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Eliminating child labour on tobacco farms in Malawi

ECLT Foundation (*Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco growing*) shares concerns raised in PLAN's new report 'Hard work, long hours and little pay'. The report highlights the grim conditions facing child labourers in tobacco farms in Malawi. ECLT is very interested in the report and its recommendations, particularly because since 2002 we have developed and supported major projects to tackle child labour in two tobacco growing districts in Malawi.

The ECLT Foundation is a multi-stakeholder partnership of trade unions, tobacco growers and tobacco companies, with the International Labour Organization as the Board advisor. Set up in 2001, ECLT is working in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, as well as Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines.

Globally the agricultural sector employs nearly 70 percent of child labour (132 million girls and boys). In Malawi 29% of children aged 5-14 years old are involved in child labour according to UNICEF¹. Accounts from children in PLAN's report, and ECLT's own research, demonstrate that children are working to earn money for food and to support their families. ECLT recognises that the solution to child labour is not simply withdrawing children from work. The only lasting approach involves addressing the underlying causes that allow child labour to thrive amongst poor rural communities.

As the report shows, the main drivers for child labour are poverty and inter-related issues like HIV/AIDS, lack of food security and lack of access to education. HIV/AIDS is robbing children of their parents or leaving them caring for dying parents. Children have little choice but to support siblings and sick parents. For those lucky enough to have healthy parents the costs and quality of schooling means that it is either not available to them, or is simply not effective. In many rural communities in Malawi the lack of access to basic healthcare, clean water and sanitation adds to a precarious existence for families and their children.

ECLT's programmes have shown how an holistic approach to the issue of child labour can bring about lasting impacts for children. ECLT programmes tackle both the causes and the symptoms of child labour. The ECLT Foundation has been supporting projects in Malawi since 2002 with an overall investment of over US\$6.6 million. Through its many interventions the project has already protected

¹ UNICEF country statistics http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/malawi_statistics.html

over 13,500 vulnerable children, who may otherwise have become child labourers, in over two hundred Malawian villages. It has also withdrawn 1778 children who through the project have been supported to return to school.

The unique feature of ECLT is its multi-sector collaborative community based model. In Malawi a group of four locally based NGOs, each with a distinct focus, are working together to tackle child labour. They are using their different expertise for greater impact and efficiency. Together they are: raising awareness about the problems caused by child labour; improving access to, and quality of, education; improving food security; providing access to water and sanitation; providing a package of basic health services.

One partner Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM) contributes to the improvement and provision of education. So far CRECCOM has constructed and rehabilitated 33 schools, 17 classrooms and other school blocks, plus 55 school pit latrines. The ECLT funded project has seen that 164 teachers have been trained, their quarters improved, 66 bursaries given to children, classrooms furnished with 700 desks and over 1000 books and other materials provided. Inspired by the work, mobilised communities have made significant additional contributions to the local initiatives. As a result most projects have achieved more than anticipated when setting the original project targets.

To create local capacity to address child labour 31 Child Labour Committees, comprising 310 members and 127 Parents'/Teachers' Associations have been established or strengthened. 330 Community Leaders and 120 farm owners, those most influential in the community, have been trained on child labour. As leaders and employers they can have a direct influence on attitudes and instances of child labour.

Total Land Care another partner has supported 833 villages (the original target was 200) with training, equipment and seedlings to improve food security and conserve the surrounding areas by planting more than one million trees. Three small scale dams for irrigation have been constructed and 167 treadle pumps have been installed. Almost 10,000 villagers participated and benefited from these activities. People in 263 villages have been supported to provide and maintain their own clean water supplies.

NKHOMA Synod, another partner, has provided improved water and sanitation to the targeted communities, either through rehabilitating wells, 14 to date, and drilling new bore holes, 9 completed to date. 263 villages have been reached and 175 water points have been provided. Community health committees have been established, 22 maintenance supervisors have been trained and 30 health surveillance assistants are trained on water chlorination to prevent diseases.

LIFELINE Malawi has contributed to community health through the building of a clinic and providing 10 outreach health posts. 60 health volunteers and 40 health and water committee members have been trained on improved community based health. Counselling and HIV Voluntary Testing has reached over

4760 clients. In total over 75,000 community members have had access to one or more of the integrated medical services, which have been provided through the outreach clinics as well as the main Kasese Clinic. These services have reached well over double the number of patients initially planned.

With its sustainable, holistic and community based approach the ECLT funded projects have successfully supported hundreds of villages in the Dowa and Kasungu districts. Thousands of children are being withdrawn from harmful work and are returning to school. Communities in over 200 villages are being mobilised to improve their living conditions. From the lessons learned it is hoped that this initiative will offer a model of best practice for government, non-governmental organisations, international development agencies and others interested in eliminating child labour.

Notes to Editor:

1) The ECLT Foundation is an innovative and unique initiative, which is supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO), and aims to combat child labour in tobacco growing. Its members are representatives of the trade unions, the tobacco growers and corporate sector, including:

- International Union of Food & Allied Workers (IUF)
- International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA)
- Tobacco companies: British American Tobacco; Alliance One International, Inc; Imperial Tobacco Group PLC; Japan Tobacco Inc.; Japan Tobacco International; Philip Morris International; Philip Morris USA / Altria Client Services; Scandinavian Tobacco Group; Swedish Match; Tribac Leaf; Universal Leaf Tobacco Company, Incorporated.

ECLT partners' Steering Committees also have representation from producers, companies, unions, government representatives and the ILO. The projects comprehensively address the causes and impacts of child labour. The approach offers an excellent example of how other players, donors, NGOs and government, can mainstream child labour policies into all areas of their work.

2) What is child labour?

Child labour is work that harms children's well being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. Child labour is work which, by its nature and the way it is carried out, harms, abuses and exploits the child or deprives the child of an education.

Hazardous child labour is work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed, or injured or made ill as a consequence.

Not all work that children (under 18) undertake in agriculture is bad for them or is work that we seek to eliminate. Age related tasks, carried out in a limited number of hours, that are of low risk and that do not interfere with children's schooling, physical development, health or right to leisure-time are not at issue.

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