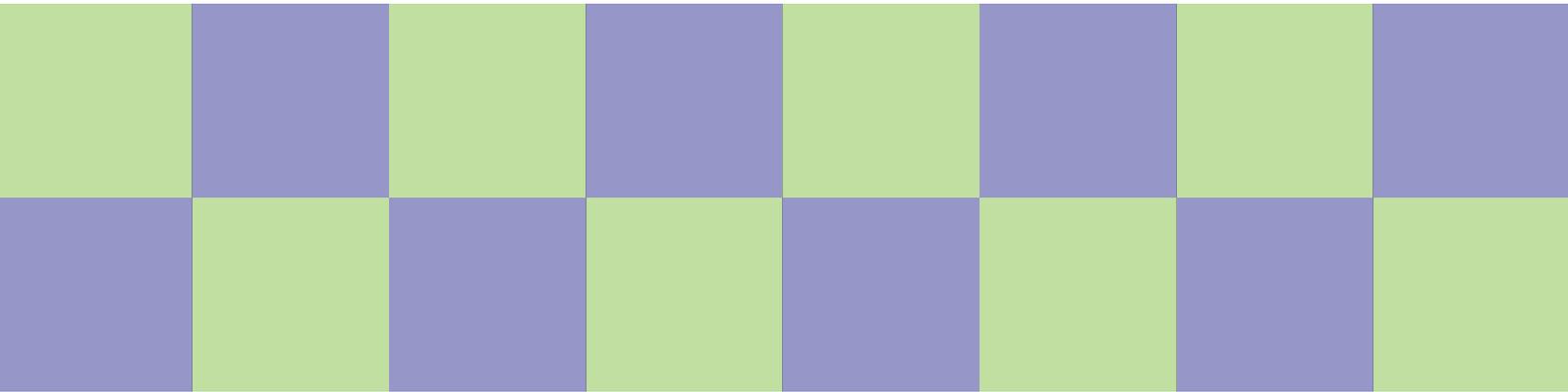


ENDING CHILD LABOUR AND ENSURING EDUCATION IN UGANDA: AN OVERVIEW FOR TAKING ACTION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL



Jointly developed by



NATIONAL ORGANISATION
OF TRADE UNIONS (NOTU)



GLOBAL MARCH

Against Child Labour
Contra el Trabajo Infantil
Contre le Travail des Enfants

Acknowledgement

This paper has been jointly developed by Global March Against Child Labour and National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU), under the project, *“From Exploitation to Education and Empowerment through Child Friendly Communities”* running in Uganda for ending child labour and promoting education in rural communities.

The development of this paper along with other project activities have been possible with the support of Comic Relief who has supported the project to sensitise the important stakeholders on the issue of child labour, using education as a means to end this global problem.

The project has disclosed some grave realities on the issue of child labour and status of education in Uganda, and thus a need was felt to produce an awareness raising paper that could inform and influence the concerned stakeholders, to take action on the situations described in the paper and eventually contribute in the promotion of quality education for all and ending child labour for good.

The term ‘project’ in the subsequent pages refers to the project implemented by NOTU with the support of Global March Against Child Labour in Uganda.

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Introduction

Child labour is work that harms children or keeps them from attending school, deprives them of their childhood and is detrimental to the entire lives of such children (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development report, 2012).

The practice of child labour manifests itself in various forms and in different sectors. These include commercial agriculture (e.g tea and sugarcane plantations), domestic service, the informal sector, hotels and bars, commercial sexual exploitation, child trafficking, construction, fishing, stone and sand quarrying businesses.

In Mukono and Mbale Districts, like in any part of the country, child labour and out of school children are rampant. In Mukono because of poverty, children of primary school age, instead of being at school, work in the stone quarries- either working alone or accompanying their parents. Also children work in plantations of sugar and tea. In Mbale, they work in the rice fields chasing birds. In both geographical areas, children hawk food stuffs like carrying baskets of vegetables while their parents wait for the proceeds at home.

The drivers or main reasons for pushing children in child labour in villages of Mukono and Mbale districts are majorly three; low capitation grant, poor school environment and poor or no feeding at all, from the perspective of access to education which is a key in ending child labour. The government pays for each child 2400 Ugandan shillings per term. This money is supposed to be for instructional materials, administration, sports and co-curriculum among others, which is clearly not enough to ensure quality education and retention of children in schools. Apart from not being enough, it is sent late to schools, fluctuates in amount and the Head teachers are not aware on how it is computed. According to one head teacher, it is even not good to ask the District officials about the discrepancies in figures; one term, the school can get an amount and the second term, the same school will receive a different figure and head teachers receive no explanation but have only one choice to receive money in their accounts without questioning.

The second problem that affects primary education is poor school environment. The infrastructural set up of the schools in the project area is poor as children have few

desks and end up sitting down. In addition, the floor is dusty something that puts the children at the risk of some diseases. The number of children per class is too big especially with schools that received a big of children that are supported by the project. For example, Bubirabi Primary School in Mbale received 194 children and such a number puts pressure on the school infrastructure.

The third and last problem that is affecting primary education is the poor feeding program. The Government when it was introducing Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the late 1990s prohibited the payment of any money from parents. Government insisted that it is the responsibility of a parent to pack a meal for her / his child. But most parents across the country have no enough food and parents could not pack for their children. The end result was that children are staying at school the whole day without any meal. Then the Government changed the policy it had earlier set and allowed head teachers to charge money for a meal. But again, parents were too poor to pay this money.

Lack of a food at the school created an environment where children were leaving school early and even absenting themselves. But the present intervention of paying for a meal under the project, has kept children in school, no absenteeism and the project is receiving some reports of academic improvements since children keep in school and they concentrate on their studies.

The structure of the local government at the village level is instrumental in encouraging parents and children to attend school. Since 1986, villages have been organised around households. Initially, it was known as "*Mayumba Kumi*" literally meaning that 10 households would form an administration area responsible for the village. It was later transformed into Village Resistance Councils (LC 1). These were bigger than "*Mayumba Kumi*" and were better organised. The Local Council at the village level is headed by a 9 member committee headed by the Chairperson and is responsible for the day to day administration of the village.

The structure is the first level of government that is closer to the people and so for any Government program to succeed, the LC 1 is highly instrument.

The LC 1 as an administrative body must be targeted by advocacy since it is the structure that is closer to the people. This is because the LC 1 knows all the

households and members therein. They also know which child is out of school and which child is in school and at times. They know the circumstances under which such a child is out of school.

Another target for advocacy is the village religious leader. This is because the religious leader has a bigger audience and he/ she is normally respected person in the community.

The village child protection committee is an important organ to be targeted as it is responsible for all the children who are vulnerable. However even though such is the government structure at the village level, it is common to find villages where it is not established. For the case of the project area, these structures were revived and strengthened.

Community Mobilisation and its Importance

The concept of “Child Friendly Villages” introduced by NOTU in the villages of Mbale and Mukono districts, supported by the Global March Against Child Labour is a community empowerment model that puts a child at the centre stage of any intervention. It emphasises child participation of any intervention that addresses child labour rather than participation of other community members only. The model was developed in India and later extended to Nepal and it is being piloted in Uganda. Its origin is in “rights based programming” where every school going children will be in school and every child is free from exploitation.

The project is withdrawing children from child labour and placing them into the school and is empowering the child through the formation of Children’s Parliament and sensitising them about their rights. It is also empowering communities through provision of information about child, organising and empowering women and youth groups and increasing household incomes through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA). It also supports the local government structure to deal with child labour by supporting and empowering the village Child Protection Committee. This was done empowering and training the Sub County Child Protection Committees and by constituting and training the Village Committees.

The project has registered successes in that it has so far withdrawn 1200 children from child labour and from being out of school and enrolled them in schools across 20 villages of Mbale and Mukono districts, and mobilised the communities against child labour. The communities are now aware about child labour; they can now differentiate child labour from child work. This is because of sensitisation that has been done in the communities in the form of preparation, printing and distribution of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials.

The community response has been very good to this intervention. Parents of child beneficiaries have been organised and they constantly hold meetings to discuss about the project. They are always reminded that the responsibility of looking after the children entirely rests on them and that any outside help is supplementing their efforts. Through the good will of the parents, they have been able to construct kitchens in all the schools as the way of contributing to the education of their children.

In Mbale, the parents of child beneficiaries have also been able to contribute some funds to cater for the 3 most vulnerable children who were not one of project beneficiaries. The money which they contributed pays for their meals, books and uniform; and one of these children is an albino- a stigmatised condition to have in Uganda. There are few children remaining out of school in the villages as result of the intervention. Those who are not directly supported by the project have been motivated to enrol in school and the number of children eating lunch at school has tremendously increased. School attendance has improved due to the provision of meals and absenteeism and escaping from school has drastically reduced; this was according to the Head Teacher of Bubirabi Primary School.

Community Efforts in Ending Child Labour

Whereas government and other partners can help, community members have a responsibility of ensuring that their own children stay away from child labour and focus on education.

Community participation is essential in the efforts to prevent and fight child labour. It is a sustainable strategy because the children that engage in child labour come

from these very communities. In some instances, it is the parents themselves that send their own children into such labour-intensive activities as a way of supplementing family incomes. Parents often see the short-term benefit of their child's earnings but fail to see the long-term disadvantages of lack of education in a child's life.

The fight against child labour therefore requires combined effort of all local leaders and other stakeholders which include religious leaders, political leaders, community based organisations, area development committees, village development committees, chiefs, child labour committees, parents, teachers, school committees etc. This implies the importance of community participation in the fight against child labour. The participation will build the capacity of the communities to enforce effective measures in combating child labour at a local level.

Children live in communities with the community leaders who can monitor their movements and the work they do. This therefore calls for proper sensitisation of community leaders so that they are well versed with child labour issues. In turn they will closely work with child labour structures at community level. Community leaders are also better placed to handle cultural issues that have a bearing on child labour, introduce bye laws and effective implementation mechanism with other stakeholders. Particular reference should be given to understand the difference between child work and child labour. When these community leaders are sensitised, they can enforce the law and possibly enact bye-laws that will guide their communities.

However, some children are compelled to stay out of school due to several factors, among which are school-borne ones like the unfriendly school environment and lack of midday meals at schools. Given that lower level Local Councils (L.C) structure is found within communities, therefore, LC 1 and LC 111 can play a vital role in the mobilisation and sensitisation of communities. This can be instrumental in initiating community initiatives as regards monitoring the child labour situation in their respective areas.

In the child labour concern, mobilisation of a community will enable them be aware of this problem or concern and then decide to take an action together for shared benefits. Therefore, in the anti- child labour drive, there is need to ignite interest in

people through awareness-raising and motivational activities, and change them for action. During the awareness-raising, specific groups of people including the general public, will be alerted about the existence of child labour and the harm it does both to children and society as a whole.

Community mobilisation will encourage people's own use of resources, establishing own capacities and willingness to contribute. In addition, there will be need to sensitise and train key influential groups in the community towards fighting child labour, and equip them with skills to mobilise the rest of the community members. Activities here might involve sensitisation meeting, focus group discussion, formation of child labour committees, identification of mentors and peer groups, among others.

Majority of the rural people say that poverty is driving their children into child labour. Attempts should be made to improve the household incomes. All the government programs; Wealth Creation, National Advisory Services (NADs) etc, must aim at improving household incomes. Communities must be organised around Village Savings Loans Associations (VSLA) so that they can save in a group. Reports from Mbale where VSLAs were piloted indicated that by community members benefitted by the end of the saving circle. Reports indicated people acquiring properties like buying build materials, acquiring goats, getting money for business, getting money for hiring land for agriculture purposes.

Communities/Families Need to Know the Following

Are you aware of the potential life-threatening situations that child labour exposes your child to?

- Child labour exists and is harmful to the children's physical, emotional, mental well-being
- It deprives children of their childhood
- Children miss out on education, which is a basis for their future prospects
- Some children's health is at risk as they work with no protection gear. For example, those working with pesticides on farms.
- Many such children are susceptible to contracting HIV/AIDS

Community Strategies For Ending Child Labour

- ✓ Community members MUST be at the forefront in advocacy and awareness raising to fight child labour so that children can attend school. That is some community members will have to take a lead in sensitising other parents about the usefulness of supporting their children's education.
- ✓ Leaders will have to sensitise communities about the basics of the legal and policy frameworks concerning child labour. That is parents/caretakers need to understand that once they are accomplices in child labour activities, they have to face legal consequences. Besides, they need to understand the future of their children is at stake should they continue engaging in child labour activities.
- ✓ Community leaders also have a duty to report any cases of abuses of child's rights. Some parents/guardians tend to neglect to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, education support to their children, which might compel such children into child labour. If such cases reach Local Council offices, interventions can be made to avert the situation.
- ✓ They will also fight practices that perpetuate child labour in their communities.
- ✓ They all need to participate in the identification of the problem and the generation of solutions to the problem(s). Parents/families have to unite and try to establish the root causes of child labour. Working as a team, they have to find ways of fighting child labour.
- ✓ They will need to develop community ownership (of everything agreed upon) and take action against child labour (for instance if it is a school-related force, what can be done? Is there anything you can do to alleviate school dropout? Can you change/adjust situations at home that lead to school dropout?)
- ✓ Communities can establish Village Child Protection Committees. They can help track children forced into child labour by talking to their parents so that children resume school for a brighter future. Social mobilisers (with social work academic background) can be identified to make family visits and coordinate children's return to schools

- ✓ Formulate community by-laws to guide the process. These guidelines are to be made by the same community members and have to be adhered to.
- ✓ Communities have to demand from government good services at school so that children can be retained at school and be able to complete at least primary school level. This may include improving on the learning environment, provision of instructional materials to enhance learning and taking care of the adolescent girls' menstrual cycle concerns.
- ✓ Parents need to play their role of providing for the children's needs so they can enjoy their stay at school. This will be in terms of meeting the basics like proper feeding at home, uniform, health care, among others
- ✓ Working with village/LC1 Education committees, the community members can raise their voices to government in an effort to increase the capitation grants sent to schools per child annually so as to register some improvement in the teaching and learning. In the process, retention of the children in schools will be realised.
- ✓ As regards to school feeding, government will need to take over the entire exercise, which will in turn see more children attending school and retained at school. Besides, there will be learner improvement in school performance and health as well.
- ✓ Using the same forum of village level discussions, the communities can also engage government to ensure the school learning environment is conducive and stimulating enough. This will help attract and retain more children in school.

Conclusion

Communities have a right to demand for a better service from government with regard to basic public goods that the government as a custodian and caretaker of the welfare of its people is mandated to do.. This requires government, through its implementing structure, to ensure that mechanisms have been put in place to enable all children attend school and are protected from child labour. Such efforts can bear fruit when community members play a collaborative role with government. This could be in terms of community mobilisation and sensitisation programs to fight the practice of child labour. This may also involve community active involvement in planning, implementing and monitoring of anti child labour initiatives for the general well-being of the children. In the process, people will be able to work towards a common cause of supporting their children's educational programs for the betterment of their future and realising economic development at a national level.

“Schooling is the principle occupation of children.”



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