Area-based assessment of forced labour risk

A rapid assessment approach to understand differing levels of risk and prioritize where efforts to prevent and address forced labour are most needed

Overview

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Forced labour is a serious human rights abuse, affecting an estimated one in 200 workers in the cocoa sector of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.[1] However, the risk of forced labour is understood to vary considerably across the country and is considerably higher in some areas than others.

ICI has developed an area-based assessment approach to identify areas at higher risk of forced labour, helping to prioritize where action is most urgently needed to prevent and address labour rights abuses.

This document provides an overview of the area-based assessment approach, explains how it works, and outlines its intended use and value. It does not include the assessment tool itself. Stakeholders interested in conducting an area-based assessment of forced labour risk are invited to contact ICI for further information and support.

This document is structured as follows:

- What is the approach?
- How does it work?
- Why use the approach?
- How was the approach developed?
- How to go about conducting an area-based assessment of forced labour risk?

What is the approach?

The forced labour risk assessment takes a *key informant* approach, gathering data from knowledgeable individuals with a good understanding of the situation in their local area. Rather than trying to identify individuals in situations of forced labour directly, the approach asks different key informants in targeted communities to share information about what they have seen and heard in the places they live or work.

This approach allows information to be triangulated, it reduces bias (a key challenge when dealing with sensitive topics such as forced labour) and gathers information without exposing

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[1] de Buhr, E & Gordon, E 2018, *Bitter Sweets: Prevalence of Forced Labour and Child Labour in the Cocoa Sectors of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana*, Tulane University & Walk Free Foundation. Note that this is the only available forced labour prevalence study and starts to be dated. The actual situation today may differ considerably from the estimates presented in this report.

potential victims or vulnerable workers. The focus on risk factors, rather than cases, informs preventative measures that can be implemented by companies or civil society actors.

The assessment generates risk scores at the *district* level, which are displayed on a map, and can be used to inform planning of activities to prevent and respond to forced labour risks.

How does it work?

A standard questionnaire is administered to three groups of key informants (typically *community leaders, cooperative or buying company staff*, and *local sustainability staff*). These individuals answer a set of closed-ended questions, covering different aspects of forced labour risk within their communities. For example:

> *In this community…*
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> - *Are you aware of any cocoa workers whose administrative documents (eg, identity card, passport, work permit) have been confiscated by their employer?*
> - *Do you know of anyone working on a cocoa farm to pay off debts for themselves or their family?*
> - *Have you heard of any cocoa workers who have suffered ill treatment or abuse, such as physical violence, threats, or sexual abuse, at the hands of their employer?*

The information collected is compiled and aggregated, first to community level, then at the district level. It can also be used to identify "*hotspots*" – groups of nearby communities with particularly high reported risk scores, informing the prioritization of support.

Why use the approach?

The area-based assessment of forced labour risk allows stakeholders to:

- Identify areas where forced labour risk is higher, using a standard methodology
- Define a coherent strategy to prevent and respond to forced labour risks, proportional to the level of risk
- Use available data to prioritize where to act first and what to do, to prevent and respond to forced labour risks (e.g., raising awareness on forced labour, setting up operational grievance mechanisms, helping workers and employers sign contracts to formalize working agreements)
- Share data collected with other stakeholders, via the risk map, contributing to a shared understanding of forced labour risk and helping to avoid duplication of efforts.

How was the approach developed?

The questions asked to key informants are drawn from ILO's Indicators of forced labour (2012), adapted for use in cocoa-growing areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

At the time of writing, the tool has been used by ICI to gather data on forced labour risk in over 2,000 communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The methodology has been progressively refined over time.

Answers are analyzed using a technique called *Item Response Theory*, which takes into account the probability that a risk will be reported in order to determine its severity. This method allows us to determine the difference between *lower-risk* and *higher-risk* communities more efficiently, reducing the number of questions to be asked and hence the time required to collect data.

How to go about conducting an area-based assessment of forced labour risk?

ICI conducts area-based assessments of forced labour risk on behalf of members and partners. Contact us to see if risk data is already available for districts of interest and to learn more about how we can support you.