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Prioritising Agro-Rural Areas with Holistic and Community-Participatory Initiatives to Accelerate Progress towards Elimination of Child Labour

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Abstract

Agriculture continues to be the most challenging sector with the majority of child labourers (70%) working in hazardous conditions. The innumerable interventions to tackle child labour have failed to impact informal supply chains in agro-rural regions. This article examines the key challenges and emerging good practices to understand and address child labour in informal economies such as agriculture by using an intersectional and holistic lens. Drawing from the experiences of Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) and its regional partners of more than two decades, this article proposes a holistic, area-based approach to address child labour in the agro-rural regions.

Keywords: Child labour, agriculture, gender, stakeholders, area-based approaches, supply chain, child labour monitoring

1. Introduction

The world has made progress in reducing child labour. There are now 86 million fewer children in child labour in 2020 as compared to 246 million in 2000, when the practice of gathering global estimates on child labour began (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).¹ International laws on child labour have been domesticated by countries into national laws, policies and action plans to prevent, protect and remedy exploitation of children. Stakeholders from Global North and Global South ranging from governments, civil society, trade unions, teachers' organisations, UN agencies and private sector rank among the key players in the fight against child labour today. Further, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the current development agenda and framework - the Sustainable Development Goals

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

(SDGs) include a target on child labour, viz. SDG 8.7 which commits states to end all forms of child labour by 2025. The achievement of this target is backed by multi-stakeholder partnership - Alliance 8.7, hosted by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Lastly, a key highlight of progress made towards ending child labour is the declaration of 2021 by the United Nations as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.²

But where there is progress, there are also challenges and stumbling blocks. Progress in eliminating child labour has stalled for the first time since the year 2000, with the number of children in child labour instead of decreasing from 152 million in 2016, increasing to 160 million today.³ The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 further threatens to hamper progress by adding another 8.9 million children by the end of 2022, due to increased poverty and exacerbated vulnerabilities caused by the pandemic (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Laws, policies and action plans are not necessarily being translated into efforts on the ground for want of “real” political will, resources and capacity, among other things. The largest proportion of children continues to be found working in one of the most hazardous and difficult sectors, i.e., the agriculture sector which employs 70% of all child labour.⁴ Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors for child labourers, in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases.⁵ More children are working in rural areas, often considered hard-to-reach areas due to the urban bias in policy making and implementation, i.e., 122.7 million child labourers in rural areas vis-a-vis 37.3 million in urban areas. The majority of child labour is found in the youngest cohort, i.e., 89.3 million children between 5 to 11 years, putting a question mark on delivery of universal primary education policies and programmes (ILO and UNICEF, 2021).

Sadly, all this is happening against the backdrop of the clock ticking away towards the 2025 deadline to achieve zero child labour. While the realisation of target SDG 8.7 in terms of no child labour by 2025 looks unlikely, it is goalpost worth moving towards, aiming at maximum possible reduction in child labour. This conundrum begs the question - where do we then prioritise our efforts to end child labour and how? The solutions lies in the problem itself - focus and prioritise efforts in the largest and most prevalent sector of child labour in agriculture sector. This article focuses on the state of affairs, viz., the challenges and progress made in the agriculture sector; analysis of emerging good practices that have the potential to address key issues of child labour in agro-rural economies and how a holistic approach that combines such practices can achieve lasting impact in terms of reduced child labour.

² International Labour Organization. 2021. “2021: International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.” [www.ilo.org. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_766351/lang-en/index.htm). Accessed 2 July, 2021

³ “Child Labour Rises to 160 Million – First Increase in Two Decades,” https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_800090/lang-en/index.htm. Accessed 10 July, 2021

⁴ Ibid

⁵ “Child Labour in Agriculture (IPEC).” *International Labour Organization*, <https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Agriculture/lang-en/index.htm>. Accessed 6 July 2021

It is important to point out that while this article focuses on agriculture sector specifically, in general terms it covers child labour in the rural and informal economy. Therefore, at times the term ‘agro-rural sector’ or ‘agro-rural economy’ may be used to refer to this sector in the general sense.

1.1 Methodology

This article draws examples and insights from key data published by the ILO, UNICEF and other such agencies on child labour. Further, it uses evidence from civil society organisations, especially the ones working on the issue of child labour, bonded labour and forced labour in agriculture. Besides using news reports and articles to highlight more recurring issues pertaining to child labour in supply chains of agricultural commodities, the literature also makes use of vast practical experience of Global March Against Child Labour (Global March) and its southern-based network in child labour, spanning over two decades along with its approach to combine the various emerging good practices to address child labour in agro-rural settings. The article proposes an intersectional approach with a need to look beyond sex-disaggregated data, reflecting upon the gendered nature of child labour and the impact of women’s socio-economic status on child labour.

2. Child Labour in Agriculture - The State of Affairs

2.1 Background

Child labour in agro-rural economy is pervasive. More than 60 goods in this sector are found to be made with child labour, comprising farming, fisheries and aquaculture, forestry and livestock production.⁶ This socio-economic phenomenon is not only confined to countries of the Global South. The U.S and Turkey from the Global North, for example, are infamous for child exploitation in tobacco farms and hazelnut picking, respectively. Also, as mentioned, agriculture is the biggest employer of children, consistently employing around 100 million child labourers over the years (See Table 1 below). Further, over 30 million children in this sector work in hazardous conditions on family farms, commercial farms or plantations.

⁶ “2020 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor.” 2020. <https://www.dol.gov/>. https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods?tid=All&field_exp_good_target_id=All&field_exp_exploitation_type_target_id_1=All&items_per_page=10. Accessed 14 July 2021

Time Period	Percentage of Child Labour in Agriculture	Absolute number of children in child labour in Agriculture	Hazardous child labour in agriculture (million)	5-11 years	12-14 years	15-17 years
2008	60%	129				
2012	58.9%	98				
2016	70.9%	108		60 millio	29.2 millio	18.3 millio
2020	70%	112	31.4	68.4 millio	27 millio	16.7 millio

Table 1 – Trends in Child Labour in Agriculture (International Labour Organization)

Forced and bonded child labour is prevalent in commodities such as sugarcane especially during harvesting in India. Several reports have been published in the last few years highlighting the varied forms of child exploitation and human rights violations in the sugarcane supply chain in India. A 2017 study by PRAYAS, Centre for Labour Research and Action in India, called to attention the condition of sugarcane migrant farm workers trapped in indebtedness resulting in bonded labour, forced labour and child labour.⁷ Findings from the research were further validated by a research conducted from 2019-2020 by Global March, specifically on the issue of child labour and its gendered impacts in sugarcane supply chain in India.⁸ It was found that children as young as 6 were engaged in hazardous child labour working in extreme weather conditions and for long hours on farms, loading and unloading of sugarcane to and from trucks and using a machete to cut cane. While both boys and girls were engaged in child labour, girls were found to be spending additional time in household chores, childcare and also at the risk of child marriage.

Trafficked child labour has also been reported in cocoa growing in regions such as Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.⁹ The recently filed lawsuit against world’s leading cocoa giants by children who claim they were used as slave labour on cocoa plantations in Ivory

⁷ “A Bitter Harvest, Seasonal Migrant Sugarcane Harvesting Workers of Gujarat.” 2017. Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action. December 2017. <http://clra.in/research-and-study>. Accessed 23 August 2021

⁸ “Paradox of the Sweetest Crop, Child Labour and Its Gendered Dimensions in the Sugarcane Supply Chain in India.” n.d. <https://Globalmarch.org/>. India: Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/paradox-of-the-sweetest-crop/>. Accessed 9 July, 2021

⁹ Balch, Oliver. 2021. “Mars, Nestlé and Hershey to Face Child Slavery Lawsuit in US.” The Guardian. February 12, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/12/mars-nestle-and-hershey-to-face-landmark-child-slavery-lawsuit-in-us>. Accessed 23 August 2021

Coast shows enslavement of thousands of children in cocoa chains. Child migrants are also brought to Ivory Coast by people other than their parents. At least 16,000 children, and perhaps many more, are forced to work on West African cocoa farms by people other than their parents, according to estimates from a 2018 survey led by a Tulane University researcher.¹⁰

Based on the above overview, it can be seen that effective elimination and reduction in child labour will require a breakthrough and priority efforts in agriculture.

2.2 Challenges and efforts in addressing child labour in agriculture: An analysis

Addressing child labour in the agro-rural economy has been fraught with challenges and efforts have either been inadequate and/or inefficient. Key challenges and gaps in existing efforts to tackle child labour in this sector are discussed below.

Weak laws and enforcement - Child labour laws have had little impact in the agriculture sector. Laws remain limited, non-applicable, unenforced or only poorly enforced in many countries. In India, the widespread practice of child labour in sugarcane harvesting where young children handle a sharp sickle or machete type tool, remains unrecognised as hazardous work in the national legal list of hazardous activities that defines child labour.¹¹ Similarly, in Bangladesh, child labour in shrimp fry catching is not covered in the national list of hazardous, an activity that clearly is dangerous that involves children going in the deep water without any sort of protective gear to catch shrimp fries.¹² In contrast, in Uganda while growing, planting, harvesting and transporting sugarcane are among hazardous activities in national law, not permitted for employment of children, child labour in this sub-sector is common in the Eastern region, indicating gaps in law enforcement.¹³

A key reason for weak enforcement is that government labour inspection services in agriculture and rural areas are either absent or weak. The IUF, the largest union of food workers, has noted that monitoring and enforcement in agriculture is undermined when farms are in remote areas, isolated or far apart. This combined with a shortage of labour inspectors and limited resources for inspection means that many farms are never visited by labour

¹⁰ de Buhr, E & Gordon, E 2018, Bitter sweets: prevalence of forced labour and child labour in the cocoa sectors of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Tulane University & Walk Free Foundation. Accessed 24 August 2021

¹¹ Ibid (9)

¹² Global March Against Child Labour. "Mapping and Analysis of Child Labour and Associated Stakeholders in Shrimp Fry Collection in Targeted Upazila of Bangladesh." 2021 <https://globalmarch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Child-labour-in-shrimp-research-findings.pdf>. Accessed 5 July 2021

¹³ Global March Against Child Labour. "Research : A study on child labour and it's gender dimensions in sugar growing in Uganda," 2020. <https://globalmarch.org/research-a-study-on-child-labour-and-its-gender-dimensions-in-sugarcane-growing-in-uganda/>. Accessed 5 July 2021

inspectors.¹⁴ Thus, owing to limited regulation, the agriculture sector remains largely informal, heightening the risk of exploitation for vulnerable families and their children.

Also, many countries struggle with inconsistencies between their local laws as compared to international legal standards. Incoherencies between the minimum age for employment and the age of completion of compulsory schooling have been extensive.¹⁵ Additionally, the regional legislations do not take into account gaps pertaining to understanding of terms such as “child labour”, “working children” and child labour in “family work” which vary from one region to another, and pose additional implementation challenges. Relevant evidence is the controversial Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 in India that legalises child labour in “family or family enterprises”. The term “family and family enterprises” is defined ambiguously, and when applied to the agricultural sector, the issue is only exacerbated.¹⁶ Moreover, nearly 70% of child labour is classified under unpaid family labour (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2018), creating a problematic grey area within the Act that doesn’t regulate agricultural child labour.¹⁷

Overall, the effectiveness of legislations and policies aimed at reducing child labour seems challenging when it comes to child labour in agriculture since majority of child labour takes place in family setting. Structurally the informal nature of agriculture, lack of proper employment contracts and normalisation of daily wage, seasonal and contractual labour also promotes dependence of agriculture on family labour. It must be noted that while legislations pertaining to compulsory education, minimum employment age and hazardous occupations must be asserted, these alone are not enough to address child labour in rural and informal settings, In fact, child labour in agro-rural settings is dependent on socio-economic indicators of the community and can be effectively addressed if there is an ecosystem and enabling environment for the community to thrive and become child friendly. Therefore, enforcement gaps in cross-cutting and fundamental labour rights (such as freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, and freedom from discrimination and from forced labour), also need attention given their inter-relationship with child labour.¹⁸

The “special status of helping out” in agriculture - Majority of child labour in agriculture takes place in family, smallholder farm units which is unpaid. Traditionally and culturally

¹⁴ IUF. “100 Years of Advancing Freedom of Association,” 2021. <https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/C11-anniversary-study.pdf>. Accessed 9 July 2021

¹⁵ ILO. “Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes,” 2018 https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_653987/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed 12 July 2021.

¹⁶ Ibid (9)

¹⁷ “FAO - News Article: Child Labour in Agriculture Is on the Rise, Driven by Conflict and Disasters.” n.d. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1140078/icode/>. Accessed 8 July 2021

¹⁸ Global March Against Child Labour. “International Conference on Child Labour in Agriculture, Working Paper on Child Labour in Agriculture.” 2012. <https://globalmarch.org/events/from-farms-and-fields-to-classrooms-si-se-puede-yes-we-can/> Accessed 7 July 2021.

working on family farms is seen as “helping out”, which often masks the hazardous conditions in which the children work and/or loss of education time for the duration spent on fields.¹⁹ Further, as children in family farms work in an informal economy set up, there is lack of reporting on this kind of employment, making family child labour in agriculture invisible, hidden, unacknowledged and even more difficult to tackle.

Undue focus on popular crops and global supply chains - Despite the pervasiveness of child labour in agriculture, most efforts have been confined to mostly popular agro-crops such as cocoa, coffee, and palm-oil to name a few. Other sub-sectors of agriculture such as livestock and fisheries have often been neglected and key reason is that these sub-sectors are non-export oriented.²⁰ Other examples include existence of child labour in non-typical crops such as spices (chillies) in India and shrimp fry catching in Bangladesh, which are largely ignored in policy, programmatic and project interventions.²¹ Further, resources and attention since recent years has focussed mostly on global supply chains, whereas majority of child labour takes place for domestic consumption.

Limited or non-existent access to schools and poor quality of education in rural areas - As agriculture constitutes the main point of entry into child labour for the youngest children (5-11 years) with nearly 76.6% of children (68.4 million) from this age group working in agriculture, education of these children is compromised. These children are either out of school and/or struggling to combine school and work. Further, nearly 20.5 million children in rural areas in this age group are out of school (ILO and UNICEF, 2021). Among other things, these figures indicate that despite compulsory primary education policies and laws in countries, there are gaps in implementation as schools in rural areas are limited, non-existent or offer poor quality of education. In countries such as India, teacher absenteeism, poor infrastructure including poor sanitation facilities have been some key reasons for children to remain out of schools in villages. In Uganda, school-related fees and lack of school feeding programmes have made education unaffordable for children from poor families in sugarcane and coffee growing communities.²² The cultural attitudes of communities about the role of children in rural areas and negative perception towards the value of education have also played a role. Further, the alternative technology based education used in many countries

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ “From Farms and Fields to Classrooms.” 2012. *Globalmarch.org*. Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/from-farms-fields-to-classrooms/>. Accessed 11 July 2021

²¹ Global March Against Child Labour’s field observations

²² “Short Summary of Research: A Study on Child Labour and It’s Gender Dimensions in Sugarcane Growing in Uganda – Global March.” 2020. *Globalmarch.org*. Global March Against Child Labour. <https://globalmarch.org/short-summary-of-research-a-study-on-child-labour-and-its-gender-dimensions-in-sugarcane-growing-in-uganda/>. Accessed 11 July 2021

amidst school closures with the on-going pandemic, is only further keeping children in rural areas away from education and learning with the existing digital divide.²³

Girl child labour and gender concerns - Girl child labour in agriculture forms a significant part of the workforce, and helps maintain this phenomenon. Girl child labourers have a triple burden and are particularly disadvantaged since they usually have to also undertake domestic chores in their own homes before and after their agricultural work and on weekends. Also, their access to education is often more restricted than that of boys. In India, girls drop out of school and accompany their parents to sugarcane harvesting regions to look after their siblings. Some often end up being married before turning 18. Household chores in own household and domestic work in third-party houses both of which sees mostly girls, have found little coverage in child labour policies and implementation at national and international levels.

Rural poverty and low social protection coverage - Poverty is widespread in rural areas. Rural labour markets are weak, characterised by large employers, oversupply of labour, and poor transport and communications infrastructure restricting movement of labour to stronger markets, all keeping rural wages depressed and people trapped in poverty. Most child labourers come from poor families and households. Household poverty makes families vulnerable to pushing their children into work. This was seen in the case of Uganda where the poverty level of 42% in the Eastern region contributed to children working in the sugarcane growing sector among other things.²⁴ Families in rural-agro economies also have lower levels of social protection, resulting in use of their children's labour in work to meet the family daily needs. In coastal regions of Bangladesh, lack of adequate social protection services has been a contributing factor to push children into the hazardous work of wild shrimp fry catching.²⁵

3. Analysis of emerging good practices in tackling child labour in agriculture

The above discussion points to the complexity of child labour in agro-rural sector, and therefore there is no “one size fits all” approach to eradicate child labour universally. However, some practices have shown to be efficient, albeit with challenges. The section below critically analyses some of the emerging good practices that have impacted the cause of eradicating child labour positively and their potential to address child labour in agro-rural sector.

²³ “COVID-19 Exposed the Digital Divide. Here’s How We Can Close It.” n.d. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/covid-digital-divide-learning-education/>. Accessed 12 July 2021

²⁴ Ibid (21)

²⁵ Ibid (12)

3.1 Human Rights Supply Chain Due Diligence Legislations that Reinforce Child Labour Frameworks

Various human rights due diligence (HRDD) legislations to tackle human rights abuses including child labour in supply chains are being implemented by countries such as France (2017 Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law), the UK (Modern Slavery Act) and Australia (Modern Slavery Act), among others. Particularly, the recently proposed EU legislation on mandatory human rights due diligence (mHRDD) is noteworthy which requires businesses to conduct risk assessments of their value chains and address any identified human rights issues, along with the issues of governance and environment with enforcement mechanisms and sanctions.²⁶ These specific legislations, among other things have added the responsibility on businesses to address child labour in their supply and value chains, along with respecting the rule of law in countries of their operations.

While these global legislations and measures are aimed at benefiting global supply chains and making countries child-labour free, their impact and outreach to informal sectors such as agriculture and its workers at the bottom, still has a long way to go. Each country's HRDD legislation has a different purpose, and thus requires a different approach.²⁷ Additionally, effective HRDD in agricultural supply chains will need participation of stakeholders such as grassroots organisations, NGOs, trade unions, producer groups and local level governments for businesses to go beyond the top tiers and conduct a comprehensive risk assessment.

3.2 Education-centred Interventions

The most effective way to prevent child labour is to improve access to and quality of schooling. Education is also referred often as a social vaccine to address child labour and finds prominence across most approaches on child labour. Yet, simply ensuring withdrawal of child labourers and their enrolment in schools is not enough to compensate for the missed years of education and other pedagogical, logistical as well as gender-based challenges that need to be addressed for transitioning from child labour to education to youth employment in decent work.

Various contextual challenges need to be taken into account while designing and implementing programmes and policies that intend to increase school enrolment and prevent child labour. For instance, given the data on early entry of young children in child labour, early childhood education is crucial for improvement in enrolment and learning indicators

²⁶ "Pressure Mounts on EU Regulator to Deliver on Mandatory Human Rights, Environmental and Governance Due Diligence." <https://www.whitecase.com/publications/alert/pressure-mounts-eu-regulator-deliver-mandatory-human-rights-environmental-and>. Accessed 9 July 2021

²⁷ Landmark Report on 1,000 European Companies Shows the Need for Human Rights Due Diligence Laws." Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/blog/landmark-report-on-1000-european-companies-shows-the-need-for-human-rights-due-diligence-laws/>. Accessed 9 July 2021

and improving children's overall success in school and later life, particularly for vulnerable, at-risk children who live in poverty or in low-income households. The World Bank's Uganda Nutrition and Early Child Development Project, initiated in 1998 has been one such example.²⁸ It aims to improve the malnutrition indicators, psychosocial, and cognitive growth and development of children less than six years of age. This project had positive and significant effects on school enrolment for children aged 3 to 5 years and a positive and significant effect on the highest grade attended.

Besides early childhood education, linking food security to education and child labour has also resulted in positive impacts in encouraging enrolment and attendance in schools, by targeting the root causes such as poverty, vulnerability and hunger at home. Large scale global interventions by organisations such as the World Food Programme, the Hunger Project, Caritas International amongst others have been consistently working on enhancing access of children to education and fighting child labour by ending hunger. Their cross-cutting programmes extend beyond providing meals to school children and include working with smallholder farmers, women's groups and communities in high-risk areas of child labour and out-of-school children.

India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) is another example where 115.9 million children from vulnerable segments receive cooked meals every school day.²⁹ While the programme has been criticised such as for poor quality of food, it has also been applauded for enhancing learning outcomes amongst children. Recently, the Government of India extended this scheme through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of the cooking cost for the meals taking into account the impacts of COVID-19.³⁰ The outcomes of this one time aid are yet to be seen but it indicated that interventions aimed at addressing education challenges need to be contextualised and strengthened in times of crisis to prevent further increase in child labour.

Education union led multi-stakeholder initiatives have also proven to be successful in retaining children in schools. For the last two decades, Global March's member Education International and its affiliates, Algemene Onderwijsbond (the Netherlands) and Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (Germany), through the Fair Childhood Foundation, have supported projects to reduce school dropout rates and child labour and to contribute to the

²⁸ Alderman, Harold. "Improving Nutrition through Community Growth Promotion: Longitudinal Study of the Nutrition and Early Child Development Program in Uganda." *World Development* 35, no. 8 (August 2007): 1376–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.04.003>. Accessed 14 July 2021

²⁹ "Mid-Day Meal Scheme : How India Feeds 115 Million Children Every School Day." *Microsave*, January 19, 2021. <https://www.microsave.net/2021/01/19/mid-day-meal-scheme-how-india-feeds-115-million-children-every-school-day/>. Accessed 14 July 2021

³⁰ Singhal, Ashok. "11.8 Cr Students to Benefit from Financial Help by Government under Mid-Day Meal Scheme." *India Today*, May 28, 2021. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/11-8-cr-students-to-benefit-from-financial-help-by-government-under-mid-day-meal-scheme-1808179-2021-05-28>. Accessed 14 July 2021

development of child labour-free zones in over 13 countries.³¹ Some of their best practices include enhancing teacher motivation; School-Based Child Labour Focal Points and Monitoring Structures; creating an environment to encourage student participation and a caring, safe environment; monitoring absenteeism and assessing academic performance; bridging and remedial classes and initiatives to support the girl child.

3.3 Addressing Informality

Agriculture is largely informal, characterised by invisibility, low regulation, low wages/income, and low job and social security, resulting in precarious living and working situations for children and their families. Strong policies at the livelihood and labour market level can help in addressing these shortcomings of informality. Investing in development of sustainable learning and livelihood opportunities is especially important for the youth and other workers in the informal economy to achieve decent work and prevent the need to engage child labour. Informal apprenticeship and skill accreditation programmes have had a positive impact in imparting skills in the informal economy in many countries, such as Bangladesh.³² The country has a model based on the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework to encourage accreditation for skills acquired through work in the informal economy by providing benchmarks for skills attainment, alignment, and recognition.³³

Poor wages and price for agro-produce also result in poverty amongst agricultural households and increases the chances of child labour. Social protection instruments such as conditional cash transfers are essential in this regard. Studies have shown reductions in child labour in poorer households reached by cash transfer schemes. Assessments of the Bolsa Família Programme show positive impacts on the living conditions of poor people. Cash transfers helped in promoting food and nutritional safety and reducing poverty and inequality at the same time lowering the risk of child labour, strengthening local economies, and promoting gender equality.³⁴

Amidst the pandemic, the need for cash transfer and/or child-centred cash transfers is being recommended by many civil society organisations to prevent parents from using children's labour as a coping mechanism in times of crises. One such example is a recent

³¹ Education International, and Wintour Nora. "EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices and Union Impacts," June 2020. https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2019_ei_research_childlabour_eng. Accessed 3 July 2021

³² ILO. "Ending Child Labour by 2025: A Review of Policies and Programmes," 2018. https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Informationresources/WCMS_653987/lang--en/index.htm. Accessed 4 July 2021

³³ ILO: Transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, Report V (1) International Labour Conference, 103rd Session 2014 (ILC.103/V/1). Accessed 4 July 2021

³⁴ Pais, P.S.M., Silva, F.d.F. and Teixeira, E.C. (2017), "The influence of Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer program on child labor in Brazil", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 206-221. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-02-2015-0038>. Accessed 4 July 2021

report by Human Rights Watch, which based on research in Nepal, Ghana and Uganda calls on donors and governments to prioritise cash allowances to families to protect children's rights and enable families to maintain an adequate standard of living without having to resort to child labour.³⁵

3.4 Area-based Approaches

Area-based approaches focus on a specific geographical area based on indicators such as the burden of child labour, lack of decent livelihood opportunities and access to education amongst others. Without making any distinction between different forms of child labour, children are encouraged to go to school and stop working.³⁶ Various models such as the child friendly villages, child labour free zones and child labour monitoring (and remediation) system (CLMRS) can be found in villages, plantation areas, small islands, urban neighbourhoods, or cluster of communities.³⁷ The focus is not only on child labour in a specific sector or on the worst forms of child labour, but on all children within the area who are not able to attend school. Thus, area-based approaches over the limitation of sector specific approaches where specific sector targeting can result in increase or movement of children from the identified sector to other sector/s, thus not addressing the issue of child labour sustainably.³⁸

The area-based approach towards child labour free zones involves all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, children, unions, community groups, local authorities, religious leaders and employers. The power comes from the people living in these communities who set the norm that 'no child should work; every child must be in school'. The cocoa sector is one such evidence where significant resources have been used in implementing area-based approach models such as the CLMRS. The first cocoa-specific CLMRS system was developed by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), in partnership with Nestlé, building on models developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Going beyond the supply chain, a CLMRS is embedded in the community structure with local stakeholders for liaising and conducting regular visits to households where child labour is found to build trust with both parents and children. The data collected from all monitoring visits is sent to a central database. Children in or at risk of child labour are provided with suitable remediation and other forms of support at child, family, cooperative, or community level such as provision of birth certificates, school materials and establishment

³⁵ Human Rights Watch. "I must work to eat. Covid-19, Poverty and Child Labour in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda", 2021. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/05/crd_childlabor0521_web.pdf. Accessed 5 July 2021

³⁶ FUNDAMENTALS & ITC-ILO, Mapping interventions addressing child labour and working conditions in artisanal mineral supply chains, Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020.

³⁷ "What Is a Child Labour Free Zone?" 2021. Education International. May 4, 2021. <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/21951:what-is-a-child-labour-free-zone>. Accessed 24 August 2021

³⁸ Ibid

of an income-generating project for the women of the village. There is continuous monitoring of child labour as well as their school attendance. So far companies such as Nestlé have committed to rolling out CLMRSs over their entire African supply chain by 2025, along with Mars for all at-risk households. According to ICI's estimates, its CLMRS identify at least 60% of the children in a community involved in child labour whereas impact analysis shows that CLMRS can reduce child labour by 50% among those children identified as in child labour.

Similarly, the child friendly village model is being implemented by Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF), for over 15 years in countries like India, Nepal and Uganda. The concept of a Child-Friendly Village (CFV) or *Bal Mitra Gram* (BMG) directly addresses the multi-dimensional problems that generate and maintain the child labour situation. The rationale for the creation of a Child-Friendly Village is, there is a lack of proper educational infrastructure and of quality education at various villages in the country and child labour does not exist only because people in the communities are poor. Thus, it attacks the root causes to assure sustainability and perpetual settlement of the child labour in targeted areas. The area-based approach towards CFVs involves stakeholders, including teachers, parents, children, field activists, women and youth, village/community head, local authorities, leaders and employers. A successful example of area-based approach is the CFV model of KSCF in the mica mining area of Koderma district in Jharkhand, India. The intervention contributed to international mica industry corporates initiating action on child labour in mica mining and collection.³⁹ KSCF designed the selection criteria for their intervention with an area-based approach including indicators such as targeting the location where mining is rampant, the number of children working as child labourers in mines and the number of school dropouts. The formation of this CFV started in the year 2001 as an intensive campaign and now has the support of various stakeholders from businesses to international NGOs such as The Hans Foundation, Oberoi, Infosys, Estee Lauder, McKinsey, etc. In October 2018, the Jharkhand government signed an MoU with KSCF for a child labour free mica in Jharkhand. So far, 540 villages have been made child friendly by KSCF across India and the model has been replicated in other regions such as Nepal and Uganda.

Another example of successful models emerging from area-based approach is the CLFZ which was introduced in the year 1991, by an Indian NGO called Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MV Foundation) that managed to release thirty children in Ranga Reddy district in central India from the grip of bonded labour. It was their first project on child labour. To date, they have taken one million children out of work and helped them to integrate into full time, formal schools. Over 1,500 villages have been declared child labour free zones. MV Foundation challenged conventional beliefs about child labour, poverty and education and took a different stand: it is not poverty, but deep rooted social norms, the violation of workers' rights, discrimination against certain groups, and a poorly-functioning

³⁹ "Case Study on Bal Mitra Gram (Child Friendly Village)." 2018. *Wwww.satyarthi.org.in*. Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation. <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mica-BMG-Case-Study.pdf>. Accessed 10 July 2021

education system which are the main reasons why children weren't attending school. International research has now confirmed the fact that the majority of families can survive without the income of their working children. With the support of Stop Child Labour and partners, the CLFZ model has been replicated outside of India in 9 African countries where all children are systematically being withdrawn from labour and (re)integrated into formal, full-time schools in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Morocco, Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso.⁴⁰

The area-based approach has proved to be an impactful way in addressing child labour in agro-rural sectors. Noticeably, it focuses on interventions to prevent and eventually eliminate child labour in specific geographical locations. It is centred on a rights-based approach targeting the community, different stakeholders and the local duty bearers to work collectively towards creating spaces that are not just free of child labour but also child-friendly. In the agro-rural sector where law enforcement has been weak, such community participatory and community-led initiatives have proved to be effective alternatives.

The approach can be seen being implemented in the form of various models such as the child friendly village (CFV), child labour free zones (CLFZ) and child labour monitoring system (CLMS). Agro commodities producing countries have also implemented their own child labour monitoring systems, such as the Ghana Child Labour Monitoring System (GCLMS) and the Système d'Observation and the Suivi du Travail des Enfants (SOSTECI) in Côte d'Ivoire.⁴¹

While these examples indicate progress in addressing child labour, there are certain crucial aspects to be addressed even within these emerging good practices. According to the 2020 Cocoa Barometer report, despite the reduction in child labour in the communities where CLMRS has been implemented by ICI, it can only stop around 30% of child labourers from engaging in hazardous activities. Similarly, NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a survey to assess the effectiveness of interventions to reduce child labour and the worst forms of child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The results of the survey indicated that while multiple interventions implemented in a community led to a statistically significant reduction in the rates of child labour and hazardous child labour in cocoa production and while the prevalence rate of child labour did not increase in the high cocoa production areas, it increased substantially in low and medium production areas between 2008-09 and 2018-19. This clearly indicates the need for scaling up monitoring programmes rooted in area-based approach to regions with lower levels of production with plans that are more realistic and relevant to the community including stronger partnerships at the local level.

Further, there is a growing risk that different area-based models use different methodologies with radically different results, common definitions, standards and benchmarks. Additionally, despite most CLMRSs being prevalent in cocoa sector, most cocoa

⁴⁰ "Child Labour Free Zones Evaluated." 2015. Stop Child Labour. June 25, 2015. <https://stopchildlabour.org/child-labour-free-zones-evaluated/>. Accessed 23 August 2021

⁴¹ Fountain, Antonie C. and Hütz-Adams, Friedel (2020): 2020 Cocoa Barometer. <https://www.voicenetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-Cocoa-Barometer.pdf> Accessed 12 July 2021-25 August 2021

is still not traceable, and the non-traceable cocoa potentially comes from areas where producers are not organised into farmer groups and risks of child labour are likely higher. There is also hesitation from the global donor community to fund such interventions for longer periods of time which is crucial for creating sustainable models in informal economies such as agriculture especially for generating decent work and livelihood opportunities to prevent child labour holistically. Moreover, area-based good practices also need stronger interventions for strengthening social and economic empowerment of women farmers and farm workers who contribute to the informal agricultural sector significantly and yet remain invisible.

Despite the imperfections and challenges associated with the above-mentioned good practices, their contributions to tackling child labour in agro-rural economies cannot be undermined. There is no single model that can be replicated from one region to the other but understanding of these models and combining them with other emerging good practices for a holistic approach can yield effective results. The following section focuses on the potential of combining area-based good practices and using an intersectional approach to address some of the various gaps of the interventions for addressing child labour holistically.

4. Moving Forward with a Holistic and Intersectional Approach

The canary in a coal mine metaphor is an appropriate one to understand and address the complex issue of child labour. The presence of children in hazardous work is a clear sign of other human rights abuses and risks for all stakeholders, especially the government and the private sector. Therefore, addressing child labour needs a perspective of including pre-existing risks such as poverty and gender inequality. As described in the preceding sections, the area-based approach has so far been the most widely implemented approach in various forms especially in agro-rural sectors such as cocoa communities in Africa. However, in order to address child labour organically, no one specific model can be replicated to tackle root causes and associated risks that contribute to child labour. Thus, a holistic approach comprised of different good practices such as CLMRS and emerging practices such as Child Labour Free Seal (CLFS) is being used by Global March to address child labour in variety of settings. This is further explained in the proceeding sections.

4.1 Holistic Approach to addressing Child Labour in Agro-Rural Economy

Global March Against Child Labour's suggested approach to address exploitation of children in agro-rural sector is centred upon tackling the issue of child labour holistically, viz., by focusing on root causes, combining proven and emerging good practice area-based interventions at grassroots level with multi-layered advocacy (i.e., top-down and bottom-up) and engagement between all actors from Global North and Global South. Further, the holistic approach combines 'whole-of-supply chain' action with gender as a cross-cutting issue that also allows understanding of the (gender) inequalities perpetuating child labour and more sustainable ways to address those intersectionality as described previously. Such an approach

not only enables prevention of child labour and detecting of weak systems responsible for perpetuating it, but also keeps communities at the center, using area-based good practices such as Child Friendly Village and Child Labour Monitoring System which in turn creates an ecosystem for sustainable and child labour friendly agro-rural supply chains. Further, being an advocacy and network based organisation, evidence and lessons from grassroots work is used by Global March to influence policy implementation and delivery at local (district), national and regional levels, while its access and participation in international forums and alliances is used to inform southern civil society of global developments and put pressure on national governments.

Global March Against Child Labour’ holistic approach : A glance

- Address root causes of child labour (poverty, inequality, illiteracy, etc.)
- Combine grassroots interventions with advocacy at all levels, i.e., bottom-up and top-down interventions, linking stakeholders in Global South and Global North
- Use best and proven area-based interventions on the ground that are community-driven in an integrated/inter-connected manner (i.e., Child Friendly village, Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System, and Child Labour Free Seal)
- Engage and encourage engagement across all stakeholders - civil society, governments, UN agencies, Members of Parliament, children and youth, private sector
- Encourage and represent voices of children and youth from communities
- Use gender as an cross-cutting theme / intersectional lens
- Use whole supply chain approach
- Build capacity of southern civil society working on child labour (towards sustainability) and facilitate their participation in international foras
- Advocate and engage at global and national levels on child labour. For example, for greater allocation of resources to anti-child labour programmes, to address implementation gaps in legal policy frameworks, dissemination of best practices towards knowledge gap
- Influence international agenda and discourse on child labour via participation in forums of Alliance 8.7, International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, etc.

This section elaborates upon Global March’s approach towards addressing child labour in agro-rural areas by adopting the essence of various crucial models and best practices built on the area-based approach in an interconnected manner.

The Child Friendly Village Model - A Child Friendly Village (CFV) is a village or community wherein (after the intervention) there is not child labour, all children are in learning, and key decisions in the community are made keeping the welfare of all children in mind. In a CFV, focus is on community participation and decentralised governance by

forming community groups (Children’s Parliament, Youth Groups and Women’s Groups) that are educated and empowered to know their fundamental rights and advocate for them with the local governments to realise the same. This process of community engagement, in combination with an inclusive gender approach addresses the issue of child labour in an intersectional manner and creates an environment to combat structural inequalities to change attitudes towards harmful norms and traditions that cause violations of children’s rights and hinder community development. The model also fosters cross-linkages with different government departments like education, labour, health, social welfare, etc., and their participation for overall delivery of entitlements, social protection services and access to rights.

A key element of CFV in Global March’s implementation design is a school feeding programme in Uganda used to encourage school enrolment and retention of children using “seeds for education”. Here the coffee farmers in coffee growing regions of Mt. Elgon are engaged in growing food for children to overcome the obstacle of food insecurity in preventing child labour. The school staff is also using the unutilised space in the schools for growing food where children also participate to learn kitchen gardening in their leisure time.

Outcome and Impact of CFV

- Re-enrolment of out of school children
- Tackling of teacher absenteeism
- Provision of separate toilets for girls in school avoiding their drop-out
- Advocating for quality mid-day meals in schools
- Stopping child marriages by Children’s Parliament members
- Gaining access to different social welfare schemes
- Addressing child labour in supply chains such as mica mining

This model has also been used for advocacy at regional, national and international levels with governments as well as with private sector to address child labour.

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An impact assessment of the CFV model implementation by Global March and its sister organisation, BBA in India indicates that the model is overall highly impactful in terms of achieving the main objective which is to constitute Child Friendly Villages to reduce child labour. Almost all villages reported that child labour at the time of the assessment was non-

⁴² Addressing Child Labour in Supply Chains,” 2020. <https://globalmarch.org/addressing-child-labour-in-supply-chains/>. Accessed 15 July 2021

existent.⁴³ Among the villages where primary data was collected, respondents categorically denied existence of child labour while adding that child labour did exist previously in each of the villages and has been eradicated in the last two years. However, it should be noted that though child labour per se may be non-existent, there may be indicators that suggest that the risk of a child falling into the trap of child labour has not been eradicated completely.

Further, partnering with stakeholders such as environment experts resulted in the most engaging evidence of environment protection. In areas around the Mangla *panchayat* (village council) in Karnataka, environment protection trainings coupled with sustainable livelihoods helped in curtailing forced migration and provided local livelihood opportunities to communities with high incidents and risk of child labour. The community is engaged in making furniture and craft products out of a locally grown grass known as Lantana. The grass was infamous for harming soil productivity and poisoning cattle and was therefore treated as a weed.

Child Labour Monitoring System - The CLMS is an active and coordinated process used to regularly monitor and address children in child labour or at risk of it, in a particular defined area (community/district, etc.). Its objective is as a result of monitoring, to ensure that children are protected from exploitative and hazardous work. Designated local stakeholders such as district level officials in the labour department, grassroots organisations and school authorities conduct regular visits to every family and speak to parents and children. Information received from these monitoring visits and discussions is shared with a database at the central level.

Key activities of a CLMS include –

- a. Regularly repeated direct observations to identify child labourers and determine risks to which they are exposed.
- b. Referral of these children to services (education, health, vocational training, etc.).
- c. Verification that they have been removed and tracking them afterwards to ensure that their situation has improved

The model has been used in Ghana to address child labour in cocoa sector, in Indonesia and Philippines in the fishing sector, and in many other countries. Global March proposes using a combination approach which has community participation in it as a key feature. CLMS helps to mainstream child labour in government work by not only enhancing the government's accountability but also supporting its work through participation of other stakeholders. In this way, it also facilitates coordination and cooperation with different stakeholders including local industries and employers not only to share information, but also

⁴³ "Impact Assessment of Project on Creating Child Friendly Villages in India." 2017. *Globalmarch.org*. <https://globalmarch.org/impact-assessment-of-project-on-creating-child-friendly-villages-in-india/>. Accessed 22 August 2021

implement joint solutions. In many cases, it is not recommended to completely withdraw a child from child labour unless an alternative means of livelihood for the family is arranged. Therefore, various other forms of support through a CLMS are also possible at child, family, cooperative, or community level; from the provision of school materials to the establishment of income-generating projects for the smallholder farmers and producers particularly women of the village. Once a child is entered into this system, their exposure to child labour will continue to be monitored, as well as their school attendance.

The Child Labour Free Seal (CLFS) Model - The CLFS model allows companies, associations and informal producing units such as communities and farmers to enter socially responsible markets and promote their products free of child labour. The seal is the first step for an informal production unit to be able to comply with international standards and maintain more transparency as they are directly linked with the government without middlemen or suppliers. The producer community or informal unit has to agree to follow certain standards to apply for the seal issued by the government. Such a model makes it possible for the communities to also access the bigger market to increase livelihood and generate a living income. Being part of the seal increases their visibility making them less vulnerable to being exploited as the seal is directly issued by the government.

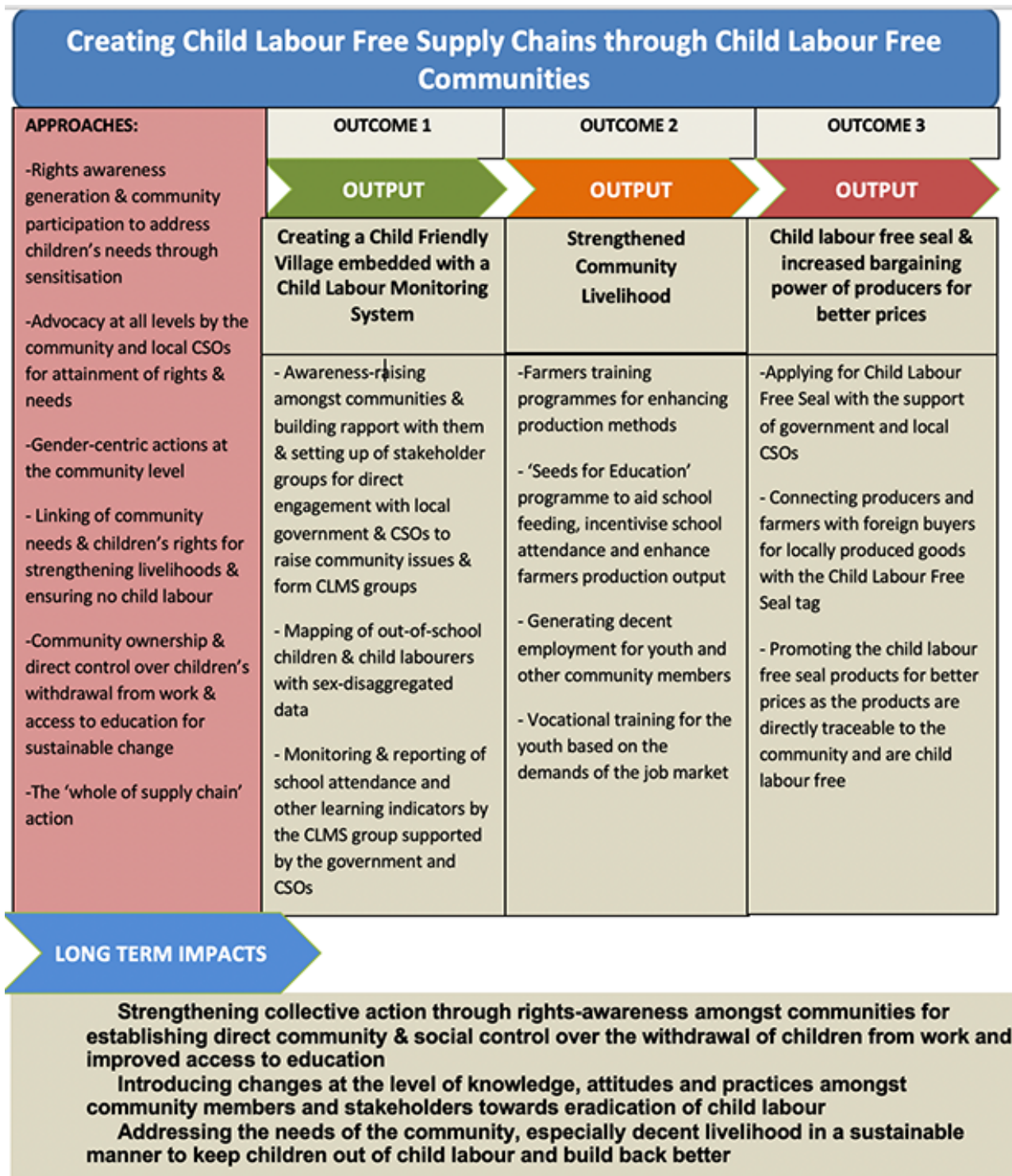
This model has been used in Peru and Mexico to address child labour in global and domestic supply chains of agriculture. When communities apply for a seal to the government they will also fall under a monitoring system of the government for better transparency. The community will then also be directly linked to global supply chains and therefore have better market access and can ask for higher prices. As this is done on a community level, farmers can collectively engage and increase their bargaining power for better prices for their products and also promote their work to attract foreign buyers.

In the case of CLMS, the community itself is sensitised and empowered via CFV activities and keeps a track of the out of school children making them *equal partners in monitoring progress* to ensure there is no child labour which further makes them more accessible and more qualified to apply for the CLFS. This also enables overcoming certain weak points of other interventions such as certification schemes, as they often lack the monitoring aspect. As a community keeps track of the out-of-school children, the records only need to be checked by government officials in order to continue the seal. However, the companies can also have access to such records for monitoring and full transparency of their supply chain so that they are able to pay a fair price to the actual farmer/producer. Further, a company can also use block chain technology to make sure no foreign products are entering their supply chain.

In a nutshell, the rights awareness and sensitisation process through which Global March engages with the community in a CFV serves as a stepping stone for their collective participation and action, enabling them as vigilantes of protection of children. A CLMS group formation gives the community in a CFV, the autonomy to monitor and report the progress indicators of children's school attendance and withdrawal of children from work, with the incentive of getting a CLFS by the support of government and local NGOs.

Eventually, with a CLFS label, such a community in a CFV can successfully sell its products to foreign buyers with increased bargaining power as their community is child labour free, making their product supply chain transparent and traceable. Combining a CLFS with a CFV can also help to overcome the livelihood related challenges often faced by area-based interventions.

The interconnectedness of three key components of the approach, i.e. CFV; CLMS and CLFS with a gender responsive lens has the potential to not only monitor and reduce child labour in agro-rural supply chains but also enhance the income of farmers and communities with the help of the local government and other key stakeholders. This integrated approach is based on years of experience with the constituent elements of CFV, CLMS, and CLFS and is a proven means for reducing child labour and removing children from dangerous working situations. This interconnectedness is further described in through Global March's theory of change below:



4.2 Applying an Intersectional Lens to Effectively Address Child Labour

There is strong evidence that more boys are involved in child labour than girls at all ages. Among all boys, 11.2 per cent are in child labour compared to 7.8 per cent of all girls. In absolute numbers, boys in child labour outnumber girls by 34 million. However, when the definition of child labour expands to include household chores for 21 hours or more each week, the gender gap in prevalence among boys and girls aged 5 to 14 is reduced by almost half (ILO and UNICEF, 2021: 28). Gender based norms rooted in patriarchal division of labour are harmful for both boys and girls, but more girls carry the triple burden (working as child labourers, performing unpaid household labour and being more at risk of remaining out of school). Thus, adopting a gender-based intersectional approach to address child labour is essential to assess the lived experiences of boys and girls differently as child labourers. This means going beyond the much needed sex-disaggregated, age and sub-sector data on child labour to a more interconnected approach that reflects the impact on child labourers and how gender inequality contributes to child labour. For instance, the gendered nature of child-care acts as a key factor for young girls in India to migrate with their families during the season of harvesting of crops such as sugarcane to take care of the household chores and the younger children besides working in the farms. This cycle continues for girls until they are married, to be repeated when they become wives, mothers and grandmothers.

Similarly, the gender-based norms with regards to socio-economic status and working conditions of women also have an impact on child labour. For centuries, women have been pushed to work in lower productivity jobs especially in the informal sectors such as agriculture than their male counterparts. This plays a key role in preventing their right to equal wages and decent jobs which impacts the household income negatively and creates undesirable circumstances for child labour. In Bangladesh's shrimp sector, it is common to find women and children engaged in hazardous work. While girls and boys work equal hours in catching fries for shrimp cultivation, there is a significant gap in their earnings. Women in the shrimp supply chain are also unequally paid. A 2019 study by INCIDIN Bangladesh discloses that monthly income of the surveyed children from Bagerhat, a hub of collecting fries for shrimp cultivation, is BDT 1869 (girls BDT 1487 and boys BDT 2134). Several discussions also reveal that if a man gets 300 BDT for a day of work, a woman gets 250 for the same job, which is greatly influenced by stereotyped beliefs about women's capability and normalisation of low wages for them.

Issues such as access to financial and income related resources as well as knowledge sharing is also limited for women which further impact the situation of child labour. This can be understood with example from Uganda where Global March carried-out research to identify and analyse the issue of child labour in sugarcane growing with a gender lens. One of the findings relates with the lack of tenure of land and land rights by women with consequences of further risks, in particular child labour. In the Busoga sub-region (traditional Bantu Kingdom) in Uganda, the male heads of households from family farms are the owners and inheritors of the land. They dedicate most of their property to sugarcane production, leasing the land to outgrowers and companies to feed the ever-rising numbers of sugarcane

industries in the region. This decision is taken without consultation with their wives (most of the family structures in this area are polygamous), leaving little or no land for the family for food production or economic activities when most households do not have alternative sources of income to purchase the required food products. This adds to the already existing poor socio-economic conditions of women, children and elderly who often face neglect, extortion, exploitation and other forms of violence by their male counterparts.

Case Study - This case study is a part of Global March's research, *Paradox of the Sweetest Crop* on the issue of "Child Labour and its Gendered Dimensions in the Sugarcane Supply Chain in India"

Maheswari and Kavita (name changed) migrated from the Bellary region of Karnataka to Mandya district, also called the Sugarcane city. While Maheswari dropped out of school after 5th grade, Kavita was never enrolled in any educational institute. Both of them started working on the sugarcane farm as soon as they dropped out of school and are now going to be married at the age of 15 and 17 respectively into the family of sugarcane harvesters. When asked why they are getting married early, both of them shared that their parents have to worry about their safety all the time so they will be "given" to a suitable boy and their parents can work peacefully.

Girls like Kavita and Maheshwari are not only victims of child labour but also child marriages amongst the families of sugarcane workers in India. The practice is illegal yet prevalent in districts of states where farming incomes are low and migration for sugarcane harvesting has been a norm. This indicates that child labour is more than just a commodity based issue. The practice does not exist in isolation and poses other risks for millions of children at risk. Normalised structural oppression based on caste and gender is also reflected in practices such as debt bondage, sexual abuse of women workers and burden of unpaid labour on girls and women amongst the migrant workers and their families in agriculture sector in India.

Therefore, while companies using agro-commodities could be taking various steps to address child labour in their supply chains, there is a high probability that their efforts might remain futile in the absence of an intersectional approach that also addresses gender related concerns. In order to pre-assess and address the risk of child labour in supply chains, it is crucial for businesses and other stakeholders to move beyond the idea and practice of gender from a 'tick-box exercise' and a separate labour rights category to gender as a cross-cutting issue across all stages of the due diligence processes and access to remedy as well. Gender based practices of discrimination and exploitation are not only limited to women with respect to the negative impacts and play a crucial role in contributing to the ecosystem that results in child labour.

5. Conclusion

Addressing child labour in agro-rural economies is not an isolated issue. It is a mammoth task with challenges such as high informality, large numbers of child labourers, minimum reach and efficacy of laws and regulation, social protection services, associated issues of poor education facilities and existing gender inequalities. But, it is a task that must be done, and with urgency. The holistic approach of combining area-based interventions with multi-stakeholder advocacy, engagement and capacity building, while centring on communities themselves, provides a hopeful remedy, overcoming some of the challenges found in tackling child labour in the agro-rural sector. Community sensitisation on child and human rights in child friendly village model combined with community participation in child labour monitoring system can address some key challenges of the agro rural communities where often laws and policies may either be poorly implemented or non-existent. Focus on the importance of the right to education of children, together with engagement of parents, children and the school authorities can help overcome the challenges in terms of rural education and school infrastructure and quality of education. The area-based approach ensures that all forms of child labour across sectors are tackled vis-a-vis cherry picking sectors or sub-sectors as per donor's preferences. Additionally, bringing producers in the community together to apply for child labour free seal, improves their bargaining power contributing to better prices and lowering household poverty in the long run - a key driver of child labour. Gender as a key pre-existing risk also needs to be taken into consideration rather than treating as a separate category. It is evident that child labour is a gendered experience governed by patriarchal norms, gendered division of labour and normalisation of hiring children and women as invisible and cheap workers with no agency. As has been said, "it takes a village to raise a child", addressing child labour in informal sectors such as agriculture therefore requires the villages and other such communities to be empowered socio-economically in order to raise children in a child friendly ecosystem with no need for child labour.