

*Final report*

**Final evaluation report on Association for the  
Elimination of Child Labour – AECL  
Tadwe School Project in TA Mwansambo –  
Nkhotakota District, Malawi**

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## Executive Summary

The AECL – Tadwe school project was set up in response to the rampant use of child labour in tobacco estates in the Nkhotakota district. The objectives of the project were to contribute to the lasting reduction of child labour through the provision of a school in an area without a school and through raising the awareness of the negative impacts and consequences of child labour and campaigning for parents to send their children to school rather than letting them work on the estates. The project has been managed and implemented by the AECL in collaboration with TOTAWUM and with the involvement of the district level government agencies.

The evaluation found that the school has been built to a very good standard. There are 4 standard classrooms that are well ventilated and have enough light during the day. The classrooms have good chalkboards. The school has school playing fields well laid out and with facilities for both athletics and ball games such as netball and soccer. There are enough clean sanitary facilities for the pupils. Furthermore, the school has benefited from being a project sponsored school in terms of learning materials, sports equipment and even secure, all year round water source (borehole) built by the project funds. The evaluators could not be certain that the physical structures and existing level and quality of educational learning materials can also be maintained given the low levels of income of the parents around the school and the Ministry of Education may be too far stretched to have enough resources to maintain the school in its current state, let alone develop it to reach Standard 8, the end of primary education. In fact, the state of the other schools in the project impact area suggests the same even with the assistance of the district education authorities.

The school enrolment is up at Tadwe School as well as at four other schools in the project catchment area. This improved school enrolment is attributed to a better appreciation of the benefits of education for children and an improved awareness of the evils or adverse effects of child labour. Still there are according to the teachers mapping survey some children of school going age who were not in school. They attributed the reason for non-enrollment of children as ignorance of the benefits of going to school and getting some education.

Also, school enrolment remains unstable with children shifting to other schools and staying away for other reasons. This could be related to the peak in the harvesting season for both tobacco and other crops and that some parents may withdraw their children from school so they give a hand in the harvesting process could not be ruled out. One other critical factor that came up was the fact that at the end of the tobacco-growing season, tenant farmers together with their families move back to their original homes, only to return when the new agriculture season begins in September. The visit to two estates showed deserted homesteads occupied by tenant farmers who had gone back to their original homes. In this regard, the tenant system has a contributing element to the rather

fluctuating school enrolment that was found to be typical of Tadwe and its neighbouring schools. It is also clear that the project impact area still has other issues, which may lead children to work if not addressed. Some of these issues were stated in the interviews and discussions as orphanhood, poverty, the HIV and AIDS epidemic and the tenant system.

The evaluation has not been able to establish with any firm measure how many children have been removed from tobacco estates as a direct result of the project activities, but the occurrence of child labour according to both parents, tenant farmers and estate owners and managers is markedly reduced.

The Tadwe School project was found to be relevant in that it did not simply seek to work with the community to set up a school to stop children from going to provide labour in the tobacco fields as well as other crops. The evaluation exercise established that the project sought to create an alternative for the parents in relation to the food security and welfare situation of children and families. In this regard, the project facilitated provision of training to both landlords and tenant farmers on better methods of farming to improve their yields. However, the project fell short in meaningfully promoting other means of income generating to replace child labour. While income generating activities (IGAs) for the communities were not planned for and included in the AECL project plan, IGAs were needed to cushion the more vulnerable families that required child labour to contribute to family income. There were thus reports that children would come to school without having breakfast, and parents also reported that they had to work harder in the absence of the income from children's work. The evaluation concludes that there is a risk that children may revert back to work in the estates during periods when food is short and during periods when parents require their children's assistance in the fields.

The project has succeeded in mobilising the community around the construction of the school and in participating in the sensitization and training activities. Notably, the child labour committees have been a good instrument to disseminate the information and to carry out continuous inspection and monitoring of child labour in the estates. These committees acted as the watchdogs of the project in combatting child labour and had an even stronger and perhaps longer lasting impact on the child labour situation than the building of the school through the child labour committees set up in villages and estates around Tadwe School.

However, the establishment of a primary school that goes up to Standard 4 which is half way the primary school cycle may not have a lasting solution to the problem of child labour in the long run. In other words, the AECL Tadwe School project may have created a situation where the gains in fighting child labour may actually be lost when children who fail to proceed with their primary school education go back to child labour because they cannot continue with their primary school education. While the 5-6 kilometer distance to school is not unusual by Malawian standards for children attending standard 5-8, this is felt by the evaluators to be a factor.

Availability of teachers was also found to be a limited resource. It was a struggle to get enough trained teachers for Tadwe School. E.g. one teacher was allocated by the Ministry from a neighboring school and this school received no substitute teacher despite a growing enrollment.

The project has potential to make a lasting impact. The evaluation notes the following main factors that impacts on the sustainability of the project:

- The project mobilised the community in terms of setting up and empowering local community structures to be a driving force for the project. The community moulded some 40,000 bricks to put up the school and provided other forms of labour. The community has established a School Management Committee and Parents Teachers Association to take charge of the school development issues. This is a positive sign for project sustainability. The community further demonstrated their interest in the school by providing their labour to prepare the school grounds so children have recreational facilities.
- The composition of the AECL Board, which brought together employers, Tobacco growers and exporters and trade unions and people with a background in finance. The composition of the Board had the potential of having different groups of people with conflicting interests but all converging on the issue of combating child labour. It was also noted however that the AECL has failed to hold on to and to involve the active support of all these actors and stakeholders.
- At district level, the project took on board in the implementation key government departments and traditional authority structures. The project established networks with Traditional Authority leaders, village headmen, existing child labour committees, ARET officials on training landlords and tenant farmers on better farming methods and the Nkhotakota District Assembly. These networks emerged as one of the key strengths of this project

The evaluation recommends

- That the child labour committees as already decided by AECL and ECLT as a project follow-up be given continuous training perhaps through joint sessions by TOTAWUM and TAMA. While, the two groups may represent conflicting interests of workers and large-scale tobacco producers, both have shown they can work together to address the issue of child labour. ECLT may consider supporting this process to further strengthen and consolidate a process it has already contributed to.

- The Ministry of Education and District Assembly authorities should lobby for the need to get the school proceed to Standard 8 through the MASAF development programme and complement what the AECL project has achieved.
- The project model should be used with some adaptations on networking with other child labour actors such as CRECCUM and TECS in other districts and other cash crops.
- The AECL Board should be re-energized so that this association can use what it has learnt from this project to contribute to the efforts in addressing child labour in Malawi.
- The AECL should use this model in working very closely with other NGOs, government institutions on tackling the child labour issue in other sectors such as tea and coffee using the lessons it has learnt from the Tadwe School project.