has appointed a National Commission on the Rights of the Child.

However, this commission is still in the process of creating institutional mechanisms for monitoring and coordinating children's rights.

The goal of the seminar was to identify effective strategies and activities to eliminate and prevent child labour in the Caribbean. Some of the objectives include reviewing the progress of the action programme in Parika, assessing strengths and weaknesses of the programme, its design, execution and outcomes to date, enhancing team spirit among team members, providing information on the Regional Child Labour Project, its goals and achievements to date, reviewing constraints to effective implementation of rehabilitative programmes and identifying strategies to overcome obstacles.

The target group included Varqa Foundation (programme team), members of the National Steering Committee for the Prevention of Child Labour, UNICEF, UNDP, government officials, community leaders from Parika and NGOs.

The seminar was a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security and the ILO Regional Labour Project.

Other speakers at the seminar were First Lady Varshnie Jagdeo, Andrew Hicks of the steering committee and Roderick Nurse, Secretary, Board of Industrial Training. (Afeefah Stuart)