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Katanga, Democratic Republic of Congo

UN Volunteer Luca Guanziroli (left) meets with members of Wengui local association for children’s rights. Field visits like this one are key to the volunteer’s work, as it captures the reality of child labor in mines of Katanga region in the Democratic Republic of Congo. (Photo: UNV, 2012)

Corporate social responsibility as a tool in the fight against child labor in the Katanga mines

“We often forget that child labor is behind certain consumer goods such as cocoa and mobile phones. One of the main challenges is to fight against the ills of globalization,” responds Luca when questioned about his motivations to become a UN Volunteer.
After arriving to the Democratic Republic of Congo in April 2012, Luca Guanziroli joined the UNICEF team in Lubumbashi. As a UNV Child Protection Officer, he is in charge of the programme to fight against child labor in Katanga mines and gravel pits and of developing a corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme for Katanga. “UNICEF entrusted me with the responsibility to develop its CSR programme for Katanga,” says Luca. “It’s an innovative programme which demands new ideas from me and an ability to innovate at work, which is very stimulating. Field visits are also a strong point of my work. They allow me to get an on-the-ground understanding of the reality of child labor in the Katanga mines and gravel pits.”

Katanga is a region rich in natural resources; it holds 34% of the world’s cobalt reserves and 10% of its copper along with nickel, uranium, lead and silver resources. In spite of the region’s immense riches, 70% of Katanga’s population lives in poverty. Weakened by their parent’s vulnerability, children go to work in the artisanal mines to contribute to the family’s income.

“The fight against child labor in the mines and gravel pits is complex, particularly because the artisanal exploitations falls within the informal sector, which is difficult to control, and also because child labor, above all, is an issue of vulnerable families and is linked to poverty,” explains Luca. “The main challenge is beyond the fight against child labor is to fight against poverty by attacking it on multiple fronts, such as illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, water pollution, unemployment and others while integrating other perspectives.”

The region’s economic drivers, mining companies play an important role in the fight against child labor. As it is, the large mining companies have plenty of interests in play: they are concerned about child labor in their production line and look to curb a practice posing a threat to their image. Additionally, they are subject to the social obligations of the mining code, which requires them to implement sustainable development projects for the communities affected by their mining activities. “By developing a CSR programme, UNICEF establishes itself as a corporate advisor and facilitator for their community-based projects,” adds Luca. “Responding to child labor by supporting corporate social initiatives is an effective way to reintroduce the problems relating to children’s rights. Jointly arranged with and claimed by the communities, these initiatives provide a real shift for the community’s development and may be integrated into the province’s socio-economic development plans.”

**Bio:** Luca Guanziroli studied international relations at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Switzerland. Prior to become a UN Volunteer, this Italian-Argentinian dual citizen worked on child labor issues at the International Labor Organization and at the International Cocoa Initiative, where he oversaw the implementation of community-based projects aimed at eliminating child labor in the cocoa sector.
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