Towards a National Public Policy Agenda
On Worst Cases of Child Labor in Peru

by
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"In the absence of criteria valid across cultures of what a healthy and happy childhood implies, [children’s "happy" development] is not simply a matter to balance the positive aspects of work against the negative ones".

Olga Nieuwenhuys, Children's Lifeworlds (1994, 204)

"Children as ready-to-use, disposable labor are the last frontier of renewed over-exploitation, under networked, global capitalism. Or is it?"

Manuel Castells, End of Millennium (1998, 154)

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, children began to increase their role in labor markets, becoming "economic factors in the system" (Ray 1998, 2). In those times, child labor was massive and common, as people did not see a moral conflict with it, and the law and regulations permitted it by omission (Alarcón, 19). Thus, child labor was seen as necessary as much for capitalistic accumulation as for working families subsistence and reproduction (Alarcón, 19).

With the changes in the economic patterns, the development of new technologies and the evolution of the conceptualization of childhood, the demand for child workers shifted downwards compared to those times (Alarcón, 20). However, and despite the fact that recent worldwide surveys show those declining trends in the rates of children’s labor participation, they still found 250 million children ages between 5-14 years old engaged in economic activities (ILO 1998-1999, 3). Furthermore, since at least half of those children perform labor on a full-time basis, they can hardly enjoy from educational and recreational opportunities.

The large concentration of working children in the world's poorest regions under harsh conditions, the widening gaps between those who enjoy the benefits from modern society and those who do not, and the growing vulnerability of the weakest social actors in the "globalized" economy, explain the raising attention the topic is gathering at international forums, in spite of the statistical trends.
In the case of Peru, the situation is worrisome. On one hand, the economic conditions prevailing in the country are pushing more children to work under physical and moral hazards. On the other hand, there is a weak and inconsistent government response, which lacks a clear vision on the topic. This situation does not only erode the State’s image as a valid interlocutor vis-à-vis the international context, but it also puts it in a disadvantaged situation in relation to worldwide initiatives that could affect macro policies, such as those dealing with foreign trade in the presence of the increasing use of labeling practices.

However, child labor policy-making in Peru is not an easy task. The urgency of intervention in cases where children suffer from inhumane conditions contrasts with the regional heterogeneity across the country. At the light of the recently signed Convention 182, that aims to eradicate the worst forms of child labor, the expected state response must then be more solid and proactive to handle not only an increasingly troublesome internal context, but also a more dynamic international environment.

This paper aims to explore some of the complexities of policy-making on the worst cases of child labor, following the definition established by the Convention 182, with focus in the Peruvian case. It will address the importance of the State intervention, describe the nuances in the Peruvian situation and finally propose policy guidelines. The analysis, however, will not discuss child pornography and prostitution, included in the Convention, because they require different policy frameworks than those described in this paper. In general, pornography and prostitution, particularly in the case of children, is (and should be) more accurately analyzed as pure human exploitation rather than under the field of labor.

The paper consists of four sections. The first one will address the elements that make a case to address child labor with a policy perspective. It will describe the magnitude of the problem, its causes and the welfare effects on children. The second section will describe the
institutional framework, both from the national and international perspective, identifying key actors and relevant regulations on the matter. The third section will explore the characteristics of the “worst cases” of child labor in Peru. Finally, the fourth section will discuss the dimensions of the problem policy makers must be aware of as well as explore some policy alternatives that should be accounted for in the government agenda.

Section 1. The case against child labor in Perú

1.1. Magnitude of the Problem

In Peru, the 1995 Ministry of Labor Urban Employment Survey (UES) estimated that about half million children performed some kind of remunerated activity. Nonetheless, indicators of the magnitude of child labor are not fully reliable. Indeed, two years before, the National Census had provided with an official estimate of 196,000 working children. Taking into consideration that the UES is not applied in rural areas, it is clear the existence of an underestimation in the Census’ estimations. Thus, they only should be accounted for as a broad reference, but not as reliable and updated information for specific purposes (Verdera 1995, 28). Additionally, this statistical weakness prevents comparisons across regions and time.

These discrepancies are driven by the lack of specialized surveys on the matter, being the national census data the most used source for forecasting estimates (U.S. Department of Labor 1998c, 157). Thus, in the latest national censuses (1961, 1973, 1981 and 1993), the economically active population indicators included children six to fourteen years old who fit in categories such as working for pay, temporarily absent from work, or working as a helper to a family member for no pay (U.S. Department of Labor 1998c, 157). The fact that is the head of the household the one who answers the census survey may, in addition to other methodological flaws (e.g. definitions of child labor), affect the accuracy of the estimates.
Despite the data limitations, Verdera found that at the national level, the number of working children rose between 1961 and 1981 at an average annual rate of 2.2%, and it could have also increased between 1985 and 1991, taking into account that. Among national surveys, the latter had a smaller scope than the former (Verdera 1995, 25).

Table 1. Economically Active Population 6-14 years old, 1961-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Thousands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>1961 July</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>1972 June</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>1981 July</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>124.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENNIV</td>
<td>1985 December a/</td>
<td>National with the exception of three departments</td>
<td>376.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENNIV</td>
<td>1991 b/</td>
<td>National with the exception of three departments</td>
<td>349.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>196 c/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly household survey (INEI)</td>
<td>1996 first quarter</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>300-600 d/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a/ The two surveys ENNIV did not account for three Sierra departments because they were emergency zones by the time of implementation (Ayacucho, Apurímac and Huancavelica).
b/ October-November. Besides the above mentioned indication, this survey did not include either Rural Coast or Jungle. It did not account for housekeepers, either.
c/ and d/ From U.S. Department of Labor, 1998c.
Source: Verdera (1995, 26). Unless otherwise noted.

Additionally, Alarcón found flaws in the surveys, embedded in their conceptualization. According to him, the International Labor Office (ILO) and the National Institute of Statistics define the Economically Active Population as the population who are six years or older and who in the week of reference used by the census, either worked, looked for a job because they lost their former one, or looked for a job for the first time. This definition is, in Alarcón’s words, flawed, as children from low-income families do not go out on the streets to look for a job as their parents do (Alarcón, 35). The channels for labor engagement in the case of children
would be different, as they do not pass by a supply and demand market, in the traditional sense of this concept (Alarcón, 35). Indeed, the definition of Economically Active Population implies a relation based on salary, which would be leaving aside a large share of the actual cases.

Due to the fact that the Peruvian Government does not report labor survey statistics for children below 15 years of age, the only source of official data on child labor are national censuses data collected once a decade. An initiative for developing a specialized survey, in hands of the ILO and the Ministry of Labor, is still pending to be materialized.

1.2. Exploring the causes

Most of the academic work on this topic emphasized the importance of the prevalence of poverty as determinant for child labor. In rural Peru, children are, for instance, the victims of poor lands and the lack of resources, the low productivity, the scarcity of adult labor supply due to migrations and the poor educational conditions (Verdera 1995, 29). Likewise, in urban areas, the increment in the magnitude of the problem is mainly caused by the impact from economic crisis, and to a lesser extent also to the inadequate educational system, which has not been responsive to the rising demands of the population and the requirements from the market economy (Verdera 1995, 30).

However, as Alarcón states, the study of child labor participation requires also attention to the role of the family, as a fundamental space to understand why similar macro-social structures generate different outcomes in terms of labor participation (Alarcón, 21.). Moreover, the problem is not only bounded by economic and demographic characteristics. As families are embedded in specific cultural patterns, their behavior is closely related to the cultural context they belong to (Alarcón, 21.). Indeed, Alarcón suggests that “the fundamental factor that explains why not all children and adolescents work, is the progressive expansion of school infrastructure and the
prestige education was acquiring [in recent years] as an expression of progress and a mechanism for social improvement” (OIT 1998a, 60). Therefore, working would not necessarily constitute a first-option path parents would envision for their children, unless their conditions get worse enough to push children to be economically active.

In a culturally diverse country like Peru, then, it would be necessary to avoid generalizations when speaking of child labor; starting from definitions to characteristics to actual policy recommendations.

Geographically, according to National Population Censuses, child labor trends were evolving from an urban to a rural concentration until 1981. Nevertheless, ever since it has shifted to urban: the 1993 Census found 54% of the economically active population 6 to 17 years old in those areas (OIT 1998, 65). The result is consistent with the trends of urbanization in the country, as well as with the consequences of terrorism during the Eighties, which mobilized thousand of people from the fields to the cities.

Nonetheless, child labor is still widespread in the Andes. Patrinos and Psacharopoulos found child labor in Peru more likely for indigenous, rural and poor children, as well as in the presence of a peasant head of household (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 197/390). Child employment is also higher for those who are overaged respect to their schooling, older and male (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 396). For a closer look at the nuances that differentiate urban employment from rural, it would be necessary to deepen the analysis for each sector.

In the case of urban areas, the rise in the number of working children is, according to Verdera, related to the economic crisis worsened from 1983 (Verdera 1995, 49). In addition to the massive urban impoverishment, Verdera suggests that the social condition of the household head and the higher relative value of work in relation to education constitute two important determinants to the decision to enter the labor market (Verdera 1995, 50). What Verdera defines
as social condition is actually the different cultural background and its expression through the transmission of values and norms to the children, accounting for the assignment of roles and responsibilities as workers and as family income-contributors (Verdera 1995, 50). In this regard, Ramos asserts, "the roles that children perform in the peasant family unit may have been translated into the cities through migration" (Cited by Verdera 1995, 51.). This is certainly consistent with the hypothesis that families and not children themselves are the main channel through which children begin to work and with the idea that labor markets conventionally defined are not fully relevant to the issue of child labor.

In rural areas, child labor corresponds to the definition of peasant economy, due to the fact that this type of economy is based on the utilization of all the available family force for the totality of family activities, which constitutes the production and consumption unit (Verdera 1995, 71). However, although residence in rural areas has a large effect on child labor (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 390), there are some cultural nuances that must be accounted for. Patrinos and Psacharopoulos found that among the indigenous Aymara people, child specialization is exercised. In their communities, working starts at early age and is combined with school work due to the fact that the Aymara place a high value on education and hope that at least one of their children will pursue a "career" (defined as obtain some type of salaried employment) (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 390).
1.3. Welfare effects of children's labor

In its Annual Report 1996, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) indicates that working children and adolescents have in average two years of study lower than those who do not work. Thus, working children are likely to enter the labor market in a situation of comparative disadvantage, increasing their chances of getting low-productivity jobs and to earn less money. From this standpoint, the short-term decision of entering the labor market can translate in an intergenerational factor for reproducing conditions of poverty. Furthermore, the combination of poverty and the lack of a widespread and institutionalized social security network facilitates the development of harsher forms of child labor (e.g. slavery, prostitution), that exacerbate the conditions previously described (Badiwala 1998).

Besides the intergenerational relation, there is another pervasive link between child labor and poverty. When families send their kids to work, these children may replace activities formerly performed by adults, thus lowering the salary for those occupations where there is competition between adults and children. This phenomena, thus, perpetuates poverty, as well as unfavorable labor conditions (Verdera 1995, 47).

Likewise, it is acknowledged that the time taken away from children to work, translates into less time available for education. Accounting for the fatigue and weakening of health conditions as a consequence of working, it is expected that labor will produce a negative impact on performance. According to Psacharopoulos, child workers see their educational attainment reduced by about two years of schooling relative to non-working children. Thus, a child employed full time, is likely to remain uneducated and to have low productivity as an adult (Basu 1999, 49.), reinforcing poverty cycles. Even if that were the case, Patrinos and Psacharopoulos
suggest that "while work may have deleterious effects on schooling, without work many children may not be in school at all." (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 402.).

Working children accumulate, in relation to those who do not work, very important losses in years of education, which brings as a consequence that later in their adult life, they earn income about 20% lower than their peers (CEPAL, 1996).

The investment in education for children, adolescents and youth is so profitable for them, their families, society and the economy, that it widely justifies their exclusive dedication to study until they reach at least 10 years of study and preferably one year of secondary education (CEPAL, 1996). According to an ECLAC study, with the current returns, the higher productivity could lead them to earn income six or more times the costs to obtain such levels of education. Likewise, to provide adolescents with four years of secondary education allows for savings ranking from 1.5 to 5 times higher with respect to what compensatory adult education costs. In terms of firms, excluded those countries with schooling rate close to 100%, savings in expenditures related to additional training reach 25% to 50% of the costs for initial training. In the same study, they found a non-detrimental relation between child work and schooling, a result that suggested that rather than preventing from schooling, labor can provide children with the necessary resources to cover incidental expenses such as uniforms or books and remain in school (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 398.). This could be especially true in rural areas and in the urban informal sector where working hours are not rigid (Basu 1998, 21.). Furthermore, especially in Lima, the majority of working children are able to attend school because the Peruvian educational system is organized into part-time shifts (Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1996, 391.). This argument however, has to be counterweight with the fact that labor seems to be a good predictor for school drop-outs.
Table 2. Overage rates and drop-outs: the gap between working and non-working children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overage rates</th>
<th>Drop-outs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6-14 years old</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12-19 years old</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Besides, it is known that, in general poor children get low-quality education. In fact, their schools often lack cement floors and restrooms, have unfinished walls, their furniture is insufficient and worn, and blackboards are usually the sole teaching aid (U.S. Department of Labor 1998d). Thus, the time flexibilities public schools offer to working children, due to the poor quality these institutions have, make the educational services children actually receive even poorer. Working children do not only attend low quality schools, but their attendance is combined with labor, reducing the effective likelihood of learning for them.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that working is indeed a dignifying activity, thus helping in some cases to strengthen some positive values on children. The thin line that separates what some scholars define as "formative" work is out of the scope of this paper. Our target area is composed by cases where children are exposed to constant physical and/or moral hazard. Therefore, the consequences described above are only the minimum children actually suffer. Some of the specific consequences of such types of child labor will be explored in the next section.
2.1. Conflicting Philosophical Stances

International awareness on child labor follows a long and cyclical path with very few tangible results. Although recent developments on the matter aim to gather a broader attention, the issue the international community is lacking a unified approach on the topic, which in practice seriously affects the likelihood of success of different interventions. This section will start with the definition of these different approaches, and later describes the current international regulatory framework, worldwide programs and current policy practices.

Broadly defined, there are three main streams of thought with regards to child labor: abolitionists, protectionists and promoters. The first group advocates for the prompt abolition of child labor, arguing that countries would enjoy the benefits of such measures in the long run through better endowments of human capital. For a long time the advocates of these ideas focused their attention on promoting restrictive laws and regulations for preventing child labor. In the last years there has been an important shift towards targeted initiatives with emphasis on the most critical cases, in recognition of the magnitude, heterogeneity and inner causes underlying child labor. Protectionists, on the other hand, aim to provide working children with better labor conditions, in the assumption that the causes for this problem are beyond the reach of policies at the micro level. Therefore, their objective is to improve their working conditions rather than banning labor. Finally, a more radical approach proposes that children have the right to work thereby focusing their advocacy not only in making labor conditions more suitable for children but also in promoting the organization of labor unions and labor rights. These proposals differ from the protectionists’ in the fact that promoters do not see anything wrong on children working. They see this activity as dignifying, part of the children’s process of socialization and of their development of class consciousness.
However, it is difficult to assign labels to specific institutions, as protectionists, promoters or abolitionists. Throughout the years, some institutions have switched from one conceptualization to other, especially given the nuances among these definitions. For instance, currently the International Labor Office is the leading institution in charge of promoting the Convention 182, which aims to eliminate the worst cases of child labor. Seventeen years ago, in a book released by ILO, their position in relation to child labor and education stand (Rodgers and Standing, 35):

“In first place, labor itself can be an important component of “education”, especially in production systems based upon domestic activities, as well as other forms of learning. This is the reason why it is important not to confound education with schooling. Secondly, it is often argued that the type of schooling for poor working families is focused not on developing the creative capacities of children but on preparing loyal and ductile workers, or docile citizens who can accept diverse forms of exploitation. In third place, there are some hints that suggest that formal schooling can be dysfunctional, as it weakens rather than strengthens the child’s skills to survive in a poor environment.”

The evolution of theoretical and policy trends with relation to child labor is important due to the fact that as they evolve, institutions shift their standpoints in a way that might affect national policies, not only related to child labor matters, but also to others apparently unrelated. For instance, as we saw before, trade policies are affected by changes on labor regulations. Thus, the lack of awareness from the government on the evolution of their interlocutors’ thinking can affect negotiations and the formulation of national commercial agendas.

Likewise, the discrepancies on the definitions constitute another indicator on the philosophical stands of an organization, as well as on the level of evolution of their thinking. In her study on rural India, Nieuwenhuys defines child labor as any activity done by children which either contributes to production, gives adults free time, facilitates other people’s work or substitutes for the employment of others (Nieuwenhuys, 27). Although comprehensive, this definition could also be too broad and fuzzy not only because of the subjectivity it carries, but also because of the lack of data that can support it. Thus, in the majority of studies, scholars
focus only on "visible" work, the one that is trade in labor markets, underestimating household labor, with detrimental consequences to a better assessment of the magnitude of the problem as well as leaving aside its effect on gender relations.¹

In Peru, there is also debate about definitions of child labor. In a study made for the International Labor Office (OIT 1998, 59), CESIP defines it as any legal and socially accepted activity delivered by children with the following features:

- Direct participation in production processes, trade or delivery of services.
- Those goods and/or services are to be consumed mainly outside the children’s home.
- For those activities, the child may or may not receive earnings, and these are not necessarily monetary.
- That participation implies time patterns: certain hours a day or days a week.

However, that definition contrasts with another one provided by Giangi Schibotto, who defines child labor as any activity delivered by a minor aiming to contribute to satisfying his or her basic material needs. Thus, this latter definition encompasses informal labor, non-salaried work and illegal activities, such as prostitution and robberies.

The effects of working over children’s development is seen as the key factor to identify whether an activity is harmful or not. For ILO, the type of child labor that must be eradicated is that developed by children living prematurely adult lives, working many hours a day for a low salary and in hazardous conditions for their health and physical and mental development (OIT 1998, 60). In the next section, there is a description of how these philosophies and concepts translate into regulation frameworks.

¹ As a matter of fact, ILO does not regard cooking, child care and other domestic duties as child labor, since such duties are undertaken to some extent by children in all societies. (Ray; p. 4). ILO recognizes that the traditional
2.2. Worldwide Institutional framework

Until recently, the 1973 ILO Convention about Minimum Age (Convention 138) was the fundamental framework on child labor policy. Although its ultimate objective was the total eradication of child labor, it recognized that such objective would take a long time due to its link to the world development in the long run. Due to the existence of cases that require a prompt attention, it was seen as necessary to work towards a more explicit convention to deal with such cases.

In 1999, after an ILO-sponsored world meeting, the Convention 182 to Eradicate the Worst Cases of Child Labor was signed. Upon this Convention, the basic obligations of the ratifying states are to adopt measures to ban and immediately eliminate the worst forms of child labor. This encompasses all the forms of slavery, prostitution, pornography-related activities, the use of children in illicit industries—with emphasis in drug commerce—, and any other type of labor that by its nature or conditions may constitute a health, safety or moral threat to children.

Some of the changes promoted from Convention 138 to Convention 182 are shown in the following table:

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3 Ibid. p. 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Convention 138</strong></th>
<th><strong>Convention 182</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum age for admission for hazardous work must not be under 18.</td>
<td>Applied to all people younger than 18 years old; no person younger than 18 must be under a worst form of child labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified.</td>
<td>Defines the worst forms of child labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified. These are treated as forms of forced work.</td>
<td>- Slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified.</td>
<td>- Pornography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities that due to nature or conditions can be hazardous for children's health, safety or moral. These activities are defined under national laws and competent authorities, after consultation with employers and workers’ organizations.</td>
<td>- Illicit activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain jobs can be authorized after 15 years old, as well as after 16, instead of 18, with the condition that there are previous consultations, and that there are adequate protection and formation.</td>
<td>- Activities which constitute a health, moral or safety threat to children. These activities must be defined upon national laws, competent authorities, upon consultation with employers and workers’ organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries can limit initially the scope of application, with the exception of sectors explicitly designed.</td>
<td>No specific norm that authorizes certain type of work after 16 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worst forms of child labor are applied in all sectors</td>
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</table>

Based on the objectives of Convention 182, in 1992 ILO launched the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).\(^4\) This program aims to support countries on the implementation of programs for the progressive elimination of child labor, emphasizing on its worst forms; to identify and prevent those; to enforce both Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention)\(^5\) and Convention No. 182 (Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor)\(^6\); and to increase public awareness around the issue (ILO-IPEC 1999a, 4).

Specifically, IPEC supports the country members to develop and apply measures oriented to prevent child labor, to free children from hazardous labor, to provide them with adequate conditions for rehabilitation and social reintegration, and to provide opportunities for them and their families to escape from poverty (OIT 1998b).

Additionally, through the Program for Statistic Information and Monitoring on Child Labor Matters (SIMPOC), IPEC is strengthening the development of methodologies for implementing studies about child labor. Likewise, the project plans to maintain databases on active institutions and organizations on the field, projects and programs, activities in the industrial sector, legislation and national indicators. These databases will provide a reliable baseline for analyzing and evaluating the efficacy of the programs, as well as the essential information governments, NGOs and industries require in order to formulate programs and policies to satisfy the demands from working children (OIT 1998b).

\(^4\) The relevance of this relatively new institution resides in the fact that other important international stakeholders, such as UNICEF and the World Trade Organization, endorse their support to IPEC, and coordinate regulations and policies with it.

\(^5\) The 1973 Minimum Age Convention, establishes that the minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or circumstances in which is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years.

\(^6\) The 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention establishes that each ratifying member of the convention shall take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor as a matter of urgency (Article 1). The term worst forms of child labor encompasses all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (Article 3).
Currently, 37 countries have already signed the Memorandum of Understanding with IPEC, while another 30 countries are involved in the program in a less formal way.  

On a regional basis, Andean countries signed the Cartagena of Indies Agreement, creating National Committees to coordinate the participation of the different social sectors in the formulation and development of public policies regarding the progressive elimination of child labor. They also agreed in supporting the Regional System of Child Labor Information (SIRTI) created by IPEC to systematize the information and analysis of the operations of the committees, progress of national plans, legislation, statistics and experiences.

As these policy frameworks and policy initiatives on the matter have been blooming, policies apparently unrelated but with a direct impact on child labor have been also undertaken. This is the case of labor standards.

Used in the early 1900’s to promote humane working conditions and to fight child labor, labels once again were introduced, at the end of the century. Conceptually, all the current consumer labeling programs have certain common elements. They all include: a physical label, claims behind the label, the administration of a labeling program, transparency to the public and enforcement (U.S. Department of Labor 1998c).

Promoted by the United States through the Department of Labor as a part of its pursuit for “corporate responsibility”, it aims to impose regulations over specific industries overseas that are reported to staff children for their operations (U.S. Department of Labor 1998d, 153).

Labeling for labor conditions, including child labor, has the potential to allow the consumer to purchase a product without the uncertainty that it may have been produced under unacceptable conditions (U.S. Department of Labor 1998c). Thus, placing a label describing labor conditions on a product allows consumers to penalize or reward the firms’ practices.

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7 Peru is a signer of the MOU, but as of December 2000 was not yet associated with IPEC. Latin American
Critics to this approach question it from various stands ranking from its very foundations to its implementation downsides. About its foundations, critics say that rather than being child-protection driven measures, labeling is just a new version of protectionism, a trade practice that protects powerful nations from developing countries' industries imports. The impact of these measures, however, is at the best uncertain (The Economist 2000, 79):

“Differing labor standards are hardly trade-distorting. (...) It is also argued that child labor in poor countries imposes emotional costs on rich-country consumers who find this offensive, and is thus another cross-border side effect. If so, the rich would do better to send the children aid rather than impose harmful trade restrictions. If exports made by child labor are banned, children often end up unemployed or in unregulated sectors such as prostitution.”

Likewise, on the implementation side, critics raise the question of the complexities that are dragged out from implementing monitoring systems that certify labor standards for labeling. It is indeed common for governments in developing countries to have their inspection services lacking sufficient resources, staff and logistical support to adequately perform the task of monitoring child labor laws.

2.3. Nationwide Institutional Framework

Based on the United Nations Children’s Rights Convention, which Peru ratified in September 1990, the Peruvian Congress passed the Children and Adolescents Code (Decree Law No. 26102), which among other issues, regulates child labor. The Code defined 12 years old as the minimum age to work and created an institution called the Ente Rector, which would focus on the promotion and implementation of educational programs aimed at safeguarding the physical and mental development of the children, as well as in developing policies for working adolescents.

countries associated with IPEC are Colombia, Haiti, Mexico and Uruguay.
Table 4. Peru’s Status in relation to International Agreements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention on the Rights of the Child</th>
<th>Ratified (04-09-90) /1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Convention 182)</td>
<td>Pending for ratification, as of May 24, 2000. /3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/2 International Labor Office. ILOLEX; the ILO’s database on International Labor Standards.
/3 International Labor Office. ILOLEX; the ILO’s database on International Labor Standards.

Nonetheless, by mid-December 2000, the Peruvian Congress has passed a law increasing the minimum working age from 12 to 15. Although this law is still pending Presidential signing, the Congressional approval indicates a positive signal. As a matter of fact, most countries in the Americas have not been sufficiently mobilized to discourage the child labor under the age of 14 and most governments have not effectively addressed the problem through enforcement of child labor laws or policy initiatives (U.S. Department of Labor 1998a, 11).

Furthermore, despite Peru’s Constitution call for 11 years of compulsory schooling (including preprimary, primary, and secondary level education, through the tenth grade), currently (until the new law has Presidential signing) the minimum working age is of 12. Therefore, with children beginning school at six years of age, Peru, along with countries like Guatemala and Tanzania, have a minimum work age that is lower than the age for competing compulsory education. This gap may encourage children who have reached the minimum working age –and not yet finished compulsory schooling- to join the work force, neglecting their studies or dropping out of school altogether.

Along with the weaknesses in the regulatory framework, the policy front side has also been far from effective in fighting child labor. Under coordination of the Ente Rector, by the middle of 1996, and with the sponsorship of the International Labor Organization, a National
Commission to Fight Child Labor was created. This commission was composed of representatives from the Ministries of Labor, Education and Health, the National Police, the National Statistics Institute and the Confederation of Private Business Institutions of Peru (Confiep). One Unicef representative also participated of the meetings. The basic aims of this commission were to gather information about the different activities and programs that each of the sectors was at the moment undertaking and that have an impact on child labor, and to design a comprehensive plan to fight child labor in a coordinated manner. Despite the low commitment from some sectors\(^8\) and the fact that the group met irregularly for about five months, the commission was able to produce a document that broadly synthesized scopes and objectives on policy-making for each sector regarding child labor.

With the creation of the Ministry for Women's Promotion and Human Development (Promudeh) in October 1996, the Ente Rector was absorbed under one of its management areas, and the commission was in practice dissolved. The following year, by Supreme Resolution No. 057-97-PROMUDEH, the Promudeh, created the National Directing Committee on Child Labor that comprised the same sectors its earlier version has had.\(^9\) The committee was installed in October 1997, with the aims to develop the necessary instruments to adopt and implement policies to prevent, eradicate and rehabilitate working children, with special attention given to those laboring in high-risk activities. The lack of resources and the weak political will on the matter, however are preventing this committee from acting more actively on the subject under its scope.

On the political stance, the move of the policy-design of child labor policies from the Ente Rector to the Promudeh represented more a cost in terms of time than a cost in actual

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\(^8\) The high turnover among the representatives of the public sector could be taken as an indicator of the little relevance put on the task. The Ministry of Education alone changed their representative almost every session.
position in the agenda. The Ente Rector was first part of the Ministry of the Presidency -the most powerful Ministry in the social field in Peru, accounting for 22% of the national budget, the second highest proportion among Ministries only behind the Ministry of Economy. However, their weight in policy decisions was far from high. Physically, they did not share the same building than the Ministry, and in fact, they finally moved out to a house where they received the news about their dissolution in the amidst of their installation.

On the other side, Promudeh was a Ministry that enjoyed a strong support from the President and that has been working in a close coordination with him. However, the fact that this institution was not only new but it was created mixing agencies from different former institutions, set the scenario for a slow process of accommodation and internal equilibrium. Besides, being new and created with no little resistance from the opposite parties and analysts, the institution was in need for rapidly demonstrating achievements setting their short-term agenda in terms of visible outcomes. In that context, child labor was probably not the best case to prioritize.

In relation to the constitution of these boards for policy coordination, one of the major absentee in the committee were NGOs involved in the issue. In particular, groups such as Manthoc, an NGO sponsored by Radda Barnen, have led the public opinion on the matter, with their proposals for protecting child labor and with the promotion of the National Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (MNNATS), a sort of child laborers union. Despite their controversial take on the subject, Manthoc mobilized public opinion in 1995 and 1996, when

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9 Both versions had in theory representatives from labor unions. However, they did not participate from the meetings.
they sponsored MNNATS in launching a national convention of child workers to discuss labor issues.\footnote{These events captured media attention, and the conclusions were submitted personally to Keiko Fujimori, First Lady of the Nation.}

Aside from these intergovernmental efforts, individual governmental initiatives have been in place for years with uneven outcomes. For instance, the National Institute for the Family Welfare has been implementing the Street Educators Program for about a decade with the objective of "promoting the integral development of children and adolescents that work or live in the streets."\footnote{From \url{http://www.promudeh.gob.pe/inabif/25.htm}. Available as of April, 2000.} Their scope deals with providing counseling, tutoring and in general support to children to continue with their education.\footnote{One of the most important Inabif interventions has been the Huachipa Brick Fields project, in which they collaborated with other three NGOs for giving economic incentives to families to withdraw their younger children from that activity -some of them between 3-4 years old- and providing labor and vocational training to adolescents.} After the educators identify a working child, they contact families for providing parental guidance and also teachers to monitor the child’s performance at school. In many cases, they ask NGOs for loans so that families can set up microenterprises. The program is time and labor intensive, as it entails earning children's trust and building relationships with families in the community. A total of 5,549 street children and working children have participated in the program in the period 1994-1998. As of March 1998, the program had 156 educators serving 3,854 working children in 12 Peruvian cities.

Likewise, the National Police, through the Division of Children and Adolescents Police, sponsors a similar program called "Colibri" in a few districts of Lima (La Molina, Surco and Cercado), with the additional aims to keep children away from drugs and alcohol use, as well as to prevent and intervene in situations of domestic violence. Other government agencies also deal with related issues, such as the Ministry of Labor, through industry inspections and the
administration of work permissions for minors (U.S. Department of Labor 1998e, 45.), the Ministry of Health, with programs targeted to street and working children to prevent their consumption of illegal substances, and the Ministry of Education (U.S. Department of Labor 1998d, 76).

At the local level, the most important initiative is the implementation of the Municipal Agencies to Protect Children and Adolescents (DEMUNAS), initiated in 1993 with the purpose of creating a service that assisted violations to the Children and Adolescents Code. The program started with six municipalities in Lima and has later expanded to others, as well as some other capitals of departmento. It is expected that in the short run a higher level institutions will be in place to coordinate activities across DEMUNAS, that will also work directly with other institutions at the local levels, such as the police, schools, health centers, judiciary courts, as well as religious organizations, women's organized groups, community associations and NGOs. The presence of these ombudsman offices also represents a key element for further policy development, as they are the only decentralized public institutions that could effectively (in terms of expertise and legitimacy) be mobilized for child labor policy-making.

Finally, from the organized civil society side, the Unitary Workers Federation of Peru (CUT) has been advocating for the eradication of child labor, and has a national plan on the matter, which encompasses programs related to education and training and the strengthening of the institutional network.

Having taken a glance at how the State is organized for fighting child labor and previously at some general characteristics of the problem in Peru, in the next section we will take a closer look at the worst cases in the country, as defined by the Convention 182.

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13 District or provincial municipalities are responsible for authorizing work of street children and domestic servants within their jurisdiction.

14 As of 1999 there were 450 DEMUNAS nationwide and they assist about 100 thousand cases annually.
Section 3. Child Labor and the “Worst Cases” in Peru

Hazardous labor conditions can have devastating effects over children’s development. The consequences from physically painful tasks, such as carrying heavy burdens or jobs that require them to keep a forced body position can cause them permanent physical damage. Furthermore, the younger the child, the more vulnerable they are to the inherent risks from economic exploitation, since they have a longer period of exposure to cumulative risks. For instance, the early exposure to some chemicals, increases the likelihood to get chronic diseases such as lung cancer at the beginning of the adult age. It is also more likely in the case of younger children to be less aware of the dangers they are exposed to.

In the case of Peru, children participate in a number of hazardous occupations, varying from region to region.

The following map synthesizes the most relevant regions hosting “worst cases” in Peru.
In the next paragraphs we will describe the situation of critical economic sectors in Peru, where “worst cases” can be found.\footnote{For each subsection, unless otherwise noted, the source is OIT, 1998b.}

### 3.1. Mining.

In communities in south-central Peru, children help their families in informal gold mining operations. They are at risk of contact with powder, gases, hazardous vapors, very humid environments, extreme temperatures, work under uncomfortable body positions and rock sliding. These risks increase their likelihood for respiratory diseases (lung fibrosis, asbestosis and emphysemas), osteo-muscular damage, bone-breaking and even death.

Most work as non-remunerated family workers, helping their parents with mining and household chores. They perform hard physical labor for many hours a day and walk long distances carrying heavy loads. Children who work in the mine shafts risk cave-ins and injuries from working with picks and other tools in the narrow shafts. Children who help to transform gold using a quimbalete often come into direct contact with mercury. Studies done by NGOs at several of these mines found high levels of mercury in the children’s body systems. Psychological examinations found that 60 percent of children and 78 percent of adolescents tested below normal levels for intellectual performance. Likewise, mining also attracts a great number of working children, particularly for stone quarrying and gold mining, where children often come into direct contact with mercury (U.S. Department of Labor 1998d, 28.).

A typical example is that of traditional mining in Mollehuaca. Mollehuaca, a gold mining area in Peru is located in the south of the country. The region produces gold worth about $50 million every year. Nonetheless, only 3% of the families have running water, sewerage, garbage collection or electricity, and health services are available only twice a week. Furthermore, during the last decade, these communities have suffered from different disasters: most of existing formal
mining companies at the beginning of the nineties were expelled by action of terrorist movements; in 1996 an earthquake destroyed 85 per cent of their homes; and recently floods caused by the El Niño phenomenon swept away buildings and damaged water supplies.

In 1998 Mollehuaca had a population of 1,154, with 104 children between 6 and 17, working in mining. Most of them worked payless for their parents, upon a culturally accepted norm that they must help to pay for their clothes and school needs. While boys over 16 do not go to school, children between 6-15 attend school during weekdays and work with their families after school and during the weekends. An intellectual capacity evaluation showed that out of 36 children aged 7-12 years of age evaluated, 66 per cent had an intellectual capacity below the average for their age. In children aged 13-17, the proportion was 77 per cent.

Children working underground have 12-hour shifts for one or two weeks at a time, eating and sleeping at the mine entrance. Specific occupations they perform are quimbaletero (in charge of stone mills taking shifts for up to 15 hours a day balancing on a piece of wood atop a big boulder, rocking it to grind the ore), ranchero (younger kids who take food to the miners, carrying it through a hill that requires up to seven hours walk) and burreros (who drive donkeys to the mine entrance, load the minerals onto them and drive the loaded donkeys down again).

Additionally those above mentioned, health of the child workers is also highly impacted by their contact with the mercury, either when they mix it with the ore and water, when they remove the amalgam from the mill, or if they are present when the amalgam is burnt to purify the gold, liberating mercury vapor.

Since 1998, IPEC is implementing two projects of technical assistance in a couple of mining enclaves, targeting on about a thousand children. IPEC’s projects aim to withdraw children from this type of hazardous work, accounting on the active participation of community organizations, teachers, and the beneficiaries themselves. The projects offer children educational,
sanitary and other relief services. Likewise, their parents have received training for developing alternative income-generating activities.

### 3.2. Brick-kilning

In Huachipa, in the outskirts of Lima, children, as young as three and four years old toil turning over row after row bricks that are laid in the sun to ensure even drying (U.S. Department of Labor 1998e), along with their families. Most are recent migrants from the provinces.

Traditionally, children’s participation depends on their age. Three to five year olds do the “canteo”, which consists in turning over the bricks laying on the floor while they are drying under the sun. Five to seven year-old children put the bricks in piles to facilitate their transportation. Six to seven year-old kids carry fine sand to assist adult workers in the brick preparation. Finally, children older than eight years of age, may even perform themselves all the stages in brick preparation in the same way adults do (ADEVI, 21).

The brick preparation has many potential and actual physical dangers: contact with silicatos, tin and carbonate monoxide, excessive carrying of heavy burdens, backbone pain, burns, drastic temperature changes, exposure to dust, water and mud to hands and feet (ADEVI, 22).

To alleviate this situation, the Huachipa brick-fields project has been implemented by the Street Educators Program, identifying almost a thousand children working in the area. Street Educators have placed adolescent brick makers in vocational training courses and have provided mentoring and tutoring for younger children. The Huachipa Program has served 300 children ages six to 13 years, with the outcome of helping one hundred children stopped working, while the 200 remaining children reduced their hours of work from 40 to 15 hours a week (U.S. Department of Labor 1998b).
3.3. Agriculture

It is common to idealize agrarian child labor, considering it as a natural part of their socialization process. However, a study made in 1992 in three Cuzco communities however, found that although working is a natural duty for children, they were the last to eat at home and sometimes they only had the leftovers from the adults' meals (Verdera 1995, 71). Additionally, children frequently miss classes during the school year to harvest crops such as coffee, cotton, rice, fruit, and asparagus (U.S. Department of Labor 1998d: 164).

Agrarian work for children include to work with heavy machinery, animals, and agrochemical products; to recollect harvest and to carry agricultural products. These activities lead to a number of risks, namely the use of unsafe heavy machinery, dangerous substances (insecticides, herbicides), heavy burden to carry, extreme temperature, which can end up causing poisoning (chronic and acute) by chemical agents, cuts and body injuries, and other diseases to the working children.

A recent journalistic report showed that in the Apurimac valley (Ayacucho; southern Peruvian sierra), around three thousand children work gardening coca fields. They earn between three and ten soles daily (around $0.87 and $2.90). These coca fields are owned by drug traffickers, who also use children in the coca paste. Since drug traffickers are currently paying about $1.74 per kilogram of coca leaf (the price in 1998 reportedly fell down to $0.13 per kilo) adult peasants are using their children to reach maximize profits. It is also estimated that about 70% of these children are orphans whose parents died as a consequence of terrorism (Diario Ojo 2000, 12-13).
3.4. Fishing

In northern Peru, children spend long workdays submerged in the sea, extracting shrimp larvae for cultivation and export (U.S. Department of Labor 1998e). In Lima and Chimbote, children work extracting the nails' caparisons. The operation damages the children's articulations; it also corrodes their nails as it expels some strong acid fluids.

Child fishers are in danger of exposure to high atmosphere pressure, attacks from carnivore and poison fish and from the anti-hygienic conditions they perform their tasks. These can lead to ear problems, injuries, gastrointestinal diseases and other contagious illnesses.

3.5. Fireworks industry

Children, mostly boys, insert fuses into firecrackers and perform other related tasks. There is a permanent state of danger as the number of accidental explosions is high due to the precarious conditions those firms operate. Children risk burns, amputations, and even death, due to the likelihood of fire, explosions and the leaking of dangerous chemical substances. On-the-job exposure to gunpowder leads to respiratory illness and eye irritations that cause itching, tearing and burning.

3.6. Marketplace workers and garbage sorting

In Lima, at the Mesa Redonda marketplace, children 6 to 14 years old work collecting cardboard pieces to sell them to merchants. They are exposed, not only to contagious diseases, but also to robberies and sexual harassment, as these activities are performed at dawn (Instituto Apoyo 1996: 210). Likewise, an estimated 800 children and adolescents work in Lima on weekends and holidays helping their parents pick through and sell trash after pigs have eaten the
edible garbage. They reportedly earn 50 cents per bag of garbage –typically five soles (US$ 1.42) a day.

These kids are at risks of cuts by glass and metals, contact with dangerous substances, inhalation of fetid odors from rotten materials, infections from insects and the temptation to eat leftovers.

In marketplaces too, children perform basically three other types of jobs: “cutreros”, who are five to 14 year-olds who steal products to large-scale vendors and give them to their parents to sell;16 “juntadores”, which are mainly five to 16 year old girls who walk around the farmers´ markets picking up fruits and vegetables left on the floor or thrown away by the vendors; and barrow-keepers, who are mainly male migrant adolescents working daily for about 5 to 12 hours, seven days a week (Parroquia “La Vírgen de Nazaret”, 8). Depending on the activity they deliver, these children are exposed to night shifts, sexual harassment, diseases (scabies, lung-related disorders, hernia and tuberculosis), violence and car accidents (Parroquia “La Vírgen de Nazaret”, 18).

3.7. Domestic workers

In Peru, roughly 80 percent of child domestic workers are girls, many working under the guise of protective, family-like arrangements. In reality, however, they are often assigned all the household chores and denied the opportunity to attend school. They work long hours, often for no compensation other than meals, lodging, and clothing, and are maintained in dependent relationships. These children are vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse by family members.

16 Oddly enough, performing this activity over 15 years old does lead to social rejection and punishment.
Section 4. The Policy Perspective

In the Mines of Santa Filomena, there is a program in place led by IPEC and the NGO CooperAccion. They work in coordination with the Mining Workers Society SOTRAMI and the Management Committee for Development of Santa Filomena, which encompasses different local institutions, such as the Mothers Club, municipal authorities and the school’s parent board. Their program includes the expected components something of this kind must address: health, education, awareness, sensibilization, training, technological change, self-esteem and income-generation activities for parents. The program seems to have reached their objectives making it a successful story.

However, Santa Filomena hosts only a little more than a thousand people. Thus, the magnitude of resources, the complexity of the problem and the intensity of labor required for implementing this program make it also hard to replicate. Moreover, as these mines extract gold for export, any restrictions for trade that could be imposed if labeling practices are put in this industry, could cut the already low income these mining workers earn.

Acknowledging that there is no single policy for preventing the development of conditions that lead to child labor, it is also true that the components needed to reach a successful story are not unknown. The issue, then, is to have a clear goal, a leading agency and to mobilize the resources needed.

It is undeniable that under some circumstances, children’s economic contribution to their families’ income is required for survival. But, even in such cases, having children working is not the ideal scenario for their healthy development. In fact, when economic conditions are harsher, the likelihood of having child workers under more hazardous circumstances increases.

In the case of Peru and despite the advances towards modernization of the country, it is still considered one of the poorest South American countries, and the economic and social
conditions have not been improving over the last decade. Due to the economic reforms implemented during the nineties, the labor market has become more volatile to external and internal impacts. This is reflected in the national underemployment rates that account for half of the economically active population. Under such context, the likelihood of having children participating in the labor market or supporting household activities, diverting time from school or entertainment, is high. The processes of urbanization and the expansion of the education system have made education opportunities more available to individuals, who in return, are also placing more value to education. Thus, being child labor in Peru more of a consequence from poverty than a culturally driven outcome, it would be expected that, as Ray suggests income improvements would help to reduce child labor. Then, proposals for banning child labor in the country would not only be rhetorical but would, in practice, worsen conditions for those the proposal aims to better. Child labor is a way to survive poverty, thus the first goal should be to fight poverty not to fight child labor.

However, this is not easy. The characteristics of child labor divert from one region to other, from one activity to other, and even from one specific time to other. Resources are scarce and misused, as the few existing initiatives for fighting child labor lack coordination and a leading goal. Unlike other fields where many institutions overlap in functions and regional scopes, in the case of child labor, despite some overlapping in functions, the initiatives are so scattered and narrowly localized that the overlapping effects are irrelevant.

The lack of attention the issue calls inside Peru contrasts with the world’s context. The institutionalization of a new specialized convention (182) and the promotion of policy initiatives through IPEC, are two important facts that show the interest the issue is gathering around the world. However, not all those policies are narrowly focused on child labor. Indeed, an initiative such as labeling constitutes more a trade policy than how social policies often look like. As a
matter of fact, it is potentially dangerous to impose labor standards to countries that are not prepared for those, as the situation of the weaker layers of society could worsen rather than improve. As we saw in the case of mining microenterprises, their level of activity could sharply shrink and their living conditions deteriorate if a labeling program is implemented in that industry without any assistance provided.

The mechanisms for tackling child labor, then, are not single-dimensional. The introduction of labor standards and labeling practices, also introduces with them the need for taking into account new elements to the issue. It is, now, relevant to take special attention to the condition of tradable or non-tradable the economic sector we are dealing with belongs to when designing policy.

Thus, how to make policy in this constantly complicated issue? In the case of Peru the policy developments are still incipient. The State needs to set their priorities, choose a leading agency, identify feasible objectives, key stakeholders, and conciliate policies on different areas in a way that a long-run fight to child labor is not bear over the shoulders of a couple of agencies working in isolation with weak decision power.

First, there must be a clear decision from the State to intervene in the matter. On this respect, IPEC states, "concerted action against the worst forms of child labor at the national levels has been feasible where there has been strong political will (ILO-IPEC 1997, 24)." This decision for state intervention should be consistent and internalized across agencies. Once the decision to intervene is set, there must be a grounded agreement that supports the intervention. A good concept to recall is suggested by Basu (1998, 22):

"For a child, to work is not the worst thing that can happen. So when we stop child labor, there must be a reason to believe that this will not make the children worse off, for instance, by causing starvation or bodily harm. The justification of these interventions depends on whether we believe that the state is more concerned about the well-being of children than are parents of the children."
Secondly, it is required to state a mission for the intervention. In the Peruvian case, the priority must be placed on children working under hazardous conditions. No poverty level can justify children exposing themselves to high-risk activities.

In third place, it is needed to have a leading agency invested with legitimacy in the field and authority to coordinate different initiatives. The creation of a new institution could do more harm than alleviate the current situation. Then, two parallel measures should be taken: in first place, to create a sort of information network upon the existing local, regional and national institutions; and second, create a board for policy coordination.

Due to the regional differences, in Peru such agency has to have a deep level of decentralization already in place to deal with the nuances of the specific cases. Currently, there is not such agency, but a good proxy are the local Demunas. As they are local ombudsmen responsible for children and adolescents issues, they would need to become a strong network to exchange information, build upon their diverse expertise and reach consistency across regions. As there are actually very few incentives for municipalities to coordinate, another decentralized office can assist in the institutionalization of the network. In Peru, the second trustworthiest institution is the Defensor del Pueblo, a sort of national ombudsman with decentralized offices in the capitals of departamento around the country. Their well-grounded legitimacy around the country, can serve to bridge the gap across municipal Demunas. Then, a mixture of Demunas which assist in localities and the departmental offices of the Defensor del Pueblo in the capitals of departamento could become the institutional infrastructure required to build a solid policy network on child labor issues.

However, the Defensor del Pueblo must not become an implementing agency or decide policy. That is not its area of expertise. The role of the Defensor del Pueblo and the Demunas must be to serve as a channel of communication from localities to the central decision-making.
As they are closer to the field, they must focus on another key element for policy: data gathering. As the Peruvian case suggests, the problem is not homogeneous across the nation. However, these differences have not been systematized and rely heavily in anecdotal references. To undertake the initiative of surveying nationwide the cases of child labor looks like an ambitious and costly project, but it constitutes a necessary one to gather enough information on the situation that would enhance policy targeting. It is important to mention that costs on gathering information could be greatly reduced by identifying different actors involved in policies on the subject and involving them in the process.

The responsibility for sector policies must remain as it currently is, with emphasis in three ministries that must enhance their role. First, the Ministry of Education, must continue the reform of the system so as to make education more attractive to children. This focus on quality must encompass physical conditions (infrastructure), as well as contents -suitable and flexible according to local needs-. On this respect, I am not in favor to reducing school hours for working children. That would damage the quality of their learning experience and affect their potential productivity. Second, the Ministry of Labor should improve its registry of young workers, coordinate vocational and labor training programs with the Ministry of Education, as well as enhancing its inspection systems, particularly for the case of worst forms of child labor. And third, the ministry of the interior, through the national police must move towards a more efficient law enforcement action, identifying promotors of hazardous labor activities, including bounded labor, gathering the attention of the media and having as a goal to raise awareness on these serious violations of human rights.

It is also important to institutionalize a coordination board for policy design and implementation. Indeed, the initiatives for organizing across-the-board planning committees are valuable, but two conditions not yet addressed have to be also accounted for. First, it should
come with a higher level of commitment from the parties, something that can be accomplished by either appointing key top-level officials to be involved in the subject, and/or ensuring resources (financial, technical assistance) from the international agencies engaged in the process.

And second, those initiatives must broaden the scope of the committee to account for the participation of civil society, NGOs and the ombudsmen officials, which can improve the dynamic of the process and make it sustainable.

On the international level, special attention shall be placed on the international developments respect to child labor. The role institutions like IPEC could play in raising international awareness about the issue, is important and should be supported by the government. However, it is necessary to be aware of the consequences that international agreements may pose over the internal context. In particular, labor standards must be carefully revised before being endorsed, especially for cases that could have a significant economic impact. In those cases, agreements must be coupled with international technical and financial assistance for effective compliance.

Finally, to succeed in the fight against child labor, the elements still missing in the picture: political will, accurate data gathering and policy coordination, must be institutionalized through a solid relation between civil society and the State. Strengthening this relation at the local, regional and national stages guarantees the sustainability this initiative requires.
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