



Addressing child labour in
the cocoa supply chain

GUIDANCE FOR COMPANIES

What is child labour in cocoa?

Most of the cocoa in West Africa is grown by smallholder farmers. These households face the realities of rural poverty, such as a scarcity of land, food insecurity, limited access to quality education and drinking water, and inadequate health services. These factors increase the risk of child labour.

The UNICEF/ILO “*Child Labour – Global Estimate 2024, Trends and the Road Forward*” report estimates that worldwide, 137.6m children were involved in child labour in 2024. Child labour prevalence is highest in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (accounting for 86.6m children), and 70% of these children are involved in agriculture. According to the report, “most of this labour takes place as part of family subsistence and on smallholder farms.”

A study published by a US research institute called NORC, using data from the 2018/19 cocoa season, estimated that around 1.56 million children were involved in child labour in cocoa in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. This equates to around 45% of children living in cocoa-growing areas.

What is needed to tackle child labour in cocoa?

Tackling child labour requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from many different stakeholders. Cocoa and chocolate companies, governments, civil society actors, international organizations, cocoa cooperatives, cocoa producers and donors all have a role to play. This document contains practical guidance for cocoa and chocolate companies on how to tackle child labour in their supply chains.

Since 2007, together with our partners, we have tested numerous activities to address child labour, empower farming communities and better protect children. Activities to tackle child labour generally act on one or multiple root causes, including:

Social norms and a lack of awareness of the dangers of child labour

Child labour often happens because farmers are not aware of the risks it poses to their children's healthy development and well-being or may not know what constitutes hazardous work. Perceptions of child work as part of a child's socialisation process also contribute to its prevalence.



Activities

Community and household level awareness raising (group discussions, household visits, radio broadcasts, films, community theatre, etc.), parenting skills training, and teacher training.

Household poverty

Child labour is often used as a coping strategy in response to a sudden drop in household income or if farmers cannot afford adult labour (which isn't always readily available). Limited access to social safety nets and essential services such as health care, social security and pensions exacerbate this risk.



Activities

Cash transfers, support with school fees or school materials, "living income" premiums, adult labour groups and subsidies.



Lack of access to quality education

Our research shows that while many children combine school with work in cocoa farms, child labour is lower where education quality is higher, and children enrolled in school have higher levels of wellbeing than those who aren't. This highlights the importance of a quality education in protecting children from harm to their development caused by child labour.



Activities

Construction and rehabilitation of schools (including toilets, clean water and canteens), accelerated education programs known as “bridging classes”, to help children catch up and re-enter the formal school system, youth skills and apprenticeship programs.

Gender equality

Advancing women's economic empowerment, encouraging their participation in household decision-making, and involving them in systems that aim to tackle child labour all contribute to increasing child protection and help reduce child labour rates.



Activities

Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) training, community savings groups (Village Savings and Loans Associations) and adult literacy classes.

To be effective, company programs set up to tackle child labour should include activities that focus on as many of these root causes as possible. It is particularly important that programs are designed to support positive behaviour change and change harmful social norms. Farming households need to be supported with both knowledge and skills, and understand what is expected of them.



How can companies set up effective, holistic programs to tackle child labour?

There are many ways a company can set up an effective, holistic program within their supply chain to deliver activities to prevent and address child labour. The two most common approaches being Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) and Community development.

Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems

Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) are the most commonly used approach in West Africa. These systems can be used to provide ongoing guidance and support to households, identify children in or at risk of child labour, provide targeted support, and follow up on children and their families over time.

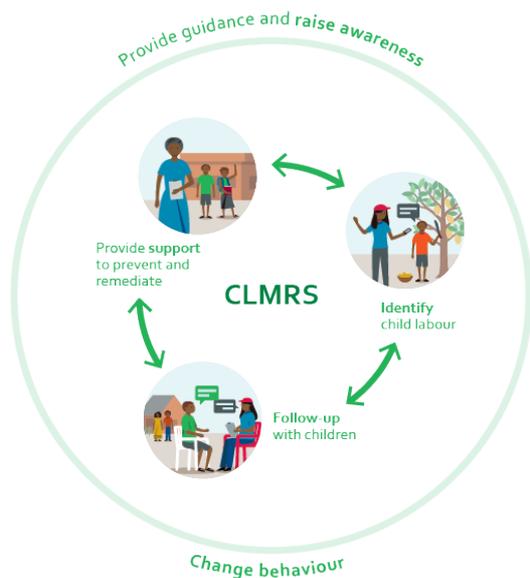
Support activities can include many of those mentioned above. Choosing a selection that focuses on more than one root cause will lead to a more effective CLMRS. Support should be provided at the individual, household and community levels.

Companies can choose whether their CLMRS targets households linked to their supply chain or entire communities within a sourcing area:

- A supply chain-based CLMRS includes only the households of cocoa producers and their workers who are supplying the company.
- A community-based CLMRS includes all households within communities the company sources from, regardless of whether they are directly part of the supply chain.

Even within a supply chain-based CLMRS, activities at community level, such as awareness-raising and school renovation, can benefit other community members.

CLMRS are also a way for companies to conduct Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD), a responsibility highlighted within international frameworks such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and increasingly a legal obligation in many jurisdictions. HRDD requires companies to identify, prevent, mitigate and address actual and potential adverse human rights impacts associated with their operations, supply chains and business relationships.



Find out more about CLMRS [here](#), and more information on how CLMRS aligns with HRDD [here](#).

Community development

Community development approaches are another common foundation for delivering support. Beginning with a participatory needs assessment, the community is supported to develop a holistic plan that will help reduce child labour and respond to community priorities. Companies contribute to financing and implementing a Community Action Plan, usually including many of the activities listed above.

If implemented in a certain way, a community development approach can also be used to help companies to fulfil their HRDD requirements. While CLMRS systematically gather data as part of implementation (allowing for ongoing monitoring), community development approaches may need to add monitoring and evaluation to understand outcomes. In addition, Community development approaches are traditionally time-bound, expecting communities to “graduate” after three years, after which support stops. Adding a long-term outlook that facilitates improvement over an indefinite period (for as long as households are involved in the supply chain) is necessary for a Community Development Approach to fulfil HRDD requirements.



Find out more on Community Development [here](#) and more information on how Community Development aligns with HRDD [here](#).

How can companies integrate approaches to tackle child labour into broader sustainability programs?

Many companies implement broader sustainability programs covering multiple objectives such as environmental protection, living income and others. Integrating approaches to tackle child labour within these broader programmes is important as it can improve efficiency and effectiveness, and ensure objectives are complementary.

When designing a program to tackle multiple objectives, it is important to remember that some activities may have positive impacts on one objective but negative impacts on another. For example, the relationship between household income and child labour is complex. Some initiatives that support households to develop new income-generating activities can lead to an increased need for labour, and therefore an increase in child labour. It is key when implementing such activities to ensure they are designed in a way that reduces the risk of adverse impacts.

What is the role of other actors?

Companies alone will never solve child labour. Child labour is a complex challenge that can only be solved through coordinated action of all parties involved, including governments in cocoa producing countries who have a responsibility to provide services such as education and healthcare to their citizens, civil society organisations, international organisations, cocoa-growing communities and governments in cocoa-consuming countries who have a responsibility to create a regulatory framework to ensure companies respect human rights within their supply chains. This note focuses only on the activities companies can put in place to tackle child labour within their supply chains.



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