Working Children as Change-Makers: Perspectives from the South [1]

I. Introduction

Child labor is rooted in poverty.[2] A complex problem that must be viewed against the complex macroeconomic and social backdrop of development, it is the clearest and worst manifestation of how Apoverty has a child's face.[3] It is often also an elusive cross-border issue that requires cross-border agreements, legislation, and interstate cooperation to combat it effectively, especially in its most sensitive worst forms which are commonly hidden and clandestine because they are linked to criminal cross-border trafficking, illegal drug trade, and armed conflict. Child labor is a dehumanizing phenomenon that harms children's bodies and minds, their spirits and future . . ., a prison that withers both capabilities and potential.[4] In sum, child labor needs to be understood and acted upon in all its complexities. No simple or unilateral approaches that are confined primarily to the area of employment or the labor market will lead to its elimination. It is this challenge that confronts us, especially in the application of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) relative to child labor[5] and even more especially in the application of 1999 ILO Convention (No. 182) Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (ILO C182).[6]

The central thesis of this chapter is that mainstream approaches to child labor, especially in the Global South, are grossly inadequate because they are premised on dominant Western conceptions of childhood and child development that tend generally to criminalize hazardous and exploitative work performed by children and therefore, in most cases, to neglect solutions to the problem on a lasting and sustainable basis. Partly in response, but as a consequence also of an increasing trend towards a rights-orientation in development, there has begun to emerge (as this volume itself bears witness) a human rights approach to working children and child labor. It puts the child at the center of policy planning and execution and, in keeping with promoting Athe best interests of the child, it favors the active involvement of children in the defense of their basic rights. What has come to be known as a child-centered approach to child labor has emerged from this rights-

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[1] Chapter 12 from *Child Labor and Human Rights: Making Children Matter*, edited by Burns H. Weston. Copyright © 2005 by Burns H. Weston, pp.293-317. Used with permission of Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

[2] Consistent with Chapter 2 in this volume by Ennew, Myers, and Plateau (Defining Child Labor . .), the term child labor is herein used to mean work by children (generally youth under age 15 or 18 depending on the nature of their work) that is deemed harmful to them because it is considered abusive, exploitative, or otherwise contrary to their best interests. It is a subset of child work, a descriptively neutral classification that covers also economic activity on the part of children that generally is considered compatible with their best interests (expressed as beneficial child work, benign child work, harmless child work, etc.).

[3] UNICEF, *Beyond Child Labor . . .*, p. 10.

[4] Ibid., p. 1.

[5] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

[6] ILO Convention No. 182 (1999).

orientation. Specifically inspired by the spirit and key provisions of the CRC, this rights-oriented/child-centered approach has come increasingly to influence the vision and actions of a range of social actors, primarily in civil society, in the developing world. It has also influenced, and been influenced by, working children who have become organized and by working children's movements that have developed over two decades in many parts of the world. These organizations and movements have made it possible for working children to become effective advocates for this new approach. These perspectives and actions most often at the grassroots level in the countries of the Global South pose not only new challenges for mainstream orientations and programs against child labor, they are beginning in practice to show relevant and effective alternatives to address the problem as well.

My central thesis is that mainstream approaches to child labor are not adequate to its challenge because they fall short of valuing the full range of children's rights which, if taken seriously, would do so. It is based on many years of experience with child labor in the Global South and on the perceptions and actions of NGOs and other civil society organizations in this field, including organizations and movements of working children in developing countries, especially in Asia. Also it is based on the perceptions and actions of working children relative to their everyday experiences of work and labor, and on their hopes and dreams for the future as well. These perceptions and actions have significantly influenced the human rights/child-centered approach as it has evolved in the Global South, Asia in particular.[7] The salient features of this alternative approach are discussed below. I argue that, at present, it is perhaps the most effective way to ensure that children's rights are respected in children's everyday lives. The fact that the majority of working children are to be found in poor countries and in the poor districts and regions of these countries makes it imperative that we base our perceptions, analyses, and actions on the reality and experience of working children in these countries of the Global South.

This chapter is divided into four main parts. First I argue the case for using a rights-based approach to child labor and point out the implications for policy and action. Second I review the new thinking that, based on the concrete everyday experiences of working children and their supportive NGOs and other civil society organizations, has shaped our understanding of child work and child labor. Next I describe what has come to be known as the child-centered approach to working children, an approach that guides and inspires the processes of progressive intervention and change vis-à-vis child labor in the developing world. Finally, I consider the implications of these alternative approaches to current thought and action in the world of child labor and the lives of working children. Here I discuss some key factors that are helping to win the current struggle against child labor in the developing South, including a Anew sociology of childhood that addresses the structural context, focuses on inter-generational poverty, takes a cultural approach that recognizes organized working children as social actors in their own right.

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[7] International Save the Children Alliance organized two regional workshops on child-centered approaches to working children in Asia. See *Child-Centered Policies and Programmes* (1999); *Child-Centered Policies and Programmes* (2000).

II. Towards a Rights Approach to Working Children and Child Labor

A. Conventional Approaches to Child Labor

Conventional approaches to child labor are premised on a labor market ideology that aims primarily to keep children away from the labor market by keeping them in school. From this perspective, children's work is viewed largely as labor exploitation which must be abolished.

This approach has dominated child labor discourse for a long time and continues to inspire mainstream policies and programming for working children. The adoption of ILO C182, which mandates the identification and elimination of unacceptable and intolerable forms of work, is a step forward in the struggle to combat the detrimental affects of hazardous and exploitative work on children. By and large, policies and programs previously in place have failed to make a significant impact in eliminating these forms of children=s work.[8] The reasons are many, but salient among them are the following:

- most of these worst forms are hidden, clandestine, and illegal, largely inaccessible to policy makers (including governments) and field workers in international agencies;
- policies and program interventions against the worst forms of child labor have not taken into account the general role of work in the lives of children, nor the cultural, social and economic conditions and factors that compel children to earn a livelihood through labor;
- a general failure to address the root causes and structural conditions that perpetrate hazardous and exploitative child labor, particularly in the context of rapid globalization and international trade; and
- a too narrow focus on removal and rescue operations of children in bondage and servitude in the worst forms of child labor, with too little attention and resouces invested in providing sustainable alternative livelihoods for rescued children and their families, income-generation, improving the quality, relevance, and accessibility of education and the schooling system.

The prevalence of the worst forms of child labor in developing countries appears inevitable in situations where there is abject poverty and parents lack the income and abilities needed to meet basic needs;[9] where the labor market requires cheap, docile, and bonded labor for certain services; where unscrupulous employers and middle-men exploit children for illegal activities; where the system of education is inaccessible, expensive, and irrelevant; and where the local traditions and practices encourageCin some cases even

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8 See Hanson and Vandaele, AWorking Children . . .@, pp. 73-146.

9 The results of a nine-country survey in Latin America showed that if teenage children did not work, poverty rates would increase by 10% to 20 %. UNICEF, *Beyond Child Labor* . . ., p. 3.

endorseCthe worst forms of child labor.[10] The problem of child labor is thus based on a multi-contextual set of complex variables that are structural to the societies in which it exits. The approach adopted to combat child labor must, therefore, take these variables into account.

Any approach to ending the worst forms of child labor must take into account also the attitudes of adults and society as a whole towards child labor. The very fact that children are involved in the worst forms of work is a reflection of mainstream adult and societal attitudes towards children, attitudes that are rooted in traditional social and cultural as well as modern practices that commodify children vis-à-vis the labor market. Adult attitudes as to why children are desirable to perform worst forms tasks and services is well summed-up by an Indian district government official: For the employers, it's very easy to work . . . with children; you don't have any problem at all; you can just make them work all day, and they will not protest . . .; you can really terrorize them [and] you will be paying much, much less than you will normally pay for an adult.[11]

As a starting point, then, the cultural reasons for children's work not just the work itself must be considered. As Myers and Boyden observe*: it [is] necessary to replace a narrow view of child work as a labor exploitation issue with a broader appreciation of it as a critical influence on the growth and development of perhaps the most of the world=s children*.[12] The adoption of the CRC, with its emphasis on the best interests of the child, reinforces this view.

B. The Rights-based Approach to Child Labor

Conventionally, child labor programs have adopted a stereotyped "triple-R" strategy: removal, rescue, rehabilitation. This strategy is based on *needs* rather than *rights*, a welfare approach which results in piece-meal solutions that do not address the root causes of the problem nor contribute to sustainable alternatives.

In contrast, a rights-based approach to child labor recognizes that children often forfeit their right to education and healthy development irrespective of the kind of work they do. It aims, therefore, to:

- redefine the concept of work and labor in the lives of children, taking into account the specific social, cultural, economic context of the society where it exists;

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10 Karunan, *Save the Children=s Approach* . . . .

11 Interview with Supriya Sahu, p.14.

12 Myers and Boyden, *Child Labor* . . ., p. 5.

- understand and analyze children's lives not just in terms of needs, or areas for development, but in terms of the obligation to respond to the rights of individuals . . ., [to empower] people to demand justice as a right and not as charity;[13]
- listen to and incorporate children's views and opinions their perceptions and experiences of work, of hazardous and exploitative labor, of work and school, etc.;
- address the centrality of exploitation in the lives of working children;
- involve children actively in the interpretation of circumstances of their work, in the design of policies and strategies aimed at identifying and eliminating intolerable forms of child work, and shaping interventions when seeking solutions to these problems;
- identify the structural conditions and factors that contribute to exploitative work performed by children;
- go beyond economic rights and address the full range of human rights of working children;[14]
- develop coordinated multi-sectoral interventions in a variety of fields related to the effects of hazardous and exploitative work on children, viz., education, health, nutrition, rest and relaxation, play, social security, and responsibilities of parents;[15] and
- finally, in all matters affecting working children, safeguarding their best interests and their rights (as rights-bearers), on the one hand, and holding families, business enterprises, institutions and governments accountable and responsible as duty-bearers to promote and protect children's rights, on the other.

Understood in this way, child labor is not simply a labor market concern; it is a human (child) rights issue.[16]

This fact has not been lost on children who work. Time and again, children have articulated their concerns and pleaded for a rights-based approach to combating child labor. As Joan Ranoy, a 17-year old girl from the Philippines who worked for five years as a child domestic servant, put it in 1999 at the 87th Session of the International Labor Conference (which adopted ILO C182): *We, as working children boys and girls are below 18 years of age, and in keeping with the spirit of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 32), we have the right to be protected from exploitation and hazardous work and abuse*.[17] In other words, the key to distinguishing between benign children's work and work that is

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13 Robinson (U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights), AForeword,@ p. iv. For extensive discussion along these lines, see Weston and Teerink, AAbolishing Child Labor . . .@, ch. 1 in this volume.

14 See Weston and Teerink, Abolishing Child Labor . . ., ch. 1 in this volume, at pp. ?-? The rights-based approach embraces the three generation rights, viz., civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and solidarity or community rights (e.g., the right to peace, to development, and to a clean and healthy environment).

15 See UNICEF, *Beyond Child Labor* . . ., p. 4.

16 UNICEF, *First Consolidated Donor Report*, p. 4.

17 Presentation by Joan Ranoy to the 87th Session of the International Labor Conference, Geneva, June 1-17, 1999 (on file with the author), p. 1

harmful to their overall development is the nature and extent of exploitation involved.[18] Article 32 of the CRC guarantees the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

It is this centrality of exploitation through work done by children that often is ignored in child labor discourse as well as in programming child labor interventions and actions. A rights-based approach helps us to address this centrality and to identify the conditions and factors that contribute to these forms of work prevalent in society. It also takes us beyond economic rights and helps us to address the range of rights.

Moreover, the programmatic implications of such a rights-based approach implies coordinated and multi-sectoral interventions in a variety of fields related to the effects of hazardous and exploitative work on children, viz., education, health, nutrition, rest and relaxation, play, social security, and responsibilities of parents.[19] Child rights generate both entitlements and obligations and thus imply indeed requireCthe building of strategic partnerships among children and between adults and children to confront this problem jointly and in combination. It means empowering children to participate actively in the improvement of their lives and in developing solutions to their problems and needs while at the same time empowering adults to fulfill their responsibility and duty to protect the rights of children.[20]

Thus, as entitlements provided to both children and adults and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[21] and other key instruments such as the CRC and ILO C182, rights are not just an abstract recognition of societal values. They have real and practical implications that hold governments and others accountable and thereby shape behavior and practice in society. They help to create the conditions in which children can effectively enjoy their rights; benefit from the actions of othersCgovernments, family, community to make these rights a reality in children's lives recognize the increasing capacity of children to exercise their rights and to make valid claims on them; and impose a general duty and responsibility on everyone, including the state, to respect those rights and to refrain from any action that will prevent their enjoyment or violate them in any way.[22]

The family is the first line of protection for the child. It is the primary environment wherein children are introduced to the culture and therefore the values and norms of society. It is also the first opportunity for the child to experience tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity.[23] A rights-based approach to child labor recognizes this important place and role of the family in the lives of children. It calls upon the community and state to render

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18 See note 1.

19 UNICEF, *Beyond Child Labor . . .*, p. 4.

20 Santos Pais, *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework . . .*, p. 5.

21 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

22 Santos Pais, *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework . . .*, p. 6. See also Weston and Teerink, Abolishing Child Labor . . ., ch. 1 in this volume, at pp. ?-?

23 Santos Pais, *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework . . .*, p. 13.

appropriate support and assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing duties so as to facilitate the capacity of the family to protect the rights of children and their enhancement. It also means holding parents and guardians accountable for actions that put their children in harms way by their induction, coercion, or sale for employment or services in the worst forms.

The rights-based approach, it can safely be said, is gaining recognition and beginning to challenge mainstream approaches and actions relative to child labor. The ILO acknowledges this fact in a recent report: *After the CRC was adopted, international NGOs began to reconsider their work with children to bring about a change from an essentially welfare-based, adult-focused, charitable approach to a more child-centered, rights-based approach*.[24] While this approach and its application are spearheaded primarily by NGOs and other civil society organizations largely as a consequence of their reconsideration of the rights of children following the adoption of the CRC, it is beginning to influence key donors and international agencies. The time is past due that the same rethinking be undertaken by U.N. agencies and other key players in the field of child labor.

III. The "World of Work" of Children: Towards A Redefinition

Using a rights-based approach to the world of children's work and the conditions that cause them to undertake dehumanizing work enables us to view work and labor from a radically different perspective; and the first point to be made is that participation by children in the labor market is commonly against the free will and choice of the children involved. Typically this is the case with prostitution, pornography, trafficking, bonded labor, and soldiering, for example. Because these services and tasks tend all too commonly to be accepted in the adult world even if not they are not always acceptable there, they enjoy a kind of unofficial legitimacy that tolerates the exploitation of children in ways that are usually beyond their control.[25] Noi, a 16 year-old sex worker from Laos put it this way: *I really hate this work. But I have to do it because I need the money. Sometimes I really don't like the client, but I have to sleep with him even if I don't like him. I don't think about myself. I don't really have an idea about the future. I just want to earn money to help my mother and my family*.[26]

The work undertaken by children today is defined mainly in terms of economic activity that can be measured and counted in a labor market framework. When children undertake the same work that adults do in society, however, this work is often viewed differently.[27] Why is this so?

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24 International Labour Organization, *A Future Without Child Labour* . . ., p. 25.

25 Research conducted among 300 working children in Bangladesh, El Slavador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and The Philippines by Save the Children-Sweden in 1996-97 revealed that Awhile a few children felt they had been forced to work . . ., but many felt they had made the choice to work, within the constraints of their circumstances. Woodhead, Children's Perceptions of their Working Lives, Summary of the Radda Barnen Study, pp. 9-14.

26 Quoted in *End Child Exploitation*, p. 22.

27 Writes one keen observer: [Some] authorities in the field of the childhood discourse . . . deprecate the attempts at analytical distinctions between what child labour is and what child labour is not . . .. It is assumed that children do

For a long time, mainstream thinking and analysis relative to child labor has been dominated by social patterns that separate children from economic activity. In the Global North, as noted by Judith Ennew, children have been banned by law from the labor force, and their economic contribution to society is not accounted for in national budgets despite the fact that many of them are workers[28]. The implication is that they are working for pocket money or seeking to learn good work habits. Ennew notes that this perception is wholly inappropriate for many Southern contexts in which children have economic and other responsibilities to fulfill within families and communities; are not the sentimental core of nucleus families but rather part of an inter-generational system of interchange and mutual responsibilities; and (in recent history at least) have often been important political protagonists.[29]

From a Southern child's perspective, work is learning, where the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior relative to living and interacting in society are nurtured and developed, closely tied with the family and community. If work is learning, then it becomes an integral part of the educational and developmental process of the child and of the family's obligation towards child rearing and upbringing. A distinction is often made between *work that facilitates* and *work that is detrimental* to child development. Children and families in the Global South see a clear difference between a child working in the fields side by side with her or his father or mother to learn the skills of the trade, and a child required to do repetitive work in a factory setting or forced into hazardous work or abuse in the industrial or commercial sector. These two conceptions of work come from two different traditions that influence the way society views work (good) and labor (bad). The difference is revealed in the value society places on the tasks or services performed by children in the case of child labor, children become commodities that are bought and sold, traded, trafficked, and bonded into servitude for economic purposes. In other words, linking the concepts of child work and child labor to the market is significant because it often determines how we define them. A key complicating problem is whether the work or labor is in or out of the market sector, and whether it is formal or informal.[30]

Children's own perceptions of their work provides some useful insights into the relationship between them as children and the world of work and labor. They are therefore an important source of information and evidence on how work affects their lives and on whether and how it can cause harm to their development. The 1996-97 Save the Children Sweden study on child labor in South Asia and Central America and concerning children's perceptions of work revealed that while many children may not be aware of certain detrimental effects of work on their lives they may be acutely aware of other effects. The main findings of this study lend comprehensive insight into the world of work as lived and

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work, and it does not make much sense to delineate child labor as a specific activity. Such a reduction carries the danger of smoothing out child labor as a problem. Lieten, ACHild Labor: Questions . . .@, p. 52.

28 See Ennew, *Capacity Building and Maintenance* . . . .

29 Ibid., p. 7.

30 Karunan, *Children and Work in Southeast and East Asia* ,p.21.

experienced by working children themselves, as demonstrated by the following summary of children's views and opinions of their working lives:[31]

- A few children felt they had been forced to work, but many felt they had made the choice to work within the constraints of their circumstances.
- Children believe they must work to help their families. Work is part of the family life style, they are valued for it, and they are initiated at a very early age.
- Work is an important part of many children's self-respect we are helping our parents work even though we are young. We are not just another mouth to feed. We are helping the family survive.[32]
- Child workers are aware of many of the physical hazards of work.
- Working children are very sensitive about being stigmatized for their work.
- Children value many aspects of school and would like to combine work with school.
- Faced with new regulations preventing them from working, most groups would defy or evade the law.

In contrast, Northern perceptions and attitudes towards work often involve a separation between learning that is confined to formal classrooms and work or labor that involves skills and earnings (wages) in the workplace. This distinction is not only misleading but detrimental to the best interests of children. Based on this logic, an artificial distinction is often made between learning and education and work and employment.[33] As Antony and Gayathri note in the Indian context,

> *what is intriguing in an analysis of children's work is that those who are enrolled or attending the school are not considered for their involvement in activities, which are otherwise counted as work for out-of-school children. This omission, basically due to the dominant dichotomous framework of work/education in children's lies, has allowed for various misconstructions. First of all, it corroborates the class based construct of a childhood, in which education is a prerogative of some and work is a destined vocation for some others.*[34]

The realities in the developing world show clearly that these constructions or distinctions are false and misleading; in the given social, economic, and cultural context of developing societies, they in fact blend into one and interface with each other in the daily lives of children, their families, and their communities.

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31 Woodhead, Children's Perceptions . . ., pp. 9-14.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 21.

34 Antony and Gayathri, AChild Labor : A Perspective . . ., pp. 1-12.

IV. The Child-Centered Approach to Child Labor

This approach, which I call the rights-based/child-centered approach, developed as a response to mainstream thinking and interventions on child labor that were driven by a labor market framework and top-down programming which often criminalizes children's work and seeks quick-fix solutions to complex problems.[35] Myers and Boyden discuss three key factors that have contributed to the development of a child-centered approach to child work issues: the growing influence of the CRC on both national and international ideas about protecting children; the expanding quantity and quality of empirical information about child work and working children; and working children themselves [becoming] a quickly growing influence on thinking about child work.[36]

Using the CRC as its starting-point and keeping the best interests of the child paramount, this approach seeks to restore the centrality of the child her or his role, situation, problems, needs, capabilities, skills in the discourse on child labor. The holistic approach of the Convention addresses human rights while placing the child at the center of its considerations. This child-focused perspective guides its call for action and progress towards the realization of all the rights of the child, and stresses that the best interests of the child should always be a guiding reference.[37]

Three key elements characterize the child-centered approach to working children : a radical paradigm-shift in our view of children and childhood; resilience of working children; and working children's participation. Each of these elements is briefly discussed below.

A. Paradigm Shift in Our View of Children and Childhood

A child-centered approach that is rights-based believes that children's knowledge and perspectives are shaped by the socioeconomic, historical, and cultural conditions of the family and community, which implies their active involvement and participation in all matters that affect their lives and well-being. It challenges us to accept a mind-shift in the way we look at, and relate to, children in daily life.[38] This has implications for how we perceive childhood and child development.

Mainstream perceptions of childhood are based on a Western stereotype where play, learning and schooling are staple topics, while work is rarely mentioned . . . [and] masquerade as scientific knowledge about children's nature, their normal development, and

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35 See Myers, Valuing Diverse Approaches to Children. . ., pp. 27-48.

36 Myers and Boyden, *Child Labor . . .*, p. 6.

37 Santos Pais, *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework . . .*, p. 8.

38 UNICEF's approach based on a human rights perspective signifies a radical shift in the way the agency views and works with children: This approach reflects a general shift from a time when the most disadvantaged children were widely considered as objects of charity rather than holders of rights with valid claims on society. They are often perceived as problems to society rather than as individuals affected by society's failures to meet its obligations to all its children. UNICEF, *Programme Cooperation for Children and Women . . .* , p.7.

their universal needs.[39] In non-Western societies, on the other hand, the transition from childhood to adulthood is more fluid and less traumatic, where the child's world and the adult's world [are] not separate and [are] characterized by greater inter-generational reciprocity. Play and work [are] also not such sharply delineated activities and mingled together in a manner that often it [is] difficult to distinguish the two. More importantly, the child is not viewed as separate from the larger unit, be it family, tribe, clan, etc.[40] Thus it is important that we recognize that there are different cultural traditions and concepts of childhood and that there is no one universal model that is applicable in all situations or that can be universally imposed. At the same time, we must be aware of those elements in our cultures and traditions that do not serve the best interests of the child or other children's rights. We need to be careful not to endorse discrimination and exploitation while harnessing the potentials in these cultures and traditions for promoting the rights of children.[41]

In addition, the concept of childhood and, by implication, how children are viewed in society and their relationship to work and labor is constantly changing to keep pace with the rapid development of societies. Our own culturally-determined concepts and perceptions of children, their childhood, and their roles and capabilities need therefore to change accordingly. We need constantly to question our own assumptions and attitudes about children.[42] As adults, we must bring into being a mind-shift from traditional notions and values that we cherish about children as vulnerable and non-productive to a child-centered approach that is rights-based, viewing children positively and as contributors to social development. We need to challenge traditional notions of childhood and child development that have become everyday cultural norms and practices in society. This is no easy task as it entails a psychosocial shift that will alter fundamentally adult status, power, and control over children,[43] a shift that urgently calls for a new sociology of childhood (discussed below) that is based on a human (child) rights framework which is sensitive to the local social and cultural conditions prevailing in societies today.

Finally, a human rights/child-centered approach seeks to view working children as change-makers. It locates children at the center of our perceptions, approaches, and actions. Its starting-point is to view children not just as innocent, vulnerable, and susceptible beings, but as active social actors who can make a positive contribution, as children, to social development and change. Children contribute based on their own abilities and capacities (evolving capacities) which are constantly developing.[44]

B. Resilience of Working Children

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39 Woodhead, Child Work and Child Development . . ., p. 126.

40 Raman, Politics of Childhood . . ., p. 18.

41 See Karunan, *Participatory Action Research . . .,* p.2.

42 See Theis, Children and Participatory Appraisals . . ., p. 25.

43 Karunan, *Participatory Action Research . . .,* pp. 13-14.

44 See Save the Children Norway & Sweden, *Child-Centered Approaches . . .*, p. 33.

One of the significant outcomes of using the human rights/child-centered approach to comprehend children and their work has been a growing recognition of the resilience of many working children, based initially on experience with street and working children primarily in Latin America where the coping mechanisms of these children were identified and their competencies documented.[45] In the Philippines, interest in resilience as a key concept in working with children came from dealing with children in especially difficult circumstances. A pioneering child-centered study conducted by the Program for Pyschosocial Training of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies aimed at understanding this concept from the experience and perspective of the children and their caregivers.[46] Entitled Working with Abused Children: From the Lenses of Resilience and Contextualization, the study involved the participation of twenty-five children from six NGOs who had suffered physical, sexual, emotional, and labor abuses. The findings of the study, based on narratives of the children=s experiences and life histories, were grouped into 14 themes, as follows:[47]

- acceptance of difficulty and adjustment to the demands of difficult situations
- competent functioning in the presence of major life problems
- learning from life's adversities
- capacity to be self-reliant and self-governing
- forbearance and not making a big deal of problems
- finding happiness amidst difficulties
- ability to make sanity in the face of traumatic experience
- good and wholesome character despite of deprivation
- a firm sense of what is right and wrong
- recovering from past wounds moving on with life
- therapeutic construction of reality
- ability to be other-centered
- ability to see situations as temporary
- ability to resist temptation.

The research also identified concrete guidelines, four in number, designed to help identify and promote resilience among abused and exploited children:[48]

I Have the child's external supports and resources that endorse resilience. In most cases this refers to the child's access to survival and development services food, clothing, etc.

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45 The experiences of working children's resiulience in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were presented at a major international consultation organized in Oxford, England on Children in Adversity, Sept. 9-12, 2000. See http://www.childreninadversity.org

46 See Save the Children (U.K.), *Integrating Child-Centered Approaches* . . . .

47 Ibid., pp. 54-61.

48 Ibid., pp. 67-70.

I Can the child's social and inter-personal skills for example, communication,

Problem solving, managing feelings and impulses, seeking trusted relationships, etc.

I Am the child's internal, personal strengths such as feelings, attitudes and beliefs.

I Will the child's willingness, capacity and commitment to do or to participate in matters affecting him or her.

Increasing knowledge and understanding of resilience among working children reinforced the need to pay attention to children's capacities, actual and potential, to deal with their situations and contribute towards change. This has informed the human rights/child-centered approach to working children, developed on the basis of pioneering research as well as many years of grassroots experience and lessons learnt by NGOs and child labor organizations and networks, primarily in the Global South.

C. Working Children's Participation

We as working children and our parents and communities know best what is good and relevant for us, said Filipina Joan Ranoy, the 17 year-old former child domestic worker at the 87th Session of the International Labor Conference in 1999.[49] *In many countries in Asia*, she continued, *we are being actively supported and assisted by NGOs, community and civil society organizations that have promoted our best interests and protected us from abuse and exploitation. It is therefore imperative that working children themselves, families and communities, NGOs and civil society organizations are seen as active partners and collaborators in the national plans of action on the new Convention*.

Working children, with their organizations and networks, have today entered the public stage of discourse on child labor and have increasingly come to be recognized as key social actors to be taken into serious account in policies and interventions on child labor. As Per Miljeteig notes, *in fact, it could be claimed that the public appearance of working children and youth has helped to give child labor a face and contributed to a more nuanced and diversified understanding of what child labor is.*[50]

A human rights/child-centered approach to working children is based on the principle of respecting children's views and opinions and involving them as active partners in seeking solutions to their problems. Being the most directly affected by the worst forms of work and child labor, it is only logical that they should be in the first line of participation and involved in efforts to address these issues and seek solutions. Four key principles or approaches are essential:

- children have a right to be heard about matters that affect them;

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49 Presentation by Joan Ranoy to the 87th Session of the International Labor Conference, Geneva, June 1-17, 1999 (on file with the author), p. 1

50 Miljeteig, *Creating Partnerships . . .*, p. 22.

- children are not affected passively by their work they are for the most part intelligent, active contributors to their social world, trying in their own way to make sense of their circumstances, the constraints and the opportunities available to them;
- children are capable of expressing their feelings, concerns and aspirations within a context that respects their abilities and is adapted to their interests and style of communication; and
- children are an important source of evidence on how work may harm their development, in the particular economic, family, community and cultural context.[51]

Child respondents from the Philippines and Ethiopia identified the following three characteristics of participation by working children:[52]

- *Participation is both a right and a responsibility* all children must be given the opportunity to express themselves. At the same time, it also implies taking responsibility for their actions.
- *Participation is an expression of capability* of the children's capacity to stand up for what they believe in and accomplish what they intend to do. Children are active agents of change.
- *Participation is a process of growth* through participation, children become more aware of their own capacities and limitations. They can also acquire and develop skills and knowledge.

Participation, it thus must be added, is also a learning experience for the child. In participation, children learn to express their own needs, consider those of others, and develop skills of cooperation, negotiation and problem-solving. In short, their participation provides children the opportunity to learn, develop and enhance skills that they would need to lead better lives.[53]

In mainstream approaches to child labor, there is a general tendency to view working children's participation as merely taking into consideration children's views and opinions.[54] While this is an important step forward in promoting children's participation concerning their working conditions and experiences, it falls short of another key element of meaningful participation: involving children in all actions that affect their lives. As this chapter points

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51 Woodhead, Child Work and Child Development . . ., p. 127.

52 Save the Children (U.K.), *Integrating Child-Centered Approaches . . .* , p. 33.

53 Quoted in Regional Working Group on Child Labor, Handbook for Program Managers . . . , p. 6.

54 Paragraph 2 of Recommendation 190 concerning ILO C182, not the main articles of ILO C182 itself, refer to this important point with some qualification as follows: The programmes of action referred to in Article 6 of the Convention should be designed and implemented as a matter of urgency, in consultation with relevant government institutions and employers' and workers' organizations, *taking into consideration* the views of the children *directly affected* by the worst forms of child labour, their families *and, as appropriate, other concerned groups* committed to the aims of the Convention and this Recommendation. (Emphasis added.).ILO website at http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/recdisp1.htm

out, there is sufficient successful experience among NGOs and other civil society organizations of meaningfully involving working children in programming and interventions at the ground level. Moreover, working children themselves have begun proactively to advocate for their involvement in all decisions and actions concerning their lives and future, supported by strong working childrens organizations and movements that have developed in the regions of the Global South today.

For too long, working children have been viewed as a default category.[55] It is time not only that they be recognized, but that their voices be heard and that they be actively engaged as partners in the fight to combat the worst forms of child labor. This is a fundamental right of working children which needs to be promoted and guaranteed.

V. Implications for Progressive Social Change

A. A New ASociology of Childhood?

It is time that we develop a new sociology of childhood, for the developing world especially, to guide our responses to child labor that is based on the provisions and spirit of the CRC a new discipline that, consistent with the rights-based/child-centered approach considered above, takes children seriously as they experience their lives in the here and now as children.[56] It needs to take a comprehensive view of children and therefore to be interdisciplinary, drawing upon various academic and practice-based knowledge and research in the field, with a special emphasis on incorporating working children's own perceptions and experiences of child labor and child development. The subject-matter of this new sociology should be, among other things, children in the context of family and community, viewed from a child-centered perspective that puts children's best interests first. It should recognize the positive contributions that children can make to the society around them and encourages their active participation in shaping and determining their own lives. A new sociology of childhood of this kind is critical as a foundational base to the human rights/child-centered approach to working children.

B. Addressing Structural Conditions and Factors

Today we know a fair amount about the numbers of children working, about their working conditions and environment, about their experiences of exploitation and abuse, and about their perspectives on alternatives. We know much less, however, about the structural conditions and factors that promote and maintain the exploitation of working children.[57] Mainstream approaches and interventions to exploitative child labor have generally failed to take these structural matters into account or to address them frontally with concrete

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55 Since working children are primarily viewed as a default category (those who do not go to school), it follows that solutions being sought to address the issue also tend to be limited in their scope. Ramachandran and Saihjee, *Looking Back in Order to Look Ahead.*

56 Morrow and Richards, The Ethics of Social Research . . ., p. 11.

57 But see Bachman (Translating International Labor Standards . . .), ch. 5 in this volume; Bourdillon (Translating International Labor Standards . . .), ch. 6 in this volume.

remedies in hand. In this regard, a critical gap in child labor discourse today is the macro-economic context of globalization and its direct and indirect influence on child labor in developing countries. If child labor is socially reproduced, then it is ever more important to focus on the structural context and factors that enable this reproduction. Unfortunately, however, structural matters have remained so far largely unchallenged and unaltered.

This neglect is alarming. Macro-economic factors and structural changes directly impact on child labor. The so-called Asian economic crisis of 1997 clearly showed this relationship. Thailand experienced massive reversal migration during the crisis in 1997-98 from urban to rural areas. During that period, some 0.8 to 1.1 million children between 11 and 14 years of age were child laborers, representing about 3% of the total 32 million labor force in the country. In 1998, more than 110,000 children from primary school grade 6 to secondary school grade nine were estimated to have entered the labor force, and among them over 80% were primary school students[58]. In the Philippines, the crisis contributed to an increase in the number of children working away from their homes, younger children working on agricultural farms, and an increase in the number of invisible children who work as child domestic workers.[59]

The macro-economic conditions in most countries of the Global South today is characterized by stagnation in agriculture, handicrafts, and local industries; rapid erosion of control over land and its resources by the mass of peasantry, artisans, and fisherfolk; and an escalating commercialization of entire economies that is wiping out small producers and self-sufficient farmers.[60] It is this context and the resulting unequal relationship between rich and poor countries in international trade and commerce that is missing from the child labor discourse. The international campaign against child labor is focused largely on the manufacturing, commercial, and small-scale informal sectors, not on agriculture where most of the child labor in the Global South is found and where the majority of laborers are women and children drawn from poor districts and regions. The World Bank acknowledges this direct connection between agriculture and child labor when it observes that the best predictor of child labor seems related to the structure of production: the higher the share of agriculture in GDP, the higher the incidence of child labor[61]. Implicitly, it acknowledges also the backward and forward nature of economic development in the agricultural sectors, which has a direct bearing on the incidence of child labor. As Vasanthi Raman laments, however: *The focus on child labor in these sectors tends to ignore the structural linkages both backwards (i.e., stagnating agriculture, etc. which ensures a steady supply of child laborers) and forwards (i.e., linkages with the international system*).[62]

Another structural determinant of child labor is inequality. A 2002 comparative study of child labor and child schooling in Nepal and Pakistan showed this relationship clearly: *First, high inequality provides demand for child labor from the more affluent households.*

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58 Karunan, *Children: The Forgotten Victims*, p. 4.

59 Ibid.

60 See generally Chua, *World on Fire . . .* ; Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*.

61 Fallon and Tzannatos, *Child Issues and Directions . . .* , p. 3.

62 Raman, Politics of Childhood . . ., p. 22.

Second, such inequality creates a pool of child labor from among children in the less affluent households. Third, high inequality implies that credit is siphoned off to the more affluent leaving the less affluent households to rely on child labor to smooth their income fluctuations.[63]

A rights-based approach to child labor must take into account the structural factors and conditions that impinge upon the kinds of exploitative work that children are subjected to. It must probe and unravel the problem in all its dimensions, especially in areas such as agriculture where it is most prevalent, as well as establish links with the global macro-economic context that shapes it.

C. Addressing Poverty and Child Labor

Poverty or, more precisely, income poverty is viewed often as the primary if not sole cause of child labor. A number of other key factors determine the supply of child labor, however: vulnerability, poor educational services, lack of social security mechanisms, gender- and age-specific characteristics of some labor markets, consumerist pressures, and increasing population. Another key factor, one that has come increasingly to dominate entire political economies of poor countries, is international trade and the internationalization of production, which specifically create demand for cheap, unskilled labor, often children.[64]

In the developing world, in other words, poverty is a complex phenomenon that has broad and deep social, cultural, and political ramifications in addition to direct economic ones. Working children in the Global South are confronted with situations that drive them to work to earn an income to support themselves and their families, and this of course keeps them from school. It is not income-poverty alone that is the direct cause of child labor, as is well illustrated in the Indian context by the following comment of Vasanthi Ramachandran:

> *In our country, economic poverty locks firmly with social poverty, political poverty and environmental poverty and drives children out of schools. The education system is driven by class and caste biases, and does not equip children to respond to other forms of poverty that play out in their lives. Schools defeat their own purpose. Reading and writing do not help when entire forest-based livelihoods get wiped away, or when teachers harass students for their lower-caste allegiances . . . . Given such a situation, a child=s decision to work for the family rather than go to school is the most appropriate choice he can make.*[65]

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63 Ray, Simultaneous Analysis . . ., p. 5216.

64 *Marcus and Harper, Small Hands . . ., p. 17*

65 *Quoted in Ramachandran, Education, Work and Rights.*

In most parts of the developing world, not just in India, the culture of poverty that prevails embraces a variety of important factors that define and determine the lives of children and families. Briefly put, income poverty or even economic poverty generally is but one among many important elements that define the circumstances of working children. Together with vulnerability, discrimination, deprivation, and other indignities, however, they can be daunting barriers to change. It is this multifaceted challenge that confronts the problem of child labor and thwarts attempts to address and eliminate it, and thus one more reason why an holistic human rights/child-centered approach to child labor is imperative.

D. Culture and Working Children

As discussed above, working children tend to fall outside the Western conception of childhood and child development that dominates current child labor perceptions and interventions. It is not often acknowledged that this mainstream conception though based on centuries of custom and tradition, runs up against complex cultural realities that, likewise based on centuries of custom and tradition, do not bend easily to it. If the right of children to have their best interests served is to be effectively realized, therefore, it behooves us to approach childhood and child development in a manner that seeks to understand and interpret accurately the specific cultural environment (values, beliefs, practices) within which working children and their families/communities function and thereby arrive at a definition of child labor that is relevant and support interventions that are sustainable. As Martin Woodhead reminds us, *we need to recognize that children=s needs, and their process of meeting those needs, as well as protecting children from harmful influence, is profoundly shaped by beliefs and practices through which children are incorporated into their families and communities and which gradually become part of their own identity and self-esteem*.[66]

An interesting anthropological angle is provided by Olga Nieuwenhuys in her discussion of child labor and anthropology.[67] Her main thesis is that modern society sets children apart ideologically as a category of persons excluded from the production of value.[68] Given mainstream thinking that equates work with employment (i.e., paid work), it thus can be argued that any work that is performed outside this equation is not considered work at all, that work done by children produces no value. For this reason, Nieuwenhuys observes, the disassociation of childhood from the performance of valued work has been increasingly considered a yardstick of modernity.[69] In developing countries, especially in poorer regions and provinces where the incidence of child labor is commonly higher, we know little about the production of value and the role of children in relation to it. As Nieuwenhuys rightly points out, there is need for more information and research which will uncover how the need of poor children to realize self-esteem through paid work impinges upon the moral condemnation of child labor as one of the fundamental principles of modernity.[70]

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66 Woodhead, Child Work and Child Development . . ., p. 126.

67 Nieuwenhuys, The Paradox of Child Labor . . ., pp. 237-51.

68 Ibid., p. 246.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

Cultural traditions and practices have a strong influence on child-rearing and child development, and on what roles children play in the family, community, and society. Not all of them are benign, however. In South Asia, for example, caste factors influence how child work is viewed. In some cases, they endorse abuse and exploitation. A human rights/child-centered approach to child labor would identify and condemn such harmful traditions and practices. It also would address the factors that perpetuate them, a large challenge to say the least. Indeed, this is perhaps the greatest challenge for action against the worst forms of child labor. It directly confronts culturally sensitive attitudes, beliefs, and practices in families and communities, especially in the Global South where child labor is widespread.

A human rights/child-centered approach to child labor needs, therefore, to evolve culturally-sensitive strategies that facilitate the participation of working children and that develop interventions that are based on local conditions. As Per Miljeteig comments, *it is important to look for cultural and traditional experience that can ease the introduction of a concept that often feels alien in many societies, non-western and western alike. Here it is a need to draw on local expertise on cultural practices and local understandings of childhood and children's role in society.*[71]

E. Organized Working Children as Social Actors

A human rights/child-centered approach to child labor values the positive contribution of children to their family, community, and society, and their resilience and capacity to contribute to change. It is no longer tenable to view children as just innocent, vulnerable and susceptible but as active social actors who can make a positive contribution as children to social development.[72] Time and again, and notwithstanding the conditions of poverty and vulnerability, children have shown that they can affirm their role as social actors and display potentials that can be harnessed by society for development. As a 1998 study on child labor in rural Philippines notes: *Rural children are active participants in the development process. They contribute in their own small way to the economy . . .. [A]lthough very vulnerable and exposed to the hazards of rural childhood, [they] have a role to play in rural development. They are not simply dependents and are not necessarily better off than their urban counterparts. They should be more active participants in development, if only for the reason that the future belongs to them and thus, even now, have a stake on current development initiatives.*[73]

Working children have begun to organize themselves to defend their rights for better conditions and services.[74] A comprehensive study of working children's organizations in the

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71 Miljeteig, *Creating Partnerships . . .* , p. 39.

72 Karunan, *Children and Work . . .* , p. 1.

73 Garcia and Molina, *Rural Children . . .*, p. 56.

74 Some of the well-known working children's organizations that have emerged in the developing world include, among others, the following: Movement of Working Children and Adolescents of Nicaragua (NATRAS), website at http://www.natras.kraetzae.de; the Movement of Working Children and Adolescents from Christian Working Class Families (MANTHOC) in Peru, website at http://www.manthoc.50megs.com; the National Movement of Street Children (MNMMR) in Brazil, website at http://www.mnmmr.org.br; Bhima Sangha in India, website at

world, published by Save the Children in 1999, surveyed selected organizations of street and working children in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.[75] The author, Anthony Swift, observed that

> *the children's movements are leading exponents of the participation and organization of children. Most came into being because of the lack of concerted action by the state; or anyone else, to provide the most basic protection or development opportunities to the children of poor neighborhoods. What the movements have done is build on children's ability to help protect themselves against the physical and psychological traumas that poverty and social exclusion expose them to. They have gone further, enabling children in varying degrees to become protagonists for their rights and for social change rather than victims of poverty.*[76]

An excellent example of a local and indigenous working children's movement is Bhima Sangha in southern India, an independent non-governmental organization of working children launched in 1990 and with a present membership of over 13,000 working children. The organization seeks to inform working children of their rights, the means available to them to change their situations, and the power of the union. Members of Bhima Sangha feel that they are their own first line of defence and so have the right to organize themselves. They also believe that they are protagonists and can impact on social, political and economic structures in order to mould the society closer to their vision.[77]

The first-ever world movement of working children was launched in India in 1996 when working children from thirty-two countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America met for the first International Meeting of Working Children in Kundapur and adopted the Kundapur Declaration,[78] the points of which laid down the perspective and demands of working children that is relevant today:

1. We want recognition of our problems, our initiatives, proposals and our process of organization.
2. We are against the boycott of products made by children.
3. We want respect and security for ourselves and the work that we do.
4. We want an education system whose methodology and content are adapted to our reality.

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http://www.workingchild.org; and working children's organizations supported by ENDA Jeunesse Action in West Africa, website at http://www.enda.sn.

75 Swift, *Working Children Get Organized*.

76 Ibid., p. 7.

77 See The Concerned for Working Children, *Working Children as Protagonists*.

78 Kundapur Declaration.

5. We want professional training adapted to our reality and capabilities.
6. We want access to good health care for working children.
7. We want to be consulted in all decisions concerning us, at local, national and international level.
8. We want the root causes of our situation, primarily poverty, to be addressed and tackled.
9. We want more activities in rural areas and decentralization in decision making, so that children will no longer be forced to migrate.
10. We are against exploitation at work but we are for work with dignity with hours adapted so that we have time for education and leisure.

Similarly, in March 1998, working children representatives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (except Brazil) met in Dakar, Senegal, formed the International Committee of Working Children's Movements, and though unable to participate in the ILO Conference in June of that year (despite making a request to do so), issued a comparable statement,

Urging that working children's movements are consulted before processes concerning them are launched;

Declaring their opposition to such intolerable forms of child labor as prostitution, drug-trafficking and slavery but identifying them as crimes rather than forms of work;

Asserting that one day (when the causes that compel children to work have been tackled) children should have the choice of whether to work or not; [and]

Stating that the work children do should depend not on their age but on their development and capabilities.[79]

In addition, they explained that their movements did not support the Global March Against Child Labor because they could not march against their own jobs and were not taken account of in the planning phase of the march.[80]

With the rapid growth of working children's organizations in the developing world and their successful efforts at international networking, advocacy, and influencing major international events and conference in recent years, many international agencies and NGOs have today come to accept that working children are able to exercise their right to form

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79 Quoted in Swift, *Working Children Get Organized*, pp. 10-11.

80 Ibid., p. 11.

associations and networks to protect their interests and advocate their rights. The International Save the Children Alliance, for example, in its recent Position Paper on Children and Work reemphasizes that *[w]orking children's organizations help to achieve children's rights to participate and associate, and can help children to achieve their right to be free from harmful work. They can serve a variety of functions, including whistle-blowing, monitoring work places, providing mutual support and protection, and advocating for policy change. Girls and boys have the right to participation and association, and such organizations are to be encouraged*.[81]

Notwithstanding these positive developments and a few pioneering studies on working children's organizations and networks, there remains, however, still a seeming lack of in-depth research on, and understanding of, children's workforce participation and its impact on societal change. Per Miltejeig notes that this lack of understanding is particularly related to what, in the case of working children, participation means and that , if it is to be taken to its fullest meaning, it must include respect for the capacities and integrity of children and be culturally sensitive. He proposes a research agenda to address this gap that includes the following key issues and questions:

- Children=s capacity for participation and partnership, their competence, resilience and other aspects of development that are relevant,
- Results and impact of working children's participation
- How working children and youth perceive their roles and strategies when involved in programs or other activities related to child labor,
- Mechanisms that facilitate and complicate (or obstruct) children's participation,
- Local understandings and traditions that can be conducive to children's participation and respect their contribution to family and society,
- To what extent are programs that include working children actively more effective and sustainable, and what makes such programs replicable,
- Relationships and roles between children of different ages as well as between children and adults, how to establish non-intrusive working relations between children of various ages and adults, [and]
- The role of adults involved how do they balance their efforts to make a difference against the respect for children's integrity? How do they most effectively support the children without making them dependent on their constant presence?[82]

Bearing in mind the right of children, as provided in Article 12 of the CRC, to express [their] views freely in all matters affecting [them] and in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting [them], all of these issues and questions both inform and must be informed by the human rights/child-centered approach to the problem of child labor.

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81 International Save the Children Alliance, *Save the Children=s Position on Children and Work*.

82 Miljeteig, *Creating Partnerships . . .* , p. 37.

VI. Conclusion

Work per se is not an issue for children. The issue is whether or not the work that children do is abusive and/or exploitative and/or deprives them of full human development. As Ben White puts it *the problem [of child labor] is . . . best understood not as a problem of >work= as such, but as an issue of the exploitation and abuse of children=s capacity to work.*[83]

Our concern, thus, is with the rights of children and how their economic exploitation is a violation of their fundamental rights. Child labor as defined herein prevents children from being recognized as legal subjects or rights holders and denies them their work-related rights. Indeed, some have argued that it is not until these work-related rights are recognized that children will become legal subjects as rights holders.[84] Hence the need for a rights-based approach to child labor. It acknowledges that working children have rights and that they are, therefore, legal subjects whose rights need to be promoted and defended. As this chapter has argued, working children are able to exercise their rights and have proven that they can be responsible and effective change-makers with or without the aid of international legal instruments. Evidence shows both from Bhima Sangha in Asia and Niños y Adolescentes Trabajadores in Latin America that the first step toward successful advocacy by working children is their assertion of their self-identity as recognized legal subjects and rights holders.

Some analysts have pointed out to the danger of a polarized discourse in the child labor debate, putting human rights/child-centered advocates (primarily NGOs and other civil society organizations) at one end, and the traditionalists (primarily trade unions and the ILO) at the other.[85] Alec Fyfe argues that this polarization leads to false choices: *child-centered vs. traditional paternalism; work vs. education; public vs. private; local vs. global.*[86] While this may be true given that child labor is an issue that has come to evoke passionate, emotional and political sentiments among institutions and activists alike, there is enough evidence to suggest some of it noted in this chapter that today we are witnessing a comprehensive challenge to mainstream approaches and actions coming not only from grassroots civil society but working children themselves. In this polarized situation, the real choices, I submit, reflected in the ideological and strategic positions taken in the current child labor discourse, are adults vs. children, institutions vs. movements, top-down vs. bottom-up, and North vs. South.

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83 White, Defining the Intolerable . . ., pp. 133-44.

84 Hanson and Vandaele, Working Children . . ., pp. 73-146.

85 See Fyfe, Child Labor and Education . . ., p.70.

86 Ibid., p.83.

The challenges we face in this complex realm can be surmounted only by building a broad-based social movement to combat the economic exploitation of children and especially the worst forms of child labor a bottom-up social mobilization process that effectively identifies, acts upon, and eliminates the worst forms of exploitation of children by addressing root causes and structural conditions that perpetrate this situation. A rights-based approach enables us to meet this challenge to address the structural factors and spearhead a broad social movement involving a strategic alliance of partners with the working children and their movements as its center. At the same time, we need to ensure that our policies and actions are strategic in terms of results and outcomes, guided by the provisions and spirit of the CRC and ILO Convention182. A blanket abolitionist approach to child labor is untenable with a rights-based approach and mitigates against protecting and promoting the rights of children. Moreover, an unqualified ban on child labor, without ensuring children's right, can easily result in the eradication of the children itself.[87]

Kathy, a 16 year old girl from Barbados, in her contribution to a global discussion on children and work on UNICEF's Voices of Youth, summed up well the problematic of child labor and the challenges ahead:

> *The exploitation of child workers is a vicious global disease running rampant and unimpeded in our world today. Its monstrous tentacles know no boundaries, no limits. It snakes it way into every society regardless of race, religion or ethnicity leaving behind a gaping hole in the blanket of our humanity revealing the horror and terror; the abuse and agony that its victims must bear. I wish the answers were simple . . . to a child they are. . . . Tell me someone please what can YOU do when the kids who are exploited can look you in the eye and say 'there is no other way, bills have to be paid, my brothers and sisters must eat, I have NO CHOICE. . . . Sadly the only solution I can find is to never stop, never stop trying to fight child exploitation even when all seems lost, never stop. FIGHT TO THE BITTER END, for to give up would mean the destruction of humanity itself.*[88]

87 Quoted in Voices of Youth, *Young People Speak Out on Child Labour*.

88 Ibid