

Child Labor in Eritrea and Somalia

What Awaits the Small Hands?

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June 2021



Child Labor in Eritrea & Somalia... What Waits for the Little Palms?

A New Study Prepared by: The African Affairs and Sustainable Development Unit

June 2021

Preamble

Child labor is one of the most serious problems in Africa that is triggered by the extreme poverty in which large segments of the population live, and the lack of access to adequate education, and despite the existence of legislations regulating child labor, they are not implemented on ground. The programs aimed at alleviating poverty and improving education and human services are necessary to reduce forms of child labor.

The country's economic situation is one of the main causes behind child labor. The economy can be affected by several reasons, chiefly wars, natural disasters, homelessness of parents, illegal immigration...etc. All these reasons can contribute to the low standard of living, which is the main factor for child labor and the motive for their exploitation. In many cases, the child's wages are the only or primary source of income covering the needs of the family.

In addition, Africa has the world's highest incidence rates of child labor. Recent statistics reveal that there are an estimated 186 million child laborers worldwide. 80 million children out of this number are engaged in dangerous jobs, recruited in armies and fall prey to fighting factions. They are considered victims of insecurity, poor economic conditions and the outbreak of ethnic and tribal conflicts.¹ About 20% of African children, that is about 72 million children, are involved in child labor. In addition, 9% of those children are engaged in hazardous work that is not commensurate with their age.

¹ د/ سالي فريد، عمالة الأطفال في أفريقيا الابعاد والاثر الاقتصادية، مركز فاروس للدراسات الاستراتيجية، فبراير 2020، متاح علي:

<https://2u.pw/XiJ4X>

Summary of Study

First: Child Labor in Africa: A General View

African children have the worst life chances in the world, and the gap between the survival rates, the education and the development of Africa's children and the children of other continents is increasing. Over the decade, more than 100 countries have reduced under-five mortality rates by 20 percent or more; however, in Africa, the rate has fallen by only 3 percent and has actually increased in nine African countries. The under-five mortality rate in sub-Saharan Africa has reached 195 per thousand recently, more than double the global average of 81 per thousand and about 30 times higher than the rate of children in developed countries.

Second: Child Labor in Eritrea

In Eritrea, children engage in the worst forms of child labor. Many of them are forced to work in agriculture, collecting firewood, fetching water, and grazing livestock. Child labor commonly involves using potentially dangerous machinery and tools and harmful pesticides and carrying heavy loads.

Eritrea has passed a number of legislation providing for child protection and other laws related to employment. However, the laws on commercial sexual exploitation of children are insufficient because the use of a child in prostitution is not criminally prohibited, although the government announced in 2015 that it was considering drafting a new criminal law that bans commercial sexual exploitation of children. However, it is unclear whether this law was drafted or entered into force. Moreover, voluntary military service for children under the age of 18 is not authorized in Eritrea as that Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 which requires compulsory national service from all citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 years, is not enforced.²

² GPA, Eritrea: Overcoming education challenges for the most disadvantaged children, July 2019, at: <https://2u.pw/WqRte>

About 39% of children in rural areas do not have access to education, in Eritrea alone, 27.7% of children are deprived from the right to education. To address this shortage, the government has deployed teachers in marginalized and less densely populated areas to teach rural and nomadic children, but these teachers have not performed their job³ to and sought to avoid unspecified conscription in the national service system in Eritrea, and this is clear evidence of the absence of oversight in Eritrea through which the conditions of children can be improved.

Third: Somalia

Children and women in Somalia face more health challenges than in almost any other country in the world. The under-five mortality rate is estimated at 137 per 1,000 live births, making Somalia the third-worst in the world after Angola and Chad. One in seven Somali children dies before reaching five years. Newborn deaths (those that occur in the first 28 days of life) occur at a higher rate in Somalia than in any other country except Angola and the Central African Republic.⁴

Somalia has ratified some of the major international conventions related to child labor, including the ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age, ILO No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Armed Conflict, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. In October 2015, Somalia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, becoming the 196th country to ratify the Convention.

Despite those laws, legislations and agreements that Somalia has signed in the field of child protection, from January 2020 to June 2020, there was a 25% increase in reported cases of sexual

³ US Department State, **2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Eritrea**, Mar 2021, Available at: <https://2u.pw/PYm5l>

⁴ Idem

violence against women and girls in Somalia compared to the same period in 2019. This increase has been exacerbated by the outbreak of the Coronavirus, and this shows the need to put in place protection policies at the government level.⁵

It can be concluded from the above that the effects of growth and poverty reduction, expansion of education, and reduction of population growth on child labor are clearly recognized. There is evidence that children who attend school are less likely to engage in harmful forms of work, most of which are inconsistent with normal school attendance, and statistics indicate that half of the children in Somalia have never attend school, while the proportion of children deprived of the right to education in Eritrea is 63%, and therefore the percentage of child labor has increased based on the high rate of non-enrollment in education, as the percentage of working children in Somalia has reached 49%.

Despite the aid received by Eritrea and Somalia to reduce child labor, this phenomenon remains common in both countries, in violation of human rights. Accordingly, **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:**

1. Working to confront poverty as it is the chief reason behind child labor

The spread of extreme poverty is a key reason behind child labor. In poor families, children may contribute with a large percentage to the family income, which means that child labor may be critical to survival, given that these families spend most of their income on securing food and essential needs. Therefore, in this context, the programs aimed at improving the income of the poor, addressing the shortcomings of capital markets, and providing safety networks may be of critical importance.

2. Children's education: what education can do should not be underestimated

⁵ Idem

The measures aimed at increasing participation in primary education encourage the development of human capital with its positive economic and social results. There are three ways: making basic education compulsory, facilitating work and study together, and reducing costs incurred by families in exchange for children's attendance in school. Compulsory education is a defensive means important to counter child slavery and most forms of child labor. Lowering the cost of education is another option because it gives families the opportunity to transfer children from employment to education.

3. The necessity of amending and updating the legislative and regulatory environment for child labor

Both Eritrea and Somalia have legislation and regulations regulating child labor, but their application is often limited. It is known that tightening the application of these legislations in many countries may do more harm than good to the very groups targeted by protection. It may reduce the incomes of poor families and force working children to engage in worse forms of employment. Besides, if the inspectors' salaries are low, the possibility of bribery and the application of legislation on a discretionary basis may become a real danger. Therefore, an integrated human rights approach must be adopted to deal with child labor issues by countries and international organizations working in the field.