



## Independent mid-term evaluation of the Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa Project

### QUICK FACTS

**Countries:** Africa Region, with focus on Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda

**Evaluation date:** August 2021 – March 2022

**Evaluation type:** Mid-Term evaluation

**Evaluation timing:** Mid-term

**Administrative Office:** ILO Regional Office for Africa

**Technical Office:** Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch

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**DC Symbol:** RAF/18/08/NLD

**Donor(s) & budget:** Government of the Netherlands, 23,500,000 EUR (27,389,278 USD)

*Key Words:* Child labour, supply chains, ACCEL

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

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

ILO has been working to tackle child labour for many years, primarily using a very successful traditional approach, focusing on downstream interventions, monitoring systems, capacity building and law and policy regulation. Yet, changes in the global economy and the ever-increasing power of global supply chains and the resulting emergence of new forms of child labour has warranted a new approach to tackle this grave violation of children’s rights. ILO has embraced this challenge by strategically aligning its flagship programme (IPEC+) to fill this gap and designed the Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa project (ACCEL) to implement this new approach. ACCEL, which is funded by the Government of the Netherlands, aims to tackle child labour in the global supply chains by combining evidence-based action to strengthen public policies and communities’ empowerment and representation, with strong private-sector partnership to up-scale interventions and ensure sustainability. Critically, the project aims to apply a systems-approach to tackling child labour that moves away from project-based downstream interventions towards strengthening existing systems that are critical to tackle root causes of child labour, such as those around social protection, social finance, education, and skills development.

The ACCEL Programme has the overarching goal to accelerate the elimination of child labour in Africa, through targeted actions in selected supply chains in Cote d’Ivoire, Egypt, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, and Uganda. To achieve this, the project is tackling three interrelated components: 1. Public policy and good governance; 2. Empowerment and representation, 3. Partnerships and knowledge sharing among global supply chain actors.

### Present situation of the project

The project completed its inception phase at the end of 2019 and received final donor approval of the country-specific strategies (referred to as country annexes) in December 2019, ready to commence fully-fledged implementation at the beginning of 2020. However, only two months into implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, severely impacting on the project’s ability to roll-out. Travel bans and other lock-down measures, such as office closures, resulted in the project having to cancel a large proportion of scheduled activities, such as field missions, training workshops, and other face-to-face encounters. Staff were working from home across country offices and recruitments slowed down. Although over the course of 2021 lockdown measures have eased in most countries and work has slowly started to resume, the pandemic has significantly impacted on project delivery across the board.

### Purpose, scope and client of the evaluation

In line with ILO’s policies on evaluation, ILO requires a Mid-Term Evaluation of the ACCEL Africa project with a focus on *“reviewing the implementation of the project to identify strengths and weaknesses, lessons and good practices to be learned, and provide practical recommendations for improvement.”*

**Includovate** was commissioned to carry out the evaluation.

The primary users of the Mid-Term Evaluation are as follows:

- ILO constituents
- Implementing partners
- The donor
- ILO (Country project staff, regional and HQ levels)
- Other stakeholders (e.g., CSOs, direct beneficiaries, other counterparts)

**Methodology of evaluation**

The Mid-Term Evaluation adopted a contribution analysis approach. As the project activities are based in the six countries, one general theory of change is utilised, and the project is guided by a comprehensive logical framework, the evaluation has focused on identifying causal links that support or revoke the Logical Framework/results chain of the project. The evaluation has employed a qualitative approach, with a detailed literature review, semi-structured Key Informant Interviews, and interactive Focus Group Discussions. Tailor-made guides for each category of stakeholders have been developed to guide data collection. Following an in-depth document review and virtual consultations with project main stakeholders and the production and approval of the Inception Report, data collection was undertaken from October 11 to November 12, 2021. Data was analysed, validation workshops were held in each target country, and the evaluation report was produced.

**MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS**

ACCEL Africa has achieved significant progress at the time of evaluation, despite having worked in a highly challenging context of a global pandemic, which hampered implementation but made the project ever-more critical. Notably, research indicates that child labour increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as a negative coping mechanism for vulnerable households and because of school closures. It has been estimated that temporary school closures affected more than 1 billion learners in over 130 countries.<sup>1</sup>

As such, the project approach and design continue to be of utmost relevance as the pandemic continues to unfold in parts of the world and its aftereffects will long be felt. The evaluation found, overall, that the project’s two-pronged approach to project design, which allowed for the development of a coherent overall project document that is well-aligned with international commitment around child labour and for the elaboration of country-specific annexes, has proven effective and ensured strong alignment with national and international frameworks. However, significant delays in carrying out baseline assessments did not allow for project interventions to be tailor-made and evidence-based to the extent that was envisaged in the project document.

Strong synergies with other ILO projects, such as Better Work, CLEAR Cotton or of well-vetted ILO approaches, such as SCREAM (‘Supporting Children’s Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media’), and effective collaboration with other development partners, such as GIZ, IFC, UNHCR, UNICEF, ENDA Mali, the World Bank, WFP and the African Union have proven effectiveness.

Project design was appropriate for most countries as the project is largely focusing on supply chains that are vital for economies of the respective target countries. The only exception appears to be Malawi, where informants raised concerns about the selection of coffee as a focus value chain, due to its relatively limited economic clout in Malawi. Instead, sugar was suggested as a potential value chain with greater impact.

The Theory of Change was comprehensive but found to be insufficiently linked to

<sup>1</sup> ILO, *COVID-19 and child labour: A time of crisis, a time to act* (2020). Available at [https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_747421/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_747421/lang--en/index.htm).

the specific country contexts. In addition, although overall considered realistic, the formulation and conceptualisation of Outcome 2 was found to be complex, highly ambitious, but overall well-conceived and sufficiently linked to ILO's comparative advantage.

Overall, an assessment of project effectiveness at mid-term has been mixed across the target countries and the three outcomes. Progress on Outcome 1 and Outcome 3 have been remarkable and are likely to continue strong for the remainder of the project. Strong focus on partnership with the private sectors, particularly in Outcome 3 is promising and will likely yield some very interesting results by the end of the project. Regarding Outcome 2, progress was somewhat more limited, partly because of COVID-19 pandemic that restricted access to local communities, partly because of the complexity of the outcome, as also noted by the Evaluability Assessment. Identification of potential partners and orientations around most effective entry points for interventions proved to be more time consuming than originally anticipated.

Tripartite participation was strong throughout the project, but additional care should be taken to ensure that selected partners are thoroughly representative of the core project target group, which, in the case of ACCEL Africa, are workers and producers at the lowest tier<sup>2</sup> of the selected supply chains. Although a good gender analysis is included in the project document and some assessments, there appears to be no comprehensive gender strategy that guides ACCEL Africa's interventions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

### Main findings & Conclusions

- It is recommended to streamline the development of Terms of Reference(s), the identification of suitable service providers and, where possible, contracting procedures for studies. In this regard, it is highly advised to ensure that a clear and endorsed methodology to carry out Value Chain Analysis (VCA) studies with specific reference to child labour and FPRW is available within the ILO.
- Ensure that assessments are firmly based on available evidence and only conduct primary data collection where strictly necessary and in a highly focused manner.
- Firmly integrate assessments into the project inception phase to ensure findings can influence project design and implementation.
- Engage in conversations with the donor on possibly shifting from coffee to sugar in Malawi as a focus supply chain or alternatively to invite sugar value chain actors to some of the capacity building activities. Sugar might provide an opportunity to scale-up the project's impact and increase its financial delivery rate in addition to the targeted supply chains.
- Develop more tailor-made and comprehensive country-level ToCs that can strategically guide project implementation and reporting throughout the life of the project. This will provide opportunity for an overall strategic guidance to county teams to implement this new approach to tackling child labour and should be rectified should the project roll-over into a second phase.
- The ILO should adopt new approaches which include more focus on systems-strengthening in research and data collection, giving special attention on the specific comparative advantages of ACCEL to investigate how complex supply chains, with extensive transformation, can be mapped and how child labour prevalence can be calculated in different steps of the chain.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the promising examples of engaging lowest tier workers include empowering workers through an agreement between TUC and NLC in Nigeria or mobilisation of lowest tier workers in Uganda through their implementing partner NOTU.

- It is highly recommended to increase the human resources and technical capacity on social finance by investing in additional social finance specialists at country-levels considering its effectiveness as a successful comprehensive model in some countries such as Egypt. This will be supported by linking the targeted groups with the financial and non-financial services providers and facilitate their linkages to service providers where they are living guided by relevant friendly-user manuals.
- It is highly advised to grant a 12-months no-cost extension to the project to ensure full quality implementation of the rest of the programme interventions considering the impacts of COVID-19 on the path of the programme implementation in addition to the pilot nature of some interventions such as the SFI, PPI, and others and to promote the learning among the participant countries. On the other hand, this can be extended to include some additional sectors or crops under agriculture sector where the child labour can be observed, when possible, as a step ahead towards Phase 2 by maximising the analysis being done on the supply chains in each country.
- It is highly recommended to develop mapping analysis to the review selected institutions selected for system-strengthening (i.e., TEVET Malawi) to ensure that all selected partners have sufficiently functioning systems to merit project support. In this regard, it is advised to give special attention to the institutional assessment for better governance and effective partnerships with these institutions.
- Revise resource allocations to implementing partners and consider budget allocations for field work to implementation partners, taking into consideration COVID-19 rules and regulations. Also, this should be associated with better flexibility regarding the administrative work processes.
- The ILO should continue ensure better strong learning mechanism where all the best practices and lessons learnt would be shared among the participant countries and among the different stakeholders in each country regularly guided by well-structured M&E framework and dissemination strategies. ILO should work with the participant countries to develop and implement a practical gender strategy that integrates a strong gender lens in regional and country-level interventions across all target countries. This should be supported by ensuring that the presence of outcomes indicators have been tracked regularly under the Child Labour and social finance pillars in each country.

**Main lessons learned and good practices**

**Lessons learned**

- ACCEL’s approach to focus on underlying root causes of child labour is commendable. However, the overall design of Outcome 2, which encapsulates much of this work looking at social finance and income generation, was designed in a highly ambitious and complex way.
- Although the project aimed to have an evidence-based and country-specific intervention strategy and developed country annexes in close consultation with local partners, significant delays in carrying out planned baseline studies precluded the implementation of the fully-fledged evidence-based approach envisaged in the project document.
- The importance of flexibility regarding administrative work processes, such as contracting procedures and budget allocations was a key lesson learned by ACCEL to-date.
- Delays and challenges in budget management at country-level have highlighted the necessity to establish a clear mechanism for visibility on expenditures and effective budget management and follow-up at country-level.
- The ILO could strongly focus on its comparative advantage and very specific value addition when piloting new approaches and allow for

sufficient time when venturing into new areas of work and non-traditional partnerships. This includes the collaboration with ILO MULTI unit of Enterprise Department and ACTEMP on issues related to private sector activities.

### **Good practices**

- ACCEL AFRICA has successfully applied a systems-approach to tackling child labour that moves away from project-based downstream interventions towards strengthening existing systems that are critical to tackling root causes of child labour, such as those around social protection, social finance, education, and skills development.
- Critically, the system-strengthening approach has proven highly successful in cases where countries have sufficiently functioning systems in place that could be strengthened and made more targeted towards the elimination of child labour. However, caution must be exercised in cases where national systems are weak and not fully functioning in and of themselves, as it might render ILO's interventions ineffective.
- Work on social finance and social protection is showing promise, although its interventions are still in their infancy, thus assessing their impact premature.
- ILO value addition is clearly offered through the integration of child labour into other kind of interventions like social finance and income generation. New approaches are explored and experimented within this project. In fact, this was seen by the evaluation as one of the key successes and innovation generated by the project because simply, only integrated responses will effectively reduce child labour. Stand-alone interventions have not proven impact at scale.
- Due to the innovative upstream approach going slightly beyond the traditional approach to tackling child labour, ACCEL has established close working relationships with other relevant departments of the ILO. Work on social finance has required the establishment of close cooperation with the Enterprise and the Social Protection departments of the ILO. Indeed, collaboration between these different departments has been at the heart of the innovative ACCEL approach, with the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches being viewed as a key positive result of this deliberate integrated way of working.
- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the project changed its training modality from intensive one-week in-person training courses, for instance, its training for journalists, to using online modalities. In addition, the training was delivered over a course of three months. This approach allowed for more consolidated learning as well as the building of a strong network for peer-to-peer support and information sharing among the trainees, which likely would not have happened to the same extent had the training been a one-off one-week get-together.