

WHOSE HANDS ARE BEHIND YOUR COFFEE?



CHILDREN'S WORK IN THE COFFEE SECTOR OF GUATEMALA

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This report is a summary of the original report specially
prepared for SCAA 2014

FOREWORD

The paper presents analysis and discussion of the results of research on children working in the coffee sector in the department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala.

The paper draws evidence collected between April 2011 – July 2011 and during several other visits between 2011 and 2014.

The research was funded by Union Hand-Roasted Coffee, to examine the causes and consequences of children working in the coffee sector and to improve understanding and discourse around the issue.

Huehuetenango is situated in the northwest of Guatemala on the border with Mexico at an altitude between 850 and 3700 meters. There are 33 municipalities (*municipios*) in Huehuetenango, of which 18 municipalities produce coffee.

ETHICAL TRADING INITIATIVE

Union Hand-Roasted Coffee is member of the Ethical Trading Initiative.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. We work in partnership to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable workers across the globe who make or grow consumer goods.

Ethical trade means that retailers, brands and their suppliers take responsibility for improving the working conditions of the people who make the products they sell.



Picture: Stephen Cummiskey

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CHILD LABOUR – WHAT IS IT?

CHILD WORK, OR CHILDREN’S WORK VERSUS CHILD LABOUR

The report “Understanding Children’s Work in Guatemala” written by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Unicef and the World Bank this paper uses the term children’s work. “Child work” or “Children’s work” is a general term covering the entire spectrum of work-related tasks performed by children. Child labour refers to activities that are by definition injurious to children and that should be targeted for abolition. This distinction recognizes that work by children per se is not necessarily injurious to children or a violation of their rights. In some circumstances children’s work can be beneficial in contributing to family survival.



HOW TO DEFINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR?

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has defined child labour as:

- Labour performed by a child who is under the minimum age specified in national legislation for that kind of work; and
- Labour that jeopardises the physical, mental or moral well-being of child, known as hazardous work (Minimum Age Convention, No. 138, 1973); and
- Unconditional “worst” forms of child labour, internationally defined as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, unforced recruitment for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182 1999; ILO 2002).



Carrying heavy weight is considered inappropriate work for your children.

ILO DEFINITIONS:

Children in Employment:

Children involved in any economic activity in the formal or informal industry, for cash or kind.

Child Labour:

Subset of children in employment, children below the minimum age, children involved in worst forms of child labour

Hazardous Work

Subset of Child Labour. Any activity or occupation that by its nature has or leads to adverse effects of the child’s safety, health (physical or mental) and moral development. It can also be derived from excessive workload, physical conditions of work, and/or work intensity in terms of the duration of hours of work.

ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and work.

Picture: Pascale Schuit	The minimum age at which children can start work.	Possible exceptions for developing countries
Hazardous work Any work which is likely to jeopardize children’s physical, mental or moral health, safety or morals should not be done by anyone under the age of 18.	18 (16 under strict conditions)	18 (16 under strict conditions)
Basic Minimum Age The minimum age for work should not be below the age for finishing compulsory schooling, which is generally 15.	15	14
Light work Children between the ages of 13 and 15 years old may do light work, as long as it does not threaten their health and safety, or hinder their education or vocational orientation and training.	13-15	12-14

CHILD LABOUR IN THE WORLD

It is estimated that:

264.4 million children all over the world work.
168.0 million are involved in Child Labour and;
85.3 million children participate in hazardous work or the worst forms of child labour.

Agriculture is the sector in which most children participate with 58.6% of all children involved in child labour participating in agricultural economic activities.

Asia has, in absolute terms, the highest number of Child labourers with 77.7 million Children involved in child labour. If we look at the numbers in relative terms (compared to the number of children in total) it is Sub Saharan Africa that has the highest percentage with 21.4% of children involved in Child Labour; Asia: 8.8%; Latin America, Middle East and North Africa: 8.4%.

What can we conclude from this:

We source coffee from high-risk regions and countries.



CHILD LABOUR IN GUATEMALA

Guatemala has ratified the ILO convention. Hence, according to Guatemalan law child labour is defined as all work performed under the age of 14, except in cases where a permit is granted by the Inspector General of Labour (IGT). The Inspector General has the authority to grant work permits for children under 14 if the child is an apprentice, or extreme poverty warrants the child's contribution to the family income. The work should be light in duration and intensity and not prevent the child from meeting compulsory schooling requirements.

Guatemala as in most countries, while national legislation restricts the formal employment of children it is not effective in many circumstances. Children working needs to be seen in the context of local understandings of childhood and the contributions that children make to their families.

CHILDREN WORKING IN GUATEMALA

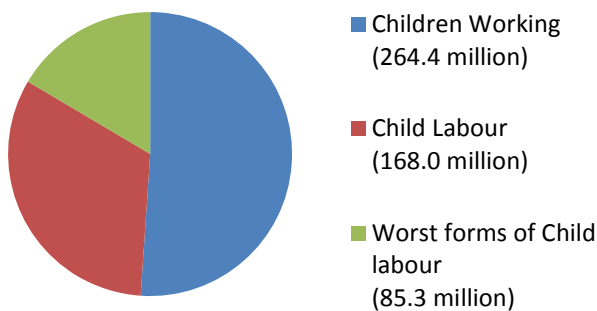
Socio economic activities in Guatemala are difficult, 53.7% people live in poverty in the department of Huehuetenango. In our study area poverty levels are above the national average at 60.5% (INE, 2011).

Children's work is very common in Guatemala. Some 507,000 children aged 7-14 years, one fifth of the total children in this age group, are engaged in work. The work prevalence of indigenous children is almost twice that of non-indigenous children.

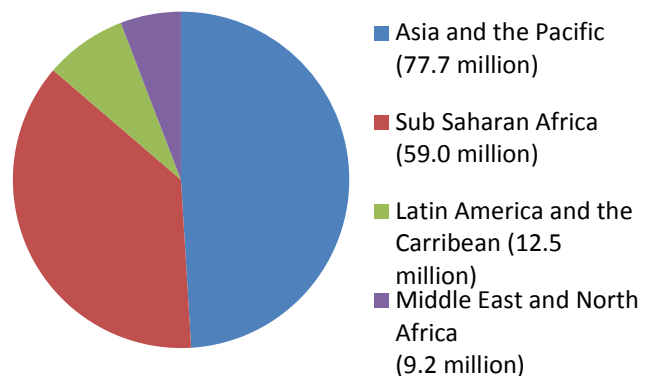


Source: Adapted from ILO (2013) Marking progress against child labour. Global estimates and trends 2000-2012

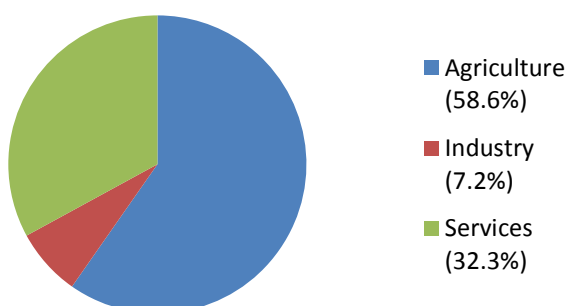
Children, employed, working & worst forms



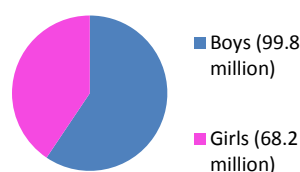
Child Labour per region



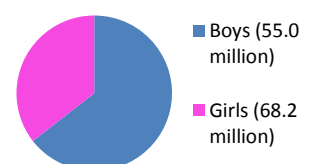
Sectoral Distribution



Gender Distribution Child Labour



Gender Distribution Hazardous Work





Picture: Pascale Schuit

CHILD WORKERS

In general one can distinguish three types of workers in the coffee sector:

Estate workers who work and live on large estates. In general these people do not own land, therefore they work on the private property of large landowners or multinationals. Their lives are contained within the estate and this is also the place where their children go to school.

(Seasonal) migrant workers migrate during the harvest to villages where coffee is cultivated. By picking coffee they can earn some extra income. Normally they stay from several weeks up to several months in the village where they pick coffee and then return to their home town. Some of these workers may own private land on which they cultivate crops or keep livestock, others may be landless. Some of these migrant workers stay after the harvest to work in the pruning of coffee trees and shade management.

In Guatemala migrant workers in the coffee fields tend to be workers from within Guatemala. They come from poorer municipalities, often located high up in the mountains where the climate and soil quality does not allow the cultivation of commercial products. In Huehuetenango, many come from municipalities such as San Sebastian, or Santa Barbara where there is few economic activity.

Family labour refers to workers or members of a family unit that work on their own private land. They are also referred to as small-scale growers.

It is also mainly a rural phenomenon; the prevalence of children who work in rural areas is almost twice that of urban areas and rural child workers make up three fourths of total child workers. A survey performed by the National Institute of Statistics in Guatemala (INE Instituto Nacional de Estadística) in 2011 revealed that 291,497 of children 15 years old and below are working, representing 5.5% of the workforce. Of these children 66% works in the agricultural sector. The children who work have an average educational level of 3.6 years, and an average salary of Q462.80/\$58.39 month which is equivalent to 24% of the average national minimum salary.

(HAZARDOUS) WORK IN THE COFFEE SECTOR

The growing and harvesting process involves many aspects: weeding, fertilizing, pruning, picking, weighing and carrying coffee. There are several risks in undertaking these actions.

Pesticide poisoning, snake or insect bites and injuries by cutting tools and branches can occur. Moreover, high levels of exposure to sunlight can cause skin cancer, lifting and carrying heavy baskets and repetitive movements can cause musculoskeletal injuries.

Results from a study performed in 2011 by Union Hand Roasted amongst smallholders in this region showed that very few producers own protective equipment and first aid kits. In 2011, of the 90 producers asked about cultivation practices on their parcels 3% indicated they use herbicides and pesticides.

Conversations with producers during recent visits (2013-2014) reveal that coffee leaf rust (CLR) has caused an increase in the use of chemical products. The increased use of chemicals increases the likelihood that children and minors of age participate in hazardous work.



Picture: Pascale Schuit



Picture: Stephen Cumiskey

Victorina (13 years), and her mother Lucia. She has finished primary education and now helps her mother with household chores and her family with picking and processing coffee on the farm. She would like to study, but her father does not want to send her to school.

Her father explains that he does not have the money to send Victoria to school. He has 22 cuerdas (almost 1 ha.) of coffee from which he has to maintain 7 children: 2 sons and 5 daughters.

Children in the agricultural sector in Guatemala, work either as migrant or estate workers usually part of a family unit, or growing up on a family farm

PAYMENT

In general coffee pickers are paid per quintal (100 lb.) of coffee cherry. Prices paid per quintal (qq.) vary per region, the type of land (accessible or not), the condition of the coffee plant (whether or not it bears a lot of fruits) and the coffee price. In times of high coffee prices, pickers demand higher wages. Depending upon whether it is the first, second or third round of the harvest, this will influence the price too. Day labourers try to negotiate the price that they receive per quintal according to the factors mentioned above.

In 2011-2012 the price in the region lay between Q40/\$5.05 and Q60/\$7.54. If pickers were paid per day they received around Q60/\$7.57 - Q75/\$9.46.



School started 8th February, but this girl is working far from her home. Her parents stayed after the harvest to work as agricultural workers. It is now March and within 30-45 days her family will return home and she can go back to school. She will have missed 2-3 months of school by the time she goes back.

The quantity that an average coffee picker can pick depends several factors such as the health and the condition of the picker, whether or not carrying and nurturing a child, the quantity of red cherries on the tree, the accessibility of the parcels and the height of the trees (Bourbon and Tipica grow sometimes up to more than 2 meters).



Picture: Pascale Schuit

Complete families migrate and work in the coffee fields.

Generally speaking an average picker collects around a quintal a day. However, it is not uncommon for a picker to deliver 4 to 6 quintales per day because his wife and children helped him collect coffee.

In January 2012, the minimum agricultural wage in Guatemala was Q68. With prices of 50Q per quintal, families that want to earn a minimum wage have to pick with various persons a day to earn a single minimum wage.

In 2014, the situation has become worse for Guatemalan pickers. The minimum wage rose officially to 75 Quetzales a day, but in practices pickers receive around 40 Quetzales per quintal and are picking less due to a decline in production because of CLR and low coffee prices in 2013.

A minimum wage in Guatemala does not equal a living wage, since it does not allow a family to supply themselves with their basic needs. In order for families to satisfy their basic needs (food security, shelter, health, education) they have to pick more than one quintal a day.



WORKING OR PLAYING?

If there are children present in the coffee fields it is not possible to control whether they are playing or working.

It is considered that the best place for children to be is in school. Yet, even during the school holidays the coffee fields are not a place for children to spend their time. Coffee fields can be a dangerous place for children to play; hills can be steep and young children risk falling, they are vulnerable to insect bites and the constant exposure to the heat of the sun or the heavy rains in the tropics can be harmful.

Mothers should have the right to a decent place to nurture their small children, free from dirt, rain or extreme sun exposure.

Picture: Pascale Schuit

The smiling girl in this photo is In third grade. School has already started and she would like to be there, but she needs to wait a couple of days more till her family returns home. She picks an average of three baskets of coffee cherries a day. Her father receives the money.



Picture: Pascale Schuit

WHAT DO FARMERS SAY?

The opinions and views of those interviewed reveal that there is a general consensus of poverty being the driving force behind child labour or children working, but other aspects such as social acceptance, tradition and culture also play a role.

PAYMENT IN KIND

Besides the wage, some small growers who have pickers working for them provide the pickers with extras such as a feed ration of maize and/or beans, or some meat on the weekends. Others provide their pickers with lunch or coffee and a small snack during a work day. However, this varies from producer to producer and from village to village.

THE COMPLEX QUESTION OF THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN THE COFFEE FIELDS

"They are playing not working"

Can children be present in the coffee parcels? Are they just playing and like to hang around with their parents?



Picture: Pascale Schuit

Picture: Pascale Schuit

“La situación económica nos obliga”

The economic situation forces us.

“No hay otra forma”

There is no other way

“No tenemos dinero para pagar un trabajador”

We do not have the money to pay a day labourer

Ellos se llevan a los niños, la cosecha de café es unos de las pocas fuentes de empleo que hay por estas personas. Ellas viven en tierra fría en que no se cultiva nada”

“(Migrant workers) bring their children, the harvest is one of the few opportunities in which they can earn income. They live in land with soils that are not suited for cultivation

“Prohibir familias en la finca es discriminación”

Prohibiting families on the farm, would be discrimination

“Yo siempre trabajé cuando era niño y mira...”

I always worked when I was a child and look (pointing at himself indicating that he grew up to be a healthy man).

“Así es en Guatemala”

That is how things go in Guatemala

“Ellos vienen de la montaña y llevan a sus hijos para cortar, son muy pobres y la cosecha de café es unos de las pocas fuentes de ingresos que hay. Pero los hijos no van a la escuela, y solo saben cortar café cuando van a estar grande igual van a cortar café con sus hijos también”

“They come from the mountains to pick coffee and bring their children, they are very poor and picking coffee is one of the few income earning opportunities that they have. But, their children do not go to school and only know how to pick coffee. When they are grown up they will be picking coffee with their children too”

Many people do not perceive children working as something harmful *per se*. It might even be considered positive, allowing children to acquire skills and learn on the job. It is also related to the lack of importance attached to education in Guatemala. Although school enrolment has risen over the years, many rural families send their children long enough to school to only learn the basics of how to read and write. Many students drop out in the fifth or sixth year of elementary school; this seems to be especially true for young women. With little income to pay for school utilities, limited off-farm opportunities available in small villages, and unlikely job prospects, these decisions to cease a child's education made by the households are understandable but not in the child's interest. Some coffee producers feel that prohibiting children on their farm is denying poor migrant families the opportunity to earn an income.

STUDY RESULTS

Child labour and children working is largely invisible, but as soon as it is encountered it leaves a bitter taste to even the finest cup of coffee. The presence of child labour should not go unreported, nor ignored. The extent and severity of children working is difficult to track down. In Guatemala children under 14 are not allowed to work. In the coffee fields, however, we spoke to several children below the age of 14 who were harvesting coffee.

MOST VULNERABLE GROUP

The study reveals that the group of which we should be concerned most are the seasonal migrant workers that come to these village during the harvest to pick. It is a marginalized group, mainly of indigenous ethnicity. They belong to the poorest quintile of Guatemalan society and often possesses little, infertile or no land. They are to a large degree dependent on the coffee harvest as it is one of the few decent income earning opportunities in the year. Tracking this group down is difficult since they come from different municipalities. They bring their families with them, and producers hiring pickers have no other option than to accept the whole family.



Picture: Stephen Cumiskey

A strategy to address the welfare of children in the coffee industry must prioritize the elimination of the most harmful forms of child labour and take into consideration the root causes and various forms of child labour in coffee.

Roasters, exporters, importers, farmers and NGO's should work together in improving workers conditions on the farm.

Solutions can be sought in establishing nurseries, paying labourers per day instead of per quintal. And providing schooling and educational activities for farm workers.

ABOLISH OR REGULATE?

The objective of combating child labour is to improve the situation of the children involved. The most important principle in development work is **do no harm**. Prohibiting children on a farm with immediate effect, without providing alternatives can have an adverse effect on the lives of children and their families. If child labour is verified on a farm, it is important to take corrective actions. Children should be immediately removed from dangerous or hazardous work situations, but children are allowed to work under certain circumstances.

Children can be engaged in economic activity if:

- Above a certain minimum age
- It does not interfere with school
- It is not hazardous or included in the list of worst forms of child labour
- Work is light and adjusted for age
- Work is compensated equal to an adult

HOW TO CONTINUE

Children working must always be analysed and understood within the broader context of social, economic and educational progress in the country of interest. Abolition of child labour in the coffee sector is desirable but might be contrary to the economic interests of working children and their families. In Guatemalan society, everyone needs to contribute to the household even children are taught to help their parents. Children working is accepted by a vast majority as a natural and customary way of life. In trying to regulate children working, this discourse is going to be the most challenging aspect. As long as there is the need for children to contribute to financial support their families, it is difficult and might even be undesirable to strive for complete abolition of children working.

CONCLUSION

Those who get actively involved with labour standards in origin have to tackle the many complex questions about what their company should take in order to trade ethically, and make a positive difference to workers' lives.

One has to deal with different cultures, traditions and ideas. Poverty, complex socio-economic circumstances and tradition may explain the circumstances but this does not justify the situation. School is the best place for children to work. This study does identify that in order to tackle the problem it is necessary to take a universal approach. We cannot view the child labour issue in isolation. It is related to the socio-economic circumstances and other labour issues at origin such as living wages and working hours.

The scope and complexity of the question requires an approach that involves the coffee industry, small roasters, big roasters, importers, exporters and third parties such as NGO's.

AS AN INDUSTRY WE HAVE TO:

Acknowledge there are serious labour issues in our supply chain

Do more research and investigation at origin.

Have a pro-active approach. Ask questions. Bring the issue under attention

Involve third parties : take a multi-stakeholder approach



Picture: Pascale Schuit