

A photograph of a classroom in India. A female teacher in a pink sari stands behind a wooden desk, looking at a book. In front of her, a group of young girls in white school uniforms are sitting on the floor, facing her. A chalkboard with Telugu text is visible in the background.

JOURNAL of MODERN SLAVERY

A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Human Trafficking Solutions

Volume 6, Issue 4, 2021

CHILD LABOUR Special Edition

Guest Editors

Cindy Berman

Urmila Bhoola

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Child Labour Special Edition

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION to the CHILD LABOUR Special Edition	1
Cindy Berman and Urmila Bhoola	
Reframing, refining, and reconceptualising the worst forms of child labour through participatory adaptive programming	12
Marina Apgar and Danny Burns	
Reviewing child labour and its worst forms: Contemporary theoretical and policy agenda	32
Md Mahmudul Hoque	
Prioritising Agro-Rural Areas with Holistic and Community-Participatory Initiatives to Accelerate Progress towards Elimination of Child Labour	52
Purva Gupta and Gazal Malik	
Multinational Enterprises and child labour: Insights from supply-chain initiatives in different sectors	76
Jolijn Engelbertink and Ans Kolk	
The Role of NGO-Supported Community Based Schools Gardens in Contributing to Reducing the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Eastern DRC	106
Cecile Fanton d'Andon, Mark Canavera, Nadine Nkubonage Rudahindwa, Pascal Mongane, Henry Gathercole, and Stefano Battain	
“I’m literally here to hear your story... let them know that”: Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery	131
Dr. Romana Farooq, Chelsea Addy, Gavin Smyth, and Afua Appiah	

INTRODUCTION to the CHILD LABOUR Special Edition

Cindy Berman

Urmila Bhoola

Guest Editors

There has been progress in the universal commitment to end child labour by 2025, as set out in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past twenty years, 86 million fewer children are in child labour (160 million in 2020 compared to 246 million in 2000). Yet the incidence of child labour is rising again in absolute numbers. It has increased by over eight million in the past four years¹, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Covid 19 pandemic has undermined human rights, destroyed jobs and forced many already vulnerable people into further debt and poverty. Many families have been forced to resort to child labour to meet their economic needs. Children locked out of school have had to take on additional burdens as well as being vulnerable to increasingly new forms of exploitation through online platforms and apps. Children who are subject to the worst forms of child labour are harmed in ways that impede their physical, mental and emotional development, which affects their prospects for a decent life. They may fall victim to slavery and slavery-like practices as a result of human trafficking or other forms of coercion into forced labour or sexual exploitation by those willing to abuse their vulnerability.

Child labour also results in children being denied access to accessible and quality health care, schooling and other their fundamental rights and freedoms. Some children are also forced into servile marriages in order to support their families or based on discriminatory laws, norms and practices. Of course, children above the minimum age of employment can and should be able to work, provided this does not detrimentally affect their education or harm their health and development. Their agency to exercise this right is important and is recognised in international law, and the types of work they are permitted to carry out should be proscribed in national laws designed to protect their health and development.

Despite universal ratification of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour (which was achieved in August 2021 - all 187 ILO member states), and the widely ratified ILO minimum working age Convention 138 (short only of 14 ratifications). Despite this, child labour and its worst forms remains a persistent social and economic problem globally. Children are performing child labour in the formal and informal sector; in agriculture, artisanal mining, manufacturing and in services such as domestic work; and in the supply chains of transnational

¹ ILO and UNICEF, 'Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward.' (New York: International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, 2021)

enterprises. Domestication of these standards in national laws, policies, action plans, monitoring and enforcement are largely inadequate. To accelerate progress to achieve SDG 8.7, the United Nations declared 2021 the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, calling on the governments of the world to take urgent action to fulfil this promise to children.

International norms and public pressure have highlighted the unacceptability of child labour – especially in its worst forms. Over many decades, we have seen high levels of commitment and massive investment in bilateral, multilateral and multi-stakeholder initiatives to tackle the problem, import bans of goods suspected to be made with child labour, worker-centred trade policies in the USA, and thousands of large and community-based projects aimed at reducing or eliminating child labour. But there remains limited evidence of the effectiveness and long-term impacts of interventions to address child labour.

This special edition of the *Journal of Modern Slavery* seeks to explore the degree of progress there has been in tackling systemic and complex issues of child labour. Child labour – especially in its worst forms – is most often evident at the intersection between high levels of poverty, discrimination and exclusion, lack of social protection, lack of access to affordable, quality education, failures in labour rights protection & monitoring by states, impunity & lack of accountability of the private sector and high degrees of labour market flexibility. It often affects those working in the informal economy, doing work that is often invisible to public scrutiny and outside of the scope of labour protections. As such, strategies to end child labour need to involve multiple interventions and resources by multiple actors operating at the level of work sites, across whole sectors, at national levels and transnationally - crossing borders – with added risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration and displacement.

A critical issue flagged by various authors in this edition is the problem of definition. The ILO's commonly used definition is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, that is harmful to physical and mental development, as well as work that interferes with a child's education. These concepts are understood differently in different contexts. Also, the six categories of child work and child labour stipulated by the ILO are also subject to interpretations by different countries whose laws determine the age at which children can work and the type of work permitted at different ages.

This poses challenges for multi-national companies whose supply chains span multiple jurisdictions, involve many types of work and a range of commercial partners. They are rightly held accountable for abuse of human rights – including international standards on child labour - but must contend with varying legal frameworks in different jurisdictions on what type of work is allowed at different ages.

Several articles in this edition cite the complexity and multi-dimensionality of tackling child labour and highlight the importance of taking a more holistic and long-term approach to end child labour. There are also examples that give priority to the participation of those most directly impacted and affected by child labour in finding appropriate solutions.

Corporate actors that adopt a zero-tolerance approach with their suppliers when child labour is found, remove risk and liability to themselves but do not solve the problem. It is

common to see patronizing and somewhat racist attitudes based on assumptions that families or employers are simply not aware or concerned about the harm that is caused to children engaged in hazardous work. Initiatives that ‘rescue’ children from situations of harm without putting in place viable alternatives can subject them to even greater levels of vulnerability and harm. The children that must do what they can to survive and support their families are often pushed further into dangerous forms of work that are hidden further down supply chains in the informal economy. Some end up in illegal work that subjects them to criminal prosecution.

Our assumptions about the children who work and who employs them are rarely based on a deep understanding of the complex root causes of the problem. But even where structural drivers are recognized, interventions to tackle child labour are fraught with limitations: the challenges are too enormous to tackle by a single actor or even multiple actors that have limited influence, resource and capacity.

Projects and programmes are often designed by professionals in large international agencies or non-governmental organizations, based on a standardized model and are funded by those with an interest in ending the practice within a specific time frame. But several years later, it is common to go back and find there is little to show for earlier efforts, so the cycle starts again – sometimes with a new design based on fact-finding, identifying stakeholders and partners that will implement their interventions based on a menu of options (education, livelihoods, behaviour change etc.), with agreed outputs and outcomes. Everyone walks away feeling they’ve made a difference with the time, resources and effort they’ve invested. But little changes for those living and working at the margins of the economy and society: often desperately poor, vulnerable to shocks, invisible to decision-makers, and sometimes belonging to groups that subject them to discrimination and social exclusion in their own communities.

In relation to child labour in global supply chains, while many articles have been written by scholars about the role and responsibilities of multinational businesses and the ways they have sought to address the problem, there is still little understanding of the impact of their interventions in the lower tiers of supply chains. This is in large part because of the multiple layers of complexity in the sourcing, production, logistics and trade systems, spanning multiple jurisdictions, involving labour market dynamics and employment relationships that lack transparency and are determined by fierce competition and a race to the bottom on pricing. In places where unions are prevented from organizing and representing adult workers in negotiations for better terms and conditions, the incidence of exploitation of all workers – including child and forced labour – is greater. But it has also meant that both companies and scholars have had little understanding of where and how the worst forms of child labour are taking place, and what to do about that.

The articles in this edition seek to advance our understanding and provide some interesting new insights and suggested ways forward.

The edition moves from the general to the specific: starting with two articles on theoretical and conceptual models for understanding and designing interventions on child labour. What follows is a series of articles focused on community-based initiatives and multi-stakeholder

initiatives involving large multi-nationals, and end with a specific therapeutic approach aimed at the personal healing of children as individuals who have been traumatized by abusive practices. And finally, we offer a few conclusions as food for thought.

Developing a participatory action research methodology to understand the drivers of the worst forms of child labour is the subject of the article **‘Reframing, refining, and reconceptualising the worst forms of child labour: early experiences from CLARISSA’** by Marina Apgar and Danny Burns from the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University. The programme is a collaborative initiative involving multiple international, national and local organizations – focused on the worst forms of child labour in the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, Nepal and the leather supply chain in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The article focuses on the participatory action research methodology that has guided the conceptualization, implementation, monitoring and review process, and draws on complexity theory to make explicit the hidden and complex dynamics around the worst forms of child labour (WFCL).

The “Child Labour: Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia” (CLARISSA) programme takes as its starting point that child labour is complex, and that initiatives to tackle the forms of work that cause harm to children must recognize its’ multiple, changing and sometimes uncertain chains of causality.

The authors posit that the agency of children often remains absent from the design of interventions to address child labour, despite the many policy frameworks that recognize children’s rights to participate and make decisions affecting their lives. The programme therefore applies a participatory approach to both shed light on the multiple factors that drive WFCL and adopts an adaptive programming model that can adjust the interventions as greater clarity of the specific contexts and factors in which the most harmful child labour practices are discovered. It shows that the links between school, home life and working life are interconnected: in poor many children work in family businesses. The study seeks not only to learn about the types of work being done, but how that work is understood by the children, their families, their employers and other significant local and wider actors, as well as their views on how harm could be mitigated.

Funded by the UK government at an initial cost of £11m, the programme is designed to build a rigorous evidence base, generate innovative solutions to the drivers of (WFCL) that can be scaled. It has set up multiple participatory learning and advocacy groups in each country, as well as a social protection intervention in Bangladesh to test universal and unconditional cash involving a participatory approach with families and communities.

Unlike many WFCL interventions on global supply chains that involve multinational companies and brands, this programme focuses on the informal economy, local and regional markets for the goods that children are producing: this is where most of the WFCL is taking place. It remains invisible in plain sight of the everyday struggle for survival facing families in the poorest urban slums. In scope of the study is are the multi-layered, long and complex supply chains production processes in a whole supply chain (in the case of leather - 107) involving small family-run business units that contend with extremely tight margins and struggle themselves to make ends meet. The imperative to employ the poorest, most vulnerable children is obvious;

working for very low pay, doing back-breaking work for long hours, using dangerous equipment and exposed to hazardous chemicals. The health and long-term impacts on children are enormous, although these are rarely recorded.

COVID-19 and the funding of the programme have significantly disrupted the research and implementation, and as such, it is premature to present findings and conclusions. However, the authors assert that the collaborative teamwork and trust that has been built has generated important insights and has convinced them of the value of experiential learning. They remain convinced that understanding the complexity of child labour is critical to finding solutions to end it. They posit that we should avoid pre-constructed solutions (e.g. education and livelihoods) based on assumptions that are often well-meaning but misguided. The most sustainable solutions will be found in understanding the multi-faceted drivers of the problem and the participation of those most directly involved and affected.

In his article **“Reviewing child labour and its worst forms: Contemporary theoretical and policy agenda”**, Mahmudul Hoque strongly challenges abolitionist approaches to the worst forms of child labour. His article features ILO legal standards and evidence from academic scholars in reviewing how child labour is defined and understood. The international legal framework regulating child labour is based on three major ILO conventions – C38, 138, C182. The ILO draws distinctions between work excluded from minimum legislation, light work, non-hazardous work, hazardous work and unconditional worst forms of child labour – the latter being the subject of zero-tolerance, ‘abolitionist’ strategies and approaches. He argues that whether child labour is conceptualized from an economic, political economy, moral and ethical, human rights or modern slavery perspective, these theoretical constructs most often fail to provide a valid explanation for why child labour as a phenomenon is increasing rather than decreasing, and why it persists in some contexts, even when poverty indicators improve. As such, the global target to eradicate child labour by 2025 is unattainable.

The paper reviews a wide range of studies (including meta-studies) in their understanding of child labour, its definitions and classifications, and the degree to which these have shaped the global fight against it. Despite decades of work and significant investment in tackling this issue, Hoque argues, the incidence of child labour in all forms continues to increase and ‘poses a great threat to the progress of many developing countries’.

The paper cites studies that expose the inconsistencies and lack of clarity in how basic definitions of childhood differ, as well as how harmful and hazardous work is understood by theorists and practitioners. Regarding education, he agrees with scholars that argue concepts of childhood need to be understood in their socio-cultural contexts and involve a range of factors that are continuously evolving. One example is the idea that child labour interferes with a child’s basic right to education, but ignores the fact that many children support their schooling from their income.

In relation to minimum age restrictions, he cites studies that argue these do more harm than good by pushing working children further out into the fringes of the labour market and eventually encourage hidden practices under informal arrangements. He cites number of scholars

who argue that bans, boycotts and trade policies do not effectively reduce child labour incidences. In relation to hazardous and harmful work, he also argues that there are different perceptions of this, and argues that the views of children, families and communities should be sought on finding alternatives to the worst form of child labour, but that also recognize the economic contribution of working children. He concludes that innovative community-led alternatives to the worst forms of child labour are more likely to be in the best interests of children.

The article, **“Prioritising Agro-Rural Areas with Holistic and Community-Participatory Initiatives to Accelerate Progress towards Elimination of Child Labour”** focuses on agriculture, which continues to be the most challenging sector for child labour interventions, with the majority of child labourers (70%) working in hazardous conditions. It points out that innumerable interventions to tackle child labour have failed to impact informal supply chains in agro-rural regions. The article examines the key challenges and emerging good practices to understand and address child labour in informal economies such as agriculture by using an intersectional and holistic lens. Drawing from the experiences of Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) and its regional partners of more than two decades, it proposes a holistic, area-based approach to address child labour in agro-rural regions.

The article draws examples and insights from key data published by the ILO, UNICEF and other such agencies on child labour. It uses evidence from civil society organisations, especially the ones working on the issue of child labour, bonded labour and forced labour in agriculture. Global March Against Child Labour’s suggested approach to address exploitation of children in agro-rural sector is centred upon tackling the issue of child labour holistically, that is, by focusing on root causes, combining proven and emerging good practice area-based interventions at grassroots level with multi-layered advocacy (i.e., top-down and bottom-up) and engagement between all actors from Global North and Global South. Further, the holistic approach combines ‘whole-of-supply chain’ action with gender as a cross-cutting issue. This offers a better understanding of the (gender) inequalities perpetuating child labour and more sustainable solutions to address this intersectionality. Such an approach not only enables prevention of child labour and detecting of weak systems responsible for perpetuating it, but also keeps communities at the centre, using area-based good practices such as Child Friendly Village and Child Labour Monitoring System which in turn creates an ecosystem for sustainable and child labour friendly agro-rural supply chains. Being an advocacy and network based organisation, evidence and lessons from grassroots work is used by Global March to influence policy implementation and delivery at local (district), national and regional levels. Its’ access and participation in international forums and alliances is used to inform southern civil society of global developments and put pressure on national governments.

In elaborating upon Global March’s approach towards addressing child labour in agro-rural areas, the article refers to the adoption of various crucial models and best practices built on the area-based approach in an interconnected manner. Of these, the Child Friendly Village Model based on a village or community wherein there is no child labour, all children are in learning, and

key decisions in the community are made keeping the welfare of all children in mind. It also considers various other models that have been used and analyses their long-term impact. It makes the key point that “it takes a village to raise a child”/ This addresses child labour in informal sectors such as agriculture, and as such, requires the villages and other such communities to be empowered socio-economically in order to raise children in a child friendly ecosystem with no need for child labour.

The article ‘**Multinational Enterprises and child labour: Insights from supply-chain initiatives in different sectors**’ by Ans Kolk, Jolijn Engelbertink explores how Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) have sought to eliminate child labour in the lower tiers of their supply chains – focusing specifically on multi-stakeholder partnerships engaged in coffee, cocoa, and textile sectors.

The authors highlight the challenges referred to earlier about definitions of child labour that vary in different jurisdictions. They review the literature on the root causes of child labour ‘supply side’ and ‘demand-side’ factors that create the enabling environment for child labour. They also cite evidence on conditional and unconditional cash transfers, awareness-raising, alternative income strategies and those focused on improving opportunities for families, school attendance through investment and incentives.

Self-regulation has been the dominant framework used by multi-national companies to manage child and forced labour risks, using voluntary codes of conduct, certification schemes and social auditing compliance systems. The authors recognize (as they should) the limitations of these, particularly as there are a multiplicity of standards and certifications with different sectoral and geographical scope that differ also in the types of employment arrangements that are covered at certain tiers in the supply chain.

The authors review collaborative initiatives of multi-nationals based on a recognition of the limitations of their own influence and individual efforts to tackle systemic and structural drivers of child labour. The article reviews three examples of these:

- An area-based initiative to tackle child labour in the coffee sector in Uganda using UTZ certification standards and involving a range of local and international organizations
- Child labour monitoring and remediation systems in the cocoa sector in Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana involving Nestle, the International Cocoa Initiative and local partners
- Workers’ committee grievance mechanisms in the textile sector in Tamil Nadu, India

Independent evaluations of these programmes highlight some successes and lessons learnt for the future. But the impact of COVID-19 means that some of the positive impacts of this work are at risk of being rolled back.

The authors draw three conclusions at the end of their article. First, multi-national companies have significant leverage: while the problem of child labour may exist in the lower tiers of their supply chains, they can make a difference by doing sound analysis, identifying the right stakeholders and support the right interventions for the problems in the specific context that

are identified to be most effective. Second, they argue for a pragmatic approach to the problem of definitions. Third and finally, they assert that the evidence on long-term effectiveness of these interventions is limited: evaluations are generally limited in scope. The results are often difficult to attribute to a particular intervention given the wide range of factors that are at play in any given time. They conclude with a sober recognition that addressing child labour takes time and will need to include political, social and economic drivers that are beyond the scope of specific companies and their supply chains. They emphasize the importance of building relationships between different actors in the supply chain and for flexible approaches that take account of each context and the prevailing conditions under which children work.

The article **“The role of NGO-supported community-based schools gardens in contributing to reducing the worst forms of child labour in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)”**, presents key findings from a qualitative longitudinal study that observed the implementation and assessed the potential of the school garden intervention in a project designed to reduce the worst forms of child labour in eight school communities in North and South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. The study focused on helping communities by cultivating crops that can be utilised to support households’ economy to reduce the necessity of child labour for those households. It generated findings on how to improve the relevance, community ownership, and sustainability of the school gardens intervention to contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of child labour in at-risk communities.

The study is based on project implemented by Partnership Against Child Exploitation (PACE), which is a consortium of non-Governmental, academic, media, and private sector organisations working together to implement the programme funded by the UK government. The project essentially seeks to identify and test effective approaches to prevent and reduce the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention n. 182 as *“all practices that include the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict, and all forms of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children.”*

The article describes the context in which child labour occurs in North and South Kivu and the risk factors and compounding factors that increase the risk of children becoming engaged in worst forms of child labour. The study focuses on pilot school gardens implemented in eight schools across two geographic areas of the DRC: three schools in Masisi territory, North Kivu Province, and five in Walungu territory, South Kivu Province. It analyses how school gardens implemented by international NGOs working in collaboration with community groups can contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour in fragile contexts.

The article notes out that in fragile and conflict-affected contexts such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), chronic poverty and acute shocks, including displacement, frequently impact households’ income as well as children’s access to education and other basic rights. PACE is therefore implementing a range of interventions designed to address the root causes of the phenomenon, including developing alternative livelihoods to alleviate households’ reliance

on child labour and supporting children to access quality education and vocational training opportunities as alternatives to the WFCL. Child labour is a frequently observed coping mechanism for families in situations of food insecurity; therefore, projects aiming at strengthening food security also have the added benefit of fighting child labour. Yet, according to a recent report, using school feeding to address social issues such as child labour is a relatively new approach with limited evidence of impact to date. The study also refers to other studies exploring the impact of school feeding systems on the use of children's time and these have found mixed results.

The research question examined for the study is: "How can school gardens implemented by international NGOs working in collaboration with community groups contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour in fragile contexts?" More specifically, the following sub-questions are analysed: What factors are or are not likely to impact school gardens' ability to contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour? What did we learn about implementing school gardens in a fragile and conflict affected context through this pilot learning?

It outlines findings in three key areas: relevance, community ownership and motivation and intervention sustainability. The first set of findings suggest that school gardens can be relevant to addressing child labour only if the use of the harvest is well designed to serve children at risk of engaging in, or already engaged in child labour. In the study, school gardens that did not have such planning tended to benefit relatively better off caregivers who were able to commit a substantial amount of time volunteering in the garden and benefited personally from their participation. It recommends that to reach more vulnerable children, school gardens should be connected to feeding programs that serve all the children of the school. It notes that sustainability relies on community ownership and leadership by school staff and the school gardens committees. It also notes that unless local and national governments will ultimately take over the responsibility to ensure long-term sustainability of school meals systems and programmes, it is unlikely that an NGO-implemented project will succeed in establishing fully sustainable school feeding systems. It suggests that future research could include exploring how NGOs can work with governments to ensure sustainability and scale-up of school garden models.

The article, **"I'm literally here to hear your story... let them know that": Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery**", outlines the use of narrative therapy techniques with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery, in particular the Tree of Life Approach is presented as an approach for supporting children and young people to reconstruct personal narratives focussed on resilience and hope.

The article describes the 'best practice fit' routine therapeutic interventions that are used with children and young people who have been subjected to, or are at risk of being subjected to, trafficking, exploitation and slavery, given the high number of cases of child trafficking, exploitation, and slavery in the UK and at present. It states that although these can be effective at reducing harm in the short-term, few interventions have been developed which begin to promote long-term and sustainable positive change in the lives of children and young people. The article

recognises that there are significant mental health needs for victims of child trafficking, exploitation & slavery because of their psychological distress and multiple traumas, often within their early years of development. Despite this, within the UK child trafficking, exploitation and slavery continues to pose systemic challenges in effectively engaging children and young people in therapeutic interventions to reduce risk and harm, as current therapeutic mental health interventions are primarily focussed on physical safety, stable housing, financial stability, location, relocation, rescue and rehabilitation. It outlines emerging novel and innovative interventions and found the key theme of these to be that interventions which utilise co-production and co-design principles seem to be most effective with children who have been subjected to exploitation. The article explains that narrative therapy focuses on the idea that an individual's difficulties are not problems which are located within them but are external to their identity.

The narrative therapy approach proposed by the paper, is the Tree of Life approach. It was originally developed to support vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa and utilises the metaphor of a tree derived from Zimbabwean folklore and collective narrative practice to support individuals and communities to overcome difficult life experiences. The Tree of Life enables people to speak about their lives in ways that are not re-traumatising, but instead strengthens their relationships with their own history, their culture, and significant people in their lives. The paper posits that using the Tree of Life approach would enable a child victim of trafficking, exploitation and slavery to amplify the seldom heard narratives of their life including strengthen their self-esteem, capabilities and relationships. It concludes that although there is a growing evidence base around the use of narrative therapy approaches with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery, there remains a need for further research and exploration of this approach with children and young people.

CONCLUSION

We are encouraged by a growing number of conceptual frameworks and research that reflect a far more nuanced analysis of the structural drivers and root causes of child labour – that acknowledge complexity, context and the multiplicity of factors that are at play where child labour is found and where it continues to rise despite well-intentioned interventions. Our expectations need to change also on the time it takes to deliver lasting change, and the recognition that there is no single actor or intervention that can deliver lasting change.

Building trust, increasing transparency, listening, enabling dialogue and collaboration between relevant and diverse actors - including children, their families, their employers, local and national governments, multinationals, donors, NGOs, community organisations and trade unions and international organisations. They need to sit around the table – listening and responding appropriately to the problems that are revealed, rather than picking from a menu of interventions based on a set of assumptions or acting according to a need to see the problem removed from sight and their responsibility relinquished.

We hope you will find this edition interesting and that it challenges your thinking. We would be happy if it prompts debate - even heated debate. It should stimulate researchers and practitioners to raise new questions, build knowledge, generate evidence and new insights into what we can do better to address the urgent and critical problem of harmful forms of child labour.

Reframing, refining, and reconceptualising the worst forms of child labour through participatory adaptive programming

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of using participatory action research as an adaptive programming modality to drive learning and innovation to tackle the drivers of (and seek to eliminate) the Worst Forms of Child Labour. We draw on our experience from early phases of implementation of a large-scale action research programme, which despite the constraints covid-19 posed in moving to full implementation and participatory engagement with children and other stakeholders on the ground, is already generating rich learning about the opportunities and challenges of designing programmes that respond to the complex reality of WFCL. We share early learning about what it takes to be fully open to using the lived experience of programme development, and early findings from scoping and mapping of the dynamics of social norms, business practices and urban neighbourhoods and supply chains influencing WFCL in Bangladesh and Nepal, to frame and reframe the questions and response strategies and operationalise a participatory adaptive intent to work with hidden and complex dynamics that characterise the WFCL.

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We would like to thank all of our amazing colleagues on the CLARISSA programme. This includes international members of the consortium partners, and those in our country teams in Nepal and Bangladesh. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of those are no longer involved in CLARISSA but made important contributions. In particular we would like to acknowledge the Ethical Trading Initiative and the CLARISSA Myanmar team. We would also like to give special thanks to the foundational contributions made by Pauline Oosterhoff, Vicky Johnson and Peggy Hermann. Finally, we would like to thank FCDO for funding and actively participating in designing this ambitious initiative – in particular Andrew Clayton.

Introduction

This paper explores the early phases of implementation of a large scale participatory adaptive programme (CLARISSA), designed to generate evidence about and innovation in response to Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) in Nepal and Bangladesh. Our starting point is a recognition that child labour is a complex problem and requires programmatic responses that embrace complexity.

The increased global commitment to child rights and greater visibility of child labour in supply chains linked to global brands is resulting in more attention and programming focused on its elimination. The Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour was adopted by the ILO in 1999 as ILO Convention No 182 and asks countries to develop plans for its eradication (Avis, 2017). This remains a critical international framework guiding action, yet the ways in which child labour as a problem, and in particular its worst forms, are defined, framed and responded to are full of contestation.

The well-rehearsed definitional disagreements (e.g. Maconachie et al. 2020; Bhukuth, 2008) around what categories constitute forms of labour that are harmful to children is evidence of the complexity that lies beneath a seemingly simple and agreed problem than needs urgent action. While the ILO definition of ‘unconditional “worst” forms of child labour, internationally defined as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities’ (Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182, 1999) is largely uncontested, definitional ambiguity arises around article 3 (d) of the Convention “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children”. Adding to the definitional mix is that countries are required to develop their own contextualised definitions while international measures used to build policy and interventions are still unable to distinguish between harmful and beneficial work (Bourdillon *et al.* 2010). In Bangladesh, for example, the Child Labour Action plan of 2012 was designed to eradicate child labour entirely and has been extended now till 2025 as part of the National Child Labour Elimination Policy. Government interventions include the removal of children from dangerous workplaces alongside strengthening the education system, funding research and investing in public health and nutrition. In Nepal a multi-faceted legal framework builds on the Labour Act 2007, the Children’s Act 2018 and the National Master Plan to End Child Labour 2018-2028 with a National Plan of Action in development. The overarching aim is to eliminate child labour and currently prohibits labour of children under 16 in hazardous work yet focuses on sectors as hazardous rather than the type of work. Interventions are focused largely on reforming the education sector and child protection to support the elimination of child labour.

The international landscape of child labour programming in large part, therefore, still responds to the underlying assumption that all work for children is ‘bad’ and, can be traded off

against ‘goods’ such as education. Yet the drivers that push and pull children into the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) are not easy to understand or isolate. Programming responses that are built around reductionist attempts to isolate drivers into clear and measurable variables, show mixed results at best. For example, two studies on microcredit programmes in Bangladesh found conflicting effects on child labour. Charkabarty (2015) found it reduced child labour, albeit less through microcredit alone than in combination with microinsurance, but Islam and Choe (2013) found that instead, microcredit increased the probability of child labour. The former effect stems from a reduction in household vulnerability, the latter from adults spending more time out of the home running enterprises – forcing children to take on a greater burden of household work. Such evidence of the interactions between multiple actors leading to child labour linked to long and often not well understood supply chain dynamics, contribute to unpredictable patterns of change. Under such conditions, designing interventions to only respond to one aspect of the complex interactions, and often the variable that is easiest to measure, are unlikely to produce appropriate or sustainable outcomes.

The agency of children is mostly absent from intervention design, despite a matured policy framework recognising children’s right to participate and make decisions about matters that affect their lives (Raenaert et al. 2009). Children’s agency also exists within a complex system of power dynamics with peers, families, adults in communities and in work settings, local labour environments and on the streets in towns and cities and at different points of global supply chains. Johnson’s (2017) change scape model (which inspired DFID’s social-ecological approach) illustrates the importance of understanding that children’s well-being is nested within all of these relationships and results from interaction across each of the different interconnected domains. The fact, for example, that most children are working in family businesses shows that work and family relationships are often intertwined. The links between school, home life and working life are interconnected – there is no simple trade-off between school or work or family support – indeed in poor households these are often complementary realms of activity for children, and in certain contexts there is a commonly held view that the combination of engaging in school and work is preferred by and may in fact be beneficial for children. Further, families that are most vulnerable, are characterised by intersectional inequalities which means that single interventions (such as the provision of primary education) are unlikely to be effective on their own. Consequently, interventions that might be able to shift underlying drivers of child labour, and specifically target those forms of work that cause harm, must orient towards working with long and uncertain causal chains; they must take complexity seriously.

Ideas of complexity and complex systems approaches to addressing development challenges are not new, indeed applications were first discussed over twenty years ago. Chambers (1997) was an early champion, arguing that the unpredictability of development which arises when it is viewed through the lens of complexity, suggests that diverse, locally grounded responses should be nurtured instead of imposing top down and externally designed solutions. It was not, however, till a 2008 working paper by the Overseas Development Institute (Ramalingan et al. 2008) that we see the first substantive attempt to situate what complexity could mean to the

development and humanitarian sectors as a whole. Since then, practical examples of how complexity thinking can help to reshape strategy, institutions and practices have been proposed (Ramalingan 2013). A critical dimension of complexity is that change is non-linear, multi directional and multi causal (many factors lead to single outcomes and single factors lead to many outcomes) leading to unpredictable causal pathways. The unpredictability of how change comes about means that very small interventions might have large impacts and large interventions can have little or no impact (or indeed negative impacts). What is required is to identify leverage points and this is best done through engagement with actors in the system who are the agents of change (Burns & Worsley, 2015). Methodological contributions for navigating complexity include action research and in particular Systemic Action Research (Wadsworth 2001, 2010; Burns 2007). Their iterative nature, involving a continuous participatory process of review and reflection enables learning about if and how outcomes emerge to be surfaced and fed back into design and planning.

Applications of SAR in the context of bonded labour (not exclusively with children) have shown promising results (Oosterhoff and Burns, 2020) but have not yet been applied in an intentional way and at a large scale to WFCL. In this paper we share early learning from a partnership of research and development organisations working collaboratively since 2018 using SAR in the context of WFCL in urban neighbourhoods in Bangladesh and Nepal. We, the co-authors, are members of the programme's management team, responsible for programme co-design and implementation of participatory and evaluation research and supporting partners who lead the research in the context of the leather supply chain in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu, Nepal. We first introduce the programme and its intentional learning design for facilitating iterative reflection on our programmatic assumptions. We then describe the specific ways in which the approach has thus far led to reframing, reconceptualising and refining the programmes interventions in response to the reality of working children – to remain focused on the goal of embracing and working with, rather than reducing complexity. Our contribution at this early stage of programming is necessarily focused on our processes as full participatory action research with children is still in the initial phases. We offer some tentative conclusions about the complex dynamics of WFCL, and share implications for ongoing adaptive programming.

CLARISSA: A participatory programme at scale

As noted above, CLARISSA is an action research programme focused on tackling the underlying drivers of the WFCL in urban neighbourhoods in Bangladesh and Nepal¹. Funded by UK Aid (FCDO), it is implemented by a Consortium of partners working across research and implementation. Led by the Institute of Development Studies, an international development research centre, and implemented in collaboration with three child rights organisations: Terre des

¹ Myanmar was part of the original design but in 2020, a combination of Covid 19, UK Aid budget cuts and the military coup led to the closure of the Myanmar programme.

Hommes Foundation; ChildHope; and Consortium for Street children, and implementation and research partners in each country². Partners bring complementary experience in participatory and child-centred programming. From its conceptualisation, we set out the programme intention to apply a participatory approach to produce and use multiple forms of evidence on the drivers of WFCL. In particular, a focus on evidence generated by children and other stakeholders expands the narrow approach to evidence that characterises the sector, and that relies largely on ‘synthesized evidence products’ based only on expert driven evidence generation, and which largely favours experimental evaluation designs³ (Apgar, 2019).

The aim of the programme is to uncover systemic dynamics of WFCL, uncover what drives children into WFCL and generate innovative solutions to the underlying drivers, recognising that the problem requires that we first listen to the lived reality of working children. In Nepal, the focus is the adult entertainment sector in several neighbourhoods in the Kathmandu valley, and in Bangladesh the leather supply chain in Hazaribagh and Hemaytpur neighbourhoods in Dhaka. Central to the programme design are 20 participatory processes in each country: 18 participatory action research (PAR) groups, a children’s’ research group and a children’s advocacy group. In addition, in Bangladesh, an innovative social protection intervention will test universal and unconditional provision of cash together with family-oriented case work and community development facilitation in one slum neighbourhood in Hazaribagh, Dhaka reaching 1800 households. This scale of participatory interventions makes it a highly ambitious programme, with large participatory research teams operational in each country (including 77 full or part time in country and international staff across the programme).

The overarching implementation design is modelled on SAR (Wadsworth 2001, 2010; Burns 2007, 2015) a programming modality that places emphasis on two dimensions of social change. Firstly, that interventions must be rooted in an understanding of how change happens. The approach hypothesizes that change results from interventions in complex systems and posits that it is necessary to reveal the causal dynamics of those systems, the inter-relationship between factors in them in order to design interventions that work and are sustainable. The second is that in order to create systemic change it hypothesizes the need to build processes across systems to provide multiple perspectives on the issues, and multiple entry points for change. This requires numerous participatory processes to be implemented in parallel with learning mechanisms building connection across different parts of the system.

Using action research as the intervention modality the programme’s theory of change hypothesises that facilitating participatory processes can generate community owned solutions tailored to the lived experience of working children, their families, employers and other actors in the system (see Snijder & Apgar, 2021 for further details on how this informs programme evaluation). The significant departure from common intervention modalities is that by definition,

² See <https://clarissa.global/the-people/> for a full list of programme partners

³ DFID How to Note on Assessing Strength of Evidence: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/291982/HTN-strength-evidence-march2014.pdf

the specific concerns that become opportunities for shifting dynamics that push and pull children into WFCL are defined by the participants based on their own analysis and evidence generation. In the early phases of implementation, then, the focus is on gathering evidence with participants to explore the nuanced contextualised reality of WFCL, to appreciate the complexity starting with lived experience.

Questioning underlying assumptions

Accompanying the SAR design is an embedded and participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning system which is complexity-aware in its design (see Apgar et al. 2019), providing the mechanisms for systematic data collection, sensemaking and use of learning as understanding evolves and change unfolds. Through iterative and reflexive use of theory of change across scales (whole of programme, intervention and activity level) the intention is to make testing starting assumptions explicit and use structured learning moments to collectively reflect on our evolving understanding about the lived reality of children engaged in WFCL. This approach has been shown to support learning within a contribution analysis impact evaluation design (Apgar, Hernandez and Ton, 2020).

The intentional learning design responds to critiques of adaptive management becoming simply another development fad at a time when there is an explosion of deceptively similar approaches (e.g. Shutt 2016, Prieto Martin, Apgar and Hernandez, 2020). In particular, we acknowledge the need for adaptive decision making to listen carefully to lived reality of change processes of children and other stakeholders enmeshed in the complex dynamics at play (e.g. Yanguas, 2018) and we build on the distinction made by Green and Guijt (2019) of interconnected levels of learning and decision-making in what we call a people-centred approach (see Apgar et al. 2020 for full design details).

The intention is to go beyond using learning on the surface, to deepen learning as the complexity of dynamics in the system that produces WFCL are revealed. This requires moving from the important yet relatively straight forward single-loop learning about what we are doing to ensure we are being operationally efficient and effective with our actions, towards the more challenging double-loop learning. Double-loop learning in the context of adaptive programming is about revisiting the assumptions we hold – asking questions about whether we are in fact doing the right things. For us this means asking ourselves: what are we learning about the nature of WFCL in particular contexts? what are we learning about our own conceptualisation of WFCL and the dynamics of supply chains? what are we learning about how our implementation strategy is responding to the complex reality of WFCL? how might we need to shift our focus and strategies to ensure we are responding to and navigating complexity rather than ignoring it? (Argyris and Schon 1992; Ramaligan et al 2009). Asking these deeper questions is critical if the programme is to walk the walk of being complexity aware, to shine a light on the hidden spaces of WFCL to uncover the drivers that push and pull children into harmful work and evidence how the participatory interventions produce locally relevant and systemic solutions.

Early experiences of being complexity-aware

At the time of writing, in 2021, the programme was in its third year of operation. As shown in Figure 1, we began with a ten-month inception phase, during which Consortium partners built upon the initially proposed structure of four broadly defined areas of research and intervention workstreams (social protection, supply chains, children's agency and social norms) through using in country scoping as well as the evidence gaps identified in a systematic literature review on modern slavery and child labour (Oosterhoff et al. 2018). This was followed by a one-year set-up phase that enabled greater contextualisation of the programme design and the selection of locations and types of interventions, deepening the understanding of the reality of WFCL in selected locations, and building capacity of operational teams in country. The first year of implementation was severely disrupted by covid-19, yet despite the challenges, research initiated through: the participatory collection of 800 life stories of children engaged in WFCL; neighbourhood mapping; supply chain mapping; a slum census and baseline survey all feeding into intervention designs, and a crystallisation of the programme's evolved research agenda around core research and evaluation questions (see Burns, Apgar and Raw 2021 for full design).

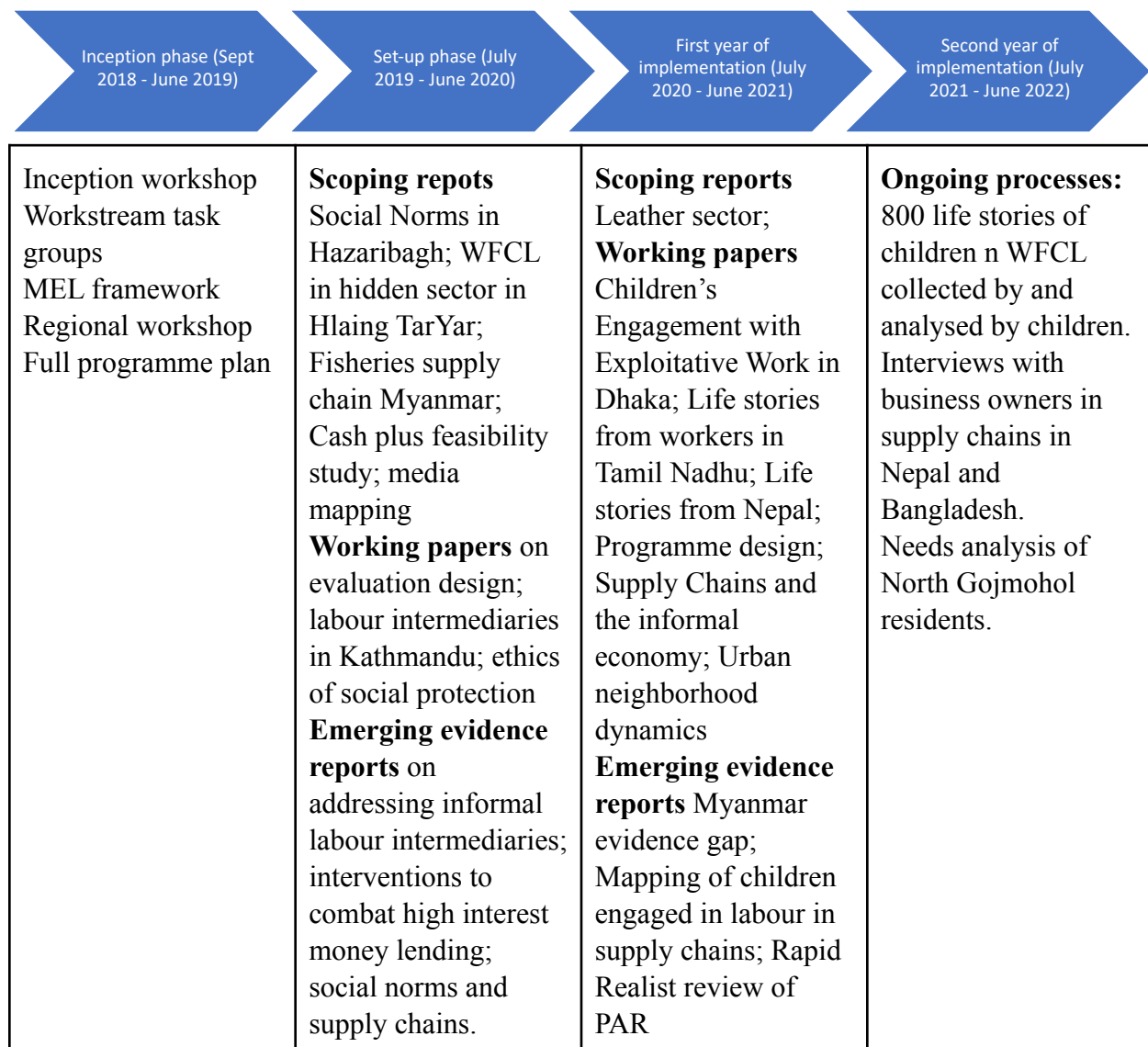


Figure 1. Early phases of CLARISSA project and main outputs generated

In the period of June – November 2021, 800 life stories of children in WFCL were collected by children. The life stories are triggered by a single prompt question and so are open ended. Selected children were then supported to analyse these by identifying critical causal factors, and linking them by creating causal system maps, working from each story to eventually produce a large collective system map (see Burns 2021 for full view of methodology). These systems maps have generated child-led evidence of the systems dynamics for 100 or more experiences gathered in each location. The full systems dynamics, rather than just fragmented

answers to researcher generated questions (such as please tell me about your experiences of going to school, and why you dropped out) have led to identification of key causal dynamics where children now see potential to intervene – the leverage points into systems change.

In Nepal children then prioritised which dynamics identified through their analysis they wish to work with through engagement in participatory action research (PAR) groups. Some of the themes they prioritised include the causal dynamic of children ending up in exploitative work in the adult entertainment sector through accepting jobs brokered by trusted intermediaries including family members; and addiction and conflict within families leading to children needing to enter exploitative work.

These ‘issues’ which represent causal dynamics identified by working children will now become the themes for PAR groups, and children will be supported to do further evidence gathering around the issue, their own further analysis to identify actions they and others in the system can take in response. Each of these locally specific actions will have a theory of change and assumptions about how the children imagine change might happen. Each group will engage in their own reflection and evaluation of their actions to learn about their interventions influence systems dynamics.

While these and other participatory processes are yet to bear fruit, we are already experiencing how the intentional learning design is enabling our own questioning of assumptions through use of early evidence from the scoping, mapping and engagement with stakeholders (such as the children’s life stories). Next, we share the opportunities we’ve had to fundamentally rethink and reshape the programme in response to a more nuanced understanding of the reality of working children and the systems they are part of.

Reframing the issue – from corporate brands to informal and domestic markets

One of our starting assumptions was that our greatest leverage for change around WFCL was to surface hidden child labour within the supply chains of corporate brands, and engage them in dialogue, and in action research processes, to generate solutions. The programme had initially engaged an organisation that had relationships with global brands assuming that the ownership built by corporate actors of both the problem and solutions through engaging them in analysis would incentivize solution seeking behaviour. However, less than a year into the programme, by the time we had our first all partner regional planning event in Bangkok in 2018, we were already beginning to challenge this assumption.

Once we had identified key sectors (leather production in Bangladesh, and the provision of adult entertainment in Nepal) through mapping and scoping in country, the premise that we had started with, that labour in the informal sector, in the further reaches of supply chains was hidden, was challenged. Engaging more directly in the neighbourhoods through transect walks in Hazaribagh, the traditional leather production area in Dhaka, it was possible to see hundreds of children working in the hot sunlight, working at night, carrying heavy loads, using dangerous tools and cutting machines, and working with chemicals. We realised that the visibility of

children in WFCL is not the issue. The visibility of the dynamics which bring those children into WFCL and the links to different markets and supply chain is what remains hidden. Through further scoping into the supply chain (Moktadir and Bashar 2021 forthcoming; AK Maksud, 2021) we found that the WFCL were not mostly to be found in the formal sector supplying brands within global supply chains, but rather in tens of thousands of small family businesses which predominantly operate in the informal sectors, often supplying domestic and regional markets, but also seasonally supplying more formal markets to meet gaps in demand.

Better understanding these dynamics led to revisiting the communications into, for example, dialogues around the 2021 year for the elimination of child labour. Our early messaging has focused on communicating that while working with thousands of small businesses is much harder than working with critical actors in corporate supply chains and or governments, it is what the sector needs to turn its attention to, alongside work with corporate brands. The task is apparently infinite in its scope, it will require building movement-based change rather than convincing senior management, and there are very few if any good models of how to do it. Yet, however difficult this is, it is critical to focus on where the real problem lies rather than what is easy to engage with. This is not to say that corporates cleaning up their supply chains will not have an important long-term influence, or that policy and enforcement measures are unnecessary, but that in the medium term both will be marginal in their impact because they barely touch the drivers (both push and pull factors) that incentivise WFCL in the informal sector. The challenge that we face is not so much that no one has noticed that WFCL is substantially perpetuated in the informal domains, rather that because engagement with these multiple actors seems so complex, that most organisations and institutions choose to invest their time and resources where they think they might see measurable results. Yet it is only if we are looking at and working in the right place that we have any chance of building positive responses to the actual problem.

Refining the entry points – from informal businesses to the micro dynamics in urban spaces

Reframing of the issue towards informal, domestic and regional markets in Bangladesh thus required a refining of entry points for the programme's participatory processes as interventions. We realised that in order to create change at the level of individual businesses, participants of action research groups would need to understand the dynamics of small businesses in the focus sectors at a much more granular level. We would need to understand the complexity of business-to-business transactions, money flows between businesses, lending patterns, advances and obligations, and other such dynamics that exist at multiple stages within a supply chain.

This might have led us to focus solely on the informal, but we were simultaneously confronted by the siloed conceptualisation of formal and informal workplaces – which did not reflect the reality which was being uncovered by the teams on the ground (Aked, 2021). In both the Bangladesh leather supply chain, and the Nepal adult entertainment sector the formal and informal are often interwoven. People running formal businesses are simultaneously running

informal businesses, and/or are dependent on informal businesses. The grey spaces in between them and their interdependencies seems to be what facilitates or lubricates both the formal and informal work.

What also became clear was the need to situate participatory interventions within an emergent understanding of the urban dynamics of the informal neighbourhoods that the WFCL existed within and was constitutive of. There are very few studies of micro level dynamics of WFCL in urban settings (Kasper, 2021). While triggers such as health crises (which lead to high interest loans) are common across urban and rural areas, in rural locations, the constituent populations, local social norms, and economic opportunities available to families tend to be more homogeneous. In urban areas, however, there is a huge diversity of ethnicities, work opportunities can spring up in multiple sectors and there is a complex web of underground mafia type activities. These far more complex urban dynamics that lead to WFCL are not yet well understood.

This led to new questions about the ways in which urban dynamics fuel WFCL, such as: how do neighbourhood social norms govern decisions about children's work? how does the spatial infrastructure impact on hazardous work? what are the local power relations which govern work? The scoping studies have shown that children have to work in polluted environments - ranging from traffic fumes to working amid toxic waste, they work on rubbish tips resulting from dumping of urban waste; they carry heavy loads upstairs in high rise buildings, and they work in transport and construction related to city growth. To tackle child labour in the city it was going to be critical to understand these dynamics. The programmatic response has been to build a process of participatory GIS mapping into the intervention design, such that we can keep building a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and identify leverage points for action research to respond.

Reconceptualising the system – from supply chain to human chain

The initial workstream on supply chains, conceptualised as a focus on revealing and reducing harm to children in supply chains, was a useful starting point for engaging in the leather sector in Bangladesh, and as discussed already, enabled a reframing towards the grey areas of connected formal and informal domains. In the case of the adult entertainment sector in Nepal, however, the supply chain model did not fit reality. This became obvious early on, and in the same workshop in Bangkok in 2018 when we challenged our assumptions about focusing on corporate brands, we were also challenged as to how to best conceptualise the relationships and patterns that drive children into the adult entertainment sector in Kathmandu valley.

In this context, we were looking at the provision of 'services' where the child was either 'service provider' or indeed the 'commodity' itself. The pathway of the child and the way that she moved through different forms of work seemed to provide a clearer explanation of the dynamics. This led to the formulation of a conceptual framework around what was called the 'human chain' (Social Norms Working Group, CLARISSA 2020). This new way of

conceptualising the system of focus has enabled interaction with the actual dynamics of what is going on.

The ‘human chain’ was conceptualised in relation to the pathways taken by the child through different forms of child labour, some of which are ‘worst forms’ and the *‘social networks that enable and facilitate children’s pathways into, within, and out of the worst forms of child labour’* (Social Norms Working Group, CLARISSA 2020). Specific findings from the early scoping work in Nepal on social norms, labour intermediaries and trajectories of children into the adult entertainment sector (Oosterhoff & Hacker, 2020) that inform this approach highlighted amongst other key factors that we needed to take into account the ways in which complex social networks and mobile phone technology mediate the pathways that children take. Further, it is diverse labour intermediaries, many based on kinship ties, blurring formal and informal relationships and building a picture of a mosaic of actors, some working in unpredictable ways that should be the focus. This in turn requires a much more nuanced understanding of who are victims and who are perpetrators, as the motivations of key people and their overlapping roles prove dichotomous views of who is ‘good’ and who is ‘bad’ in this system are often false and unhelpful. Furthermore, recently conducted interviews with leather sector business owners have revealed that a substantial proportion were formerly child labourers doing the very work that they are now employing other children to do. Having created their own business it is not hard to see how they might see the employment of children as providing them with opportunities (A.K Maksud et al, 2021). Having reconceptualised this work around the idea of human chains, the participatory work which follows will seek to understand how these pathways work, and to build solutions out of this knowledge.

Manifestations of the complexity of WFCL

The above examples illustrate how we have reframed the issue, refined entry points and parameters for our participatory interventions and reconceptualised the system all in response to new understandings and intentional use of learning. Through this journey of learning, we are able already to highlight five manifestations of complexity of WFCL in supply and human chains that have implications for ongoing programme design.

Being mindful of unintended consequences of interventions

Using a detailed focus on the micro-dynamics of WFCL in guiding participatory responses, calls for investigation into the feedback loops that might result in unintended consequences in what are seemingly obvious responses. For example, we might assume livelihood initiatives could support some families to come out of poverty because families could start their own businesses. However, these new businesses are precisely the types of businesses that already exist and are likely to mirror the thousands of family businesses which already

draw children into WFCL. In other words, if the supply chain dynamics mean that profit margins are so low then any new business is likely to replicate the survival strategies that already exist.

Similarly, education initiatives which encourage families to send some of their children to school may put more pressure on other children in the family to work in WFCL to pay for the costs of education and mitigate the effects of some young householders not bringing income into the family. At a policy level we could already observe the way in which efforts by the Bangladesh government to move the formal sector to new modern units in Hemayetpur and away from the historical centre of informal leather production in Hazaribagh, has resulted in the creation of new informal settlements developing around the formal production units. Economic drivers create a demand for informal work to feed the formal work, because the margins within the formal work sector are so fine that manufacturers can't make a profit without subcontracting.

Exploring multi-layered processes in the whole chain

Our scoping studies found that WFCL in the leather sector exists in 104 of the 107 processes mapped. Long and complex supply chains mean extremely tight profit margins for all actors in the chains. Understanding how the system of child labour works requires inquiry across all stages of the supply chain. Further, understanding the complex role that loans and credit play in mediating the risks to businesses up and down the chain is important. A crisis, or a gap in demand, high levels of local competition, and other such dynamics can trigger the need for business-to-business loans or the extension of credit from adjacent and connecting businesses in the supply chain. This can lower margins and/or impose restrictive obligations creating an imperative to employ children. As risk gets pushed down the supply chain, it can impact at every level. Consequently, to understand how the imperative to employ children in WFCL is generated, it is necessary to understand how these pressures cascade down the chain. We don't yet know how this system of loans, obligations and dependencies work, and this will be a core part of ongoing participatory research through engaging directly with a selection of small businesses in order to fully understand how they work. Moreover, three action research groups of business owners in different geographical locations in each country will explore how to support sustainable businesses which don't require children engaging in hazardous work.

Recognising overlapping identities of perpetrators and victims

As noted already in the context of the labour intermediaries in Kathmandu, categories of victims and perpetrators are blurred across both the human and supply chains. In Dhaka, slum dwelling families and their children who are working in the leather industry, are both victims and perpetrators. If much of the WFCL is found in small family businesses, then it is people in the very same communities who are employing them. These intersecting identities that are driven by a combination of neighbourhoods and supply chain dynamics require careful navigation as we define participants for different types of action research groups.

Appreciating hidden indirect and long-term harm

The risks of working with chemicals is clear and stark, as are the effects of working 16 hours a day, working outdoors in 40 degrees, carrying heavy loads up open flights of stairs, or working with dangerous machinery. But some of the more insidious long-term physical and psychological effects are more invisible and still largely ignored. As identified by the literature review of WFCL in supply chains (Aked, 2021:13) “the harm being done to children is not obvious in the short term (ILO 2002) the fact that a lot of WFCL remains unseen in global and national data sets (Avis, 2017) and that incidences of child labour are not recorded alongside health impacts (Muntaner et al, 2010).”

The hidden long-term effects have unpredictable impacts on other aspects of the system. For example, income generators (such as parents or siblings) can no longer work after 5-10 years because of kidney disease or a mental health crisis, families are then left with no choice but to take out loans to pay their medical expenses and to compensate for the loss of income – so their children enter the workplace. When a child living in Hazaribagh (named in 2013 as the 5th most toxic location in the world⁴) walks through the streets and passages to work, they are exposed to hazards which cannot be linked to their work in a direct way, yet they also play directly and explicitly into the dynamics that facilitate WFCL.

Responding to crisis and ongoing change in complex systems

Since the inception of the programme, multiple intersecting crises have disrupted implementation – the covid-19 pandemic, a military coup in Myanmar and unexpected budget cuts as a result of reductions to the UK ODA budget. Nothing could have prepared any programme, even one that intends to be adaptive, for this level of crisis. Yet, the reality for many trapped in systems dynamics that perpetuate WFCL, shocks are not rare events, but a daily reality. These may include household level shocks like the death of a family member, or a health crisis, or community level shocks such as flooding or earthquakes or a fire in a nearby factory. In the early conceptualisation of the programme the importance of understanding the role of shocks in accelerating precarity and vulnerability was part of the framing. Our assumption was that we would understand, through the individual life stories, the ways in which children and families were forced to adapt to shocks, and this would enable us to uncover feedback loops and resulting dynamics.

We could not have predicted that a global pandemic would provide real time data about how shocks are changing neighbourhoods and supply and human chains on an unprecedented scale. The intentional adaptive design, however, does mean that we have been well placed to navigate ongoing uncertainty. Our design and ways of working – as an integrated partnership bringing multiple capacities together – has been built precisely to embrace the complexity in

⁴ As reported by <https://www.worstpolluted.org/docs/TopTenThreats2013.pdf> and <https://www.dhakatribune.com/uncategorized/2013/11/05/hazaribagh-named-5th-most-polluted-place-on-earth> Dhaka Tribune, November 5th, 2012

systems that we are engaging with. Operational teams in country are set up to work across multiple layers and communicate across specialised teams; we have built an intentional capacity development process as an attempt to support building technical skills as well as behavioural competencies for flexibility and reflexivity. A high-level operational adaptation in real time has helped, in the most part, to navigate ongoing shifts related to both covid-19 and reduced budgets – teams in the field have built covid safe ways of collecting life stories, and adapted methodologies to online working, including building ways to facilitate participatory methods across locations using online learning platforms such as Miro. More substantively, we have pivoted work to explicitly monitor the impacts of covid – such as children’s research groups undertaking an inquiry on “covid through the eyes of children working in WFCL”. This is not to suggest that these periods of crises have not been incredibly challenging for all involved, or that we haven’t had moments of questioning how the programme can continue, and indeed some parts have had to be radically shifted, but to illustrate that embodying complexity in design is one factor that has contributed to the programme still having a future ahead of it.

Building our adaptive competencies into the future

In reflecting on our experiences thus far and the extent to which and ways we are supporting double loop learning, we use Prieto Martin et al.’s (2017) core adaptive practices as a framework to share both progress and challenges. An effective partnership is at the heart of enabling *collaborative teamwork*. While trust has been built across the partnership and has enabled us to collectively question underlying assumptions, it requires ongoing monitoring and nurturing as different organisational structures and incentive systems are learning how and at times still struggling with working together. Working as integrated teams is new to many in the context of siloed project-based development programming. Intentionality in assessing our partnership working and supporting collective learning are useful mechanisms to continue to strengthen our collaborative teamwork.

Taking seriously that action research is the intervention has helped to shine a light on the need to *promote experiential learning* from the outset – and in this paper we have discussed what this looks like in practice. Yet deepening the learning and enabling full *contextual embeddedness* to bring the participatory aspects of adaptive programming to life has not been fully materialised in the early phase coupled with the need to work online during the pandemic. The next phase of the programme will offer opportunity to further build on the children’s own analysis of their own life stories, and we expect new rounds of questioning our assumptions to ensure we *stay focused on our values*. Ongoing reflection on the quality of our engagements, the quality of our partnership and the quality of our evidence generation is intended to continue to enact the adaptive intent we have laid out in this paper as a response to the complexity of WFCL.

Conclusion

We began with an observation of how, in the wider child labour programming sector there is a tendency to ignore the complexity of the problem and respond with pre-constructed solutions (education, livelihoods) that respond largely to easy to define and measurable variables. We propose that applying a complexity-aware approach to programming is one way to embrace rather than erase the dynamic nature of the problem, to work with it rather than against it. We described the participatory and adaptive design of an action research programme implemented through a Consortium of partners and now in its third year of operation and shared early learning. We evidenced the ways in which we have already been able to question our underlying assumptions about both the nature of WFCL and the ways in which a participatory programme can respond. As working children, their parents and guardians as well as business owners are able to build more ownership of the evidence gathering, undertaking their own analysis and ultimately designing their own responses, we expect more programmatic assumptions to be questioned and richer learning to emerge about the complex reality of WFCL.

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Reviewing child labour and its worst forms: Contemporary theoretical and policy agenda

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Abstract

The global response to child labour is based on the standards set by three major international conventions. This review examines the historical development of the conceptualizations of various forms of child labour, relevant views and perspectives, contemporary theoretical underpinnings, and policy suggestions. The emerging evidence shows that child labour incidences in all its forms have increased in many parts of the world, and the global target to eradicate child labour by 2025 seems unattainable. The evaluation indicates that the current global age-based abolitionist policy to fight child labour has lost some ground. The covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation and the worst forms of child labour have become even more widespread and deeply normalized in many contexts and communities. The current scholarship of child labour remains critically ignorant of the relevant societal and cultural norms. Contemporary theorists and empiricists emphasize on constructing knowledge with the children and families engaged in child labour and focusing on finding innovative community-led alternatives to the worst forms of child labour. Regulations, policies, and support programmes must recognize the economic contribution of working children and work towards the children's best interests.

Key words: Child labour, Worst forms of child labour, Hazardous labour, Global policy, Emerging evidence, Contemporary debates

1. Introduction

Although child labour is an age-old phenomenon, the effort to reduce its incidence was first formally adopted in the United States in 1938 when the Fair Labor Standards Act prohibited oppressive child labour and set the minimum age of employment to sixteen (Shefelman 1939). However, the international consensus to eliminate global child labour to allow children a formative childhood developed in the second half of the twentieth century (Dessy and Pallage 2005). Reflecting on this general agreement, three international conventions – ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in 1973, United Nations Convention on

the Rights of the Child, 1989 (UNCRC), and ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) – have standardized the legal parameters of child labour and provided the basis for global action against it (Bhukuth 2008; Khan et al. 2015). During this period, child welfare emerged as a major global concern and harmful child labour significantly declined in the western developed countries (Cunningham 2000). In the twenty-first century, international development agencies have run comprehensive global policy strategies, namely developing fresh regulatory and conventional frameworks to protect children, promoting decent work opportunities for young adults, providing social protection to children in need, ensuring access to education, and shielding children against a wide range of vulnerabilities (ILO 2019). Besides enacting anti-child employment legislation, national governments have undertaken various measures – rules, policies, and programmes – to sanction and cease the practice of harmful child labour. Local government and non-government organizations have also initiated projects, interventions, and schemes to support poor children and their families so that they can find alternatives to child labour. However, the latest global estimates (recorded in 2020) show that global progress against child labour has stalled.; 160 million children remain engaged in child labour, according to statistics from various international organizations. This number is 8 million more compared to 2016 (in absolute terms), while the percentage has stayed the same (ILO and UNICEF 2021). In addition, the economic and livelihoods disruptions caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic are forcing countless vulnerable children into child labour across developing countries (Hoque 2021; Kaur and Byard 2021). Now in 2021 (which UN declared the international year for the elimination of child labour), an analysis suggests that 8.9 million children will engage in the practice by 2022 (ILO and UNICEF 2021). The increasing number and eroding situation indicate that the current policies and actions to fight harmful child labour are losing ground¹.

The scholarship of the issue of child labour has also travelled far and deep since a wide range of perspectives and scholarly debates have compounded the understanding of the relevant concepts, causes and consequences. Dominant theoretical approaches to study and explain child labour come predominantly from the perspective of economics (K. Basu 1998; K. Basu and Van 1998; Gupta 2001; López-Calva 2001); political economy (Bachman 2000; Dimova 2021; Maffei 2005), modern slavery (Nolan and Bott 2018), morals and ethics (Satz 2003) and human rights (Humbert 2009). Some studies present global perspectives (Develtere and Huybrechts 2008; Myers 1999), while others focus on national and local contexts (Webbink, Smits, and de Jong 2012). However, the academic disputes regarding various forms of child labour, and the direction of evidence-based policy suggestions in addressing those forms, have been the highlights of this scholarship. In this essay, I review this scholarly journey concerning global child labour, explore the gaps and argue why it is imperative to emphasize on finding alternatives to the worst forms of child labour instead of eliminating its generic forms.

¹A UNICEF press release, published on the 10th of June 2021, quotes its executive director saying, “we are losing ground in the fight against child labour, and the last year (with global lockdowns, school closure, economic disruptions, and shrinking national budgets) has not made that fight any easier” (UNICEF 2021).

2. Conceptualizing Child Labour: Issues with Definitions and Forms

With no universally agreed definition, child labour remains a deeply contested concept (Abebe and Bessell 2011; Bhukuth 2008; Erdem Türkelli 2019). While work and labour for children are often used interchangeably in literature, the ILO categorizes three types of working children: children in employment, child labourers, and children in hazardous work (Fors 2012; ILO 2006). Some commonly used criteria to define labour for children are ‘age of the child’, ‘number of working hours’, ‘type of work’, ‘location and environment of work’ and ‘what it limits or offers’ (ILO, 2017). The current classifications are multifaceted, but in a nutshell, child labour refers to the work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and dignity, and which is harmful to their physical and mental development (ILO, 2018). Khan et al. (2015) argue that child labour is a legal rather than a statistical concept since standards set by the conventions provide the basis of national and international actions against it. The provisions set by the ILO convention No. 138 were – (a) the minimum age for any economic activity of children is 12, (b) regulations may permit the employment from 13 years of age (12 years in developing countries) in ‘light work’², (c) legislations can set the minimum age as 14 – 16 for non-hazardous work, and (d) the minimum age is 18 for ‘hazardous works’ (i.e., work that its by nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons). The UNCRC, recognizing labour rights, have demanded the protection of children by being exploited through enacting regulations for working hours and conditions, and sanctions for breaches relating to this (Erdem Türkelli 2019). Following this conventional advancement, ILO launched the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1992 to promote a global organization to combat and eradicate child labour practices. However, by the mid-1990s, it became more commonly understood that not all work is harmful for children. Some work could be beneficial to achieve survival levels of consumptions and also to acquire skills (Rogers and Swinnerton 2002). During this period, economic models of Basu and Van (1998) and Rogers and Swinnerton (2002) established how shortage of adult labour and parental misbeliefs can result in child labour. Kabeer et al. (2003) showed that lack of educational opportunities can also result in child labour. The issue of child labour, which was once defined only by the minimum employment age, now has various socio-economic facets to it. Therefore, the Millenium Development Agenda, which primarily focused on education, health, and poverty reduction was seen as a win-win strategy to reduce child labour. (Grimsrud 2003).

² Article 7 of the Convention defines “light work” as works (a) not likely to be harmful to their health or development; and (b) not such as to prejudice their attendance at school, their participation in vocational orientation or training programmes approved by the competent authority or their capacity to benefit from the instruction received (Khan et al. 2015, 3).

Eventually, to maneuver a wider consensus and more effective direction towards fighting global exploitative³ or harmful child labour, ILO Convention (No. 182, Article 3) defined ‘the worst forms of child labour’ as:

- a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, as well as forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- c) the use, procurement or offering of a child for illicit activities, for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties; and
- d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

Through this Convention, ILO/IPEC prioritized the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and marked a significant shift of global policy. Hazardous works (i.e., sexual work, work in mining or underground or at high altitudes, work with dangerous machinery, chemicals or substances) which represent the largest category of children working in the worst forms, also became a priority within the elimination agenda (Brando 2020). In 2002, IPEC, in its flagship global report ‘A Future Without Child Labour’, clarified this abolitionist policy and the basic distinctions embodied in the ILO Conventions Nos. 38 and 182 with an explanatory figure (Internationales Arbeitsamt and International Labour Conference 2002). As illustrated in Figure 1, the (unconditional) worst forms of child labour (i.e., slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities) were universally prohibited for everyone below 18 and prioritized for elimination, followed by hazardous labour. The shaded area in figure 1 represents the abolition criteria, while the non-shaded area represents the acceptable child work. This is offered as a guide to governments across the world to formulate national abolitionist and restrictive legal and policy frameworks to fight global child labour. This acts as a shift from previous sudden and radical abolition of all types of child labour to a more sensible gradual approach (Brando 2020).

³ Rogers and Swinnerton (2002) notes that the term *exploitative child labor* generally emerged to distinguish certain works that were clearly harmful to the children involved.

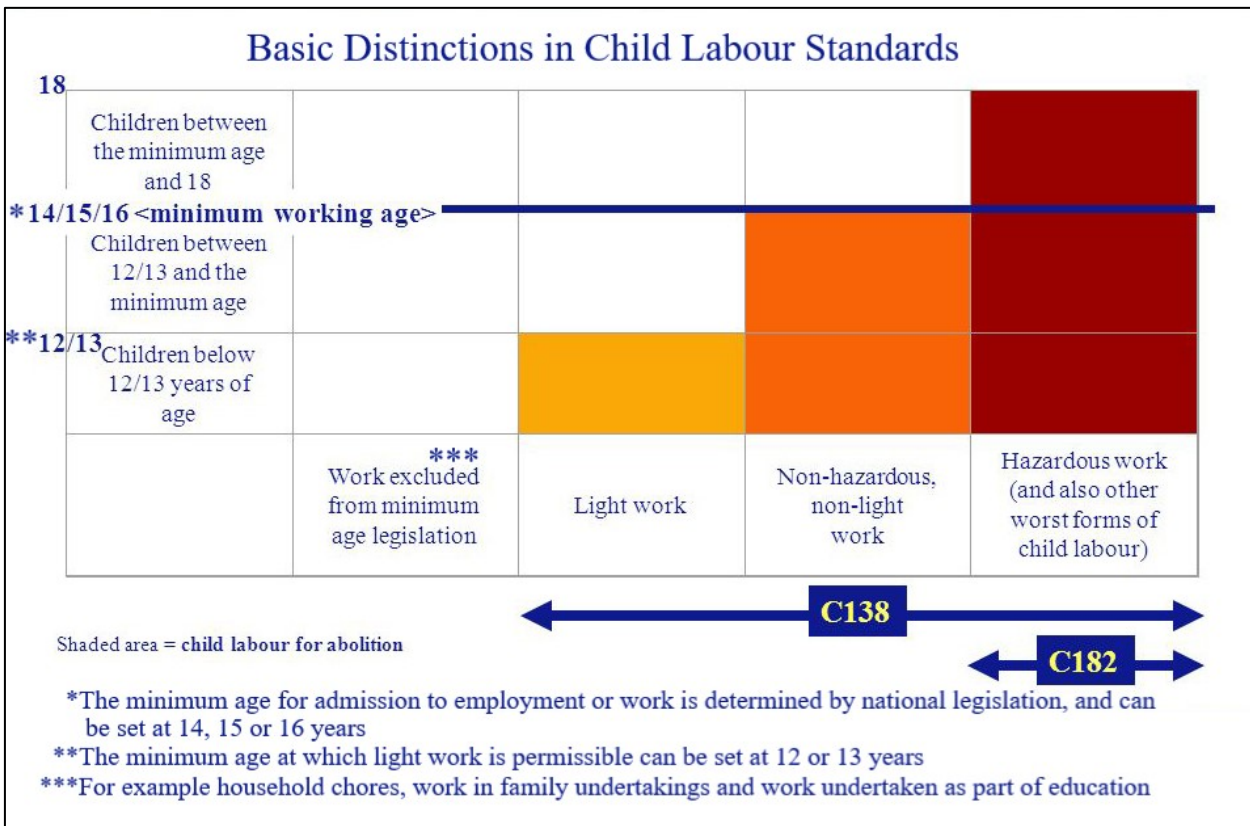


Figure 1: Basic distinctions in ILO child labour standards (Source: IPEC 2002).

Many expected that the introduction of this new abolitionist policy would direct governments and agencies to formulate targeted policies and programmes to support children and families engaged in the worst forms of child labour. This could potentially work to eradicate the worst forms from developing countries. However, the definitional and conceptual interpretation regarding child labour became even more complicated in the 2000s, when growing evidence pointed out heterogeneous socio-cultural views and their different implications in various contexts. Edmonds et al. (2008) reviewed 34 theoretical pieces, 90 empirical research works, and 27 national studies conducted by various statistical bureaus, and found that what is meant by ‘harmful work’ for children had been interpreted in several ways. Further, child labour was understood to “refer to activities in which child participation makes the child worse off”. This created a problem since it was not possible to know from those statistical reports what working children would have been doing had they not been engaged in labour. The review also critically noted that hazardous work, which was defined based on the characteristics of the work instead of relying on the alternatives, did not face the question of the counterfactual intrinsic. Bhukuth (2008) argues that these various takes on the issue of child labour make it a heterogeneous phenomenon. Further, he says that taking poor and marginalized children away from hazardous work may, instead of solving the problem, deepen their marginalization. The debates and controversies further intensified with some emerging theoretical and empirical works (Abebe and Bessell 2011). A few pertinent questions remained problematic to answer – (i) what is harmful

work and what is not? (ii) How do we differentiate between hazardous, potentially hazardous, and non-hazardous work? (iii) Who exactly will specify these terms?

After acknowledging the problems with the current classifications of the aforementioned forms of child work/employment introduced by ILO, Brando (2020) summed up the difference pointing out that child work is paid or unpaid work that causes no harm to children's health or personal development and does not affect their schooling (see figure 2). In contrast, generic labour harms children's personal development and dignity, hazardous labour harms children's health, safety and moral of children, and the unconditional worst forms are illicit and unacceptable⁴. This latest classification of defining terms of child labour, unfortunately, has not led to a better clarification of the concept.





 Child Employment	 Child Labour	 Hazardous Labour	 Worst Forms
<p>Work in any form of market production and certain types of non-market production.</p> <p>Formal/informal; paid/unpaid; in/out of family.</p>	<p>Deprives them of their childhood, potential, dignity, and that is harmful to their development.</p> <p>Mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous; interferes with school.</p>	<p>By its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.</p> <p>Used as proxy category for 'worst forms'.</p>	<p>Enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves.</p> <p>Slavery, prostitution, illicit activities, armed conflict.</p>

Figure 2: Simplified definitions of child employment, child labour, hazardous labour, and the worst forms of child labour (Source: Brando, 2020)

Fors (2012) notes that the common perception of child labour occurring in industrial settings such as a factory or mine was somewhat mistaken since the majority of children were employed by their parents to work in family farms or businesses. Although poverty remained the underlying factor of child labour, evidence showed that alongside subsistence poverty, market imperfections, global supply chains, household and parental characteristics, macroeconomic national and international political factors and lack of implementation of laws and policies may all contribute to the decision to send a child for labour (Bachman 2000; Doepke and Zilibotti 2009; Fors 2012; Tama et al. 2021). In the 2000s and 2010s, cities in the global south have experienced rapid urbanization which resulted in massive rural-to-urban migration, increased urban poverty, and practices of hazardous child labour in industrial jobs (Ensing 2009; Narasaiah

⁴ Although ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 specify unacceptable forms of child labour that are to be abolished, the problem arises when poorly designed labour force surveys fail to reflect the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable forms of work for children (National Research Council 2004).

2005; Save the Children 2012; Webbink, Smits, and de Jong 2012; World Vision 2014). These hazardous jobs in urban industries attracted millions of families to engage their children in child labour in informal economies. Gutheil (2019) describes how millions of children are trapped as labourers – *mired* in mining in DRC; *enslaved* in fishing in Philippines; *surrounded* by tobacco in Zimbabwe and Indonesia; *hemmed* in by cotton, clothing and chocolate in Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, and China; and *burdened* in brick kilns in India. Child labour even in its worst forms are regularly detected and reported from many parts of the developing world. Due to the high degree of prevalence, some industrialized places have been marked as ‘hotspots’ of child labour (Subrahmanian and Groppo 2020; Wood 2010). Fresh forms of hazardous and harmful child labour are on the rise in many contexts (Ampofo 2021; Frimpong et al. 2021; Ali 2021). Academics and researchers have embarked on new approaches to unpack these contexts to generate insights and construct knowledge. The outcomes demand an impetus in shifting the direction towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour.

Target 8.7 of the 2015 UN Global Sustainable Development Agenda asks governments and agencies to take immediate and effective measures to “...secure the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.” However, with the increasing number of working children engaged in a wide range of the worst forms of child labour in a more urbanized world, this target remains seemingly unattainable.

3. Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives and Knowledge Needs

Global policy responses formulated by the abovementioned ambiguous conceptualizations of child labour have drawn critical responses and theoretical debates. These debates continue to shape the understanding of child labour and its various forms, identify the gaps in existing knowledge, and to suggest ways in which inquiries may be conducted. Erdem Türkelli (2019) illustrates three key debates in relation to the currently dominant discourse of eliminating child labour in its all forms (i.e., keeping children away from paid work is always beneficial). First, the critics of minimum age for work argue that such restrictions do more harm than good, because it pushes working children further out into the fringes of the labour market and encourages hidden practices under informal arrangements (Aufseeser et al., 2017; Bourdillon et al., 2009; Bourdillon & Carothers, 2019). Fors (2012) argues that bans, boycotts, and trade policies cannot effectively reduce child labour incidences. Referring to the studies of Basu and Zarghamee (2009) and Doepke and Zilibotti (2009), Fors contends that a generic ban would be difficult to enforce in the rural areas, and such a ban by local or international trading partners on goods that children produce may drive child labour out of the export sector and into other formal or informal sectors of the economy. Second, the current conceptualization of exploitative child labour lacks meaningful engagement of the most vulnerable children, families and communities (Bourdillon and Carothers 2019; Liebel 2012). Instead of taking an abolitionist approach, prioritizing a participatory approach to children’s work-related health and environmental rights

could be useful (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013; Posso 2019). Such approaches can allow communities and families themselves to find alternatives to the worst forms of child labour. Third, there is a lack of clarity in terms of how restriction-based approaches distinguish between hazardous and non-hazardous work in relation to wfcl, and various crimes such as sex work, and child and drug trafficking (Fontana and Grugel 2015; Huijsmans and Baker 2012). Therefore, legislations of prohibiting the worst forms of child labour cannot be effective if associated social, economic and cultural factors are not adequately addressed.

The traditional theories and studies of child labour have a heavy focus on socio-economic factors. However, the theoretical understanding of why child labour occurs is still lacking on a few critical fronts. Firstly, these dominant perspectives largely concentrate on the wider understanding of child labour but does not differentiate this to the worst forms of child labour to any great extent in their analyses. In fact, the issue of worst forms of child labour has received little attention from theorists⁵ and empiricists (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Basu & Chau, 2007). Secondly, evidence suggests that in many contexts child labour in all its forms has become part of cultural normalization and socialization processes (Delap 2001; Ensing 2010; Tshabangu 2018). However, very few theoretical attempts have been made to understand the cultural persistence of child labour in these contexts. Third, the existing evidence of child labour largely comes from surveys of children, which alone cannot be informative about the determinants (Edmonds, 2007). Gatsinzi (2020) argues that in many contexts, states fail to provide children with legal birth registration documents, which makes the regulation difficult to impose and raises questions about those surveys determining the exact chronological age of such children. These issues shed light on the current policy's lack of understanding of cultural relativism (Gatsinzi 2020). Therefore, context-based qualitative research can generate more insightful understanding and policy recommendations.

The most common explanation of child labour that IPEC puts forward (i.e., work that deprives children from their childhoods) fundamentally involves two concepts – child and childhood (ILO 2004). How ‘child’ is defined and what childhood entails in a socio-cultural context are complex social functions of various factors that are continuously evolving (Karikari 2016; Takyi 2014). What characteristics distinguish an adult from a young child vary in terms of location, cultural attitudes, and time variables. For instance, an individual's biological age is still not a prime factor in determining childhood in some societies (Karikari 2016; Takyi 2014). What a young child was expected to do during the Industrial Revolution in the UK, was different to today's societal values and norms (Cunningham 2000; Humphries 2010). From a normative perspective, Satz (2003) argues that not all societies define childhood in terms of chronological age. Instead, they actively consider social factors too. Modern societies view children as developing persons whose incomplete cognitive, moral, and affective capacities to behave competently in their own interests justify adults' paternalistic behaviour to protect, nurture, and educate them through socialization, Satz adds.

⁵ Dessy and Pallage's (2005) theory of worst forms of child labour is limited to its economic propositions and deals with parental investment in children's education.

Societal norms and beliefs are long-established and hold communities together across all societies. Several economic studies have explored how social norms (with their adopted definitions), along with other factors such as poverty, influence children and families to engage in child labour. For instance, Basu and Van (1998) provides a critical understanding of parental altruism and household norms regarding child labour decisions. López-Calva (2001) constructed the ‘social stigma model’ to explain the supply of child labour in societies which disapprove of people sending their children to work and where parents care about that ‘embarrassment.’ Goto's (2011) theoretical analysis of household decisions on child labour in relation to materialistic utility and societal norms highlights the importance of adult labour efficiency. After analyzing three relevant dominant discourses – (i) the work-free childhoods perspective; (ii) the socio-cultural perspective; and (iii) the political economy perspective, Abebe and Bessell (2011) suggest that the causes and nature of children’s work, and the problems and benefits associated with it, can only be understood within the local ecological context. Krauss (2016) terms this ecological approach of studying cultural influence as ‘social norms viewing child labour as part of socialization’. These emerging theoretical underpinnings call for the construction of knowledge in participation with children engaged in child labour and their families and to look for ways to build community-led solutions.

4. Emerging Evidence and Policy Discussions

Why harmful child labour still widely persists is a contemporary question in academia, and a few recent studies have attempted to provide answers. The issue remains widespread even in societies where income poverty has significantly declined, making it a real puzzle for many scholars. Sarkar and Sarkar (2016) chose an economic perspective to this puzzle and highlighted the role of income inequality as a channel for the transmission of child labour. They also showed that free public education may raise schooling, improve health, and reduce income inequality, but does not necessarily eradicate child labour.

Recent estimates and surveys reveal that child labour incidences have increased in many parts of the world, even in their worst forms. In 2020, about seventy-nine million children were engaged in hazardous work, and more than one-fourth of children within the age bracket of 5 to 11 were in family-based child labour likely to harm their safety, health, and morals (ILO and UNICEF 2021). The findings of a recent survey which adopted ILO’s definition of the worst forms of child labour reveal that 34.6 percent of children living in the poor slum areas of Dhaka – the capital city of Bangladesh⁶ – are found to be engaged in the worst forms of child labour (Maksud, Hossain, and Arulanantham 2019). Kasper's (2021) review of 48 recent academic sources reveals that social and spatial economic informalities are creating spaces in urban neighbourhoods with specific dynamics driving families to engage in the worst forms of child

⁶ The findings of the survey are distressing since the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 prohibits the employment of any child less than 14 years of age in any occupation or establishment and strictly bans the employment of anyone below 18 in certain enlisted hazardous works.

labour. Several reports and papers published by the Child Labour Action-Research-Innovation in South and South-Eastern Asia reveal that various forms of hazardous child labour remain widespread across many economic sectors and business supply chains in the capital cities of Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal (Aked 2021; Constant et al. 2020; Oosterhoff and Hacker 2020). Gatsinzi (2020) notes that child labour in rural sub-Saharan Africa is far more nuanced than has been diagnosed by current donors. During the pandemic, many developing countries have witnessed a sharp rise in child marriages which exposed millions of children to the worst forms of child labour (Bhatnagar 2021; Hoque 2020). These findings indicate that the worst forms of child labour have not only become widespread but also widely normalized in many hotspots.

Governments across many developing countries fail to administer legislation and policies against child labour in these hotspots. De Guzman Chorny et al. (2019) studied analyses of child labour legislation from 193 UN member states and revealed that one in five ratifiers of ILO and UN Conventions legally allow children to do hazardous work. The analyses further showed that the loopholes in legislation and implementation continue to undermine children's right to protection. Das and Chen (2019) note that although the economic aspects of child labour have rightly received much attention, other aspects including violence against children as workers have been largely neglected. The issue of labour rights of the working children has also been significantly absent from contemporary policy discussions. Howard (2014) argues that if child labour is not going to be eradicated, it should at least be formalized, regulated, and recognized for the best interests of the children. In 2014, Bolivia brought a legal amendment to the *Code of the Child and Adolescent*, setting a new national standard (i.e., allowing children ten years old and older to work independently) to recognize the indigenous traditions and the country's social and cultural realities (Liebel 2015). This law challenged the dominant abolitionist policy and contained provisions pertaining to the protection of working children (Howard 2014). However, the initiative received intense criticisms from a faction of the international community led by ILO and the United States government, and eventually, those provisions (regarding the legal protections for working children under the age of 14) were removed in 2018 without consulting the children (Liebel 2019). On this background, Willman (2020) finds that children in Bolivia still possess various perspectives on working, which permit us to move beyond current debates of child labour and recognize children's views and aspirations.

Previous qualitative studies have also illustrated the importance of integrating children's views and engaging families in constructing the understanding of harmful child labour (Jijon 2020; Togunde and Weber 2007; Zhang et al. 2019). Karikari's (2016) critical discourse analysis of the worst forms of child labour points out that current policies are not cognizant or sensitive to local constructions and conceptions of appropriate roles of children at various ages. Jonah and Abebe (2019) argues that while the current abolitionist framework emphasizes children's right to education, the dichotomy is that most children support their schooling through their income. They add that the concept of work-free childhoods is at odds with prevailing sociocultural and economic realities. These discussions highlight that the current global and national policies are

neither based on the context-specific evidence, nor formulated for the best interests of the working children.

The emerging evidence necessitates immediate attention to the children engaged in the worst forms of child labour, and their families. Generic child labour has been rooted in cultures, systems, and traditions across many societies. Policy and support programmes should aim to attack the socio-cultural norms and realities that generate hazardous labour and the worst forms of child labour.

5. Conclusion

This review has illustrated the historical developments of the understanding of child labour and demonstrated how definitions and classifications of child labour has shaped the global fight against this phenomenon. Scholars continue to debate various approaches to study and understand the phenomenon of child labour but have struggled to find effective ways to address the issue. With the rapid urbanization, social exclusion, and destabilized livelihoods in the current pandemic-affected world, child labour incidences in all forms continue to increase and pose a great threat to the progress of many developing countries. With the changing nature and landscape of hazardous labour, the dominant global age-based abolitionist ideology has not been successful. Contemporary theorists and empiricists have emphasized understanding local contexts and generating qualitative evidence through involving the families and communities where children are engaged in harmful child labour. The eradication, or at least the alleviation, of the worst forms of child labour must be prioritized, and innovative community-led participatory solutions can help to reduce harmful social and cultural norms that normalize harmful child labour in its biggest hotspots. The emerging evidence and critics point out that children's contribution through labour in their own lives and in supporting their families must be recognized. Therefore, policies should regulate the phenomenon in ways that can ensure children's best interests, and support programmes must target the elimination of the root causes of child labour and provide the alternative to its worst forms.

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Prioritising Agro-Rural Areas with Holistic and Community-Participatory Initiatives to Accelerate Progress towards Elimination of Child Labour

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Abstract

Agriculture continues to be the most challenging sector with the majority of child labourers (70%) working in hazardous conditions. The innumerable interventions to tackle child labour have failed to impact informal supply chains in agro-rural regions. This article examines the key challenges and emerging good practices to understand and address child labour in informal economies such as agriculture by using an intersectional and holistic lens. Drawing from the experiences of Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) and its regional partners of more than two decades, this article proposes a holistic, area-based approach to address child labour in the agro-rural regions.

Keywords: Child labour, agriculture, gender, stakeholders, area-based approaches, supply chain, child labour monitoring

1. Introduction

The world has made progress in reducing child labour. There are now 86 million fewer children in child labour in 2020 as compared to 246 million in 2000, when the practice of gathering global estimates on child labour began (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).¹ International laws on child labour have been domesticated by countries into national laws, policies and action plans to prevent, protect and remedy exploitation of children. Stakeholders from Global North and Global South ranging from governments, civil society, trade unions, teachers' organisations, UN agencies and private sector rank among the key players in the fight against child labour today. Further, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the current development agenda

¹ International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward, New York, 2021. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf. Accessed 1 July, 2021

and framework - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include a target on child labour, viz. SDG 8.7 which commits states to end all forms of child labour by 2025. The achievement of this target is backed by multi-stakeholder partnership - Alliance 8.7, hosted by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Lastly, a key highlight of progress made towards ending child labour is the declaration of 2021 by the United Nations as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.²

But where there is progress, there are also challenges and stumbling blocks. Progress in eliminating child labour has stalled for the first time since the year 2000, with the number of children in child labour instead of decreasing from 152 million in 2016, increasing to 160 million today.³ The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 further threatens to hamper progress by adding another 8.9 million children by the end of 2022, due to increased poverty and exacerbated vulnerabilities caused by the pandemic (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Laws, policies and action plans are not necessarily being translated into efforts on the ground for want of “real” political will, resources and capacity, among other things. The largest proportion of children continues to be found working in one of the most hazardous and difficult sectors, i.e., the agriculture sector which employs 70% of all child labour.⁴ Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors for child labourers, in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases.⁵ More children are working in rural areas, often considered hard-to-reach areas due to the urban bias in policy making and implementation, i.e., 122.7 million child labourers in rural areas vis-a-vis 37.3 million in urban areas. The majority of child labour is found in the youngest cohort, i.e., 89.3 million children between 5 to 11 years, putting a question mark on delivery of universal primary education policies and programmes (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).

Sadly, all this is happening against the backdrop of the clock ticking away towards the 2025 deadline to achieve zero child labour. While the realisation of target SDG 8.7 in terms of no child labour by 2025 looks unlikely, it is goalpost worth moving towards, aiming at maximum possible reduction in child labour. This conundrum begs the question - where do we then prioritise our efforts to end child labour and how? The solutions lies in the problem itself - focus and prioritise efforts in the largest and most prevalent sector of child labour in agriculture sector. This article focuses on the state of affairs, viz., the challenges and progress made in the agriculture sector; analysis of emerging good practices that have the potential to address key issues of child labour in agro-rural economies and how a holistic approach that combines such practices can achieve lasting impact in terms of reduced child labour.

² International Labour Organization. 2021. “2021: International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.” [www.ilo.org. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang-en/index.htm). Accessed 2 July, 2021

³ “Child Labour Rises to 160 Million – First Increase in Two Decades,” https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_800090/lang-en/index.htm. Accessed 10 July, 2021

⁴ Ibid

⁵ “Child Labour in Agriculture (IPEC).” *International Labour Organization*, <https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Agriculture/lang-en/index.htm>. Accessed 6 July 2021

It is important to point out that while this article focuses on agriculture sector specifically, in general terms it covers child labour in the rural and informal economy. Therefore, at times the term ‘agro-rural sector’ or agro-rural economy’ may be used to refer to this sector in the general sense.

1.1 Methodology

This article draws examples and insights from key data published by the ILO, UNICEF and other such agencies on child labour. Further, it uses evidence from civil society organisations, especially the ones working on the issue of child labour, bonded labour and forced labour in agriculture. Besides using news reports and articles to highlight more recurring issues pertaining to child labour in supply chains of agricultural commodities, the literature also makes use of vast practical experience of Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) and its southern-based network in child labour, spanning over two decades along with its approach to combine the various emerging good practices to address child labour in agro-rural settings. The article proposes an intersectional approach with a need to look beyond sex-disaggregated data, reflecting upon the gendered nature of child labour and the impact of women’s socio-economic status on child labour.

2. Child Labour in Agriculture - The State of Affairs

2.1 Background

Child labour in agro-rural economy is pervasive. More than 60 goods in this sector are found to be made with child labour, comprising farming, fisheries and aquaculture, forestry and livestock production.⁶ This socio-economic phenomenon is not only confined to countries of the Global South. The U.S and Turkey from the Global North, for example, are infamous for child exploitation in tobacco farms and hazelnut picking, respectively. Also, as mentioned, agriculture is the biggest employer of children, consistently employing around 100 million child labourers over the years (See Table 1 below). Further, over 30 million children in this sector work in hazardous conditions on family farms, commercial farms or plantations.

⁶ “2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor.” 2020. <https://www.dol.gov/>. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods?tid=All&field_exp_good_target_id=All&field_exp_exploitation_type_target_id_1=All&items_per_page=10. Accessed 14 July 2021

Time Period	Percentage of Child Labour in Agriculture	Absolute number of children in child labour in Agriculture (million)	Hazardous child labour in agriculture (million)	5-11 years	12-14 years	15-17 years
2008	60%	129				
2012	58.9%	98				
2016	70.9%	108		60 million	29.2 million	18.3 million
2020	70%	112	31.4	68.4 million	27 million	16.7 million

Table 1 – Trends in Child Labour in Agriculture (International Labour Organization)

Forced and bonded child labour is prevalent in commodities such as sugarcane especially during harvesting in India. Several reports have been published in the last few years highlighting the varied forms of child exploitation and human rights violations in the sugarcane supply chain in India. A 2017 study by PRAYAS, Centre for Labour Research and Action in India, called to attention the condition of sugarcane migrant farm workers trapped in indebtedness resulting in bonded labour, forced labour and child labour.⁷ Findings from the research were further validated by a research conducted from 2019-2020 by Global March, specifically on the issue of child labour and its gendered impacts in sugarcane supply chain in India.⁸ It was found that children as young as 6 were engaged in hazardous child labour working in extreme weather conditions and for long hours on farms, loading and unloading of sugarcane to and from trucks and using a machete to cut cane. While both boys and girls were engaged in child labour, girls were found to be spending additional time in household chores, childcare and also at the risk of child marriage.

Trafficked child labour has also been reported in cocoa growing in regions such as Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.⁹ The recently filed lawsuit against world's leading cocoa giants

⁷ "A Bitter Harvest, Seasonal Migrant Sugarcane Harvesting Workers of Gujarat." 2017. Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action. December 2017. <http://clra.in/research-and-study>. Accessed 23 August 2021

⁸ "Paradox of the Sweetest Crop, Child Labour and Its Gendered Dimensions in the Sugarcane Supply Chain in India." n.d. <https://Globalmarch.org/>. India: Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/paradox-of-the-sweetest-crop/>. Accessed 9 July, 2021

⁹ Balch, Oliver. 2021. "Mars, Nestlé and Hershey to Face Child Slavery Lawsuit in US." The Guardian. February 12, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/12/mars-nestle-and-hershey-to-face-landmark-child-slavery-lawsuit-in-us>. Accessed 23 August 2021

by children who claim they were used as slave labour on cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast shows enslavement of thousands of children in cocoa chains. Child migrants are also brought to Ivory Coast by people other than their parents. At least 16,000 children, and perhaps many more, are forced to work on West African cocoa farms by people other than their parents, according to estimates from a 2018 survey led by a Tulane University researcher.¹⁰

Based on the above overview, it can be seen that effective elimination and reduction in child labour will require a breakthrough and priority efforts in agriculture.

2.2 Challenges and efforts in addressing child labour in agriculture: An analysis

Addressing child labour in the agro-rural economy has been fraught with challenges and efforts have either been inadequate and/or inefficient. Key challenges and gaps in existing efforts to tackle child labour in this sector are discussed below.

Weak laws and enforcement - Child labour laws have had little impact in the agriculture sector. Laws remain limited, non-applicable, unenforced or only poorly enforced in many countries. In India, the widespread practice of child labour in sugarcane harvesting where young children handle a sharp sickle or machete type tool, remains unrecognised as hazardous work in the national legal list of hazardous activities that defines child labour.¹¹ Similarly, in Bangladesh, child labour in shrimp fry catching is not covered in the national list of hazardous, an activity that clearly is dangerous that involves children going in the deep water without any sort of protective gear to catch shrimp fries.¹² In contrast, in Uganda while growing, planting, harvesting and transporting sugarcane are among hazardous activities in national law, not permitted for employment of children, child labour in this sub-sector is common in the Eastern region, indicating gaps in law enforcement.¹³

A key reason for weak enforcement is that government labour inspection services in agriculture and rural areas are either absent or weak. The IUF, the largest union of food workers, has noted that monitoring and enforcement in agriculture is undermined when farms are in remote areas, isolated or far apart. This combined with a shortage of labour inspectors and

¹⁰ de Buhr, E & Gordon, E 2018, Bitter sweets: prevalence of forced labour and child labour in the cocoa sectors of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Tulane University & Walk Free Foundation. Accessed 24 August 2021

¹¹ Ibid (9)

¹² Global March Against Child Labour. "Mapping and Analysis of Child Labour and Associated Stakeholders in Shrimp Fry Collection in Targeted Upazila of Bangladesh." 2021 <https://globalmarch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Child-labour-in-shrimp-research-findings.pdf>. Accessed 5 July 2021

¹³ Global March Against Child Labour. "Research : A study on child labour and it's gender dimensions in sugar growing in Uganda," 2020. <https://globalmarch.org/research-a-study-on-child-labour-and-its-gender-dimensions-in-sugarcane-growing-in-uganda/>. Accessed 5 July 2021

limited resources for inspection means that many farms are never visited by labour inspectors.¹⁴ Thus, owing to limited regulation, the agriculture sector remains largely informal, heightening the risk of exploitation for vulnerable families and their children.

Also, many countries struggle with inconsistencies between their local laws as compared to international legal standards. Incoherencies between the minimum age for employment and the age of completion of compulsory schooling have been extensive.¹⁵ Additionally, the regional legislations do not take into account gaps pertaining to understanding of terms such as “child labour”, “working children” and child labour in “family work” which vary from one region to another, and pose additional implementation challenges. Relevant evidence is the controversial Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 in India that legalises child labour in “family or family enterprises”. The term “family and family enterprises” is defined ambiguously, and when applied to the agricultural sector, the issue is only exacerbated.¹⁶ Moreover, nearly 70% of child labour is classified under unpaid family labour (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2018), creating a problematic grey area within the Act that doesn’t regulate agricultural child labour.¹⁷

Overall, the effectiveness of legislations and policies aimed at reducing child labour seems challenging when it comes to child labour in agriculture since majority of child labour takes place in family setting. Structurally the informal nature of agriculture, lack of proper employment contracts and normalisation of daily wage, seasonal and contractual labour also promotes dependence of agriculture on family labour. It must be noted that while legislations pertaining to compulsory education, minimum employment age and hazardous occupations must be asserted, these alone are not enough to address child labour in rural and informal settings. In fact, child labour in agro-rural settings is dependent on socio-economic indicators of the community and can be effectively addressed if there is an ecosystem and enabling environment for the community to thrive and become child friendly. Therefore, enforcement gaps in cross-cutting and fundamental labour rights (such as freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, and freedom from discrimination and from forced labour), also need attention given their inter-relationship with child labour.¹⁸

¹⁴ IUF. “100 Years of Advancing Freedom of Association,” 2021. <https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/C11-anniversary-study.pdf>. Accessed 9 July 2021

¹⁵ ILO. “Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes,” 2018 https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS_653987/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed 12 July 2021.

¹⁶ Ibid (9)

¹⁷ “FAO - News Article: Child Labour in Agriculture Is on the Rise, Driven by Conflict and Disasters.” n.d. [Www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1140078/icode/). Accessed August 26, 2021. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1140078/icode/>. Accessed 8 July 2021

¹⁸ Global March Against Child Labour. “International Conference on Child Labour in Agriculture, Working Paper on Child Labour in Agriculture.” 2012. <https://globalmarch.org/events/from-farms-and-fields-to-classrooms-si-se-puede-yes-we-can/> Accessed 7 July 2021.

The “special status of helping out” in agriculture - Majority of child labour in agriculture takes place in family, smallholder farm units which is unpaid. Traditionally and culturally working on family farms is seen as “helping out”, which often masks the hazardous conditions in which the children work and/or loss of education time for the duration spent on fields.¹⁹ Further, as children in family farms work in an informal economy set up, there is lack of reporting on this kind of employment, making family child labour in agriculture invisible, hidden, unacknowledged and even more difficult to tackle.

Undue focus on popular crops and global supply chains - Despite the pervasiveness of child labour in agriculture, most efforts have been confined to mostly popular agro-crops such as cocoa, coffee, and palm-oil to name a few. Other sub-sectors of agriculture such as livestock and fisheries have often been neglected and key reason is that these sub-sectors are non-export oriented.²⁰ Other examples include existence of child labour in non-typical crops such as spices (chillies) in India and shrimp fry catching in Bangladesh, which are largely ignored in policy, programmatic and project interventions.²¹ Further, resources and attention since recent years has focussed mostly on global supply chains, whereas majority of child labour takes place for domestic consumption.

Limited or non-existent access to schools and poor quality of education in rural areas - As agriculture constitutes the main point of entry into child labour for the youngest children (5-11 years) with nearly 76.6% of children (68.4 million) from this age group working in agriculture, education of these children is compromised. These children are either out of school and/or struggling to combine school and work. Further, nearly 20.5 million children in rural areas in this age group are out of school (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Among other things, these figures indicate that despite compulsory primary education policies and laws in countries, there are gaps in implementation as schools in rural areas are limited, non-existent or offer poor quality of education. In countries such as India, teacher absenteeism, poor infrastructure including poor sanitation facilities have been some key reasons for children to remain out of schools in villages. In Uganda, school-related fees and lack of school feeding programmes have made education unaffordable for children from poor families in sugarcane and coffee growing communities.²² The cultural attitudes of communities about the role of children in rural areas and negative perception towards the value of education have also played a role. Further, the alternative

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “From Farms and Fields to Classrooms.” 2012. *Globalmarch.org*. Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/from-farms-fields-to-classrooms/>. Accessed 11 July 2021

²¹ Global March Against Child Labour’s field observations

²² “Short Summary of Research: A Study on Child Labour and It’s Gender Dimensions in Sugarcane Growing in Uganda – Global March.” 2020. *Globalmarch.org*. Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/short-summary-of-research-a-study-on-child-labour-and-its-gender-dimensions-in-sugarcane-growing-in-uganda/>. Accessed 11 July 2021

technology based education used in many countries amidst school closures with the on-going pandemic, is only further keeping children in rural areas away from education and learning with the existing digital divide.²³

Girl child labour and gender concerns - Girl child labour in agriculture forms a significant part of the workforce, and helps maintain this phenomenon. Girl child labourers have a triple burden and are particularly disadvantaged since they usually have to also undertake domestic chores in their own homes before and after their agricultural work and on weekends. Also, their access to education is often more restricted than that of boys. In India, girls drop out of school and accompany their parents to sugarcane harvesting regions to look after their siblings. Some often end up being married before turning 18. Household chores in own household and domestic work in third-party houses both of which sees mostly girls, have found little coverage in child labour policies and implementation at national and international levels.

Rural poverty and low social protection coverage - Poverty is widespread in rural areas. Rural labour markets are weak, characterised by large employers, oversupply of labour, and poor transport and communications infrastructure restricting movement of labour to stronger markets, all keeping rural wages depressed and people trapped in poverty. Most child labourers come from poor families and households. Household poverty makes families vulnerable to pushing their children into work. This was seen in the case of Uganda where the poverty level of 42% in the Eastern region contributed to children working in the sugarcane growing sector among other things.²⁴ Families in rural-agro economies also have lower levels of social protection, resulting in use of their children's labour in work to meet the family daily needs. In coastal regions of Bangladesh, lack of adequate social protection services has been a contributing factor to push children into the hazardous work of wild shrimp fry catching.²⁵

3. Analysis of emerging good practices in tackling child labour in agriculture

The above discussion points to the complexity of child labour in agro-rural sector, and therefore there is no “one size fits all” approach to eradicate child labour universally. However, some practices have shown to be efficient, albeit with challenges. The section below critically analyses some of the emerging good practices that have impacted the cause of eradicating child labour positively and their potential to address child labour in agro-rural sector.

²³ “COVID-19 Exposed the Digital Divide. Here's How We Can Close It.” n.d. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/covid-digital-divide-learning-education/>. Accessed 12 July 2021

²⁴ Ibid (21)

²⁵ Ibid (12)

3.1 Human Rights Supply Chain Due Diligence Legislations that Reinforce Child Labour Frameworks

Various human rights due diligence (HRDD) legislations to tackle human rights abuses including child labour in supply chains are being implemented by countries such as France (2017 Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law), the UK (Modern Slavery Act) and Australia (Modern Slavery Act), among others. Particularly, the recently proposed EU legislation on mandatory human rights due diligence (mHRDD) is noteworthy which requires businesses to conduct risk assessments of their value chains and address any identified human rights issues, along with the issues of governance and environment with enforcement mechanisms and sanctions.²⁶ These specific legislations, among other things have added the responsibility on businesses to address child labour in their supply and value chains, along with respecting the rule of law in countries of their operations.

While these global legislations and measures are aimed at benefiting global supply chains and making countries child-labour free, their impact and outreach to informal sectors such as agriculture and its workers at the bottom, still has a long way to go. Each country's HRDD legislation has a different purpose, and thus requires a different approach.²⁷ Additionally, effective HRDD in agricultural supply chains will need participation of stakeholders such as grassroots organisations, NGOs, trade unions, producer groups and local level governments for businesses to go beyond the top tiers and conduct a comprehensive risk assessment.

3.2 Education-centred Interventions

The most effective way to prevent child labour is to improve access to and quality of schooling. Education is also referred often as a social vaccine to address child labour and finds prominence across most approaches on child labour. Yet, simply ensuring withdrawal of child labourers and their enrolment in schools is not enough to compensate for the missed years of education and other pedagogical, logistical as well as gender-based challenges that need to be addressed for transitioning from child labour to education to youth employment in decent work.

Various contextual challenges need to be taken into account while designing and implementing programmes and policies that intend to increase school enrolment and prevent child labour. For instance, given the data on early entry of young children in child labour, early childhood education is crucial for improvement in enrolment and learning indicators and improving children's overall success in school and later life, particularly for vulnerable, at-risk

²⁶ "Pressure Mounts on EU Regulator to Deliver on Mandatory Human Rights, Environmental and Governance Due Diligence." <https://www.whitecase.com/publications/alert/pressure-mounts-eu-regulator-deliver-mandatory-human-rights-environmental-and>. Accessed 9 July 2021

²⁷ Landmark Report on 1,000 European Companies Shows the Need for Human Rights Due Diligence Laws." Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/blog/landmark-report-on-1000-european-companies-shows-the-need-for-human-rights-due-diligence-laws/>. Accessed 9 July 2021

children who live in poverty or in low-income households. The World Bank's Uganda Nutrition and Early Child Development Project, initiated in 1998 has been one such example.²⁸ It aims to improve the malnutrition indicators, psychosocial, and cognitive growth and development of children less than six years of age. This project had positive and significant effects on school enrolment for children aged 3 to 5 years and a positive and significant effect on the highest grade attended.

Besides early childhood education, linking food security to education and child labour has also resulted in positive impacts in encouraging enrolment and attendance in schools, by targeting the root causes such as poverty, vulnerability and hunger at home. Large scale global interventions by organisations such as the World Food Programme, the Hunger Project, Caritas International amongst others have been consistently working on enhancing access of children to education and fighting child labour by ending hunger. Their cross-cutting programmes extend beyond providing meals to school children and include working with smallholder farmers, women's groups and communities in high-risk areas of child labour and out-of-school children.

India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is another example where 115.9 million children from vulnerable segments receive cooked meals every school day.²⁹ While the programme has been criticised such as for poor quality of food, it has also been applauded for enhancing learning outcomes amongst children. Recently, the Government of India extended this scheme through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of the cooking cost for the meals taking into account the impacts of COVID-19.³⁰ The outcomes of this one time aid are yet to be seen but it indicated that interventions aimed at addressing education challenges need to be contextualised and strengthened in times of crisis to prevent further increase in child labour.

Education union led multi-stakeholder initiatives have also proven to be successful in retaining children in schools. For the last two decades, Global March's member Education International and its affiliates, Algemene Onderwijsbond (the Netherlands) and Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (Germany), through the Fair Childhood Foundation, have supported projects to reduce school dropout rates and child labour and to contribute to the development of child labour-free zones in over 13 countries.³¹ Some of their best practices include enhancing teacher motivation; School-Based Child Labour Focal Points and Monitoring Structures; creating

²⁸ Alderman, Harold. "Improving Nutrition through Community Growth Promotion: Longitudinal Study of the Nutrition and Early Child Development Program in Uganda." *World Development* 35, no. 8 (August 2007): 1376–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.04.003>. Accessed 14 July 2021

²⁹ "Mid-Day Meal Scheme : How India Feeds 115 Million Children Every School Day." *Microsave*, January 19, 2021. <https://www.microsave.net/2021/01/19/mid-day-meal-scheme-how-india-feeds-115-million-children-every-school-day/>. Accessed 14 July 2021

³⁰ Singhal, Ashok. "11.8 Cr Students to Benefit from Financial Help by Government under Mid-Day Meal Scheme." *India Today*, May 28, 2021. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/11-8-cr-students-to-benefit-from-financial-help-by-government-under-mid-day-meal-scheme-1808179-2021-05-28>. Accessed 14 July 2021

³¹ Education International, and Wintour Nora. "EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices and Union Impacts," June 2020. https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2019_ei_research_childlabour_eng. Accessed 3 July 2021

an environment to encourage student participation and a caring, safe environment; monitoring absenteeism and assessing academic performance; bridging and remedial classes and initiatives to support the girl child.

3.3 Addressing Informality

Agriculture is largely informal, characterised by invisibility, low regulation, low wages/income, and low job and social security, resulting in precarious living and working situations for children and their families. Strong policies at the livelihood and labour market level can help in addressing these shortcomings of informality. Investing in development of sustainable learning and livelihood opportunities is especially important for the youth and other workers in the informal economy to achieve decent work and prevent the need to engage child labour. Informal apprenticeship and skill accreditation programmes have had a positive impact in imparting skills in the informal economy in many countries, such as Bangladesh.³² The country has a model based on the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework to encourage accreditation for skills acquired through work in the informal economy by providing benchmarks for skills attainment, alignment, and recognition.³³

Poor wages and price for agro-produce also result in poverty amongst agricultural households and increases the chances of child labour. Social protection instruments such as conditional cash transfers are essential in this regard. Studies have shown reductions in child labour in poorer households reached by cash transfer schemes. Assessments of the Bolsa Família Programme show positive impacts on the living conditions of poor people. Cash transfers helped in promoting food and nutritional safety and reducing poverty and inequality at the same time lowering the risk of child labour, strengthening local economies, and promoting gender equality.³⁴

Amidst the pandemic, the need for cash transfer and/or child-centred cash transfers is being recommended by many civil society organisations to prevent parents from using children's labour as a coping mechanism in times of crises. One such example is a recent report by Human Rights Watch, which based on research in Nepal, Ghana and Uganda calls on donors and governments to prioritise cash allowances to families to protect children's rights and enable families to maintain an adequate standard of living without having to resort to child labour.³⁵

³² ILO. "Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes," 2018. https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_653987/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed 4 July 2021

³³ ILO: Transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, Report V (1) International Labour Conference, 103rd Session 2014 (ILC.103/V/1). Accessed 4 July 2021

³⁴ Pais, P.S.M., Silva, F.d.F. and Teixeira, E.C. (2017), "The influence of Bolsa Familia conditional cash transfer program on child labor in Brazil", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 206-221. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-02-2015-0038>. Accessed 4 July 2021

³⁵ Human Rights Watch. "I must work to eat. Covid-19, Poverty and Child Labour in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda", 2021. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/05/crd_childlabor0521_web.pdf. Accessed 5 July 2021

3.4 Area-based Approaches

Area-based approaches focus on a specific geographical area based on indicators such as the burden of child labour, lack of decent livelihood opportunities and access to education amongst others. Without making any distinction between different forms of child labour, children are encouraged to go to school and stop working.³⁶ Various models such as the child friendly villages, child labour free zones and child labour monitoring (and remediation) system (CLMRS) can be found in villages, plantation areas, small islands, urban neighbourhoods, or cluster of communities.³⁷ The focus is not only on child labour in a specific sector or on the worst forms of child labour, but on all children within the area who are not able to attend school. Thus, area-based approaches overcome the limitation of sector specific approaches where specific sector targeting can result in increase or movement of children from the identified sector to other sector/s, thus not addressing the issue of child labour sustainably.³⁸

The area-based approach towards child labour free zones involves all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, children, unions, community groups, local authorities, religious leaders and employers. The power comes from the people living in these communities who set the norm that ‘no child should work; every child must be in school’. The cocoa sector is one such evidence where significant resources have been used in implementing area-based approach models such as the CLMRS. The first cocoa-specific CLMRS system was developed by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), in partnership with Nestlé, building on models developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Going beyond the supply chain, a CLMRS is embedded in the community structure with local stakeholders for liaising and conducting regular visits to households where child labour is found to build trust with both parents and children. The data collected from all monitoring visits is sent to a central database. Children in or at risk of child labour are provided with suitable remediation and other forms of support at child, family, cooperative, or community level such as provision of birth certificates, school materials and establishment of an income-generating project for the women of the village. There is continuous monitoring of child labour as well as their school attendance. So far companies such as Nestlé have committed to rolling out CLMRSs over their entire African supply chain by 2025, along with Mars for all at-risk households. According to ICI’s estimates, its CLMRS identify at least 60% of the children in a community involved in child labour whereas impact analysis shows that CLMRS can reduce child labour by 50% among those children identified as in child labour.

³⁶ FUNDAMENTALS & ITC-ILO, Mapping interventions addressing child labour and working conditions in artisanal mineral supply chains, Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020.

³⁷ “What Is a Child Labour Free Zone?” 2021. Education International. May 4, 2021. <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/21951:what-is-a-child-labour-free-zone>. Accessed 24 August 2021

³⁸ Ibid

Similarly, the child friendly village model is being implemented by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF), for over 15 years in countries like India, Nepal and Uganda. The concept of a Child-Friendly Village (CFV) or *Bal Mitra Gram* (BMG) directly addresses the multi-dimensional problems that generate and maintain the child labour situation. The rationale for the creation of a Child-Friendly Village is, there is a lack of proper educational infrastructure and of quality education at various villages in the country and child labour does not exist only because people in the communities are poor. Thus, it attacks the root causes to assure sustainability and perpetual settlement of the child labour in targeted areas. The area-based approach towards CFVs involves stakeholders, including teachers, parents, children, field activists, women and youth, village/community head, local authorities, leaders and employers. A successful example of area-based approach is the CFV model of KSCF in the mica mining area of Koderma district in Jharkhand, India. The intervention contributed to international mica industry corporates initiating action on child labour in mica mining and collection.³⁹ KSCF designed the selection criteria for their intervention with an area-based approach including indicators such as targeting the location where mining is rampant, the number of children working as child labourers in mines and the number of school dropouts. The formation of this CFV started in the year 2001 as an intensive campaign and now has the support of various stakeholders from businesses to international NGOs such as The Hans Foundation, Oberoi, Infosys, Estee Lauder, McKinsey, etc. In October 2018, the Jharkhand government signed an MoU with KSCF for a child labour free mica in Jharkhand. So far, 540 villages have been made child friendly by KSCF across India and the model has been replicated in other regions such as Nepal and Uganda.

Another example of successful models emerging from area-based approach is the CLFZ which was introduced in the year 1991, by an Indian NGO called Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MV Foundation) that managed to release thirty children in Ranga Reddy district in central India from the grip of bonded labour. It was their first project on child labour. To date, they have taken one million children out of work and helped them to integrate into full time, formal schools. Over 1,500 villages have been declared child labour free zones. MV Foundation challenged conventional beliefs about child labour, poverty and education and took a different stand: it is not poverty, but deep rooted social norms, the violation of workers' rights, discrimination against certain groups, and a poorly-functioning education system which are the main reasons why children weren't attending school. International research has now confirmed the fact that the majority of families can survive without the income of their working children. With the support of Stop Child Labour and partners, the CLFZ model has been replicated outside of India in 9 African countries where all children are systematically being withdrawn from labour

³⁹ "Case Study on Bal Mitra Gram (Child Friendly Village)." 2018. *Wwww.satyarthi.org.in*. Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation. <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mica-BMG-Case-Study.pdf>. Accessed 10 July 2021

and (re)integrated into formal, full-time schools in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Morocco, Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso.⁴⁰

The area-based approach has proved to be an impactful way in addressing child labour in agro-rural sectors. Noticeably, it focuses on interventions to prevent and eventually eliminate child labour in specific geographical locations. It is centred on a rights-based approach targeting the community, different stakeholders and the local duty bearers to work collectively towards creating spaces that are not just free of child labour but also child-friendly. In the agro-rural sector where law enforcement has been weak, such community participatory and community-led initiatives have proved to be effective alternatives.

The approach can be seen being implemented in the form of various models such as the child friendly village (CFV), child labour free zones (CLFZ) and child labour monitoring system (CLMS). Agro commodities producing countries have also implemented their own child labour monitoring systems, such as the Ghana Child Labour Monitoring System (GCLMS) and the *Système d'Observation and the Suivi du Travail des Enfants (SOSTECI)* in Côte d'Ivoire.⁴¹

While these examples indicate progress in addressing child labour, there are certain crucial aspects to be addressed even within these emerging good practices. According to the 2020 Cocoa Barometer report, despite the reduction in child labour in the communities where CLMRS has been implemented by ICI, it can only stop around 30% of child labourers from engaging in hazardous activities. Similarly, NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a survey to assess the effectiveness of interventions to reduce child labour and the worst forms of child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The results of the survey indicated that while multiple interventions implemented in a community led to a statistically significant reduction in the rates of child labour and hazardous child labour in cocoa production and while the prevalence rate of child labour did not increase in the high cocoa production areas, it increased substantially in low and medium production areas between 2008-09 and 2018-19. This clearly indicates the need for scaling up monitoring programmes rooted in area-based approach to regions with lower levels of production with plans that are more realistic and relevant to the community including stronger partnerships at the local level.

Further, there is a growing risk that different area-based models use different methodologies with radically different results, common definitions, standards and benchmarks. Additionally, despite most CLMRSs being prevalent in cocoa sector, most cocoa is still not traceable, and the non-traceable cocoa potentially comes from areas where producers are not organised into farmer groups and risks of child labour are likely higher. There is also hesitation from the global donor community to fund such interventions for longer periods of time which is crucial for creating sustainable models in informal economies such as agriculture especially for generating decent work and livelihood opportunities to prevent child labour holistically.

⁴⁰ "Child Labour Free Zones Evaluated." 2015. Stop Child Labour. June 25, 2015. <https://stopchildlabour.org/child-labour-free-zones-evaluated/>. Accessed 23 August 2021

⁴¹ Fountain, Antonie C. and Hütz-Adams, Friedel (2020): 2020 Cocoa Barometer. <https://www.voicenetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Cocoa-Barometer.pdf> Accessed 12 July 2021-25 August 2021

Moreover, area-based good practices also need stronger interventions for strengthening social and economic empowerment of women farmers and farm workers who contribute to the informal agricultural sector significantly and yet remain invisible.

Despite the imperfections and challenges associated with the above-mentioned good practices, their contributions to tackling child labour in agro-rural economies cannot be undermined. There is no single model that can be replicated from one region to the other but understanding of these models and combining them with other emerging good practices for a holistic approach can yield effective results. The following section focuses on the potential of combining area-based good practices and using an intersectional approach to address some of the various gaps of the interventions for addressing child labour holistically.

4. Moving Forward with a Holistic and Intersectional Approach

The canary in a coal mine metaphor is an appropriate one to understand and address the complex issue of child labour. The presence of children in hazardous work is a clear sign of other human rights abuses and risks for all stakeholders, especially the government and the private sector. Therefore, addressing child labour needs a perspective of including pre-existing risks such as poverty and gender inequality. As described in the preceding sections, the area-based approach has so far been the most widely implemented approach in various forms especially in agro-rural sectors such as cocoa communities in Africa. However, in order to address child labour organically, no one specific model can be replicated to tackle root causes and associated risks that contribute to child labour. Thus, a holistic approach comprised of different good practices such as CLMRS and emerging practices such as Child Labour Free Seal (CLFS) is being used by Global March to address child labour in variety of settings. This is further explained in the proceeding sections.

4.1 Holistic Approach to addressing Child Labour in Agro-Rural Economy

Global March Against Child Labour's suggested approach to address exploitation of children in agro-rural sector is centred upon tackling the issue of child labour holistically, viz., by focusing on root causes, combining proven and emerging good practice area-based interventions at grassroots level with multi-layered advocacy (i.e., top-down and bottom-up) and engagement between all actors from Global North and Global South. Further, the holistic approach combines 'whole-of-supply chain' action with gender as a cross-cutting issue that also allows understanding of the (gender) inequalities perpetuating child labour and more sustainable ways to address those intersectionality as described previously. Such an approach not only enables prevention of child labour and detecting of weak systems responsible for perpetuating it, but also keeps communities at the center, using area-based good practices such as Child Friendly Village and Child Labour Monitoring System which in turn creates an ecosystem for sustainable and child labour friendly agro-rural supply chains. Further, being an advocacy and network based

organisation, evidence and lessons from grassroots work is used by Global March to influence policy implementation and delivery at local (district), national and regional levels, while its access and participation in international forums and alliances is used to inform southern civil society of global developments and put pressure on national governments.

Global March Against Child Labour’ holistic approach : A glance

- Address root causes of child labour (poverty, inequality, illiteracy, etc.)
- Combine grassroots interventions with advocacy at all levels, i.e., bottom-up and top-down interventions, linking stakeholders in Global South and Global North
- Use best and proven area-based interventions on the ground that are community-driven in an integrated/inter-connected manner (i.e., Child Friendly village, Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System, and Child Labour Free Seal)
- Engage and encourage engagement across all stakeholders - civil society, governments, UN agencies, Members of Parliament, children and youth, private sector
- Encourage and represent voices of children and youth from communities
- Use gender as an cross-cutting theme / intersectional lens
- Use whole supply chain approach
- Build capacity of southern civil society working on child labour (towards sustainability) and facilitate their participation in international foras
- Advocate and engage at global and national levels on child labour. For example, for greater allocation of resources to anti-child labour programmes, to address implementation gaps in legal policy frameworks, dissemination of best practices towards knowledge gap
- Influence international agenda and discourse on child labour via participation in forums of Alliance 8.7, International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, etc.

This section elaborates upon Global March’s approach towards addressing child labour in agro-rural areas by adopting the essence of various crucial models and best practices built on the area-based approach in an interconnected manner.

The Child Friendly Village Model - A Child Friendly Village (CFV) is a village or community wherein (after the intervention) there is not child labour, all children are in learning, and key decisions in the community are made keeping the welfare of all children in mind. In a CFV, focus is on community participation and decentralised governance by forming community groups (Children’s Parliament, Youth Groups and Women’s Groups) that are educated and empowered to know their fundamental rights and advocate for them with the local governments to realise the same. This process of community engagement, in combination with an inclusive

gender approach addresses the issue of child labour in an intersectional manner and creates an environment to combat structural inequalities to change attitudes towards harmful norms and traditions that cause violations of children's rights and hinder community development. The model also fosters cross-linkages with different government departments like education, labour, health, social welfare, etc., and their participation for overall delivery of entitlements, social protection services and access to rights.

A key element of CFV in Global March's implementation design is a school feeding programme in Uganda used to encourage school enrolment and retention of children using "seeds for education". Here the coffee farmers in coffee growing regions of Mt. Elgon are engaged in growing food for children to overcome the obstacle of food insecurity in preventing child labour. The school staff is also using the unutilised space in the schools for growing food where children also participate to learn kitchen gardening in their leisure time.

Outcome and Impact of CFV

- Re-enrolment of out of school children
- Tackling of teacher absenteeism
- Provision of separate toilets for girls in school avoiding their drop-out
- Advocating for quality mid-day meals in schools
- Stopping child marriages by Children's Parliament members
- Gaining access to different social welfare schemes
- Addressing child labour in supply chains such as mica mining

This model has also been used for advocacy at regional, national and international levels with governments as well as with private sector to address child labour.

42

An impact assessment of the CFV model implementation by Global March and its sister organisation, BBA in India indicates that the model is overall highly impactful in terms of achieving the main objective which is to constitute Child Friendly Villages to reduce child labour. Almost all villages reported that child labour at the time of the assessment was non-existent.⁴³ Among the villages where primary data was collected, respondents categorically denied existence of child labour while adding that child labour did exist previously in each of the villages and has been eradicated in the last two years. However, it should be noted that though

⁴² Addressing Child Labour in Supply Chains," 2020. <https://globalmarch.org/addressing-child-labour-in-supply-chains/>. Accessed 15 July 2021

⁴³ "Impact Assessment of Project on Creating Child Friendly Villages in India." 2017. *Globalmarch.org*. <https://globalmarch.org/impact-assessment-of-project-on-creating-child-friendly-villages-in-india/>. Accessed 22 August 2021

child labour per se may be non-existent, there may be indicators that suggest that the risk of a child falling into the trap of child labour has not been eradicated completely.

Further, partnering with stakeholders such as environment experts resulted in the most engaging evidence of environment protection. In areas around the Mangla *panchayat* (village council) in Karnataka, environment protection trainings coupled with sustainable livelihoods helped in curtailing forced migration and provided local livelihood opportunities to communities with high incidents and risk of child labour. The community is engaged in making furniture and craft products out of a locally grown grass known as Lantana. The grass was infamous for harming soil productivity and poisoning cattle and was therefore treated as a weed.

Child Labour Monitoring System - The CLMS is an active and coordinated process used to regularly monitor and address children in child labour or at risk of it, in a particular defined area (community/district, etc.). Its objective is as a result of monitoring, to ensure that children are protected from exploitative and hazardous work. Designated local stakeholders such as district level officials in the labour department, grassroots organisations and school authorities conduct regular visits to every family and speak to parents and children. Information received from these monitoring visits and discussions is shared with a database at the central level.

Key activities of a CLMS include –

- a. Regularly repeated direct observations to identify child labourers and determine risks to which they are exposed.
- b. Referral of these children to services (education, health, vocational training, etc.).
- c. Verification that they have been removed and tracking them afterwards to ensure that their situation has improved

The model has been used in Ghana to address child labour in cocoa sector, in Indonesia and Philippines in the fishing sector, and in many other countries. Global March proposes using a combination approach which has community participation in it as a key feature. CLMS helps to mainstream child labour in government work by not only enhancing the government's accountability but also supporting its work through participation of other stakeholders. In this way, it also facilitates coordination and cooperation with different stakeholders including local industries and employers not only to share information, but also implement joint solutions. In many cases, it is not recommended to completely withdraw a child from child labour unless an alternative means of livelihood for the family is arranged. Therefore, various other forms of support through a CLMS are also possible at child, family, cooperative, or community level; from the provision of school materials to the establishment of income-generating projects for the smallholder farmers and producers particularly women of the village. Once a child is entered into this system, their exposure to child labour will continue to be monitored, as well as their school attendance.

The Child Labour Free Seal (CLFS) Model - The CLFS model allows companies, associations and informal producing units such as communities and farmers to enter socially responsible markets and promote their products free of child labour. The seal is the first step for an informal production unit to be able to comply with international standards and maintain more transparency as they are directly linked with the government without middlemen or suppliers. The producer community or informal unit has to agree to follow certain standards to apply for the seal issued by the government. Such a model makes it possible for the communities to also access the bigger market to increase livelihood and generate a living income. Being part of the seal increases their visibility making them less vulnerable to being exploited as the seal is directly issued by the government.

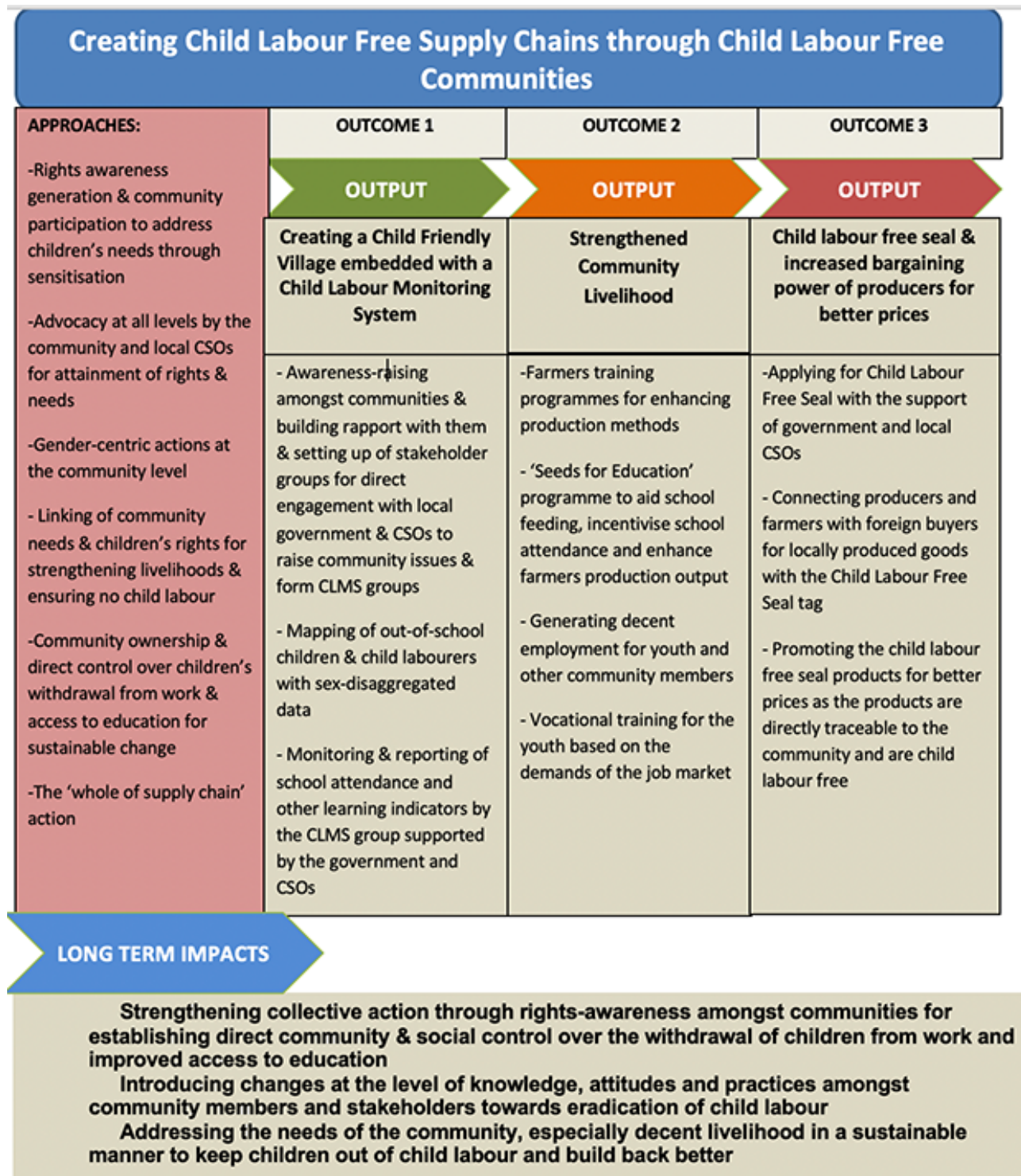
This model has been used in Peru and Mexico to address child labour in global and domestic supply chains of agriculture. When communities apply for a seal to the government they will also fall under a monitoring system of the government for better transparency. The community will then also be directly linked to global supply chains and therefore have better market access and can ask for higher prices. As this is done on a community level, farmers can collectively engage and increase their bargaining power for better prices for their products and also promote their work to attract foreign buyers.

In the case of CLMS, the community itself is sensitised and empowered via CFV activities and keeps a track of the out of school children making them *equal partners in monitoring progress* to ensure there is no child labour which further makes them more accessible and more qualified to apply for the CLFS. This also enables overcoming certain weak points of other interventions such as certification schemes, as they often lack the monitoring aspect. As a community keeps track of the out-of-school children, the records only need to be checked by government officials in order to continue the seal. However, the companies can also have access to such records for monitoring and full transparency of their supply chain so that they are able to pay a fair price to the actual farmer/producer. Further, a company can also use block chain technology to make sure no foreign products are entering their supply chain.

In a nutshell, the rights awareness and sensitisation process through which Global March engages with the community in a CFV serves as a stepping stone for their collective participation and action, enabling them as vigilantes of protection of children. A CLMS group formation gives the community in a CFV, the autonomy to monitor and report the progress indicators of children's school attendance and withdrawal of children from work, with the incentive of getting a CLFS by the support of government and local NGOs. Eventually, with a CLFS label, such a community in a CFV can successfully sell its products to foreign buyers with increased bargaining power as their community is child labour free, making their product supply chain transparent and traceable. Combining a CLFS with a CFV can also help to overcome the livelihood related challenges often faced by area-based interventions.

The interconnectedness of three key components of the approach, i.e. CFV; CLMS and CLFS with a gender responsive lens has the potential to not only monitor and reduce child labour

in agro-rural supply chains but also enhance the income of farmers and communities with the help of the local government and other key stakeholders. This integrated approach is based on years of experience with the constituent elements of CFV, CLMS, and CLFS and is a proven means for reducing child labour and removing children from dangerous working situations. This interconnectedness is further described in through Global March's theory of change below:



4.2 Applying an Intersectional Lens to Effectively Address Child Labour

There is strong evidence that more boys are involved in child labour than girls at all ages. Among all boys, 11.2 per cent are in child labour compared to 7.8 per cent of all girls. In absolute numbers, boys in child labour outnumber girls by 34 million. However, when the definition of child labour expands to include household chores for 21 hours or more each week, the gender gap in prevalence among boys and girls aged 5 to 14 is reduced by almost half (ILO and UNICEF, 2021: 28). Gender based norms rooted in patriarchal division of labour are harmful for both boys and girls, but more girls carry the triple burden (working as child labourers, performing unpaid household labour and being more at risk of remaining out of school). Thus, adopting a gender-based intersectional approach to address child labour is essential to assess the lived experiences of boys and girls differently as child labourers. This means going beyond the much needed sex-disaggregated, age and sub-sector data on child labour to a more interconnected approach that reflects the impact on child labourers and how gender inequality contributes to child labour. For instance, the gendered nature of child-care acts as a key factor for young girls in India to migrate with their families during the season of harvesting of crops such as sugarcane to take care of the household chores and the younger children besides working in the farms. This cycle continues for girls until they are married, to be repeated when they become wives, mothers and grandmothers.

Similarly, the gender-based norms with regards to socio-economic status and working conditions of women also have an impact on child labour. For centuries, women have been pushed to work in lower productivity jobs especially in the informal sectors such as agriculture than their male counterparts. This plays a key role in preventing their right to equal wages and decent jobs which impacts the household income negatively and creates undesirable circumstances for child labour. In Bangladesh's shrimp sector, it is common to find women and children engaged in hazardous work. While girls and boys work equal hours in catching fries for shrimp cultivation, there is a significant gap in their earnings. Women in the shrimp supply chain are also unequally paid. A 2019 study by INCIDIN Bangladesh discloses that monthly income of the surveyed children from Bagerhat, a hub of collecting fries for shrimp cultivation, is BDT 1869 (girls BDT 1487 and boys BDT 2134). Several discussions also reveal that if a man gets 300 BDT for a day of work, a woman gets 250 for the same job, which is greatly influenced by stereotyped beliefs about women's capability and normalisation of low wages for them.

Issues such as access to financial and income related resources as well as knowledge sharing is also limited for women which further impact the situation of child labour. This can be understood with example from Uganda where Global March carried-out research to identify and analyse the issue of child labour in sugarcane growing with a gender lens. One of the findings relates with the lack of tenure of land and land rights by women with consequences of further risks, in particular child labour. In the Busoga sub-region (traditional Bantu Kingdom) in Uganda, the male heads of households from family farms are the owners and inheritors of the land. They dedicate most of their property to sugarcane production, leasing the land to

outgrowers and companies to feed the ever-rising numbers of sugarcane industries in the region. This decision is taken without consultation with their wives (most of the family structures in this area are polygamous), leaving little or no land for the family for food production or economic activities when most households do not have alternative sources of income to purchase the required food products. This adds to the already existing poor socio-economic conditions of women, children and elderly who often face neglect, extortion, exploitation and other forms of violence by their male counterparts.

Case Study - This case study is a part of Global March's research, *Paradox of the Sweetest Crop* on the issue of "Child Labour and its Gendered Dimensions in the Sugarcane Supply Chain in India"

Maheswari and Kavita (name changed) migrated from the Bellary region of Karnataka to Mandya district, also called the Sugarcane city. While Maheswari dropped out of school after 5th grade, Kavita was never enrolled in any educational institute. Both of them started working on the sugarcane farm as soon as they dropped out of school and are now going to be married at the age of 15 and 17 respectively into the family of sugarcane harvesters. When asked why they are getting married early, both of them shared that their parents have to worry about their safety all the time so they will be "given" to a suitable boy and their parents can work peacefully.

Girls like Kavita and Maheshwari are not only victims of child labour but also child marriages amongst the families of sugarcane workers in India. The practice is illegal yet prevalent in districts of states where farming incomes are low and migration for sugarcane harvesting has been a norm. This indicates that child labour is more than just a commodity based issue. The practice does not exist in isolation and poses other risks for millions of children at risk. Normalised structural oppression based on caste and gender is also reflected in practices such as debt bondage, sexual abuse of women workers and burden of unpaid labour on girls and women amongst the migrant workers and their families in agriculture sector in India.

Therefore, while companies using agro-commodities could be taking various steps to address child labour in their supply chains, there is a high probability that their efforts might remain futile in the absence of an intersectional approach that also addresses gender related concerns. In order to pre-assess and address the risk of child labour in supply chains, it is crucial for businesses and other stakeholders to move beyond the idea and practice of gender from a 'tick-box exercise' and a separate labour rights category to gender as a cross-cutting issue across all stages of the due diligence processes and access to remedy as well. Gender based practices of discrimination and exploitation are not only limited to women with respect to the negative impacts and play a crucial role in contributing to the ecosystem that results in child labour.

5. Conclusion

Addressing child labour in agro-rural economies is not an isolated issue. It is a mammoth task with challenges such as high informality, large numbers of child labourers, minimum reach and efficacy of laws and regulation, social protection services, associated issues of poor education facilities and existing gender inequalities. But, it is a task that must be done, and with urgency. The holistic approach of combining area-based interventions with multi-stakeholder advocacy, engagement and capacity building, while centring on communities themselves, provides a hopeful remedy, overcoming some of the challenges found in tackling child labour in the agro-rural sector. Community sensitisation on child and human rights in child friendly village model combined with community participation in child labour monitoring system can address some key challenges of the agro rural communities where often laws and policies may either be poorly implemented or non-existent. Focus on the importance of the right to education of children, together with engagement of parents, children and the school authorities can help overcome the challenges in terms of rural education and school infrastructure and quality of education. The area-based approach ensures that all forms of child labour across sectors are tackled vis-a-vis cherry picking sectors or sub-sectors as per donor's preferences. Additionally, bringing producers in the community together to apply for child labour free seal, improves their bargaining power contributing to better prices and lowering household poverty in the long run - a key driver of child labour. Gender as a key pre-existing risk also needs to be taken into consideration rather than treating as a separate category. It is evident that child labour is a gendered experience governed by patriarchal norms, gendered division of labour and normalisation of hiring children and women as invisible and cheap workers with no agency. As has been said, "it takes a village to raise a child", addressing child labour in informal sectors such as agriculture therefore requires the villages and other such communities to be empowered socio-economically in order to raise children in a child friendly ecosystem with no need for child labour.

Multinational Enterprises and child labour: Insights from supply-chain initiatives in different sectors

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ABSTRACT

This article explores possible ways in which Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) contribute to eradicating child labour in the lower tiers of their supply chains. After highlighting key insights from academic literature and policymaking on definitions and approaches, we examine several innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships—from the coffee, cocoa, and textile sectors—to show how MNEs promote and implement interventions aiming to address root causes of child labour. Engaging with organizations that are well-rooted in local communities and using common and practical definitions seem crucial. We reflect on implications for day-to-day practice and policymaking and for further research.

Keywords: Child labour, multinational enterprises, non-governmental organizations, multi-stakeholder initiatives, partnerships

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written already about the role and responsibilities of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) in addressing human rights violations in their supply chains, with considerable attention for different ways to help reduce them, including (voluntary) codes of

conduct, multi-stakeholder (certification) standards and due diligence requirements.¹ However, we have only limited knowledge of their impact in lower tiers of supply chains, partly due to the inherently complex and messy nature in which production, trade and sourcing is taking place nowadays, and the many steps/stages in between origin (components, raw materials) to final usage. Consequently, both companies and scholars lack a good understanding of the actors involved and the situations in which worst offenses are taking place and can be addressed.

Most controversial and disconcerting amongst these human rights violations has been child labour. Recently published estimates on its prevalence is 160 million children world-wide, a number that, after 15 years of steady decline, has increased by over 8 million over the past 4 years.² Determining how many of these child labourers are directly or indirectly linked to global supply chains is challenging, but recent estimates arrive at 9-26% of child labour as being related to exports.³ MNEs may not be (or choose not to be) aware of child labour in their supply chains, but societal, consumer and activist pressure have led to bans particularly in the visible and more easily traceable parts of their supply chains. However, as a result of the growing global recognition that child labour is to be avoided, child labour is increasingly taking place beyond the first tier or in further outsourced (hidden) sections of the supply chain (including the informal sector), making it even more difficult to detect and act upon. Recognizing that child labour is a complex problem that is rooted in many different political, economic, and societal causes, companies interested in undertaking action often do not know where to start.

Zooming in on child labour as part of a broader range of human rights violations that can take place in supply chains, this article explores possible ways in which MNEs contribute to eradicating child labour in the lower tiers of their supply chains. After highlighting key insights from academic literature and policymaking on definitions and approaches, we examine several innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships—from the coffee, cocoa, and textile sectors—to show how MNEs promote and implement interventions aiming to address root causes of child labour. The article concludes with reflections on the implications for day-to-day practice and policymaking and for further research.

¹ See e.g.: Ans Kolk and Rob van Tulder, 'The Effectiveness of Self-Regulation', *European Management Journal* 20, no. 3 (2002): 260–71; Luc Fransen, Ans Kolk, and Miguel Rivera-Santos, 'The Multiplicity of International Corporate Social Responsibility Standards: Implications for Global Value Chain Governance', *Multinational Business Review* 27, no. 4 (9 December 2019): 397–426; Dorothea Baur and Guido Palazzo, 'The Moral Legitimacy of NGOs as Partners of Corporations', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2011); Kenneth W Abbott and Duncan Snidal, 'The Governance Triangle: Regulatory Standards Institutions and The Shadow of the State', in *The Politics of Global Regulation*, ed. Walter Mattli and Ngaire Woods (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44–88.

² ILO and UNICEF, 'Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward.' (New York: International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, 2021), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf.

³ Ali Alsamawi et al., 'Measuring Child Labour, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains: A Global Input-Output Approach. Technical Paper' (International Labour Organization, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Organization for Migration and United Nations Children's Fund, 2019).

EXISTING KNOWLEDGE ON CHILD LABOUR

Below we will first briefly discuss definitions of child labour, and subsequently indicate main causes and approaches adopted to reduce its occurrence at national and local levels. The multi-stakeholder partnerships involving business that are presented in the second half of this article will be contextualized and assessed based on this analysis. Notably, existing evidence predominantly stems from programmes targeted at individual/family-levels, sometimes in coherence with state interventions, but do not directly touch upon firms/MNEs, let alone their role in supply chains, a gap we aim to help fill in our work here.

Defining child labour

To address child labour, clear definitions are necessary—but this is by no means clear-cut. Leading in this realm is the International Labour Organization (ILO), and a commonly used definition involves “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.”⁴ Some documents complement it with an educational element, by adding (after “development”) “including *by interfering with their education* [emphasis added].”⁵ More specific are six categories identified by ILO as relevant (distinguishing children in respectively, light work, employment, household activities, hazardous work, child labour and the worst forms of child labour.⁶ However, these categories concern different age ranges and overlap to different extents, as shown in Table 1. The type of activities relative to the age of the child determine whether specific activities are to be considered child labour.

⁴ ILO and Inter-Parliamentary Union, ‘Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour. A Practical Guide to ILO Convention No. 182’ (Geneva: International Labour Organization & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2002), 16, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/publication/wcms_172685.pdf.

⁵ *How to Do Business with Respect for Children’s Right to Be Free from Child Labour: ILO-IOE Guidance for Employers* (Geneva: ILO, 2015), 15.

⁶ ILO, ‘Global Estimates of Child Labour. Results and Trends, 2012 -2016’ (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2016), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575499.pdf.

Table 1: Conceptualizations of child labour ^a

Age group	Economic activities ^b				Non-economic activities	
	Light work	Regular work	Worst forms of child labour		Hazardous unpaid household services	Other work
			Hazardous work	Worst forms of child labour other than hazardous work		
<i>Children below minimum age specified for light work (e.g., under 11)</i>	Employment and other forms of work	Employment and other forms of work	Work in industries and occupations designated as hazardous, or work for long hours and/or at night in industries and occupations not designated as hazardous	Children trafficked for work; forced and bonded child labour; commercial sexual exploitation of children; use of children for illicit activities and armed conflict	Own-use production of services or volunteer work in household producing services for long hours; involving unsafe equipment or heavy loads; in dangerous locations; etc.	
<i>Children specified in age range for light work (e.g., 12 - 14)</i>						
<i>Children at or above the general minimum working age (e.g., 15 -17 years)</i>						

Note: Dark grey = child labour; Light grey = No child labour

a. Adapted from ILO, 'Resolution to Amend the 18th ICLS Resolution Concerning Statistics of Child Labour' (Geneva: 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2018), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_647347.pdf.

b. Economic activity refers to activities categorized under the 2008 United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA) which include employment work, own-use production of goods, unpaid trainee work, volunteer work in market and non-market units and volunteer work in household producing of goods in line with the 19th ICLS Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment, and labour underutilization, 2013.

c. Exact age boundaries may differ slightly per country.

Three main Conventions provide the legal framework for defining child labour: The ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age (1973), the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999). The ILO Convention 138 was the first Convention which aimed at providing a universal standard for

unacceptable work by children, while at the same time leaving room for countries' diverse economic conditions and specific resource constraints. For example, the Convention included categories of 'light work' permissible for children under the minimum age for education, and 'hazardous work' to indicate non-permissible categories of work for children under 18. Specific definitions of what was to be considered 'light work' or 'hazardous work' were lacking. Furthermore, Convention 138 provided the possibility to exclude certain categories and industries of employment and work (Article 4 and Article 5) from falling under the Convention. This leads to the conclusion that although ILO definitions have been relatively consistent throughout the years, they leave much room for (national) interpretation.

For MNEs this situation poses several challenges. In the first place they have to deal with different (national) categorizations of child labour. Furthermore, indirect forms of child labour—i.e., children not directly employed within the company supply chain but contributing indirectly such as children helping parents picking cotton or trimming clothes—are not covered by Convention 138 but can still be considered child labour (by Convention 182 and/or by popular opinion that provides a reputational risk for MNEs). Consequently, for entities operating at an international level and having to deal with different definitions in different national contexts, the assessment and measurement of child labour is a complex process. Age boundaries differ, in some cases only paid work is included as child labour, and there is no clear consensus about the threshold of acceptable working hours.⁷ These inconsistencies make it difficult to conduct meaningful comparisons between studies and build a solid evidence base for effective interventions. Moreover, it is not always clear for companies when something is considered child labour and when not, with important implications for identification and remediation activities. In order to comply with the exact national and international definitions of child labour companies may end up with very long surveys to be able to assess in which exact cases there is child labour (or not), as the identification of child labour entails a combination of type and intensity of work, and the age of the child.⁸

Existing research on causes and policy solutions

To assess the best possible entry points for MNEs to meaningfully contribute to the eradication of child labour, knowing more about key reasons for its occurrence is important.

⁷ The latest ILO and UNICEF report on child labour statistics (2021) does explicitly state the thresholds referring to acceptable hours of household chores for children below the minimum working age (maximum of 21 hours per week), and for acceptable hours of employment or non-hazardous occupations (14 hours (ages 12 – 14) and 43 hours (ages 15 -17). However, earlier research by UNICEF or national hazardous activity frameworks use (slightly) different thresholds and definitions. ILO and UNICEF, 'Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward.'; UNICEF, ed., *Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*, The State of the World's Children 2007 (New York, NY: UNICEF, 2006); ICI, 'Comparative Analysis of Child Labour Decrees in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana' (International Cocoa Initiative, n.d.), https://cocoainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Comparative-analysis-of-child-labour-decrees-GHA-CIV-CMR_26_05_21.pdf.

⁸ See for an example the detailed activity framework on Hazardous child labour in Ghana: https://cocoainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Hazardous-Activity-Framework_2016-002.pdf

Research shows that child labour has a wide range of different causes, of which poverty is an important, but not the only, one. To the dominant literature from around the turn of the century that focused mainly on poverty and credit constraints as main drivers of child labour,⁹ later studies added a variety of other influential variables, such as the influence of parental education, attitudes (social norms) towards child labour, lack of access to quality education and poor enforcement of existing (child) labour laws.¹⁰ Overall, the existing body of work has paid more attention to the so-called ‘supply side’ (i.e., which factors push children into child labour, see the next paras below) than to the ‘demand side’ (i.e. which variables create conducive circumstances for child labour to take place). Demand-side variables include business conduct that creates risks for child labour and other human rights violations in supply chains, including lack of awareness, capacity and policy commitment to respect human rights (including child labour), as well as economic and commercial pressures leading to practices such as outsourcing of production and production quotas that have been associated with the use of child labour.¹¹ In some cases also (supposed) technical requirements that some work is best carried out by children (what has been called the ‘nimble finger myth’) can play a role.¹² We also note that most studies tend to focus on the national or local levels, and interventions from actors other than companies. Although the interaction between the responsibility of the state (adequate legislation and enforcement), socio-economic pressures facing individuals and business conduct is often acknowledged as

⁹ See influential work from key scholars such as: Kaushik Basu and Pham Huang Van, ‘The Economics of Child Labor’, *The American Economic Review* 88, no. 3 (1998): 412–27; Christiaan Grootaert and Harry Anthony Patrinos, ‘A Four-Country Comparative Study of Child Labor’ (Economics of Child Labour, World Bank, 2002), 41; Eric V. Edmonds, ‘Does Child Labor Decline with Improving Economic Status?’, *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, no. 10134 (2003); Ranjan Ray, ‘Child Labor, Child Schooling, and Their Interaction with Adult Labor: Empirical Evidence for Peru and Pakistan’, *The World Bank Economic Review* 14, no. 2 (2000): 347–67; Jean-Marie Baland and James A. Robinson, ‘Is Child Labor Inefficient?’, *Journal of Political Economy* 108, no. 4 (2000): 663–79; Priya Ranjan, ‘Credit Constraints and the Phenomenon of Child Labor’, *Journal of Development Economics* 64, no. 1 (2001): 81–102.

¹⁰ See for example: Patrick M. Emerson and André Portela Souza, ‘Is There a Child Labor Trap? Intergenerational Persistence of Child Labor in Brazil’, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 51, no. 2 (2003): 375–98; Ranjan Ray, ‘Analysis of Child Labour in Peru and Pakistan: A Comparative Study’, *Journal of Population Economics* 13, no. 1 (2000): 3–19; Saqib Jafarey and Sajal Lahiri, ‘Will Trade Sanctions Reduce Child Labour?’, *Journal of Development Economics* 68, no. 1 (2002): 137–56; Ozge Sensoy Bahar, ‘Should They Work or Should They Not? Low-Income Kurdish Migrant Mothers’ Beliefs and Attitudes About Child Labor’, *Global Social Welfare* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 37–52; Emily Delap, ‘Child Housework in Urban Bangladesh: An Exploration of Intra-Household Labour Deployment’, *Journal of International Development* 12, no. 5 (July 2000): 723; Martin Ravallion and Quentin Wodon, ‘Does Child Labour Displace Schooling? Evidence on Behavioural Responses to an Enrollment Subsidy’, *The Economic Journal* 110, no. 462 (2000): C158–75; Daron Acemoglu and Joshua Angrist, ‘How Large Are Human-Capital Externalities? Evidence from Compulsory Schooling Laws’, *NBER Macroeconomics Annual* 15 (2000): 9–59.

¹¹ ILO et al., ‘Ending Child Labour, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains’ (Geneva: International Labour Organization, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Organization for Migration and United Nations Children’s Fund, 2019), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_716930.pdf.

¹² ILO, ‘Child Labour in Cotton: A Briefing’ (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2016).

contributing factors, (academic) research related to child labour seems primarily focused on the first two.

In looking at existing empirical research, there is a wealth of evidence that reports on the effectiveness of (both conditional and unconditional) cash transfers in reducing child labour.¹³ In an overview of 23 evaluations of conditional cash transfer schemes, De Hoop and Rosati¹⁴ conclude that both conditional as well as unconditional cash transfers reduce child labour and the number of hours that children work. Transfers mitigate the shocks that may induce households to resort to child labour. Their review shows that boys experience significant decreases in economic work while girls experience decreases in household chores. In more recent studies, Dammert et al. and the International Cocoa Initiative provide useful overviews of the literature on the effectiveness of conditional and unconditional cash transfers showing a solid evidence base for the mostly positive results.¹⁵ Although the evaluated cash transfer programmes have mainly been part of government-funded programmes, some companies are also experimenting with including cash transfers as a remediation tool to address child labour in their supply chains.¹⁶

Regarding interventions to increase employment opportunities the results are more ambiguous. For increased self-employment opportunities by creating access to loans, in-kind assets and/or business training, the empirical evidence does not point in one specific direction. There are two common hypotheses in this regard. The first is that in a household where it becomes more attractive for children to work due to new income opportunities, children may increase their working hours and reduce school attendance. The other is that with adults gaining new income opportunities, children may be ‘used’ to substitute their parents in the activities they previously conducted. Although three different studies from Pakistan (business training and

¹³ Eric V Edmonds and Norbert Schady, ‘Poverty Alleviation and Child Labor’, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 4, no. 4 (2012): 100–124; Sebastian Galiani and Patrick J. McEwan, ‘The Heterogeneous Impact of Conditional Cash Transfers’, *Journal of Public Economics* 103 (2013): 85–96; Eric V. Edmonds, ‘Child Labor and Schooling Responses to Anticipated Income in South Africa’, *Journal of Development Economics* 81, no. 2 (2006): 386–414; Emmanuel Skoufias et al., ‘Conditional Cash Transfers and Their Impact on Child Work and Schooling: Evidence from the PROGRESA Program in Mexico [with Comments]’, *Economía* 2, no. 1 (2001): 45–96; Norbert Schady et al., ‘Cash Transfers, Conditions, and School Enrollment in Ecuador [with Comments]’, *Economía* 8, no. 2 (2008): 43–77; Ana C. Dammert, ‘Heterogeneous Impacts of Conditional Cash Transfers: Evidence from Nicaragua’, *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 58, no. 1 (2009): 53–83; Eric V. Edmonds and Maheshwor Shrestha, ‘You Get What You Pay for: Schooling Incentives and Child Labor’, *Journal of Development Economics* 111 (2014): 196–211.

¹⁴ Jacobus de Hoop and Furio C. Rosati, ‘Cash Transfers and Child Labor’, *The World Bank Research Observer* 29, no. 2 (2014): 202–34.

¹⁵ ICI, ‘The Effects of Income Changes on Child Labour. A Review of Evidence from Smallholder Agriculture’ (Geneva: International Cocoa Initiative, 2020), https://cocoainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ICI_Lit_Review_Income_ChildLabour.pdf; Ana C. Dammert et al., ‘Effects of Public Policy on Child Labor: Current Knowledge, Gaps, and Implications for Program Design’, *World Development* 110 (2018): 104–23.

¹⁶ Tony Choclonely, ‘Choclonely Foundation’, Tony’s Choclonely, accessed 15 June 2021, <https://tonyschoclonely.com/nl/en/other-stuff/choclonely-foundation>; ICI, ‘ICI Annual Report 2020’ (Geneva: International Cocoa Initiative, 2021), https://cocoainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ICI-Annual-Report-2020_ENGLISH.pdf.

microcredit), Bangladesh (business and vocational training) and India (public employment) indeed show empirical evidence for these hypotheses¹⁷, many others paint a different picture with either mixed effects, no effects, or the intended positive effects of these interventions.¹⁸

Interventions that focus on increasing school attendance through schooling subsidies, school constructions or direct incentives (such as food for education transfers) appear to both increase school attendance and reduce child labour, although the effects on the former appear to be much larger.¹⁹ However, there are also indications that these interventions risk to increase child labour, as improving access to schooling may free up time that children spend on working, thus increasing school attendance as well as participation in paid work and/or household activities.²⁰

Scientific evidence on the effects of awareness-raising activities/programmes in reducing child labour is limited. Awareness-raising activities are often combined with other interventions making it difficult to single out specific effects. Moreover, awareness-raising is in itself more difficult to measure, especially using rigorous research methods such as randomized control trials. In their research on the impact of microcredit, Banerjee et al. also looked at the impact of an education campaign on social issues, in which they saw no significant changes in attitudes and knowledge with regard to the legal age for marriage and the role of mothers in fertility decisions; knowledge and attitudes on child labour were not measured though.²¹ Two independent research institutes evaluated programmes of the Stop Child Labour Coalition, in which social norm

¹⁷ Oriana Bandiera et al., 'Can Basic Entrepreneurship Transform the Economic Lives of the Poor?', IZA Discussion Paper, 2013, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2266813>; Xavier Giné and Ghazala Mansuri, *Money or Ideas? A Field Experiment on Constraints to Entrepreneurship in Rural Pakistan*, Policy Research Working Papers (The World Bank, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-6959>; Manisha Shah and Bryce Millett Steinberg, 'Workfare and Human Capital Investment: Evidence from India' (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21543>.

¹⁸ Orazio Attanasio et al., 'The Impacts of Microfinance: Evidence from Joint-Liability Lending in Mongolia', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 7, no. 1 (2015): 90–122; Abhijit Banerjee et al., 'The Miracle of Microfinance? Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 7, no. 1 (2015): 22–53; Yonatan Dinku, 'The Impact of Public Works Programme on Child Labour in Ethiopia', *South African Journal of Economics* 87, no. 3 (2019): 283–301; Randall Juras, 'The Effect of Public Employment on Children's Work and School Attendance: Evidence from a Social Protection Program in Argentina', *IZA Journal of Labor & Development* 3, no. 1 (2014): 14; Nina Rosas and Shwetlena Sabarwal, *Public Works as a Productive Safety Net in a Post-Conflict Setting: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Sierra Leone* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-7580>.

¹⁹ Joshua Angrist et al., 'Vouchers for Private Schooling in Colombia: Evidence from a Randomized Natural Experiment', *The American Economic Review* 92, no. 5 (2002): 37; Harounan Kazianga et al., 'The Effects of "Girl-Friendly" Schools: Evidence from the BRIGHT School Construction Program in Burkina Faso', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 5, no. 3 (2013): 41–62; Sebastian Martinez and Sophie Naudeau, 'The Promise of Preschool in Africa': Ravallion and Wodon, 'Does Child Labour Displace Schooling?'

²⁰ Jacobus de Hoop and Furio C. Rosati, 'Does Promoting School Attendance Reduce Child Labor? Evidence from Burkina Faso's BRIGHT Project', *Economics of Education Review* 39 (2014): 78–96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2013.11.001>.

²¹ Abhijit Banerjee et al., 'Targeting the Hard-Core Poor: An Impact Assessment', 2011.

change is a key element in combatting child labour (in combination with broader interventions such as improving financial resilience of parents and access to quality education, and engaging policy-makers at different levels).²² They concluded that areas where the programmes were implemented saw substantive changes in social norms regarding child labour and education, with the number of children in child labour dropping significantly.²³ However, in both cases it was not possible to disentangle the effects of changing social norms and of the other interventions taking place simultaneously. Recent research carried out in the cocoa sector in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire also assessed the impact of awareness-raising campaigns and concluded that although knowledge on child labour had increased among respondents, awareness-raising alone seemed not sufficient to change practices around working children. They further noted that interventions focusing on the health consequences of working children seemed more effective than awareness-campaigns addressing child labour from a legislative perspective.²⁴

CHILD LABOUR IN MULTINATIONALS' SUPPLY CHAINS

As noted, the above-mentioned causes and solutions are primarily focused on interventions at the national and local level. For the international picture, MNEs, which by definition operate across borders, are important, especially in the absence of binding global legislation. As such, child labour occurs frequently in (parts of) MNEs' supply chains, in a large variety of sectors; the latest overview of the US Department of Labour includes 155 goods from 77 countries that are produced with child labour and/or forced labour.²⁵ Thus far, MNEs have dealt with human rights issues in their supply chains in three main ways: (1) (voluntary) corporate codes; (2) multi-stakeholder (certification) standards; (3) due diligence requirements. These approaches, briefly discussed below, are not mutually exclusive; certification standards may for example include aspects related to due diligence (such as the establishment of policies addressing human rights issues).

²² <https://stopchildlabour.org/child-labour-free-zones/>

²³ Aidenvironment, 'Stop Child Labour - Out of Work Programme - End Term Evaluation.' (Amsterdam, 2017), https://www.stopchildlabour.org/assets/Final-report-Hivos-child-labour-programme-evaluation-2017_ZN.pdf; Adante, 'Is the End of Child Labour in Sight? A Critical Review of a Vision and a Journey. Synthesis Report.' (The Hague: Stop Child Labour, 2015), https://cocoainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/8_HIVOS.pdf.

²⁴ NORC, 'Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. NORC Final Report.' (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center. University of Chicago, 2020).

²⁵ ILAB, '2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor' (US Department of Labour Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), 2020).

Corporate codes

Voluntary corporate codes of conduct to govern and promote responsible business behaviour have been around for many decades already.²⁶ Embraced by firms as a way of being able to gain control over the way in which to shape corporate social responsibility (CSR) as opposed to being bound to government legislation on how international operations should take place,²⁷ this type of self-regulation became increasingly popular, adopted by both firms themselves and by their business associations. The way in which these voluntary codes are formulated varies in their commitment to address human rights violations (including child labour).²⁸ Some can be assessed as largely symbolic while others seem to make a significant effort to address violations in their supply chains.²⁹ Early research on corporate codes of conduct in the garment industry showed that these voluntary commitments might be effective instruments in raising awareness about ways to address child labour, including for example the importance of monitoring and compliance systems.³⁰

However, issues with even the most advanced approaches abound, and there continue to be attempts at guidance for firms. For example, recently guidelines were developed for companies under the Dutch Agreement on Garment and Textile on (a long list of) aspects considered key in the development of a child labour code and/or policy. They include definitions of child labour; the relationship with other issues (gender, discrimination, forced labour) and related policies to address them; collaboration with other actors; risk assessments on child rights risks and how to address issues and underlying causes; assessment of buying practices in relation to child labour risks; and the inclusion of concrete indicators to implement and monitor commitments to addressing child labour.³¹

²⁶ See e.g.: Ans Kolk and Rob van Tulder, 'Setting new global rules? TNCs and codes of conduct', *Transnational Corporations* 14, no. 3 (2005): 1-27; Ans Kolk, Rob van Tulder and Carlijn Welters, 'International codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility: can TNCs regulate themselves?' *Transnational Corporations*, 8, no. 1, (1999): 143-180.

²⁷ See also Ian Maitland, 'The Limits of Business Self-Regulation', *California Management Review* 27, no. 3 (1985): 132-47.

²⁸ Ans Kolk and Rob van Tulder, 'Setting new global rules?'; Ans Kolk and Rob van Tulder, 'Ethics in international business: multinational approaches to child labour', *Journal of World Business* 39, no. 1 (2004): 49-60.

²⁹ Bindu Arya and Jane E. Salk, 'Cross-Sector Alliance Learning and Effectiveness of Voluntary Codes of Corporate Social Responsibility', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (2006): 211-34.

³⁰ Kolk and van Tulder, 'The Effectiveness of Self-Regulation'.

³¹ FLA, 'Guidelines for Improving Policies and Practices on Child Labour and Forced Labour' (Fair Labor Association, IRBC Agreements, Social and Economic Council (SER)), accessed 14 June 2021, <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/-/media/imvo/files/kleding/child-labour/d-child-labour-forced-labour.pdf?la=en&hash=6CFCF83B91EA8BEBE72C4979B08B5E6>.

Multi-stakeholder (certification) standards

Besides the existence of business codes, such guidelines for responsible behaviour have over time also been developed and governed by multi-stakeholder initiatives; sometimes accompanied by standards for certification.³² They provide a way for companies to show to what extent their activities respect environmental issues and human rights, but in contrast to business codes described above, these social standards are developed by a wider group of actors. While initially praised by some as potentially more effective alternatives to trade bans for products with child labour and others raising doubts,³³ the jury is still out given the tremendous multiplicity of standards that has emerged over the years. There are general and more specific certifications and standards that firms can adhere to, with different sectoral or geographic scopes/issues coverage, degrees of formalization, number and types of stakeholders involved, and strictness of auditing and compliance.³⁴

Sections on child labour within these standards are usually based on definitions as determined by the ILO Conventions, but as mentioned earlier these are quite broad, resulting in a large variety of ways in which companies are expected to report on or deal with child labour. For example, the Global Reporting Initiative section on child labour refers only to three different elements (information on risks of child labour and youth exposed to hazardous work and measures taken to contribute to ‘effective abolition of child labour’)³⁵, whereas other standards such as Rugmark/Goodweave or UTZ/Rainforest Alliance have far more elaborate sections, including specifics on how child labour monitoring and remediation should be included in company policy and indicators on progressive improvement of the situation.³⁶ Interestingly, some certification bodies have started to adapt their standards from a ‘prohibiting’ approach to a more ‘step-by-step’ approach, which places more emphasis on the identification and monitoring

³² For an early overview of their emergence and characteristics, see Luc Fransen and Ans Kolk, ‘Global rule-setting for business: A critical analysis of multi-stakeholder standards’, *Organization* 14, no. 5 (2007): 667-684.

³³ For early assessments see Jean-Marie Baland and Cédric Duprez, ‘Are Labels Effective against Child Labor?’, *Journal of Public Economics* 93, no. 11–12 (2009): 1125–30; Arnab K. Basu, Nancy H. Chau, and Ulrike Grote, ‘Guaranteed Manufactured without Child Labor: The Economics of Consumer Boycotts, Social Labeling and Trade Sanctions’, *Review of Development Economics* 10, no. 3 (2006): 466–91; Sayan Chakrabarty and Ulrike Grote, ‘Child Labor in Carpet Weaving: Impact of Social Labeling in India and Nepal’, *World Development* 37, no. 10 (October 2009): 1683–93.

³⁴ For a comprehensive overview of different types of CSR standards and certifications, see Fransen, Kolk, and Rivera-Santos, ‘The Multiplicity of International Corporate Social Responsibility Standards’.

³⁵ GRI 408: Child Labor 2016. Accessible at: <https://www.globalreporting.org/how-to-use-the-gri-standards/gri-standards-english-language/>

³⁶ Rainforest Alliance, ‘Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard. Farm Requirements. Version 1.1.’, 2020, https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-Sustainable-Agriculture-Standard_Farm-Requirements_Rainforest-Alliance.pdf; Rainforest Alliance, ‘Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard. Supply Chain Requirements. Version 1.1.’, 2020, https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Rainforest-Alliance-2020-Sustainable-Agriculture-Standard_Supply-Chain-Requirements.pdf.

of the necessary steps towards addressing the problem.³⁷ In the cocoa sector, leading chocolate manufacturers are moving away from their aim at full certification (by external bodies) toward ‘own standardization’, referring to company responsible sourcing programmes that they regard as more comprehensive and effective in tackling child labour.³⁸ Driven to some extent by complex layering of requirements from different (constellations of) actors, this ‘de-standardization’—while part of a broader trend occurring in more industries—is viewed with concern given the potential for being used as excuse to escape strict external scrutiny.³⁹ The growing use of intermediaries by big brands (e.g. importers in clothing production) has also increased opacity in terms of traceability and adequate (multiple) standard compliance.⁴⁰

Due diligence requirements

The process of due diligence is guided by the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs),⁴¹ which are both voluntary mechanisms identifying actions for both state and private actors. A thorough due diligence process for MNEs covers 6 different steps: (1) to embed Responsible Business Conduct into the enterprise’s policies and management systems; to undertake due diligence by (2) identifying actual or potential adverse impacts on Responsible Business Conduct issues; (3) ceasing, preventing or mitigating them; (4) tracking implementation and results; (5) communicating how impacts are addressed; and (6) to enable remediation when appropriate.⁴² The ILO-IOE Child Labour Guidance Tool for Business provides further specifications on what is expected from MNEs under the UNGPs with regard to child labour.⁴³ Although the OECD Guidelines and the UNGPs are voluntary, a growing number of countries

³⁷ See for an example the recently adopted ‘Assess and Address’ approach by the Rainforest Alliance <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/resource-item/whats-in-our-2020-certification-program-assess-and-address/>

³⁸ See the 2018 Cocoa for Generations sustainability strategy of Mars Wrigley (<https://www.mars.com/news-and-stories/press-releases/cocoa-sustainability-strategy>); and the Cocoa Life programme of Mondelēz: <https://www.cocoalife.org/>

³⁹ Fransen, Kolk, and Rivera-Santos, ‘The Multiplicity of International Corporate Social Responsibility Standards’.

⁴⁰ Merel Serdijn, Ans Kolk and Luc Fransen, ‘Uncovering missing links in Global Value Chain research – and implications for Corporate Social Responsibility and International Business’, *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-01-2020-0002>.

⁴¹ OECD, *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, 2011 Edition* (OECD, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264115415-en>; United Nations, ‘United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework’, 2011, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf.

⁴² OECD, ‘OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct’, 2018, 21, <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-Due-Diligence-Guidance-for-Responsible-Business-Conduct.pdf>.

⁴³ ILO and International Organization of Employers, *How to Do Business with Respect for Children’s Right to Be Free from Child Labour*.

are setting up or have implemented (partial) due diligence laws that provide national legislative frameworks requiring MNEs to undertake due diligence.⁴⁴ A case in point is the 2019 Child Labour Due Diligence Act in the Netherlands stipulating due diligence by MNEs to ensure products and services offered in the country have not used child labour.⁴⁵

Supply chain transparency and due diligence laws are still a relatively new phenomenon, so there is not much data available on their effectiveness in addressing child labour. However, first studies on the effectiveness of the Modern Slavery Act in the United Kingdom show limited results in terms of the effectiveness on the occurrence of child labour. It fails to drive concrete action in the lower tiers in the supply chain, and there are even indications that it only leads to pushing child labour further down the supply chain.⁴⁶ This adds to broader concerns about this recent wave of regulation, which is characterized as mostly weak in nature, often focused on reporting rather than actual compliance, and predominantly applicable to large (international) firms.⁴⁷ An in-depth study of the UK Modern Slavery Act showed how the private sector actively helped the adoption of the least stringent, business-driven approaches.⁴⁸

Multi-stakeholder ‘pathways in action’ to tackle child labour

To implement thorough due diligence, or interventions related to corporate codes or as part of multi-stakeholder (certification) standards, MNEs have engaged in all sorts of partnerships—projects specifically focused on child labour or on child labour as part of a broader attempt to tackle human rights violations in supply chains. Collaboration can be with other firms, governments and/or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although there are examples of industry-only and public-private partnerships that address human rights issues (including child labour),⁴⁹ NGO-business collaborations and multi-stakeholder partnerships (including public sector and/or other actors as well) are most common in being specifically devoted to tackling child labour. Some are part of the direct due diligence cycle, others are collective projects that address child labour risks further upstream without being able (yet) to link the specific locations

⁴⁴ For a most recent update on countries where human rights due diligence has been translated in to legislation see the website: <http://www.bhrinlaw.org/>

⁴⁵ <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stb-2019-401.html>

⁴⁶ Professor Alex Balch, Dr Samantha Currie, and Dr Jennifer Johns, ‘Clothes, Chocolate and Children: Realising the Transparency Dividend’, *University of Liverpool*, n.d., 40.

⁴⁷ Genevieve LeBaron & Andreas Rühmkorf, ‘The Domestic Politics of Corporate Accountability Legislation: Struggles Over the 2015 Modern Slavery Act.’ *Socio-Economic Review* 17, no 3, 709-743; (2019); Nicola Phillips, Genevieve LeBaron & Sara Wallin, *Mapping and Measuring the Effectiveness of Labour-Related Disclosure Requirements for Global Supply Chains*. International Labour Organization Working Paper No 32 (2018).

⁴⁸ Genevieve LeBaron & Andreas Rühmkorf, ‘The Domestic Politics of Corporate Accountability Legislation: Struggles Over the 2015 Modern Slavery Act’.

⁴⁹ See for example the World Cocoa Foundation (www.worldcocoafoundation.org) for an example of an industry partnership to address social and environmental issues in the cocoa sector.

to the company supply chain.⁵⁰ Although there is much research on NGO-business collaborations and multi-stakeholder partnerships and factors contributing to their success or failure,⁵¹ the scientific and grey literature is particularly thin on the effectiveness of these partnerships in tackling child labour.⁵² The next section will further elaborate on a selection of these partnerships, including an overview of available literature on the effectiveness of them.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CHILD LABOUR INITIATIVES: THREE EXAMPLES

This section presents three examples of how MNEs can address child labour in their supply chains. Earlier efforts to tackle child labour were mostly taken by governments, international organisations and/or NGOs, but the past decade has seen a growing number of cases involving MNEs.⁵³ However, research on these examples is still scarce and concrete initiatives that go beyond risk mitigation of child labour in first tiers of supply chains are limited. The information on the cases below is based upon publicly available documentation, as well as the first author's practitioner experience in the NGO sector working with companies aiming to address child labour in their supply chains.⁵⁴

With access to sufficient information as crucial factor, we also aimed to cover: (1) sectors and regions in which child labour is highly present; (2) distinct approaches with different types

⁵⁰ An example of the latter is the Gold Partnership that was established between Fairphone, Royal Phillips, UNICEF, Hivos/Stop Child Labour, Solidaridad, Fairtrade Foundation and the Impact Facility, under the Dutch Responsible Gold Agreement: <https://www.solidaridadnetwork.org/news/striving-for-impact-in-tackling-child-labour-and-creating-a-fair-gold-supply-chain-in-ugandan-mines/>

⁵¹ E.g. Nicolas M. Dahan et al., 'Corporate-NGO Collaboration: Co-Creating New Business Models for Developing Markets', *Long Range Planning* 43, nos. 2–3 (2010): 326–42; Sébastien Mena and Guido Palazzo, 'Input and Output Legitimacy of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2012): 527–56; Martijn Boersma, 'Between Norms and Practice: Civil Society Perspectives on the Legitimacy of Multistakeholder Initiatives to Eliminate Child Labor', *Business Strategy and the Environment* 27, no. 5 (2018): 612–20.

⁵² See for a few exceptions: Elliot J. Schrage and Anthony P. Ewing, 'The Cocoa Industry and Child Labour', *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 2005, no. 18 (2005): 99–112; Tugce Bulut and Christel Lane, 'The Private Regulation of Labour Standards and Rights in the Global Clothing Industry: An Evaluation of Its Effectiveness in Two Developing Countries', *New Political Economy* 16, no. 1 (1 February 2011): 41–71. More recent literature is most often focused on modern slavery and/or labour rights more broadly, including child labour, but not treating their effectiveness separately. This also applies to technology projects, e.g. those using blockchain and stipulating its potential to help increase traceability, see Gabriella M. Hastig and ManMohan S. Sodhi, 'Blockchain for supply chain traceability: Business requirements and critical success factors', *Production and Operations Management* 29 no 4, 935–954 (2020).

⁵³ See most notably for example an overview of the projects funded by the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the U.S. Department of Labour to address child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/projects>

⁵⁴ From September 2014 to March 2020, Jolijn Engelbertink worked as a Monitoring and Evaluation specialist for both the Stop Child Labour Coalition (www.stopchildlabour.org/) and the Work: No Child's Business Alliance (www.wncb.org). Since then, she has worked as an independent advisor and researcher on child labour and responsible business conduct.

of engagement; and (3) initiatives in which MNEs have a leading responsibility and that can thus help shed light on possible ways in which they may make a contribution. This led to three illustrative examples from the cocoa, coffee, and textile sectors, with each specific opportunities and challenges, and different characteristics, as shown in Table 2 and explained further below. There are also interesting cross-cutting lessons, which we discuss after the three cases.

Table 2: Overview of key elements of the three partnerships to combat child labour

	CLFZ	CLMRS	Workers' committees
Country	Uganda	Cote d'Ivoire & Ghana	India
Sector	Coffee	Cocoa	Textile/garment
Companies involved	Kyagalanyi Coffee Ltd.	Nestlé	Prénatal, O'Neill, WE Fashion and the FNG Group
Other actors involved	Hivos/Stop Child Labour, CEFORD, UNATU, UTZ/ Rainforest Alliance	ICI, Farmer cooperatives	Hivos, Arisa, Social & Economic Council (AGT secretariat), SAVE, READ, Fair Labor Association
Tier involved	Tier 2 (coffee producers)	Tier 2/3 (cocoa producers/cooperatives)	Tier 2 (spinning mills and garment factories)
Timespan	2015-2017	Since 2012	2017-2020
Funding & Funding source	Project funding (± EUR 80,000) from Dutch MOFA, excluding input from KCL, UNATU and UTZ ^a	Nestlé funding: EUR 17.6 million for the period 2012-2018 ^b	Project funding for max. EUR 475,000 from Dutch Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO/FBK); 30% own funding required ^c
Coverage	13 villages (± 2,000 households)	1751 communities (73,248 farmers)	20 garment factories and spinning mills
Scope	Inside & outside direct supply chain	Inside & outside direct supply chain	Inside supply chain

a. Aidenvironment, 'Stop Child Labour - Out of Work Programme - End Term Evaluation.' (Amsterdam, 2017), https://www.stopchildlabour.org/assets/Final-report-Hivos-child-labour-programme-evaluation-2017_ZN.pdf.

b. Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report', 2019, 13, <https://www.nestlecocoaplan.com/themes/custom/cocoa/dist/assets/nestle-tackling-child-labor-2019.pdf>.

c. Fond Bestrijding Kinderarbeid: <https://www.rvo.nl/subsidie-en-financieringswijzer/fonds-bestrijding-kinderarbeid#:~:text=FBK%20is%20een%205%2Djarig,een%20maximumbedrag%20van%20%E2%82%AC%20475.000.>

Coffee: Area-based approach towards tackling child labour in Uganda

Child labour in the agricultural sector (including coffee and cocoa) comprises over 70% of the total number of child labourers world-wide.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the latest data on child labour

⁵⁵ ILO and UNICEF, 'Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward.'

show that there are more children in child labour in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined.⁵⁶ The production of coffee is associated with child labour in no less than 17 countries worldwide.⁵⁷ With an annual production of 255,000 metric tons of coffee per year, Uganda features at the 10th place of coffee-producing countries.⁵⁸ Within Africa, Uganda is the second largest producer and the largest exporter of coffee (only 5% of the coffee is consumed domestically).⁵⁹ Child labour is common in Uganda: approximately 2 million children (15% of the total number of children) from 5 to 17 years are estimated to be in child labour.⁶⁰ Of child labour in the age category 5 to 14 years, 95% is estimated to take place within agriculture.⁶¹

In 2014 the Ugandan company Kyagalanyi Coffee Ltd. (part of the international Volcafé group; hereafter referred to as KCL) started a sustainable coffee scheme in the West Nile area to assist households to improve coffee production and certify the purchased volumes under the international UTZ standard. Company field staff had identified that 50–60% of their coffee supplying households in the area were facing child labour issues.⁶² To help address them, a project was initiated together with the Dutch NGO Hivos (as part of the Stop Child Labour Coalition), CEFORD (a regional NGO) and UNATU (teachers union) to create a so-called Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) in 13 villages (approximately 2,000 households).⁶³ The key notion of a CLFZ is that all actors (teachers, employers, parents, children, local authorities) collaborate to ensure that all the children are supported out of work and go to school, focusing on all children in that specific area and not limited to specific supply chains.⁶⁴ The NGO CEFORD was responsible for building community relations and mobilization and for setting up village

⁵⁶ ILO and UNICEF.

⁵⁷ ILAB, '2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor'.

⁵⁸ <https://elevencoffee.com/top-coffee-producing-countries/>

⁵⁹ International Coffee Organization, 'The Value of Coffee. Sustainability, Inclusiveness, and Resilience of the Coffee Global Value Chain. 2020 Coffee Development Report' (International Coffee Organization, 2020), 89, https://5aa6088a-da13-41c1-b8ad-b2244f737dfa.filesusr.com/ugd/38d76b_4fc7b54a15f14a548b2f4a208c2eae6d.pdf.

⁶⁰ Colville UBOS, 'National Labour Force Survey 2016/17. Main Report' (Kampala, Uganda: Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

⁶¹ USDOL, '2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Uganda' (U.S. Department of Labour, 2019), https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2019/Uganda.pdf.

⁶² Aidenvironment, 'Results and Insights from the Child Labor Free Zone Program in West Nile Uganda. Baseline Study, Endline Study and Comparison. Final Report' (Amsterdam: Aidenvironment, 2021), <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/resource-item/results-insights-child-labor-free-zone-uganda-white-paper/>.

⁶³ Aidenvironment, 'Stop Child Labour - Out of Work Programme - End Term Evaluation.', 34.

⁶⁴ The Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) is an approach originating in India and further scaled up through the Stop Child Labour Coalition. Over the past 15 years CLFZs have been currently rolled out in over 112 communities in 14 countries worldwide. Suzanne Hoeksema, 'Celebrating 15 Years of Stop Child Labour. A Journey Full of Highlights and Lessons' (The Hague: Stop Child Labour, 2019).

committees to monitor and remediate child labour, and Village Saving and Loan Associations, while the teachers union UNATU did interventions to improve the quality of the schools in the area.⁶⁵ As part of the measures that KCL takes for their member producers to comply with the UTZ and 4C coffee certification standards, the company staff visit all their member households (over 5,000) to train them on good agricultural, environmental and social practices. As part of these trainings, any non-compliances and/or possible improvements are written up in a Household Improvement Plan, which includes sections on child labour. Within the West Nile project, the company team paid specific attention to identifying child labour and the underlying causes, and finding a fitting solution in each case. The team further linked the households to the NGO staff and the teachers union for follow-up support. Moreover, specifically in the project area the company carried out coffee school clubs (to learn skills to children on coffee growing) and trained youth (14-17 years old) on good practices for becoming a coffee producer.⁶⁶

In 2017, the project was evaluated as part of a larger programme evaluation. The evaluation concluded that the partnership had been very successful in getting many children (back) into school. Other positive results reported were increased school retention, decline in child labour and greater awareness of child rights and child labour among children.⁶⁷ Furthermore, evidence was found on aspects such as improved safety and security (less theft), better health of children, increased women empowerment, and behavioural change among adults (less alcoholism and child neglect).⁶⁸ Several factors were mentioned as contributing to the success of the project: first, the importance of different stakeholders all promulgating the same message (children should be in school); second, the complementarity of an economic, social as well as educational approach; and finally, the involvement of a certification company to ensure continued support and follow-up even after the project ended.⁶⁹ Despite the positive results there were concerns about the intensity of the approach in terms of the time and effort required as part of the approach. Moreover, the company saw similar reductions of child labour (within coffee-producing households) outside of the project area, making it difficult to assess the added value of the multi-stakeholder approach as opposed to the interventions carried out only by the company.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Aidenvironment, 'Stop Child Labour - Out of Work Programme - End Term Evaluation.'; Stop Child Labour, 'Cooperating with the Private Sector in Child Labour Free Zones in Africa' (The Hague, 2017), <https://www.stopkinderarbeid.nl/assets/HI-17-06-SKA-CSR-guidelines-Afrika.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Aidenvironment, 'Stop Child Labour - Out of Work Programme - End Term Evaluation.'

⁶⁷ Aidenvironment.

⁶⁸ Impacts identified were mainly based on qualitative information. Aidenvironment, 40.

⁶⁹ Stop Child Labour, 'Cooperating with the Private Sector in Child Labour Free Zones in Africa'.

⁷⁰ Interestingly, the company did not experience negative impacts from the reduction of child labour on coffee production—yields were reported to have grown, most likely as a result of related trainings; but this is something that would deserved targeted study.

However, recent research comparing the (cost) effectiveness of different approaches—(1) the full CLFZ approach; (2) CLFZ elements primarily targeted to KCL members; (3) only elements required by UTZ certification programme at the time—has shown that the CLFZ approach, compared to the other approaches, not only created the strongest and most extensive reduction in child labour and child labour risks but also resulted in the strongest government and community buy-in and a shift in social norms with regard to child labour and the importance of education.⁷¹ The research also compared the effectiveness of interventions across the different areas in addressing root causes of child labour. Results referring to addressing poverty/increased income (through increased yields as a result of improved agricultural practices, certification premiums or crop diversification), changing social-cultural norms on child labour and quality of education were found to be much stronger in the CLFZ areas than in the other areas.

Cocoa: Child labour monitoring and remediation systems in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana

Child labour is highly prevalent in cocoa producing countries. Evidence of child labour in cocoa production is found in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cameroon; and in Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria also incidences of forced labour.⁷² In Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana (which account for 60% of the total cocoa production worldwide), 1.56 million children are estimated to be in child labour, of which approximately 790,000 children in Cote d'Ivoire and 770,000 in Ghana.⁷³ Despite significant efforts taken to decrease child labour in the cocoa sector in these two countries, recent NORC research reports that the prevalence of child labour in cocoa production among agricultural households in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana has instead increased by 14 percentage points in the past decade.⁷⁴ In 2018/2019 45% of the children (aged 5-17) living in cocoa growing areas in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana were engaged in child labour, nearly all of them also in hazardous work.⁷⁵

In 2012, Nestlé launched the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation system (hereafter: CLMRS) together with the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), a non-profit multi-stakeholder initiative based in Geneva.⁷⁶ In the last years an increasing number of companies

⁷¹ Aidenvironment, 'Results and Insights from the Child Labor Free Zone Program in West Nile Uganda. Baseline Study, Endline Study and Comparison. Final Report'.

⁷² ILAB, '2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor'.

⁷³ NORC, 'Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. NORC Final Report.'

⁷⁴ NORC.

⁷⁵ NORC.

⁷⁶ <https://www.nestlecocoaplan.com/tacklingchildlabor>

operating in the cocoa sector have adopted (similar versions of) this approach.⁷⁷ ICI estimates that in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana 25% of the cocoa supply chain is currently covered by CLMRS or similar systems.⁷⁸ CLMRS works according to a six-step approach: (1) conducting home visits to raise awareness; (2) identification of children at risk of child labour; (3) data entry in database; (4) follow-up visits to explain child labour (laws and risks); (5) remediation; (6) measuring effectiveness.⁷⁹ Locally recruited child labour agents and community liaison people based in the farmer cooperatives are responsible for collecting household level information and implementing follow-up and remediation activities together with local partners and ICI. ICI is responsible for the overall implementation of the CLMRS, supports the recruitment and training of these child labour agents and community liaison officers, and aggregates and analyses collected data in the CLMRS database to identify trends.⁸⁰

Remediation activities are aimed both at preventing children from engaging in child labour and helping children in child labour to stop. Examples of remediation activities include the provision of school kits, arranging birth certificates, bridging classes to 'mainstream' out-of-school children into school, parental literacy trainings, income generating activities for adults to diversify sources of income, and the creation of community service groups that train adults to be able to undertake specific tasks and provide labour support to fellow group members when needed (reducing the need to rely on child labour for these tasks).⁸¹ Specific attention is given to existing gender dynamics, for example in assessing which remediation activities may be more effective for girls than for boys (and vice versa).⁸² Through these multiple intervention areas, Nestlé aims at tackling both direct and indirect causes of child labour. The approach also acknowledges the importance of seeking solutions that go beyond the direct scope of the company's own supply chain, for example through enabling educational support to all children in a certain community (not only those working within connected cocoa producing farmer households).⁸³

⁷⁷ In 2020, the International Cocoa Initiative assists 8 companies in implementing CLMRS systems, covering 194 farmer cooperatives and targeting over 160,000 cocoa farming households. <https://cocoainitiative.org/our-work/our-work/supply-chain/> (accessed 6 June 2021)

⁷⁸ ICI, 'ICI Annual Report 2020'.

⁷⁹ Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report', 2019, <https://www.nestlecocoaplan.com/themes/custom/cocoa/dist/assets/nestle-tackling-child-labor-2019.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Fair Labor Association, 'Is Nestlé's CLMRS Contributing to the Reduction of Child Labor in Its Cocoa Supply Chain in Cote d'Ivoire?' (Geneva: FLA, 2020), https://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/addressing-child-labor-cocoa-cote-divoire-oct_2020.pdf.

⁸¹ Fair Labor Association, 25–26; Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report'.

⁸² Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report', 20.

⁸³ Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report'.

In 2019, Nestlé identified through its CLMRS approach 18,283 children (23% of all children monitored) as being in child labour in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.⁸⁴ Of these children 15,740 (86%) received at least one form of remediation (e.g., school kits, birth certificates, access to bridge schooling). 55% of the children identified as being in child labour were no longer doing hazardous work during the most recent follow-up visit. However, after a second follow-up visit, only 29% of the children is reported not to be involved in child labour during both visits, showing the difficulty of ensuring long-term impact especially as children get older and it becomes more likely that they will be engaged in hazardous activities.⁸⁵

In 2020 the Fair Labor Association conducted an evaluation of Nestlé's CLMRS approach in Cote d'Ivoire. It concluded that CLMRS appeared successful in raising the level of awareness regarding child labour in communities, especially concerning the legal minimum age for work and (local) legal definitions of child labour. However, knowledge on definitions and examples on hazardous and light work were still not very clear among respondents.⁸⁶ The fact that the effectiveness of the interventions to combat child labour drops significantly after a second follow-up visit furthermore emphasizes the importance of interventions that address root causes. Some interventions may lead to short-term positive effects but not result in sustainable change in the long term. The evaluation also identified possible effects on increased school enrolment and attendance, with 14% of the producers stating that Nestlé's support to education was crucial for them to be able to send their children to school. In addition, a reduction in children working in cocoa production activities was registered among community members who were part of community service groups, self-help groups or income-generating activities.⁸⁷

Broader research carried out by NORC zooming in on industry interventions in the cocoa sector (including CLMRS) in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire showed that communities that had had significant exposure (at least four types of interventions over the past three years) to industry interventions were less likely to have children engaged in hazardous work in their communities. For the CLMRS system it is expected that after two years of support through ICI (funded through Nestlé), the cooperatives are able to fund the child labour agents and liaison officers who are responsible for collecting data and implementing remediation activities themselves.⁸⁸ However, of the four cooperatives that were evaluated by the Fair Labor Association in 2020, only one had developed its ability to carry out the monitoring and remediation activities without continued

⁸⁴ Nestlé uses children in hazardous labour as a proxy for children in child labour, based on research by the Tulane University stating that there is a 97% overlap between child labour and children involved in hazardous work in the cocoa sector (Fair Labor Association, 5.)

⁸⁵ Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report'.

⁸⁶ Fair Labor Association, 'Is Nestlé's CLMRS Contributing to the Reduction of Child Labor in Its Cocoa Supply Chain in Cote d'Ivoire?', 18.

⁸⁷ Fair Labor Association, *ibid*.

⁸⁸ Fair Labor Association, 12.

support from ICI.⁸⁹ The report does not further specify the reasons for the other cooperatives not being able to continue without ICI support, which points at an interesting area for further investigation to be able to assess the viability and sustainability of the approach in the long run.

Textile: Workers' committee grievance mechanisms to tackle child labour in spinning mills and garment factories in Tamil Nadu, India

The 2020 ILAB List on Goods produced with child land or forced labour finds evidence for child labour in garment in 8 countries and for forced labour (including both children and adults) in 7 countries, making it the among the top three of goods reported to be produced with forced labour worldwide.⁹⁰ In India, an estimated 45 million people are employed in the textile and garment industry, accounting for around 12% of India's total export revenues.⁹¹ Most recent statistics on child labour in India estimate that there are 10.1 million children (aged 5-14) in child labour.⁹² Child labour occurs in different forms in different tiers in the garment supply chain. In cotton seed production, it involves children (boys and girls) helping on family farms, children as hired workers and children of both under and over 14 years of age engaged in hazardous practices.⁹³ Further downstream in the spinning mills, child labour often concerns an older category of children (14-18 years) and mostly girls, working under hazardous circumstances, long hours, night shifts or to pay back earlier loans and debts.⁹⁴

In 2017, four textile and garment companies (Prénatal, O'Neill, WE Fashion and the FNG Group) joined forces with local and international NGOs to tackle child labour in their supply chain in Tamil Nadu, India.⁹⁵ Being part of the broader Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textile, these MNEs had committed to preventing human rights violations in their

⁸⁹ Fair Labor Association, 14.

⁹⁰ ILAB, '2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor'.

⁹¹ The Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, 'Annual Report 2019-2020': <http://texmin.nic.in/documents/annual-report>

⁹² ILO, 'Child Labour in India' (Delhi: International Labour Organization), accessed 14 June 2021, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_557089.pdf.

⁹³ ILO, 'Child Labour in Cotton: A Briefing'; Davuluri Venkateswarlu, 'Cotton's Forgotten Children. Child Labour and below Minimum Wages in Hybrid Cottonseed Production in India' (ICN - India Committee of the Netherlands, Stop Child Labour Coalition, 2015), <https://www.stopkinderarbeid.nl/assets/CottonsForgottenChildren2015.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Pauline Overeem, Martje Theuws, and Diewertje Heyl, 'Spinning around Workers' Rights' (SOMO - Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations & Arisa, 2021); Annie Delaney and Tim Connor, 'Forced Labour in the Textile and Garment Sector in Tamil Nadu, South India: Strategies for Redress', SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2016), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2889125>; India Committee of the Netherlands, 'Fabric Of Slavery. Large-Scale Forced (Child) Labour in South India's Spinning Mills' (Utrecht: ICN - India Committee of the Netherlands, 2016), <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/FabricOfSlavery.pdf>.

⁹⁵ <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/en/garments-textile/tools/child-labour/about>

supply chains.⁹⁶ Supported by funding from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (through their Fund Against Child Labour, FBK), this multi-stakeholder partnership targeted 20 garment factories and spinning mills.⁹⁷ The project focused on strengthening policies and practices of suppliers in Tamil Nadu for embedding social standards including on child and forced labour, and on mapping the upstream garment and textile supply chain.⁹⁸ The local NGO SAVE was responsible for engaging with the management of factories and mills, in order to establish and/or strengthen workers' internal compliance committees and workers' grievance redressal committees, and to establish functional and transparent policies and procedures to prevent and address child labour and forced labour. Based on the supply chain mapping conducted by the Dutch brands, relevant facilities were identified and invited to the trainings.⁹⁹ As the causes of child labour for these adolescents can be mainly categorized under hazardous labour or forced labour, the assumption was that in factories with well-functioning workers' management committees, issues such as extreme working hours and working nightshifts can be addressed. This assumption is grounded in broader research on the effectiveness of social dialogue in addressing working conditions.¹⁰⁰

The project reports to have increased knowledge of workers about their labour rights and the rights of children. The spinning mills and garment factories introduced child-friendly age verification methods. Furthermore, the functioning of workers' committees was improved, leading to a rise in filed employee complaints. All these issues have been resolved, either through direct dialogue between the committee and factory management, with SAVE support where necessary, or through regional unions or the Dutch brands if additional leverage was needed. Another positive result of project interventions is the fact that over 400 employees have been registered under the Employee State Insurance Act, a social security scheme giving workers access to healthcare, maternity benefits, and sickness and disablement benefits.¹⁰¹ These results taken together can be expected to reduce the number of child labourers working in the spinning

⁹⁶ <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/en/garments-textile>

⁹⁷ The broader project also focused on textile factories in Bangladesh; details on that part are not included here. For more information on the full project see SER, 'Results of a Collaborative Project to Combat Child Labour in the Garment Supply Chains' (The Hague: Social And Economic Council, 2020) and the project website: <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/en/garments-textile/tools/child-labour/india>

⁹⁸ <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/en/garments-textile/tools/child-labour/india>

⁹⁹ https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/-/media/imvo/files/kleding/Flyer_Folder-Remedies-Workplace-India.pdf

¹⁰⁰ See for example: ILO, 'Progress and Potential: How Better Work Is Improving Garment Workers' Lives and Boosting Factory Competitiveness: A Summary of an Independent Assessment of the Better Work Programme' (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2016), https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BW-Progress-and-Potential_Web-final.pdf; James Lowell Jackson, Anna Burger, and Jason Judd, 'Sustainable Labour Practices in Global Supply Chains. Mapping Social Dialogue in Apparel: Synthesis Report' (Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations & The Strategic Partnership for Garment Supply Chain Transformation, 2021), <https://cornell.app.box.com/s/zzg1c5n43lj0c3atrsnl72jrbnj0gn2q>.

¹⁰¹ SER, 'Results of a Collaborative Project to Combat Child Labour in the Garment Supply Chains'.

mills, but the extent to which the establishment and functioning has indeed led to a reduction of children working in the spinning mills has not been reported.

At a more downstream level, the project improved relationships between the Dutch brands and their Indian suppliers, which translated during the Covid-19 pandemic in efforts by Dutch brands to support continuous payment of workers, and by suppliers to seek alternatives to continue business operations as much as possible.¹⁰² It must be noted, however, that due to the Covid-19 pandemic many factories shut down, leading to factory workers (including workers' committee members) returning to their home villages. In some factories and spinning mills the training programmes will therefore be implemented again (which is currently planned as part of a follow-up project, also under the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textiles).¹⁰³

Cross-cutting insights

All three cases show a commitment to addressing child labour that goes beyond mere identification and (direct) remediation, combining interventions targeting both direct (e.g., absence of birth certificates or age verification systems) as more indirect causes (e.g., household income, educational opportunities) (see Table 3). There are (first) positive results in tackling a number of these issues, and the CLMRS and CLFZ cases also indicate a positive effect on child labour. The worker committee case is more limited than the other two in terms of addressing the root causes of child labour as factors contributing to young girls working in garment factories in order to pay off family debts are not tackled through this approach. Considering the fact that many workers migrate from different regions¹⁰⁴, tackling root causes in this case might be beyond the scope of MNEs.

¹⁰² Corien Lambregste, '5 lessen over de bestrijding van kinderarbeid in de kledingindustrie', *SER Magazine*, 8 December 2020, <https://www.ser.nl/nl/Publicaties/kinderarbeid-in-kledingindustrie>.

¹⁰³ <https://www.imvoconvenanten.nl/nl/kleding-en-textiel/nieuws/sociale-themas-india>

¹⁰⁴ Overeem, Theuws, and Heyl, 'Spinning around Workers' Rights'.

Table 3: Tackling root causes

	CLFZ	CLMRS	Workers' committees
Poverty/Increased income or wages	X	X	X
Credit constraints	X	X	
Parental education		X	
Access to quality education	X	X	
Attitudes/social norms towards child labour & education	X	X	X
Poor laws and/or law enforcement	X		X

The cocoa and coffee cases explicitly aim at including children and community members that are not directly involved in the respective company's supply chain. These activities can support a broader attitudinal change towards child labour and the importance of education in communities. Widening the scope of interventions beyond the direct supply chain also addresses the risk of child labour moving from more direct to indirect involvement in the supply chain (such as to the informal sector) that would mean shifting instead of addressing the problem. Illustrative is the fact that child labour in cocoa-growing communities in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire increased over the past decade, while research zooming in on those areas where MNEs have been active showed that child labour had decreased.¹⁰⁵ The importance of looking for durable solutions beyond global supply chains has also been acknowledged in broader studies on child labour and global supply chains.¹⁰⁶ Expanding interventions beyond the direct scope of the supply chains has the potential of being more embedded—and thus more sustainable—than those only connected to the direct supply chains, as research conducted in the coffee sector confirms.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Santadarshan Sadhu et al., 'Assessment of Effectiveness of Cocoa Industry Interventions in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Growing Areas of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Final Report.' (National Opinion Research Center. University of Chicago, October 2020).

¹⁰⁶ ILO et al., 'Ending Child Labour, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains'; Alsamawi et al., 'Measuring Child Labour, Forced Labour and Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains: A Global Input-Output Approach. Technical Paper'.

¹⁰⁷ Aidenvironment, 'Results and Insights from the Child Labor Free Zone Program in West Nile Uganda. Baseline Study, Endline Study and Comparison. Final Report'.

Another interesting insight is that although all cases build on ILO child labour definitions, the context in which the MNEs work and the specifics concerning child labour in that context informs the development of practical working definitions. As noted, there are different (inter)national definitions determining what exactly is a 'heavy load' or the threshold of 'long working hours' for specific age groups. Furthermore, the specifics (the combinations of the variables age, type of work and working conditions) necessary to establish whether or not a situation can be considered child labour can result in very elaborate questionnaires and extensive data collection. Table 4 shows how all three cases use different working definitions based on the respective contexts, looking for the best balance between data collection and information needed in order to determine action. Differing perspectives of MNEs and NGOs might lead to different definitions, which can be challenging in project implementation.

Table 4: Working definitions per project

	Working definition for child labour	
	<i>Under the minimum age for working (14/15/16)</i>	<i>Under 18</i>
CLFZ	<p>Stop Child Labour Coalition: All forms of work done by children up to 15 years of age that deprives them of their right to formal, full-time education.^a</p> <p>In practice: all children who do not attend school full-time are considered as “participating in child labour”</p> <p>Kyagalanyi (UTZ Standard):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children under 14/15 years who are engaged by the cooperative or cooperative members • Children under 14/15 years working during school hours or conducting activities that are harmful to their health and development, interfere with leisure time or are unsupervised by an adult.^c 	<p>Stop Child Labour Coalition: The worst forms of child labour performed by children up to 18 years of age^b</p> <p>Kyagalanyi (UTZ Standard): Children younger than 18 that conduct hazardous work or are engaged in worst forms of child labour^d</p>
CLMRS	CLMRS identifies children in the age group of 5-17 years performing hazardous work as being in child labour. Children engaged in hazardous work is used as a proxy for child labour. ^e	
Workers’ committees	All children employed in non-family enterprises under 14 ^f	Work carried out by children under 18 that is carried out during night-time (7 pm to 8am), for more than 6 hours per day or children working overtime. ^g

a. Stop Child Labour – Out of Work, Into School: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, June 2015 (unpublished)

b. Stop Child Labour – Out of Work, Into School: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, June 2015 (unpublished)

c. UTZ Guidance Document Child Labour, Version 1.0, August 2016: <https://s37336.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Child-labor-guidance-document-UTZ.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2021)

d. UTZ Guidance Document Child Labour, Version 1.0, August 2016: <https://s37336.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Child-labor-guidance-document-UTZ.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2021)

e. Fair Labor Association, ‘Is Nestle’s CLMRS Contributing to the Reduction of Child Labor in Its Cocoa Supply Chain in Cote d’Ivoire?’ (Geneva: FLA, 2020), https://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/adressing-child-labor-cocoa-cote-divoire-oct_2020.pdf.

f. As per the 2017 India Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act prohibiting employment or work by children younger than 14 years in any occupation, before and after school hours, except in family enterprises (Overeem, Theuws, and Heyl, ‘Spinning around Workers’ Rights’).

In all cases action in local communities to address root causes is not taken by the MNE itself but by NGOs organisations with well-established connections in the area, which can have important benefits for embeddedness and receptiveness in the local context. All three projects envisage interventions to be taken by other actors with or beyond the supply chain at some point. For the CLMRS system, child labour monitoring and remediation tasks are to be fully transferred to the farmer cooperatives, no longer needing ICI/Nestlé direct support. With regard to the worker's grievance committees, union presence and/or access to factories could be a relevant and effective alternative for continuation after funding ends. However, committees and trainings on workers' rights facilitated by NGOs appears to be more acceptable for factory owners than the presence of unions, which is a clear challenge.¹⁰⁸ In Uganda the long-term commitment of different partners in the area positively influenced both the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions by involving a large range of different stakeholders (including the local government).

Finally, as the Nestlé data shows—further corroborated by broader findings from ICI and Aidenvironment—tackling child labour effectively and sustainably takes time and thus significant resources.¹⁰⁹ However, the examples show that while the initial investment may be substantial, costs are expected to decrease over time as government and community buy-in increase and behavioural change becomes embedded in wider social norms. At the same time, behavioural change often takes many years and even more than one generation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the comparison of three different approaches in tackling child labour in MNEs' supply chains, and the cross-cutting insights already offered, we want to highlight the following issues in this final section. The first relates to the importance of **leverage** in addressing child labour. As child labour currently emerges further down the supply chain, in specific locations/products/firms, many MNEs refer to this complex challenge as barrier for addressing child labour. However, the three cases in this article show that it is possible for MNEs to engage with local stakeholders in addressing child labour in the lower tiers of their supply chain. With dedicated time and effort from the MNEs to first identify the relevant actors at those lower tiers and thereafter develop—together with local stakeholders that are well informed of the local context and potential sensitivities—the best possible approaches, important steps towards addressing child labour can be made. Sharing experiences across sectors helps to identify and explore concrete options that MNEs can embark on.

A second point concerns **definitions** of child labour, given the huge variety of conceptualizations (Table 1). It is key to find a right balance between simplifying the definition

¹⁰⁸ Delaney and Connor, 'Forced Labour in the Textile and Garment Sector in Tamil Nadu, South India'.

¹⁰⁹ Nestlé, 'Cocoa Plan Tackling Child Labor. 2019 Report'; ICI, 'ICI Annual Report 2020'; Aidenvironment, 'Results and Insights from the Child Labor Free Zone Program in West Nile Uganda. Baseline Study, Endline Study and Comparison. Final Report'.

and having enough contextualized data to work towards an adequate ‘solution’ to the problem. This may contrast slightly with the perspective of some scholars who flag the risk of focusing too narrowly on the goal of eradicating child labour and ignoring the potential benefits of child labour.¹¹⁰ While this is undoubtedly true, the differentiation between worst and less worse forms of child labour has led to an almost incomprehensible list of definitions and standards when it comes to determining what is child labour and what not. The three cases presented above provide practical and actionable examples on how to refrain from aiming to cover all the different elements and aspects of the definition, and to concretize and contextualize the definition to make it relevant and useful in the particular context.

Overall, this article has presented several inspirational initiatives from different sectors and countries. However, although the cases provide interesting insights in ways in which MNEs can collaborate with others to tackle child labour in the lower tiers, **evidence on (long-term) effectiveness is limited**. Evaluations were often not carried out with a counterfactual and/or were limited in scope, making it difficult to formulate solid conclusions. The bulk of the studies on effectiveness of child labour interventions have focused on (conditional and unconditional) cash transfers and public programmes focusing on employment opportunities, but rigorous research on the effects of multi-stakeholder collaborations in addressing child labour remains limited. The medium and long-term effects of interventions also deserve further attention.¹¹¹

Addressing child labour takes time and requires an approach that stretches to different (political, socio-economic, financial, commercial) domains, within and beyond specific supply chains, involving at the minimum an international baseline to do no harm. Our examples illustrate how MNEs can fulfil at least part of this moral obligation and help address (some of) these issues. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that progress towards eradicating child labour is vulnerable, and we have probably not seen the full effects of the pandemic on child labour yet, also given the likely transformation of supply chain strategies (e.g., reshoring/relocation) and the firms operating within them. With over 1.5 million schools closing in India alone, affecting 247 million children,¹¹² the impact on child labour may continue for the coming years. Families suffering economic consequences of the pandemic may need to resort to child labour. Furthermore, vulnerable children that are not able to go to school are more likely to start working; and once children have left school and entered paid employment it may be difficult for them to return to school. The recently published ILO-UNICEF global report on child labour predicts an additional increase of child labour of 9 million world-wide by the end of 2022 due to

¹¹⁰ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/open-letter-change-course-international-year-elimination-child-labour/>

¹¹¹ Dammert et al., ‘Effects of Public Policy on Child Labor’; Dinku, ‘The Impact of Public Works Programme on Child Labour in Ethiopia’; Edmonds and Shrestha, ‘You Get What You Pay For’.

¹¹² ‘COVID-19: Schools for More than 168 Million Children Globally Have Been Completely Closed for Almost a Full Year, Says UNICEF’, accessed 15 June 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/india/press-releases/covid-19-schools-more-168-million-children-globally-have-been-completely-closed>.

the pandemic.¹¹³ This makes current action by all actors involved even more necessary. The examples presented in this article highlight the role of MNEs through building relationships between different actors in the supply chain and adopting a flexible approach that takes into account the reality of child labour in that specific area. We hope this can be inspirational for researchers, managers, policymakers, activists and citizens, and will lead to positive steps for a better situation for children, families and communities.

¹¹³ ILO and UNICEF, 'Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, Trends and the Road Forward.' (2021), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf

The Role of NGO-Supported Community Based Schools Gardens in Contributing to Reducing the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Eastern DRC

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Abstract

The article explores the key findings from a qualitative longitudinal study that observed the implementation and assessed the potential of the school garden intervention in a project designed to reduce the worst forms of child labour in eight school communities in North and South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo by cultivating crops that can be utilised to reduce the necessity of child labour to support households' economy. The study generated findings on how to improve the relevance, community ownership, and sustainability of the school gardens intervention to contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of child labour in at-risk communities.

Keywords: modern slavery, worst forms of child labour, conflict-affected countries, school meals, school gardens, child labour

1. Introduction and background

1.1 Background on the Partnership Against Child Exploitation (PACE)

The Partnership Against Child Exploitation (PACE) is a consortium of non-Governmental, academic, media, and private sector organisations working together to implement an programme funded by the United Kingdom (UK) government that seeks to identify and test effective approaches to prevent and reduce the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention n. 182 as *“all practices that include the use of children in slavery, forced labour, trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, prostitution, pornography, forced or compulsory recruitment for armed conflict, and all forms of work that are likely to harm the safety, health or morals of children.”*¹ PACE's objective is to innovate, study, and produce evidence on effective ways to address child labour across four main areas of work. PACE project implementation officially started in October 2019 and is due to end in September 2022.

Given that poverty is well understood to be a primary driver of child labour and that the worst forms can force children into unsafe working conditions to support their families, one focal area of PACE is supporting children and their families to access suitable alternatives to the WFCL. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), chronic poverty and acute shocks, including displacement, frequently impact households' income as well as children's access to education and other basic rights. PACE is therefore implementing a range of interventions designed to address the root causes of the phenomenon, including developing alternative livelihoods to alleviate households' reliance on child labour and supporting children to access quality education and vocational training opportunities as alternatives to the WFCL.

The specific intervention on which this article focuses is school gardens through which communities are supported to establish productive school gardens that provide food for school canteens and participating households. The school garden pilot activity has been implemented in eight schools across two geographic areas of the DRC: three schools in Masisi territory, North Kivu Province, and five in Walungu territory, South Kivu Province. The article aims to analyse how school gardens implemented by international NGOs working in collaboration with community groups can contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour in fragile contexts. School gardens were included in the project's theory of change based on a situation analysis that indicated that the need for parents or caregivers to put their children to work often served as a barrier to attending school as did costs associated with attending school. The introduction of school gardens was designed to support the provision of free school meals that were expected to create an incentive for attending school, to reduce households' burden of spending on food, and to bring children into a protective educational environment.

¹ ILO, “Convention No. 182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention,” (1999). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182

Moreover, by actively engaging parents and caregivers in the establishment and management of the gardens, the activity is intended to create an opportunity to engage with parents, caregivers, teachers, and school directors to discuss parenting, child rights and child labour issues at community level.

1.2 Context: child labour in North and South Kivu provinces in DRC

Within the conflict-affected Kivu provinces, Masisi and Walungu territories are notable for the presence of extractive activities including mining of wolframite, gold, cassiterite, and coltan. Both locations are also similarly characterised by the influence of several armed groups that are often involved in controlling mining sites.^{2,3} As a result, of the complex socio-economic situation, mining activities and armed groups are often associated with a high prevalence in the WFCL. These factors also prevent the most vulnerable households from accessing land which further contributes to perpetuating conflict, poverty, and food insecurity.

In both North and South Kivu, the population has been affected by repeated cycles of displacement, and many households are therefore confronted with insecure livelihoods and vulnerable socio-economic circumstances which translate to high levels of food insecurity, poor nutrition, low income, high unemployment, and limited access to social services and protection.⁴ Each of these compounding factors increases the risk of children becoming engaged in the WFCL. Younger children, girls, and those with disabilities as well as other marginalised groups are additionally vulnerable to the risk of child labour.⁵

The challenging socio-economic situation of many households in Masisi and Walungu forces families to resort to coping mechanisms that risk detrimental effects to child development, protection, and wellbeing. Participating in child labour as a mean to generate additional income to meet basic needs is a significant and widespread coping mechanisms in the region. Children are hired daily in casual jobs that involve walking unaccompanied long distances and frequently require carrying heavy loads, handling risky equipment, and working in conditions hazardous for their health and safety. Children work as street vendors or cattle herders and spend long periods of time unsupervised with merchandise or a herd to attend to, and often, protect from risk of theft. The proliferation of mining sites requiring cheap, unskilled labour has engaged a

² Jason Stearns, and Christoph Vogel, “The Landscape of Armed Groups in the Eastern Congo”, Congo Research Group, 2015, <http://congoresearchgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CRG-Armed-Groups-in-the-Congo.pdf>

³ IPIS, “Maps of conflict minerals in Eastern DRC”, (2020), accessed June 15, 2021, <https://ipisresearch.be/publication/map-conflict-minerals-eastern-drc-a0-posters/>

⁴ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, “Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Acute Food Insecurity Situation February - July 2021 and Projection for August - December 2021”, accessed on 15 June 2021, <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1154108/?iso3=COD>.

⁵ Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Nicola Jones, “The devil is in the detail Why a gender- and adolescent-specific lens is essential to accelerate progress in eradicating child exploitation. Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence, (2018), <https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/GAGE%20Child%20Exploitation%2012082018.pdf>.

significant number of children in dangerous and harmful mining activities. In the targeted areas, the WFCL also include association with armed groups, which includes “children recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity”, and exploitation in prostitution, which refers to the exchange of sex for money, gifts, or material goods.⁶

1.3 Existing evidence from similar programmes and the integration of school gardens and school feeding

In fragile settings, shocks to food systems are common, and the current COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional disruptions to these systems.^{7,8} Child labour is a frequently observed coping mechanism for families in situations of food insecurity; therefore, projects aiming at strengthening food security also have the added benefit of fighting child labour. Yet, according to a recent report using school feeding to address social issues such as child labour is a relatively new approach with limited evidence of impact to date.^{9,10}

Studies exploring the impact of school feeding systems on the use of children's time have found mixed results.¹¹ For instance, in Burkina Faso, Kazianga and colleagues found that there was no evidence of school feeding activity significantly affecting child labour while take-home rations conditional on enrolment did.¹² Aurino and colleagues studying a large-scale government-led school feeding program in Ghana, reported that in-school meals did not significantly affect children's participation in farming or productive work, but reduced their participation in household chores by 20 minutes a day on average.¹³ A report by Food and Agriculture

⁶ UNICEF, “the Paris principles. Principles and guidelines on children Associated with armed forces or armed groups”, February 2007, <https://www.unicef.org/mali/media/1561/file/ParisPrinciples.pdf>.

⁷ World Food Program, “Food systems in Fragile settings: Identifying gaps and opportunities to support access to improved diets”, Fill the Nutrient Gap, (July 2020), <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000118080/download/>.

⁸ Christophe Béné, “Resilience of local food systems and links to food security – A review of some important concepts in the context of COVID-19 and other shocks”, *Food Security*, volume 12, pages 805–822 (2020).

⁹ FAO, “Social protection and child labour”, (2020), <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9485en/CA9485EN.pdf>.

¹⁰ FAO, “Social protection and child labour”.2020, <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9485en/CA9485EN.pdf>

¹¹ We have focused this literature review on school feeding programs generally as the PACE project design involves school gardens that aliment school feeding programs. The literature on school gardens alone is extremely limited.

¹² Harounan Kazianga, Damien de Walque and Harold Alderman, “Educational and child labour impacts of two Food-for-Education Schemes: evidence from a randomised trial in Rural Burkina Faso”. *Journal of African Economies*, 21(5), 723-760, (2012).

¹³ Elisabetta Aurino, Jean-Pierre Tranchant, Amadou Sekou Diallo and Aulo Gelli, “School Feeding or General Food Distribution? Quasi-Experimental Evidence on the Educational Impacts of Emergency Food Assistance during Conflict in Mali”. Innocenti Working Papers no. 2018-04. Innocenti, Florence, UNICEF Office of Research, (2018), <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/956-school-feeding-or-general-food-distribution-quasiexperimental-evidence-on-the-educational.html>.

Organisation (FAO) suggested that preliminary findings from case studies in Bangladesh, Egypt and Zambia showed a positive impact of school feeding programs in reducing child labour.¹⁴ Another report by FAO alluded to positive effects of the Cocoa Life programme encouraging communities to implement school feeding systems supported by school gardens in Ghana.¹⁵ Records show improved enrolment during the implementation stages and a reduced number of children engaged in farm activities. Conversely, Aurino et al. in Mali, found that provision of school meals reduced the time spent on farming or on productive tasks by almost a month for girls.¹⁶

As stated in FAO (2020a), “The lack of school attendance among child labourers feeds a poverty cycle leading to youth unemployment and an unproductive agriculture sector.”¹⁷ School feeding systems could have the potential to retain child labourers at school, and even teach them agricultural skills. The McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme systematic review and meta-analysis summarises the state of existing evidence on the positive impact of school feeding on educational outcomes, both in terms of enrolment, *“indicating that school feeding serves as an incentive to get children into school and help keep them there”* with benefits found to be stronger for girls than for boys.¹⁸

School feeding systems can also impact learning achievements of children. Colombini evaluated a programme in Guyana aiming to improve school participation by providing a meal three days a week and complementary activities. The study found out that children were better able to focus and had better exam results following the implementation of the programme.¹⁹ School feeding indeed has a proven positive impact also on learning achievement and cognitive function.²⁰

¹⁴ FAO, “Social protection and child labour”, 2020, <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9485en/CA9485EN.pdf>

¹⁵ FAO, “How can agricultural policies and strategies help to end child labour in agriculture?”, Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition, report on activities No. 165, (2020).

¹⁶ Aurino, Tranchant, Diallo and Gelli, “School Feeding or General Food Distribution? Quasi-Experimental Evidence on the Educational Impacts of Emergency Food Assistance during Conflict in Mali”.

¹⁷ FAO, “Social protection and child labour”.

¹⁸ Bechir Rassas, Edgar Ariza-Nino and Katia Peterson, “School Feeding and Educational Outcomes in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis”, The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, US Department of Agriculture (USDA), (2020). This finding is also confirmed by Powell and colleagues and Aurino and colleagues, the latter of whom documented how “school feeding led to increases in enrolment by 11 percentage points and to about an additional half-year of completed schooling.”

¹⁹ Jane Colombini, “Good practices in tackling child labour through education: Selected examples from the IPEC TACKLE project, Geneva, International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013, https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_22956/lang--en/index.htm.

²⁰ This is confirmed by Chakraborty and Jayaraman, Jacoby, Cueto and Pollitt, Simeon, and Grantham-McGregor, Nkhoma and colleagues.

Other proven impacts of school feeding include positive outcomes on children's health and physical development.^{21,22} Also, according to Jennings and Bamkole, the collective cultivation and management of a common plot of land by parents or caregivers, teachers, and students enables them to establish new social connections and, over the time, to develop a bond of mutual trust and solidarity and increased social capital.²³

Finally, in line with PACE's approach, Rassas and colleagues support the idea that school feeding activities may be more effective in combination with other activities to support quality education and be a valuable measure contributing to achieving a more effective education system.²⁴ Altogether, the literature on school feeding programs does support their use as a means to prevent and to reduce the WFCL; with our own study, we sought to understand if school gardens that aliment school feeding programmes can also contribute to similar results.

1.4 Implementation

The study period started in January 2020 and ran until August 2020. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) established three school gardens in North Kivu and five in South Kivu. The long-term goal of the implementation in North Kivu was to produce enough vegetables to support a sustainable school feeding system, and therefore a canteen was included from the beginning into the design of the project. In South Kivu, the school gardens were intended as a *"platform for learning"*, and a support for *"better nutrition by feeding and inspiring children to eat healthy food, teach them gardening and improve their retention at school"*, and a canteen was not included in the initial plans. Land was either lent to the school, rented by the NGO or already available at the school. The size of the land used for the school gardens, therefore, differed therefore depending on availability, budget, and objectives of the garden.

In each project location, the NGOs established one school garden committee, formed of 10 to 15 caregivers, school staff, and community members responsible for leading the management of the garden. They were initially supposed to supervise and coordinate the work done on the garden with the help of other community members and parents or caregivers with the

²¹ Sarah Adelman, Daniel O Gilligan, Joseph Konde-Lule, Harold Alderman, "School Feeding Reduces Anemia Prevalence in Adolescent Girls and Other Vulnerable Household Members in a Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial in Uganda", *The Journal of Nutrition*, 149(4): 659–666, (2019).

²² Kazianga, de Walque and Alderman, "Educational and child labour impacts of two Food-for-Education Schemes: evidence from a randomised trial in Rural Burkina Faso".

²³ Viniece Jennings and Omoshalewa Bamkole, "The Relationship between Social Cohesion and Urban Green Space: An Avenue for Health Promotion", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2019;16(3):452. Published 2019 Feb 4, (2019) doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030452>. These findings resonate with previous work from Kingsley and Townsend, Espejo and colleagues, and Jennings and Bamkole.

²⁴ Rassas, Ariza-Nino and Peterson, "School Feeding and Educational Outcomes in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis".

NGOs playing a sometimes facilitating and sometimes more directive role in decision making. Additional labour was recruited during key phases of the agricultural cycle using project funding. In each site, an agronomist was recruited by the NGOs to provide technical oversight to the project, to conduct training, and monitor the gardens' situation. Inputs such as seeds, plant protection products, and fertiliser were provided by the NGOs along with tools.

The table below summarizes the main aspects of the implementation of the activity in both locations.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW	North Kivu - 3 gardens in 3 schools	South Kivu - 5 gardens in 5 schools
Goal/long-term vision	Focus on maximum possible quantity food production through the gardens to support a sustainable school meals system to foster school enrolment and attendance	Gardens as “platform for learning” and a support for “better nutrition by feeding and inspiring children to eat healthy food, teach them gardening and improve their retention at school

<p>School selection criteria (not always fully respected in both location)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessibility of school via roads and telephone networks. 2. Accessibility of water (i.e., water must be close to the school garden for maintenance work, such as watering). 3. Dynamism and motivation of the actors involved for the school garden activities (e.g. director, teachers, the parents' committee [Comité des Parents d'Elèves, or COPA] and the school management committee [Comité de Gestion, or COGES]). 4. Availability of a large, cultivable, and cost-free area for school garden activities to be conducted close to the school. 5. Proximity of the garden to vulnerable children who are victims of the worst forms of child labour in the school to be selected. 6. Officially recognised, publicly accessible schools. 7. In the case of religious schools being selected, a diversity of religions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school is in one of the 10 villages supported in the project and accessible (roads and telephone network), safely 2. The school has access to water i.e., water must be close to the school garden for maintenance work such as watering. 3. Dynamism of the school actors i.e., Director, teachers, COPA (parent committee) and COGES (Management committee) for the school garden activities. 4. Availability of a cultivable and free area for school garden activities 5. Availability of organic fertilisers made by the direct or indirect beneficiaries 6. Proximity to vulnerable children who are victims of the WFCL in the school 7. Public school with state accreditation 8. The school has infrastructure capable of reintegrating a considerable number of children 9. The school must be in partnership with the project for the reintegration of vulnerable children without cost or payment of school fees.
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School canteens support (infrastructure, utensils, and cooking equipment)	Planned support to establish or refurbish school canteen for meals preparation	Canteen initially not included in activity design and planning
Access to land	Either lent by the school, rented by the NGO or already available at the school, size of land differed therefore depending on availability or budget	
School garden committees	Established and formed by parents, school staff and community members to lead the work on the garden (10 to 15 members) NGO playing a facilitating role in decision making perceived as more participatory	Established and formed by parents, school staff and community members to lead the work on the garden (15 members) NGO taking active part in the decision-making process, perceived as more directive
Training and technical support	One agronomist conducts training on agricultural techniques and regular monitoring visits.	
Human resources	Additional manpower was recruited during key phases of the agricultural cycle.	
Agricultural inputs:	Provided by the NGO tools, seeds, phytosanitary products, and fertiliser	

2. Research question

To strengthen the existing evidence on the use of school gardens to foster increased school enrolment and participation and contribute to tackling the WFCL in fragile settings, the following research question is examined: “How can school gardens implemented by international NGOs working in collaboration with community groups contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour in fragile contexts?”

More specifically, the following sub-questions are analysed: What factors are or are not likely to impact school gardens’ ability to contribute to reducing the worst forms of child labour? What did we learn about implementing school gardens in a fragile and conflict affected context through this pilot learning?

The study sought to capture the implementation challenges and successes through the words of all parties involved and the evolution of stakeholders’ views on the project as it progressed.

3. Methodology

PACE began implementing the school garden activity in December 2019. Following training developed by the lead researcher and close supervision throughout the data collection, a group of PACE research assistants led five data collection rounds and ran 48 in-depth interviews in North Kivu and 47 in South Kivu, with key informants involved in the project implementation between January and August 2020.

The key informants were leaders of the local community, members of the community directly involved in the implementation of the project, and NGOs staff members. These interviews were conducted in either French or the local language of each territory and transcribed in French.²⁵ The research assistants also undertook structured observations of the project start-up, training, and implementation and documented field notes.

The PACE research lead undertook structured qualitative analysis, including the development of a codebook through inductive coding and applications of these codes to the dataset by two separate researchers to ensure the validity of the coding. The lead researcher reviewed the coded transcripts multiple times to determine key findings and recommendations.

4. Findings and recommendations

The overall goal of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of how school gardens can contribute to reducing the WFCL in fragile contexts. Based on the available data it is possible to outline findings in three key areas: relevance, community ownership and motivation and intervention sustainability.

4.1 Findings on the relevance of school gardens to addressing child labour.

Findings in this section explore the relevance of school gardens in the specific context of North and South Kivu and focus on the importance of clarifying early into project implementation the intended use of the harvests produced by the gardens. It also questions a secondary impact of the school garden activity on improving household-level food security.

In the PACE baseline studies ²⁶, in both North and South Kivu, households in which children were engaged in WFCL reported low income and a significant majority also indicated that they experienced food insecurity in the previous six months. Households reported having to reduce the frequency of meals or reduce the portion size (95.9% in North Kivu, and 97.9 in South Kivu). They reported having to go an entire day without eating (86.7% and 95.7%

²⁵ Translations provided in this article have been provided by the research team, some members of which are bilingual.

²⁶ PACE website, accessed on 15 June 2021.

respectively), and they reported having to borrow food or money from friends to buy necessary food (90.3% and 93.5% respectively). These findings are consistent with the most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis currently describing Masisi, North Kivu as being at level 3 (crisis) out of 5 and projecting Walungu, South Kivu to reach the same level in the August to December 2021 period²⁷.

Both in North and South Kivu, child labourers interviewed displayed low levels of school enrolment, 22% in North Kivu and 42.3% in South Kivu. The main factor that would help them go back to school, as cited by more than 80% of out-of-school children surveyed, was financial support. In North Kivu, community members identified food insecurity as a key driver of school dropout. Therefore, it was hoped that the school gardens would also encourage stronger attendance at school and reduce dropout rates, as indicated by these two parents in the following quotes²⁸:

The other change for our children is that when they came home from school and they could not find anything to eat, it [i.e., this inability to find food at home] encouraged them to wander around the neighbourhood, but with the new school canteen system that will be implemented soon, it will considerably reduce school dropouts. (Parent, March) Sometimes in our area, we see a lack of good education due to the famine, but with this school garden programme that will provide food for our children, it will help motivate them to love school more.²⁹ (Parent, March)

1) The importance of clarifying plans for harvest use. School garden harvests can be managed in at least three ways: they can be used for meals through a school canteen, be sold on the local market to earn an income for the school, or the ones in charge can decide to distribute the harvest directly to parents, caregivers, or children in need. In all the observed schools, a school garden committee was established and trained to care for the garden. Committee members were working in the garden several times per week and were in close contact with the NGOs that trained and equipped them with necessary agricultural inputs. Then the school garden committee, with the support of the NGOs, would decide how to best utilise the harvest.

In situations where the school garden was not associated with a school canteen, the school committee could either sell the harvest on the local market or distribute the crops to vulnerable children's households, so children could benefit from the garden either by receiving a ration from the harvest or having their school fees and school material paid thanks to crops' sale

²⁷ IPC, "Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Acute Food Insecurity Situation February - July 2021 and Projection for August - December 2021".

²⁸ Please note that all the quotes included in this article have been translated to English from the original language by the research team.

²⁹ "Famine" here is the colloquial term used by one of the interviewees to describe the high prevalence of acute and chronic food insecurity in the area. At the date of writing this paper there are no official sources supporting the presence of famine as defined by international standards in any of the DRC provinces.

profit. For example, in one of the schools in South Kivu, the school was able to cover exam fees of 60 students at the end of the harvest.

Yet in the absence of canteens, it was observed that the committees mostly decided to share the vegetables among members themselves, especially when the yield was small. Therefore, one finding is the need for a clear plan in place for the use of garden harvests so that the gains from the garden do not accumulate only to those who have the most time to invest in the project rather than contributing to reducing community vulnerability.

Having a clear plan in place early into project implementation on how to manage the harvest therefore seems a prerequisite to ensure that the garden contributes to mitigating the food insecurity situation affecting children and to motivating the most vulnerable ones to remain at school instead of working. As mentioned above, selling the crop on the market, and using the money to cover children's school fees was a way of tackling some of the barriers to children's enrolment. Findings from the study also suggest that the establishment of a canteen associated with the gardens and providing school meals to all children at school was a relevant option to encourage enrolment and attendance. As illustrated by the testimony of a school director below, with sufficient initial investment feeding all school children is considered a desirable, and realistic goal:

For example, as I know the interest or the impact of the canteen on the functioning of the school, if we could have the means to have the seeds, we could cultivate a large area to have enough food for all [location anonymised] students. (School director, July)

In the interview below a parent links working in a mine, one of the WFCL, to support their household to the lack of sufficient food at home and consider the school canteen an effective way to relieve some pressure from the household economic situation. The parent supports the idea that this intervention is not only relevant but essential in supporting their children to remain in school and prevent their engagement in detrimental forms of work:

Given the situation we are going through, I think that assistance to the children is essential. Therefore, NGO's decision to grant a school canteen to our children will allow us to redirect them towards schools to the detriment of the mining sites. Because the main cause of the presence of our children in these places is only in search of small money to pay for food or help feed their family. (Parent, March)

2) Potential additional benefits from school gardens: enhanced household food security?

When asked whether the project has changed anything for them, most children interviewed reported that their parents or caregivers had either started or improved their garden at home and could sell the vegetables they harvested. Caregivers participating in the activities in the garden indeed learned new knowledge on agricultural techniques, and those with land could therefore apply this to their own fields. In some instances, as illustrated by the below testimony, this

knowledge transfer improved productivity at home in a way that relaxed part of the economic pressure that families were going through.

When I went to school in the past, I was regularly chased out because of money [i.e., family could not pay school fees]. Also, when mom learned [this new activity], I began to see her grow eggplants at home that she sells at each harvest. Until today, she continues in the business. We study; we are not worried at school anymore. (Girl, 16, June)

School gardens are spaces to share learning and develop new skills and, in a context where parents or caregivers own land, could potentially have a positive impact on private land productivity, and consequently on food security. Yet in fragile settings like the Kivus, that potential cannot be fully exploited because of two major issues: lack of land and widespread insecurity. In a situation where the access to land is a complex and conflictual matter, only a limited number of parents can cultivate land for themselves. These parents might not be from the families that are the most in need, and their children the most at risk of engaging in hazardous or worst forms of child labour.

The analysed data support the idea that school gardens can be a relevant activity to contribute to protect children from child labour if the use of the harvest is well designed to serve children at risk of or enrolled in child labour. Moreover, while for the subgroup of caregivers involved in the garden cultivation and having a private plot, school gardens can contribute to enhanced agricultural production in their private plots, thus strengthening these households' food security; this positive outcome, however, does not address the needs of the most vulnerable children whose families typically do not own land.

4.2 Findings on factors that influence community buy-in, ownership and motivation.

The second set of findings of this study relates to community engagement and ownership of the project, and it explores how design and implementation choices affected community buy-in and motivation. It also analyses the risks of relying on a small team that might end up working more than is reasonable to support the garden. The first dimension explored is motivation, a key factor to ensure continuous engagement by all the key community actors involved in the school garden. The second is community expectations and their influence over key stakeholders' engagement in the activity. The third is the role of the opportunity cost of cultivating a common plot for collective benefits of all school children, which subtracts time from pursuing other opportunities which provide more immediate and tangible economic benefits for an individual's household.

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, interventions are likely to be more sustainable and relevant if NGOs have processes to engage with, listen to, and build ideas in collaboration

with communities.³⁰ The school garden intervention we studied relied heavily on the school garden committees that took an active part in managing and implementing the activity with support from the NGOs and the school directors.

They [members of the school garden committee] recognised that the success of this project would rely heavily on the community's investment in it. (NGO Staff)

The data collected shed light on the expectations and motivations of the various actors involved. We present below findings around factors that enhance, or hinder community members' buy in and motivation.

Schools board and caregivers' motivation. Schools were selected for inclusion in the school garden pilot according to a range of criteria. One criterion was interest and enthusiasm for the initiative and school staff's motivation to reduce child labour in the area. Where that criterion was respected, schools' directors and teachers supported the programme and engaged throughout the implementation more consistently than in schools with less motivated boards. Some school directors were regularly involved in the school gardens, working the fields together with the parents. The quote below illustrates how this behaviour can be inspirational for some of the parents.

The lead [of the school garden committee] left his own activities aside to help these children so that all parents would know that others had sacrificed themselves. (Parent, July)

Findings show that belonging to a group is a key motivation factor among school garden committee members. The positive group dynamic among the participants seemed to be a motivator of the members of the school garden committee, resulting in a feeling of belonging to a community. Members generally reported a strong collaborative environment between participants, who can see each other as friends, celebrate each other for "*courage and bravery*" and share a common "*sense of responsibility*". The quote below illustrates the bonding aspects of the garden and suggests that this exercise may also enable group members to overcome pre-existing class barriers.

We meet in the courtyard; we begin to cultivate by talking and discussing. We exchange about the news. Whoever has information, he shares it with others.... All of us work; there is no chief. If it is the hoe or the machete, it is the same thing. It is all of us for an

³⁰ Michael Wessel, "What Are We Learning About Protecting Children in the Community? An inter-agency review of the evidence on community-based child protection mechanisms in humanitarian and development settings", Save the Children, (2019).

activity including the manager. You can come and see him; you will find him dressed up for the field. (School garden committee member, June)

The above statements indicate that, if well implemented, this activity has potential benefits that go beyond the provision of daily meals and act as an incentive to draw the school community together. School gardens represent an opportunity for community aggregation, echoing additional literature that shows that such programmes can break down barriers and provide people with a shared goal for the community and therefore contribute to increase participants' social capital.³¹

This collaborative atmosphere can be fostered by implementing NGOs both to motivate caregivers and to ensure additional community-wide outcomes by supporting committees' team building, facilitating joint decision making and sharing of agricultural tools.

The ultimate objective of the project was an important motivation factor. Caregivers demonstrated an understanding of the activity objectives, and some declared being motivated at the idea that children will be receiving meals. Most of them expressed enthusiasm and motivation to contribute:

We parents, we are well informed that we will not receive anything immediately from this harvest, and we know that what we are doing is so that our children can have access to food. Perhaps in the long term, when the project will be well established, there will be other advantages that we are not currently aware of. Anything my child receives, I receive indirectly. (Parent, May)

The existing caregivers and committee members' motivation can be reinforced by complementary interventions around parenting and child protection. As a matter of fact, in North Kivu, PACE involved parents or caregivers from the school garden committee in the training on positive parenting techniques, and many respondents reported that having been trained on positive parenting helped them find motivation to work for their children. Additional non-financial measures that interviewees suggested to strengthen the collaboration within the committees were providing agricultural, business, and soft skills training as parents expressed strong appreciation for being able to access technical training.

Transparency. In an area where most households have difficulties to satisfy their basic needs and where NGOs have been operating for a long time with a variety of projects providing direct support, the announcement of an agricultural intervention supported by an NGO in a school can trigger high expectations beyond the scope of the project.

³¹ Muhammad Bello Ibrahim, Salim Hassan and Demba Sanyang, "Social Capital in Agricultural Community Development: A Review", *Journal of Agriculture and Veterinary Science (IOSR-JAVS)* e-ISSN: 2319-2380, p-ISSN: 2319-2372. Volume 10, Issue 7 Ver. I (July 2017), PP 07-10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9790/2380-1007010710>, (2017).

Some school garden committee members initially expected more direct benefits from the garden, such as a share of the crops to allow them to feed the family and even sell the surplus to generate a small income. Other anticipated benefits included agricultural skills building, wherein families would be able to cultivate land on their own.

After the harvest, my production will be subdivided in two parts: one part will be used to feed my children and another part will go to the market to be sold. This money will allow me to buy either a goat, a sheep, or chickens, and from there I can start breeding. (Parent, March)

In some places where these initial expectations were not aligned with what the project could realistically provide, parents and caregivers often disengaged when they later understood that they would not get actual direct benefit. This fact suggests the need for a higher level of transparency and explanations at the early phase of the project implementation.

The risk of unreasonable sacrifices. Taking care of a garden involves continuous efforts in the long run, and, in some phases of the cultivation cycle, long and tiring work. The project locations being rural areas, community members knew the types of effort that agricultural work would require. Some, as illustrated in the quote below, declared they were aware of the difficulty and ready to face it. The quote below also suggests that success lies in the active participation of the entire community.

Today's meeting was to announce the coming of this food security project and to form a committee to manage and oversee these activities. The task will be very heavy, but in the long run we will need the participation of everyone for good success. (Parent, March)

In the organisation of the agricultural work planned by one of the NGOs, the school garden committee members were responsible for the garden, but additional parents were asked to join and help them when needed. In an area where many parents already worked long hours to provide for their household, the additional volunteer work required by the school gardens meant giving up time to engage in much needed income-generating opportunities. This opportunity cost of engaging in the garden is illustrated by the below quote by a parent.

So that this project advances strongly, see that we are five people here out of 17. Many of us have deserted; they got tired on the way. When you know that you can cultivate for another person so that he pays you 3000 francs [~1.50 USD] while if you come here, your children will sleep without eating, it is easy for some to deceive even by saying that they are sick. But going to cultivate for others to earn money, why? It's to get food. (Parent, July)

The initially planned process, in which parents would participate in the garden cultivation for no payment, was therefore confronted with the reality of the area where some families, already in a situation of food insecurity, could not realistically volunteer to work in the garden.

If we make them come, we will make them starve. (NGO staff, June)

In addition, when parents participated intermittently in the garden, they would benefit from less training, would not participate in the joint decision-making, and might not feel as fully part of the group as the members of the school garden committees did. Most members of the school garden committees mentioned that parents were hard to mobilize and not used to working on a voluntary basis. All reported having to convince parents to work more; many reported having to offer something in exchange for their labour (mostly promise a share of the harvest to those parents), and on rare occasions, members of the school garden committees even reported being insulted by disappointed parents.

It is hard to see that the parents are beginning to be angry at me. They were the ones who had cultivated, but none of them got their share. These insults that I'm starting to get, which I don't appreciate, might result in that tomorrow I might not [see] the parents participating in the activities as planned because there is no interest for them. (School garden committee member, June)

Therefore, in many of the schools studied, the school garden committee members performed most of the work by themselves without involving additional parents or caregivers. Their initial motivation was therefore confronted with the difficulty and sacrifices that working in the garden represented. This loss of motivation was observed in almost all schools and is a threat to the sustainability of the committee's engagement and thus to the overall activity.

We even did the ploughing and the sowing in rainfall, but we sacrificed ourselves body and soul to finish. (Committee member, May)

[The committee leader] really gave it his all; he gave up his activities. Unfortunately, it is a sacrifice, and we don't know what salary he will be paid. Everything he did before, he left for the garden. He has good will. (Committee member, July)

To summarise, while school garden requires full community buy-in and support to be well organized and functioning interventions, they cannot be productive, sustainable, and effective in fighting child labour if parents are spending extensive unpaid hours working in the garden. Indeed, if they cannot provide for their own families because of volunteering to work in the gardens, then their children might be pushed into work to compensate.

4.3. Findings on enablers and barriers to sustainability

In a fragile context like the Kivus in the DRC, the population's susceptibility to economic shocks is likely to mean that children can only reintegrate school fully if a school feeding programme is working continuously. In line with other findings from the literature such as Bundy and colleagues, we consider that school gardens should tend to economic sustainability.³² Studying this activity in its early phase of development allowed the research team and PACE to understand the threats and key steps toward enhanced outcomes and sustainability.

Selecting the land and the crops. Schools were selected in areas where child labour and school dropout were an issue. One important criterion when selecting schools was that enough land had to be available and accessible, meaning close to the school and the village with access to water for irrigation. In one of the two locations where the canteen was planned from the beginning, the land dimension requirements were estimated based on the potential yield in the area and the number of children in the school.

The project found that engaging the community in identifying the land and crop selection helped support an effective implementation.

[NGO] involved the community through the discussions carried out through the focus group technique that involved the community of all different age groups.... We ourselves established the criteria and conditions for choosing the schools where the project will be carried out.... [NGO] consulted with the community about everything, and we are the ones who are carrying out the activities ourselves. (Local leader, March)

In some project locations where the school did not have land of its own, the land for the gardens was either lent to the school or had to be rented. In such instances, the school garden committee found an agreement with landowners. While our data do not provide information on all agreements, we know some were informal oral agreements, for example when a nearby parish lent some land to one of the schools under study. These informal agreements could potentially be a threat to sustainability.

Another key factor to consider beside land extension is also land quality. In one of the two provinces, in many interviews the land was described as infertile, and in one school, poor quality soil was mentioned by parents as a reason for poor soybean yield. In locations where land was not fertile, many respondents mentioned having difficulty accessing fertilisers because, as it is often the case in areas affected by prolonged conflict, markets are not fully functional; therefore, artificial fertilisers are expensive, and natural fertilisers are scarce. The below quote by a school garden committee member illustrates that point and suggests the need for additional investment.

³² Bundy, Burbano, Grosh, Jukes and Drake, "Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development, and the Education Sector, the World Bank".

Our soil is no longer fertile. It is necessary to improve the soil. Local improvement is done with manure that comes from livestock, which we do not have. There is a need to increase animal husbandry. If the authorities and the NGO staff can help us with small farms that can allow us to have fertiliser, that can increase the production and allow the children to stay in school and make sure that all these needs are met. (School garden committee member)

Participants and NGO insisted on the importance of providing children with a balanced diet through daily meals, suggesting that crop selection was an important point of sustainability. In some schools the committee therefore selected a variety of crops to plant. In others, few crops were planted with the idea that part of the yield would be sold on the market and others would be bought to diversify. Among the various gardens observed, the most successful started with a few types of crops that are commonly grown in the area, with the objective of developing knowledge and techniques for these specific crops and to diversify in successive agricultural cycles. The quantity of vegetables harvested varied based on size of land but also on which crop was planted, some proving more productive than others.

Training and technical support. The NGOs leading the school garden interventions engaged an agronomist as part of the team both in South Kivu and North Kivu to provide expert guidance on agricultural techniques and management, to increase the productivity of the garden, and to train and support participants on advanced agricultural skills and good practices.

While the local communities of North and South Kivu are widely engaged in agriculture, participants reportedly valued the expertise and guidance brought by the agronomist. Several participants expressed an interest in learning more on advanced agricultural techniques. One of the school garden committee members quoted below valued both the training and ongoing support received:

A: We had an agronomist who showed people how to cultivate, how to plant, how to distance the seedlings, how to place the pots. We had been given medicines [phytosanitary products] and shown how to use them.

Q: Did this agronomist follow up?

A: Yes, he monitored the evolution of the seeds and seedlings.

Q: After how long did he come by?

A: He participated in every activity. If it was the period when the crops were being planted, he had to come by to make sure that the standards he had given were respected. And besides, we had bought ropes to allow the agronomist to measure the distance between the different crops. (School director, July)

While valuing training received by the agronomist on specific aspects of agriculture that the committee did not master, respondents also expressed the need to be continuously supported, suggesting once more that sustainability is a long process and that developing participants' skills also requires time, as illustrated by the quote below by a school director.

Apart from seed support, [the NGO] can help us in the accompaniment of the agronomist. The agronomist can accompany us in the techniques of growing, giving advice. The agronomists master the growing seasons of each crop. I was afraid because the sun was hitting too hard, but an agronomist told me that it was going to rain soon. And after two days, the rain had fallen and had watered the potatoes during the right period. The big obstacle I fear is putting the crops in place during the incorrect growing season. Because that can cause the crops to be damaged. If the crops are damaged, it is a big loss. That is why the accompaniment of the agronomist can be important so that he can guide us. Even if we do not have the money to pay for it. (School director, July)

Analysed data confirmed that the inclusion of a qualified agronomist has the double advantage of improving the productivity of the school garden while strengthening the capacity of the school garden committees to manage the initiative more effectively.

While the school gardens were elaborated by PACE with the clear objective to address the needs of children involved in child labour, in the schools observed, training of committee members and staff on child protection, safeguarding and sensibilization on child labour in schools was not systematic. While these trainings might not seem like a prerequisite to develop an effective school feeding system, being trained on child protection and safeguarding is a paramount for anyone involved in work with or around children.

Anticipating costs and long-term support. This study explored the type of costs that such a garden must support. Some could be anticipated, such as cost of inputs, plant protection products, tools and tool replacements, and additional labour when required by the agricultural cycle as previously mentioned. Where a canteen was established, the project also ensured the cost of building or renovating a place to cook and the cost of buying and replacing cooking equipment. Based on the data collected, it appears that in future projects, some funds need to be allocated to an emergency fund that can cover unexpected costs, such as damages caused by natural events (excessive rain, flooding, draught) or manmade damages caused by theft or vandalism.

As an example, during the time of the study, schools faced security issues, a problem that was not budgeted for by the NGO. In areas with high rates of criminality, weak rule of law and where a large part of the population lives in extreme poverty, whose situation worsened due to the COVID-19 impact, the risk of collective goods like the school gardens being targeted by

petty thefts is quite high. An agronomist from South Kivu, commented that with high level of food insecurity, “people do not know which way to turn” and “the victims are the gardens”; he reported that theft happened concurrently with the harvest, pressuring school garden committees and the NGO to harvest quickly and store the yield securely.

Therefore, a key area of concern to protect the school meals systems is protecting the crops from theft. One school director expressed the opinion that a guard is essential for this activity to prevent theft before harvest and must be budgeted for.

The other obstacle is theft. We have a guard who spends all night in these fields to guard the crops. This has a cost; we must pay for it. He comes at seven PM, and he starts to circulate in the field with a torch until 11pm. He will be able to return at three AM to circulate again in the field. (School director, July)

Until the gardens reach the required levels of production, organisations, and financial sustainability, covering all the costs mentioned above, these must be supported by the implementing partners.

The need for ongoing continuous support was confirmed by interviews with the committees and the parents at the end of the first harvest. Participants wondered if they would be supported in the next seasons and expressed doubt in their ability to pursue, “if the plants do not give the first time”, stating they “would not have the means to reach every third season”. In the below extract a parent expressed doubts regarding their ability to proceed without further support after only the first season. Even when the harvest had been successful in the first cycle, respondents from the school committees highlighted the need for seeds for the next agricultural round, both to continue and expand their agricultural production.

I wish [NGO] could help us during these three seasons. We do not ask them to support us forever but to support us in case of problems such as lack of seeds as we are still at the beginning of the project. For example, if we want to farm two hectares for potatoes and we only have 10 bags of seeds that can only support one hectare, [NGO] can help us with the other 10 bags so that we can farm all two hectares. (Parent, July)

5. Conclusion

The first set of findings suggest that school gardens can be relevant to addressing child labour only if the use of the harvest is well designed to serve children at risk of engaging in, or already engaged in child labour. In our study, school gardens that did not have such planning tended to benefit relatively better off caregivers who were able to commit a substantial amount of time volunteering in the garden and benefited personally from their participation. To reach more vulnerable children, school gardens should be connected to feeding programs that serve all the children of the school.

A garden of sufficient dimension to support a sustainable meals system requires effort, work, coordination, and supervision, and therefore the community must own the activity, in line with the technical guidelines promoted by FAO.³³ Findings highlight the importance of ensuring all stakeholders' expectations are aligned with the project plans and resources. Moreover, it is equally important to support the school garden committee to gradually take ownership of the project by ensuring sufficient time is spent on team building and that sufficient training is provided to everyone. Finally, to maintain engagement of participants over the long term, a clear and fair distribution of tasks, effective coordination mechanisms, and adequate financial support for labour-intensive phases of the agricultural cycle are essential to enabling community members, and parents, to regularly participate in the school gardens management without undermining their households' livelihoods and wellbeing. The findings also recommend starting a school garden initiative with a small agricultural production and then gradually but steadily expand over time.

As described in this paper, sustainability relies on community ownership and leadership by school staff and the school gardens committees. Even when access to land and financial sustainability is ensured, changes in school leadership and in the school, committees can undermine the long-term sustainability of the overall school meals systems as new members or new school directors might not be equally motivated and skilled in coordinating and leading the work of the school committees. Thus, while pursuing sustainability is engrained in this activity, implementing agencies should consider these additional factors when planning and implementing this approach, being aware of these risks and managing them appropriately. Unless local and national governments will ultimately take over the responsibility to ensure long-term sustainability of school meals systems and programmes, it is unlikely that an NGO-implemented project will succeed in establishing fully sustainable school feeding systems. Future research could include exploring how NGOs can work with governments to ensure sustainability and scale-up of school garden models. Another future area of learning involves children who have already dropped out of school: while providing children with school meals through a school garden model might prevent pupils from dropping out when economic shocks affecting their households, barriers to re-enrolment exist for those who have already dropped out. To address those, researchers and programmers should explore how school gardens could be complemented by other interventions, considering perhaps information campaigns in the workplace informing about the existence of school canteens, material support, and cash transfers to households that cannot afford school fees and related expenditures, and providing children who need it with accelerated learning classes, keeping in mind the additional barriers faced by girls. In sum, despite the promise of school garden models, future research should concentrate on how to make these models sustainable and how to make them work for a broader array of children, especially those most vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour.

³³ FAO, "Setting up and running a school garden", Technical Document, Rome, (2005), <http://www.fao.org/3/a0218e/a0218e.pdf>.

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***“I’m literally here to hear your story... let them know that”:* Exploring Narrative Therapy Approaches with Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery**

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Abstract

Child trafficking is when “*children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold*” (NSPCC, 2021). Child exploitation is “*when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain... including sexual exploitation or forcing the child to commit crime*” (Cambridgeshire Constabulary, 2021). Modern day slavery is “*defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation*” (Public Health England, 2017).

There are a high number of cases of child trafficking, exploitation, and slavery in the UK and at present, ‘best practice fit’ routine therapeutic interventions are used with children and young people who have been subjected to, or are at risk of been subjected to, trafficking, exploitation and slavery. Although these can be effective at reducing harm in the short-term, few

interventions have been developed which begin to promote long-term and sustainable positive change in the lives of children and young people (Countryman-Roswurm & DiLollo, 2017).

Here in this practice paper, we outline the use of narrative therapy techniques with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery, in particular the Tree of Life Approach (Ncube, 2006). The Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006) is presented as an approach for supporting children and young people to reconstruct personal narratives focussed on resilience and hope.

Keywords: Child Trafficking, Child Exploitation, Child Slavery, Narrative Therapy, Tree of Life

Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery: A UK Context

Child trafficking is when “*children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold*”.¹

Child exploitation is “*when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain... including sexual exploitation or forcing the child to commit crime*”.²

Modern day slavery is “*defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation*”.³

It is important to note that these definitions are both complex and contested. They are not discrete phenomenon which occur but are those which both overlap and interplay and are all forms of child abuse. Whether a child or young person has been exploited, trafficked, or subjected to modern day slavery, they will have experienced a range of abuse and neglect, which includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse as forms of control. Children and young people are also likely to be physically and emotionally neglected and may be sexually exploited. In essence they have experienced significant and complex trauma(s).

In the UK, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.⁴ Within the UK, 10,613 potential victims of human trafficking were identified within the year 2020, with 4946 (47%) of these victims being those which were exploited as children, which is a

¹ NSPCC. (2021). *Child Trafficking*. Retrieved from <https://nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>

² Cambridgeshire Constabulary. (2021). *Child exploitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambs.police.uk/information-and-services/Child-protection/CSE>

³ Public Health England. (2017). *Research and Analysis: Modern slavery and public health*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-and-public-health/modern-slavery-and-public-health>

⁴ NSPCC Learning. (2021). *Children and the law*. Retrieved from <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/children-the-law#heading-top>

10% increase from the previous year.⁵ Additionally, in the year ending March 2019, in England alone, 2230 children were subjected to a child protection plan for the experience of or risk of sexual abuse which includes sexual exploitation and trafficking for sexual purposes.⁶

Specifically, there have been major investigative and national inquiries in the UK into instances of child exploitation, such as the Alexis Jay Inquiry where approximately 1400 children were found to have been sexually exploited and subjected to sexual violence from 1997 to 2013.⁷

Despite the large numbers of recognised cases of child trafficking, exploitation and slavery, definitions of these phenomenon can often remain unclear, inconsistent and vague. In 2017 the UK Government announced changes to their definition of child exploitation due to the previous being ‘unclear and out of date’.⁸ However, along with the UK Government’s definition of child exploitation, trafficking and slavery, it is important to consider what this term means to children and young people who themselves have been subjected to or are at risk of being subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. In the UK, many practitioners and services often abbreviate child sexual exploitation to ‘CSE’ and although practitioners may shorthand their discourse for ease of use, it can perhaps inadvertently sanitise the issue or take away from the child or young person’s difficult and traumatic experiences. Farooq and Colleagues (2018) undertook collaborative conversations with children and young people who had been subjected to sexual exploitation on their experience of language and definitions of child sexual exploitation in the UK, one young person reflected:

“What is CSE? Personally when I see stuff like that, ‘CSE’... by shortening ‘Child Sexual Exploitation’ to that it kind of takes the importance away from those words... When you actually say Child Sexual Exploitation it’s more impactful isn’t it? I can imagine for a young person... you’re sitting there and someone says ‘you’re CSE’, you’d be like ‘what?’... You’d find that all of a sudden that trauma that you’ve been through all of a sudden wasn’t as traumatic to the psychologist because they’re calling it CSE they’re not calling it what it actually is”⁹

⁵ Home Office. (2021). Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, UK, End of Year Summary, 2020. Retrieved from [Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, end of year summary 2020 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/96443/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2020.pdf)

⁶ Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Child sexual abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019*. Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/caddy/Downloads/Child%20sexual%20abuse%20in%20England%20and%20Wales%20year%20ending%20March%202019.pdf](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/childsexualabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019)

⁷ Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/279/independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-rotherham>

⁸ Community Care (2017). Government changes statutory definition of child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/02/16/government-changes-statutory-definition-child-sexual-exploitation/>

⁹ Voice of a child quoted in Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 55.

Narratives of children and young people evidenced the importance of attending to language and deconstructing dominant understandings of child exploitation.¹⁰ Their narratives also highlighted the need to scrutinise interventions and treatments and whether the needs of children who were subjected to exploitation were being met. These ideas are important to consider for child trafficking, forced labour and slavery too.¹¹

Mental Health Needs of Victims of Child Trafficking, Exploitation & Slavery

Children who are victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery have often been victims of extreme physical and psychological violence and as a result, have experienced significant psychological distress and multiple traumas, often within their early years of development.¹²

The psychological effects of exposure to multiple traumas for child survivors of trafficking, exploitation and slavery frequently results in the presence of complex trauma symptomology and various mental health needs and disorders, to include, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), affective disorders such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder and severe stress.¹³ As well as this, child survivors may also experience other associated health risks, such as sleep difficulties, nightmares, flashbacks, collapse, trauma-memory-associated body pain, dissociation, palpitations and physical difficulties, which contributes to these complex presentations.¹⁴

Soroptimist International of the Americas (2008) found that 79% of trafficked women and girls were trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation.¹⁵ Research has also shown that sexual exploitation can result in serious mental health consequences, particularly anxiety, depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.¹⁶

¹⁰ Appiah, A., Baguley, S., SPACE & Farooq, R. (2021). *Making Words Matter. Attending to Language when working with children subject to or at risk of Exploitation: A Practice & Knowledge Briefing*. The National Working Group for Exploited Children, Derby, UK.

¹¹ Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 52 - 57.

¹² Helen Bamber Foundation. (2015). *Addressing mental health needs in survivors of modern day slavery. A critical review and research agenda*. London: The Freedom Fund.

¹³ Wood, L. C. N. (2020). Child modern slavery, trafficking and health: a practical review of factors contributing to children’s vulnerability and the potential impacts of severe exploitation on health. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 4, 1 – 11.

¹⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵ Soroptimist International of the Americas. (2008). Slavery’s new face: Sex trafficking of women and girls. Retrieved from www.soroptimist.org/stoptrafficking.html

¹⁶ Helen Bamber Foundation. (2015). *Addressing mental health needs in survivors of modern day slavery. A critical review and research agenda*. London: The Freedom Fund.

Mental Health & Therapeutic Interventions - What Works?

Within the UK, child trafficking, exploitation and slavery continues to pose systemic challenges in effectively engaging children and young people in therapeutic interventions to reduce risk and harm.¹⁷ Currently in the UK, therapeutic mental health interventions to address child trafficking, exploitation and slavery are primarily focussed on physical safety, stable housing, financial stability, location, relocation, rescue and rehabilitation.¹⁸ For example, in child welfare services, the removal of children and young people from their family homes and communities to often far away residential care homes or secure facilities is a common intervention. Although these interventions provide physical safety by disrupting exploitative relationships and removing the child or young person from immediate risk and harm, it does not address self-esteem, trauma or identity difficulties, as well as psychological and relational dynamics. Shuker (2013) emphasises that children and young people who have experienced trafficking, exploitation and slavery need physical safety alongside both relational and psychological security to work effectively and to ameliorate the effects of their experiences.¹⁹

When physical safety is prioritised without the consideration of relational and psychological security, these interventions will only ever be effective in the short-term and instead of supporting meaningful change in the lives of at-risk children and young people, they promote as some have suggested, a rather enforced compliance.²⁰ Therefore, inhibiting the exit from exploitative relationships in the long-term and potentially inadvertently promoting children and young people’s disengagement from services.²¹

However, there are others who have proposed alternatives to interventions focused solely on physical safety. For example, Scott and Colleagues (2019)²² outline six stages to conducting

¹⁷ Lefevre, M., Hickie, K., Luckock, B., & Ruch, G. (2017). Building trust with children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation: the professional challenge. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47, 2456-2473.

¹⁸ Soderlund, G. (2005). Running from the rescuers: New U.S. crusades against sex trafficking and the rhetoric of abolition. *National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) Journal*, 17(3), 64–87; Fong, R., & Cardoso, J. B. (2010). Child human trafficking victims: Challenges for the child welfare system. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 33, 311–316

¹⁹ Shuker, L. (2013). Constructs of Safety for Children in Care Affected by Sexual Exploitation. In Melrose, M., & Pearce, J. (Ed). *Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

²⁰ Beckett, H. (2011). *Not a Work Away: The Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Barnardo’s NI.

²¹ Shuker, L. (2013). Constructs of Safety for Children in Care Affected by Sexual Exploitation. In Melrose, M., & Pearce, J. (Ed). *Critical Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Trafficking*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

²² Scott, S., McNeish, D., Bovarnick, S., & Pearce, J. (2019). What works in responding to child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from <https://www.beds.ac.uk/media/268527/what-works-in-cse-july2019.pdf>

direct therapeutic interventions with children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of being subjected to exploitation which includes:

- 1) engagement and relationship building
- 2) support and stability
- 3) providing advocacy
- 4) reducing risks and building resilience
- 5) addressing underlying issues
- 6) enabling growth and moving on

Furthermore, in recent years in the UK, context informed models have been developed with the aim of taking a holistic approach to understanding the therapeutic needs of children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of trafficking, exploitation, and slavery. In the UK, Contextual Safeguarding has been developed as “an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families”.²³ This framework explores the different relationships in a child or young person’s life beyond the family home and recognises the importance of these individuals, communities, and systems as integral in safeguarding children. In addition to this, Hickle and Hallett (2016) have drawn on harm reduction work principles, which are typically used in substance misuse services, and explored their feasibility with children who were subjected to exploitation in the UK to promote child-centred long-term change.²⁴ The key theme emerging in these more novel and innovative interventions has been that interventions which utilise co-production and co-design principles seem to be most effective with children who have been subjected to exploitation. This is further evidenced by the work of Bovarnick and Colleagues (2018) who conducted a UK scoping review as part of the ‘Being Heard’ project that explored the involvement of children and young people in participatory research on sexual violence.²⁵ The key findings from this review were that there was evidence of multiple benefits to collaboratively involving children and young people in participatory interventions addressing sexual violence against children.²⁶

Although some of the models outlined above were informed by research and evaluation, there remains a paucity of evidence base which explores alternative therapeutic interventions with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. In particular, at

²³ University of Bedfordshire & Contextual Safeguarding Network. (2017). Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework. Retrieved from <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>

²⁴ Hickle, K., & Hallett, S. (2016). Mitigating Harm: Considering Harm Reduction Principles in Work with Sexually Exploited Young People. *Children and Society*, 30, 302-313.

²⁵ Bovarnick, S., Peace, D., Warrington, C., & Pearce, J. (2018). Being Heard: Promoting Children and Young People’s Involvement in Participatory Research on Sexual Violence. Findings from an International Scoping Review. Retrieved from https://www.our-voices.org.uk/assets/documents/UoB_BeingHeard-report.pdf

²⁶ Ibid.

present in the UK, there remain few evidence-based interventions, which are effective, replicable and grounded in theory.²⁷ It is evident that there is scope for further development of effective interventions and innovative methods in engaging children and young people who have been subjected to or who have been at risk of trafficking, exploitation and slavery. Narrative Therapy techniques are explored here as a means of adding to the ‘what works’ UK and international evidence base in engaging and working therapeutically with child victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery.

What is Narrative Therapy?

Narrative therapy focuses on the idea that an individual’s difficulties are not problems which are located within them, but are those which are external to their identity.²⁸ An individual’s life consists of various narratives, influenced and shaped by cultural discourses about identity and power, which help them make sense of who they are. Narrative therapy aims to diminish ‘problem-saturated’ conversations held around an individual and instead, uses various techniques to support these individuals to analyse and reflect upon their narratives in order to help them make sense of their lived experiences and difficulties.²⁹

Narrative Therapy has a lot to offer our understanding of how powerful discourses influence the way in which we listen and respond to children and young people. It focuses on the importance of narratives that are told and untold, as well as narratives that are dominant or subjugated in society and systems.³⁰

Key Narrative Therapists such as White & Epston (1990) have discussed the importance of recognising that our lives and the lives of others are multi-storied and that power influences what stories are heard and what remains unheard.³¹ White (2000) has also related how the stories that are told about us can be so powerful as to shape our identity, highlighting the importance of attending to the language and stories we construct, reconstruct and distribute, as well as deconstructing language and cultural discourses.³²

At its core, Narrative Therapy recognises the harmful psychological effects of dominant stories that disqualify, oppress, limit, or disempower people. It then offers alternatives which

²⁷ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

²⁸ Johnstone, L., & Dallos, R. (2014). *Formulation in Psychology and Psychotherapy: Making sense of people’s problems*. Routledge: London and New York.

²⁹ Madigan, S. (2011). *Narrative Therapy*. American Psychological Association.

³⁰ White, M. (2011). *Narrative practice: Continuing the conversations*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

³¹ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: WW Norton & Company; Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 777-90.

³² White, M. (2000). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

address and make visible the effects of cultural stories about gender, race, class, religion and sexuality on people’s understandings of themselves and the world.³³

The externalisation technique is one of the core processes in Narrative Therapy as it works to separate the individual from their problems and difficulties in the initial stages of therapy.³⁴ This technique involves the problem being defined in a way which is separate from the individual’s experiences and to facilitate this, the problem can be given a different name. For example, the development of the character ‘Sneaky Poo’ has been used as a tool for facilitating discussion and shared understanding of faecal soiling with young children.³⁵

As well as externalising the problem from the individual, Narrative Therapy also serves to help the individual make sense of their story and lived experiences. The deconstruction technique does this by helping the individual break down parts of their story which seem large, overwhelming, and chaotic. The assumptions and implicit meanings behind these broken-down stories are then explored and challenged with the individual and alternative endings can be considered.³⁶

The effectiveness of narrative therapy with the child population has been well documented. In a population of 353 children age 8 to 10 years, it was found that a Narrative Therapy intervention showed significant improvements in the children’s self-awareness, self-management, social awareness/empathy, and responsible decision making.³⁷ This research also showed that Narrative Therapy practices such as externalising and re-authoring, significantly contribute to the development of social and emotional skills in children.

The use of Narrative Therapy with children and young people who have been subject to trafficking, exploitation and slavery in the UK

Within the UK at present, interventions that are routinely used with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery are often a ‘best practice fit’ which consist of ‘rescuing efforts’ to reduce immediate risk and harm.³⁸ As discussed,

³³ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: WW Norton & Company; Russell, S., & Carey, M. (2003). Feminism, therapy and narrative ideas: Exploring some not so commonly asked questions. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2, 67–91.

³⁴ Ryan, F., O’Dwyer, M., & Leaby, M. M. (2015). Separating the Problem and the Person. Insights from Narrative Therapy with People who Stutter. *Top Lang Disorders*, 35(3), 267-274.

³⁵ Heins, T., & Ritchie, K. (1985). *Beating Sneaky Poo: Ideas for faecal soiling*. Canberra, Australia: Child and Adolescent Unit, Mental. Health Branch, ACT Health Authority

³⁶ Ibid, 9.

³⁷ Beaudoin, M., Moersch, M., & Evare, B. S. (2016). The effectiveness of narrative therapy with children’s social and emotional skill development: an empirical study of 813 problem-solving stories. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 35(3), 42-59.

³⁸ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

although these interventions can be effective in reducing risk and harm in the short-term, they are not equally as effective at reducing risk and harm in the long-term and supporting children and young people to lead positive and fulfilling lives.

Additionally, these ‘best practice fit’ interventions can often alienate and invalidate the child or young person’s subjective experiences of exploitation, trafficking and slavery, rather than supporting them to understand their lived experiences and empowering them to lead different, positive and fulfilling lives. The use of Narrative Therapy as a tool to effectively engage children and young people who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking and slavery will be explored and examined.

Although there is limited research exploring the use of Narrative Therapy for Child labour and slavery, there is a growing evidence base around using these techniques with survivors of sex trafficking, sexual violence, child sexual abuse and those exiting sexual exploitation.³⁹ There is also a significant evidence-base that Narrative Therapy is effective when working with the effects of significant and complex trauma. STAIR Narrative Therapy was developed as both a skills-focused and Narrative Therapy intervention for trauma which consists of interventions around emotion-regulation and social impairment which are then used to support the individuals engaging in Narrative Therapy techniques.⁴⁰ Empirical evidence indicated that the STAR Narrative Therapy intervention may be an effective treatment for alleviating post-traumatic distress and improving the emotional and social impairments of these individuals.⁴¹

Countryman-Roswurm and DiLollo (2017) present a method for helping survivors reconstruct personal narratives that reflect resilience, recovery, and prosperity drawing on narrative therapy ideas.⁴² They highlighted how particular Narrative Therapy techniques, such as externalising the problem, focussing on unique outcomes, and contextualising the experiences of survivors of sex trafficking, allowed empowering and subjugated narratives to emerge. The Narrative Therapy practices presented by Countryman-Roswurm & DiLollo (2017) are offered as a component of a larger survivor-centred and survivor-led human trafficking response model in an urban Midwestern city in the United States as well as across Central America.⁴³ They state

³⁹ Harker, T. (1997). Therapy with male sexual abuse survivors: Contesting oppressive life stories. In G. Monk, J. Winslade, K. Crocket, & D. Epston (Eds.), *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope* (Ch. 7, pp. 193–214). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Denborough, D. (2006). *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experiences*. Adelaide, SA: Dulwich Centre Publications; Kress, V. E., Hoffman, R., & Thomas, A. M. (2008). Letters from the future: The use of therapeutic letter writing in counselling sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 3, 105–118; Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

⁴⁰ Hassija, C. M., & Cloitre, M. (2015). STAIR Narrative Therapy: A skills focused approach to trauma-related distress. *Current Psychiatry Reviews*, 11, 172-179.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72.

⁴³ Ibid.

that the use of these practices has demonstrated promising results in these settings, which is consistent with wider literature on the application of Narrative Therapy with victims of sexual abuse and trauma.⁴⁴

Similarly, Sahin and McVicker (2009) explored the usefulness of optimism and narrative therapy with survivors of sexual abuse. They found that Narrative Therapy and the focus on optimism was significant in helping clients gain a sense of power and influence over their lives. They highlighted that optimism and narrative therapy was helpful in focusing on client’s strengths and competency, as well as encouraging personal growth.⁴⁵

The available evidence base points to the most effective interventions for children and young people who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking and slavery are those, which include the active participation of children and young people themselves, acknowledge the role of systems, families and communities on the lives of children and young people, as well as those that are anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory.⁴⁶ In order for these approaches to be embedded and implemented in services offering therapeutic support, it is vital that clinicians, management, service providers and commissioners recognise the value of innovative and systemic therapeutic approaches to tackling child trafficking, exploitation and slavery and that it is also acknowledged at strategic and policy level. It is proposed that the Narrative Therapy approach termed Tree of Life offers this and enables collaborative and reflexive conversations to take place.⁴⁷ The following section will outline the Tree of Life approach and the authors will examine its applicability to children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery.

⁴⁴ Harker, T. (1997). Therapy with male sexual abuse survivors: Contesting oppressive life stories. In G. Monk, J. Winslade, K. Crocket, & D. Epston (Eds.), *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope* (Ch. 7, pp. 193–214). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Denborough, D. (2006). *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experiences*. Adelaide, SA: Dulwich Centre Publications; Kress, V. E., Hoffman, R., & Thomas, A. M. (2008). Letters from the future: The use of therapeutic letter writing in counselling sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 3, 105–118.

⁴⁵ Sahin, S., & Mcvicker, M. (2009). The use of optimism in narrative therapy with sexual abuse survivors. *Journal of European Psychology Students*, 1(1), 7.

⁴⁶ Countryman-Roswurm, K., & DiLollo, A. (2017). Survivor: A Narrative Therapy Approach for Sex Trafficked Women and Girls. *Women & Therapy*, 40(1-2), 55-72; Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 52 – 57; Lefevre, M., Hickie, K., & Luckock, B. (2019). ‘Both/And’ Not ‘Either/Or’: Reconciling Rights to Protection and Participation in Working with Child Sexual Exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 49, 1837-1855.

⁴⁷ Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16.

The Tree of Life⁴⁸

The Tree of Life approach was originally developed to support vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. This approach utilises the metaphor of a tree derived from Zimbabwean folklore and collective narrative practice to support individuals and communities to overcome difficult life experiences.⁴⁹ The Tree of Life enables people to speak about their lives in ways that are not re-traumatising, but instead strengthens their relationships with their own history, their culture, and significant people in their lives. In the Tree of Life the different aspects of the tree represent the following:

- **The Roots** – This is a prompt for the child to speak about where they have come from, their family, their origins etc
- **The Ground** – This represents where the child lives at present and their daily life
- **The Trunk** – This is an opportunity for the child to speak about or represent visually their skills. It also includes special and precious memories that the child holds
- **The Branches** – These represent the hopes, dreams and wishes of the child
- **The Leaves** – These represent people who are significant and important to the child
- **The Fruits** – These represent gifts that the child has been given, these do not have to be material gifts but can also be acts of kindness, love, care etc.

The Tree of Life Approach has since been used in a number of different settings with a range of individuals including with refugee children, young people and families⁵⁰; parents of children with physical health conditions⁵¹; adults in mental health inpatient settings⁵² and individuals with anorexia nervosa.⁵³ In addition, Parham, Ibrahim and Foxwell (2019) conducted

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Lock, S. (2016). The Tree of Life: A review of the collective narrative approach. *Educational Psychology Research and Practice*, 2(1), 2-20.

⁵⁰ Hughes, G. (2014). Finding a voice through “the tree of life”: A strength-based approach to mental health for refugee children and families in schools. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 19(1), 139–153; Jacobs, S. F. (2018). Collective narrative practice with unaccompanied refugee minors: “The tree of life” as a response to hardship. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 23(2), 279–293.

⁵¹ Haselhurst, J., Moss, K., Rust, S., Oliver, J., Hughes, R., McGrath, C., Reed, D., Ferguson, L., & Murray, J. (2021). A narrative-informed evaluation of tree of life for parents of children with physical health conditions. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 26:1.

⁵² Wellman, J., Lepori, F., & Szlachcic, R. (2016). Exploring the utility of a pilot TOL group in an inpatient setting. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 11(3), 172–181; Fraser, J., Williams, L., Hayes, M., Akpan, U., & Bowerman, U. (2018) Humanising the inpatient experience through service user-led tree of life workshops. *Clinical Psychology Forum*, 312.

⁵³ Ibrahim, J., & Tchanturia, K. (2017). Patients’ experience of a narrative group therapy approach informed by the “tree of life” model for individuals with anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 68(1), 80–91.

a literature review of the applicability and utility of the Tree of Life approach in Mental Health Settings and found key themes across all studies that explored its practice and utility.⁵⁴ They found that the Tree of Life approach was helpful in promoting recovery through its focus on alternative stories, offering hope and empowerment and by allowing people to connect to others. They also highlighted themes around the inclusivity of the model which highlighted that it allowed individuals to overcome barriers to traditional psychological support and that it was highly culturally applicable.⁵⁵

In the following section we outline the applicability of the Tree of Life approach with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery.

The Tree of Life & children who have been subject to exploitation, trafficking & slavery

Therapeutic interventions with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery typically start with the child’s description of their “problem saturated story”.⁵⁶ However Payne (2006) has suggested that this leads to development of “thin descriptions” rather than making visible the diverse and multi-storied identities that the individual has including their strengths, resilience, hopes and wishes.⁵⁷ The Tree of Life approach would enable a child victim of trafficking, exploitation and slavery to amplify the seldom heard narratives of their life including strengthen their self-esteem, capabilities and relationships.⁵⁸ Developing their Tree of Life enables them to enhance the important parts of themselves which may otherwise remain subjugated, for example the process of discussing and exploring the Trunk of the tree enables children to recognise their skills, strengths and capabilities which have allowed them to survive the multiple traumas they have experienced. The Tree of Life approach is participatory, validating and privileges the voice of the child. This is vital for child victims of trafficking, exploitation and slavery because the process of hearing and respecting a child or young person’s voice is recognised as a core component of building their resilience.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Parham, S., Ibrahim, J. & Foxwell, K. (2019). Could the Tree of Life Model Be a Useful Approach for UK Mental Health Contexts? A Review of the Literature. *Narrative Works*, 9(2), 44–70.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ White, M. (1989). Selected papers. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Center.

⁵⁷ Payne, M. (2006). Narrative therapy: An introduction for counselors (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

⁵⁸ Ncube, N. (2006). The Tree of Life Project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in Southern Africa. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 3-16.

⁵⁹ Department for Education. (2017). Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf

Farooq and Colleagues (2021) recently highlighted the applicability of the Tree of Life approach for children who were subjected to exploitation and trafficking using a case study methodology. They highlighted how this approach was both participatory and enabling to children who were subjected to exploitation and trafficking, as well as how it could be adapted to meet the needs of these complex and diverse cohort of children.⁶⁰

Summary & Discussion

The narrative-informed Tree of Life approach outlined in this paper is a unique, innovative, and novel therapeutic approach and has potential for use with children who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery. There is some evidence of feasibility and acceptability of the Tree of Life narrative approach with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation and trafficking.⁶¹ Furthermore, wider reflections from children and young people, in respect of what intervention works, has highlighted the importance of taking a narrative approach and offering a safe space for them to tell their story, in their own words. Young people who have been consulted on these narrative techniques have stated:

“It’s their story so give them that control about how they tell their story, when they tell their story. And even if like they don’t want to talk about it, is there an option they can paint it, can they write a song about it and go off to a hill somewhere and scream as loud as they possibly want cause that’s how they want to get it out... It’s a hard thing because you can’t force a child to talk about their story but I think just having the tools and being open and willing to listen. Just saying to a child, I’m literally here to hear your story to hear your emotions, to feel your emotions – let them know that.”⁶²

The UK government has highlighted that there is a need to consider innovative therapeutic approaches when working with children and young people who have been subjected to trafficking, exploitation and slavery as the current models and approaches do not meet the needs of this cohort of children.⁶³ Furthermore, research has identified principles that underpin the provision of good support to children and young people who are sexually abused or

⁶⁰ Farooq, R., Addy, C., Smyth, G., Appiah, A., & Kennedy, P. J. (2021). “No one’s gonna tell your story better than you are”: The use of a Narrative Therapy Approach informed by the Tree of Life with Children and Young People subject to Sexual Exploitation. *Clinical Psychology Forum*

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Voice of a child quoted in: Farooq, R., Stevenson, L., & Beacham-Hulvej, G. (2018). ‘Risky Child, risky involvement?’: Hearing the voice of the child subject to or at risk of sexual exploitation. *Child and Family Clinical Psychology Review*, 6, 55

⁶³ Ofsted (2014b) *The Sexual Exploitation of children: It couldn’t happen here, could it?*. London: Ofsted

exploited⁶⁴, which includes practitioners understanding and working with dynamics of power and inequality, an emphasis on a strengths-based approach and the active involvement and participation of children and young people in the focus and pace of the work. The Tree of Life narrative approach actively deconstructs the operation of power, focuses on the strengths, resilience and assets that children and young people bring whilst actively encouraging their participation in the work. It is emphasised that the Tree of Life narrative approach could be one innovative therapeutic approach to utilise with vulnerable children and young people.

Although there is a growing evidence base around the use of narrative therapy approaches with children and young people who have been subjected to exploitation, trafficking and slavery, there remains a need for further research and exploration of this approach with this population of children and young people including exploring the long-term efficacy of this approach.

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⁶⁴ Taylor-Browne, J. (2002) *More than one chance! young people involved in prostitution speak out*. London: ECPAT; Berelowitz, S., Clifton, J., Firmin, C., Gulyurtlu, S. and Edwards, G. (2013) *If only someone had listened: Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (final report)*. London: OCC; Warrington, C. with Beckett, H., Ackerley, E., Walker, M. and Allnock, D. (2016) *Making noise: children’s voices for positive change after sexual abuse*. Luton: University of Bedfordshire/ Office of Children’s Commissioner; Smeaton E. (2016) *Going the extra mile: learning from SECOS’ child sexual exploitation service*. Ilford: Barnardo’s;

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