



PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

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-  **PROJECT TITLE** Partnership Against Child Exploitation (PACE)
 -  **SECTOR** Child Protection
 -  **TIMEFRAME** 11 October 2018 - 10 October 2022
 -  **PEOPLE REACHED** Direct: 24,200 (14,547 girls and boys)
Indirect: 400,000
 -  **LOCATION** Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia
 -  **DONOR** Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
 -  **GOAL** To bring changes for boys and girls to enjoy their rights to be protected from the worst forms of child labour in Ethiopia, Central African Republic (CAR) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Context and programme objectives

There are 160 million children, aged between five and 17 years old, involved in child labour - and 79 million are engaged in hazardous work. Child labour is known to have harmful impacts on children's physical and mental health, learning and protection. Therefore, World Vision UK, in partnership with others¹, embarked on the Partnership Against Child Exploitation (PACE). With funding from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), PACE aimed to generate evidence on what works to prevent and reduce the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) and deliver four outcomes:

1. Increased children's agency so that children feel empowered to exercise their rights, engage in advocacy and challenge negative social norms that condone or perpetuate child labour.
2. Improved access to appropriate alternatives to WFCL by supporting children to stay in or return to school or alternative education, providing skills training, start-up capital, facilitating savings groups and other viable pathways to prevent WFCL.
3. Strengthened legal and policy environment through mobilising coalitions of NGOs, law enforcement, government agencies, and other stakeholders with enhanced capacity to implement legal frameworks and National Action Plans on WFCL.
4. Improved supply chain due diligence and duty of care by mapping the supply chains in each country through an innovative bottom-up approach to identify the prevalence of WFCL, and promote positive business practices.

From debt bondage to freedom



PACE Senior Programme Manager Philip Wilkinson, who visited Ethiopia in September 2022, shares three stories highlighting the impact of PACE, especially on children sold into debt bondage.

"Sadly, when Abai's* father died, the family lost their main provider. As the eldest son, Abai (pictured here with his mother) was sold into debt bondage at just nine years old to provide for his family. PACE chose this family, living in Amhara, Ethiopia, due to their extreme poverty and vulnerability. They received income-generating support, which included training in animal husbandry, business skills, livestock (five sheep) and start-up capital (12,000 Birr/ £196). Through shrewd buying and selling of further livestock, including cows, they managed to turn their lives around.

"The family also benefitted from being part of the World Vision / PACE savings groups, which enabled them to buy better feed, and, thanks to their new income, two siblings now attend school. At the time PACE started helping, Abai was 15 and had been supporting his mother, an elder sister, and two younger siblings for six years. The team had discussed enrolling Abai in school but he preferred to learn animal husbandry and business skills.

"Meeting this family recently was such a highlight: to see first-hand how Abai and his family have managed to transform their lives, with a little help from PACE, was amazing."

*Name changed to protect identity



Children reborn

Members of the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) in Ghondar Zuria, Ethiopia (pictured above left), formed through PACE. It has been transformational, saving three children from debt bondage. Members invested their savings in small scale enterprises, which grew. Three people had made the heart-wrenching decision to sell one child each into debt bondage - but thanks to income generated through VSLA, all three were brought back home and helped to return to school.

As the VSLA leader put it,

"three children were reborn". She wished that, "more communities could benefit like we have."

The group now has enough capital to join a government run savings scheme, proving that initiatives like this are sustainable after the programme closes.

PACE supported Muslim leaders in Ghondar Zuria (pictured above right), in their aim to protect children. This faith group brings together religious leaders of five mosques, meeting regularly to provide an informal child protection network. The group aims to prevent early marriage and illegal trafficking of children from Ethiopia into Sudan and on to other countries. They educate congregations and act as a network watch group.

OPPOSITE: Abai* with his mother. Libo Kem Kem, Ethiopia. The family received income-generating support and Abai's mother is also a member of the local Village Savings and Loans Association.
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ABOVE LEFT: Members of the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) in Ghondar Zuria, Ethiopia. ©2022 Philip Wilkinson/World Vision

ABOVE RIGHT: Muslim leaders in Ghondar Zuria, Amhara, Ethiopia. The group aims to prevent early marriage and illegal trafficking of children from Ethiopia into Sudan and on to other countries.
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Results

After four years, and amidst reduced funds, context instability and Covid, we recorded measurable changes in all three countries. While child labour reduced by as much as 5%², the reduction was not statistically significant. However, there were measurable changes that can be attributed to the programme. Children were more engaged in work at home instead of paid outside work - a positive trend away from exploitative working conditions. For example, in Ethiopia we recorded a 40% increase in children working for their households and simultaneously a 17% decrease in those working for pay outside of the home. School enrolment increased, as did household resilience, and more child-reported improvements on health and satisfaction. For example, 16% increase in school enrolment in Ethiopia, 7% decrease in households who had to reduce food intake, and 10% reduction in households who had to borrow money.

There was an increase in awareness among parents, community members and others, though deeper shifts did not appear to take root during this relatively short programme. Other key achievements include:

- **2,583 children completed training** in rights and skills
- **134 community groups trained** on child rights
- **8,430 children re-integrated** into school
- **1,679 youth trained** on vocational skills
- **3,440 carers of children in WFCL trained** on business and financial skills
- **6 journalism training sessions** delivered with 54 local journalists
- **536 businesses participated** in PACE-organised meetings
- **17 examples** of business best practices

¹World Vision national offices in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia, War Child UK (WC), the Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network at Columbia University, the UN Global Compact Network-UK, Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) and Fifty Eight.

²Mean average across all programme locations.



Learning and Recommendations

Priority was given to documenting what works, and challenges to success, in tackling WFCL. General lessons include³:

- **Bringing together specialists from a range of backgrounds - including NGOs, the private sector, academics, a research agency and the media - has been essential.** Coordinating the various programmes, such as improving livelihoods, supporting children to return to school or alternative learning / skills training, improving implementation of child labour laws, and promoting change in social norms and business practices, has been vital.
- **Seeing child labour from the eyes of children and their families** is crucial to help design context-specific interventions. We found that child labour is not always forced upon children. Sometimes, it is seen as a positive decision, or is unavoidable due to lack of social safety nets and opportunities. Parents often saw work as a 'safer option' than more risky activities, such as joining armed groups, and children said they wanted to work to support their families and learn. One participant noted, "I have learned doing business independently. I have also learned saving and buying anything I need from my own income ... I got the best life experience from these tasks..." [Girl, 15, Ethiopia]. Programmes also need to question whether alternatives, including education, are fit for purpose.
- **The social norms in communities (child labour is 'normal') and of those who employ children (giving work to children 'helps' their families) cannot be underestimated.** Changing social norms, which takes time, must be accompanied by alternatives to child labour, improved implementation of policies and strengthened community protection mechanisms. We also found that it is crucial to involve influencers like teachers and religious leaders.
- **Reducing risk instead of eradicating WFCL could prove more impactful in the short-term** than seeking to 'remove' children from the workplace altogether (which may negatively impact families' income), such as by nurturing healthier and safer labour options for children, which can support families and continued education.

- **Stronger community-leadership increases success.** Understanding local power dynamics, and supporting community members with tools and skills, is key in protecting children from child labour. When communities led awareness, there was greater understanding and clear shifts in people's views. Child-led activities, in some instances, also resulted in improved confidence of children. "The reinforcement of the local protection structure, by putting an office [here], is a step forward for protection. People can abuse children, but it is more difficult in this village because immediately it will be denounced and prosecuted." – Local authority, DRC
- **Partnership with private sector to map child labour from the source communities is promising.** PACE mapped the supply chain from source communities, sought to understand corporate culture, and engaged with local businesses in defining ways to improve the wellbeing of communities and children. Yet there is limited awareness among the private sector on WFCL, a reluctance to engage, and supply chains are not transparent. There are prospects for scaling up a bottom-up approach applied in PACE to tackle these challenges.

LEFT TOP: Children training in auto mechanics at a vocational skills training centre supported by PACE in DRC. ©2021 Olive Akonkwa Mahese/World Vision

LEFT BOTTOM: Frederic (not his real name) training in dressmaking at a vocational skills training centre supported by PACE in DRC. ©2021 Olive Akonkwa Mahese/World Vision

³For more information on the PACE Programme impact and learning: [PACE – Partnership Against Child Exploitation \(pace-consortium.org\)](https://pace-consortium.org/).



Conclusion

The gains made in PACE could lead to lasting change: greater community awareness about the harms of child labour, prioritising reporting child exploitation, significant reduction in children undertaking exploitative work, and increased school enrolment. There was improved resilience among households too. Amid difficult conditions due to conflict, Covid and budget cuts, PACE staff worked with tremendous resilience to deliver commitments to the communities. Whilst grappling with multiple issues, these communities stepped up to protect children from the harms of child labour. For long-term, sustainable change to occur, actions need to be created and delivered together, with a focus on approaches that enable those directly impacted – children, families and communities – to be empowered to navigate the issues themselves.

Next steps

For sustained change, further work is needed to address the insecurity, instability, weak governance and poor resourcing that threaten the outcomes. In CAR and DRC, reduction of child labour will remain a priority for our strategic objective to protect children from violence through programmes and advocacy/campaigns⁴. World Vision CAR will also leverage the project to continue to strengthen its relationship with donors. In World Vision Ethiopia, child labour continues to be prioritised in seeking to achieve their strategic priority of empowering girls and boys to

ABOVE: Melaku (not his real name), is now attending school after his family received goats as livelihood support from PACE in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. ©2021 Aklilu Kassaye/World Vision

⁴World Vision DRC Strategy FY21-25

⁵World Vision Ethiopia FY21-25 Strategy

World Vision UK

World Vision House, Opal Drive, Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR
tel: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 00 fax: +44 (0) 1908 84 10 01 email: info@worldvision.org.uk

worldvision.org.uk Follow us: @WorldVisionUK     

At World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children, in the most dangerous places, overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian faith, we've worked together with communities, partners, local leaders and governments, for over 70 years, so that children – of all faiths and none – are empowered to experience fullness of life.

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COVER PHOTO: Marie (not her real name) training in dressmaking at a vocational skills training centre in DRC. ©2021 Olive Akonkwa Mahese/World Vision

