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# Final Independent Evaluation: Strengthening Resilience to Climate Change for the Elimination of Child Labour in Cocoa-Producing Areas in Ghana

## QUICK FACTS

**Countries:** Ghana

**Evaluation date:** 05 April 2026

**Evaluation type:** External

**Evaluation timing:** Final

**Administrative Office:** ILO CO Abuja

**Technical Office:** ROAF

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**DC Symbol:** GHA/24/02/JPN

**Donor(s) & budget:** Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1,500,000 USD

*Key Words:* Agriculture, child labour, income-generating activities, local economic development, poverty alleviation, training.

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

West African communities are among the populations most exposed to the consequences of climate change, despite contributing least to global emissions. In Ghana, shifting weather patterns — marked by unpredictable rainfall and prolonged droughts — have destabilised cocoa production and undermined the livelihoods of farming families. With agriculture accounting for roughly 22% of Ghana's GDP and employing nearly 40% of its workforce, declining crop yields directly threaten household income and food security. The resulting poverty is a well-documented driver of child labour: when families cannot afford school fees, uniforms, or learning materials, children are put to work rather than sent to school. According to UNICEF, approximately 21% of Ghanaian children aged 5 to 17 are involved in child labour, a rate twice as high in rural areas.

Building on the progress made by the ILO's ACCEL Africa project in raising awareness of child labour, the Climate Cocoa project (formally titled Strengthening Resilience to Climate Change for the Elimination of Child Labour in Cocoa Producing Areas in Ghana) was designed to address gaps that remained. Funded by the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (budget: USD 1,500,000) and implemented over twelve months (March 2025 to March 2026), the project pursued one outcome: strengthened systems for identifying, preventing, and addressing child labour. The outcome was expected to be achieved through three outputs: strengthening the Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) mechanism in Bibiani Ahwiaso Bekwai District; improving the livelihoods of 300 cocoa farming families through the introduction of biochar as green technology; and systematically documenting and sharing knowledge on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through biochar.

### Present situation of the project

The project has been completed.

### Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

This final evaluation was commissioned by the ILO and serves both accountability and learning purposes for the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ILO country and regional offices, national government institutions, and implementing partners. It covers the full project lifetime and all activity areas across the Bibiani Ahwiaso Bekwai District, with additional perspectives gathered from

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|                                        | national-level stakeholders. Its findings are intended to inform the design of future ILO projects on climate resilience, child labour, and green agriculture, and to provide evidence of Japan's leadership in sustainable development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Methodology of evaluation</b>       | <p>The evaluation was structured around the six OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, with cross-cutting attention to gender equality and non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, social dialogue, and international labour standards. A total of 26 evaluation questions were developed and operationalised.</p> <p>The evaluation conducted desk research, 18 interviews with national and local stakeholders, and consulted 80 beneficiaries (36 women) in 10 focus group discussions.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>MAIN FINDINGS &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b> | <p>The project was largely <b>relevant</b> to the needs of its beneficiaries, responding to well-documented challenges at the intersection of climate change and child labour. The introduction of biochar addressed farmers' need to strengthen crop resilience in an affordable and sustainable way, and the remediation packages for vulnerable children addressed a recognised barrier to school attendance.</p> <p>The project designed activities in response to identified gaps in community and district capacity to meet CLFZ criteria. It was also aligned with the Ghana Accelerated Action Plan Against Child Labour (GAAPACL) and national SDG commitments, including SDG 8.7 on eliminating child labour, SDG 1 on poverty reduction, and SDG 13 on climate action. However, the project did not explicitly assess and address women's specific needs (limiting gender mainstreaming to participation targets).</p> <p>Climate Cocoa was <b>coherent</b> with ACCEL Africa in terms of geographic focus, community structures, and project staff. The shared team enabled smooth coordination and mutual reinforcement between the two projects, for example through CCPC members from Output 1 being recommended to receive biochar training under Output 2. Coordination with UNICEF, including</p> |

quarterly meetings and intervention mapping, was a notable good practice that ensured complementarity without overlap.

The project's Theory of Change was more logically coherent than the project's logframe, which did not fully capture the contribution of all three outputs to the overall outcome. Within the project, the connection between Output 2 (biochar production) and Output 3 (knowledge documentation) was strong, while the link between Output 1 and Output 3 was more tenuous.

Under Output 1, the project made visible **progress** in building capacity at district and community level towards CLFZ criteria, particularly in child labour monitoring, referral, and multi-actor collaboration. All five communities had functioning CCPCs and SMCs with clear roles and strengthened capacity by the time of the evaluation. The awareness-raising activities reached 199 participants, and several stakeholders perceived the Bibiani District to be close to achieving formal CLFZ status.

Under Output 2, 300 community members attended biochar workshops and 53 were trained in production. Preliminary results from demonstration farms were positive: biochar-enriched seedlings showed stronger root development, broader stems, and greater robustness than untreated plants. Beneficiaries and district stakeholders observed the differences and expressed strong interest in adopting and purchasing biochar. However, this component also faced numerous challenges, which were generally addressed or mitigated by the project team.

Under Output 3, practical manuals on biochar production, its use in cocoa farming systems, and carbon credit generation were produced and submitted for government validation. CERES certification for carbon credit generation was pending at the time of the evaluation, with a first audit completed and identified gaps subsequently addressed.

The project was largely **efficient** given its constrained one-year timeline and shared staff arrangements. The dual-project workload for staff was perceived as heavy, and a twelve-month timeframe

was considered too short for an agricultural project requiring observable results across full growing cycles. The M&E framework was proportional and fit for purpose, though the risk register was found to identify existing challenges rather than forward-looking risks and was not regularly updated.

Implementation faced several challenges, namely changes in rainfall patterns, destruction of demonstration plots by livestock, and recruitment difficulties due to competition from higher-paying illegal mining sites, which delayed some activities. However, ILO and implementing partners responded adaptively, increasing community engagement efforts and replicating a model biochar production site across all five communities.

By strengthening community and district-level structures, reinforcing behavioural change, and introducing a promising agricultural technology, the project is likely to **impact** the reduction and elimination of child labour in Bibiani over the medium term, particularly in combination with ACCEL Africa. Preliminary biochar results suggest improved crop resilience and potential for income generation, which could reduce the poverty that drives child labour.

The project's impact extends beyond directly trained beneficiaries: non-participating farmers were aware of the demonstration farms, had observed results, and were actively interested in purchasing biochar. At national level, the government's validation of the biochar manual opens the possibility of replication across Ghana. The project's environmentally friendly approach also positions it as a contribution to carbon emission reduction. A notable limitation is the project's short timeline, which did not allow for evidence of long-term biochar effects on mature cocoa plants.

The biochar component is among the most **sustainable** aspects of the project. Producers and farmers demonstrated strong motivation to continue and upscale production, and there is clear community demand for the product. Key enabling conditions such as production sites, trained producers, practical manuals, and the regulatory pathway to carbon credits are in place.

The sustainability of community-level child labour structures is more uncertain. CCPCs and SMCs are active and well-capacitated at present, but their voluntary nature makes their long-term continuity dependent on motivation and external support. Precedent from a previous UNICEF initiative in Bibiani showed that similarly strengthened SMCs had become inactive over time without sustained follow-up. The lack of transport resources for district officials poses a further risk to the continuation of community oversight.

## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Main findings & Conclusions

The Climate Cocoa project was an innovative and valuable contribution to the Bibiani District and five of its cocoa communities. It addressed a genuine and evidence-based problem through a well-integrated, multi-output approach that connected local farming communities with international standards, technologies, and knowledge networks. Despite significant implementation challenges, including a non-extendable twelve-month timeline, competing incentives from illegal mining, and weather-related setbacks, the project delivered concrete results and created foundations for continued progress.

The evaluation concludes that the combined effect of Climate Cocoa and ACCEL Africa is likely to contribute meaningfully to the eradication of child labour in Bibiani, and that the biochar component has clear potential to be replicated and scaled across Ghana and beyond. The evaluation provides the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Build a case study of the biochar component for scaling up across other ILO agricultural projects, in possible combination with entrepreneurship/financial literacy trainings
- **Recommendation 2:** Support the national and local governments to identify solutions to the illegal mining site in Bibiani
- **Recommendation 3:** Integrate follow-up mechanisms with SMCs and CCPCs into ACCEL activities.

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|                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recommendation 4:</b> Ensure that each community-level project has a dedicated strategy for community engagement, including female community members.</li> <li>• <b>Recommendation 5:</b> Adjust the design of risk registers to be living documents that focus on potential events rather than existing challenges</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Main lessons learned and good practices</b> | <p>Two key lessons emerged from the evaluation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, projects targeting agricultural systems that are explicitly designed to address climate change impacts should identify within their risk registers how climate change may itself affect project implementation.</li> <li>• Second, in communities where illegal mining or other informal income opportunities compete with project activities, community engagement and awareness-raising must be systematic, commence immediately, and be backed by a clear communication of longer-term benefits.</li> </ul> <p>Three good practices were identified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, the strong coordination framework among ILO, UNICEF, and JICA in the Bibiani District, through which the three organisations mapped their interventions, avoided overlaps, and actively exchanged lessons learned.</li> <li>• The second is the effective use of international knowledge and technologies to enhance environmental sustainability.</li> <li>• The third is the involvement of research institutions whose participation ensured scientific rigour in documenting biochar results and increased the credibility and replicability of the project's findings with government and donors.</li> </ul> |