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Child labour on tobacco farms in Malawi

ECLT Foundation (*Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco growing*) was saddened to see the findings of Channel 4's *Unreported World* which aired in the UK on 14 May 2010. The documentary showed very young children forced to work in hazardous conditions and denied their right to go to school.

ECLT was set up in 2001 by tobacco companies, growers and unions to contribute to the elimination of child labour in tobacco growing areas. Like the International Labour Organization (ILO), the ECLT is a partnership that recognises the important role that different sectors can play in addressing labour issues. ECLT works in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, as well as Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines. In Malawi ECLT supports projects in two tobacco growing districts to tackle the issues that the television programme raised.

According to the government there are over four million children engaged in child labour in Malawi¹. Most of these children are involved in agriculture. Globally the agricultural sector employs nearly 70 per cent of all child labour (132 million girls and boys)². As one of the most under regulated industries agriculture is regarded as hazardous, and therefore is one of the worst forms of child labour. It is ten years since ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL) came into force. Although this convention is the most widely ratified there is still a long way to go before the deadline in 2016 to completely eradicate WFCL.

The main drivers of child labour are poverty and inter-related issues like lack of food security and lack of access to education, basic health and other social services. ECLT's approach 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.

The ECLT Foundation has been supporting projects in Malawi since 2002, with an overall investment of over US\$6.6 million. The Integrated Child Labour Elimination Project (ICLEP) is coordinated by local partner **Creative Centre for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM)** and began in 2006. ICLEP operates in two districts, Kasungu and Dowa (in the Suza and Katalima Education Zones respectively). A local advisory group of tobacco companies, unions, tenant associations, the Ministry of Labour and the ILO provides strategic direction and oversight to the project.

¹ Government of Malawi Report, 2002.

² Source: *IPEC action against child labour: Highlights 2006*. IPEC, February 2007, Part III, p 47

Four locally based NGOs, each with a distinct focus, work together to implement the ICLEP project to address child labour. Together they: raise awareness about the problems caused by child labour; improve access to, and quality of, education; improve food security; provide access to water and sanitation; provide a package of basic health services.

Apart from coordinating the project **CRECCOM** contributes to the improvement and provision of education. They also help to raise awareness about the negative consequences of child labour and work with communities and the local government to withdraw child labourers. **Total Land Care** supports 833 villages with training, infrastructure, equipment and seedlings to improve food security and conserve the surrounding areas. Farmers have been supported to grow food crops that have meant they could support their families and earn additional cash to send their children to school. (See a story of how one farmer has benefited from the programme at www.eclt.org/projects-and-progress/malawi/case-study-malawi. **Nkhoma Synod** has improved water and sanitation in 263 villages, through rehabilitating wells, drilling new bore holes and supporting community committees to manage their maintenance. The fourth partner, **Lifeline Malawi**, contributes to community health through the building of a clinic and providing outreach health posts.

An evaluation produced for ECLT, by Anthony Roland Brouwer and David Dalison Mkwambisi, in January 2010 summarised the impact of ICLEP between 2006 and 2009. Schools in the project areas have seen an increase of 20% in enrolment rates. There has also been a reduction in dropout rates by about 30%. Parents and pupils have noticed improvements in the quality of teaching.

Data obtained from a survey among parents in the project areas indicates that the incidence of child labour has diminished considerably. The largest reduction is amongst children under twelve (from 57% to 16%). However more than half of children at school had done paid work over the previous twelve months, which suggests seasonal work persists.

According to national education statistics the number of children dropping out of school has decreased throughout Malawi. The decrease is more pronounced in Kasungu and Dowa, suggesting that in these districts the concerted efforts by ICLEP partners and other agencies, including the Ministry of Labour and the ILO, have contributed to the decrease in child labour.

In most cases the distance to water sources for people living in the project areas has been reduced and the quality of water has improved. The prevalence of water borne diseases has reduced by more than 75% since 2006. Also the outreach clinics introduced by the project have dramatically reduced the distance to health services and the quality of health services has been improved.

Through local child labour committees the project has directly removed 1,778 children from child labour and reintegrated them into school. It is clear from the evaluation that many more children have been withdrawn and safeguarded from child labour in the project areas.

There is still much work that is urgently needed. One of the project's aims is to document best practice and lessons learned so that the government and other players can replicate the project throughout the country. Best practice and lessons learned are now being captured so they can be shared widely with the Government and other stakeholders to achieve this end.

Background:

1. The unique feature of ECLT is its multi-sector collaborative community based model. ECLT's members are representatives of trade unions, the tobacco growers and the corporate sector. They are represented on the Board of the Foundation and on local project advisory committees:
2. The ECLT Foundation Board includes:
 - a. the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations (IUF);
 - b. the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA);
 - c. multinational tobacco companies;
 - d. The International Labour Organization (ILO) as a Board Advisor.
3. ECLT country partners also have tobacco companies, unions, government representatives and the ILO on their Advisory Committees. The projects comprehensively address the causes and impacts of child labour. The approach offers an example of how other players, donors, NGOs and government, can mainstream child labour policies into all areas of their work.
4. 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 undertake in agriculture is bad for them or is work that we seek to eliminate. Age related tasks that are of lower risk and that do not interfere with children's schooling or right to leisure time are not at issue.