


Child labour and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

At a meeting of the UN in 2000, all of the world's governments committed to realising 8 promises. These 8 promises – or goals – set targets for the international community on progress towards a more equal, just and sustainable world. The target date for the achievement of these goals – including the education goals – is 2015.

‘The MDGs are achievable if we act now.’
Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN (MDG Report 2007)

The 8 goals are:		
	Goal 1:	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
	Goal 2:	Achieve universal primary education
	Goal 3:	Promote gender equality and empower women
	Goal 4:	Reduce child mortality
	Goal 5:	Improve maternal health
	Goal 6:	Combat HIV & AIDS other diseases
	Goal 7:	Ensure environmental sustainability
	Goal 8:	Develop a global partnership for development

‘In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, world leaders set forth a new vision for humanity...they committed themselves “to spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from abject and dehumanising conditions and extreme poverty” We must recognise the nature of the global trust at stake and the danger that many developing countries’ hopes could be irredeemably pierced if even the greatest anti-poverty movement in history is insufficient to break from ‘business as usual’. Are we on course to look back, in 2015, and say that no effort was spared?’

Meeting the Challenges of a Changing World UN, 2006

Focus on Goal number 2 – Education for All

Target 1: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

According to the UN, there has been some progress towards the attainment of this goal but there is still a long way to go. (UN MDG Report 2007)

For example:

- Net enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 57% in 1990 to 70% in 2005 and in developing regions as a whole, from 80% to 88% during the same period.
- In Southern Asia, net enrolment currently stands at 90% while in Eastern Asia it is 95%.
- The highest net enrolment rate is seen in Latin America and the Caribbean where the figure stands at 97%.

While these figures look promising, it is important to note that they do not give us any indication of how long children stay in school after they enrol or the quality of education that they receive when they are there. In some cases, children are enrolled but never actually attend school. Although the enrolment numbers are increasing, in many cases, there has not been a corresponding increase of investment in infrastructure and many schools are struggling to provide adequate resources and facilities such as teachers, classrooms, books, teaching material and toilets. The lack of these basics often discourages children, especially girls, from attending school. It is also important to note that these figures do not incorporate data from countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. If these figures were included, the global estimates would be less optimistic.

The UN also notes that girls and children from poor rural families are least likely to attend school:

- 31% of children of school going age in rural areas are out of school (compared to 18% for urban areas)
- 37% of children in the poorest 20% of the population are out of school (compared to 12% for the richest 20%)
- Overall, this means that poor girls from rural areas are least likely, of all groups, to attend school. Even when enrolled, these are also the most likely group to drop out of school.









Looking at sub-Saharan Africa in more detail, the figures indicate that **30% of children of primary school going age are not in school at all**. In many cases, these children will come from some of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised groups in these countries – those that are in most need of the education that will give them access to opportunities to break free from the cycle of poverty.

Furthermore, according to the ILO, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest incidence of child labour so the **link between child labour and education** becomes strikingly apparent. Free, compulsory, quality education to the age of 15 is crucial in the elimination of child labour.

While the second millennium development goal relates directly to Education, Child Labour has an impact on progress towards achieving all 8 of the goals.

‘Child labour is an issue of grave importance. It must become a top priority for all governments of the world. How can the world move into the twenty-first century with children still being exploited for their labour and denied their basic right to an education?’

Craig Kielburger (Childrens’ rights campaigner)

	Goal	Child Labour...
	1. Poverty	Causes and perpetuates poverty.
	2. Education	Denies children their right to education.
	3. Gender Equality	Both girls and boys are involved in child labour but young girls are disproportionately affected.
	4. Reduce Child Mortality	Children are involved in dangerous and hazardous work.
	5. Reduce maternal Mortality	Physical effects of working when young. With education less women marry early or become pregnant at a young age.
	6. HIV & AIDS	Children are forced to drop out of school to tend to sick parents or to look after siblings. Many work to provide for their families.
	7. Environment	Dangerous work. Unsustainable industrial and agricultural practices involving children.
	8. Global Partnership	Government, business, consumers and citizens – their inaction and apathy sustain child labour around the world. Demand for cheaply produced products and unfair trade rules create demand for cheap labour which often involves children.

RWANDA Butamwa

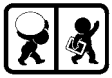
Children in a classroom at the Public Primary School of Butamwa. This school has 985 students, but only 17 teachers. The parents have to pay school fees for their children, up to \$3 per trimester, but many struggle to pay this.

Photo: Dieter Telemans/Panos Pictures





From work to school – bridging the gap



The MV Foundation

‘Making education a reality for every child’

The Mammipuddi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) is a Concern partner based in the state of Andhra Pradesh in southern India. The Foundation has developed an innovative and successful approach to dealing with the issue of child labour which is based on a firm conviction that all children must be in school. It recognises the inextricable link between universal education and the abolition of all forms of child labour. With community participation and action, the MVF Foundation seeks to remove all barriers to ensure that every child goes to school and stays in school.

Child labour in India

India has the largest number of children working in the world. It is now estimated that one third, (between 70 and 80 million), of the world's working children are in India.

This reality continues despite the Indian Constitution's prohibition on the employment of children under 14 years (Articles 24, 39 and 45) and guarantees that all children will have access to free and compulsory education.



MVF Foundation community participation initiative.
Photo: Lizzy Noone/Concern (2004)

The Foundation's principles

‘Child labour exists because we allow it to exist’

The MV Foundation provides an alternative to many current views on the link between child labour and education. While many groups argue that poverty is the main determinant of child labour, the MVF argues that it is social norms that allow it to continue and that these norms must be challenged if child labour is to be eliminated.

The organisation's approach is captured in its Charter of Basic Principles (or ‘non-negotiables’). These principles guide the Foundation's work and clearly outline its approach.

1. All children must attend full-time formal day schools.
2. Any child out of school is a child labourer.
3. All labour is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child.
4. There must be total abolition of child labour.
5. Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.
6. All arguments in support of child labour are anti-child and are contrary to the values of real human development.



The MV ‘non-negotiables’ painted on the wall of a school.
Photo: Lizzy Noone/Concern (2004)

The MVF also challenges the myth that children should not return to school until the quality of education improves. It argues that improvements in the quality of education will only come after children return to school because the community will campaign more effectively for better schooling when their own children are there.

The Foundation's approach

'No child is free until all children are free'

The MV Foundation's activities focus on the twin tasks of the abolition of child labour and the strengthening of schools. The MVF believes that every child has a right to a childhood and an opportunity to develop to his/her full potential and that every form of work done by a child interferes with this right. According to the Foundation, the essence of any program to eliminate child labour is, first of all, to create a norm within communities that no child should work and that all children should be in formal schools.

Bridging schools and camps

When child labourers are withdrawn from work, they are enrolled in 'bridge schools'. The purpose of these schools is to allow children to catch-up on the education they have missed and after this, they can enrol in the formal education system in the class that is most appropriate for their age.

The Foundation also organises monthly 3-day camps to encourage children to slowly withdraw from work. This also allows MV volunteers to demonstrate to parents and employers that if they can do without children's help for three days, they could do for longer. This time also facilitates discussions on the value of education. These short camps prepare children for longer 3 month camps which in turn, prepares them to enrol in the formal education system. These step-by-step approaches ensure that parents, employers and communities can see the value of allowing children to go to school instead of work.

Community activities

The MV Foundation enlists the support of every sector of society and it relies on the involvement and support of the local community in every village where it operates. Public awareness is raised through rallies, public meetings and poster campaigns. In their role as education activists, youth volunteers work directly with families of girls and bonded labourers and with child labourers themselves. The Foundation also acknowledges that the co-operation of parents is vital and recognises that parents, even poor parents, are motivated strongly to provide a better future for their children through education. The Foundation has established a number of Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPF) where supporters can come together and advocate for change in their own communities. By June 2006, there were 25,000 CRPF members throughout Andhra Pradesh.

MV Foundation in numbers

Founded in 1991, after successfully removing 50 children from bonded labour and enabling them to attend school, the MV Foundation has continued to expand:

- The MV Foundation is currently working in 2,500 villages.
- Due to the Foundation's activities, over 400,000 former child labourers are now in school.
- The programme is being implemented in more than 6,000 villages, covering 137 villages in 11 districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- 1,000 villages in the Ranga Reddy district have become 'child labour free villages'.
- 45,000 child labourers have gone to Bridge Course Camps.
- 3,000 education activists have been mobilised to liberate children.
- The Foundation relies on strong community involvement and the support of 8,000 youth volunteers, 500 women's group and 1,500 teachers.
- 3,000 school education and local government committees supporting the Foundation's work.

Resulting in:

- The withdrawal of children from the labour market.
- The bargaining power of rural labourers has been increased.
- There has been an increase in wages for women,
- Conditions and wages for contract labourers have improved.
- There has been an increase in demand for adult labour and.
- There has been a positive change in employer's attitudes to child labour.

The experience of the MV Foundation clearly demonstrates that given the opportunity and support they need, poor and vulnerable parents are willing to withdraw their children from work and enrol them in school. Even though parents were not given any incentives or subsidies, they still want their children to realise their right to education.

For more information on the MV Foundation, its approach and work, please visit www.mvfindia.in

Shashikala's story

Shashikala was 1 when her father died. Her older sister was forced by her extended family to skip school and earn money so that she, instead of them, would look after the family. While others her age were starting school, Shashikala began to work in a biscuit factory in the Kattedan Industrial Area outside Hyderabad. She earned 15-20 rupees per day depending on how fast she worked. Now, she cannot bear the smell of biscuits.

Thanks to the intervention of the MV Foundation, Shashikala left the factory and is now preparing for her Standard VII exams at a residential school for girls. Other former child labourers attend the school too – Lalitha, who had preciously looked after buffaloes and Mamta, an orphaned 12-year old factory worker. They are all eager to learn and all of them are definite about never wanting to work in a factory again.

The MV Foundation logo painted on the wall of a school. Children attending a MF Foundation programme.
Photos: Lizzy Noone/Concern (2004)



Keshavallu's story

Seven-year-old Keshavallu – one of many children in the residential camps run by the MV Foundation – had been herding cattle as a bonded labourer from the age of five. His working day used to last from sunrise to sunset and his duties included sweeping the yard, cleaning the cattle-shed and taking the cattle out to graze.

His parents – who migrated to the city – had bonded him to a landlord in exchange for a loan. His employer provided him with one warm meal at night – in the morning he had to make do with rice left over from the night before. Even after six months in the residential camp Keshavallu's small body shows the ravages of malnutrition and hard labour. But he is happy in the camp, where he is being prepared to enrol in school as a full-time student. He says he will never go back to work. He recently encouraged his eleven-year-old brother – bonded to another landowner – to join him in the camp. The simple enticement of 'three meals a day and time to play' was enough to make his brother run away from his employer.

Every child in the MV Foundation camps has a similar story to tell. Saritha, a twelve-year-old, was bonded to a biscuit factory owner to pay off her father's debt. She often had to work all night in the factory, to complete rush orders. Twelve-year-old Malesh spent six years of his life making plastic slippers in a small factory – he now owns his first pair. Eight-year-old Sakuna had been plucking flowers from dawn to dusk for the last two years.

This is the story of countless children across India who start work at an early age, work long hours for little pay, and often in hazardous and exploitative conditions. The only difference is that Keshavallu, Saritha, Malesh, Sakuna, and many others like them in the Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh, have been lucky enough to get a chance to reclaim their childhood and their right to education. Through the efforts of the MV Foundation, these children have opted out of work and have chosen instead to join the formal school system. They have done this voluntarily and without the promise of cash or other incentives to their families.

(Source: Getting Children out of Work and into School - MV Foundation, UNDP India, 2003)

Concern and Child Labour

It has been said that Ireland's Celtic Tiger began not with the joining of the EEC (now EU) in the 1970's or with direct foreign investment into the country in the 1980's but with the passing of the compulsory secondary school act in the 1960's.

Just as education here has helped provide a qualified and highly skilled workforce here, so too, Concern believes, should children in the developing world be afforded their right to education in order that they too may bear the fruits of personal and economic development.

'Education is not just a way of escaping poverty it is a way of fighting it.' Julius Nyerere

Education is a right, not a privilege, and should be available to everyone, regardless of gender, class, ethnicity or location.

Education has a powerful impact in addressing social and economic barriers in society and is central in building human capacity and empowering people.

Education is positively linked to other economic and welfare benefits. It is a necessary precondition to tackling poverty and is essential for sustainable development.

Concern believes that the problem of child labour must be addressed through the provision of full time formal education for all children. To do this we have to focus on two key tasks:

1) Get children who are now **'out of school'** enrolled in fulltime, formal education

2) Ensure that those who are in school, stay in school (by receiving a quality education)

Our education programmes, currently running in 15 countries throughout Africa, Asia and the Caribbean specifically target children of primary school going age (6-14 years) from marginalised and vulnerable communities who are excluded from the formal education system. They are children who come from the poorest families and include the landless, child labourers, children of minority groups, children of pastoralist (nomad) or migrant families, orphans, and children who are either infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. In particular Concern's education programmes reach out to girls, as nearly 60% of them are excluded from education and many more drop out (or are pulled out) before attaining four years of primary education. Girls with disabilities are up to ten times more likely to be excluded from school than for the population as a whole and it is estimated that fewer than 5 percent of children with physical, cognitive, or sensory impairment in developing countries are reaching the goal of primary school completion.

Out-of-school children

In many rural areas, primary school enrolment rates are half those of urban areas. Attendance figures further suggest that as many as 72 million children worldwide do not attend school regularly; two thirds of these are girls. It is also estimated that there are over 218 million child labourers in our world. At first glance these two figures seem to be at complete odds with each other, however some international agencies attempt to make sense of them by explaining that many child labourers receive 'one or two' hours of education each day either at work or in the evening after their day of toil is complete. For Concern, this type of education is completely unacceptable.

The four A's: To ensure that the right of every child to full time formal education is being met four key elements must be in place, these are;

Availability: is there school buildings, teachers, books, space?

Accessibility: how far will a student have to travel to get to school, what language will the student be taught in, are there school fees?

Acceptability: does the education that students receive meet quality standards?

Adaptability: is the school year flexible enough to accommodate student and family needs?

Keeping children out of work and in school...

Catch Up Classes in Burundi

Burundi is one of the poorest (it is ranked 167 out of 177 in the Human Development Index of 2007) and most densely populated countries in the world. During the last 30 years Burundi has suffered from instability and conflict.

The current state of the education system has been described by the Minister of Education as "catastrophic". Before the beginning of the civil war 70% of children in Burundi were enrolled in primary schools. During the conflict that figure fell to 30%. Nowadays the figure has risen to just over 60%. Problems faced by the education system prior to the conflict have worsened. There is a lack of funds and an unequal geographical spread of services.

The quantity of teachers has decreased as well as the quality of teaching. Thousands of pupils have been displaced, and 25% of school buildings have been destroyed. The right to education is not fully respected and gender inequality in relation to access to education needs to be addressed.

Meeting the basic right to education not only requires repairs to educational infrastructure but also a major expansion of capacity and a change in people's behaviours.

To address these issues Concern established 'catch up' classes aimed at encouraging 'out of school children' to enrol in an accelerated learning programme which would enable them to return to the formal school system at the grade most appropriate to their age.

By 2007, 1,197 pupils completed the catch up classes and another 867 children were supported to return to school through outreach work without attending the catch-up classes.

Working to get children into school in Bangladesh

Most households with out-of-school children are extremely poor. In a sample of 30 households, over half had incomes of less than 2,000 taka (23 Euros) per month during the months they found work at all. Where there were 3 or more income-earners, household wages sometimes exceeded this.

None of the parents from these households had received any formal education at all.

Most, but not all, of these children were enrolled in school after the age of six and attended school for one or two years before leaving. The decision to leave school was sometimes the child's decision due to humiliation, beating, or inability to understand the schoolwork.

In other cases, it was the parents' decision. They see their children as valuable potential income-earners and were not convinced that going to school would help their children to secure a better job. In other cases, parents could simply not afford school fees.

The well-being of the poorest households varies according to the season due to the availability of work and the presence of other factors such as flooding or illness in the family. When a family member is in need of medicine, it is necessary for these households to sell their duck or chicken (if they have one) in exchange for medicine, or to borrow money (normally at exorbitant interest rates), if they can. In times of extreme stress, they depend upon their own family – brothers or parents. They have nowhere else to turn.

Once a child is enrolled in school, Concern works with teachers to help them provide as high a quality an education as possible. This not only benefits the teacher but also helps to lessen the chance that the child will drop out of school before mastering essential learning and basic skills.

The School Management committees are supported to identify youth and mothers in the community to assist in working with the poorest and underperforming students.

These volunteers are trained and guided in effective teaching techniques to assist the classroom teaching as well as support sessions with the poorest children and mothers before and after school. The volunteers become trainers themselves after 3 years.

Keeping a child in school... reasons given for dropping out of school:	
Infrastructure and equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough schools: Schools too far away • Not enough classrooms in established schools • Inferior quality and shortage of school materials and resources • Lack of basic furniture such as desk, chairs, blackboards • Poor water and sanitation facilities (or none at all)
Teachers not motivated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn up late • Classes too large so they can't help children/ only help brightest • Low salaries so they need a second job to support themselves
Poverty: School costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fees too high • Uniforms • Books, pens, etc. • Protracted illness/malaria • Illness of parents • Many children are orphans/ unaccompanied who have no support, no encouragement, no income
Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malnutrition • No food at lunch time • Lack of food means children can't concentrate, so drop-out
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delinquency of students • Parents do not value education or see school as important/ relevant • Children refuse to go and parents can't force them • Lack of role-models, especially for girls
War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaced populations • Security • Buildings destroyed • Teachers won't work in some areas

'There are so many myths about the causes of child labour....people say that it is caused by poverty. We believe it is the other way around. It is child labour that causes poverty in that it depresses wages, it arrests development and creates poor quality of life for communities and society as a whole.'

Shanta Sinha, former secretary of MV Foundation

Child labour on the lake shore of Malawi

Malawi is ranked as one of the 10 poorest countries in the world where the majority of people rely on small scale farming or fishing to provide food and income for their families. Many children work in the fields or in the fishing industry.

Concern has been working with a Community Based Organisation called Khwapu, based along Malawi's central lake shore, to eliminate one of the most serious problems facing the community there – child labour in the fishing industry. With assistance from Concern and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Khwapu conducted training with community and spiritual leaders, teachers and parents on the rights of the child as set out in the Malawian constitution. Open air debates and discussions were held on the meaning of child labour, child protection and the importance of education. Drama groups held plays, workshops and developed songs and poems which brought to life many of these issues which had not been recognised previously by the community.

The community as a whole responded so well to this project that there are now 310 more children attending the local school. While many children still take part in fishing activities, they do so only out of school hours and parents are now ensuring that school is the biggest priority for their children. This project has not only been successful in terms of getting children into formal education, it has also encouraged the community to lobby their local government departments to provide the necessary resources needed to house these extra students. More teachers are needed as are extra classrooms, and this is the next challenge that Khwapu is undertaking, guaranteeing that the lessons learnt regarding human rights and child labour are put to good use.



The additional children back in school now being taught under a tree as there are not enough classrooms, Khwapu school. 2008.
Photo: Rodwell Kanyimbo



Children and fishermen hauling in fishing nets, Nkhotakota district Malawi. 2008. Photo: Louise Finan

Thika Declaration on Child Labour, January 2007

At the East African Conference on Child Labour in January 2007, organised by the **Stop Child Labour Campaign**, NGOs from Kenya, Uganda and Somalia adopted the “East Africa Regional Declaration on Abolition of all forms of Child Labour and upholding Children’s right to Education”.

This declaration acknowledged the fundamental rights of children and called for the abolition of all forms of child labour. It also acknowledged children’s right to education.

Importantly, the declaration also noted that “child labour perpetuates poverty, depresses adult wages and undermines labour standards and productivity; liberation of children from labour paves way for socio-economic development that includes the poor and marginalised”

The declaration also acknowledges the role that everyone must play in the elimination of child labour
“Every individual and every organ of society....will strive to promote respect for child rights and freedom from child labour”