

REPPER

International Exchange Network for Programs and Projects for Street Children

Bulletin No. 4

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WORK DONE BY CHILDREN: IS IT HARMFUL FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT?

3 POINTS OF VIEW

FRANCOIS LEFORT (Médecins du Monde, 62 rue Marcadet, 75018 - Paris)

Several times and in many countries, when I've spoken to street children and said, "You know that in France children don't have the right to work until they're 16," the children have responded, "Why are you lying?" When I replied I wasn't lying, the street child would invariably look sad and say, "Oh, the poor kids..."

Some Westerners' talk about child labor sounds like an effort to clear their consciences. **But in fact, if the children couldn't work, many would die. If they couldn't work, many street children would thus lose their last hope to learn a trade and be integrated into society.**

The real scandal isn't that children work, it's that there are children who don't have parents or enough to eat, and have no other means to carry on or even survive, if they can't work. It is critical to be able to offer them a hostel and a school, just as other children have, and the rest will come later. Prohibiting work would make their lives even more difficult.

Of course, we do have to fight against exploitation in child labor, such as when the children are reduced to slavery, forced to do degrading work like prostitution or garbage scavenging, or do deadend work on assembly-lines.

Yes! I, too, dream of a world where each child is free from work because he or she will have enough to eat and can attend school. But let's not reverse the priorities. **Before speaking on behalf of children, let's listen to them!**

ARMEL DUTEIL (Assn. Claire Enfance in St. Louis, SENEGAL; now c/o B.P. 2016, Conakry, GUINEA)

The Convention of Children's Rights is very important and a significant foundation on which to base our actions. But it isn't adapted to the problems of children in difficulty or working. The right to have a family is essential and we help these children to return home when that is possible, but that isn't always the case. If it isn't, then the children want to have the right to live free and happy in the street, to be protected not only from gang leaders, but also from police on raids who arrest children even if they haven't committed any crime and then beat them up at the police station. Of course, it is important to fight against child labor, especially when it concerns genuine exploitation or dangerous work. But in light of the economic problems in the city, many children in St. Louis need to work to live and also to help provide for their family. In any case, they can't go to school -- less than half of this country's children attend school. The state doesn't have the means. Isn't it better to work than do nothing? **What the children want is the right to work, but in better conditions** (adequate protection, respect, duties which aren't too heavy, a salary which corresponds to the work done) **and the possibility to be trained.** We are working along these lines with organizations in a dozen Western African countries. We're meeting legislative leaders, too, so that youths can create small businesses without being subject to onerous and complicated corporate legislation.

Association QOSQO MAKI (Apartado 440, Cusco, PERU)

Two theories clash head-on: The **International Labor Office** has noted of the precarity of child labor. International legislation calls for the abolition of child labor and carries traces of the traumatic consequences for Western corporations which have exploited thousands of children in their factories.

Both **private and public institutions which deal with disadvantaged children** consider that work is the means of obtaining dignity and self-realization. In any case, that is the situation here in Peru.

To take the heat out of the debate, 2 questions should be considered:

- 1) On the individual level, what is the impact of work on the child?
- 2) On the social level, what is the impact of child labor on the development of Peruvian society?

On the individual level, the arguments against child labor are numerous. It prevents children from playing, receiving an education, or apprenticing. It presents dangers, either from prolonged hours, heavy burdens or inadequate wages. Often that is true. But these arguments, which were true before, aren't in Peru now, since there is an unemployment rate of 70%, of which half are under 18 and having a job is considered to be very lucky.

The different types of work done by children include domestic work, trades like shoe polishing, kitchen helpers, and candy, ice cream and cigarette vendors.

A specific case: Francisco, a street child, became an ice cream vendor. To attract attention, he learned to be clean, punctual (you have to be the early bird!), to save for "rainy" days, and to "market" his product to increase sales. The fact that he worked meant that he, like others, discovered his own abilities, improved them and understood how society works so he could become part of it.

In the West, companies prefer to eliminate the risks in order for the child to grow up in a protected environment. He or she is only considered responsible and capable of coping with reality when an adult. In Peru, given the present economic and cultural reasons, young children have adult responsibilities.

Who is right? Is there a model? Who should decide what is appropriate for a child? The parents? The children? The State? International organizations?

What is the impact of work on schooling? Children who work desert their schools, it's true, but as things now stand, Peruvian education doesn't fulfill its formative role as one would expect. Abolishing child labor wouldn't make school any more attractive or training more accessible.

What about the impact of work on employment? Is the child in competition with the adult? The risk is minimal, because children generally work in sectors appropriate for them and less than 5% of their jobs might interest adults: in mining, manufacturing and building.

So it isn't the children's work but **POVERTY** which creates the inequality of opportunities to be able to discover and reveal individual talents.

In conclusion, the reason children work is necessity. But this fact means an immense effort must be made to improve the skills of these youths, to guarantee the social recognition of children's and adolescents' contributions.

Two issues for reflection emerge from your letters and meetings of our member associations:

1. Do you need volunteers? What do you expect from them? How do you choose, train and use them? What is the minimum length of stay in your associations?
2. Are links between associations and the media necessary? Within what limits?

These questions will be addressed in upcoming issues of our newsletter, **provided that you send us your views!**

So write to us/REPPER in care of CONSTRUIRE, 16 rue de la Glacière, 75013-Paris, FRANCE

CONSULTANTS DU MONDE (CONSULTANTS AROUND THE WORLD)

HUBERT LANDIER 54 rue St. Lazare, 75009 - Paris, France Tel and Fax: (44) 01 44 53 08 85

Set up in 1993, this international network is comprised of active professional consultants in various fields: creation and management of companies or projects (economic, social or cultural), human resources, and production (industrial or agricultural). They offer their services on a volunteer basis to assist people in the field who want to undertake initiatives. From diagnosis to actually setting up activities, these professionals adhere to a strict code of professional ethics, based on the conviction that the recognition of different cultural values allows people to progress together and on one imperative: the local people must preserve their control of their initiatives. The requests for assistance are in general received from the field through network contacts linked to Consultants du Monde.

This group has already worked with associations helping street children. They prepared a summary of the seminar held in Rufisque in December 1994. They also completed an audit of the "Solidarity Fund for Street Children" set up by François Lefort. The Association "La Bergerie" in Bogota used an audit done by them last July as an instrument to improve the efficiency of their action there. At the request of the association called "3/4 of the World," this group went to Guatemala in February of this year to help two associations - Cedic and Solo Para Mujeres -organize their communication with the European Association of Sponsors.

ASHALAYAM - Calcutta

Association de soutien à Ashalayam, chez Mme Hélène Cabral, 100 Bd Kellerman, 75013-Paris
Tel (44) 01 45 88 95 80

Almost five acres of land were purchased in Kalyani, 35 miles from Calcutta, to build 8 little homes which will each accommodate 5 to 6 street children suffering from mental handicaps in a farm setting, to help the children develop and prevent their being sent to decrepit asylums.

THE DIRECTORS ARE LOOKING FOR:

- 1) A volunteer with computer skills (Access), who is willing to come work for a few months to do tasks such as setting up files for all the children.
- 2) A photocopy machine that works adequately. The association needs to photocopy its bulletin to send to its 1,000 members and wants to reduce its expenses to have more to send to Calcutta.
- 3) Contacts, information, people who can help obtain free or reduced air freight fees for clothes and books, etc., which have been collected in France and they'd like to ship to India.

RUE DES ENFANTS (Street of the Children)

79, avenue de la Republique, 75543 - PARIS Cedex 11, France (Tel: 33.01.46.40.17.92)

Mentored by several "sages" with long experience in dealing with street children, fifteen students at ESCP (a large business school in Paris) recently created this association. During an "observation" mission in Benin, they saw firsthand the difficulties of evaluating, financing and maintaining programs. So, they decided to put their skills to this task. They propose to go on-site on short missions of about a month to assist in concrete ways: contributing **administrative** help (writing up applications to obtain funding or subsidies), **accounting** (setting up simple tools which will be useful locally as well as permitting total financial clarity for use by donors), and even **computer** assistance, when circumstances allow.

What is their motivation? "It's there-- in the streets of Manilla, Nouakchott, and Calcutta-- that the future is being built, in the cities, where often more than half the population is under 20 years old. Because we are close in age to them, we want to devote some time and use our skills to help them to live with more dignity."

SCELLES FOUNDATION: "Break the chains of a new kind of slavery"

14, rue Mondetour, 75001- Paris, France (Tel: 33.01.40.26.04.54 and Fax: 33.01.40.26.04.58)
President and Founder: Mr. Jean Scelles

Created in 1993, the Foundation continues the action undertaken by Jean and Jeanne Scelles against human exploitation of all kinds (**prostitution, pornography, sale of human organs, sexual tourism, etc.**) and **against social injustices**. The Foundation's mission is to reverse the worsening trend by sensitizing public opinion and governments. The facts today are appalling: **10 million people are prostitutes in the world, of whom there are about two million children.**

The Foundation works in three areas:

- 1. Observation.** With the help of CRIDES (the Center for International Research and Documentation on Sexual Exploitation), founded in Paris in 1964, the Foundation collects all the data and studies concerning sexual exploitation in the world, in order to support those who fight this problem: associations, international or government organizations, and legal bodies.
- 2. Support for actions undertaken by organizations.** There are many such groups, both in France and around the world, involved in prevention, support for ex-prostitutes, rehabilitation. The Foundation devotes a large portion of its budget to supporting actions taken in the field. **It distributes grants**, according to criteria such as urgency, innovation, and efficiency. Its "Organizations Projects Committee" studies proposals and then selects those which will be submitted to the Board of Directors, as well as carrying out follow-ups.
- 3. Information Communication.** A continuous flow of information is made available to the media, in the form of regular studies, documents, witnesses' statements and a regular newsletter.

The Foundation is looking for volunteers...

Volunteers -- to work in teams, depending on their availability and within the terms set out in a volunteer's agreement -- are **needed for the following types of tasks:**

1. information research, in conjunction with CRIDES
2. reading the press and making summaries of CRIDES documents
3. report writing, both by subject and geographical areas
4. journalistic writing, preparing communications for the media and public
5. translators for documents received in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Japanese, etc.
6. secretarial assistance and computer skills
7. specialists for specific areas of concern, such as medicine, law, education, the media, political contacts
8. members of the clergy of all religions
9. tourist agents
10. foreign contacts, to enhance our information network around the world
11. students, whom we would be happy to welcome to help us in the areas mentioned above.

Candidate volunteers should contact us at the above address, with their name and address, nationality, the amount of available free time and which task they'd be interested in.

.....PROFILES of MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS.....

"MAMA" KOUYATE B.P. 4255-01, Ouagadougou, BURKINA FASO (Tel: 226.30.69.34)

In 1988, she created the theatrical group called "WAMBE." Today the troop includes about 30 children between the ages of 3 and 15, from various ethnic groups and taken out of the street. Mama teaches African traditions with songs, dances, mime, masks and myths. Having taken to the stage early and played with the major companies in Burkina Faso, Mama loves children and was always convinced that "only they could take on the perpetuation of the African culture which was endangered." So she decided to help orphans or unwanted children of broken or poor families, whom she doesn't refer to as street children but as "deprived kids who have tears appear in their eyes when their mothers are referred to..." To care for them, and teach them to read and write, she sold all her possessions: her sewing machines and her two taxis. With some faithful supporters from the French-Speaking Swiss Theatre Company, she made her first trip to France and now the group has participated in many theatre festivals. Wambé has music workshops for African instruments and built a village for training children musicians and actors. Once they have found a sponsor for building a restaurant, they want to invite Western children to visit them for cultural and artistic exchanges.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

JOIN US AT THE NEXT SEMI-ANNUAL REPPER NETWORK MEETING!

Saturday, October 4, 1997 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Place: Offices of Médecins du Monde, 62 rue Marcadet, 75018 - PARIS

We would love to make REPPER even more international. We'd be delighted to hear your experiences and share ours with you. So do plan to come!

GUATEMALA: Taken from the newsletter of the association "**Les 3/4 du Monde**" (18, rue Daniel Stern, 75015 - Paris), this excerpt raises an issue we think all of us share:

"As resources become rarer and extreme poverty increases, coordinating becomes more important than ever. Some Dutch associations accepted our proposal to organize a meeting of donors. We proposed that each association commit for a minimum of 3 years, because actions undertaken require continuity over several years. Donor organizations have often elected as their mission to restrict their support to short-term commitments for start-ups, and then let the local government take over. **So a contradiction in the position of agencies is clear: they don't consider they can commit to medium-term financial support. Such a position places our own two programs (Cedric and Solo para Mujeres) in a constant state of precarity, to a degree which may even compromise their survival. In addition, these same donors expect us to specify our medium and long-term plans in order to be considered for any funding.**"

Many sponsor organizations leave directors of ongoing programs in the dark regarding their funding. **What do you think? We would be very interested in your comments, so do send them to us.**

NEPAL, ENFANCE ET LUMIERE

This association, which cares for very poor girls and ensures they are educated, is looking for young women volunteers with the following qualifications for their home in Kathmandu: at least 23 years old, English-speaking, good health, well-balanced and nerves of steel, having already traveled and interested in children and education. **Length of mission in Nepal: 5 to 10 months**

The work will be to help with homework, keep an eye on schoolwork and health, keep in touch with schools and families, and supervise the running of the home.

The association offers room and board, as well as an exceptionally rewarding humanitarian experience.

Send your résumé with a photo and handwritten letter to the headquarters:
54, route de Coulangis, 18000 - Bourges, FRANCE (Tel: 33.02.48.70.94.80)

Welcome to a new member of the REPPER Network: **L'ANERSER** (National Association for Education and Reintegration of Street Children), B.P. 11377, Ouagadougou, BURKINA FASO

INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

AIMERA (25 Avenue Foch, 6800 - Colmar, FRANCE) has begun a mail-order business for gifts from around the world and has published a catalogue of arts and crafts made and sold by four associations: **VIRLANIE** in the **Philippines**, **ASHALAYAM** in **Calcutta**, **QOSCO MAKI** in **Peru** and **OSER** in **Cameroon**. **WRITE FOR THEIR CATALOGUE TO SELECT ATTRACTIVE GIFTS WHICH WILL ENHANCE CHILDREN'S LIVES!!**

MARJUVA (Marginalization of Youth in African Cities) organizes **seminars** and publishes **seminar summaries**. The 3rd compilation of summaries includes articles on difficult childhood in Bangui, children in Abidjan, child prostitutes in Johannesburg, children in the war in Mozambique war and forgotten girls in Mexico City. **Documents** are available on: street children as "castaways" in Africa; time-money-sex; a 5-year-old drug addict in Lusaka, a hostel for street children in St. Petersburg, 1 prostitute in 10 is under 15 years of age in Bombay. For international orders, write to them at 54, Bd. Raspail, 75006-Paris, FRANCE.