



A Call to Action

Strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration and increasing funding flows for action to end child labour in agriculture

The ECLT Foundation welcomes the convening of the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour from 15th to 20th May 2022 in Durban, South Africa. The Conference, the first to be held on the African continent, occurs against the backdrop of the first increase in child labour since 2000, which predates the additional challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption of supply chains due to the war in Ukraine. These developments threaten to further derail progress made so far, with less than 4 years left for the SDG 8.7 target of 2025.

According to the 2020 ILO and UNICEF global estimates of child labour, Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as the region with the highest prevalence and largest number of children in child labour, 23.9% or 86.6 million children between 5 to 17 years. In fact, there are now more children in child labour in sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world combined. Clearly, the SDG 8.7 and Africa Union goals to end child labour will not be achieved without a breakthrough in this region.

Globally, 7 in 10 children in child labour work in agriculture. In Africa, the ratio is 8 out of 10. Moreover, agricultural work on the continent is a major entry point for the youngest children: 60% of children in child labour are in the 5-11 years age group (~52 million), most of them performing unpaid family labour.

The ECLT Foundation, having been involved in the fight against child labour in agriculture in Africa and other regions of the world since 2000, reiterates its vision for a world with thriving agricultural communities, where children are free of child labour.



Recognizing that most child labour occurs on family farms¹ in the informal rural economy and in domestic supply chains, ECLT Foundation calls for support for national coalitions to secure funding flows for action, the scaling up of effective efforts and leveraging of resources under the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture, to address the root causes of child labour across agriculture.

Accordingly, ECLT Foundation proposes that the following point should be added to the V Global Conference Outcome Document/ Call to Action:

“To promote the necessary cooperation and coordinated effort to reverse the regression in child labour in agriculture and to re-establish and accelerate progress towards its elimination by convening, within 12 months, a global meeting of the key actors on child labour in agriculture to establish – under the auspices of the IPCCLA – an inclusive, adequately resourced mechanism for that purpose.”

Key issues hampering effective and sustainable action against child labour in agriculture

Functional dependency on family labour

Most family farms rely on the unpaid labour of children because the farmers are too poor to replace it with the paid labour of adults. This is because the buyers of agricultural commodities, such as private companies, agricultural boards, traders, and local buyers often have more power than farmers and can dictate the final price. Moreover, buyers may not implement Good Agricultural Practice standards that require them to pay a price that covers the farmer’s cost of production. Against this background, it is difficult for the majority of family farms to generate enough income to hire adult labour and to provide a decent standard of living, including ensuring that

¹ See, International Labour Office and United Nations Children’s Fund, Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward, ILO and UNICEF, New York, 2021. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf

children are sent to school, attend classes regularly and complete their education.

Fragmentation and funding of actions against child labour

Actions to address child labour remain fragmented at all levels. This fragmentation means that fixing one point in the child protection system – such as removing children from child labour – will not make much difference unless all parts of the system are improved at the same time. Most obviously, child labour will not be reduced if more children are recruited into child labour than are removed from it, as occurred between 2016 and 2020.

At the international level, one the main initiatives is the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (IPCCLA). IPCCLA was formed by ILO, FAO, IFAD, IFPRI and IUF to support collaboration between principal agriculture stakeholders to better address child labour in agriculture by promoting policy coherence, mainstreaming child labour into the activities of agricultural organisations, raising awareness on child labour and fostering cooperation to improve rural livelihoods and promote decent youth employment in the rural economy. However, the Partnership has not been funded adequately to play its envisaged role in the fight against child labour at international, national and community levels.

At the national level, while many countries have strengthened national legislation and developed national action plans on child labour, programmes have tended to receive low attention within national development, social priorities, and budgets. For example, Child Labour Units and National Steering Committees tasked with leading and coordinating the implementation of national action plans on child labour continue to be understaffed and under-resourced. Coupled with a shortage of labour inspectors, limited capacity to inspect family farms and limited resources for inspection, these gaps translate into poor implementation of child labour legal policy frameworks.

Significant amounts of resources are directed towards addressing child labour in the

production of agricultural commodities linked to global supply chains. However, child labour in the cultivation of staples, in livestock and in fisheries producing for domestic and local food markets remains neglected, yet that is where most child labour occurs. In these neglected sub-sectors, agricultural boards, traders, commodity associations and other buyers have often not been as engaged as they should in the fight against child labour.

Other civil society actors have been campaigning against child labour for decades, including local and project-based activities as well as policy advocacy at the national and global levels. Indeed, one of the previous global conferences on child labour in agriculture was convened by the IPCCLA and the Global March against Child Labour.

Informality of agriculture

Despite the strengthening of the legislative framework on child labour, such laws and policies have had little effect in much of the agriculture sector due to the dispersed nature of family farms, widespread informality, limited capacity of labour inspectorates and of agricultural extension services, and the widespread absence or weakness of rural workers' and small producers' organisations. Also, many farmers are unable to distinguish between child labour and family activities of children that may be a normal part of socialization, views which are not always combatted effectively by governments. Poor policy implementation, lack of knowledge and the misleading discourse of those who do not support ILO Convention 138 on minimum age all contribute to making child labour on family farms often invisible, hidden, unacknowledged and thus more difficult to address. These gaps are compounded by poor social protection coverage and inadequate education provision in rural areas.

Ending child labour in agriculture: what needs to be done

Considering the major gaps identified above, the ECLT Foundation calls for action in three key areas:

1. Call to action for the creation of national coalitions linked to the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture. National coalitions could be piloted in selected Pathfinder countries for the purpose of testing agriculture-wide approaches to eliminate child labour – including in subsectors linked to global, regional, domestic and local supply chains, and to address the needs of families engaged in subsistence farming.

This means inter-governmental organisations, governments, social partners, donors and other relevant actors should:

a) Support the formation or strengthen national coalitions that foster and drive national agriculture-wide collaboration, strengthen social dialogue, promote decent work and standards in agriculture, and mobilize funding for action on child labour.

b) Support pilot national coalitions referred in (a) above in willing Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder countries, especially in Africa.

2. Call to action for multinational and national enterprises, agricultural boards, producer organisations, commodity associations and traders across agriculture to implement the relevant terms of the ILO Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and to ensure full integration of decent work, including the eradication of child labour, into their business activities, including by adopting Good Agricultural Practices, regardless of the destination markets for agricultural produce.

This means inter-governmental organisations, governments, social partners, donors and other relevant stakeholders should:

- a) Promote measures to address child labour in family farming and reduce the risk of children entering child labour, which most do at an early age, by improving smallholder and family farms so they become viable enough to end their functional dependence on child labour and are able to employ adults in decent work through:
 - b) increasing agricultural incomes through fair pricing; access to inputs and credit, including through the development of community savings schemes and credit unions; modern production technologies, and improved quality and productivity; and by
 - b) promoting formalization of the informal economy and decent work for adults, fair prices for farmers and decent wages for farm workers and ensure adequate labour inspection and community monitoring systems are put in place.

3. Call to action to strengthen small producers' organisations, including funding to enable them to upgrade in different value chains and negotiate for fair prices.

This means inter-governmental organisations, governments, social partners, donors and other relevant stakeholders should:

- a) Support enhanced capacity of rural producers' organisations and ensure they receive financial support to pursue the eradication of child labour in the rural economy in Africa.
- b) Provide consistent and predictable assistance to producer organisations, and support nationally determined development priorities in line with the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the continuing relevance of the Accra Agenda; and the African Union Agenda 2063 and the subsequent Addis Agenda for Financing for Development.