

## 'Tanzania advances in curbing child labour in tobacco farms'

By Guardian  
Correspondent

TANZANIA has made considerable progress in the eradication of children illegally employed in tobacco farms, said Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco Foundation (ELCT) Vice President Barbara Martellini during the launch of PROSPER programme in Dar es Salaam on Friday.

The event, which drew stakeholders from Tanzania Leaf Tobacco Company (TLTC), some government ministries, Association of Tanzania Employers (ATE), Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA), trade unions and the media, was launched by Minister for Labour and Employment Gaudencia Kabaka, who commended ELCT Foundation for coming up with a much needed programme and assured stakeholders of government support to address the child labour problem.

Martellini said ELCT Foundation was committed to fighting against child labour and supporting PROSPER to realise its objectives in Tanzania. "PROSPER not only gives children education and skills they need for a better future but also tackles wider causes of child labour in tobacco growing areas. That is why the programme is designed to help not only children but also whole families and communities too," she said.

She named other African countries implementing a similar programme as Malawi, Uganda and Zambia. "This programme focuses on two aspects: removing children from child labour and preventing them from working in tobacco farms," she noted.

Martellini said combating child labour in tobacco plantations was ongoing as it fitted well in the framework of best agricultural practices they were adhering to.

Expounding on that, Martellini stressed ELCT Foundation was formed by tobacco stakeholders worldwide to boost efforts geared towards withdrawing children from working in tobacco farms.

"We took this action because we believe child labour is a violation of the country's applicable laws, human rights and contrary to best agricultural practices we are committed to protecting and promoting," she said.

PROSPER promotes sustainable practices to eradicate child labour in tobacco farms, especially in Urambo and Sikonge districts in Tabora region, the major tobacco producing districts in the country and is funded by Winrock International, a non-profit organisation that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunities and sustain natural resources.

PROSPER's funding valued at US\$4,750,000 has been granted by ELCT member organs worldwide, whose representatives in Tanzania are Tanzania Leaf Tobacco Company (TLTC), Alliance One, Premium Active (PAT) and various tobacco unions under the umbrella of Tanzania Tobacco Growers Association (APEX) for PROSPER programme, which runs from this year to December 2015.

PROSPER programme goes in line with TLTC's best agricultural practices, which focus on conserving the environment, improving farmers' livelihoods and adhering to the country's laws including the law, which prohibits child labour.

Martellini said strategic objectives were to protect children (5-17 years old) from exploitative, hazardous and worst forms of child labour in tobacco growing areas and protect legally working children (15-17 years old) in non-hazardous tobacco work.

PROSPER envisages supporting 7,800 children and 2,330 adults by ensuring these children go to school and families are provided with US\$180 during the first year of the programme, out of which US\$40 is for a child's academic matters for year 1 and US\$140, a loan or grant to the mother for her business after which in agreement with the school she will repay US\$140 in project years 2 and 3.

This has been taken into account because poverty is the main root cause of child labour and one cannot address the child labour problem without addressing poverty first.

For her part, PROSPER project Acting Director Mary Kibogoya said community participation in addressing child labour was important and it had indeed produced notable results when looking at previous programmes implemented in the two districts.

She said children working in tobacco farms were most of the cases susceptible to health risks for lack of protective clothing and their vulnerability. She, however, blamed the community for condoning child labour, saying: "Members of the public are supposed to report to the relevant authorities if they are aware of the children leaving school to work in tobacco farms. PROSPER programme is not 'a try and err' project. Its achievements will spread to other parts of the country," she said.

Commenting on the child labour problem, Urambo District Executive Officer Molai Justus said so far over 1,600 children had been removed from tobacco plantations in Urambo District for the past three years and the district authorities were supportive of the programme in the fight against child labour. He said they had put in place bylaws to ensure all children who were supposed to go to school did so.