By addressing poverty we are addressing forced and child labour. Discuss.

This topic explores the relationship between ‘poverty’ and ‘forced and child labour’. ‘Poverty’ is often cited as one of the root causes of forced and child labour. Can forced and child labour only be addressed when we address poverty? Is the incidence of forced and child labour always a consequence of poverty? Are there other important factors at play that must also be considered?

Preparing your position

In preparing for your debate or discussion, consider the following questions:

1. What is meant by ‘poverty’?
2. How can poverty increase a person’s vulnerability to forced and child labour?
3. What other issues increase a person’s vulnerability to forced or child labour?
4. Can these be tackled by addressing poverty?
5. Can forced or child labour happen to someone who is not poor? Think of some examples.
6. Have a look at some case studies of forced or child labour. Was poverty the root cause of forced or child labour in all these situations? What other factors, if any, are also at play?

Links between poverty and forced and child labour

Addressing poverty

If a person’s income is less than the amount they require to fulfil their basic needs, this person is often said to be living in poverty. The World Bank considers anyone who earns below $1.25 a day to be living in poverty.

However, poverty involves more than just a lack of income. Many factors are indicators of whether a person or family lives in poverty. The United Nations defines poverty as:

“...a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness, exclusion of individuals, households and

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communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.”

As poverty has many characteristics and causes, a variety of strategies have been adopted to address it. Providing overseas aid, in particular, has been a widely adopted approach by both international governments and civil society. Methods of addressing poverty include projects aimed at improving access to education and health services, eliminating discrimination and exploitation, increasing incomes of the poor by providing low interest loans (micro finance), and improving water and sanitation.

Addressing poverty and ensuring families have fair wages and opportunities, can reduce the risk of vulnerable people being forced into exploitative situations through a lack of alternative choices. For example, if parents have a decent wage and living conditions they will not need to send their children out to work. Increasing access to education and working with communities to keep children in school is important in equipping children with the life skills required to help them secure work in the future and protect them from exploitation.

Some approaches to tackling poverty can also contribute to an increased awareness of rights. It can also assist in decreasing discrimination, as well as empowering people to address issues faced by their communities.

**Addressing forced and child labour**

Forced labour is when a person is forced or threatened into providing labour or services and is not free to stop. It can happen to men, women and children. However more specifically, exploitative child labour is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity; work that exceeds a minimum number of hours; work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and work that interferes with their schooling.

Many factors contribute to an individual’s vulnerability to forced and child labour, including: high unemployment rates; lack of employment opportunities; lack of amenities and social support; lack of education and skills; lack of low pay and lack of minimum wages; high crime rates; discrimination; corruption; conflict; cultural standards and norms that accept the practice, e.g. bonded labour in India; lack of rights awareness.

All these issues need to be addressed if forced and child labour is to be abolished. Many of these factors are associated with poverty levels, as either causes or contributing factors.

Poverty can therefore push people into forced and child labour. Children from impoverished backgrounds often go to work out of necessity. A child’s family may be dependent on their wages to help pay for basic

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needs like food, water, shelter, health and education. Likewise, people may take out loans to support their families and become indebted to their ‘employer’ through bonded labour. Bonded labour is when a person is forced to work for free or little pay until their debt and high interest rates are paid off.

However it is not only people living in extreme poverty that are vulnerable to exploitation. Factors unrelated to poverty can also make children vulnerable to exploitation, highlighting the need for a broader approach aimed at eliminating forced and child labour. For example, migrant communities, who have voluntarily moved away to seek new opportunities, can also become more vulnerable to exploitation because they are in a foreign environment and may not have a full understanding of their rights or access to support.

Other issues also need to be addressed to tackle the problem of forced and child labour. This includes community education about harmful cultural practices; gender discrimination; government policies and legislation.

Further reading and resources include:

Reports, Papers and Web Resources

Environmental Justice Foundation, Cotton in Uzbekistan: www.ejfoundation.org/page142.html


Refworld, Zimbabwe - Child labour on the rise: www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,,ZWE,,4f4cd73b2,0.html


News
BBC, Ivory Coast cocoa farms child labour: little change: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15681986
BBC: Pressure on Uzbekistan to end child cotton labour: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14973062
Millions pushed into child labour in Pakistan: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46297938/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/millions-pushed-child-labor-pakistan/

Video
Al Jazeera Child labour thrives (Pakistan): www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_tRJLszXxc
Child labour rises on poverty in Jordan: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gruWBVIxqpg
Children exploited in Cambodian building boom: www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0vOyyfgm7s
NBC, Millions pushed into child labour in Pakistan: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46297938/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/millions-pushed-child-labor-pakistan/

World Vision’s Opinion

Poverty is one of the factors that make people vulnerable to forced and child labour. Discriminatory practices, a lack of money and limited access to employment opportunities, education and life-skills are all factors that contribute to pushing people into situations where they are at risk of exploitation.

We can significantly reduce forced and child labour using some approaches that assist in ending poverty. For example, guaranteeing a stable income and fair wages, improving education and employment opportunities are all vital to reducing someone’s vulnerability to exploitation.

However, while those living in poverty can be more vulnerable to exploitation, forced and child labour can happen to anyone. For example, when a country or community is developing and
individuals have more disposable income, they may be in a position to travel to another region where there are seemingly better employment opportunities. However, when an individual or family are isolated by language and cultural differences, with a lack of access to information about their rights, or lack of resources, they can become more vulnerable to exploitation. Or a child could be threatened or forced to work as a domestic servant by a guardian or community member. There are also instances of children being exploited because their own government, who orders them to work.

Factors unrelated to poverty such as harmful cultural practices; vulnerabilities associated with being a migrant, gender discrimination, government policies and legislation, can also make children vulnerable to exploitation. This highlights the need for a broader approach aimed at eliminating forced and child labour.

To fully address forced and child labour, a complex and holistic response is required. It must tackle the supply of vulnerable people and demand for labour exploitation, and challenge the policies and systems that allow it to continue. Preventing vulnerability, through poverty reduction and education schemes for example, is crucial. It must also address the enormous demand which currently exists for forced and child labour. The demand for low production costs and the competitive advantages of using exploitative labour creates an environment where profits are put before people. Corporate and governmental policies and practices must be examined to ensure they do not promote or tolerate forced or child labour.
Take Action

1. Share World Vision Australia’s video [Overseas aid: An Australian View](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wftbo3RxGvs)

Teach others about the importance of overseas aid and share this video via social media and screen it at events.

2. Sponsor a Child – the difference you’ll make is more than you think

As a child sponsor through World Vision, you can help to create lasting change in children’s lives. By helping meet basic needs for things like clean water, healthcare, education, improving farming and income opportunities, you’ll help break the poverty cycle.


You could ask your audience to consider sponsoring a child and give them further information.

Find more actions that you can take at your event at [donttradelives.com.au](http://donttradelives.com.au)

Note: This document has been prepared as an aid/prompt to debate preparation and not all opinions in this document are the views of World Vision Australia. Reference to different organisations are not an endorsement.