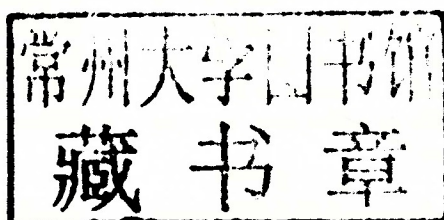


KNOWLEDGE MATERIALS

## Children's work in the livestock sector: Herding and beyond

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The report draws on available information on child labour in the livestock sector, retrieved through a literature search and the consultation of a wide range of organizations and livestock and child labour experts. It was prepared by Hanna Gooren, FAO intern, under the supervision of Bernd Seiffert and Jacqueline Demeranville at FAO. The contributions provided by FAO Representations in Bolivia, Chad, Namibia, Paraguay and Zambia are gratefully acknowledged, as are the comments and information provided by FAO colleagues and specialists outside FAO with expertise in livestock. The valuable contributions by Paola Termine and Halshka Graczyk at the International Labour Organization (ILO) are also gratefully acknowledged. Last but not least, a word of thanks to the members of the Decent Rural Employment Team within FAO's Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division for all their valuable contributions.

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Cover photograph courtesy of Ado Youssouf (FAO).



## Executive summary

Agriculture is by far the largest sector where child labour is found and one of the most dangerous in terms of fatalities, accidents and occupational diseases. Almost 60 percent of girls and boys (aged 5–17 years) in hazardous work are found in agriculture, historically and traditionally an under-regulated sector and one in which regulation enforcement is also difficult in many countries. Livestock forms a considerable subsector within agriculture, with global demand for animal products rising. The livestock sector is one of the fastest growing segments of the agricultural economy and contributes 40 percent of the global value of agricultural output, according to the FAO State of Food and Agriculture report (SOFA, 2009). Furthermore, livestock represents at least a partial source of income and food security for 70 percent of the world's 880 million rural poor who live on less than USD 1.00 a day (Neely *et al.*, 2009). Within rural environments, livestock keeping has historical, cultural and traditional roots, and the involvement of children is very common.

Age-appropriate tasks that do not expose children to conditions that are likely to cause them harm, that do not have negative health or development consequences and do not interfere with a child's compulsory schooling and leisure time can be a normal part of growing up. Such acceptable work can teach a child certain skills and may have inherent social, educational and cultural value. However, much of the work children do in the livestock sector can be categorized as child labour: it is likely to be hazardous, to interfere with a child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This definition is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Conventions No. 182 (ILO, 1999) on the worst forms of child labour (including *hazardous* work) and No. 138 (ILO, 1973) on the minimum age for admission to employment and work. A child is any person under the age of eighteen.

Poverty remains one of the major causes and consequences of child labour. Many children work for immediate household survival. Other major causes of child labour are those related to education, including lack of access to schools and perceived lack of benefits of education. Belief systems about the value of children working and of formal education, as well as a lack of knowledge about the possible harm inherent in child labour and missing school, are potential causes of child labour. Demand for child labour can stem from labour market forces and conditions, the need to pay off debt and a preference for children to perform specific activities. Child labour, through its negative effects on health and education, also contributes to creating or perpetuating situations of poverty.

Addressing child labour in agriculture is difficult due to the specificities of the sector. These include the fact that much of child labour in this sector takes place as unpaid family labour without formal contracts, the continuity that exists between the household and workplace and the tradition of children's participation in agricultural activities. In addition, agriculture and family undertakings have limited coverage in national labour legislation and there is often a low capacity of labour inspectors to cover remote rural areas.

This explorative desk study aims to give an overview of available data on child labour in the livestock sector and indicate potential avenues for action. By contributing to the knowledge base on this topic, FAO aims to provide a basis for further research and discussion on this topic in order to come to a common understanding of what efforts need to be prioritized and to encourage governments and other stakeholders to address this issue. Helping children to realize their rights and the reduction of poverty and food insecurity should be complementary goals. This study should contribute to reflection by agricultural, labour and other stakeholders on how to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the sociocultural issues related to children working with livestock, especially those concerning child herding activities within (nomadic) pastoralist communities.

There is currently little concrete information on child labour in the livestock sector; this has proved a limitation to this study. This was the case both in the literature and with the experts consulted. The lack of knowledge was a constraint to this study but at the same time confirms a strong need for further field research and more age- and sex-disaggregated data collection on child labour in the livestock sector.

The types of child labour in the livestock sector identified in the literature are work activities in poultry, animal traction, animal slaughter and work related to animal husbandry, but mainly general animal care and herding. The United States Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor (USDOL, 2011) demonstrates that cattle products are among the goods commonly produced with child or forced labour. While the literature analysed in this study focuses primarily on children herding and caring for livestock (often cattle), this is a reflection of the current scarcity of information on other types of involvement of children in the sector, rather than an indication that child labour is only an issue in herding.

Both girls and boys are involved in livestock activities. In younger age groups, there appears to be little difference in the types of activities boys and girls undertake. As age increases, work activities are often, but not always, differentiated along gender lines. In the literature encountered, boys were generally more involved with herding activities than girls. Both girls and boys were involved in general livestock care, though there were sometimes gender divisions for specific tasks. In general, girls were more involved with household chores than boys, sometimes in addition to their livestock-related work activities (i.e. a double burden). In addition to competing demands for time from work, school and household chores, girls sometimes also face additional gender-based barriers to education.

A number of country-specific case studies focused on child labour in herding. From the literature, it appears that herding can start at a young age, anywhere between 5 and 7 years. The working conditions of children herding livestock are very context specific and vary greatly. Where some children might herd a few hours a week and still go to school, others might herd for days on end, sometimes far from the home, and with no possibility for schooling. Furthermore, there is variation in the conditions under which children work (e.g. climate, levels of isolation and loneliness, physical and mental burden, dangerous environments).

The conditions of employment or working contracts are not uniform. Children typically herd either for an employer or (unpaid) for their own household or relatives. If contracts do exist, they are usually verbal agreements. Children who work for others may be paid in cash or kind. Child herders working outside the household are vulnerable to exploitation by employers and to bonded or forced labour due to indebtedness (also that of parents under systems of intergenerational bonded labour). Of particular concern is the fact that some children are trafficked within and outside country borders for (forced) herding activities. This study urges a careful assessment of children herding livestock, especially within (nomadic) pastoralist communities where children have commonly been actively involved in livestock responsibilities from an early age. It also recommends a more general assessment of children involved in all subsectors of livestock work.

In households restricted by lack of financial resources, individual needs or rights are often subordinate to the direct needs of the household. When introducing internationally defined norms, it is important to acknowledge the existence of cultural norms, traditions and aspirations. Taking this into account, agricultural and labour stakeholders can contribute to addressing child labour in the livestock sector by taking the physical and mental health of children as a point of departure, recognizing that children have specific characteristics and needs when it comes to their physical, cognitive, behavioural and emotional development. It is essential to ascertain what the communities themselves consider important, while making them aware that herding and other livestock-related activities can be harmful to a child's development, and to then work together to find where a balance can be created between safe work activities and children's education. There are strong signals that pastoralist communities recognize the importance of education for their children and very much appreciate sending their children to school *if* the education is of a good level and relevant to the pastoral way of life, and especially if schooling can be combined with child work in the herd. The possibility of schooling leading to economic diversification of the pastoral livelihood appeals to many of these communities.

In many situations, the nature of the work of children in the livestock sector makes it difficult for children to attend formal school, or the hazards and conditions involved make it a worst form of child labour. This is both a violation of human rights and an impediment to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and food security. Children working in the livestock sector, depending on their exact duties, are at risk of disrupted physical, mental, moral and social development. Working closely with livestock carries inherent risks of animal-related diseases, especially in situations without clear boundaries between working and living conditions; of health problems caused by working long hours in extreme weather conditions, poor sanitation and hygiene, using chemical products (e.g. disinfectants to treat animals) and inhaling (livestock) dust; as well as psychological stress resulting from fear of punishment from employers, fear of cattle raiders or a feeling of responsibility for the family capital. In addition, there are direct risks of injury when handling animals and sharp tools used in livestock work activities. Risks include being bitten (also by wild animals and insects), gored, kicked, stamped on; being abused by employers; and musculoskeletal disorders. Some children working in the livestock sector are also in situations of bonded or forced labour, or have been trafficked.

## Recommendations

In order to prevent and eliminate child labour in the livestock sector, this study provides stakeholder-specific recommendations, building on previous work on child labour in agriculture. While not all specific to the livestock sector, they are undoubtedly *applicable* to the sector and can therefore lead to positive change with respect to child labour in the livestock sector.

**Research institutes and academia** (also within international organizations) can contribute to improving the understanding of the nature, scope and risks of children working in the livestock sector, in order to orient action. This will require more extensive and participatory research on child labour within the livestock sector, looking in depth at the incidence, causes, contributing factors, consequences, working conditions, contractual agreements, role of education and age and gender aspects of the different types of work within the sector. Research should also include precise, age- and gender-sensitive risk assessments in order to identify and define hazards and risks for children working with livestock so that national lists of hazardous work for children can be further defined. There is also an immediate need to identify, examine and further develop best practices for combating child labour in the livestock sector.

**National governments** are important stakeholders responsible for dealing with child labour issues at the national level, creating and enforcing national legislation to contribute to child labour elimination, and providing policies and infrastructure that address the root causes. Such efforts require close collaboration with different actors (within government, as well as producers', workers' and employers' organizations, development partners, researchers, and international labour and agriculture organizations) and should ideally include participation of those directly concerned: children, parents, communities and teachers. Governments should: strengthen the legal and political framework for the reduction of child labour in the livestock sector; create an enabling environment for the sustainable reduction of child labour; promote participation; improve access and incentives for education; and support direct action to stop the worst forms of child labour.

**Producers', employers' and workers' organizations** have an important role to play in awareness raising and campaigning against child labour in the livestock sector. Efforts aimed at corporate social responsibility and good practice standards should be enhanced. These organizations should support data collection and the implementation of risk assessments to identify children in hazardous work in the livestock sector and participate in the revision and establishment of national hazardous work lists for children. They should develop their capacity to address child labour and collaborate with respective government and development partners to find practical solutions to prevent child labour situations arising in the livestock sector. Teachers' unions can support the provision of quality education tailored to livestock-raising communities, monitor attendance, and act upon child labour situations, raising awareness amongst families and working actively to keep potential school dropouts in school. Pastoralist networks and organizations should participate in research on child labour issues within the livestock sector and collaborate with government bodies to find solutions specifically adapted to the pastoral way of life, including pastoralist-smart education systems. They can help initiate dialogue at pastoralist community level about child labour, education and decent working conditions, as well as assist communities in preventing and eliminating situations of child labour.

**Rural communities, parents and children** are direct stakeholders with considerable influence in the prevention and reduction of child labour in the livestock sector, because it is here that decisions for children to work or go to school (or both) are made. Dialogue should be initiated at community and household levels by these actors: to raise awareness of child labour in livestock activities and of the importance of education; and to initiate action. Actors within the local community should establish and participate in community child labour monitoring systems, and establish work contracts and standards for safety and health, working hours, holidays and remuneration. These stakeholders should also participate in research on child labour in the



livestock sector (including definition of research areas). Both children working with livestock and the local communities can supply important information on the actual risks and hazards they face in their work. They can also provide information on what types of work activities with livestock are perceived to be acceptable for children and under what conditions. Children can also provide information regarding their aspirations and what opportunities exist to change child labour situations.

**Companies and multinational enterprises involved in the livestock industry** can work with governments and other stakeholders to ensure that children are not engaged in child labour in their supply chains, and that when child labour is found, children and families are supported to engage in alternative solutions. Companies can build on the guidance in the UN Global Compact strategies (UN Global Compact Principle Five) for businesses and work with national stakeholders to further develop strategies for implementation. According to the Compact strategies, enterprises' responsibilities include awareness of child labour situations in the livestock sector; adherence to minimum age provisions of (inter)national labour laws and regulations; exercising influence on subcontractors, suppliers and other business affiliates to reduce child labour; and implementation of mechanisms to detect child labour. Multinational enterprises should work together to develop an industry-wide approach to address the issue. In the community of operation, they should also support and help design educational/vocational training, counselling programmes for working children and skills training for parents of working children.

**Development partners** or international and local non-governmental organizations, as well as (inter) national organizations with a focus on development issues, have a role to play in ensuring that child labour issues with regard to livestock are mainstreamed into development programmes and projects. They can help support initiatives that aim to improve school attendance within rural areas and that monitor for child labour situations. Development partners are also important when it comes to supporting governments to design and implement particular policies and actions with regard to child labour and within general poverty-alleviation strategies. In addition, they should support the knowledge base through data on child labour disaggregated by agricultural subsectors, research on child labour in the livestock sector, and risk assessments that will contribute to better covering the livestock sector in defining countries' lists of hazardous work for children. These stakeholders should also initiate and support awareness-raising and campaigning on education and child labour, producing specific sensitization material.

**FAO** should continue raising awareness on child labour in the livestock sector in FAO member countries, maintain dialogue on this subject within FAO, and promote actions in areas where FAO has a specific mandate and comparative advantage. It should also contribute to building stakeholders' capacity to mainstream child labour in livestock into agricultural and rural development policies, programmes, projects and activities. FAO could support the development and implementation of school curricula relevant to the rural and agricultural context and to pastoralist societies, and create tools to help reduce child labour in the livestock sector and promote decent rural employment. FAO should also help reduce the knowledge gap in child labour in the livestock sector by supporting research initiatives on the issue (especially those on the worst forms of child labour in livestock and on the exact hazards and risks related to particular work activities). Finally, FAO could work with partners to promote existing good practices such as integrated area-based approaches to child labour prevention in livestock-holding communities. FAO should also expand collaboration within established structures (e.g. with the ILO and the IPCCLA) and seek new collaborations to address child labour in the livestock sector.

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## **Children's work in the livestock sector: Herding and beyond**

Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division  
Economic and Social Development Department



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