Unicef report **says**

**child labour law**

**in Kenya is vague**

By NATION Correspondent

The law on child labour in Kenya

is vague, a report prepared by the

United Nations Children's Fund

(Unicef) in conjunction with the

Kenya Government says.

The report which is titled *Children*

*and Women in Kenya, a*

*Situation Analysis of* 1992, says

the law on child labour as presently

drafted, does not protect

children adequately and it is difficult

to enforce.

. Signed by Unicefs representative

to Kenya, Mr Vincent

O'Reilly and the Permanent Secretary

in the Ministry of Planning

and National Development,

Fares M. Kuindwa, it says that it

seems most people who employ

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children either do not know or do

understand Kenya's child

labour law.

It says that in order for child

labour to be effectively tackled

the public should be made aware

of the fact that exploitative

labour exists and has harmful effects

on children.

According to the authors of the

document, there is also a need to

improve the living standards

within the family and the community,

adding that this should

be done by improving access to

basic services, promoting income generating activities and

family planning services.

The Government, it says, must

be encouraged to formulate a

national policy to protect working

children by improving their

working conditions, especially because

children are the most and

easily exploited of all workers.

On the issue of adolescent

mothers, aged between 12 and 18

years, it is recorded that they are

on the increase in the country and these mothers and their

c n are at special risk of infirmity and death because of

their poor legal and socio ecomomic

status and also because they lack knowledge of the needs for child survival and

development.

. Unicef (Kenya) says that

among these adolescent mothers

are schoolgirls, street girls and

child brides most of whom come

from poor families. Most of the

child brides and adolescent mothers

are found within particular

ethnic groups, especially at the

Coast and North Eastern Province,

where early marriages for

girls, usually arranged for them

without their knowledge by their

parents.

On neglected and destitute

children, it says that destitute

children in Nairobi, have been

born in the streets and do not

know any other type of life.

"Their only social contact is with

other destitute families or children."

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The authors of the report say

that the neglect and destitution

which befalls the children whose

parents die of AIDS is particularly

worrying because it is aggravated

by a total misunderstanding

of the nature of the disease as

well as a fear of the stigma attached

to it."

It adds that because Aids is associated

with promiscuity, prostitution

or other socially unacceptable

behaviour, the extended

family - the traditional refuge for

orphaned children - may abandon

the children rather than provide

for and care for them.

The child body says that the

Government, Non-Governmental

Organisations and religious

organisations must step in to

educate communities about the

HIV virus and Aids, the disease

that it causes, and strengthen

communal organisations interested

in Aids-related issues.

Turning to disabled children,

the report says that about

115,000 children are currently

suffering from a variety of handicaps

including blindness, deafness and limb disability many of

which could have been' prevented

had the children had access to

adequate health care, good nutrition and the education of their

parents, especially the mothers.

The report says it is unfortunate

that parents and communities

are not educated and

mobilised to recognise and meet

the needs of disabled children.

"Many parents, responding to

social traditions and taboos concerning

the disabled, still hide

away their disabled children, thus

condemning them to even more

fully to a life in which whatever

health educational services that

may be available are automatically

out of their reach.

On displaced children, Unicef

reports that although there was

no available precise data on the

number of displaced children in

Kenya, it was clear that such

children and their mothers suffered

many hardships which included

insecurity and lack of basic

necessities such as food, water

and shelter.

The report also indicates that

in addition to this, many displaced

children are orphaned,

most have their education interrupted and all are at unusually

high risk of malnutrition, disease

and death.

The UN body also says that

children of nomads were faced

with a high risk of malnutrition

disease and premature deaths. It

says that although the Government

and NGOs have established

health and educational facilities

and other programmes for Kenya's

nomadic population, the facilities

are few and their distance

from a temporary settlement is

often prohibitive.

Despite this profusion of programmes,

the report says, the

numbers of children in especially

difficult circumstances continue

to escalate at such an alarming rate that existing efforts provide

merely a token response to the

children.

The. report recommends that

concerned agencies concentrate

more on preventive rather than curative measures for the programmes

to have a real impact.

It is poverty, according to the

report, which is the primary

cause of the problems and it must

be addressed directly. Its conclusion is that introducing

serious measures to alleviate

poverty in the poorest sections of

Kenya's population, whether in

rural or urban areas, remains the

nation's greatest challenge.

Child labour: Children workers are the easiest to exploit and they are the most exploited, but the law on

child labour is difficult to enforce. (File picture)