

The effect of bridging classes on child labour

September 2022

A longitudinal study of the progress of
children who attended bridging classes in
Côte d'Ivoire, between 2019 and 2021.



International
COCOA
Initiative

Context

The Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities (TRECC) program aims to promote quality education for children and youth in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire.

In the framework of TRECC, the Jacobs Foundation and Nestlé co-financed a series of bridging classes in cocoa communities, using the *Teaching at the Right Level*¹ approach (known as *Programme de l'Enseignement Ciblé* in French). This child-centred pedagogical approach aims to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills by helping progress at their own speed. The classes were set-up in collaboration with the Directorate of Literacy and Non-Formal Education (DAENF) and implemented through the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) linked to the Nestlé Cocoa Plan, together with other activities to prevent and address child labour.

The purpose of this study is to assess the outcomes for children who participated in bridging classes.

It examines the progress of 879 children aged 9 to 14 enrolled in bridging classes, 48% of them girls. The children were split into two cohorts:

- **Cohort 1:** 400 children from 14 communities were enrolled in 16 bridging classes, from March to August 2020
- **Cohort 2:** 479 children from 15 communities, including 7 already supported in 2020, were enrolled in 16 bridging classes, from January to July 2021.

Methodology

The prevalence of child labour among the bridging class participants was measured through surveys, including interviews with children about their engagement in hazardous tasks in cocoa production.

A first round of surveys was conducted in December 2020 and January 2021. These data provide a short-term endline result for children in cohort 1 (4 months

after the end of the bridging classes), and a baseline for children in cohort 2.

A second survey round was conducted one year later in December 2021 and January 2022. This data provides a "medium-term" endline for cohort 1 (16 months after the end of bridging classes), and a short-term endline for cohort 2 (6 months after the end of bridging classes).

To compensate for the lack of a baseline prevalence of child labour, the survey results for cohort 1 were also compared with child labour data from the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System.

Results

School attendance

Of the 879 children enrolled, 810 (391 in 2019/2020 and 419 in 2020/2021), participated in the bridging class project, i.e., 92.1% of those enrolled attended. Upon completion of a bridging class, children have an automatic right to re-enter formal school. Almost all the children continued their studies, with integration rate of 99.8%. There was no significant difference between the attendance or integration rates of girls and boys.

Children who attended the bridging classes using the innovative *Teaching at the Right Level* approach managed to learn effectively. Using data from the Ministry of Education as a comparison, we can see that 91% of children scored average grades of 4.5 or more, compared to 14% of children in traditional bridging classes, without the Teaching at the Right Level approach.

School drop-out

We followed up with **cohort 1** at the start of their second year back in formal schooling, 16 months after the bridging classes ended. While 72% children were still in school, 28% had dropped out (24% of girls and 31% of boys). This dropout rate is much higher than the average dropout rate in formal

¹ Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is an evidence-backed educational approach that helps children develop basic reading

and mathematics skills, opening doors to a brighter future. It was developed by the NGO Pratham.

school,² reflecting the challenge of keeping children who have attended bridging classes – a particularly vulnerable group to begin with – in school in the long term.

We followed up with children in cohort 2 much earlier - four months after they had restarted formal school. At this point, 96% of children were still attending school and 4% had dropped out (3% of girls and 5% of boys). It is possible that this rate will change by the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

The most common reasons for dropping out of school, in order of importance, were:

- Children didn't like school
- No school meals provided
- Parents had moved
- Parents lack financial means
- Lack of follow up

In individual cases, the following reasons were also mentioned: distance from formal school (1 case); transfer to a Koranic school (1 case); early marriage (1 case); and early pregnancy (1 case).

Child labour

Cohort 1

Short-term effects

By December 2020, 4 months after the end of the bridging classes, child labour prevalence stood at 32%. This prevalence is 9 percentage points lower than the before the start of the bridging classes, when compared to CLMRS data. The difference is statistically significant.

According to CLMRS data, child labour identification rates were about 44% in the year prior to the start of the project among targeted children of the same age group, in the same cooperatives. Moreover, the CLMRS data show that among a comparison group of children (of the same age group, in the same cooperatives) not benefiting from bridging classes, the child labour identification rate increased from 39% to 48% during the same period.



² The average dropout rate in formal school is less than 10% according to other surveys administered by ICI.

Medium-term effects

In December 2021, 16 months after the end of the bridging classes, the second survey round found a further decrease in the rate of hazardous work by more than half, to a final rate of 14% among children in Cohort 1. This decrease is statistically significant. The same trend was observed for both sexes: the rate of hazardous work dropped from 35% to 15% for boys, and from 25% to 12% for girls.

Cohort 2

Short-term effects

We conducted a child labour prevalence survey of children in cohort 2 before the start of bridging classes, and again one year later, which was six months after the end of bridge classes and four months after they had re-joined formal school.

The rate of hazardous work decreased by more than half, from a baseline of 63% in January 2021 to 23% in January 2022. This decrease is statistically significant. For boys, child labour decreased by 39 percentage points (from 64% to 25%), and for girls, child labour decreased by 41 percentage points (from 62% to 21%).

The high child labour prevalence (over 60%) of measured among cohort 2 beneficiaries at baseline in January 2021 indicates that the bridging classes project targeted a particularly vulnerable group of children.

The significant drop in child labour should be taken with some qualification, as the reference period used a baseline and endline was different. In the baseline survey, children were asked about whether they had worked in the *past 12 months*, while at the endline, children were asked about whether they had worked in the *past 6 months*.

These results show that children in both cohorts were significantly less involved in hazardous work after the bridging classes than they were before.



Conclusion

These results show that children who attended bridging classes acquired essential skills in literacy and numeracy, successfully re-joined the formal education system, and significantly reduced their involvement in child labour.

It is particularly reassuring that this decrease in child labour occurred during the covid pandemic – a period when child labour in a comparison group increased.

These findings are in line with the expected effect that bridging classes offer a real alternative to out-of-school children in child labour, as well as supporting children's fundamental right to a quality education.

Moving forward, these results suggest that:

- Investment in bridging classes is effective at getting out-of-school children back into formal education and reducing child labour and should continue.
- The use of the *Teaching at the Right Level* approach in bridging classes should be scaled up, in line with the expanded use of this method in formal schools.
- Continued efforts are needed to help children stay in mainstream school, including to follow-up with children, invest in school feeding programmes, and support families to afford school-related costs.