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United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Novice Committee

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Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is an agency of the United Nations that specializes in advancing the rights and well-being of children worldwide. This is one of the most widely recognized social welfare organizations in the world. UNICEF was founded in December 1946 in New York to aid children and mothers who suffered in the aftermath of World War 2. In 1950, the organization was extended permanently by the general assembly to support the long-term and systematic struggles of women and children, especially in developing nations. Now, the organization operates in more than 190 nations and territories around the globe. UNICEF's operation foci include promoting child safety and gender equality, and it aims to provide children in need with immunization, nutrition, sanitation, education, emergency relief, and more. The entity targets children who are dealing with poverty, violence, sickness, political unrest, and humanitarian issues. According to the tenets of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF strives for a world where every child is allowed a chance to flourish and realize their full potential.

ACMUN XIX

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Topic 1: Food Insecurities for Children in Areas of Conflict

General Summary

Food insecurity for children is a critical global issue, with conflicts responsible for 60 percent of world hunger. Currently, it is affecting around 149 million children worldwide. According to the UN press, nearly 1 in 5 children under the age of five in conflict-affected countries suffer from malnutrition (United Nations, n.d.), and over 73 million children are at risk of experiencing hunger. Conflict exacerbates existing food insecurity, with over 60% of children in conflict zones facing food shortages and inadequate nutrition. Moreover, the United Nations reports that nearly 30 million children are forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence, furthering their vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition.

Driving factors

For these children, food insecurity sprouts from a plethora of reasons. The nature of conflicts often leads to the destruction of basic infrastructure such as roads, buildings, and homes. Demolitions can restrict civilians from accessing local markets and food sources. This impact could be extended further to other essential needs such as clean water, adequate healthcare, and education. Additionally, conflicts further exacerbate food insecurities by disrupting food production and distribution, which leads to a lack of food being grown and made

ACMUN XIX

Appleby College Model United Nations Conference 2024



available to civilians. Immense economic pressures are also placed on families, as properties and assets are often destroyed. Inflation skyrockets as jobs disappear from the market, which makes attaining the already scarce food even more challenging. Hunger often leads to social unrest, creating more conflicts in society and feeding into the vicious cycle. An example of this is the French Revolution of 1789. The food security crisis has left millions of innocent children with no access to nutritious food, harming all aspects of their development and livelihood.

There are many challenges specific to aiding food insecurity caused by conflict. First, armed conflict often restricts humanitarian access; aid and resources may experience various difficulties before they reach the people in need. This often makes humanitarian aid inefficient and ineffective. Additionally, warring parties may intentionally destroy food sources such as farms, livestock, storage and processing infrastructures, and more. These actions serve strategy but do not consider the lives of civilians. It also “severely disrupts economic activities” (National Geographic Society, 2023), further depleting community resources. Often, these catastrophes manifest into systematic issues apparent in the future. Second, the displacement of civilians causes strain, even cut-offs, on resources and humanitarian aid. Armies could take advantage of clustered people and intentionally deprive them of food until surrender. This tactic can be found in more recent conflicts, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict.

Case Studies

Addressing food insecurity for children in conflict requires urgent action and international cooperation. Some case studies for this crisis include:

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Yemen

17.4 million people are currently facing starvation. More than 2.2 million children suffer from acute malnutrition, and 1.3 million pregnant or nursing mothers are acutely malnourished. The conflict in Yemen has been the driving force behind Yemen's extreme hunger issue. UNICEF has been sending out numerous humanitarian aid efforts and funding the Community Management of Acute Malnutrition program, saving the lives of nearly 3.2 million children.

Syria

Years of conflict have exacerbated an already dire hunger crisis in Syria, with more than 9 million people, including children, facing food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition, according to UNICEF. In all, 6 million children are estimated to need humanitarian assistance. One in five children under the age of five is stunted (too short for their age). Food, clean water, and access to basic health care remain severely limited in many war-torn areas. UNICEF is providing food aid to more than 400,000 severely malnourished children and their mothers, as well as delivering essential supplies and providing access to health centers to produce and distribute therapeutic foods. Since 2012, UNICEF has also supported nutrition activities in 54 healthcare facilities across nine Syrian governorates, providing more than 233,000 community screenings and expanding access to treatment for young children. However, continued efforts from UNICEF and the international community are required to ensure adequate food, water, and healthcare access for the Syrian people.

ACMUN XIX

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ACMUN XIX

South Sudan

In South Sudan, conflict, economic instability, and environmental factors have led to a severe food crisis. About 7.24 million people, including over 1.4 million children under five, face acute food insecurity, exacerbated by displacement and disrupted livelihoods. UN agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, respond by providing emergency food aid, nutrition support, and healthcare services. WFP delivers food assistance through distributions and cash-based transfers, while UNICEF focuses on treating child malnutrition and improving water and sanitation access. However, challenges persist due to ongoing conflict, limited humanitarian access, and funding constraints. International support and a peaceful resolution are vital to address the crisis and alleviate suffering in South Sudan.

Questions to consider

1. What are the root causes of the conflict?
2. How can humanitarian aid reach affected populations safely?
3. How can UNICEF support local food production and livelihoods?
4. What measures could be taken to replenish the destroyed infrastructures, are they important?

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Top of Form

Topic 2: Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa and Pay Rights for Minors

General Summary

Child labor, the inhuman and immoral working phenomenon, is classified as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity”. It is a framework that deprives children of education as it harms their development mentally, physically, and socially. In 2016, a report by the United Nations’ International Labour Organization revealed that 1 in 5 children in African children participates in child labor, an alarming amount. There is an estimated total of 72.1 million African children currently involved in child labor and 31.5 million children in hazardous work (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

The age group of most child laborers:

Source: ILO and UNICEF: Child Labor: Global Estimates 2020, Trends, and the Road Forward (New York, 2021)

Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182 documents the worst forms of child labor:

1. All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;

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2. The use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution or for the production of pornography or pornographic performances;
3. The use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
4. Work that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

Driving factors

As studies show, the agricultural sector accounts for the largest share of child laborers, with the split being drastic for children under the ages of 15–17. The industrial sector and domestic work follow this. Gender often plays a role in the types of hazardous work exposed to children. In the agricultural industry, boys are often assigned to operate machinery and sharp tools, which exposes them to harmful pesticides, chemicals, infections, and amputations. When working with livestock, many boys are forced to be isolated for long periods, which puts them at risk of hypothermia, animal attacks, biohazards, and infections. Girls usually face a bigger risk of musculoskeletal injuries and sexual abuse. Additionally, girls are often responsible for poultry and other smaller animals. This exposes them to dangerous viruses and pathogens, which are transmitted through unsanitary working conditions and animal feces. Additionally, a larger proportion of girl child laborers are unpaid or paid less compared to boys. This is not helped by

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the popular narrative of devaluing girls' education and girls being expected to complete chores and home tasks on top of labor.

Some of the driving factors behind this issue include poverty, a lack of access to quality education, poor access to decent work, climate change, conflicts, mass migration, and the normalization of child labor through culture. Poverty is considered one of the primary contributors to child labor. In 2016, a report by the United Nations' International Labour Organization revealed that more than 40% of all sub-Saharan African child laborers do so for survival. This amounts to around 48 million children. Child labor is highly prevalent in situations of poverty, parental illiteracy, and environments with cheap and unorganized labor. Parents often employ their children as free labor to pay off familial debt. To do so, families often pull children out of the already depleted education system, which furthers the cycle of poverty for the next generation. The lack of adequate education and poor schooling infrastructure in rural areas also limits the prospect of their future. They are neither taught the skills to break out of poverty nor given a promising and sustainable market in which they could find a job that would require schooling. Cultural norms further aggravate this issue by normalizing child labor, especially in domestic cases.

Past UN actions

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UNICEF is taking action to combat child labor in Sub-Saharan Africa. Increasing the quality and access to education is the objective of UNICEF. Their plan encompasses initiatives such as school construction, the provision of educational resources, and teacher training. Concurrently, UNICEF conducts campaigns with the social service workforce to educate communities about the perils of child labor, emphasizing the intrinsic value of education in breaking cycles of poverty and exploitation. Community-based interventions collaborate closely with locals to identify and address the underlying causes of child labor, including poverty and a lack of economic opportunities. Furthermore, UNICEF provides direct assistance to vulnerable children, offering access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and recreational activities. They also aim to strengthen the birth registration system so minors can be recognized and protected.

Questions to consider

1. How can UNICEF engage with the root cause of child trafficking?
2. What are the benefits of promoting education in the case of child trafficking?
3. What are some ways UNICEF could intercept transparent child labor in the domestic sphere?

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ACMUN XIX

Appleby College Model United Nations Conference 2024

ACMUN XIX

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ACMUN XIX

Appleby College Model United Nations Conference 2024



ACMUN XIX

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