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Child Labor in Ghana

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Summary

Child labor has been a pressing issue for many years, with about 160 million children involved in child labor worldwide. Ghana has one of the highest rates of child labor per country in the world, with about 21% of the childhood population in the country participating in some form of child labor.¹ Children in Ghana become a part of child labor due to a variety of reasons, including outside cultural influences, lack of access to quality education, and a lack of regulation regarding current child labor laws. There are several negative consequences that affect children's lives when they are involved in child labor. These include harm to physical and emotional health, lack of a quality education, and long-term perpetuation of the poverty cycle within their communities.² Several organizations operating on worldwide and local scales have made significant efforts to decrease child labor around the world. These organizations often use Community Child Protection

Committees to monitor children in local communities to protect them from harm.³

Key Terms

Child Labor—Employment of children in an industry or business that violates state or federal laws that prohibit employing children under a certain age or in certain conditions.⁴

Worst Forms of Child Labor

(WFCL)—The worst forms of child labor, also known as exploitative labor, includes all forms of slavery and practices similar to slavery; using children in the production of pornography or in prostitution; and using children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking. This definition also includes any work that is likely to harm the safety, health, or morals of children.^{5, 6}

Community Child Protection

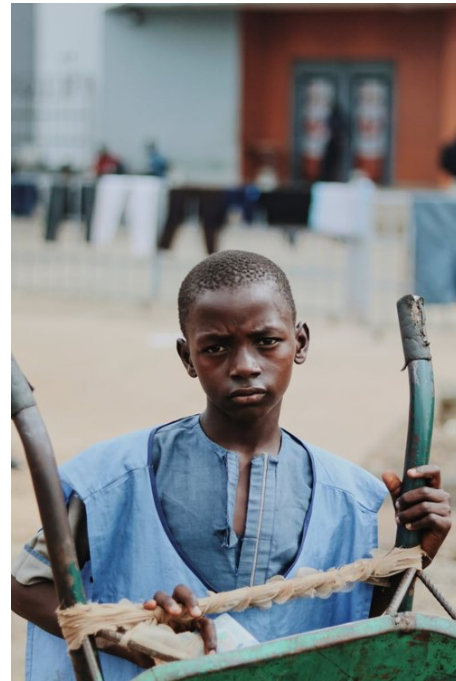
Committees (CCPCs)—Groups formed of local people that are concerned with the well-being of children. They often regulate, monitor, and protect children in their area from harm. Local governments or outside

organizations usually sponsor CCPCs, which are used all over the world. Facilitators typically lead CCPCs from the community who receive training or handbooks from representatives from third parties.⁷

Context

Q: What is child labor?

A: Child labor is defined as the employment of children that violates state, federal, or international laws because of the type of work performed or the age of the child involved.⁸ Ghana has outlined different areas of work that are permitted when a child reaches a certain age. For example, children can perform light work starting at age 13. Light work is work that is not likely to harm a child's health or development. When they reach age 18, children can start doing hazardous work, which usually involves using machinery, chemicals, or exposure to age-inappropriate behavior at hotels or bars. Hazardous work also includes going to sea, mining, quarrying, and carrying heavy



loads.⁹ The worst forms of child labor, which are also known as exploitative labor, include anything that will harm the health, safety, or morals of children, such as using children in the production of pornography, prostitution, drug trafficking, and any forms of slavery.^{10, 11} This brief will focus on children under the legal age requirements that are involved in hazardous and light work in Ghana and not on children affected by the worst forms of child labor.

Hazardous work environments often expose children involved in child labor to dangerous situations, harmful tools, and age-inappropriate behavior. Hazardous situations include those that cause physical and mental abuse, especially in the form of little or no pay, poor working conditions, and harassment.¹² Children experience direct physical harm as a result of child labor and often report illnesses, fatigue, headaches, body aches, skin rashes, stomach aches, and musculoskeletal disorders as a result of their work in harmful situations.^{13,}

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Q: Where is child labor most prevalent?

A: Child labor occurs everywhere, although it is more prevalent in Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, South America, and the Middle East.¹⁵ This prevalence is due to conflicts and displacement, high rates of violence against children, or inadequate child protection programs and systems.¹⁶ Out of all these regions,

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest child labor rates. In 2020, 24% of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa between the ages 5 and 17 were involved in child labor.¹⁷ In Ghana, the geographic focus of this brief and a country within Sub-Saharan Africa, roughly 20% of children between ages 5 and 17 in Ghana are involved in child labor.¹⁸ Child labor rates in countries near Ghana are slightly higher; for the same age range, rates are 22% in Côte d'Ivoire, 24% in Benin, 31% in Nigeria, and 38% in Togo.¹⁹ While Ghana's rates are lower than its neighboring countries, 1 in 5 children are still involved in child labor, which amounts to roughly 1.9 million children in the whole country.²⁰

Q: How have worldwide child labor rates changed over time?

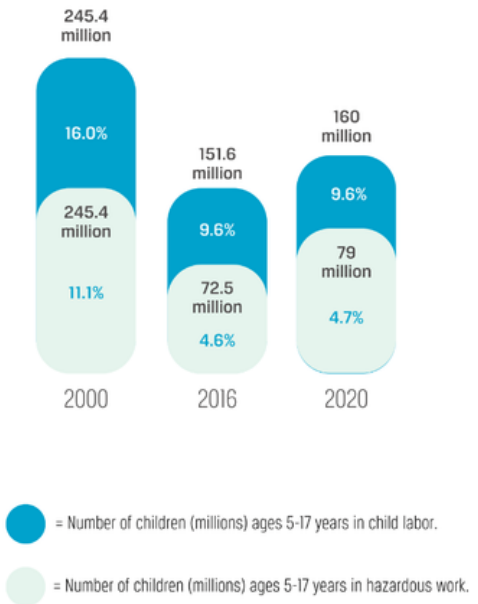
A: Every 4 years, the International Labour Organization and UNICEF publish a joint report that outlines their findings on child labor from the last 4 years. These reports outline current trends and provide future

estimates regarding worldwide child labor rates. From 2000 to 2016, they found that the number of children involved in child labor worldwide decreased from 245.5 million to 151.6 million. In their 2020 report, UNICEF and the ILO found that since 2016, the number of children involved in child labor rose by 8.4 million to reach about 160 million children worldwide. They found that this increase was primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic because lockdowns, school closures, and economic struggles placed more strain on families and led to more children working. Finally, the report warns that almost 9 million more children worldwide are at risk of becoming involved in child labor by the end of 2022 because of an increase in poverty.²¹

Q: How has child labor changed over time in Ghana?

A: In 1998, Ghana’s Parliament ratified The Children’s Act, which outlines the

Global Progress Against Child Labor has Stalled Since 2016



rights of children in Ghana. According to The Children’s Act, the minimum age for children to be involved in light work is 13 years, and the minimum age for hazardous work is 18. Children are also not allowed to work between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.²² Ghana has accepted the International Labour Organization’s Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which prohibits the worst forms of child labor on an international level. Currently, Ghana’s national laws prohibit exploitative work and include age limits for employing children in hazardous and light labor.^{23, 24}

Child labor rates in Ghana have increased slightly over the last 10 years.²⁵ However, in the last two years, Ghana has made moderate advancements in its fight against child labor, including meaningful efforts to reduce the worst forms of child labor through enacting laws, policies, or social programs. Some of the advancements Ghana made in 2020 include increasing the investigation and prosecution of child labor crimes and developing shelters for children impacted by the worst forms of child labor. Although there have been moderate advancements against child labor made by Ghana's government, there are no statistics that show empirical results of these efforts yet.²⁶

Q: Who is involved in child labor in Ghana?

A: Out of all children in Ghana between ages 5 and 17, roughly 21% are involved in illegal child labor, 14% of whom are involved in hazardous work.²⁷ Child labor rates in Ghana vary between rural and urban areas. Northern Ghana is much more rural

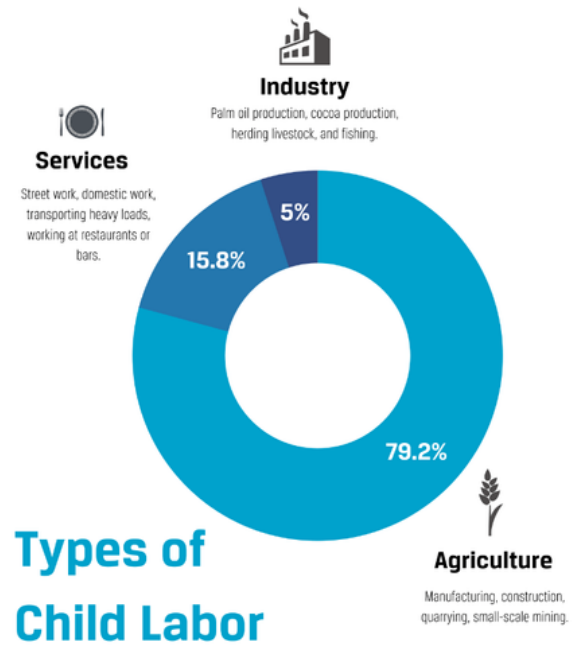
and relies heavily on agriculture, whereas southern Ghana is much more urban. In the north, more than four times the amount of children between ages 6 and 14 are employed compared to southern Ghana. Roughly 33% of children in northern Ghana are employed, compared to 7.8% in southern Ghana. In the Upper West region in Ghana, which is more rural, 44% of children in that age range are involved in child labor to some degree. Conversely, in the Ashanti region in Ghana, which is one region in southern Ghana near Accra, only 3% of children work.²⁸

Q: What industries do children work in?

A: Ghana primarily splits children's work between three main areas: the agriculture, services, and industry sectors. The agricultural sector in Ghana has the highest percentage of working children in the country, with 79.2% of working children between ages 5 and 14 employed in this sector.²⁹ The agricultural sector includes palm oil production, cocoa

production, herding livestock, and fishing. Agricultural work is often categorized as hazardous work because it exposes children to dangerous tools, chemicals, and harmful situations. The services sector has the second-highest percentage at 15.8% of working children. This sector includes domestic work, street work such as begging, transporting heavy loads, and working at restaurants or bars. Activities in the services sector fall under hazardous work because they can cause harm to children’s physical health and expose them to age-inappropriate behavior. The industry sector employs 5% of working children in Ghana. Children in this sector work in manufacturing, construction, quarrying, and small-scale mining, which again exposes them to dangerous tools and situations that cause physical harm. In all three sectors, the work children perform is hazardous because they are under the age of 18, which is the legal age limit in Ghana. Once children turn 18, the law no

longer classifies the work they perform in these sectors as hazardous.³⁰



Q: What is the education system like in Ghana?

A: In order to understand child labor in Ghana, it is necessary to understand the local education system and how it affects the way children spend their time. Currently, Ghana’s education system divides into primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. Primary public education is tuition free, is compulsory, and lasts

until ninth grade. Senior secondary education is not compulsory, which means that children are not required to attend high school.³¹

In 1995, Ghana introduced free universal basic education through its Free and Compulsory Universal Education program. This program removed tuition fees but did not remove fees for textbooks, uniforms, and other supplies.³² In 2017, Ghana implemented a policy known as the Free Senior High School (Free SHS) policy that provides three-year scholarships for students to attend senior secondary schools free of charge. To qualify for the scholarship, students must pass the national senior high school entrance exam, which grants them access to further schooling.³³ The Free SHS policy removes fees to attend senior high schools, which include tuition, books, accommodations, and food. It also introduced a dual-track semester system, which allows twice as many children to attend school in one building. Through this system, students are assigned to a track and attend school for a full semester, which is 6

months long and runs from January to June. Students then have a break from school for the other semester. The Free SHS policy noted that once Ghana's government was able to build adequate infrastructure to support the number of students attending senior high school, it would phase out the dual-track system and move back to a trimester system.³⁴ As of January 14th, 2022, the government announced that it was beginning the process to phase out the dual-track system as outlined in that policy.³⁵ The data included in this brief was collected when the dual-track system was in place.

Contributing Factors

Access to Quality Education

When students do not have access to quality education, they are more likely to become involved in child labor. School attendance and child labor have a cyclical relationship, so when students stop attending school, they

become involved in child labor, which keeps them from going back to school. The accessibility of quality education is a key factor in the likelihood that children will become involved in child labor in the first place.³⁶ In addition, poor physical infrastructure, long travel distances to school, and high monetary costs for families can limit access to school.

Infrastructure

Communities with better school infrastructure have lower child labor rates because the quality of education children receive is higher. Data from Cote d'Ivoire, a nearby country with similar demographics to Ghana, shows that communities with the bottom 20% of schools have child labor rates of about 29%; in communities with the top 20% of schools, only 10% of children are involved in child labor.³⁷ Ghana's dual-track semester system for senior secondary schools was implemented to allow more children to attend school using the same buildings while more schools were built across the country. While more students have

enrolled in school as a result of the policy, the poor infrastructure of the existing buildings affects the quality of students' education. Many schools experience physical building decay, overcrowding, lack of enough school materials, and inadequate hygiene and sanitation facilities. Roughly 22% of schools in Accra, the capital city, did not have clean water for their students or teachers; 38% of schools that had clean water did not have it within the compound, so students and staff had to leave the premises to get water during the day.³⁸ Additionally, child labor rates are lower in areas where the schools children attend have toilet facilities. Rates for children between ages 14 and 17 are between 3% and 4% lower than similar populations when the school facilities have toilets.³⁹

Furthermore, a significant number of students remain that are unable to attend school, even after the changes in 2017. In 2020, 512,000 students applied to school through the Free SHS program, but only 404,000 students were actively enrolled and

admitted.⁴⁰ Of the 108,000 students who were not enrolled, it is uncertain how many engaged in child labor instead of school; nevertheless, the fact that they were not in school statistically increases their chances of engaging in child labor.⁴¹

As a result of the free SHS policy, teaching hours increased from 1,080 to 1,140 hours a year, which has overworked teachers.⁴² Furthermore, the teacher-to-student ratio in schools in Ghana is much higher than the recommended 1:25 and averages out at about 1:42 in senior secondary schools.⁴³ In Côte d'Ivoire, a 10-student increase in a classroom correlated with a 2% increase in child labor rates.⁴⁴ Large class sizes coupled with overworked teachers decrease the quality of education children access.

Distance

Long distances to schools are also a factor that leads to children being unable to attend school. In Ghana, one study showed that the average distance to travel to primary school was 2.5

kilometers (1.55 miles) each way.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the average distance to the nearest senior secondary school is 8 km (4.97 miles) in Ghana.⁴⁶ In order to be fully accessible, schools must be within close proximity to students to decrease the time it takes them to travel to and from school. When students have to travel long distances to get to school, they have a harder time balancing work and school if they are involved in child labor. Easily accessible schools encourage higher school attendance among students and decrease the incidence of child labor. Child labor rates drop about 8% when primary schools are present in communities. Researchers have found data that suggests that child labor is more likely to decrease when children live closer to schools and do not have to travel as far to get there.⁴⁷

Cost

Another barrier to children's education in Ghana is the extra costs associated with schooling. At the primary education level, schools are tuition free but still have costs for supplies that are necessary for

children to attend school. Children may be pushed into the labor force at young ages to help their parents fund their education, or they may be pulled out of school entirely if there are too many financial burdens placed on the family. The average household spends \$57.40 on each primary-school-age student and \$96.55 on each secondary-school-age student annually.⁴⁸ Of these expenditures, 40.7% go toward the students' food, board, and lodging, while 28.3% goes towards registration fees, which the free basic education policy does not cover.⁴⁹ If parents are unable to pay these fees, students cannot attend school, which increases the likelihood that they will become involved in child labor.

Societal Expectations

Views on Child Labor

In Ghana, children working is often seen as a useful way of integrating children into life and endowing them with the necessary skills, experiences, and connections for adulthood. Child labor is also viewed as a critical part of

a child's socialization process as they go through life.⁵⁰ This view is primarily because working instead of going to school provides children with the opportunities they need to obtain skills for employment later in life. Anecdotal evidence from Ghana shows that many Ghanaians view child labor as a positive experience for children because of the valuable skills it can provide them with. Furthermore, labor can give children a cultural identity of their own, as well as a sense of belonging within their community.⁵¹



In Ghana, parents often see certain amounts of child labor as necessary for children's socialization process. This attitude often leads to children becoming involved in child labor at young ages due to the influence of their parents and/or communities.

While there are no specific statistics showing how common this belief is among parents in Ghana, interviews provide a basic description of these beliefs.⁵² Although this practice is common in Ghana, it raises concerns because of the hazardous work environments commonly found when children work. While children need to help out at home and learn valuable skills, parents often put their children into situations that endanger them and lead to further harm, especially when they work in hazardous environments.⁵³

Demand

The cultural idea that child labor is sometimes necessary and helpful for children is especially common in agricultural areas in Ghana. In regions of Ghana where agriculture is a large part of the economy, child labor is in high demand.⁵⁴ Children from agricultural families help out around the farm and are often assigned different tasks to perform to help their parents. Ghana is the world's second-largest cocoa producer, so its primary crop is always in high demand

worldwide. Keeping up with this demand requires extra help during harvest seasons, which usually comes around in the form of children helping their families or neighbors. Roughly 55% of children in agricultural households in Ghana were engaged in child labor in cocoa production during the harvest season in 2019.⁵⁵

⁵⁶ Agricultural areas require more labor, which leads to children helping their families and neighbors to perform their jobs. Northern Ghana, which is more rural and has more agriculture, has about four times as many child laborers compared to southern Ghana, which is more urban. About 33% of children in northern Ghana work, while only about 7.8% of children in southern Ghana work.⁵⁷ While children work in all regions of Ghana, they are more likely to work if they live in more rural areas where there is higher demand for more labor.

Lack of Resources for Regulation

Ghana has implemented laws to prevent and regulate child labor, but there are gaps in regulating these laws that do not adequately protect children. Five offices within the government have different responsibilities regarding child labor. One of the five offices, known as The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations (MELR), is responsible for enforcing child labor laws. The ministry establishes guidelines for child labor-free zones and works to end child labor across the country. One issue the ministry faces is the insufficient number of labor inspectors needed to cover all of Ghana's workforce. There are about 12.49 million workers in Ghana's workforce, which would constitute a labor inspection force of at least 833 inspectors in accordance with the International Labour Organization's standards. In 2020, the MELR employed 62 inspectors—not enough to cover all of Ghana.⁵⁸ Other government offices have roles like

operating shelters for affected children, investigating and arresting employers that exploit children, and educating people on child labor laws. These roles are all important and crucial to the eradication of child labor. However, each office faces similar problems that prevent them from adequately preventing child labor. Lack of funding, transportation, office supplies, office space, and employees affect the government's ability to effectively regulate child labor.⁵⁹ Even though there are laws in place to prevent child labor, 20% of children in Ghana are still illegally involved in child labor.⁶⁰ The government has implemented policies and offices dedicated to eradicating child labor but lacks the necessary resources and employees to adequately regulate child labor violations.

Negative

Consequences

Harm to Physical Health

Since their bodies are not fully developed, children are much more susceptible to physical harm than adults are. Children are often required to perform the same laborious tasks as adult workers without proper training, precautions, or supervision.⁶¹ Since they are more susceptible to injuries than adults are, they are at much higher risk of being hurt when they perform the same jobs that adults perform, especially in hazardous work environments. Although there are laws in place that outline safety regulations and restrictive age limits, officials do not adequately enforce these laws regarding child involvement in the workforce.⁶²

Children often work with dangerous tools that they do not have adequate training or supervision to use.

Rates of Child Abuse



91% of children in non-hazardous child labor have reported experiencing some form of abuse while they are at work



87% of children involved in hazardous child labor experienced abuse.

Examples of these tools include pesticide backpack devices, chainsaws, and cutlasses.⁶³ For example, 58% of male and 55% of female child laborers reported that their work exposed them to knives.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, job conditions can also expose workers to physical harm. One example is the long hours in the hot sun and dusty air experienced by street sellers or head porters. Anecdotal evidence shows that many children experience physical harm as a result of this work: headaches, fatigue, skin rashes, coughs, and body pains. They also chase cars and bikes to sell their products, which can cause motor

accidents that lead to physical injuries and even death.⁶⁵



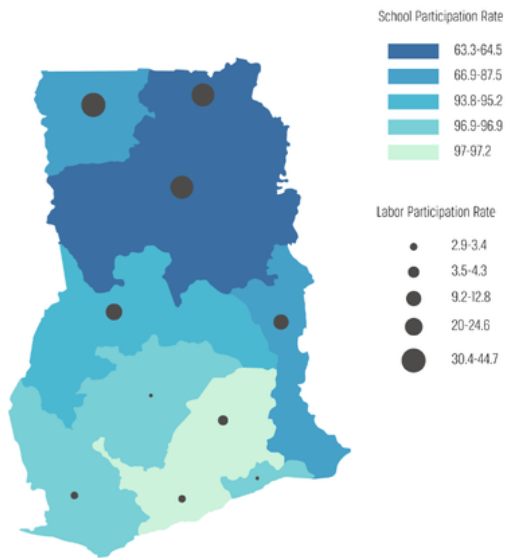
Work in the cocoa industry is categorized as hazardous labor, so when children work on cocoa farms, they perform more strenuous work than street selling. Injuries and illnesses associated with children working in the cocoa industry include musculoskeletal disorders, head injuries, fractures and sprains, skin rashes, eye injuries, and coughing. Body pain is common as well, and many children report having pain in their necks, backs, shoulders, and arms.⁶⁶

Education

Decreased Attendance

When children are involved in child labor, their education is negatively affected. Children either combine working with school or withdraw from school entirely to work. In both scenarios, children remain in child labor and cannot get the most out of their time in school. Child labor often causes children to miss school regularly. According to anecdotal evidence, absenteeism, truancy, and tardiness are common among children who work while enrolled in school.⁶⁷ ⁶⁸ One study showed that roughly 20% of children who were attending school in Ghana were also involved in child labor. Furthermore, nearly 40% of male students and 31% of female students who were involved in child labor were not attending school at all.⁶⁹ When students are involved in child labor while enrolled in school, their school attendance rates decrease.

School Participation Rates and Child Labor Rates in Ghana



Child labor rates and school attendance rates vary drastically when comparing rural and urban areas of Ghana. In rural areas of Ghana, where agriculture is a larger part of the economy, more children are involved in child labor and do not attend school. Roughly 66% of children in the Upper West region between ages 6 and 14 attend school regularly, and 44% of them are involved in child labor to some degree. The Ashanti region, which is closer to the capital city of Accra, has a 96% school attendance rate, while only 3% are involved in child labor for the same age range.

Northern Ghana's child labor rates are about four times as high compared to the southern parts of the country. For nearly all regions in Ghana, there is a strong correlation between school attendance rates and child labor rates. When children are involved in child labor, they cannot continue attending school.⁷⁰

Poor Performance in School

In addition to decreasing the time that children spend at school, child labor also leads to poorer performance in schools. When children combine working with their education, they perform worse academically than their peers who do not work. Fatigue and exhaustion due to working is one of the primary causes of poor academic performance. Students that work 7 or more hours a day had a 10% decrease in test scores at school when compared to their non-working peers.⁷¹ Furthermore, there is a negative relationship between child labor and basic reading comprehension and basic math problems. Children that work outside of school perform worse on

benchmark reading and math exams, usually scoring between 1 and 5 points lower than their non-working peers.⁷² Child labor directly contributes to poor academic performance in schools because of the mental and physical strains it puts on children.

Intergenerational Poverty

When children become involved in child labor, they are more likely to remain in poverty throughout their lives. Child labor perpetuates poverty through generations by limiting their chances for further upward social mobility as they go through life.⁷³ Although poverty itself is one factor that contributes strongly to children becoming involved in child labor in the first place, the cycle of poverty within households in Ghana further perpetuates as children remain involved in child labor. Children in child labor experience lower future earnings as they get older, which impacts what they can contribute to their local economies and negatively affects their futures. The future wages

that children would earn if they did not enter the workforce at a young age are three times higher than wages of children who begin working early.⁷⁴ When children are deprived of opportunities to develop their skills and talents at a young age, they are more likely to remain poor and become more vulnerable to economic struggles throughout their lives. Furthermore, people who were involved in child labor in Ghana from a young age were about 9% more likely to remain in poverty in the future as compared to their peers who were not child laborers. When looking at children that were involved in hazardous labor, that number doubles to 18%.⁷⁵

Researchers found that early child labor exposure created poverty traps and led to cyclical poverty within communities. When children work at young ages, they cannot gain the necessary skills they need to guarantee higher incomes in the long run, which creates situations where future generations miss out on the potential benefits that would have

happened if children were not involved in child labor from young ages.⁷⁶ Furthermore, children whose parents were involved in child labor when they were young are more likely to begin work early in their lives, which further leads to intergenerational poverty. If their fathers were child laborers, they are 12% more likely to enter the workforce than their peers whose fathers did not work. Children whose mothers worked as child laborers are 15% more likely to be child laborers themselves.⁷⁷

Practices

Community Child Protection Committees

The most common and effective practice to end child labor in Ghana involves Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs). These committees are composed of community members committed to stopping child labor at a local level.

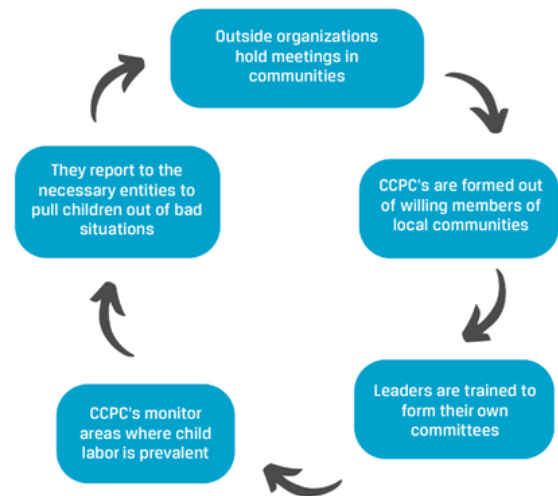
Ghana's government endorses the use of these groups and is actively working with organizations such as UNICEF and the ILO to support the creation and monitoring of CCPCs.⁷⁸ Two organizations, Action against Child Exploitation (ACE) and Child Research for Action And Development Agency (CRADA), are working directly in Ghana using the practice of these CCPCs to monitor, improve, and end child labor. ACE is a group based out of Japan that targets the use of child labor in global supply chains. ACE has been certified by Japan as a non-profit organization and is the recipient of several awards regarding social innovation in Japan. One of ACE's main strategic objectives is to end child labor worldwide. The organization is currently working on projects in Ghana, India, and Japan. In Ghana, ACE has been working with CRADA on their SMILE Ghana Project, which centers around withdrawing and protecting children from hazardous working situations, since 2009.^{79, 80} CRADA is an NGO that is local to Ghana. They focus on the

research surrounding social issues, specifically issues regarding child labor, women’s rights, youth education, and environmental conservation.⁸¹

The SMILE Ghana Project focuses on establishing CCPCs made up of members of local communities in Ghana. These CCPCs are focused on monitoring areas where child labor is happening, conducting visits to homes, engaging with parents, checking attendance of children in schools, and working to understand what is preventing children from being able to attend school. CCPCs are implemented at the community level so that individuals can work with their neighbors, family members, and friends to solve social issues in their own communities. Other interventions that ACE and CRADA use as part of the SMILE project involve building new school buildings, providing support for agricultural skill training, and developing cocoa cultivation techniques that do not involve employing children.⁸² The SMILE project has been implemented in two

villages in the Ahafo Region of Ghana. Together, the two villages have a population of around 900 people, 400 of whom are children. Of these 400 children, roughly 80% participate in child labor, and many are from cocoa farming families.

How CCPCs Are Created and Used



Impact

In their 2018–19 yearly report, ACE highlighted that its efforts made it possible to put 28 children back in school that year. They used CCPCs to evaluate children's attendance in schools and monitored their performance. ACE worked with their

CCPCs to create a way for children in dangerous working conditions to re-enter school.⁸³ Between 2009 and 2019, ACE withdrew 555 children from hazardous child labor situations and provided more than 6,000 children with enhanced school facilities, including new classrooms and supplies. They have used CCPCs to combat child labor in 10 different communities, and 70 members of these CCPCs have been trained to oversee child labor prevention operations independently of ACE. CCPCs have worked at local levels because of the direct involvement from members of a community. They can recognize dangerous situations that children are involved in, remove children from those situations, and continue to monitor the children's involvement in school.⁸⁴

Gaps

Community Child Protection Committees have effectively removed children from bad situations; however, some gaps exist in this model. One problem with CCPCs involves the commitment level of the members of

the committee. Each member needs to be diligent and fully involved with the issue they are tackling. They need to be willing to monitor situations and intervene when they notice something wrong. If committee members oppose the mission that the CCPC is pursuing, its work will not be able to progress.⁸⁵ Another gap within the CCPC model is that these committees do not exist in every region. There is no standard structure or general procedures to follow, which means that CCPCs vary drastically between communities. Many times, urban areas will have more CCPCs than rural areas do. Since members create these committees within a certain community, they are often unaware of other models or methods that other areas might implement in their CCPCs. Furthermore, other than the statistics that ACE has published, there have been very few studies done regarding CCPCs in Ghana. Since they mainly exist at the local level, statistics regarding their effectiveness are hard to come by unless an organization,

such as ACE, is behind the creation of specific groups.⁸⁶

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