

APSA Position Paper on Abolishing Child Labor in the Seed Industry

Background

Child labor has been known to occur in the seed industry, especially in developing countries. Globally, child labor has declined by one third since the year 2000, from 246 million to 168 million children in the workforce. However, the Asia Pacific region still has the largest percentage of child laborers (close to 78 million or 9.3% of child population)¹ and the seed sector in particular has been singled out in some incidents.

The Asia and Pacific Seed Association (APSA) mission is to pursue “Sustainable agriculture through the production and trade of quality seeds for the world” which embraces all people in the seed industry including farmers, workers and their families.

APSA’s position on child labor

APSA recognizes that child labor is a human rights issue and the association wishes to support its members to actively engage in eliminating child labor from seed industry. APSA also acknowledges the prevalence of child labor in seed and allied industries despite being banned in most countries. Economic factors, cultural norms, inadequate agricultural technology seasonality, migration of people and lack of educational opportunities are the foremost reasons why this activity is still occurring in this region. APSA believes every child has a right to a happy childhood, healthcare, education and protection from exploitation. APSA also underlines and takes into account the position of the International Labor Organization concerning the specificities of child labor in agriculture, as the following “in the context of family farming, some participation of children in non-hazardous activities can be positive as it contributes to the inter-generational transfer of skills and children’s food security. It is important to distinguish between light duties that do no harm to the child and child labor, which is work that interferes with compulsory schooling and damages health and personal development, based on hours and conditions of work, child’s age, activities performed and hazards involved”².

This association believes that child labor hinders the acquisition of higher education, perpetuating the cycle of poverty among children and the community as a whole, while at the same time, depriving legitimate wage earners of work.

APSA does not tolerate child labor. However, this organization is sensitive to local customs and conditions, and the association believes that the implementation and enforcement of its no-child-labor policy can most effectively be realized through the actions of its members.

¹ *Marking progress against child labour - Global estimates and trends 2000-2012*, (ILO-IPEC, 2013)

² <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>

Definition of child labor³

APSA adheres to the International Labor Organization (ILO) convention on child labor as “work that children should not be doing because they are too young to work or – if they are old enough to work – because it is dangerous or otherwise unsuitable for them”

Not all work done by children should be classified as labor targeted for elimination. The participation of children or adolescents in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their education is generally regarded as positive.

APSA’s role in preventing child labor

APSA seeks to prevent, remedy and mitigate, with the eventual aim of totally eradicating, child labor in the Asian seed industry.

APSA’s role is to engage its members in raising the consciousness of the local community through families, employers and legislators and to put forth a sustainable economic and political argument against child labor.

APSA recognizes that there is a need to identify and understand the constraints that perpetuates child labor. Poverty, labor shortages, small holdings with limited resources, distance to educational facilities and local customs all affect the number of children in the workforce in this region. APSA hopes to address these issues by influencing national policy makers, legislators and social responsibility awareness groups through joint efforts with international, national and local stakeholders from the political, public and private sector.

Recommendations to members

APSA shall work with its members in finding solutions and sustainable alternatives to child labor by devising mechanisms that will offer small growers better economic viability without resorting to child labor. APSA also wishes to encourage its members to help by providing children with opportunities to better themselves. It will work towards establishing accountability for the use of child labor and encourage its member companies to contribute to capacity building and improving the education opportunities of children in deprived agricultural/rural communities.

APSA encourages its members to take further measures to discourage the employment of child labor, which may include:

- Creating awareness in the farming community on the hazards of child labor through education, advertising and publicizing the serious repercussions of employing children
- Implementation and enforcement of a no-child-labor policy in seed production.
- Contractual agreements with individual suppliers and supply chains containing a no child labor clause

³ ILO Convention <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/ILOconventionsonchildlabour/lang--en/index.htm>

- Enforcement of sanctions inside and outside of the organization.
- Training staff in seed production and setting up of internal audit systems supported by external audits as seen fit
- Building a framework to evaluate hazardous work in the seed sector
- Having a special consideration for young women/female children and the opportunities they may be denied due to gender.
- Building manageable systems for Prevention, Monitoring, Corrective Action and Systematic Reporting.
- Involving company senior management in the reporting line and responsibility.
- Provide transparent external communication and publish clearly the improvements made and the current challenges in a spirit of a continuous improving cycle
- Collaboration and joint efforts, sharing experience and best practices among members

Supporting initiatives to contribute to the elimination of child labor.

APSA recognizes that a multi-stakeholder approach, cooperating with both public and private sectors in the effort to eliminate child labor in the seed industry would be most effective.

While the implementation of effective mechanisms in monitoring and control by the member companies is a significant contribution to eradicating child labor, similar actions by other groups outside of the influence of the member companies are necessary to achieve a long-term solution to the issue.

APSA supports its members by forming working groups to assist in:

- Building awareness and responsibility among farmers, local government officials, schools and the community on the impact of child labor.
- Sharing of best practices by engaging internal and external stakeholders.
- Initiating collaboration and joint projects.
- Develop and support temporary workplace internship and apprenticeship education programs

APSA intends to support its members by providing a practical “Child Labor Prevention Guideline” that could be followed by all industry stakeholders. This guideline will be made available on the APSA web site in due course.