



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation
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Building the knowledge base on the design and implementation of impact evaluation of child labour interventions - Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries:	<i>Global</i>
Final Evaluation:	<i>05/2013</i>
Evaluation Mode:	<i>Independent</i>
Administrative Office:	<i>ILO/IPEC</i>
Technical Office:	<i>ILO/IPEC</i>
Evaluation Manager:	<i>ILO-IPEC/DED</i>
Evaluation Consultant:	<i>David Todd</i>
Project Code:	<i>GLO/08/58/USA</i>
Donor & Budget:	<i>USDOL (US\$ 1'500'000)</i>
Keywords:	<i>Child labour; Impact evaluation; Data collection</i>

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

At the end of 2008, ILO/IPEC initiated a new project with funding from the United States Department of Labour (USDOL): "Building the knowledge base on the design and implementation of impact evaluation of child labour interventions". Executed by the inter-agency programme, Understanding Children's Work (UCW), this project aimed to support the design and implementation of pilot impact evaluations (IEs) in selected child labour (CL) elimination projects, to pilot other methods to assemble relevant evidence and to develop a dissemination approach.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The project's Immediate Objectives were:

- By the end of the project, the evidence base on CL programme impact will be extended through initial data collection for comprehensive CL IEs and through modular IEs;
- By the end of the project, access to information on IE methods/results in the area of CL will be increased through the establishment of a web-based knowledge centre.

The purposes of this final evaluation include to:

- Assess the extent to which the project has achieved its stated objectives;
- Identify and document lessons learned and good practice;
- Provide recommendations on how to strengthen the strategy of UCW and ILO/IPEC on IE as part of Impact Assessment.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation used the following data-gathering methods:

- Documentary review;
- Semi-structured in person interviews (ILO EVAL, IPEC);
- Semi-structured telephone interviews (Country-based staff, USDOL);
- Group discussions (UCW, IPEC/Evaluation and Impact Assessment Section (EIA)).

These data were analysed and triangulated using:

- Specification of key evaluation questions, methods and analytical approach;

- Comparison of documentary and interview data for consistency and key issues arising;
- Comparison of data from different sets of stakeholders;
- Identification of key issues emerging.
- Assessing evidence in relation to ToR specifications and key evaluation questions.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Quality of Design: The project design document (Final Version: 25 September 2008) can be analysed in two parts. The first of these is the Objectives, Outputs and Activities (Section 2.3), which is clear, reasonable and potentially implementable. The second consists of a surrounding text, which is a mix of practical suggestions as to how the work might be implemented and managed, disconnected information on the progress of CL prevention and a scarcely concealed “textbook” on IE, which is based upon numerous assumptions, some of which few practitioners would find convincing. Further, the document provides information concerning what types of interventions might be included, what questions should be asked in the IEs, what resources training should draw upon, how logical frameworks should be drawn up and a general excess of detailed suggestions. The document also states that the work of the project will be closely integrated with a broad variety of other evaluation initiatives of IPEC, although there is no provision for this in its activities or resources.

The project was also to have a Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) made up of representatives of USDOL, ILO/IPEC and the UCW Secretariat, which would play a role in “strategic oversight to and guiding implementation of all phases of the project”. Further, a Technical Advisory group made up of agency and external experts would “provide specialist input regarding the technical components of the project”.

Conclusion: The project design document has a usable core, which has been confounded by an over-ambitious and prescriptive description of how the project might be implemented and what it should achieve. The design did not include the role the project should play in helping ILO/IPEC to develop its overall strategic approaches to evaluating CL interventions.

Relevance: The project is intended to “contribute to the progressive elimination of child labour by improving understanding of the effectiveness of programmes addressing CL”. Since ILO/IPEC is one of the leading operators in this field, the project should therefore assist it to understand the results to which it is contributing or which might be directly attributed to it. From an ILO perspective, the Governing Body has indicated that IE should be pursued and has agreed with the basic definition of the practice and guidance the ILO Evaluation Unit has provided. So ILO is moving into IE and evidence-based policies and IPEC continues to play a leading role when it comes to IE within the ILO, based on its accumulated experience in the area. IPEC management promotes the need to document evidence and give a sound foundation, often to things, which practitioners already “know”, but with no firm basis. The randomized control trials (RCTs) under the IE project are expected to give an opportunity to learn, both from their processes and the results. They are part of the foundation for further development of the ILO approach to IE, which has been outlined by the Evaluation Unit in its Guidance Note 13. ILO is in the process of learning when IE is appropriate, where, when and how to do it, within the overall ILO evaluation policy.

Conclusion: The project has proved relevant to the interests of its key stakeholders: (a) for USDOL in terms of understanding the potential role and contribution of econometric-based IE methods, (b) for ILO as a contribution to its institution-wide approach to IE, using a range of methods, (c) to IPEC/EIA as part of its established and evolving set of Monitoring and Evaluation approaches, embodied in the concept of Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation System (and including such elements as the SPIF, Tracer Studies and, DBMR) and (d) for UCW as an element of its broad portfolio of approaches to understanding children’s work, where IE is already established as an important element. Beyond these immediate stakeholders, the project has made a relevant contribution to institutional partners, notably the WB, in terms of expanding the range of thematic areas covered by experimental and quasi-experimental IE methods to include CL, to a broader range of potential stakeholders, able to gain information on IE of CL activities through the Knowledge Centre, and to a number of ILO member states through their participation in the processes involved in IE selection, design and implementation, as well as capacity building received.

Efficiency: Overall, the project has not been efficient. The initial intention to include a USDOL-funded Child Labour and Education Initiative (EI) project as one of the three was apparently held up by delayed release of 2009 funds by the US Government and difficulties in deciding if any such project could be included. In the end, the decision was taken to include three IPEC projects. The first of these was identified around June 2010 (two years after project commencement), the second in March 2011 (after the first project revision) and the third in 2012, after the decision to drop a WB programme in Togo, which had run into implementation issues. This latter cannot be seen as an efficiency problem, but rather as part of the learning experience of trying to implement RCTs. So the first project to be included in the IE field programme was not finalized until half way through the project and the last only in the final year.

Other aspects of inefficiency revolve around the split between the technical management of the project by UCW and its financial control from IPEC/EIA. UCW appears to have found it difficult to obtain accurate information on the current and future financial situation of the project, which reduced its ability to make the most efficient decisions concerning the allocation of resources.

Conclusion: The project has been *inefficient* on several fronts, notably with regard to the timing of activities and coordination, particularly between UCW and IPEC/EIA. The unavailability of USDOL 2009 funded projects for inclusion meant a belated change to selection criteria for one of the IE field projects. Finalization of this selection process took nearly two years, half the time span of the project. Since fieldwork began late (among other reasons), a project extension was sought, but processing of this request within IPEC was substantially delayed, so that the extension was approved too late for some activities to be included.

Effectiveness: The project has had mixed performance with regard to effectiveness. The establishment of a web-based Knowledge Centre, incorporating some 80 relevant IEs and an inventory of CL interventions and IEs, as well as production of two synthetic review papers constitutes a very effective component and an important contribution to knowledge on means of addressing CL.

In terms of RCTs, one (Ghana) has been developed and designed and baseline data have been collected

and analysed. A second IE is at the same stage, but using a quasi-experimental design (El Salvador). In the third case (Thailand), it is not clear what work on IE will be done, since the numbers of beneficiaries and of potential control group members were insufficient to support an RCT and no alternative approach has yet been finalized. Overall, the in-country work to date has been of good quality and countries have appreciated the learning experience of participating in the planning process, even where it has not led to an RCT.

Conclusion : Overall, the project has been moderately effective. It has been effective in terms of *evidence concerning CL programme impact* mainly through its work on the inventory and review of CL activities and IEs relevant to them and incorporating this material into a Knowledge Centre. Modular approaches have also modestly contributed to this evidence base, while the work on field-based IEs, having only proceeded to baseline stage, cannot be said to have generated *evidence on impact*. Information on *methods* has been achieved largely through processes involved in establishing country-based IEs and has been compromised by various delays encountered by the project, which have meant that final versions of baseline reports have become available only at the “last moment.” Further, only one formal knowledge event (supplemented by two presentations of Working Papers to specific audiences) was held by the project and that only one month before the revised closure. This does not seem an effective way of sharing and discussing with peers the knowledge generated by the project over a four-year period.

Sustainability: Measures taken to ensure the sustainability of project benefits are weak. Although the two main bodies responsible for implementation and execution will both still be working on related activities, neither has identified specific financial or human resources to continue with the work in the medium term. Both IPEC and UCW are reliant on project-based funding for their programmes and have no “core funds” to enable them to support discretionary activities. This places the future of the “Knowledge Centre” in some doubt. The management of such a centre has financial and human resource implications. The content of the inventory of IEs and CL interventions will need updating, revision and maintenance. To remain current and relevant, further review papers will be necessary over time. There is no formal plan for this process, still less an assured financial commitment.

The field-based IEs are at a preliminary stage. Two baseline data sets have been collected and analysed, but the complex process of conducting and analysing the IEs of the effects of the interventions is at an early stage. Efforts have been made to secure funding through the interventions themselves, whilst UCW has a limited commitment to provide technical support for a few months. There is a danger that the IEs will be conducted at a time when it is too early to see impacts, simply to take advantage of UCW's support. This could be counter-productive, since the countries concerned may conclude that IEs require substantial efforts but produce no results in addition to those which could be obtained through conventional evaluation methods. The absence of a comprehensive sustainability plan for the IEs (at least in El Salvador and Ghana) is an omission, which should be urgently rectified.

The modular approaches, which show considerable promise to generate evidence in a cost-effective manner, have also been “squeezed” by the belated project extension, to such an extent that some potential partnerships have been dropped. At the moment, there is no clear plan (or resources) to continue with this work, which has produced draft reports on two projects within the closing months of the project. This has not allowed time for either the results or reflections on the methods to be digested, analysed and built upon.

Conclusion: Measures taken to ensure sustainability of the benefits of the project are *weak*. There are no definite plans to sustain and build upon the Knowledge Centre: the process of developing modular approaches to CL IE is coming to an end just as its first results are emerging, and the implementation of field-based RCTs or quasi-experimental IEs has no clear structure for continuing technical and managerial support for a timescale sufficient to allow impacts to emerge. Whilst it can be anticipated that IPEC/EIA will build upon what it interprets as the key gains made by the IE project, particularly through similar activities such as the GEM project and its continuing work on CMES, this does not amount to a clear sustainability strategy.

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

Recommendation 1: IPEC (EIA) and UCW should develop a formal collaboration agreement, which will establish the principles and potential modes of such collaboration, taking into account the increasing international emphasis on competitive bidding. The agreement would also consider approaches to broadening the potential range of funding sources for both bodies, through such means as the creation of a Trust Fund for research and evaluation of CL interventions and/or the possibility of creating a CL “window” in larger IE programmes, such as 3IE.

Recommendation 2: Future collaboration between IPEC/EIA and UCW (and other partners) should have clearly established and specific procedures and associated resource allocations for management, administration, technical cooperation, reporting and financial transparency.

Recommendation 3: IPEC/EIA should ensure that its project designs are accurately calibrated to (potentially) available resources, so that all immediate objectives are in principle attainable. Where substantial collaboration is expected among EIA projects, due account should be taken of the resource requirements of this activity.

Recommendation 4: IPEC/EIA and ILO EVAL should formally review the IPEC work on impact assessment, evaluation of impact and IE (including the use of terminologies), to ensure consistency of approaches or, where necessary, to justify differences of approach or emphasis between IPEC and EVAL. IPEC, in collaboration with EVAL, should ensure that its approaches and terminology are appropriately located in relation to broader international evaluation discussions. EVAL should consider how best to incorporate the IPEC work into its guidance documents for ILO as a whole.