



Working of Children Around the World
Maxine Olson, resident representative, UNDP, New Delhi At a public function in the India International centre at New Delhi on 23 March 2004, Ms Maxine Olson, the resident representative of UNDP in India, officially released the book *Working Children Around the World*. The book can be purchased through IREWOC (€20) or through the publisher, the Indian Institute of Human Development in New Delhi (ihd@vsnl.com).



Book Review Spoken by Ms Olsen while realising this book:

Many UN organisations in co-operation with the national governments have taken great care that the plight of children should not be forgotten in the process of development. In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been adopted, and since then this charter has becoming the document for child-centred policies. The specific mandate of UNICEF as a UN organisation is to organise resources and to advocate policies which will help to guarantee to all the children in the world, in the richer countries as well as in the poorer countries, a healthy and protected childhood. With a guaranteed access to education, health care and nutrition children can then grow up as rightful citizen in a future world.

Unfortunately and despite unmistakable progress, such an equitable childhood for all has not yet been reached. At the same time national governments, international organisations and civil society at large have come to the conclusion that all efforts should now be gathered to do away with one of the more dramatic forms of injustice to children, namely the around 200 million child labourers in the world.

The book which I have great pleasure to release deals with the conditions and circumstances of such child labourers and of other children who live on the street or who, while also going to school, have to work in the evening hours so as to help the family survive.

The book carries also two chapters which summarise and comment on the two leading international documents, the UN CRC Convention and the ILO Conventions. One of these articles is by professor Jaap Doek, who is heading the UN Child Rights Commission and who gives very insightful suggestions on how to improve the monitoring and implementation of these Conventions.

There are many forms of child deprivation, and they have been documented before. In this book it has been done through anthropological field work. Students of the University of Amsterdam under the guidance of Professor Kristoffel Lieten have been going to live among children living on the streets or selling in the markets.

Through a relationship of trust and respect they have been able to let these children speak out. For example the maid servants in Conakry in Guinee and the peanut sellers in Brazil. In this way we learn more about the lives and particularly about the ideas and the feelings which these children have. It is a pleasure to learn that these children are

consciously analysing their conditions, that they have aspirations and calculations which are not different from the children around us.

This is heartening because it means that these child labourers and the deprived children in general are not held back by a culture of poverty and a culture of backwardness but that they are held back by socio-economic circumstances. They are pushed into the streets and into intolerable labour conditions by social disintegration and by personal drama's occurring in the family. Through a focussed programme of development initiative we could try to improve these conditions.

Even the most downtrodden of these children, as the examples on Latin America and India in the book illustrate, have this glimmer of hope. They are not constrained by a lack of will or drive but by economic conditions which have marginalized them and which have driven them to the margins of society.

As I said, there are many forms of deprivation, but there are also many forms of empowerment. The stimulation of participation belongs to the core of the new development paradigm which focuses on ownership and empowerment, on the initiative taken by people themselves and in this book also there good cases studies how this has worked out in for example children in India and Bolivia.

Working Children around the World – Child Rights and Child Reality is a book which I have great pleasure to release.