



CASE STUDY #1

Credit: Solidaridad

TACKLING CHILD LABOR IN ARTISANAL GOLD MINES IN UGANDA

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INTRODUCTION

In Uganda, it is estimated that 12,000 children under 14 years old are engaged in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) (Schipper, de Haan, and van Drop 2015). These children undertake tasks such as digging in deep open pits, carrying stones to and operating grinding machines, and washing the ground ore (NRDO 2017). They also work in and around mines preparing and serving food and refreshments. Oftentimes boys and girls perform different tasks. This work in ASGM is considered by experts as a worst form of child labor (WFCL) due to the harsh working conditions, handling and exposure to toxic chemicals like mercury, and the vulnerability of young women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The subsistence level wages of ASM miners leave many families in a poverty-trap often relying on incomes brought in by children to support household expenditures (Hilson and Pardie, 2006). However, poverty is not the only driver for child labor, a lack of decent work for adults, and lack of and access to quality education are also contributing factors. It often results in both children and parents placing a low value on education and opting by choice or need for economic gains instead.

In a joint effort to address these challenges, in 2017 civil society organizations Solidaridad, Hivos/Stop Child Labour Coalition, Fairtrade UK, and UNICEF together with the electronic companies Fairphone and Philips launched the 5-year project *Joint Forces To Tackle Child Labor—From Gold Mine To Electronics*. The project uses an area-based approach with interventions in both communities and ASM mines as a strategy to address child labor in ASM communities. This initiative directly contributes to SDG8 in the areas of decent work and economic growth by taking immediate action to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

An area-based approach to tackle child labor in gold mining communities

To effectively tackle child labor in the ASM communities, an area-based approach was adopted which focuses on reducing and eliminating all types of child labor in a specific geographic area. The area-based approach towards the creation of CLFZ has been championed by the Stop Child Labour coalition¹ and is aimed at changing perceptions and attitudes towards child labor and improving access to education. The key point has been to combine the area approach whilst also supporting the transformation of unsafe artisanal mine practices to become more socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable. To do so, the project involved ASM sites, communities, and other stakeholders, including local and national government and supply chain actors.

The first part of the area-based approach was to involve community stakeholders for their buy-in. Busia, a district in Eastern Uganda, has a long history of mining, and the area has numerous artisanal mines. Results from the area mapping exercise conducted in Busia identified 786 households and showed that 412 children were at risk of child labor or were reported as working. To build consensus on the objectives of the project, a number of meetings were held with community stakeholders. This included members of various ASM sites, local council leaders, Community Development Officers both at District and sub-county levels, school heads, teachers, and

religious leaders. Together, a participatory Joint Action Plan against child labor was created as well as committees consisting of leaders from the various stakeholder groups and nominated due to their positive attitude, leadership, and commitment. These meetings served to inform all stakeholders about the CLFZ methodology and to build good relations with community members from the start.

Once the buy-in was achieved, the next part was to establish structures for mine associations. The project carefully selected three artisanal mining associations based on a set of criteria. With these associations, incremental improvement plans and policies with a specific focus on child labor eradication for each mine were developed based on assessments of their operations against international standards. The policy was endorsed by management and mine leaders, and sensitization trainings were held for mineworkers. This training focused on the policy and broader legislation as well as perceptions of child work and labor. It also established a child labor remediation process including a grievance redressal mechanism to allow mineworkers and management to notify community workers when children are working at mine sites. By directly engaging miners and mine managers in this way, it places ASM operators in a non-negotiable position to put an end to child labor and support children's right to education.

Next was to invest in education. A conducive learning environment is essential but often lacking in rural mining areas. The first step to address this through the project was to strengthen two existing local schools by training teachers in child-friendly schooling methods to create a positive learning environment. For children that have left school to work, motivation centers were created to transition and accelerate education so they can enter formal full-time school at a class appropriate for their age or vocational training programs. In total, 100 children from the 412 that were identified as being at risk, or 24 percent of them, were integrated in the formal school systems. A limiting factor, which inhibited the participation of more children, was the capacity of the motivation centers to host all of the children in need of education as the children require dedicated resources to successfully complete their program.

Finally, the area-based approach addressed income. The research undertaken as part of the project in Busia showed that working children usually come from large families where parents are not able to provide for all the schooling and other needs of the many children in one home. Children are therefore tempted or encouraged to work to be able to meet their personal needs as well as those of their households (NRDO 2017). The project therefore addressed income at two levels: (i) improving mine productivity; and (ii) improving household income. Mine productivity is affected by low volumes of gold extraction and poor access to markets. To address this, investments in adequate ore processing equipment were facilitated to enable the three mines to rent the equipment in exchange for a nominal fee. Demonstration workshops were also organized on the proper use of this equipment to maximize productivity. At the household level, spending patterns were addressed prioritizing the most important financial expenditures. This was undertaken through the Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA) established by the project and which helped the group members, and consequently the families, to improve their savings practices and learn basic bookkeeping, financial planning, and investment skills. As a result, families became more aware about the need to save for the educational needs of their children.

Conclusion

ASM has a poor reputation when it comes to child labor, but as the experience of the project showed, when mines and communities are properly supported, it can provide a major opportunity for economic and social development for many people. First, tackling child labor in ASM requires a thorough analysis to determine why child labor exists. It became clear as the project progressed that factors, such as existing norms, beliefs, quality of education, insufficient income, and lack of policy enforcement at community and mine level, play a major role in driving or stopping child labor. Second, involvement of all actors in communities, local authorities, schools, and mines is essential from the outset to create buy-in and ensure that monitoring of child labor is embedded in the communities and to hold them accountable. Third, transitioning children from work and into education not only requires children to become motivated, but there also needs to be an incentive for children to go back to school. That means that investing in child-friendly education by schools and authorities is essential to create a conducive learning environment for children. Finally, a support system needs to be established to enable parents to engage in economic activities and earn a higher income that will balance their household income when children stop working.

END NOTES

1 Stop Child Labour (SCL) is a coalition coordinated by Hivos. The coalition consists of the Algemene onderwijsbond (AOB), FNV Mondiaal, Hivos, the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), Kerk in Actie & ICCO Cooperation, Stichting

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