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Assessing the Child Labour Free Zone Approach to Tackling Child Labour

Evaluation Report

For Education International

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Produced by DP Evaluation

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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the main Evaluation Report on the evaluation of the Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) approach to tackling child labour, carried out by DP Evaluation for Education International. The evaluation is based on a combination of fieldwork carried out in Malawi and Uganda, online interviews with a range of respondents and a review of documents. This report should be read in conjunction with the two National Reports[1] covering the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the CLFZ approach to tackling child labour. Education International[2] and partners, having been involved in numerous successful CLFZ interventions in many countries over the last twenty years, wish to explore the efficacy and impact of the approach. This evaluation is designed to capture learning and inform strategic planning and funding decisions in relation to CLFZ implementation and how to apply the benefits of the approach at scale. Although the evaluation naturally draws on the experience of Education International and other organisations in numerous CLFZ interventions across a range of countries, particularly Malawi and Uganda, it is not an evaluation of those projects. The focus is very much on assessing the overall CLFZ approach.

The International Labour Organisation defines child labour as: "Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work."[3]

Child labour is a complex problem, affecting an estimated 138 million children worldwide, especially in low-income countries. It will only be resolved through a raft of complementary measures, taken by communities, civil society, governments, international bodies, corporate structures and employers. The CLFZ approach can form part of the solution. It was pioneered in the 1990s in India and has since been applied at the community level with the support of civil society organisations around the world.

The Stop Child Labour Coalition describes the approach as follows: "A child labour free zone is a defined area, such as a village or a plantation, where everyone is convinced that 'No child should be working, every child should be in school!' Teachers, local authorities, village leaders, employers, parents and children in these zones

[1] See Appendix

[2] Education International - Education International is the Global Union Federation that brings together organisations of teachers and other education employees from across the world. Through 375 member organisations, it represents more than 33 million teachers and education support personnel in 180 countries and territories.

[3] International Labour Organisation website

work together to get children out of work and into school. Child labour is no longer accepted because all children are entitled to good, full-time education."[4]

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach to gathering evidence. This included fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda in June 2025 (visits to multiple locations, interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of stakeholders), an extensive document review and a series of in-depth online interviews with numerous respondents who have relevant experience in a number of countries and organisations. The DP Evaluation team comprised two experienced researchers based in Africa and two experienced international evaluators based in the UK.

The evaluation team and Education International agreed five evaluation questions to shape the evidence gathering and to structure the findings. These questions addressed the following aspects of the CLFZ approach: **efficacy**; **impact**; **challenges**; **success factors**; **sustainability, replication and scaling up**. We are confident that the evidence gathering was thorough, that context has been appropriately considered and that therefore the findings are robust.

Typical CLFZ project activities include needs analysis; baseline and endline data-gathering; training of teachers, School Management Committee members and local leaders; multiple community social dialogues and other awareness-raising activities; provision of basic supplies and facilitation of engagement with local authorities. On average the annual budget for an Education International CLFZ project is around €15,000.

Key Findings

1. Efficacy of the CLFZ approach

- The CLFZ approach is very effective. There is strong evidence from multiple sources and multiple countries that the approach works. This includes evidence from our fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda and our interviews with respondents in the following countries: Albania, Belgium, Burundi, Germany, India, Mali, The Netherlands, Uganda and Zimbabwe. This evidence is also supported by other research.
- The Education International model for implementing a CLFZ project represents good value for money, costing on average around €15,000 per year. It is reported to take around three years to establish an effective CLF Zone.
- In the specified projects in Malawi and Uganda (and elsewhere), the CLFZ approach has been very effective at returning children from child labour into education and at retaining children in school. It has contributed significantly to reducing the risk of future child labour and is very successful at bringing about a change in mindset in relation to child labour, the benefits of education and the rights of children among multiple stakeholder groups (including parents, children, teachers, community leaders and officials).

[4] https://stopchildlabour.org/child-labour-free-zones/

Data illustrating the efficacy of the CLFZ approach is captured, for example, in an Education International report on a project carried out from 2021 to 2023 across six African countries. In just two years, in just a handful of communities, 3,025 former working children (1,532 boys, 1,493 girls) were permanently brought back to school and at least 714 children (335 boys, 379 girls) identified as at risk of dropping out were prevented from dropping out of school. School attendance rates increased, with increases ranging from 4.7% in Togo, 6.8% in Mali, 7.9% in Zimbabwe, 10.4% in Malawi, 12.9% in Morocco to 20.7% in Uganda and absenteeism among learners decreased in each project area.[5]

This data was reinforced by figures specifically from Malawi and Uganda and from the testimony of multiple stakeholders gathered during our fieldwork and online interviews:

> *"30% of the school population are children who have returned to school from child labour activities,"* – Head teacher, CLFZ school, Malawi.
>
> *"I was just doing housework… I used to dig for people. I didn't attend school for two years. I was 14 then… now I am 16… my parents are now supporting me to attend school."* – Primary school pupil, Uganda.
>
> *"The project has enabled the teachers to gain more knowledge and skills on how to ensure a conducive, inclusive environment for learners that could enable them to stay at school,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.
>
> *"The CLFZ approach is <u>the</u> approach that works. If you just help families with fees and materials, as soon as your project ends the children go back to work. If you just focus on a specific supply chain, such as tea or coffee, you might withdraw children from those types of employment but they will just move into other types of labour. You have to focus on <u>all</u> children in a community and involve everyone in that community,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

When implemented well, over three or more years, the CLFZ approach can make very significant changes at the community and school levels. The benefits are particularly strong for girls and for older children who are traditionally at greater risk of dropping out into child labour.

Key components of the approach include strengthening community structures, improving the school environment and continuing to raise awareness and spread consistent messages about the dangers of child labour and the benefits of education. To achieve this Education International Member Organisations typically establish data-gathering and monitoring processes, train teachers and local leaders, facilitate community social dialogue, provide some basic supplies, mobilise community resources and energy and engage with local authorities.

[5] Education International project report, 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023'

Most significantly, the CLFZ approach, built on awareness-raising and social dialogue involving all stakeholders, is very well suited to changing mindsets. It is this change of mindset, and the new attitudes and challenges to societal norms that it brings, which underpins the other achievements.

2. Impact of the CLFZ approach

- It is very clear that the CLFZ approach has positive impact in a broad range of ways, including, of course, impact on children but also on parents, teachers, schools and whole communities. It can also have other positive outcomes, such as benefits for teachers Unions, the strengthening of civil society collaborations, influence on relationships with local authorities and sometimes even changes in national policy.
- Many children have been returned from child labour to school. Many children, at risk of dropping out (again) have been retained in school. Teachers have observed increases in attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm for school and improved academic performance.
- There have been particular benefits for girls through the provision of a range of specific support measures, and for older children through remedial classes to help them reintegrate into school.
- Parents have come to value education, realising that it is a child's right and also a pathway to break the cycle of poverty.
- Teachers have benefitted from training, (often their first CPD {continuous professional development}), on child labour, children's rights, improved pedagogical methods and positive discipline. They have also enjoyed improved integration in the community, engagement with parents and local government officials, and a greater sense of satisfaction at the impact of their work.
- Schools have improved the teaching and learning environment, due to: better methods of teaching and discipline; new or improved classrooms or toilets; provision of school materials and equipment to support sports, drama and music; reinvigorated school management; the introduction of feeding programmes and the creation of Anti-child-labour Clubs.
- Communities have undergone a change in mindset, such that attitudes to education and children's rights have fundamentally changed and there is now a belief that children belong in school and child labour has become stigmatised. In many places, attitudes to girls have changed, for example making early marriage unacceptable.
- Teachers Unions have benefitted in terms of increased membership, improved finances, valuable experience in project management, improved public image, better relations with communities, schools and crucially with local and national education officials.
- In some countries there has been an impact on government education policy and practice.

Successful CLFZ interventions can change minds and attitudes in relation to child labour and education. From this, numerous outcomes can be achieved. Most importantly, children are in school in significantly greater numbers, especially girls and older children. They are much less likely to be subjected to inappropriate working

conditions. They are more aware of their right to an education, are happier to be in school and have more freedom to be children, to play as well as learn. As a result academic performance improves.

> *"The children are removed from inhumane working conditions and can (re)start their education. Now we see them smiling at school,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Parents realise that education can improve their children's future prospects. Some parents benefit from their involvement in serving on revitalised SMCs (School Management Committees) or PTAs (Parent Teacher Associations). Some also contribute to the school and community through providing labour to help improve school buildings or feeding programmes.

> "*We now understand the value of education and educated people in the community because they are respected. We want the same for our children in future*," – Father, focus group participant, Malawi.
>
> *"Their [the parents in Paidha and Abanga] attitude towards education as well as child labour has significantly changed,"* – Focal Point teacher[6], Uganda.

Teachers benefit from training on the principles of the CLFZ approach, on children's rights and child-friendly pedagogical methods. Often their first experience of professional development, this can be very motivational.

> *"We have heard from teachers that this was a very important opportunity for them, that they had never had any CPD before and that it had changed their whole perspective on teaching,"* – Education International staff member.

The impact on schools ranges from strengthened leadership and management structures and better-trained (and in some cases more) teachers, to improved infrastructure and in some cases additional buildings, along with new school materials and equipment and support for extra-curricular activities and feeding programmes. Schools become more child-friendly and the entire learning environment improves.

> "*After the child labour training workshops, we developed action plans to establish anti-child-labour clubs, allocate teachers to remedial classes and to work with the school governance structures to sensitise parents about child labour and their children's education. We also constructed four toilets for our children*," – Head teacher, Malawi.

Other outcomes resulting from the CLFZ approach include some instances of positive influence on local and even national education policy and practice, as well as improved image, finances and influence for teachers Unions.

> *"In some countries teachers Unions are seen as elitist and confrontational. This work has really changed that image in the eyes of communities, governments and teachers themselves and has also been an opportunity to strengthen capacity in terms of project management, writing proposals, reporting, public engagement, general project implementation and advocacy,"* – Education International staff member.

[6] A Focal Point teacher is the key contact and leadership person in a school involved in the CLFZ interventions

3. Challenges

- There are (remaining) challenges despite the successes of the CLFZ approach. These can be roughly categorised into four types of (often overlapping or interconnected) challenges; those related to 1) implementation, 2) sustainability, 3) cultural norms and 4) structural problems. Some implementation and sustainability challenges can be addressed directly by Education International and partners. Challenges related to cultural norms and structural problems (such as economic and climate challenges) are extremely difficult to solve and can only be addressed over the long term and often only indirectly through lobbying and advocacy.
- Implementation is, unsurprisingly, not always perfect. In many CLFZ project areas there are still pockets of child labour, either among certain families, or at certain times, or because some children still miss some lessons. Provision may not always reach some groups, such as children with disabilities. In some schools, documentation and reliable monitoring of school attendance and child labour levels remains a challenge.
- Sustaining the impact of a CLFZ project is not easy. Overcoming cultural norms and changing minds takes time and there are often many structural problems mitigating against success. Once the formal project ends, the structures and processes do not continue at the same intensity. The CLFZ approach focusses on a specific area and progress can be threatened by negative behaviours and norms from surrounding areas. The end of project funding can mean that remedial or 'bridging' classes (to help returning pupils integrate) are less frequent. Turnover among teachers and members of school management structures, such as SMCs and PTAs, can weaken the knowledge base and commitment to the approach. Paradoxically, success in returning children to school can increase pressure on infrastructure and staffing levels.
- Pre-existing cultural norms can be hard to change and may persist among some elements of the community or particularly in neighbouring communities and in the country more broadly. Some parents who have low levels of education themselves continue to value the perceived short-term benefits of child labour to enhance family income. In some countries, education can be undermined by traditional dances, funerals etc taking place during school hours and early marriage and pregnancy are still accepted as normal, leading to many girls dropping out of school. Changing minds permanently is a long-term process that may take years to accomplish fully.
- Pre-existing and pervasive structural problems affect all the countries where the CLFZ approach is implemented. These are numerous, deep-rooted and complex, requiring multi-faceted solutions involving many actors, including governments and international bodies. These problems are often major contributory causes of child labour and make the task of tackling it more difficult:
    - Many education systems are underfunded and overwhelmed; not enough teaching staff let alone qualified teaching staff (class sizes of up to 100), lacking classrooms, hygiene facilities, equipment (many children sitting on the floor) and with limited investment in teacher training and professional development. In Malawi, for example, there is an allocation of funding for "inclusive education" but it is simply not enough and is exacerbated by insufficient funding for other areas such as social services and family protection.
    - Economic factors also create other huge barriers such as limited transport and difficult access to and from school, lack of clean water and housing (which deters teachers from working in rural locations). Poverty is often commonplace, especially in rural areas, leading to financial pressures which in turn

mean that families and their children prioritise short term income for food and other basics over education. Some politicians are reticent to support the CLFZ approach as they believe poor parents with low levels of education may not support the approach and will not vote for them as a result.

- These socio-economic factors can be made significantly worse by natural disasters such as seasonal climate variation, earthquakes, droughts and flooding (some of which are related to climate change) in countries which are among the least resilient to deal with them.
- The fact that schools have historically not always been child-friendly places, (under-resourced, teachers not always present, uninspiring pedagogical approaches, regimes of corporal punishment), makes the idea of schooling very unattractive to both parents and children.

Notwithstanding the undoubted efficacy and multiple positive impacts of the CLFZ approach evidenced in this evaluation it is important to acknowledge that there remain challenges. Some of these relate to the implementation of the interventions and others have more to do with the context in which the projects are being implemented and the scale of the problem they seek to tackle.

The challenges related to cultural norms and structural problems pre-date CLFZ interventions. These challenges are pervasive in many countries, some of them are hard to overcome or indeed beyond the scope of individual initiatives. Some of them remain, although reduced, even in successful CLF Zones, and some of them remain as ongoing broader problems beyond the immediate boundaries of CLFZ projects. They constitute a significant element of the context in which the CLFZ approach is being implemented.

> "*I was told by my parents that once I complete primary school, I will not continue with secondary education because they do not have school fees for me,*" – Fourteen-year-old male pupil, in Standard Seven, Malawi.
>
> *"There are some stubborn parents who refuse to acknowledge that education is important for a child's future. They still have a negative attitude towards the project,"* – Local political leader, Uganda.

Even in successful CLFZ interventions, implementation is not perfect, with some gaps in reach or provision.

> *"We worry about disabled children in the CLF Zones who are of school age but simply cannot attend because of access issues, which is a problem that we cannot address directly,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Sustaining impact beyond the active project period is difficult, and it is not possible to ensure that all activities will continue at the same level of intensity. However, there is also evidence that certain benefits do persist, that trained teachers and many local leaders continue to apply the approach and that income generating activities continue to support some key activities.

> *"Our project was interrupted and disrupted by massive flooding in the area. We are now working in a new Zone. It is too soon to say whether the success in the original Zone will endure. The community committee is still functioning and we still have contact with them so we are hopeful. But without funding and the Union involvement activities may not continue at the same level. And the flood waters are still there after six months which is complicating things,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

4. Success factors

- It has been possible to identify and find evidence for around thirty factors which play an important role in the successful implementation of the CLFZ approach. These success factors are consistent with previous efforts to capture the key elements of the approach, such as the Stop Child Labour Coalition 'CLFZ Handbook'[7] and the research carried out for Education International into 'Transnational Best Practices'[8].
- Some success factors seem to be common across contexts; some are clearly more important in certain countries than others and some may not be relevant in certain contexts. There is not always agreement among practitioners on some of the finer details, both in terms of philosophical approach and in terms of measures which may work in one country but which would not be appropriate in another.

It is clear that the success of interventions depends on a broad mix of measures and effective coordination to maximise synergy between them. Not all success factors need to be present and not all apply to all contexts. The relative importance of different factors and the precise nature of the mix needed, varies from context to context.

Nevertheless, the measures which best characterise the CLFZ approach do seem to be the ones which are most universally applicable and perhaps, therefore, the most important, or at least most central. These include: the focus on changing beliefs, attitudes and mindsets (in relation to the value of education and with a special focus on girls in particular); the need to involve all stakeholders in ongoing social dialogue; the importance of the role played by community and other local leaders; the need for ongoing monitoring of school attendance and child labour; the need to improve the school learning environment through teacher training, child-friendly pedagogy, materials and equipment (including for extra-curricular activities) and the provision of remedial classes. These aspects can be further enhanced by collaboration with local authorities and other specific measures. Overall, the success depends more on changing minds than covering costs.

It may be helpful to categorise success factors in two ways, firstly using the headings in the Stop Child Labour Coalition 'CLFZ Handbook' (which loosely equate to the chronological steps in implementing the approach) and secondly by considering what 'type' of factor they are (activity, role, structure, relationship, change, or 'other'). The success factors are discussed in considerable detail in Chapter 6 'Success Factors'. They are listed here in brief form.

[7] "5 x 5 Stepping Stones For Creating Child Labour Free Zones" CLFZ Handbook published in 2015 by the Stop Child Labour Coalition

[8] Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices Research report, Nora Wintour 2020, published by Education International

Start up (preparation and 'project management')

- Activity: stakeholder mapping, issue identification, needs analysis
- Activity: baseline data-gathering (of school attendance, levels of child labour)
- Role: Focal Point teachers, village headmen, community/religious leaders, others
- Role: involvement of the teachers Union
- Activity: ongoing monitoring
- Relationship: local authorities
- Other: inclusive community-based approach; training the project team

Communities in charge (community involvement and awareness-raising)

- Activity: community meetings / social dialogue
- Activity: information and awareness-raising (on benefits of education and harm of child labour) through:
    - community meetings and social dialogue
    - culturally appropriate methods (traditional dance, social 'events' such as funerals, street theatre)
    - door to door 'canvassing' by teachers, local leaders, SMCs, PTAs and Mothers Associations
    - media such as local language radio, using well-known local leaders or local 'success stories'
    - campaign events such as sports/dance/theatre, often tied to national days
    - anti-child-labour clubs (children spreading messages, especially via street theatre)
- Activity: training for community leaders
- Structure: the Mothers Association
- Change: mindset shift (on child labour, education, children's rights, support for girls)

Time for school

- Activity: training of teachers and headteachers
- Structure: School Management Committee, Parent Teacher Association
- Activity: provision of 'bridging' or remedial classes
- Activity: improve school buildings
- Activity: provide school materials and equipment
    - for schools - chalk, books, cleaning materials
    - for some families - exercise books, pens, schoolbooks, uniforms
- Activity: school feeding programme
- Activity: create and equip anti-child-labour clubs (equipment for sports, music and drama)
- Relationship: local and district (education) authorities
- Change: focus on gender equality and special support for girls
- Change: improved school environment

Stronger families, stronger communities

- Activity: introduce new community byelaws
- Activity: support income generation activities
- Activity: support community savings and loan schemes
- Other: help with school fees (in a few rare contexts and only in special cases)
- Other: mobilising community resources, especially parents

The bigger picture

- Activity: engage with local, district and national education authorities
- Activity: engage with significant local employers
- Activity: support for advocacy and lobbying at local level (by teachers and community leaders)
- Activity: advocacy at national level (by Union staff or other organisations)
- Activity: engage with bigger players like ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, major NGOs

5. Sustainability, replication and scaling up

- It is important to consider sustainability, replication and scaling up separately as they are different.
- The overarching aim of eradicating child labour can only be achieved through a range of key actions taken by global and state actors (such as UN bodies, international trade and finance bodies, regional cooperation bodies and national governments) at international and national levels and by major corporate actors. The CLFZ approach, as implemented by civil society actors, cannot achieve this aim and of course it should not be judged in these terms. However, it has a role to play, in fact several roles:
  - it can make a huge difference on the ground to the communities where it is implemented. And of course there are lessons to be learned on how to maximise the benefits of CLFZ projects in terms of sustaining the impact of limited funding for as long as possible
  - the benefits of an individual CLFZ intervention can be spread to other communities through replication, either by civil society initiatives or as part of national efforts to tackle child labour at scale
  - CLFZ interventions can serve as a vital source of evidence and learning for state and other actors in designing policies, and can influence both policy and practice in ways that contribute to achieving impact at scale

Sustainability

- The cost of establishing a CLF Zone is relatively low. When implemented by an Education International Member Organisation, the costs are mostly related to the teachers Union (for staff time, travel etc), as well as costs for training and awareness-raising activities, school materials and equipment and seed funding for community savings and loan schemes.
- With community contributions to activities such as improving buildings and setting up feeding programmes and with the effective use of income generating activities and community funds to support the cost of school fees and school materials, it should, in principle, be possible for a CLF Zone to sustain itself after the initial two-year or three-year funded project period. We heard mixed evidence on the degree to which this actually happens in practice.

  "When a project ends it is not possible to maintain activities at the same level of intensity but with the Union involved in an advisory capacity we have seen, through follow-up visits, that the overall approach is still being applied," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- The likelihood of a CLF Zone becoming self-sustaining can be significantly increased by adopting as many as possible of the following measures:
    - foster a sense of community ownership from the very start
    - maintain the community structures and social dialogue to achieve critical mass
    - train at least one back-up Focal Point teacher, or a local leader or influential community member
    - train as many teachers as possible and provide materials to keep spreading the right messages
    - build capacity of head teachers and community leaders to lobby local authorities
    - lobby education authorities at local, district or even national level to provide material support
    - engage with the local authorities as much as possible, develop exit strategy and handover plan
    - engage with significant local employers

  "We are already doing less now but before we leave we need a proper handover plan, including documenting best practice, building the capacity of the community to lobby the authorities and the setting up of meetings at District level. None of this needs to cost very much and the ultimate aim is to pass responsibility for continuation to local government," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Replication

- Education International could continue to apply the 'recipe' for implementing the CLFZ approach, with sensitivity to context and informed by the findings of this evaluation. There is, however, a question as to whether this is the best strategy overall as it will not lead to the wholesale eradication of child labour and may not be the only or best way to invest funds.
- To complement any future CLFZ work there is also a role for Member Organisations to convene in their country, for example to bring all the teachers in a district together to share learning on the CLFZ approach.
- With small amounts of funding Member Organisations can extend their impact domestically by capacity building through training and sharing knowledge.

  "One way to widen the impact is to use our knowledge to provide training to other teachers. For example, we trained members of our Union to become trainers on anti-child-labour methods," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.
- Education International can play a key role in further spreading the word across its membership, by ensuring that all Union leaders understand that fighting child labour is part of their role, by enabling Union staff to visit successful CLFZ projects in other countries and by bringing staff engaged in this work together to exchange learning.

Scaling up

- There is noticeable agreement among respondents to this evaluation, reinforced by findings from the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda, that the focus for scaling up the work to tackle child labour should be advocacy.
- It is important to document and demonstrate the success of the CLFZ approach, particularly by bringing decision makers to see the impact for themselves.
- Awareness-raising, nationally and internationally, can help to create an environment more conducive to successful advocacy. Education International can play an important role in both awareness-raising and advocacy by convening, and enabling collaboration across its membership and with other global players.

  "Only governments can combat child labour on a national scale. We need to advocate for this and lobby our governments. Education International can support these efforts by convening teachers Unions and reaching out to other organisations such as UNESCO and the ILO to create synergy, avoid duplication and exert more influence," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.
- Some staff at Education International Member Organisations do not seem to have a clear understanding of what advocacy means, in the technical sense of lobbying governments, and sometimes confuse it with awareness-raising. This contributes to an overall sense, formed by the whole evaluation team, that advocacy capacity across the Education International membership needs to be strengthened.

Recommendations

The National Reports make recommendations in relation to the CLFZ projects visited in Malawi and Uganda, many of which may be applicable in other countries, especially at the level of the individual CLFZ intervention. Specific suggestions range from motivating pupils and families (with attendance certificates or rewards such as solar lamps) and providing re-enrolment kits (comprising school uniform, exercise books, pens, and soap) to the increased targeting of employers and the all-important need to lobby and collaborate with local authorities, positioning the CLFZ approach as an investment in a nation's human capital.

The following recommendations are of a more general nature and are designed principally for Education International and partners/funders to inform strategic planning and funding decisions. Education International and partners/funders should consider:

A. Continuing to fund some existing CLFZ projects (to maximise the impact of investments already made and continue bringing undoubted benefits to those communities) and implementing a limited number of new CLFZ projects. The main additional purposes of doing this are:
   - to enable the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and documentation of achievements as a basis for building and sharing knowledge
   - to make it possible to invite staff from other Member Organisations and potential collaborators and in particular decision-makers to witness the impact at first hand
   - to maintain organisational credibility to support campaigning and advocacy work

B. Directing the majority of available funding in this area, and the accompanying strategic planning and delivery effort towards advocacy, to maximise the impact of the very considerable and demonstrable achievements which the CLFZ approach clearly brings and to make the greatest possible contribution to eradicating child labour going forward. In this regard some key areas to pay attention to are as follows:

   - Child labour is a complex problem to which there is no single solution. It requires multiple actions and approaches and the CLFZ approach and the learning derived from it can be an important ingredient in the overall mix.
   - This message is not new and we are not the only ones saying it. Previous evaluations and research projects have come to similar conclusions, including the research carried out for Education International on 'Transnational Best Practices'[9], published in 2020, which makes numerous recommendations to focus on advocacy. The fact that so many respondents mentioned the need to focus on advocacy suggests that, five years on from this research, those recommendations have not been implemented.
   - Education International, supported by its partners/funders, should invest in advocacy capacity at organisational and Member Organisation level and also in using the organisation's international profile to convene and collaborate with other international actors. An overarching advocacy plan is needed as well as a range of national plans. Targeted advocacy products are needed, such as short and digestible summaries of impact (including facts, figures and typical costs and powerful testimony from community members). Carefully framed and context-specific policy calls based on Member Organisations' experience and knowledge should be developed.
   - Appropriate skills and resources are needed to deliver all of this, along with an organisational commitment to give advocacy work the necessary level of priority.

"I would like to see Education International develop and invest in a <u>really ambitious</u> programme to engage with government officials at very senior levels to open meaningful dialogue and use our experience and knowledge to influence their thinking."

– Education International staff member

[9] Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices

2. Introduction

This is the main Evaluation Report on the evaluation of the Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) approach to tackling child labour, carried out by DP Evaluation for Education International. The evaluation is based on a combination of fieldwork carried out in Malawi and Uganda, online interviews with a range of respondents and a review of documents. This report should be read in conjunction with the two National Reports[10] covering the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda.

2.1. Purpose and context

2.1.1. Purpose of the evaluation and the Education International context

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the CLFZ approach to tackling child labour. This means assessing the efficacy and impact of CLFZ interventions and also the limitations of the approach, in particular the question of its sustainability and the relationship between, on the one hand, initiatives driven by civil society organisations (such as Trade Unions and NGOs) and, on the other hand, the responsibility of governments to provide universal education for their citizens. It also means considering the challenging and often complex contexts in which the CLFZ approach is applied as well as other approaches to combatting child labour.

Although the evaluation naturally draws on the experience of Education International and other organisations in numerous CLFZ interventions across a range of countries, particularly Malawi and Uganda, it is not an evaluation of those projects. The focus is very much on assessing the overall CLFZ approach.

Education International[11], has been involved in working against child labour for over fifteen years. Much of this work has been funded by partner organisations, such as Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOb)[12], GEW Fair Childhood Foundation[13] and Mondiaal FNV[14]. *"A commitment to support the fight against child labour and to uphold the right of children to education is in Education International's constitution,"* – Education International staff member.

[10] See Appendix

[11] Education International - Education International is the Global Union Federation that brings together organisations of teachers and other education employees from across the world. Through 375 member organisations, it represents more than 33 million teachers and education support personnel in 180 countries and territories.

[12] AOb - AOb is the largest education union in the Netherlands.

[13] GEW Fair Childhood Foundation - GEW (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft) is a German education union with nearly 280,000 members. Its Fair Childhood Foundation works internationally, specifically to eradicate child labour and secure all children's right to education.

[14] Mondiaal FNV - Mondiaal FNV is the international solidarity and support organisation affiliated with the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) which, with 1.1 million members, is the largest trade union in the Netherlands.

Numerous Education International CLFZ interventions have enjoyed considerable success, and with union funding the organisation intends to continue working in the anti-child-labour field:

> "In 2024 alone, over 1,880 former child labourers have been returned to classrooms in project areas in Burundi, Malawi, Mali, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. 'Education is the most powerful force we have to break the chains of child labour and awaken dreams in every child', stated Mugwena Maluleke, President of Education International. On the World Day against Child Labour (12th June 2025), Maluleke reaffirmed Education International's commitment to the cause, stressing that 'we will not rest until every child, especially the most vulnerable, is free to learn, play, and thrive - safe in the embrace of an inclusive, quality education'."[15]

This evaluation was commissioned in an attempt to capture, and enable the sharing of, learning from a wide range of CLFZ interventions, assess the efficacy of the approach and make recommendations that can inform future strategic planning and funding decisions, in relation to sustaining, replicating and enhancing CLFZ projects as well as how to apply the benefits of the approach at scale, particularly in conjunction with other actors.

2.1.2. Perspectives on tackling child labour

In order to set the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation in context, it is important to establish some basic facts, figures and definitions. It is also valuable to give some thought to the complexity of the child labour topic, the range of views on how to combat it and which approaches might be most effective.

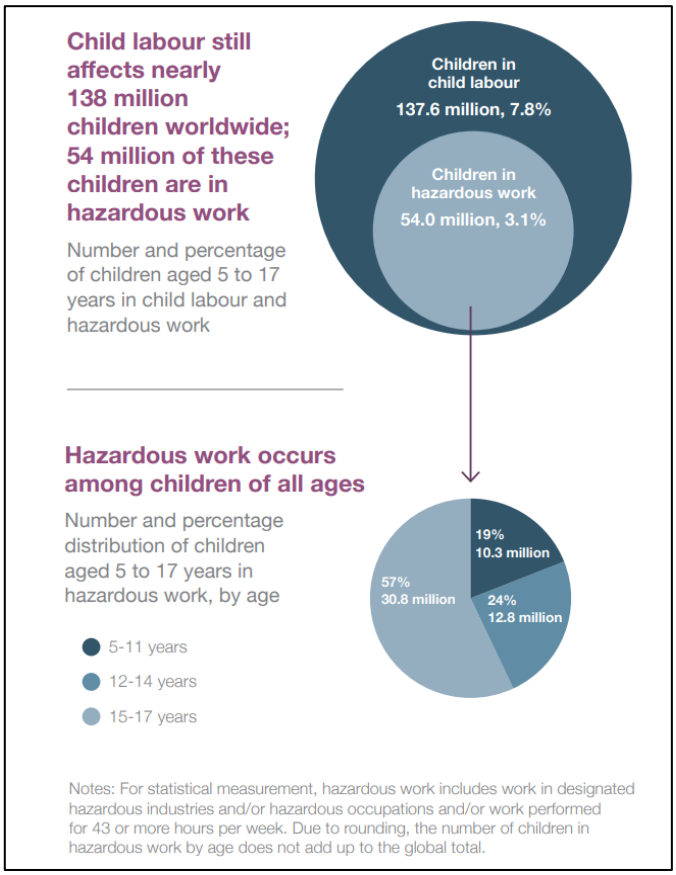
The introduction to a report entitled, 'Child Labour - Global Estimates 2024, Trends And The Road Forward', published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), states:

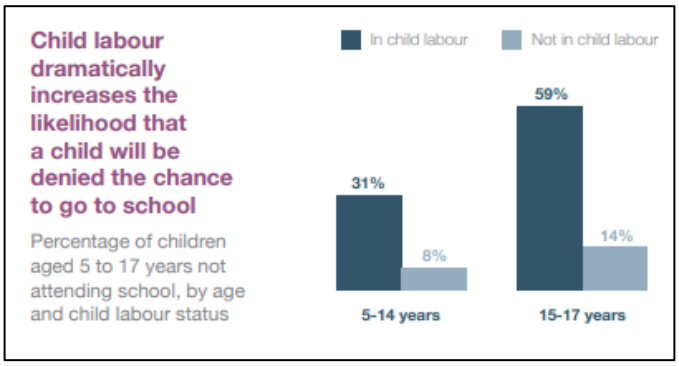
> "Freedom from child labour is a fundamental human right. It is enshrined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998), the ILO fundamental Conventions and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Together, these legal instruments embody a global consensus: No child should be engaged in work that harms his or her health, development or future prospects."[16]

As the report's charts below show, as of 2024, a shockingly large total of nearly 138 million children (roughly 8% of all children aged between five and seventeen) were estimated to be in child labour globally, many of them very young and many involved in hazardous tasks. The report goes on to say that while there is a gradual downward trend in this number, progress is much slower than envisaged by the promise made in 2015, to end child labour by 2025, as encapsulated in Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Even if the current rate of progress were to be quadrupled it would still take until 2060 to eradicate child labour.

[15] Education International webpage 2025

[16] 'Child Labour - Global Estimates 2024, Trends And The Road Forward', Report for the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund; Federico Blanco (ILO), Claudia Cappa (UNICEF) et al, 2025: Child Labour - Global Estimates 2024, Trends And The Road Forward





Child labour often blocks the path to a better future that begins with schooling. Globally, nearly one third of children of compulsory schooling age who are in child labour are missing from class. This compares to just 8 per cent of children of the same age who are not in child labour. For children in hazardous work, the educational toll is even steeper: Nearly half are out of school. For adolescents aged 15 to 17, the incompatibility of child labour and schooling is even more pronounced. Nearly 60 per cent of adolescents in child labour globally are not in school compared to just 14 per cent of their peers who are not in child labour. Despite the obstacles, over two thirds of children of compulsory school age who are in child labour still manage to attend school. This highlights an additional but overlooked challenge, however. Attendance alone does not guarantee meaningful learning. Evidence from countries that have collected data on both child labour and children's learning outcomes suggests that children in child labour lag in foundational learning skills.

Figure 1: Data and evidence from 'Child Labour - Global Estimates 2024, Trends And The Road Forward'

As the graph and supporting text make clear, being in child labour hugely increases the chances that a child will not be in school, especially if they do hazardous work or if they are older, and even if they do attend school the fact that they are in child labour means that they are less able to profit from education, achieving significantly lower levels of numeracy and literacy.

The ILO defines child labour as: "Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work."[17]

[17] International Labour Organisation website

There are differing views on how to combat child labour, as explored and helpfully summarised by Abdul-Rahim Mohammed and Dr. Adams Sulemana Achanso (both of the University for Development Studies, Ghana) in a recent paper[18]. They summarise some of the complexity as follows:

> "Child labour is arguably one of the seemingly intractable and multidimensional human development challenges confronting low-income countries, especially. The complexity of the child labour phenomenon plays out in the varied debates over deconstructing child labour; who a child is; the relationship(s) between poverty and child labour; the nexus between schooling and child labour; the nature of children's agency; and ultimately, the appropriateness of the global campaign to abolish child labour in low-income countries. These disagreements only add layers of complicatedness to an already challenging development problem by making it harder to achieve a consensus on how best to combat child labour. Further, these controversies have polarised the discussions on child labour into … 'absolutist universalists' - those who uncompromisingly want to abolish all child labour; and 'contextualists' - whose main aim is to either tolerate it temporarily or regulate it."

The paper goes on to discuss the "dominant discourse on child labour … [namely] calls to abolish it through rigorously enforcing both compulsory primary education and minimum age legislation … reinforced by media broadcasts of unsettling images of children working in sweatshops, for example." It refers to the key legal instruments that underpin such calls, namely the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)[19], the ILO Minimum Age Convention, C138 (1973)[20], and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, C182 (1999)[21]. Mohammed and Achanso go on to say, "The CRC (1989) is the most widely and quickly ratified convention in the history of the United Nations, perhaps reflecting a universal endorsement at the governmental level [of] the need for the rights of children to be recognised." They then detail some of the arguments which are commonly put forward for abolishing child labour:

- child labour is most common in low-income countries, with children working to ensure economic survival of their family (contravening CRC calls for the protection of children from economic activities), especially to navigate crisis periods
- child labour negatively affects children's education (in violation of the CRC), by preventing school attendance or leaving children too tired to enjoy the benefits of education (literacy, the chance to make informed decisions and participate fully in society, the chance to get a decent job), also making it more likely that they will pass poverty onto the next generation
- children's voices should be heard and their best interests should be considered in matters that affect them but this is often not the case in decisions leading to child labour
- the nature of child labour is often exploitative and/or hazardous, being poorly paid and dangerous, with serious consequences for children's mental and physical wellbeing

[18] 'Problematising the Dominant Child Rights Discourses: Why We Need a Nuanced Approach to Combat Child Labour', Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol. 8, No. 2, February 2021, Mohammed, A., & Achanso, A. S. (2021).

[19] https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

[20] https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138

[21] https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327

- low wages for children can also push adult wages down
- some forms of child labour are dehumanising and degrading, such as slavery, bonded labour and commercial sex exploitation, undermining the child's dignity and self-esteem

Mohammed and Achanso acknowledge that, "child labour is not a straightforward problem; it is both complex and heterogeneous … a multifaceted problem." They also claim that, "proscribing child labour, is no panacea" and insist that we must not, "ignore the context and structural barriers which condition or hinder children's life chances." They elaborate the complexity of the issue by pointing out the following challenging nuances in the child labour discourse:

- the CRC's conceptualisation of childhood and child rights is interpreted by some commentators as not being relevant in many contexts because it does not take into account cultural norms and economic realities
- the demographic make-up of Western societies makes it less necessary for children to work, whereas in other countries, especially in Africa, a much lower proportion of the population is of adult, working age and there is thus more pressure to rely on child labour
- the relationship between child labour and education is not straightforward, in many contexts attending school is not a simple alternative to child labour;
    - in many environments children actually work in order to pay for education costs (school fees, school materials, uniforms etc)
    - the poor quality of the education on offer in some countries, especially in rural areas, (unqualified teachers, poor buildings, lack of materials etc) makes school unattractive
    - in some countries school in itself can actually be harmful if children are verbally or physically abused by poorly trained teachers
- legislation to combat child labour can be counter-productive, for example, "As a result of the [1993 United States Child Labour Deterrence] Act, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association dismissed 50,000 children working in their factories. These children did not automatically enrol in schools; instead, some of them went into more exploitative and hazardous jobs such as prostitution and breaking bricks in extreme weather conditions."
- in some contexts, for example in some African communities, children working is not only part of normal life it is actually seen as a positive element of children's upbringing, contributing to their "physical, mental, spiritual-moral and social development"

In their paper Mohammed and Achanso make some valid points and it is important to be aware of such considerations when assessing the CLFZ approach as a response to child labour. In the following concluding remarks they touch on some issues which inform and characterise the CLFZ methodology (such as the need for a 'multi-sectoral approach' and 'dialogue with local communities') as well as the huge challenge presented by the 'socio-economic contexts' and 'root causes' of child labour, as well as pointing towards the 'comprehensive national policies' which are ultimately the greatest potential levers in the fight against child labour:

> "It is certainly the case that child labour is both complex and multidimensional. The complexity of the child labour phenomenon renders single top-down solutions (such as bans) unworkable. Accordingly, the attempts to combat child labour should be multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary. In combating child labour, it is crucial to understand the socio-economic contexts of child labour… The implication of transferring a decontextualised notion of childhood to non-Western societies has been that child labour legislation in these countries has been more about responding to 'global standard-setting' and less about tackling the issue from a local context. Understanding the reasons why children work, and then addressing the root causes, is a more holistic approach that is likely to guarantee success in combating child labour.
>
> "Comprehensive national policies with strands that promote rural development and the provision of basic social services, access to microcredit schemes to poor households, and the formalisation of social protection programmes are a much more realistic approach of progressively abolishing child labour… Even though the CRC may be of Western origins, in reality, it is the most widely referenced piece of work concerning child welfare. This shows that the CRC still has some level of universal relevance, notwithstanding the debates. Therefore, dialogue with local communities can challenge and alter old norms that are tolerant of child abuses. Tolerant social attitudes towards child labour can be changed by dialogue, and not by government officials ratifying conventions and treaties. Also, dialoguing with local communities can help create child protection regimes that foreground local values."[22]

A 2019 OECD working paper entitled 'Child labour: Causes, consequences and policies to tackle it'[23] echoes some of the above points, particularly the ideas that child labour is a complex problem and that at the policy level there are multiple ways in which it must be tackled – some of which chime very much with themes that have emerged from this evaluation. The OECD review identifies the following steps which can be taken, especially by governments:

- improve the knowledge base
- establish comprehensive child labour monitoring systems
- strengthen social protection
- make school an affordable and desirable alternative to child labour
- improve financial literacy
- address child labour at the workplace
- help businesses identify, prevent, mitigate and address child labour in their own operations, their supply chain and other business relationships

The conventional wisdom has been that child labour is caused by poverty. As the discussion above shows, this is too simplistic; child labour is complex and multiple factors combine to cause and sustain it. However, it is clear

[22] 'Problematising the Dominant Child Rights Discourses: Why We Need a Nuanced Approach to Combat Child Labour', Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol. 8, No. 2, February 2021, Mohammed, A., & Achanso, A. S. (2021).

[23] 'Child labour: Causes, consequences and policies to tackle it' - OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 235, Olivier Thévenon, Eric Edmonds, 2019

that poverty at the level of the family and community is one of the drivers (as has been established by innumerable studies and as is confirmed by evidence from this evaluation). It is also clear that at the macro level of national economies limited funding for education and social protection is also a major factor (hence some of the steps identified in the OECD paper noted above). Poverty and economic weakness are huge problems to tackle so if they play such a significant part in causing child labour, how should opponents go about tackling it?

One approach has been to address some of the outputs of child labour, by targeting the consumers (particularly in the Global North) of items whose production involves child labour. There have been numerous campaigns over the past few decades aimed at 'cleaning up' the supply chains involved in the production of clothing, shoes, fruit, coffee, cocoa etc. While these campaigns are important and have had success in raising awareness among consumers and influencing international legislation and some corporate behaviour, they have certainly not eradicated child labour. When observed on the ground in producer countries, the unintended outcome of focussing on specific supply chains has often been that, while child labour may be reduced in a particular industry, the child workers simply move into another area of work. And of course this approach does nothing to address the child labour involved in subsistence farming or excessive household domestic work, both of which do not involve supply chains and nevertheless account for a great deal of child labour.

In the early 1990s, the MV Foundation[24], an NGO in India, began to challenge the idea that child labour is caused by poverty alone:

> "Rather, [MV Foundation] the pioneers of the CLFZ approach argued that deep-rooted societal norms, poorly-functioning schools, and ineffective government policies were the main reasons that children were not attending school. Instead of focusing on children who were working in a specific supply chain, such as clothing factories, CLFZ proponents decided to focus their efforts on a discrete geographical area and work to ensure that all children in this area attend school."[25]

> "MV Foundation 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 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. Parents, children and entire communities need to know their basic rights, so they can actively stand against child labour and demand education for their children. This will boost their confidence, and will change the attitude of passively waiting for poverty to end."[26]

[24] MV Foundation

[25] 'The Cost and Effectiveness of Three Approaches to Eliminating Child Labor in the Ugandan Coffee Sector', Deanna Newsom et al (Aid Environment) for Rainforest Alliance, June 2021

[26] "5 x 5 Stepping Stones For Creating Child Labour Free Zones" CLFZ Handbook published in 2015 by the Stop Child Labour Coalition coordinated by Hivos, and comprising the Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOb), FNV Mondiaal, Hivos, the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), ICCO Cooperation and Kerk in Actie, Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland and local organisations in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The CLFZ approach, pioneered by MV Foundation has now been implemented around the world, by multiple civil society organisations such as NGOs and Trade Unions. The Stop Child Labour Coalition has developed a handbook (cited above) describing how to implement the approach. They define a CLF Zone as follows:

> "A child labour free zone is a defined area, such as a village or a plantation, where everyone is convinced that 'No child should be working, every child should be in school!' Teachers, local authorities, village leaders, employers, parents and children in these zones work together to get children out of work and into school. Child labour is no longer accepted because all children are entitled to good, full-time education."[27]

A study[28] for the Rainforest Alliance (carried out between 2017 and 2020 and also focusing on projects in Uganda) explored the effectiveness of the CLFZ approach. It compared different versions of the model (more and less intense interventions) and compared them with a different approach based on boosting family income through support for enhanced farming techniques, monitored by an annual certification inspection. The study found that, while more expensive, the high-intensity intervention was more effective at reducing child labour. It also endorsed, "the core CLFZ principle of including the entire community, including schools, local governments and households, in project activities regardless of their participation in a single supply chain (in this case coffee)".

One final aspect of the context in which this evaluation was commissioned and which is important to bear in mind is the current funding environment for development work in general. In the last few years there have been massive cuts to aid budgets around the world, most notably in the United States and also in many European countries including the UK, Germany, France and the Netherlands. These cuts have seen funding removed for a great many projects and Education International and partners are not immune to the impact of this situation. Furthermore, development funding tends to have fashions or trends just like many other sectors and we have heard that tackling child labour is 'currently not at the top of the list', making decisions on how to allocate available funding even more critical.

2.2. Evaluation approach (methodology, selected projects, report structure)

Approach and methodology

DP Evaluation were appointed in May 2025 to undertake this evaluation, having previously worked on another major evaluation with Education International. Alasdhair Collins and Dörte Pommerening have a background in the international development, education and environmental sectors and have worked as DP Evaluation consultants for the past twenty years for organisations across Europe on projects around the world. In order to carry out this evaluation as effectively as possible it was decided to recruit two African evaluators to carry out the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda. As well as significantly reducing the carbon footprint of the evaluation by

[27] https://stopchildlabour.org/child-labour-free-zones/

[28] 'The Cost and Effectiveness of Three Approaches to Eliminating Child Labor in the Ugandan Coffee Sector', Deanna Newsom et al (Aid Environment) for Rainforest Alliance, June 2021

limiting travel, this had the important advantage of benefitting from relevant experience of the cultural, economic and political operating contexts in Malawi and Uganda as well as from expertise in carrying out fieldwork and research in the sector. The involvement of African evaluators also increased the likelihood of genuine engagement from the full range of stakeholders.

Joshua Wakabi and Michael Nangulu were commissioned to carry out the fieldwork and write National Reports on Malawi and Uganda respectively. Both are based in Uganda, with wide experience of research, evaluation and policy in the relevant countries across topics such as gender, education, value chains, economic empowerment and young people in rural communities.

The following evaluation questions were agreed between the evaluation team and Education International to inform the project design and the structure of this report:

1. Efficacy of the CLFZ approach: How effective has the CLFZ approach in the specified projects been at returning children to, and retaining children in, education and preventing future child labour?
2. Impact of the CLFZ approach: What has been the impact on the local communities, what benefits have been enjoyed by children, parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole?
3. Remaining challenges: What challenges still remain in those communities in relation to child labour, what gaps are there in the overall impact and have there been any unexpected outcomes?
4. Success factors: In relation to the positive impact and benefits identified, what have been the key success criteria, what has worked and why?
5. Sustainability, replication and scaling up: How can successes be sustained, replicated and scaled-up?

For all these questions the intention was that the evaluation should be especially informed by the experience in Malawi and Uganda but that wider learning should also be captured that can inform future planning and decision making.

A mixed methods approach was taken to evidence and data gathering[29], combining fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda with a review of documentation and a series of in-depth online interviews with respondents who have experience of the CLFZ approach in a wide range of countries and contexts over the last twenty years or more. The evaluation team designed a set of materials to guide the data gathering, including semi-structured interview and focus group guides, templates for the national reports and a list of possible success factors to stimulate discussion.

The fieldwork undertaken concurrently in Malawi and Uganda consisted of approximately a week of visits in each country in late June 2025 to project locations, especially schools, interviews and focus group discussions with an extensive range of stakeholders, including children, parents, teachers, community leaders, local officials,

[29] See Appendix for list of respondents who took part in online interviews and a list of documents reviewed. The participants in interviews and focus groups in Malawi and Uganda are detailed in the National Reports.

Education International Member Organisation staff and others. Online interviews of between 45 and 90 minutes each were carried out between June and September 2025 and several discussion sessions were held between the evaluation team and Education International at various points to consider emerging findings and refine further data gathering.

The evaluation team is confident that the data and evidence gathering was completed in a satisfactory and thorough manner across all methods[30], that contexts were taken into account and that triangulation was undertaken wherever possible. We are therefore confident that the findings presented in this report are robust.

The selected projects in Malawi and Uganda

Education International identified Malawi and Uganda as the focus countries for data gathering to inform the evaluation since there have been significant interventions in both countries over a number of years, with some considerable success and the potential for very useful learning.

In Malawi:

Education International Member Organisations TUM (Teachers Union of Malawi) and PSEUM (Private Schools Employees Union of Malawi) implemented two CLFZ projects in 2019-2020 and 2021-2023 in the Kabwinja and Chigudu areas (in Dowa district). They are currently implementing a similar project in Salima district. The projects led to significantly improved education access, reduced child labour, and strengthened community engagement in promoting children's rights and education. A total of 1,971 children (1,022 boys, 949 girls) were removed from child labour and returned to school during the Chigudu project. Additionally, 714 children at risk of dropping out were retained in school through counselling and support services. The project led to improved infrastructure, including renovated classrooms, new toilets, and to the appointment of new teachers and the introduction of a school feeding program. Innovative learning approaches enhanced the education experience and the project increased community awareness of the differences between child labour and child work, resulting in fewer child labour cases. The project empowered local education structures, resulting in better accountability from education authorities and the adoption of 31 byelaws supporting children's education which contributed to increased enrolment and attendance.[31]

[30] See National Reports for descriptions of minimal limitations on evidence gathering during the fieldwork.

[31] Adapted from Education International's description of the project in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation.

Figure 2: Chigudu primary school, Malawi

Joshua Wakabi shared the following impressions of the project in a debrief session immediately following his fieldwork. *"The communities in Chigudu are very traditional, with deeply entrenched hierarchical leadership structures. This informs the way in which project activities have been implemented. Although there is a change in personnel in the School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations every three years, meaning some of the people I met are relatively new, there was a good understanding of the CLFZ project activities and communications. The Focal Point teachers in each school have been trained and are taking very important leading roles, for example in the anti-child-labour clubs.*

"Large numbers of children have been returned to school; the initial planning was for three hundred but in fact two thousand have come back. It was humbling to see fourteen and fifteen year olds in primary school, having returned to education and in grades intended for much younger children. Parents have really contributed to make it possible to deal with the extra numbers of children now in school, for example in one school they have helped build three extra classrooms.

"There seems to be a real understanding of the importance of education. Children seem to really appreciate the school materials. Both parents and children referred to poverty and conceded that they still sometimes have to work. A seasonal school feeding programme has been set up. Teacher Union staff feel that the project has been cost-effective and that it has had a positive impact on government officials in relation to tackling child labour."

<u>In Uganda:</u>

Education International Member Organisation UNATU (Uganda National Teachers' Union) has been running projects to combat child labour in several areas of the country since 2015, (sometimes in partnership with NGOs or private companies) including in Erussi sub-county, in the Nebbi district and Paidha and Abanga sub-counties in the Zombo district (both districts being in the West Nile sub-region). All these projects revolve around the

development of child labour free zones. All have been successful, in terms of returning former child workers to school, preventing them from dropping out and developing dialogue at school. The field visit focussed on the Erussi project that began on the ground in 2015, the effects of which are still ongoing, and on the Paidha and Abanga CLF Zones where work started in 2018 with UNATU. The Final Report for the period 2014-2017 described the early work, in collaboration with local NGO CEFORD and a local coffee company, and reported that 1,640 children were withdrawn from child labour, 988 were prevented from falling into child labour and school enrolment increased from 79.8% to 97.8%. The Final Report 2021–2023 for UNATU's work in Uganda records that the project start was delayed by nearly a year due to Covid. Nevertheless 205 children were removed from child labour and brought back to school during the project period and across the seven schools where data were collected the aggregate enrolment increased by 597.[32]

Michael Nangulu shared the following impressions of the project in a debrief session immediately following his fieldwork. *"The project in Erussi has been running for ten years so of course some of the original stakeholders have moved on. The projects in Erussi and Paidha have great potential for sustainability, although of course there are some gaps here and there. The local coffee company is committed to tackling child labour in its supply chain and having engaged early on with UNATU, after a break is now actively involved again. Local leaders have made great efforts to enact byelaws on child labour and education but these have not yet been passed into law. There is some confusion in relation to byelaws, with community leaders and District officials having a different understanding of the situation, meaning that rules are being enforced locally even though they have no legal status.*

"It is important to understand the cultural context - for example, although in Uganda men are supposed to 'take care' of women, it has traditionally been the case in Erussi that the women did the vast bulk of the work, including looking after children, while many men simply sat around drinking. However, the CLFZ project has brought change and the new watchword is 'I am my brother's keeper', meaning that adults share responsibility for ensuring that children are in school.

"Parents have generally accepted the importance of education and that as parents they should make a contribution to improving the school environment. The community dialogues that have taken place seem to have addressed the poverty argument in principle although practical challenges remain. During anti-child-labour week there are apparently very good events, such as marches and street theatre, to which schools contribute and which villagers say have really made a difference."

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The projects in Malawi and Uganda have been running for different amounts of time and have come under different funding packages over the years. To gain a sense of the child labour programme objectives, CLFZ project activities, achievements and costs it is most helpful to look at the project implementation period of July

[32] Compiled from: Education International's description of the project in the Terms of Reference for this evaluation; Final Report, 'Out of Work and Into School - Joint Efforts Towards Child Labour Free Zones', Stop Child Labour Coalition, September 2017 (only available online in French); and Education International's project report 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023'.

2021 to November 2023 in Africa, for which there is an easy to interpret, comprehensive set of information. The Education International Project, entitled 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education' covered work in Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe and was funded by AOb, Mondiaal FNV and GEW Fair Childhood Foundation with a budget of €248,409.

The Final Report 2021–2023 for this project shows that this budget was spent out, that activities were undertaken in 67 schools and that numerous project objectives were achieved, with the headline outcomes being that 3,025 former working children were permanently brought back to school and at least 714 children identified as at risk of dropping out were retained in school. Project outcomes and impact are discussed further in Chapter 3 'Efficacy' and Chapter 4 'Impact'.

Typical CLFZ project activities include needs analysis; baseline and endline data-gathering; training of teachers, School Management Committee members and local leaders; multiple community social dialogues and other awareness-raising activities; provision of basic supplies and facilitation of engagement with local authorities. On average the annual budget for an Education International CLFZ project is around €15,000. A typical activity list for a CLFZ project can be seen in the Appendix. There is further discussion of project activities in the following chapters, particularly Chapter 6 'Success Factors'.

Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. There is a chapter on each of the evaluation questions, divided into various sections. The numbered *Findings*[33] in each section are based mainly on the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda (although some relate to other countries and some are more general – more detail about the interventions in Malawi and Uganda can be found in the National Reports). The *Discussion* paragraphs in each section explore some of the findings in more detail. The *Further Discussion* sections at the end of each chapter present evidence from elsewhere and/or discuss topics more broadly. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations and is followed by an Appendix which includes a list of respondents, a list of documents reviewed, a typical project activity list and the two National Reports.

[33] The numbering of Findings is based on Chapters rather than sections. For example, the Findings in Chapter 3 'Efficacy' are numbered 3.1 through 3.7 and those in Chapter 4 'Impact' are numbered 4.1 through 4.31.

3. Efficacy of the CLFZ approach

How effective has the CLFZ approach in the specified projects been at returning children to, and retaining children in, education and preventing future child labour?

Findings

3.1. The CLFZ approach is very effective. There is strong evidence from multiple sources and multiple countries that the approach works. This includes evidence from our fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda, our interviews with respondents in a range of countries (from Education International, Education International Member Organisations and beyond – in Albania, Belgium, Burundi, Germany, India, Mali, The Netherlands, Uganda and Zimbabwe) and from existing documentation (project reports, research, media stories etc). The various aspects of the efficacy of the CLFZ approach are discussed in this chapter.

3.2. The Education International model for implementing a CLFZ project represents good value for money, costing on average around €15,000 per year. It is reported to take around three years to establish an effective CLF Zone, with significant improvements in the numbers of children being returned from work to school and retained in education despite being at risk of dropping out along with changes in mindset across the community and with functioning community and school structures and improved school infrastructure and learning environment.

3.3. However, the CLFZ approach is not a panacea. It is not a perfect solution and some child labour still remains in project areas. There are also massive structural challenges in many countries (economic, political, infrastructure, limited access, climate etc) as well as persisting cultural norms. Furthermore, and importantly, there is a question over the sustainability of the undoubted impact achieved. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 5 'Remaining Challenges'.

3.1. Returning children to school

Findings

3.4. In the specified projects in Malawi and Uganda (and elsewhere), the CLFZ approach has been very effective at returning children from child labour into education, in some cases in very large numbers.

In Malawi for the period July 2021-November 2023 the baseline study carried out at the beginning of the project showed that in Chigudu 9,579 children out of a population of school age children of 11,291 were attending school (84.8%). The endline study in October 2023 showed that 11,178 children out of a population of 11,438 were attending school (97.7%). This is a significant increase. A total of 1,971 children (1,022 boys, 949 girls) were removed from work and brought back to formal schooling.[34]

[34] Figures for Malawi from Education International project report, 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023'

In Uganda, for the period 2014-2017, 1,640 children were withdrawn from child labour, and school enrolment increased from 79.8% to 97.8%. Between June 2022 and November 2023, 205 children (107 boys and 98 girls) were removed from child labour and brought back to school. In the seven schools where data were collected the aggregate enrolment increased by 597.[35]

Discussion

In Malawi:

Enrolment surged in the project zone, with one head teacher estimating that about *"30% of the school population"* at a CLFZ school consisted of children who had returned from child labour in the community.

The CLFZ approach placed special emphasis on getting adolescent girls and other vulnerable children back into school. Community members noticed that many girls had left school for early marriage or motherhood, and older children often dropped out to work. A female village headman in Chigudu highlighted this focus: *"We had a policy of targeting girls for readmission in school. Many of them had simply dropped out, had been married or given birth"*.

In Uganda:

The CLFZ project has contributed to a significant reduction in child labour, particularly in coffee-related activities. This positive trend was widely acknowledged by teachers, representatives of PTAs (Parent Teacher Associations) and SMCs (School Management Committees), education officials, and political leaders. As a result, schools have seen a noticeable increase in school enrolment, with children returning to school and new learners attracted by the improved school environment. One former primary school head teacher in Erussi reported an increase of more than 100% over a couple of years *"…the enrolment was only 300... Last year, it reached 700."* Similarly, a Focal Point[36] teacher in Paidha also pointed out that they have seen an increase in the enrolment *"…right now, enrolment is 1,000, yet earlier it used to be around 400 to 500. So the numbers have been growing…"*

One child from Erussi Primary school explained: *"I was just doing housework… I used to dig for people. I didn't attend school for two years. I was 14 then… now I am 16… my parents are now supporting me to attend school."*

[35] Figures for Uganda from Final Report, 'Out of Work and Into School - Joint Efforts Towards Child Labour Free Zones', Stop Child Labour Coalition, September 2017 and Education International project report, 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023'

[36] A Focal Point teacher is the key contact and leadership person in a school involved in the CLFZ interventions

3.2. Retaining children in school

Findings

3.5. In the specified projects in Malawi and Uganda (and elsewhere), the CLFZ approach has been very effective at retaining children in school.

In Malawi for the period July 2021-November 2023, 714 children (335 boys, 379 girls) identified as at risk of dropping out had been prevented from dropping out thanks to counselling services facilitated by trained teachers in the schools, provision of afternoon remedial classes and the project's direct education support (provision of school materials such as exercise books, pens, pencils, school bags and school uniforms.)[37]

In Uganda for the period 2014-2017, 988 were prevented from falling into child labour.[38]

Discussion

In Malawi:

Multiple support systems were implemented to retain children in school, particularly those vulnerable to leaving again due to economic pressures or other risk factors (such as cultural norms, early marriage, pregnancy etc). As a result, many children who re-enrolled were successfully retained in school full-time, and general dropout rates in the CLFZ communities declined. The key measures that contributed to retention were the provision of induction and orientation sessions and then ongoing remedial classes for returning children, ongoing monitoring of attendance, the provision of school materials (such as books, pens, uniforms) and improving the school environment through the creation of anti-child-labour clubs which included fun activities such as sports, drama and music and the reduction of abusive behaviours and corporal punishment by teachers. "*We trained teachers on child labour and alternative forms of discipline. We encouraged them to ensure that children love attending school*" – TUM Programme Coordinator.

In Uganda:

Similarly, in Uganda, fieldwork has shown that various factors have contributed to retaining children in school, in particular creating a child-friendly environment at school through the inclusion of sports, music and drama (supported by the provision of equipment) and the encouragement of more engaging pedagogical approaches and the reduction of corporal punishment, along with measures to counter specific barriers such as hunger (through feeding programmes) and supporting schools to tackle menstrual health and hygiene challenges. As a UNATU project officer *said "…the project has enabled the teachers to gain more knowledge and skills on how to ensure a conducive, inclusive environment for learners that could enable them to stay at school."*

[37] Figures for Malawi from Education International project report, 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023'

[38] Figures for Uganda from Final Report, 'Out of Work and Into School - Joint Efforts Towards Child Labour Free Zones', Stop Child Labour Coalition, September 2017

3.3. Preventing or reducing the risk of future child labour

Findings

3.6. In the specified projects in Malawi and Uganda (and elsewhere), the CLFZ approach has also contributed significantly to reducing the risk of future child labour.

Discussion

In Malawi:

The existence of the project has contributed significantly towards breaking the cycle of child labour for the future through a combination of changing knowledge and attitudes, developing and enforcing local 'byelaws' through community surveillance, cracking down on early marriage, targeting local employers and arming children themselves with knowledge about child labour, their rights and the benefits of education. The fieldwork showed that before the project, many villagers did not even understand the concept of child labour or saw it as a normal part of life but that this has now changed significantly and is reinforced through an institutionalization of anti-child-labour norms at the village level.

In Uganda:

The effect of the project in Uganda has been similar in terms of reducing the risk of future child labour. Understanding of child labour has been transformed, as one School Management Committee chairperson of Oboth Primary School, Erussi explained, *"...in the past, people never knew what constituted child labour. But through sensitisation, even the children now know. They know that when they do a certain category of work and it interferes with their school, it is child labour…".* This has been supported by community-based monitoring of school attendance, by ongoing awareness-raising and (some) progress towards a legally enforceable local byelaw on child labour. A local employer, Kyagalanyi Coffee Limited has adopted anti-child-labour policies, awarding bonusses to farmers who do not employ children.

3.4. Achieving a change in mindset

Findings

3.7. There is strong evidence, from the specified projects in Malawi and Uganda (and elsewhere), that the CLFZ approach is very successful at bringing about a change in mindset in relation to child labour, the benefits of education and the rights of children among multiple stakeholder groups (including parents, children, teachers, community leaders and officials).

Discussion

All the benefits discussed above, both in Malawi and Uganda have been fundamentally underpinned by bringing about a change of mindset among multiple stakeholders in the community. An understanding of child-labour, the distinction between child labour and acceptable child work (such as household chores that do not interfere

with schooling), the realisation of the benefits of education and how it can help to break the cycle of poverty and a growing acceptance of the concept of children's rights have all been fundamental in changing attitudes towards child labour and to changing behaviour.

This change in mindset has been brought about by targeting all stakeholders in the community (traditional, religious and community leaders, teachers, parents, children) with appropriate and varied awareness-raising activities, from social dialogue meetings, training, traditional street theatre, home visits, radio shows, campaigning events (such as Child Labour Free Week) and so on. Local structures, such as PTAs, SMCs and Mothers Associations were brought into this effort and in some cases local officials (such as education officers and police) were also included.

The fieldwork threw up a lot of evidence of the extent and importance of this changed mindset in the projects in both Malawi and Uganda, with perhaps the most important element being the community ownership of the message – that the message has been internalized and owned by the community. It is no longer an external organisation telling people about child labour; it is neighbours reminding neighbours, children reminding parents, chiefs setting rules, and parents encouraging each other. What was once the norm or tolerated is now stigmatized.

<u>In Malawi:</u>
A mother in Chigudu shared a personal change, "*My daughter told me that if someone found out I had given her a heavy load to carry, I'd be in trouble. I immediately did the right thing*," adjusting her behaviour to keep her child safe and in school.

One female SMC member in Chigudu noted, "*Views about child labour changed because it is the responsibility of teachers to monitor children and ensure that they are in school after we have identified them and sent them to schoo*l."

A head teacher in Chigudu confirmed, "*The community is now happy about this project. Leaders have continued to raise awareness about child labour*."

"*Child labour makes a child fall sick and even die because a lot of work is given without adequate rest*," explained a 14-year-old female student. A male student added, "*It violates children's rights, can lead to pregnancy, missing school and prevents a child from seeking a bright future*."

<u>In Uganda:</u>
A Religious leader in Erussi Parish noted, *"I move within the centre and whenever I get children, maybe sorting coffee during school time, I send them to the nearest school… because it is not their time to do that…"* This shift marks a move from passive acceptance to active prevention, reinforcing school attendance as a community responsibility. These changes contributed to a broader transformation in community norms. Education became more valued and normalised, while child labour became stigmatised.

The Local Council Chairperson of Erussi explained, *"…we celebrate the Child Labour Free Week every year… the preparations are on. Next week, the Child Labour Free Week is on. We are integrating two activities—the Stop*

Child Labour campaign and also commemorating the Day of the African Child. So, having a structure and making people part of it—celebrating, talking about it, sharing successes—you create an environment where people believe this is realistic. It can be done. If they have done it, it can be done."

3.5. Further discussion (Efficacy)

As mentioned above, a valuable source of data in relation to the efficacy of the CLFZ approach is the Final Report 2021-2023 for the 'Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education' project across six African countries. Some key figures from the report, at project level, are that 3,025 former working children (1,532 boys, 1,493 girls) were permanently brought back to school and at least 714 children (335 boys, 379 girls) identified as at risk of dropping out were prevented from dropping out of school. School attendance rates increased, with increases ranging from 4.7% in Togo, 6.8% in Mali, 7.9% in Zimbabwe, 10.4% in Malawi, 12.9% in Morocco to 20.7% in Uganda and absenteeism among learners decreased in each project area.

In Malawi, according to the project report, the endline survey conducted by TUM and PSEUM in October 2023 showed that 59 school communities around Thedze, Jidi and Mthenthera primary schools could be declared 'Child Labour Free Zones / villages' since 100% of school age children living in these villages were enrolled in school. 92 other school communities around three schools (Mkanga, Chibhanzi and Maiwe) could be considered as almost free of child labour as they only registered extremely low numbers of non-school. Of a total of 390 school communities, 151 could therefore be seen as free or very nearly free of child labour after two years of the project.

The project report describes how, in Uganda, all of the eleven schools were able to make themselves more attractive to children and parents through improvements such as the provision of lunch, the abolition of corporal punishment, the availability of music instruments and sports equipment, a special focus on and support for girls, and the monitoring of the attendance of teachers. Teachers reported that they have observed a significant shift in the attitudes of parents, including those who have never had the opportunity to attend school themselves. This transformation is attributed to the awareness-raising campaigns conducted through the media and by local leaders, as well as the dedicated home visits carried out by the trained teachers and other members of the school governing bodies.

Although sustaining these benefits once the project comes to an end remains a challenge, these are very positive outcomes in a short space of time. The budget for this project in Malawi shows a total cost of €34,990 over two years. Set against the achievements in Malawi described in this chapter this represents extremely good value for money. *"We have to be humble. €15,000 per CLF Zone per year is a limited amount of investment. This is what we have at our disposal. It will never be enough to solve the child labour problem or even tackle it at scale but success in one Zone can have a knock-on effect in other areas and we can show governments how well this approach works,"* – Education International staff member.

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There is also considerable evidence from other sources (online evaluation interviews, document review) of the efficacy of the CLFZ approach in other countries and other interventions, whether through Education International or other organisations.

In Mali, where the teachers union SNEC has been involved in CLFZ projects for over ten years, nearly four thousand teachers have been trained on the approach, on children's rights and on better pedagogical methods. Seventy social dialogue spaces were created, along with 267 Mothers Associations. 3,672 boys and girls have been returned to school and a change of mentality has been brought about among parents and the community in general, in relation to a child's right to an education. In some villages almost 100% of children are in school. *"The project has been very effective. We are so proud when all the children in a village are in school."* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

We heard similar testimony on the efficacy of the CLFZ approach from multiple respondents, reporting on work in a range of countries. In Burundi, *"the project has been very effective, child labourers have been returned to school, the teachers union STEB is now known in the community, having worked with all stakeholders. The follow-up committees (made up of parents, teachers, school authorities and local authority representatives) continue to function and there is an improved dialogue with local government"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

In an early pilot project in Morocco, placing teachers at the centre of the new approach and training them on the benefits of combatting child labour and to do much more than just teach, bringing in cultural and extra-curricular activities for the children, *"we noticed that within a year there were hardly any school dropouts"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

The approach is also deemed to have been very effective in Zimbabwe, where children have been withdrawn from labour and have gone on to complete their education and get jobs. This is against a backdrop where, *"most children were not going to school and parents claimed poverty as the main reason for this. With a lot of awareness-raising work we were able to change attitudes so that parents have now come to value education. If you own a lot of cattle but do not have cash you may consider yourself too poor to afford schooling for your children but if you see education as a priority you realise that selling one cow is enough to cover school fees for a whole year"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Education International Member Organisations in Albania, teachers Unions FSASH and SPASH, have been involved in work combatting child labour for over twenty years, implementing numerous projects with support and funding from Education International, AOb, GEW Fair Childhood Foundation and FNV Mondiaal. One of the more recent initiatives ran from October 2019 to June 2021 which, alongside capacity building measures, training and lobbying, also focussed on direct action in schools in Korca. Across two schools, of 61 children who had dropped out of school, 32 were withdrawn from child labour and returned to school. Furthermore, of 104 pupils who were identified as at risk of dropping out, 84 were retained and were attending school regularly by the end of the project. The remaining children in both categories were also supported. *"In twenty years of working on child labour, in my experience not a single child who was withdrawn from child labour and returned*

to school subsequently went back into child labour" – Education International Member Organisation staff member. "*The CLFZ approach has been very successful in my opinion. I think that over 80% of the children we have worked with overall have come back to school"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Over the past fifteen years Education International and Member Organisations have supported CLFZs in 14 countries and the overwhelming sense among staff is that these projects have been successful at returning children from child labour to education, retaining children in school, reducing the risk of future child labour and changing mindsets and behaviours in the communities involved. *"It has been very enriching, with opportunities to work in the field and engage with teachers, parents and others. We have seen huge changes, for example in the perception of girls' education in Erussi in Uganda. Ten years ago if a girl had a baby there was no chance for her to return to school but now views are very different, there has been a real change in mindset"* – Education International staff member.

And there are other voices, external to Education International which echo the view that the CLFZ approach is effective.

The CLFZ approach was first pioneered in the 1990s by the MV Foundation (which started as a research institution on education and social transformation) in India. Their work initially focussed on freeing children from bonded labour but, *"we realised that if we withdrew these children from labour, their places were soon taken by other children, so it was clear that we needed to work with all children who were out of school. It took us a few years to understand and develop the concept of the child labour free zone. Since then we have established over 6,000 zones in India and have rescued over a million children from child labour. We have gone on to help other organisations, such as Education International, further develop the concept and start CLFZ programmes in other countries. My dream came true when I visited the projects in remote areas such as Erussi in Uganda and saw that the whole community was engaged and that the intervention was very successful"* – MV Foundation staff member.

"The CLFZ approach is the approach that works. If you just help families with fees and materials, as soon as your project ends the children go back to work. If you just focus on a specific supply chain, such as tea or coffee, you might withdraw children from those types of employment but they will just move into other types of labour. You have to focus on all children in a community and involve everyone in that community" – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour and a member of the Stop Child Labour Coalition[39].

[39] Stop Child Labour Coalition

4. Impact of the CLFZ approach

What has been the impact on the local communities, what benefits have been enjoyed by children, parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole?

Findings

4.1. It is very clear that the CLFZ approach has impact in a broad range of ways, including, of course, impact on children but also on parents, teachers, schools and whole communities. It can also have other positive outcomes, such as benefits for teachers Unions, the strengthening of civil society collaborations, influence on relationships with local authorities and sometimes even changes in national policy. This chapter looks at these various different impacts.

4.1. Impact on children

Findings

4.2. Many children have been returned from child labour to school. Many children, at risk of dropping out (again) have been retained in school. Many children have benefitted from remedial support to reintegrate them into school. Teachers have observed increases not only in attendance but in punctuality and enthusiasm for school.

4.3. Children in CLF Zones are aware of their own rights, to education and to humane treatment and are able to express and advocate for these rights. They are also able to behave as children, to enjoy play and extra-curricular activities such as sports, drama and music as well as learning.

4.4. Many children have improved academic achievements in terms of basic literacy and numeracy and some go on to complete primary education with some of them going on to secondary education and later employment.

4.5. Girls and older children seem to have particularly benefitted from the approach, for example through provision of specific support to girls in relation to menstruation, early motherhood and breast-feeding to help them return to, and stay in, school and through help to reintegrate older children into school through remedial classes. Support from families and the community has also contributed to supporting these groups.

Discussion

<u>In Malawi:</u>

The most significant impact is that more children are in school, attending classes regularly. A considerable number of children have been withdrawn from child labour, with one head teacher estimating that "*30% of the school population are children who have returned to school from child labour activities*". The creation of anti-child-labour clubs has engaged children in extracurricular activities such as music, drama and sport, which have

made the idea of school more attractive, as a Focal Point teacher explained, "*As a result of the anti-child-labour clubs, more children enjoyed and loved staying in school*".

An additional benefit, resulting from regular attendance and increased support, has been better academic performance, with children improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, having success in exams and progressing through grades. For example, a head teacher reported that, "*Four learners who were previously in tobacco farms have now reached Standard 7*".

Changed attitudes to education have led to a far more supportive environment for pupils, from the introduction of suggestion boxes in schools to concrete support from parents, as noted by a 14-year old female pupil, "My p*arents are now able to support me with school uniform and books. In the past they did not want to give me anything*".

In many of the project schools in Malawi the majority of children who returned to school were girls and children above the typical primary school age, suggesting that the interventions have particularly benefitted these groups. For girls, the project directly tackled barriers like early marriage, providing a pathway back to education after life events that usually end schooling. For older children (who might have felt too old or embarrassed to return), the welcoming environment and bridging classes helped them slot back in despite their age.

<u>In Uganda:</u>
The picture is similar in Uganda, where greater numbers of children in the CLF Zones are in school and attending regularly, particularly through success in withdrawing children from the coffee farming sector. The project has also been successful in retaining children in school, enabling progression to upper primary classes, where dropout rates were reported to be the worst, due to child labour activities, teenage pregnancies or early marriage. Children themselves expressed a strong desire to continue with education; *"I am in primary seven…I want to go to the secondary level"* – Focus group participant, Abanga.

Participation in activities organised in relation to the CLFZs, such as music, dance and drama and public events during the Child Labour Free Week, has helped children to learn more about child labour, its harmful effects and their right to education; *"Child labour is denial of children's rights which may lead to dropping out of school"* – Primary school focus group participant, Paidha.

Figure 3: children in Uganda are aware of their rights; here pupils at Asina primary school, Zombo, display messages

Again, there has been particular impact in reducing teenage pregnancies by keeping girls in school for longer periods. Teachers, local leaders and PTA/SMC members consistently noted that the longer girls remain in school, the lower the likelihood of early pregnancies and marriages. Moreover, collaborative efforts by local leaders have also reduced the participation of unmarried schoolgirls in the traditional "Keny" marriage celebrations. A Focal Point teacher explained, *"…from these events… some are raped. Others get married from there. A lot of things happen, including sexual harassment…but these days, you will not get any primary girl, any schoolgirl, participating in those [Keny] activities…teenage pregnancy has reduced, early marriage has also reduced."*

4.2. Impact on parents

Findings

4.6. Parents have come to value education, realising that it is a child's right and also a pathway to break the cycle of poverty.

4.7. Some parents have benefitted from support, in forms which vary from country to country, including help with school fees, provision of school materials and uniforms, clothing and even food.

4.8. Somewhat tangentially some parents have also benefitted through personal development and a sense of empowerment by being involved in the projects, for example through roles on SMCs or PTAs.

Discussion

In Malawi:

The key difference, as a result of the CLFZ projects, is a very significant change in the mindset of parents. They have come to see the value of education and to understand that it can help their children break away from the cycle of poverty as well as benefit the whole community, as the following comments make clear:

"*We now understand the value of education and educated people in the community because they are respected. We want the same for our children in future*," – Father, focus group participant.

"*At the beginning, the understanding was that children were in child labour because of poverty. However, after engaging them [the parents], they learnt that children being in school would break the chains of poverty*," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"*We now understand the importance of sending a child to school. When a child is educated, they can easily travel to another community. They can read a signpost that this is the road to Lilongwe instead of asking other people*," – Parent, focus group participant.

The proof of this change in mindset is not only evident in the increased numbers of children in school and statements like those above, but also in the actions of parents, with many contributing food and labour for school programmes, such as the home-grown school feeding programme at Mpatamoyo where parents donated food and helped build new classrooms. Parents have also contributed to funds, for example in Chibanza, where village chiefs established a fund for buying books, pens, and uniforms for children from the poorest households. Figure 4 below shows preparations for new classrooms in Chibanzi, which is a rural community largely reliant on agriculture and small scale trade. School infrastructure has been struggling to deal with the influx of returnee children, so new classrooms are needed. In some places, some parents even became advocates, volunteering to speak to other parents and lead community dialogues about ending child labour. This peer influence helped spread the new mindset across the community.

Figure 4: foundations for new classrooms at Chibanzi primary school in Malawi

In Uganda:

An equivalent change in mindset has occurred in the CLF Zones in Uganda. Many parents no longer view child labour as a necessary economic activity but now prioritise education as a gateway to better opportunities for their children. As a Focal Point teacher and an Education International Member Organisation staff member both noted, *"Their [the parents in Paidha and Abanga] attitude towards education as well as child labour has significantly changed."*

An additional benefit has been for some parents themselves, who through their involvement in the project, as members of PTAs and SMCs, have not only come to appreciate the importance of education but have also gained in self-confidence, undergoing training and acquiring new skills in resource mobilisation. In some cases this has led to improved collaboration with governance bodies. PTA and SMC members now interact more frequently with school administrations, actively participate in school monitoring, and follow up on learners more consistently than before. This shift is illustrated by the PTA Chairperson of one primary school, who remarked, *"As an individual, the project has also made me learn more about education … sending children to school is good. In the past, I was not as active, but these days I come to school regularly to monitor the children, talk to them, and engage with the teachers. It has given me a different understanding of education."*

4.3. Impact on teachers and schools

Findings

4.9. Teachers have benefitted from training on child labour, children's rights, improved pedagogical methods and positive discipline (as a replacement for corporal punishment), this often being their first/only experience of continuous professional development, which has led to an increased sense of achievement and satisfaction, with some of the Focal Point teachers going on to more senior positions.

4.10. In some countries teachers received a stipend for delivering remedial or bridging classes to help returning children integrate into school. This gave those teachers enhanced status and became an additional motivation to support the project. It also implicitly emphasized the importance of these additional classes and of supporting children at risk of child labour.

4.11. Many teachers benefitted in other ways from their involvement in CLFZ projects, for example through their increased integration into the community, newfound ability to engage with parents and local government officials, a sense of satisfaction at the impact of their work and the pupils' improved academic performance which motivated some teachers to go the extra mile, an increased sense of really belonging to the teaching profession, and (especially for Focal Point teachers) a sense of pride at being selected for involvement in the project.

4.12. Headteachers and other (senior) teachers involved in the project benefitted from the training as well as the experience of playing a leading role in a rewarding process. This has enhanced overall leadership in the schools involved.

4.13. Schools have been able to significantly improve the teaching and learning environment, both in terms of the training given to teachers (resulting in better methods of teaching and discipline) and also in terms of physical environment, such as new or improved classrooms or new toilets.

4.14. As a result of the projects, schools have also benefitted from reinvigorated school management structures (School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations), which have played an important role in reducing child labour.

4.15. Schools have undergone a "culture shift", which has made them more aware of child labour issues and more proactive in their willingness to collaborate with other stakeholders to tackle child labour in multiple ways, for example by contributing to events in Anti-child-labour Week.

4.16. Schools have also benefitted from the provision of school materials, (such as chalk, books, pens and exercise books) as well as the provision of equipment to support sports, drama and music.

4.17. Many schools have benefitted from the introduction of feeding programmes.

4.18. Some schools have been supported to access government funding such as school improvement grants to contribute to the costs of buildings and equipment.

4.19. The creation of Anti-child-labour Clubs in schools has had multiple benefits, such as enabling extra-curricular activities and facilitating the reinforcement of messages on child labour through events (such as street theatre or celebrating anti-child-labour days).

4.20. Headteachers have spoken about the impact which new 'byelaws' have had in terms of giving them a mandate, a basis and a platform to pursue anti-child-labour measures.

Discussion

In Malawi:

"*After the child labour training workshops, we developed action plans to establish anti-child-labour clubs, allocate teachers to remedial classes and to work with the school governance structures to sensitise parents about child labour and their children's education. We also constructed four toilets for our children*," – Head teacher.

This quote highlights several benefits and initiatives: teachers benefitting from training and schools creating clubs to keep students engaged and aware, providing extra lessons for those who fell behind, working with parent committees to spread the message, and even expanding infrastructure to accommodate the children (building new toilets in this case). Such comprehensive school-level planning ensured that returning students were welcomed and supported, not lost in crowded classrooms.

As a result of the training and awareness-raising work done, school environments were made much more supportive, with, for example, the introduction of child protection policies and suggestion boxes for learners to report concerns. Pupils feel empowered to voice issues and teachers have learned about non-abusive disciplinary methods, for instance, misbehaving students might be asked to bring a parent to school or read a passage aloud to the class as a corrective measure. This change has made schools more welcoming places for children, removing a former driver of child labour – children's fear of being punished at school.

In Uganda:

Teachers have benefitted from the training and support provided through the CLFZ initiatives. They have gained new skills, in terms of their teaching but also beyond this in relation to child labour – how to recognise cases and risks, how to engage with parents and community structures. As a result, teachers are now better prepared to support learners both academically and emotionally while helping prevent school dropout linked to child labour. According to a Focal Point teacher, *"the teachers have become more friendly to these learners. They teach them. They bring them closer and can find out their issues and even help them."*

Schools have improved their documentation systems, giving a clearer picture of progress. They have introduced school feeding programmes and have enjoyed more support from and collaboration with parents. As well as increasing school attendance these measures have led to improved academic results, including better performance in the Primary Leaving Examinations and higher progression rates, particularly among girls. As emphasised by one Focal Point teacher, *"We have seen that performance at the end of the primary level has increased. In the past, we would only get second and third grades, but now we are beginning to see first grades. For example, last year we had 17 learners, including two girls. All of them performed well and are now in secondary school."*

In both Malawi and Uganda schools have been able to mobilise additional resources, through parental contributions and also through accessing government funding. In Malawi this was in the form of School Improvement Grants (access and equity funds) to support vulnerable children for purchasing exercise books, pencils, uniforms, and other scholastic materials. In Uganda schools have benefited from increased Universal Primary Education (UPE) capitation grants due to higher enrolment figures, as recognised by a former head teacher, *"You know, we receive funds from the Government—these UPE funds—based on the enrolment. The more enrolment a school has, the more funds the school will receive to ensure it runs smoothly. So, the increased enrolment has also increased the capitation grants we receive. So, we have benefited from the project."*

4.4. Impact on communities

Findings

4.21. Communities in CLF Zones have undergone a change in mindset, such that attitudes to education and children's rights have fundamentally changed and there is now a belief that children belong in school and an understanding of the distinction between acceptable child work (such as household chores) and unacceptable child labour and of the role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty.

4.22. Furthermore, communities have taken ownership of these new attitudes so that child labour is now stigmatised and community monitoring systems and in many cases locally enforced 'byelaws' operate to ensure children are in school. Traditional and religious leaders often play a key role in bringing about this sense of ownership.

4.23. In some CLF Zones the change in mindset has included a change in attitudes to girls and the need to protect them from potential violence on the way to and from school and also in terms of making early marriage unacceptable.

4.24. In some CLF Zones there has been a reported reduction of anti-social behaviour and low level crime as some older child workers have returned to school.

Discussion

<u>In Malawi:</u>

As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest successes and therefore one of the main impacts of the CLFZ approach has been to bring about a mindset change in relation to child labour and education across entire communities. It is important to be clear how fundamental this shift has been - before the project, it was commonly believed that children had to work because families were poor and some even thought that if children did not do hard work, they would grow up lazy. The intensive community dialogues and awareness-raising campaigns challenged these beliefs. Over time, people came to see that keeping children in school is a better long-term solution to poverty than sending them to work.

In Malawi the traditional leaders have played a major role in driving this change at community level, through community dialogues and the passing and enforcing of local byelaws. The punishment of non-compliant parents,

although not necessarily approved of in other contexts, including fines (e.g. a goat, or for repeat offenders a bull, or in extreme cases exclusion from community activities), has encouraged everyone to comply and perhaps more importantly has shown that the entire community backs the principle that all children should be in school. As one village headman emphatically put it, "*Previously many children used to work as herdsmen and gardeners for money and food. However, this has changed. We know that all children belong to school*."

The collective change of attitude has been further reinforced by reinvigorated community structures, such as School Management Committees, Parent-Teacher Associations, Mothers Support Groups, and other volunteers who have been involved in various tasks, such as gathering materials for constructing additional classrooms and toilets. There is mutual accountability and support, at community level, including in some cases material help for the poorest families in the form of notebooks, pens, and even school uniforms.

There is a sense that increased community capacity and shared ownership of the structures, processes and activities means that CLF Zones are not just temporary projects but have become a sustainable reality.

<u>In Uganda:</u>
In Uganda a similar, fundamental change in mindset at the community level has been achieved through a combination of the influence of local political and religious leaders, community dialogues and culturally appropriate awareness-raising campaigns and events.

Community mechanisms, involving local leaders, teachers and volunteers monitor school attendance and intervene when children miss school, face abuse, or are at risk of exploitation. Strong local structures, SMC and PTA, have collaborated with parents in the community, for example in Paidha and Abanga, on the construction of teachers' staff quarters, school kitchens, and classrooms.

A further positive outcome has been a reduction in anti-social behaviour, such as petty theft, arguments, conflicts, and physical fights among children and their parents. This positive shift is due to the increased engagement of learners in structured school activities and the sense of routine and discipline promoted through education. Moreover, the project established and strengthened key community-based child protection structures, including Child Protection Committees, Child Labour Ambassadors, Child Labour Committees, and local task forces. These structures have built trust and legitimacy within communities, promoting greater vigilance, community involvement, and collective responsibility in safeguarding children. As a Community Development Officer noted, *"When children are in school, communities also somehow benefit. There is reduced insecurity, and you find that even cases of street children have reduced. So petty stealing and fights are minimised."*

4.5. Other impacts

Findings

4.25. The CLFZ approach and everything associated with it (messages, awareness-raising, activities, relationships, monitoring data, etc) creates a language and a framework in which a different discussion about combatting child labour and ensuring children's rights can take place. This also broadens the space in which further work (collaborations, research, more awareness-raising, campaigning, lobbying, advocacy) can take place, which ultimately increases the chance of future changes in policy and practice, leading to fundamental and lasting impact.

4.26. Teachers Unions have benefitted through their involvement in the CLFZ approach in numerous and significant ways, including increased membership, improved finances, gaining valuable experience in project management, much improved public image and better relations with communities and schools.

4.27. Furthermore and very importantly this improved union image (being seen as collaborators rather than opponents and critics) has led to improved relationships with local and national education officials in particular and other local/regional authorities and government officials more broadly.

4.28. In some countries there has been an impact on government education policy and practice, for example through collaboration with teachers unions and communities to support and spread the CLFZ approach, improved funding for school infrastructure or additional teaching posts.

4.29. Some CLFZ projects have, through their success, attracted or reinforced collaboration with partners, such as international and local NGOs.

4.30. In some countries, some employers have become active supporters of the approach.

4.31. In some countries there is evidence that reducing child labour can improve wages for adults.

Discussion

<u>In Malawi:</u>
The CLFZ projects were able to involve district education official in activities. Government officials (such as Primary Education Advisors and Assistant Coordinators) attended community meetings and publicly committed to supporting the cause, which added credibility and accountability. This collaboration led to a 2023 Ministry of Education directive in Malawi abolishing the practice of expelling children for non-payment of school fees (the 'school development fund'). The Government also responded to needs identified by the community by deploying more teachers to some understaffed schools and investing in school infrastructure.

Significantly, the positive experience of the CLFZ projects resulted in village headmen declaring that they would be open to participating in future development projects in the community.

Some head teachers learned to lobby NGOs and donors; for instance, Chigudu school reached out to an organization called Friends of Netherlands, which donated mats and desks for all its classrooms.

Some local businesses and farms changed their behaviour. While previously, they may well have hired children as helpers (herding cattle, gardening, etc.) especially in peak agricultural times, the shift in community attitudes also influenced employers, so that they stopped employing school-age children.

In Uganda:
In Uganda the CLFZ initiatives also endeavoured to establish closer links with local education and government officials in the hope of ensuring ongoing public engagement. This led to the integration of child labour awareness into the routine work of the Community Development Officer in Paidha, who reported, *"We have a budget allocation of 200,000 Uganda shillings for child labour activities at the sub-county level."*

In conjunction with local political leaders the project has been able to attract support from organisations such as SignPost International, Compassion International, Plan International, UNICEF, and local NGO Aruwe in Uganda, for example to provide vocational training for out-of-school girls, to train parental support groups and provide additional resources (school materials and the construction of girls' washrooms and latrines).

A locally important employer, Kyagalanyi Coffee Ltd has played a key role in tackling child labour in Zombo District, raising awareness and enforcing anti-child-labour standards among the more than 1,500 farmers they work with, contributing significantly to the project's impact. The company monitors its registered farmers through community agents and local leaders. It provides economic incentives such as premium prices to farmers who comply with the anti-child-labour policy and has helped create school demonstration gardens.

4.6. Further discussion (Impact)

Numerous examples of the impact of the CLFZ approach emerged from our interviews with respondents in other countries and from the document review. It is of course important to remember that the principal impact of this work is on the children themselves and that this can be life-changing. *"The children are removed from inhumane working conditions and can (re)start their education. Now we see them smiling at school,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Several respondents have stressed that the training received by teachers as part of the CLFZ interventions and the leadership experience for Focal Point teachers and some head teachers constituted very significant continuing professional development (CPD) for them. *"We have heard from teachers that this was a very important opportunity for them, that they had never any CPD before and that it had changed their whole perspective on teaching,"* – Education International staff member.

The impact of this CPD can also be seen in the fact that many Focal Point teachers go on to be promoted as a result. This is a double-edged sword for the impact of the CLFZ approach – it means that a trained and motivated teacher leaves, creating a gap in the school and community, but it also means that they take valuable experience and knowledge to a new area.

The CPD and involvement in the CLFZ work can be very motivational for teachers. *"It gives them an enhanced sense of professional pride, having learned about new pedagogical approaches, about children's rights and how to engage with parents,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

In Albania much of the CLFZ work is in communities with a large proportion of Roma families, where community relations can be difficult. *"The training helped the teachers to see things from a Roma perspective and they began to see Roma families as less of a problem, to understand them better and even started to offer Albanian language lessons in kindergarden to help the Roma children,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

In addition to all of the evidence discussed in this chapter relating to the impact of CLFZ projects on teachers there is another major source of evidence in the form of a research project commissioned by Education International and AOb and undertaken in Albania, Mali, Morocco, Nicaragua, Uganda and Zimbabwe between August 2018 and April 2019. The purpose was to, "identify practical evidence of context-independent best practice and innovative approaches in the professional development of teachers and in the schools; and to document the impacts of these projects on union development". The resulting report[40] identified many success factors in implementing the CLFZ approach (which are discussed further in Chapter 6 'Success Factors') and also presented clear testimony of the impact on teachers:

> "The professional development courses have been a source of motivation for school heads and teachers and an opportunity to exchange and network. Teachers … reported they felt better equipped, with new tools to use in the classroom, and had assumed a mission as a 'change agent'. Many teachers reported that, before the training courses, they had been using traditional methods and viewed their role as a mere 'provider of knowledge' … [and had] lacked a clear understanding of what constituted child labour."

A specific pedagogical approach, often included as part of the teacher training and which was mentioned by numerous respondents as being particularly relevant and important in the context of the CLFZ approach is the SCREAM[41] methodology.

[40] EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices - Nora Wintour, June 2020

[41] ILO website: SCREAM: Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media - SCREAM is an education and social mobilization programme, to help educators worldwide promote understanding and awareness of child labour among young people. The SCREAM programme aims to promote awareness among young people about children's rights, with a focus on child labour, so that they in turn can speak out and mobilise their communities to act. It is delivered by educators using the SCREAM education pack. The methodology is based on the arts – drama, creative writing, music and the visual arts – and on the media. Young people are empowered to convey their message to the wider community … and [the programme] encourages "peer-to-peer" education, with young people reaching out to other young people.

CLFZ interventions can sometimes contribute positively to community relations. *"As a result of the project, Albanian members of the community started to support Roma families – as long as the children attended school every day, they would help to pay the school fees,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

As in Uganda, there has also been a reported reduction in Burundi in anti-social behaviour, such as theft and general nuisance caused by out of school children. *"The CLFZ project is seen as benefiting the whole community in terms of improved behaviour in general,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

There is strong evidence that involvement in CLFZ work has multiple benefits for teachers Unions. These include recruitment of members (bringing in more fees), altering their image with the public and with education authorities, and gaining invaluable experience in various project-related areas. *"In some countries teachers Unions are seen as elitist and confrontational. This work has really changed that image in the eyes of communities, governments and teachers themselves and has also been an opportunity to strengthen capacity in terms of project management, writing proposals, reporting, public engagement, general project implementation and advocacy,"* – Education International staff member. *"We have been able to recruit many new members to the Union as a result of the CLFZ project,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Related to this chance to change the traditional image of teachers Unions is the fact that work on CLF Zones also seems to offer an opportunity to collaborate with education authorities and government officials, often at the local or district level. *"The perception of teachers Unions, especially in Francophone countries in Africa, is often negative, they are seen as only protecting their own, often protesting and striking. However, in work on child labour the authorities actually value the Unions' contribution. It is the area where I see most and best collaboration between Unions, communities and local authorities – working hand in hand,"* – Education International staff member.

"We would not be the Union we are today without our involvement in the work on child labour. It is helped increase our membership and finances, improved our public image and given us more authority and better relations with the Ministry of Education," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

There are some limited examples of changes in government policy and practice as a result of CLFZ interventions, such as the creation of the "social dialogue space"[42] concept through the teachers Union in Mali which has been endorsed and spread nationally by the government. *"There was a period of unrest across the country which included teacher strikes and security problems in schools. We met with the Ministry of Education and convinced them that the social dialogue space could be a useful way to calm things down. In my area of the capital, Bamako, there are 150 schools and every single one has adopted the concept. Social dialogue has improved*

[42] SNEC, the teachers Union in Mali, has created these spaces in each target village. They include representatives of the mayor, local education authorities, mothers' association, and of the monitoring committee, young people, teachers and the school management committees. They are created by the CLFZ project, to address child labour issues, but very soon they are also used as a space to talk about any other issues related to school, education, teachers etc.

across the country and the Ministry has set up a National Committee for Peaceful and Performing Schools, on which the teachers Union is represented," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Collaboration between the teachers Union and the Government in Albania has resulted in a new policy which allows children returning from child labour to take exams (despite this in theory not being allowed if pupils have missed a lot of school time).

The success of the CLFZ projects in Zimbabwe made it possible to attract NGOs to join in with lobbying the Government. In some countries, such as Zimbabwe, especially in rural farming areas, children have been seen as an easy-to-exploit cheap labour force without the capacity to negotiate for better working conditions or wages. In CLF Zones however, this changes. *"Now the children are in school and no longer available as labourers the adults have a better chance of getting a job and negotiating a better wage,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

5. Challenges

What challenges still remain in those communities in relation to child labour, what gaps are there in the overall impact and have there been any unexpected outcomes?

The evaluation question was intended to focus on 'remaining challenges', in other words those which still remain in the communities even after the successful implementation of a CLFZ project. However, as we gathered evidence through fieldwork and interviews it became clear that we needed to also include pre-existing challenges, particularly those which relate to cultural norms and structural problems. These challenges are pervasive in many countries, some of them are hard to overcome or indeed beyond the scope of individual initiatives. Some of them remain, although reduced, even in successful CLF Zones, and some of them remain as ongoing broader problems beyond the immediate boundaries of CLFZ projects. They constitute a significant element of the context in which the CLFZ approach is being implemented. Because of this we decided to broaden the scope of this chapter and call it simply 'Challenges'.

Findings

5.1. There are (remaining) challenges despite the successes of the CLFZ approach. These can be roughly categorised into four types of (often overlapping or interconnected) challenges; those related to 1) implementation, 2) sustainability, 3) cultural norms and 4) structural problems. Some implementation and sustainability challenges can be addressed directly by Education International and partners. Challenges related to cultural norms and structural problems (such as economic and climate challenges) are extremely difficult to solve and can only be addressed over the long term and often only indirectly through lobbying and advocacy. These different types of challenge along with some unexpected outcomes are considered in this chapter.

5.1. Implementation challenges

Findings

5.2. In most project areas the CLFZ is not completely successful. There are still pockets of child labour, either among certain families, or on a seasonal basis (caused by the need to harvest, lack of food or water, more difficult access etc), or in the sense that some children still miss some lessons, days or even weeks despite a commitment in principle to education.

5.3. There are also gaps in provision, for example in some countries it has been difficult to extend the benefits to certain groups, such as children with disabilities, or to urban areas. In some countries, in some schools, documentation and reliable monitoring of school attendance and child labour levels remains a challenge, with, for example, records not being up to date or with missing weeks. In some schools visited in our fieldwork some children, although in school, did not seem to really understand the concept of child labour – this is more likely to be the case for younger children or those who have recently (re)started school in a CLF Zone where the active project has finished and where some of the anti-child-labour activities are not happening with the same intensity.

Discussion

In Malawi:
Some children with disabilities and some girls who become pregnant are not being (re)integrated into school because the schools do not have the appropriate facilities and capacity to accommodate them and/or do not have clear policies covering these groups.

With limited time and capacity to access government School Improvement Grants some schools do not receive extra budgets for things like counselling services, learning materials for poor students, or facilities for disabled learners. When over-age learners or young mothers return to school they are often placed in lower grades with much younger children, but teachers have not been trained in handling the social or psychological adjustments required, especially for children who have been through trauma or exploitation.

The seasonal nature of food provision means that widespread hunger during off-season months can lead to children being sent to work on farms or in homes to earn food or money. School feeding programs operate only during the harvest season (when food is more available) and not in the lean season, which is precisely when children most need encouragement to stay in school.

In Uganda:
Many, if not most, of the children who took part in focal group discussions who have returned to school as a result of the projects are not completely free of child labour – they still need to work sometimes.

There is still resistance from some parents, who, based on their own experience (relative success despite not having had any education), do not believe in the value of education. And in rural settings it is more difficult to make the case that education is necessary to get a job. There is a need to undertake more piloting of the CLFZ approach in urban settings where this case could be made more effectively.

5.2. Sustainability challenges

Findings

5.4. It takes at least three years to establish a CLF Zone properly, but because of the need to change minds for the long term and because of the often powerful factors mitigating against success it is difficult to sustain impacts beyond the life of an intervention. There is evidence that while there may still be support in a community, once the formal project ends, the structures and processes do not continue at the same intensity and there is a risk that child labour may begin to increase again.

5.5. An inherent potential weakness of the CLFZ approach is that, by definition, it focusses on a specific area. If the approach is successful in that area, there is the potential for it to spread to surrounding areas (and there is some evidence that this does occur) but there is also a threat that negative behaviours and norms from surrounding areas can begin to weaken the impact once the active project ends.

5.6. The provision of remedial or 'bridging' classes (to help returning pupils integrate) was very successful and very important, but it often depended on the project funding stipends to pay teachers for these extra classes and once the project ended the stipends also ended and teachers were less motivated to continue.

5.7. The pressure on infrastructure and staffing levels can paradoxically become worse through the success of a CLF Zone – with significant numbers of children returned to and retained in school! Local education authorities often do not provide the additional teachers who are needed to deal with the extra pupil numbers and there can be a mismatch between provision and the needs of some returners, such as basic literacy and numeracy skills (or, for example in Uganda, coping with the recent changes in the curriculum).

5.8. There is also the inevitable turnover in teaching staff. Teachers who have played a key role in establishing a CLF Zone move on or get transferred to other schools and while some of these may be multipliers, taking the benefits of the approach with them, it may be difficult for them as individuals to introduce new Zones without support and the commitment to combatting child labour in the schools and communities they leave may be weakened through their departure. Education International Member Organisations have tried to tackle this issue by, for example, training two Focal Point teachers in each school or getting the Focal Point teacher to train their successor before moving on. But once the project finishes there is inevitably a sustainability challenge and the question arises as to whether the local government will take over such training.

5.9. Turnover can also affect school management structures, such as SMCs and PTAs where there is a limited term for members, meaning that those who have received anti-child-labour training may leave after their term, taking valuable knowledge with them.

Discussion

<u>In Malawi:</u>

Some teachers were paid a stipend by the project to provide bridging and remedial lessons to help returning children and others catch up in school. However, once the project concluded the stipends stopped, leading to a noticeable drop in remedial education activities. Some other teachers who were not part of the stipend programme were unhappy about not receiving allowances while being involved in anti-child-labour activities. This created some resentment and fatigue. In the aftermath, teachers overall feel less driven to go above and beyond their normal duties.

The success of the CLFZ interventions meant there were significantly more children in schools which struggled to accommodate them. Classrooms are overcrowded and essential facilities like toilets and desks are insufficient for the increased enrolment. Government investment has not been sufficient to bridge this gap.

In addition there are chronic teacher shortages and rapid turnover, exacerbated by a lack of proper infrastructure, such as accommodation for teachers in remote community schools. For example, at Matanda school, even when new teachers were assigned, they left after a short time because there was no accommodation for them in the area.

There is a natural drop-off in the intensity of anti-child-labour activities once the project ends. The community structures like Child Protection Committees or Mother Support Groups remain, but without funding or clear policy support (for example, on re-admitting teen mothers), their impact is limited.

In Uganda:
Although the project has significantly increased school enrolment, this positive development has not been matched by corresponding investments in infrastructure and staffing. Many classrooms are now overcrowded, with insufficient desks to accommodate all learners, making classroom management more challenging for teachers. Furthermore, the rise in learner numbers has not been accompanied by an equivalent increase in teaching staff, resulting in high pupil-to-teacher ratios. This has placed a heavy workload on the existing teachers, limiting their ability to provide effective instruction, individualised support, and adequate monitoring of learners, as pointed out by one Focal Teacher in Erussi: *"In P4 class, we have no access to reach the children behind… learners are very many"*. This difficult situation is further exacerbated by frequent teacher transfers.

Even though significant reductions in child labour have been achieved in target areas like Erussi and Paidha, neighbouring non-targeted communities where child labour persists pose a threat to this progress. Ongoing social and economic interactions between these neighbouring communities expose children to peers still engaged in child labour, increasing the risk of relapse. *"The surrounding communities can easily come to negatively influence the community we have already targeted,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

5.3. Cultural norms

Findings

5.10. Despite very significant changes in mindsets achieved through awareness-raising activities and training, cultural norms still persist among certain sections of society. Especially some parents who have low levels of education themselves continue to value the perceived short-term benefits of child labour to enhance family income above the longer-term benefits of education for their children's future development. Even some politicians have expressed the idea that child labour is normal, and that because they experienced it themselves and have nevertheless become successful, it cannot be too harmful.

5.11. In some countries, persistent cultural norms can directly undermine education, such as traditional dances, funerals etc taking place during school hours and early marriage and pregnancy being accepted as normal and leading to many girls dropping out of school and falling into child labour. In some countries, such as Malawi and Uganda, 'traditional marriages' can pose a particular problem for girls – during wedding preparations and afterwards the young bride is expected to carry a disproportionate burden of tasks and household labour, sometimes being supported by other girls (some of whom may even experience sexual violence) meaning that they are far more likely to drop out of school.

5.12. In addition, in some countries, the cultural norms around parenting, families and sexual inequality present a particular challenge; large families, family breakdown, male attitudes to women and girls and male

behaviour such as alcohol abuse and expectations that women should carry out the bulk of work and household tasks.

5.13. Changing minds is a long-term process that requires the involvement of all members of a community and is likely to take many years, possibly a generation, to really take root.

Discussion

In Malawi:

Despite the success of the awareness-raising activities some parents, especially those who have not had schooling themselves, may not fully recognize the long-term value of education versus the short-term gains of child labour.

In Uganda:

Again, despite widespread awareness-raising efforts, a significant number of children still lack a clear understanding of what constitutes child labour or have not heard about the CLFZ project. Focus group discussions revealed inconsistent knowledge levels, with some children unable to distinguish between acceptable work and harmful child labour. In some cases, children confused the child labour project with a UNICEF project, which provides school materials.

There are also persistent views among some parents, especially those who are illiterate and see no value in schooling, often because they never attended school themselves but still perceive themselves as successful. As a local political leader in Paidha explained, *"There are some stubborn parents who refuse to acknowledge that education is important for a child's future. They still have a negative attitude towards the project..."*

Additionally, some parents remain unaware of what constitutes child labour and continue to involve children in excessive work, such as vending during market days or gardening, either due to cultural norms or economic necessity.

5.4. Structural challenges

Findings

5.14. Funding for education is not sufficient. "To finance SDG 4, the UN recommends allocating 15-20% of each country's budget, or 4-6% of GDP, to education. In many low- and middle-income countries, with a growing youth population and far from the targets, 20% and 6% are needed."[43] This means many education systems are underfunded and overwhelmed; not enough teaching staff let alone qualified teaching staff (class sizes of up to 100), lacking classrooms, hygiene facilities, equipment (many children sitting on the floor) and with limited investment in teacher training and CPD. In some countries, even if there is basic teacher training, there is no provision of the specialist training that would be needed to help teachers deal with children returning to school from child labour, especially if those children have additional needs, such as disabled children or young girls returning from early marriage. In our research we have heard in several countries that the Ministry of Education is supportive of the CLFZ approach and wants to collaborate but that there is no budget. For example, in Malawi there is an allocation of funding for "inclusive education" but it is simply not enough and this is exacerbated by insufficient funding for associated areas such as social services and family protection. In some countries, there is notional support from government, with, for example, local and district education officers attending community CLFZ meetings but not really engaging on any serious level with either funding requirements or meaningful policy change.

5.15. In many countries it seems that the education authorities do not have basic data on the levels of child labour and while they may have overall figures on school enrolment they do not have accurate, up to date data on actual school attendance. Political considerations can also come into play, with officials sometimes accusing schools of falsifying attendance data. All of which makes it far harder to plan, implement and monitor anti-child-labour measures.

5.16. Economic factors also create other huge barriers such as limited transport and difficult access to and from school, lack of clean water and housing (which deters teachers from working in rural locations), lack of investment in other government departments and services such as Department of Labour, Family and Youth Services etc, exacerbated by a lack of coordination between departments and in some cases lack of interest among politicians and officials.

5.17. National (and international) economic factors mean that in many countries poverty is commonplace, especially in rural areas, leading to financial pressures which in turn mean that families and their children prioritise short term income for food and other basics over education. Many such economies are in part informal, which makes child labour difficult to monitor and many 'employers' are in fact parents whose children are engaged in unpaid household based economic activities, especially subsistence farming.

5.18. Financial pressures can manifest in politicians being unwilling to openly support the CLFZ approach as they perceive this as a potential vote-loser (because families believe they have to rely on child labour).

[43] Development Finance International policy briefing for UNESCO, October 2024

5.19. Low levels of education and literacy among parents (on PTAs and SMCs) and some local officials can make it hard for them to implement elements of CLFZ plans, for example lobbying government for new classrooms or more teachers.

5.20. These socio-economic factors can be made significantly worse by natural disasters such as seasonal climate variation, earthquakes, droughts and flooding (some of which are related to climate change) in countries which are among the least resilient to deal with them.

5.21. According to both our field research and other interviews some schools are not always child-friendly places, they are under-resourced, with teachers not always present and with uninspiring pedagogical approaches, regimes of corporal punishment (and some reports of other forms of child abuse), all of which makes the idea of schooling very unattractive to both parents and children. This is not the case in schools in the CLF Zones, where instances of corporal punishment have massively reduced or disappeared altogether and where other forms of positive discipline are in place, but it does remain a challenge more broadly.

5.22. As well as school fees some schools are levying charges around the edges. (For example, from the fieldwork in Uganda, the charges in Uganda Shillings at one school were: Examination fees per term – Primary 1 to P2 = 11,000, P3 = 13,000, P4 to P6 = 21,000, P7 = 22,000; Feeding per term = 35,000). Poverty means that certain families cannot afford those costs or children have to labour specifically to earn these fees.

5.23. No single approach, intervention or organisation can address or remedy these huge structural issues.

Discussion

In Malawi:

All the problems mentioned above, such as widespread poverty, hunger and water/food insecurity, limited built infrastructure and vulnerability to climate are long-term structural challenges in Malawi as in many of the world's so-called least developed countries.

In rural areas most families depend on small-scale farming and face extreme economic uncertainty. With only one rainy season and harvest per year, food and income can run out for months. This makes it more difficult to afford school-related expenses and also makes it more likely that children are expected to work to contribute to family income. For example, in very extreme cases such as in Mtherera, children dropped out and returned to work because their families could not afford uniforms, books or even basic clothing and soap. Also if local services fail, such as water systems - which are often unreliable, children can become involved in time-consuming tasks such as fetching water.

A further challenge is the transition from primary school to secondary, especially as those children who have benefitted from the CLF Zone now aspire to continue their education. "*I was told by my parents that once I complete primary school, I will not continue with secondary education because they do not have school fees for me*" – 14-year-old male pupil in Standard 7, focus group participant.

For example, in 2023, two learners from Chibanzi school passed their primary examinations but could not continue to secondary school due to lack of school fees. They instead opted to repeat standard 8 for another year as their parents looked for resources. A group of parents in Chibanzi have managed to negotiate with the secondary school to pay tuition fees in instalments, but so far this solution has only been available to a few families.

These problems are exacerbated by insufficient national budget allocation for education and limited direct involvement of local government in the CLFZs. While some officials (Primary Education Advisors and Assistant Centre Coordinators) did participate in meetings and received updates, they were not deeply involved in implementation. One education authority staff member admitted, "*We mostly participated in education meetings... we see that the number of children in these schools has increased over time*," implying that they observed improvements but did not drive them.

In Uganda:

The picture in Uganda is no different, with significant, long-term structural challenges defining the operating environment for CLFZ interventions.

Economic circumstances inevitably influence behaviour. Across nearly all focus group discussions, learners expressed concern over the lack of essential school materials such as books, pens, school uniforms, and money for school meals. As a result, many children reported resorting to short-term child labour activities to earn money needed for school-related expenses before they could return to class. One child from a school in Paidha said, *"Sometimes I miss school … I go and dig somebody's garden… to pay my money for examination."*

The most affected are households with large families, single or divorced parents, and orphans living with grandparents, who struggle to meet the costs of school materials and other expenses. Children from these vulnerable households are at greater risk of engaging in child labour, as economic pressures to meet basic needs often push them into work as a means of survival.

Although the CLFZ project has been active for a significant period in Erussi, Paidha, and Abanga, and although there has been considerable contact with local officials there is insufficient government support. Key government departments—such as the District Labour Office and the Office of the Probation and Social Welfare Officer—are not actively engaged in monitoring or sustaining anti-child-labour interventions. While the Nebbi District Education Office has expressed support for the project, structural challenges remain. For instance, the current Education Management Information System (EMIS) does not routinely capture data on children who are re-integrated into school. This gap affects planning and may result in continued under-allocation of resources to schools that support vulnerable learners. Additionally, the Child and Family Protection Unit, though engaged in child protection, currently has no concrete plan to adopt or continue the initiatives introduced by the CLFZ project.

And despite considerable support from local political leaders, political considerations can also influence the level of public support that candidates feel able to give, especially around election time. As one respondent said,

"They fear their community, because they want votes. And also, they live in the same communities where child labour is occurring. If they enforce child labour policies and take their neighbours to the police, who is going to protect them after that? How will they convince them to vote for them?" Furthermore, the complex legal and bureaucratic environment in Uganda means that although new byelaws related to education and child labour have been agreed at district level, these have not been ratified, meaning that they cannot be legally enforced.

5.5. Unexpected outcomes

Findings

5.24. There have been some unexpected outcomes (covered elsewhere in this document). Here is a brief overview:

- improved academic results in schools involved
- reductions in teenage pregnancies and early marriages
- improved community safety and reductions in anti-social behaviour
- children staying at school longer to engage in remedial classes and/or anti-child-labour club activities which reduces the likelihood of child labour
- emerging solutions to the challenge of transition from primary to secondary school, for example parents negotiating with the secondary school to pay tuition fees for their children in instalments
- personal development and a sense of empowerment for some parents through involvement in the CLFZ projects
- additional recruitment of members for teacher Unions along with improved public image and improved relations with education authorities
- CLFZ projects attracting or reinforcing collaboration with partners, such as international and domestic NGOs
- increased pressure on class sizes due to the success of returning children from child labour to education

5.6. Further discussion (Challenges)

We heard from other respondents similar evidence about the range of challenges that the CLFZ approach faces in many countries. These again fall under one or more of the categories, of challenges related to implementation, sustainability, cultural norms and structural problems. Again it is worth noting that Education International, partners and other implementing organisations can try to address some of the problems related to implementation and sustainability but it is incredibly difficult to tackle cultural and particularly structural problems.

"We worry about disabled children in the CLF Zones who are of school age but simply cannot attend because of access issues, which is a problem that we cannot address directly," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"We recognise that there is a gap in our provision relating to early marriage. After marrying early some girls do indeed come back to school. But if a girl becomes pregnant by a family member, which is not uncommon, she will be rejected by her family and her 'partner' will abandon her. These girls can fall through the cracks and really require specialist provision," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Another problem related to implementation can occur at the very start when we begin to survey an area. Word gets around that we are trying to identify children who are not in school and that they may receive special support. So, a small minority of parents may take their children out of school for a few weeks so that they are identified as 'not in education'. This means that we may start with inaccurate data and may target some of the 'wrong' children. This usually gets corrected in collaboration with teachers but it wastes time and resources," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Our project was interrupted and disrupted by massive flooding in the area. We are now working in a new Zone. It is too soon to say whether the success in the original Zone will endure. The community committee is still functioning and we still have contact with them so we are hopeful. But without funding and the Union involvement activities may not continue at the same level. And the flood waters are still there after six months which is complicating things," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

And of course changing minds is not easy. It requires persistence and patience. *"A mindset change is not easy to achieve, you have to build trust and you have to have multiple conversations. Just think about the change in attitudes and behaviour in relation to smoking in Europe – this has taken decades and is still ongoing,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

"Cultural heritage is a real barrier – people have grown up doing things a certain way and this becomes part of their communal self-image. So they come to think that because this is what their community has always done it must be the only way to do things. This makes them resistant to change. I also see another broad cultural norm which both contributes to the need for anti-child-labour interventions and which the CLFZ approach can also help to tackle. I believe there is a misconception of poverty in Africa. Material poverty is actually secondary to intellectual poverty. Many Africans have become used to holding out their hand for help with material needs. However, if you can change the intellectual poverty, through education, it will become much easier to tackle material poverty. Our CLFZ work is making a small contribution to this - by building the capacity of teachers and also of communities we can help reduce intellectual poverty," – Education International staff member.

We also heard evidence about the structural problems which typify the difficult operating context for CLFZ projects, many of which are either direct or indirect causes of child labour and therefore are among the reasons why anti-child-labour initiatives are needed in the first place. "*Class sizes are a huge issue. With sometimes more*

than one hundred pupils in a class, of course some children drop out," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

In many countries there are so many barriers to overcome in the battle against child labour and for education. *"There are sometimes simply no schools to go to, or if they do exist there are not enough teachers, the schools have poor classrooms, poor sanitation and no support for girls. These problems are exacerbated by poverty and beliefs that children must work and that education is not valuable,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Even in countries where the economic situation is slightly better education budgets are still tight. *"The Government does understand that the CLFZ approach works but they just do not have enough money for everything and they have competing priorities, for example they have increased teachers' salaries,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

6. Success factors

In relation to the positive impact and benefits identified, what have been the key success criteria, what has worked and why?

The Terms of Reference for this evaluation outlined, among other things, the desire to, "deepen the understanding of the effectiveness … and impact of the projects … identifying key lessons and good practices that have emerged from the implementation." Efficacy and impact have been discussed in detail in previous chapters. In discussion with Education International the evaluation team translated "identifying key lessons and good practices" into an evaluation question focussing on success factors. In other words what are the activities, functions and processes that lead to the successful implementation of a CLF Zone? In addition what are the critical changes that ideally need to be achieved and which collaborations and external relationships ideally need to be built to bring about maximum impact? This chapter explores these questions.

Presenting the findings in this area is not straightforward, for several reasons. Firstly, there are multiple sources of evidence to consider: pre-existing research and documentation on the topic such as the 'CLFZ Handbook'[44] and the Education International / AOb research report[45]; considerable experience gathered across multiple CLFZ interventions implemented in many different countries by Education International and partners and other organisations over more than twenty years; the evidence gathered from our fieldwork and interviews with numerous CLFZ experts. Secondly, there are a large number of success factors, so they need to be broken down into groups to make them more digestible and easier to understand and apply. Thirdly, there are different types of success factors; those which are more under the control of the project and 'easier' to describe, plan for and implement, such as specific activities or events, and those which are harder to pin down and which often depend on many other factors, often not under the project's control, such as cultural changes or relationships with other external parties. There is a further distinction between success factors which are context-specific and those which are more or less universal. Finally, there are varying opinions on the importance of success factors and in some cases whether or not they should even be implemented, along with various nuances of interpretation and additional aspects to consider.

In order to reflect this complexity while also making the findings as clear as possible, this chapter is therefore structured differently, as follows. In addition to a few high-level, numbered findings, we have produced a structured listing of success factors. We have divided the success factors into categories, based on the section headings in the Stop Child Labour Coalition CLFZ Handbook, which reflect the more or less chronological steps in the process of implementing a CLFZ project (although of course some things need to happen simultaneously and some need to be repeated or delivered on an ongoing basis). In each category we present a list of success factors, where possible in loosely chronological order, with a label to describe them, such as 'activity' (which includes certain processes and the funding or purchasing of certain items), 'role', 'structure', etc. Several success factors could of course belong to more than one category and be given more than one label. The label of

[44] "5 x 5 Stepping Stones For Creating Child Labour Free Zones" CLFZ Handbook published in 2015 by the Stop Child Labour Coalition

[45] EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices - Nora Wintour, June 2020

'change' is given to some success factors which do not constitute a concrete element of the project (such as an activity or key person) but rather a significant change, which if it can be achieved significantly increases the likelihood of success. Similarly, the label 'relationship' denotes success factors which are not entirely within the control of the project but which if they can be developed, again increase the likelihood of success. Each success factor is briefly described and elaborated with any relevant evidence, comments and opinions from the various sources mentioned above, with the greatest influences being the fieldwork and online interviews carried out for this evaluation but also with the intention to look beyond the projects in Malawi and Uganda.

The sections listing success factors are followed by a Further Discussion section which considers some of the distinctions and nuances mentioned above, some diverging opinions on certain issues and the extent to which some success factors are context dependent and others might be considered universal.

Findings

6.1. The 'recipe' for establishing a CLF Zone is well understood and well documented (for example in the Stop Child Labour Coalition CLFZ Handbook). This of course needs to be applied in a context-sensitive way, taking various local factors into account. The following success factors do not relate just to Malawi and Uganda but are drawn from experience in other countries as well and indeed from the experience of some other organisations. Some success factors seem to be common across contexts; some are clearly more important in certain countries than others and some may not be relevant in certain contexts.

6.2. It is also true to say that there is not always agreement among practitioners, both in terms of philosophical approach (for example the extent to which parents who do not send their children to school should be 'punished') and in terms of measures which may work in one country but which would not be appropriate in another (for example the use of detailed questionnaires and child-specific interventions as used in Albania, which are unlikely to be practicable in many Sub-Saharan African contexts).

6.1. Start up (preparation and 'project management')

Activity: stakeholder mapping, issue identification, needs analysis

Early mapping of the area identifies the key people, structures and organisations to involve and the key challenges, issues and needs in that potential zone. In selecting an area for the development of a CLF Zone it is important to consider various criteria, such as high levels of child labour / low levels of school enrolment and attendance, good contacts with enough key individuals such as local leaders and headteachers, the potential for cooperation with employers and local authorities and the capacity of the implementing organisation. *"It is really important to understand the main problems in an area through early mapping. If religious practices are a factor we can target that, or if the main problem is young girls involved in prostitution we can collaborate with the local police, for example by asking them to give talks on the dangers of crime and prostitution and so on."* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"When we started we targeted a place with specific needs and designed the project to meet those needs. We identified an important anti-child-labour champion in the form of a local council leader who lent his name to the project," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

For Education International projects it is necessary to consider the capacity of the teachers Union(s) to deliver and the commitment of the Union leadership. *"It is easier if there are not too many Member Organisations involved in the development of a CLFZ project. It is important that the Union has the human resources and capacity to dedicate to the CLFZ way of working and that the leadership is committed to a two or three year engagement,"* – Education International staff member.

Activity: baseline data-gathering (of school attendance, levels of child labour)

Initial baseline data-gathering (of school attendance, levels of child labour) is essential, firstly to reveal the extent of the problem to the community and secondly as a basis for monitoring progress.

Role: Focal Point teachers, village headmen, community/religious leaders, others

It is very clear that involving key people in key roles is essential; these include the local leaders (village headmen/headwomen, local councillors, religious leaders), head teachers and the appointed Focal Point teachers. Focal Point teachers receive special training and are identified as the main school contacts and they play an instrumental leadership role. There may be other key individuals according to the local situation. *"The full-time 'anchor person' or project coordinator for the implementing organisation is crucial as they keep everyone else connected,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

Role: involvement of the teachers Union

In the Education International interventions this involvement has been absolutely essential given that without the Union as catalyst the CLF Zone would not exist at all. Teachers Unions are clearly very well placed to play this role. However it is possible to create a CLF Zone with another organisation such as an NGO being the driver; nevertheless the involvement of teachers and schools is of course absolutely essential and therefore it makes complete sense to involve the teachers Union. *"The involvement of the teachers Union is indispensable, especially if the Union leaders are active and committed to the CLFZ approach,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"It was a new dynamic for us, working with the teachers Union. As they focussed on child labour alongside their normal issues their involvement really added value," – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

Activity: ongoing monitoring

Systems to continue monitoring school attendance, children returning from child labour, children retained in school and children remaining in child labour are important to measure progress and to be able to report on success and the scale of the remaining challenge. Improved school record-keeping of children's attendance form the basis for this monitoring, supported by community monitoring, reporting of child labour and follow-up with families where necessary through PTA, SMC and Mothers Associations, sometimes accompanied by teachers. *"We have registers... it is that classroom leader who is the one to take*

care of that register…every morning they record the pupils who are present…It reduces the absenteeism of the pupils…and the teachers," – Former head teacher, Uganda

Relationship: local authorities

Getting early approval for the development of the Zone and ongoing support from local authorities can make implementation much easier – although achieving this can be difficult and time-consuming and can be complicated by lack of government funding or political considerations. 'Local authorities' can include local or often district level education authorities, various local government departments, police and local politicians.

Other factors:

- inclusive community-based approach: it is essential to approach CLFZ implementation in a way that includes all stakeholders in the community, which requires patience and the building of relationships and trust
- training the project team: on child labour issues and community engagement

6.2. Communities in charge (community involvement and awareness-raising)

Activity: community meetings / social dialogue

Social dialogue involving diverse community stakeholders is one of the main defining elements of the CLFZ approach. This social dialogue needs to be built up over time and needs to be repeated regularly so that everyone feels involved. It can be delivered in numerous ways, such as all-village meetings and chiefs' meetings, or the inclusion of child labour topics in church services and school assemblies.

Activity: information and awareness-raising

A fundamental activity, or series of activities, to raise awareness and inform community members on the benefits of education (helping parents and the wider community to 'visualise' the difference education can make to a child's prospects and how it can break the poverty cycle), on the harm of child labour and the distinction between child labour and child work and on children's right to education. This is absolutely fundamental as a first step but also needs to be maintained as an ongoing process so that the messages are repeated and reinforced until eventually the community takes ownership of the new understanding and attitudes. There are multiple methods for undertaking this awareness-raising. The best mix will vary according to context but is likely to include some of the following:

- community meetings and social dialogue as mentioned above – this is probably the most important element of awareness-raising, especially in rural/traditional communities
- culturally appropriate methods such as traditional dance, the use of social 'events' such as funerals and street theatre – such methods are effective and can add legitimacy to the message especially when led or supported by traditional leaders
- door to door 'canvassing' by teachers, local leaders, members of SMCs, PTAs and Mothers Associations

- use of media such as local language radio, for example using well-known local leaders or local 'success stories' as spokespeople
- campaign events such as sports/dance/theatre especially if these are tied to national days such as 'the day of the African child' or 'anti child labour week'
- inclusion in many of the above activities of the anti-child-labour clubs (see below) which involve the children themselves in spreading important messages; in particular street theatre (often involving children from the clubs) has been one of the most powerful methods, across many CLF Zones, of raising awareness of the harm that can be caused by child labour and the behaviour of some parents

"Awareness-raising needs to comprise various methods: community meetings organised by project staff, meetings organised by village chiefs (as they come to realise that a CLFZ project contributes to general community development and cohesion and can harness the energy of young people); involvement of Mothers Associations to focus on girls; teachers getting out of the classroom and into the community, having meetings with parents (which can sometimes be very emotional)," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"The anti-child-labour clubs do a great job of peer to peer awareness-raising, for example through street theatre. And during the performances during the holidays we are able to re-enrol children for the next school year," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"The local council leader made a real difference to the awareness-raising. His name and picture were on posters, he introduced us to key people in schools and the community, organised child labour free weeks in various villages and spread the word in other parts of the district," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Activity: training for community leaders

Training to community leaders on the overall approach, their role and the benefits to children and the community of education and the need to combat child labour. *"Training/informing/convincing important key stakeholders is key. Many people, teachers included, do not know much about national legislation, for example on compulsory schooling, minimum working age, etc. If school-related structures, like PTAs or mothers associations, do not exist, support and training should be given to set them up,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Structure: the Mothers Association

To reinforce the change of attitude towards girls, to support girls to return to school from early marriage or pregnancy, to help girls deal with menstruation and help young mothers with childcare. Mothers Associations are also often active in community savings and loan schemes to fund community/school needs and/or support income generation for poor families. *"Mothers Associations are very important because they hep to change the 'code of conduct' for women within communities. They raise awareness among other women in the communities about girls' education and keeping them in school. By keeping girls in school, mothers prevent them being drawn into domestic work in large cities. Members of Mothers Associations actively participate in monitoring the school attendance of learners and also ensure the schooling of their*

children by using the profits from income-generating activities," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Change: mindset shift

The success factors above are important because they contribute to bringing about a shift in mindset. If it is possible to achieve such a shift, in terms of changed attitudes to child labour, the value of education, children's rights, support for girls, and in particular to achieve community ownership of the project and this new mindset, this is a very significant milestone and will enhance further implementation and contribute to the sustainability of the CLF Zone. *"We often hear the 'poverty argument' – that school is unaffordable. It is true that families do have to make sacrifices, but we have found that actually the poorest families do send their children to school. Once the conversation is focussed on the children and their right to an education people drop the poverty argument,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

6.3. Time for school

Activity: training of teachers and headteachers

Training provided to headteachers and teachers on child labour, community engagement and new ways of teaching; resulting in new outlooks among teachers and a commitment to engage in the project (such that they were involved in awareness-raising, talking to parents and in some cases giving extra remedial classes without payment); this training often constitutes the first time these teachers have benefitted from continuing professional development; the appointment of Focal Point teachers who are the main contact in the schools for the CLFZ project has also been very important.

The research mentioned earlier into 'Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices' carried out for Education International and AOb in six countries in 2018 and 2019 focussed on best practice in developing teachers in the context of CLFZ interventions. Although the focus of the research was narrower than for this evaluation, the relevant findings are remarkably similar. The report concluded that:

> "A key best practice appears to be that the courses are tailor-made, and the content varies from country to country. All were based on participatory learning methods and included planning for follow-up through training of trainers and continuous support. The use of expert trainers, including union leaders, university or teacher-training staff, facilitators from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or from the Education Inspectorate or Ministry of Education appears a key element to ensure effective courses.
>
> "The courses were an opportunity to explain the … child labour-free area-based approach, … child-centred pedagogy and active learning techniques, …. children's rights and definitions of child labour, … a specific focus on the girl child, … gender relations, guidance and counselling on sexual education for both boys and girls, and menstrual management.

> "Unions have developed training manuals or other resources which combine information on child labour, including relevant national legislation and agencies, with pedagogical training modules and information on active learning techniques."[46]

"The training of teachers is delivered by the Union but sometimes also involves staff from the education authority who are specialists in a particular topic, such as gender awareness. Training materials are developed by each Union and training is delivered in the local language (which makes it difficult to share any locally developed materials)," – Education International staff member.

"According to context the order of topics could vary, but it seems from our projects that at least training about national legislation on schooling, child labour etc is important, to give teachers the right arguments to talk with parents. This training should start as soon as possible, it should be part of the start-up as these teachers might also be involved in the baseline data-gathering work," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Training may also include important additional topics such as capacity building on lobbying and local resource mobilisation and how to access government funding. *"Training was provided by the Union in collaboration with NGOs. It was about more than child labour and the CLFZ approach. It was also about understanding children's needs, non-violent communication, broad pedagogical approaches and awareness-raising – it was a real eye-opener for the teachers. A very important element was the SCREAM[47] methodology,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

Structure: School Management Committee, Parent Teachers Association

It is important to involve local structures, in particular School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent teacher Associations (PTAs) and Mothers' Associations. In some cases, such as in Mali and Burundi, the CLFZ project has actually created a Mothers' Association, where this was missing. However, if possible it is advisable to work with existing structures as this is more likely to be accepted and to endure; this sometimes entails the redefining of the role of these structures, giving them a new sense of purpose and a clear sense of responsibility for child protection and liaison between the community and the school (possibly through training); in some cases it entails creating new bodies such as a 'child protection committee', which may include representatives from the school, the wider community, employers and local authorities. "*School Management Committees are very important. Once they are clear on their role it really makes a difference. Local authorities are actually grateful when the teachers Union is training the SMC because they often don't have the capacity to do it,"* – Education International staff member.

Activity: provision of 'bridging' classes

The provision of remedial or 'bridging' classes to enable children to (re)integrate into school so that those who have missed schooling due to child labour can catch up on missed content and so that they are not

[46] EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices - Nora Wintour, June 2020

[47] ILO website: SCREAM: Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media

stigmatised for having worked and for being older than their new schoolyear – in some schools these extra classes were also open to all children thus reducing stigma and helping to raise overall academic standards.

The fieldwork in Malawi revealed that a critical component of the CLFZ project's effectiveness was the provision of bridging classes (remedial education) to help children who had been in labour catch up academically and smoothly reintegrate into formal schooling. Many returnee students had fallen behind in their studies or even forgotten things they learned before. The project introduced special measures to boost their learning and confidence, ensuring that returning to school was not only socially positive but also academically sustainable. The bridging efforts were very effective, benefiting not only the former child labourers but also improving the overall school culture of support through remedial lessons for returnees, teacher incentives and motivation as well as holistic reintegration activities. The project leveraged extra-curricular activities (like clubs, sports, drama) as a means to integrate returning children socially. "*Remedial classes are for Standard 1 to 8 children who are slow learners in class and have just returned from child labour. However, study circles happen when children voluntarily stay behind after school and either study on their own or with support from a teacher,*" – Head teacher, Malawi.

In Uganda some teachers have been offering literacy and bridging classes in their own time without being paid. The literacy classes are being offered on a voluntary basis to young illiterate people who were inspired by the project's awareness-raising efforts. The teachers want to give them a second chance to learn how to read and write. At present a temporary, makeshift space is being used. However, parental contributions are currently enabling the construction of a good new building, which when complete will mean there is a proper classroom for the adults classes.

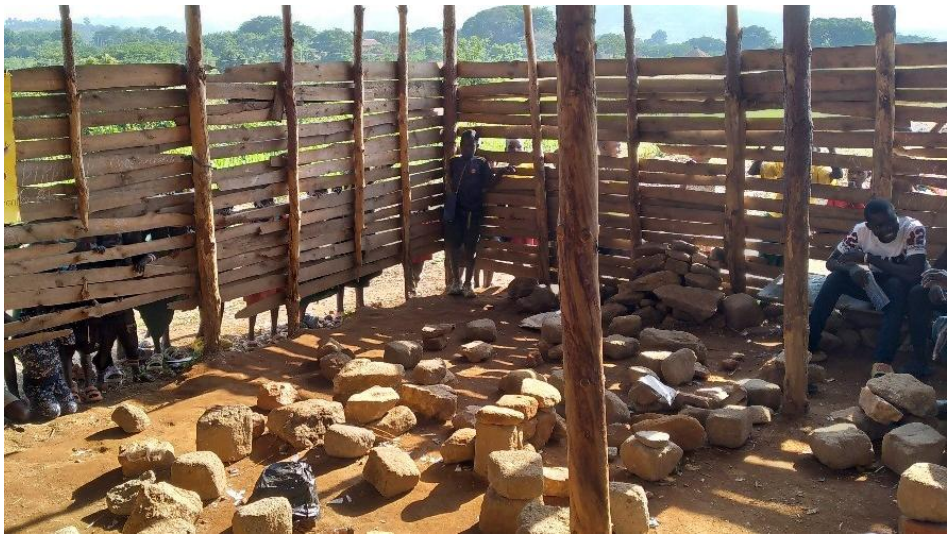


Figure 5: Temporary, makeshift space being used for some voluntary literacy classes in Uganda, while a new building is under construction.

Remedial classes have also been complemented by support and counselling to aid reintegration into school. *"Because of that counselling and the guidance that the teachers were giving me, it made me work harder and excel at academics,"* – Former child labourer, returned to school, Uganda.

Activity: improve school buildings

The project can improve the condition of school buildings (better toilets, repainting etc) with the involvement of parents and the community (providing labour and materials) and sometimes through lobbying of local education authorities. Better buildings will make school more attractive, and the proper provision of separate toilets is especially important for girls. Some respondents feel this is not a necessary pre-condition for the establishment of a CLF Zone and/or that providing suitable school buildings is properly the responsibility of governments.

Activity: provide school materials and equipment

The provision of basic school equipment, such as chalk, books and cleaning materials, along with extra equipment for sports, music and drama. Specific support to help poorer families with school materials, such as exercise books, pens, schoolbooks, and sometimes even uniforms. This can be financed in various ways, for example through community savings schemes or special funds set up by community leaders based on parental contributions or sometimes (and controversially, according to some experts) fines for parents who have not been sending their children to school. Occasionally this provision (and also improvements to buildings) may be funded by a local employer as part of their corporate social responsibility activities.

Activity: school feeding programme

Hunger can discourage children from attending school and can also drive child labour as a means to paying for food. Setting up school feeding programmes, often with the involvement of parents and the community in the form of donated produce or the creation of school gardens can help to address this problem. In Chigudu, Malawi, the community started a village garden to grow food for school meals, which helped to reduce dropouts due to hunger. *"As a community, we have a village garden. We plant and harvest food that our children eat while at school,"* – Village headman, Chigudu.

Activity: create and equip anti-child-labour clubs

The creation of 'Anti-child-labour Clubs' to enable fun extra-curricular activities such as drama, dance, music and sport and to offer counselling and enable a culture of peer support, including peer to peer awareness-raising and monitoring and a central role in community awareness-raising activities, with the additional benefit of keeping children longer in the school grounds to play (rather than leaving to work); in some cases this was done by integrating anti-child-labour messages/activities into existing clubs; these clubs can contribute to the sustainability of messages and new attitudes as their members grow into adulthood. The project can also support these efforts through the provision of equipment (balls, instruments, costumes) to support the extra-curricular activities such as sports, music and drama.

"The anti-child-labour clubs are worth a special mention. They can have important roles in street theatre, ongoing monitoring, door to door awareness-raising etc and in many countries, children have this peer to

peer influence, they meet friends in the street and 'lobby' them to come back to school" – Education International staff member.

"I now look forward to attending school every day because of my friends and my role in the club as an actor," – fourteen year old male student, Malawi.

Figure 6: Pupils at Asina primary school, Zombo, in Uganda involved in spreading messages on child labour

Relationship: local and district (education) authorities

Education authorities are often struggling with lack of resources at a national level. However, CLFZ implementation can still be enhanced by developing a relationship with them, through outreach or lobbying by headteachers and local leaders (traditional and political). In the best case this can lead to collaboration to improve infrastructure to attract/retain teachers (such as accommodation, sanitation), to build more classrooms, train and allocate teachers (especially more female teachers in some contexts) and to reduce teacher transfers – all of which are key factors in implementing and sustaining a CLF Zone. In Malawi some schools have engaged volunteer or retired teachers from the community on an interim basis to ensure class sizes remain reasonable, in light of the increased pupil enrolment – although training and allocation of

teachers is really a government responsibility. *"This issue is addressed by the Union in the form of advocacy, which is why actions are being taken to integrate 16,014 community teachers into the local government civil service [and why] we advocate for more female teachers during the various recruitment processes. As a result, since 2014 more than 5,600 community teachers in Mali have been integrated into the local government civil service,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

It is also important to engage with local politicians and local/district government beyond just the education authorities. *"We initially approached the local sub-county council leader for permission to implement the project. He became an advocate and gave us access to schools and to key local government administrative units and helped to form a child labour committee at sub-county level. He is now standing for election at district level and told us that his work on child labour has helped to raise his profile,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

Change: focus on gender equality and special support for girls

To successfully implement the CLFZ approach it is often important to have a special focus on girls as they are disproportionately affected by child labour and school drop out as a result of early marriage, pregnancy and historical lack of support around menstruation and breast-feeding. A change of attitude in the community, accompanied by special provision in school has made a real difference to returning and retaining girls in education. *"We give them preferential treatment so they get time to go back home early to breastfeed or look after the kids…We also have a linkage to the nearest health facility, to reduce repeat pregnancies,"* – Head teacher, Uganda

Change: improved school environment

All of the success factors above can ultimately contribute to creating a better school environment, which is more likely to attract parents and children and retain both teachers and pupils. Better teaching, including more child-centred pedagogical approaches without corporal punishment can build trust, improve student-teacher relationships and create a supportive atmosphere in class, as noted by a Focal Point teacher in Malawi, *"Children in our school are open to us. They tell us their problems and anything that affects their lives at home and school".* These approaches, along with better school buildings, with adequate supplies and enhanced through extra-curricular activities and special support for returning children and especially girls can create an environment that all community members support.

6.4. Stronger families, stronger communities

Activity: introduce new community byelaws

Community acceptance of, and compliance with, the principle that all children should be in school can be strengthened through the introduction of community byelaws, such as punishments for parents who do not send their children to school or banning traditional dances during school hours. However, this varies considerably according to the national and local context; in some cases byelaws take the form of community rules issued by traditional leaders, accepted by the community and enforced through punishments; in other places it is more about driving a process to ensure that local rules on child labour and

children's right to education become endorsed through the political/legal system so that they can be legally enforced. It should also be noted that some supporters of the CLFZ approach are against the use of punishments.

Activity: support income generation activities

In some contexts the introduction of income generating activities is seen as very important, to help poor families to pay school fees and afford school materials and uniforms. Such activities can be more effective if they are implemented in conjunction with savings and loan schemes.

Activity: support community savings and loan schemes

Community savings and loan schemes, often run by women, perhaps through the Mothers Association can be set up to provide funding for school improvements or help pay for school-related expenses. In some places the community have themselves contributed to a local fund set up to support the poorest families with school materials and even basics such as clothes. *"Some of the women made money from making and selling ropes and were able to save small amounts through the savings and loan association which they could then use to pay for school fees,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

Other factor: help with school fees

In a few rare contexts (and in special cases), the projects themselves helped the poorest families with school fees, which is controversial given that it is not sustainable as soon as a project intervention ends.

Indeed, the whole area of financial support is very context-dependent and can be controversial, with some practitioners favouring income generating activities, others preferring community savings and loans schemes to help families afford the cost of schooling. All experts agree that there should be no school fees and that simply paying fees is anyway not sustainable. Others recognise that unfortunately school fees often do exist and that some families need help to pay them and/or to pay for school materials and uniforms and that this can be a decisive factor in getting children back into school:

> *"Helping with school fees is not sustainable and creates a spirit of dependence,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.
>
> *"I think it is much better to start first with voluntary savings and loan associations and then work towards income generating activities. The benefits are much stronger if they come from parents' own initiative and resources that they have saved,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.
>
> *"In theory the right to education should be free and at no cost to parents,"* – Education International staff member.

Other factors:

- mobilising community resources: engaging the community and especially parents to get involved in providing resources, labour and materials for feeding programmes and building improvements, or to lobby for changes, for example negotiating support for children moving to secondary school. *"When we were beginning the school feeding programme, they took it positively, because they are also*

contributing food items, and the school is supporting some learners. So, the parents are fully engaged in the learning of their children," – Focal Point teacher, Uganda

6.5. The bigger picture (how to sustain, replicate and scale up)

The final chapter in the Stop Child Labour Coalition CLFZ Handbook is entitled 'The Bigger Picture' with section titles 'Towards child labour free zone policies', 'Involving multinationals', 'Join the international movement', 'The power of stories' and 'Pass on the spark'. These sections essentially address the question of how to sustain, replicate and scale up the CLFZ approach. Since this is precisely our final evaluation question, rather than go into these topics here, in this chapter on success factors, we have chosen to save the discussion for Chapter 7 'Sustainability, replication and scaling up'. There is also discussion of these topics in the two National Reports, but for now, we have restricted ourselves to the following two high-level findings.

Findings

6.3. Our research has shown that although there are many common and very successful elements in the implementation of CLF Zones, there is considerable variation in the approach to measures which can contribute to sustaining, replicating and scaling up the success of the CLFZ approach. While there are examples of positive developments and some notable successes in this area, the approach is not consistent and there are clearly some weaknesses, which in fact represent an opportunity for Education International, Education International Member Organisations, partners and funders.

6.4. It is important to resist the temptation to lump these topics together and rather to distinguish between sustaining, replicating and scaling up as these are different and require different thinking, different approaches and different types and levels of resourcing.

6.6. Further discussion (Success factors)

It was very noticeable across the online interviews carried out for this evaluation just how often the same success factors were mentioned, unprompted, by respondents. The measures discussed above were referred to time and time again which suggests that many of them are important in a wide range of settings.

Another theme which came through strongly from all evaluation methods however, was that some success factors are heavily context dependent. There are success factors which are more important in one setting and less important or even irrelevant in another.

Not all success factors must be present in order to achieve success and its unlikely that all will be brought to bear in one project – there will often be some elements which have only been partially implemented.

As has been alluded to above there are sometimes differing opinions as to whether a particular aspect of the approach is a decisive success factor or indeed whether it should even be included. For example, we heard a

range of views on the extent to which distinguishing between unacceptable 'child labour' and acceptable 'child work' (such as household chores) is a good idea and whether the intention to combat child labour should be absolute or pragmatic (the first two comments below contrasting with the second two):

> *"A non-negotiable stand against all forms of child labour creates a strong campaign. Tackling child labour but allowing child work leads to compromise,"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.
>
> *"You have to stick 100% to the principles – you cannot allow even a little child labour or any grey areas,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.
>
> *"Don't use the terms 'child labour' and 'child work', to distinguish between the acceptable and unacceptable - they can mean the same thing and in some languages there is no distinction. It is better to distinguish between 'child work/labour' and 'light work' (the latter is allowed according to national law and ILO conventions C.138 and C.182 on child labour),"* – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.
>
> *"Allowing children who may work part-time to arrive at school later, or leave earlier, helps retention,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

The importance of taking context into account and also the potential for widely divergent opinions is vividly illustrated by the following range of views in relation to byelaws from respondents to this evaluation, drawn from different types of organisation across three continents:

> *"Byelaws and ordinances are easy to enforce at community level since they are made by the locals and they are aware of the consequences of breaking them. Community members are more vigilant to report anyone breaking the law."*
>
> *"The Union has managed to convince traditional leaders to take action against parents who do not bring their children to school. These community agreements also contribute significantly to combating child labour, but also to consolidating community mobilisation around the objectives of the child labour-free approach."*
>
> *"It depends on the context what would help, it could be informal byelaws or other things, but they should however be more supportive than punitive."*
>
> *"Not every country is using byelaws or ordinances. Some countries just use the law! Don't use punishment, make it more a form of dialogue".*
>
> *"Byelaws are effective when backed by awareness and community enforcement, but must be culturally sensitive."*
>
> *"The CLFZ approach works by consensus and motivation only. Punishments backfire."*

There are clearly some approaches which can be seen as essential success factors in a specific context but which are not generally applied and which would not work in other settings. A good example of this are a number of characteristics of the approach taken in projects in Albania. These include the use of individual pupil questionnaires leading to development plans which identify the reasons for dropping out of school and the steps needed to address them in the case of that individual pupil. These plans are implemented and monitored by a small working group made up of around three teachers, one parent and one child, which is responsible for around eight pupils and which meets regularly to assess progress. Another specific measure employed in Albania

is the provision of financial support and even food packages (worth around €30 per month) for some of the poorest families, where many of the interventions take place in communities with large numbers of Roma families and where this is recognised as sometimes being the key intervention which can help remove a child from child labour. These approaches are very resource-intensive and would not be practical or indeed necessary in other settings.

Having said that context is important and that there are divergent opinions in relation to success factors it does seem that there may be some success factors which are more or less universal or at least very common across multiple contexts and that there is also broad agreement on which might be some of the most important success factors and even on which might be some of the less important. Two additional significant sources of evidence can shed light on this.

Firstly, the 'Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices' report[48] identifies a number of measures that are "working well" under the headings of teachers' "professional development" and creating "a school environment conducive to learning". It is striking how many of these are the same as the success factors which have emerged from our fieldwork and interviews in relation to those topics. Success criteria identified in relation to the training of teachers included the "use of expert trainers", to deliver training on "child-centred pedagogy and active learning techniques", "children's rights and definitions of child labour" and the "child labour-free area-based approach". There were significant "gender aspects [in] the training programmes" and the implementation across the board included a "focus on the girl child and how to overcome obstacles they face in staying on in school, particularly after puberty".

Similarly, in relation to creating a better school environment, the following success criteria were identified:

- the enhanced status and motivation of teachers
- 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
- sports, drama, arts and music as both curricular and extra-curricular activities
- school meals programmes
- initiatives to support the girl child
- bridging and remedial classes
- student involvement in anti-child-labour initiatives
- a school philosophy of inclusive education
- strengthened communications with parents
- strengthened school management structures
- a multi-stakeholder approach

[48] EI/AOb Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices - Nora Wintour, June 2020

All of these factors have also been evidenced as important in this evaluation. This is unlikely to be a coincidence and it is reasonable to conclude that they are probably of near universal significance in the successful implementation of CLFZ projects. Furthermore, we heard no dissenting opinions[49] on any of the 'transnational best practices' mentioned above.

Secondly, there is some potentially interesting evidence from an exercise which we carried out as part of the evaluation. We asked the two evaluators who had carried out the fieldwork along with the respondents who had taken part in online interviews to respond to a list of possible success factors which we had developed based on document review and some early discussions with Education International. We asked respondents to first add any success factors that they felt were missing, then to comment on the importance, relevance, interpretation and universality of success factors and finally to give a score out of ten for each success factor, where 1 = 'not at all significant' and 10 = 'fundamental – the approach cannot work without this'.

We received fourteen responses in total, all from very well-informed and experienced respondents. Not everyone commented on every success factor and not everyone gave a score to every success factor. Nevertheless, the comments were interesting and some of them have been quoted in the discussions above, along with comments from interviews and evidence from the fieldwork.

Some interesting patterns emerged from the scores, although these must be treated with caution as the analysis is not statistically robust. We excluded from the analysis success factors that were only scored by one or two respondents. This produced a long-list of 28 success factors and we calculated a simple average score for each. (The success factors in the first two tables below were in fact each scored by eleven or more respondents.) We did not calculate standard deviation but did look at where there was considerable variance in the scores for a success factor (which was only in a few cases) and have commented on this below. The sample size is small and there could be various reasons why a respondent gave a high or low score to a specific success factor, for example because it is particularly important or unimportant in the specific context with which that individual is most familiar. Despite these caveats we think the evidence is worth presenting as food for thought if nothing more.

[49] The were some differing views on how to use definitions of child labour. The majority of respondents agreed that it is helpful to distinguish between unacceptable 'child labour' and acceptable 'child work' (which is sometimes called 'light work' or 'socialising work' and equates to a reasonable amount of 'helping out at home'). However a small number of respondents were nervous about this distinction as they felt it creates ambiguity and can be exploited to justify children carrying out inappropriate work. They advise caution, particularly because the terminology in some languages can be open to interpretation.

The average scores for the 28 success factors that were scored by at least three respondents ranged from 7.1/10 to 9.6/10, indicating that on average respondents considered *all of those success factors to be important* and making it clear that the CLFZ approach depends on a wide mix of measures, many of which work in synergy with each other.

We have taken two arbitrary cut-off points to identify the 'more important' success factors (with an average score of more than 9/10) and the 'less important' success factors (with an average score of less than 8/10).

The relatively 'more important' or perhaps *more universal* success factors, based on these average scores, are shown in the table below. They were all given consistently high scores by all respondents – in other words there was very low variance. (There was just one exception to this, one respondent gave a low score to one of these success factors, which was based on that individual's experience that this success factor had not been well implemented in the projects they were familiar with).

'More important' CLFZ success factors (based on average scores of >9/10 from eleven* or more respondent scores)
Key roles – Focal Point Teachers, village headmen, community/religious leaders, others
The training provided to teachers on child labour, community engagement and new ways of teaching
Involvement of education authorities
Involvement of the teachers Union (including follow-up contact)
Initial baseline data-gathering (of school attendance, levels of child labour)
Better teaching, including: more child-centred, music, sports, theatre, no corporal punishment
Information and awareness-raising on benefits of education, harm of child labour and distinction between child labour and child work (meetings, training, street theatre, door to door, radio etc)
The community meetings / social dialogue
Engage with bigger players like ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, EI, Save the Children, Global March, Stop Child Labour partners who can reach out and engage higher levels in governments, unions, employers' organisations, etc.*

* The final success factor in this table was in fact not on our original list of possible success factors but was added by four respondents who all gave it a high score, producing an average score above 9/10. It concerns the importance of engaging with large organisations in any advocacy work and is therefore covered in Chapter 7 'Sustainability, replication and scaling up'.

The relatively 'less important' or perhaps *more context dependent* success factors, based on these average scores, are shown in the table below. The fact that these success factors are perhaps more context dependent is borne out by the fact that there was much more variance in the scores given, with some success factors in this table receiving both very high and very low scores. When we looked at some of those 'outlier' scores, (either very high or very low), and which respondent gave them and the comments they made, it became clear that this variance is due to either divergent opinions on certain approaches (for example the use of byelaws) or the relevance of a particular measure (such as income generating activities) in some settings or the quality of implementation (such as the strength of some School Management Committees) in some communities. It is interesting to note that three of the six success factors in this table are specifically concerned with money,

suggesting that combatting child labour is indeed more about mindset and support than it is about covering costs.

'Less important' CLFZ success factors (based on average scores of <8/10 from eleven or more respondent scores)
Better school buildings (better toilets, repainting etc)
New community bylaws (e.g. punishments for parent who do not send their children to school or banning traditional dances during school hours)
The School Management Committee
Community savings and loan schemes
Income generation activities
Help with school fees

For sake of completeness, and to emphasise the point that the successful implementation of the CLFZ approach depends on a broad mix of the success factors most relevant to any context, the table below shows the remaining success factors that were given an average score of between 8/10 and 9/10.

Remaining CLFZ success factors (based on average scores between 8 & 9 /10 from twelve* or more respondent scores)
Advocacy at national level (by Union staff or other organisations)
Advocacy and lobbying at local level (by head-teachers, teachers, community leaders)
Provision of "bridging" classes to enable children to (re)integrate into school
Training for community leaders
Ongoing monitoring of school attendance, children returning from child labour, children retained in school, children remaining in child labour
The early stakeholder mapping to identify key people
The Parent Teachers Association, The Mothers Association
More teachers, more female teachers
Focus on gender equality and special support for girls (around menstruation, pregnancy etc)
School feeding programme
School books, sports and music equipment
Involvement of employers
Anti-child-labour Clubs *

* The final success factor in this table was in fact not on our original list of possible success factors but was added by three respondents whose scores produced an average score between 8/10 and 9/10.

A final point in relation to success factors which has come though strongly in the course of this evaluation is the importance of the commitment of the staff implementing the projects. This is not something which staff members themselves talk about but it is something that we observed in our fieldwork and interviews. The staff

members of the Education International Member Organisations and other organisations care deeply about tackling child labour and are committed to the implementation of the CLFZ approach. Without this commitment and energy the interventions would not be as successful as they are. *"When you see a child who you were able to withdraw from child labour go on to complete their schooling and get a proper job it is very rewarding. Of course there are frustrations but overall the work is more rewarding than frustrating and I am motivated to remove more children from child labour – this keeps me going,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

We also heard that there are many other highly committed individuals making a large contribution to the success of CLFZ projects, from teachers, headteachers and trainers to community leaders and local politicians. "*A key success factor is having people who are convinced by and committed to the approach, for example dedicated trainers who work on a peer to peer basis with the teachers they are training,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7. Sustainability, replication and scaling up

How can successes be sustained, replicated and scaled-up?

Funders, implementers and evaluators of international development interventions and other civil society initiatives often talk about 'sustainability, replication and scaling up' in one breath, as if they are just different aspects of a single criterion, namely to extract a 'better return on investment' or to achieve 'more impact'. In fact, often (and definitely in the case of the CLFZ approach), as we noted above, these are three different concepts. They are, though, related and there are some measures which may contribute to two or even all three.

The overarching aim of eradicating child labour can only be achieved through a range of key actions taken by global and state actors (such as UN bodies, international trade and finance bodies, regional cooperation bodies and national governments) at international and national levels and by major corporate actors. These actions are not easy to accomplish, for obvious reasons (the scale of the problem, the dominance of competitive free trade philosophies, political and national self-interest, conflict, the unequal impact of climate change, etc) as evidenced by the persistence of child labour and many other dimensions of global inequality and social injustice.

The CLFZ approach, as implemented by civil society actors, cannot achieve this aim and of course it should not be judged in these terms. However, it has a role to play, in fact several roles:

- it can make a huge difference on the ground to the communities where it is implemented. And of course there are lessons to be learned on how to maximise the benefits of CLFZ projects in terms of **sustaining** the impact of limited funding for as long as possible
- the benefits of an individual CLFZ intervention can be spread to other communities through **replication**, either by civil society initiatives or as part of national efforts to tackle child labour at scale
- CLFZ interventions can serve as a vital source of evidence and learning for state and other actors in designing policies, and can influence both policy and practice in ways that contribute to achieving impact **at scale**

The following sections consider the three issues of sustainability, replication and scaling up. The chapter is structured slightly differently to previous chapters. Numbered *Findings* and supporting quotes from respondents are presented together, drawing on both the fieldwork and the online interviews – as far as possible we have tried to present the key points in respondents' own words.

7.1. Sustainability

As discussed above, the CLFZ approach is not 'sustainable' in the sense of 'continuing with this approach will achieve the overarching aim of eradicating child labour', because of the limited levels of funding and resources available to civil society actors and because of the need for action by much larger actors in the face of such a large challenge. So what we are really talking about here is how to sustain the impact for as long as possible and how to make the CLFZ projects as self-sustaining as possible. The following findings and evidence relate to this interpretation of sustainability.

7.1. The cost of establishing a CLF Zone is relatively low. When implemented by an Education International Member Organisation, the costs are mostly related to the teachers Union (for staff time, travel etc), as well as paying for training and awareness-raising activities and the costs of school materials and equipment, as well as sometimes seed funding for community savings and loan schemes to support income generating activities. The costs are highest in the first year and can be expected to average out at less than €15,000 per year, over a three year period.

"A local NGO might help by providing a school kitchen. We are not an NGO and we don't fund facilities like this. We don't provide school fees and we don't provide ongoing funding. We help to change mindsets and we invest some seed funding," – Education International staff member.

7.2. With community contributions to activities such as improving buildings and setting up feeding programmes and with the effective use of income generating activities and community funds to support the cost of school fees and school materials, it should, in principle, be possible for a CLF Zone to sustain itself after the initial three-year funded project period. We heard mixed evidence on the degree to which this actually happens in practice.

"Even though the project has ended we have seen that the teachers are still really committed. Because of low birth rates and high levels of emigration in Albania it is also in the teachers' interests to make school as attractive as possible, otherwise there may be too many teachers and not enough pupils. But they also see this as an important task in itself and realise that it is an ongoing task as there will always be the next generation of children," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Income generating activities can help to sustain a project. For example funds to help poor families were provided by a small pig and poultry farm attached to the school. It was managed by the school development committee, community members provided their labour and the children were involved as part of their lessons. Some of the CLFZ projects have been running for over ten years now and have even expanded their income generating activities – we are no longer involved and just visit occasionally to monitor progress," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"When a project ends it is not possible to maintain activities at the same level of intensity but with the Union involved in an advisory capacity we have seen, through follow-up visits, that the overall approach is still being applied," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.3. The likelihood of a CLF Zone becoming self-sustaining can be significantly increased by adopting as many as possible of the following measures:

- foster a sense of community ownership from the very start

  "It is important to create a sense of ownership form the beginning. School and community leaders, including women, need to accept and understand that child labour is a problem and that we will stand beside them but that ultimately they will have to solve it themselves. Sometimes we ask them to sign a 'social contract' setting out values and new norms so that when we leave they are committed to upholding them," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- maintain the community structures and social dialogue to achieve critical mass

  "The community structures, such as the Mothers Associations, along with the anti-child-labour clubs and ongoing social dialogue play an important role in maintaining the CLF Zone," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

  "We can probably convince about two thirds of people in the community that this initiative is important. It is through patience, many meetings and peer to peer communication that the critical mass can be reached," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- train at least one additional Focal Point teacher, or a local leader, a member of the Mothers Association, or anyone who is motivated and has influence in the community, as a back-up - to take on the role if the initial Focal Point teacher moves on, as often happens

  "In Togo they train two focal point teachers and one additional focal point who is an influential member of the community," – Education International staff member.

- ensure that as many teachers as possible have been trained and provide communications materials to keep spreading the right messages

  "As we leave a school we make sure that teachers have been trained and that they are really clear about the CLFZ approach and their role within it. We also leave them with posters and banners to put up around the school to remind teachers and pupils how important this work is to encourage them all to continue," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

  "Teacher training is really instrumental, we have seen that even years later the teachers who we trained are still doing the work," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- support and build capacity of head teachers and community leaders through training to lobby local authorities

  "Teachers in Malawi were leaving their posts due to a lack of a local water supply. We provided training on lobbying and with our support the teachers were able to work with local officials so that a reliable water supply was provided. Similarly, training and support for teachers in Nicaragua enabled them to successfully lobby the authorities for the provision of extra classrooms," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- lobby education authorities at local, district or even national level to provide various forms of material support to increase the impact and the likelihood that it will endure

  "In one school, where 95% of the children were from the Roma community and where many did not attend school every day we were able to convince the Government to provide free meals as we knew this was a key factor," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- engage with the local authorities as much as possible

  The fieldwork in both Malawi and Uganda revealed that there was room for improvement in terms of lobbying and connecting with local authorities, not just education authorities but also departments responsible for labour, social affairs, probation and child and family protection.

  "Simple policy changes can make a big difference, for example it really helps if we can convince the education authorities to stop transferring teachers (who we have trained and who play a leading role) away from the area," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

  "To sustain success we must focus on mainstreaming the CLFZ approach into the work of the local and district government so it is part of their planning and becomes their responsibility. This needs to involve the Sub-county Community Development Officer, Sub-county and Parish chiefs as well as the District CDO and District Probation and Social Welfare Officers. Those structures are there but they do not have the budget allocations to properly fulfil their roles," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

  "We need to bring staff from local and district authorities to visit an existing CLFZ project so they can see how well it is working," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

  "When we engage with local authorities in the area it is important to include all the relevant departments, especially at District level and to get them all singing from the same hymn sheet, namely that no child should work. This means not just the Education Department but also the Health, Labour and Youth Departments as well, since they all have key roles to play. We can then refer any problems to the most appropriate authority," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- develop a proper exit strategy and 'handover plan'

  "We are already doing less now but before we leave we need a proper handover plan, including documenting best practice, building the capacity of the community to lobby the authorities and the setting up of meetings at District level. None of this needs to cost very much and the ultimate aim is to pass responsibility for continuation to local government," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- engage with the local authorities as much as possible

  "We have found that continuing with monitoring visits definitely encourages both the school and the community to keep up the good work," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

- engage with significant local employers

  "Much child labour is within families or in the informal economy but where there is a large employer the CLFZ project should engage with them as the benefits of doing so are significant, as shown by the experience of working with the Kyagalanyi Coffee company in Uganda and can help to sustain the impact" – Education International staff member.

7.2. Replication

Replication can be seen in two ways; firstly CSOs replicating the success of the CLFZ approach by essentially doing more of the same or, secondly, engaging state actors to apply the approach as part of efforts to deliver impact at scale. The second of these is considered below in section 7.3 'Scaling up'. In this section the main message is that Education International Member Organisations or indeed other civil society organisations can replicate the successes of the CLFZ approach documented in this evaluation and elsewhere by implementing the same approach in new areas (amended in line with any learning emerging from this evaluation that may apply to their context). As mentioned before, there is an effective 'recipe' for implementing the approach. There is, however, a question as to whether this is the best strategy overall as it will not lead to the wholesale eradication of child labour and may not be the only or best way to invest funds. We return to that debate in Chapter 8 'Conclusions and recommendations'. For now we confine ourselves to some findings that elaborate the basic concept of replication and some measures that could enhance it.

7.4. Trained teachers can be valuable multipliers.

"Trained teachers, especially if they have been Focal Point teachers or had a leading role in the implementation of a CLFZ project, can be advocates for the approach and the carriers of knowledge and motivation (without additional funding) if they move to a new school," – Education International staff member.

7.5. Forming domestic alliances with other CSOs can extend reach.

"We can increase impact by forming alliances with other CSOs in our country. This involves mapping the civil society landscape to see who is working on which issues and carrying out awareness-raising aimed at CSOs. We can then develop joint strategies, for example around media work and identifying potential influencers and suppliers, such as trainers, to support our work," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.6. There is also a role for Member Organisations to convene in their country, for example to bring all the teachers in a district together to share learning on the CLFZ approach.

"Member Organisations can bring wider groups of teachers together to share learning and can also use major union events, such as congresses, to promote the CLFZ approach and share best practice among their own members," – Education International staff member.

7.7. Lack of funding/resources is holding Member Organisations back from straightforward replication.

"We could expand some of the CLF Zones to include two or three wards in the same district which would increase the overall impact. But we would need extra resources for this. The teachers will do the work on a voluntary basis but there are costs to the Union to cover administration, and staff travel as well as to pay for things like training, extra remedial classes and workshops with local authorities," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.8. With small amounts of funding Member Organisations can extend their impact domestically by capacity building through training and sharing knowledge. Education International and partners could include in future projects plans and budgets a small provision to create a country-specific CLFZ handbook to give to Focal Point teachers and other key individuals, to support continued application of the approach after the project period and encourage uptake in new locations.

"Our resources are limited; our membership fees are low so we need external funding. One thing we can do with some support is provide training to other teachers and explain the CLFZ approach to them," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"One way to widen the impact is to use our knowledge to provide training to other teachers. For example, we trained members of our Union to become trainers on anti-child-labour methods," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"We should produce a handbook for schools and teachers and we need to document best practice so that we can share our learning with schools and communities in the surrounding areas. This would not be expensive and would help to spread the benefits of the CLFZ approach," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.9. Education International can play a key role in further spreading the word across its membership, by ensuring that all Union leaders understand that fighting child labour is part of their role, by enabling Union staff to visit successful CLFZ projects in other countries and by bringing staff engaged in this work together to exchange learning.

"Leaders and members of some teachers Unions do not see tackling child labour as part of their remit. It was a struggle at first to get our own leaders to accept this. We know that strong leadership and the involvement of teachers Unions is crucial to the success of CLFZ interventions. And we know that this can also bring significant benefits to the Union as well. We have to spread these messages to all Member Organisations," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Peer to peer learning is very important. We have organised study visits, where members from one Member Organisation visit a CLFZ project in another country to see the impact and learn from colleagues there. We have also held peer leaning events bringing together staff from multiple Member Organisations engaged in CFLZ work, (for example recently in Malawi), including visits to schools and meetings with SMCs, parents and teachers, followed by workshops for staff to exchange experience and learning," – Education International staff member.

"I had very positive experiences of how Education International and partners can help to share knowledge. After they brought people from Albania, India, Honduras and Nicaragua together I know that unions in

Honduras and Nicaragua started to undertake work to tackle child labour," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.3. Scaling up

'Scaling up' implies that the CLFZ approach could just be implemented on a larger scale, but this is not feasible, since the approach works, by definition, through focussing on a limited geographical area and engaging all stakeholders in that community. This might work on a slightly larger geographical area but cannot be applied at regional or national scale since there is no 'community' to which it can be applied. Therefore we need to think about scaling up in different terms.

One way would be to convince governments to mandate the implementation of the CLFZ approach in every community in the country and to support this through funding and the mobilisation of regional and local government structures. However, it is unlikely that any government is going to do this and it may not even be the most cost effective solution at national scale.

What is more plausible is to take the learning and evidence from the CLFZ approach and use this to influence major actors, especially governments, to address some of the causes of child labour, by raising awareness, challenging societal norms, investing sufficiently in education (to improve teacher training, pedagogical approaches and school infrastructure), introducing effective legislation on universal education, changing labour practices and so on. The following findings emerged clearly from the evaluation and all relate in one way or another to this interpretation of scaling up.

7.10. It is important to document and demonstrate the success of the CLFZ approach, particularly by bringing decision makers to see the impact for themselves.

"It takes time to establish a CLF Zone. You have to engage with all the local institutions and regional government. Their response is often slow due to staff turnover so you have to invest in relationships. What they really need is a demonstration – they need to see it for themselves. So we need to bring them to see the success on the ground," – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

"At first the Ministry of Education was sceptical about this work. But now they have seen the results they acknowledge that the Union has made a real difference and they are supportive. They want to collaborate with us but they will not provide funding as they simply do not have a budget for it," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Advocacy at national level needs to be carried out by Member Organisation staff [rather than community members]. We need to bring politicians and senior civil servants to visit CLFZ projects to meet the communities and see for themselves what a difference the projects make," – Education International staff member.

"We need to demonstrate our success and get decision-makers to come and see that success for themselves," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.11. Advocacy at national and international levels is of fundamental importance to bring about lasting impact at scale and staff across Education International Member Organisations have already identified some key areas to target.

"The focus for scaling up should absolutely be advocacy at the national level. The Government has priority areas and tackling child labour may well not be seen as so important. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Labour all need to play a role. At present their budgets are inadequate. As a Union and with support from Education International and other international stakeholders, such as UNICEF, we have to try and change this," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"International and national legislation is often poorly applied. For example, a new penal code against child labour and slavery was introduced in Mali in 2023. It is very clear and very strong. We need to lobby to ensure it is actually enforced," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Our advocacy needs to include calls on governments to include information on the CLFZ approach and on children's right to education in initial teacher training," – Education International staff member.

7.12. Awareness-raising, nationally and internationally, can help to create an environment more conducive to successful advocacy.

"We need to do more awareness-raising at national level so that people realise that child labour is a real problem. At the moment it is still a 'silent issue'. We need more media coverage and we need to get education on child labour into the national curriculum," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.13. Education International can play an important role in both awareness-raising and advocacy by convening, and enabling collaboration across its membership and with other global players.

"Engage with bigger players like ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, Global March, [and] Stop Child Labour partners who can reach out and engage higher levels in governments, unions, employers' organisations, etc," – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

"Only governments can combat child labour on a national scale. We need to advocate for this and lobby our governments. Education International can support these efforts by convening teachers Unions and reaching out to other organisations such as UNESCO and the ILO to create synergy, avoid duplication and exert more influence," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"Education International has an important role to play in bringing people together as it has expertise in collaborating and negotiating with bodies such as the European Union and the World Bank," – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

"We did try to collaborate with other NGOs and a UN agency. At first this was a challenge but we did learn from each other and were able to add value to each other's work and to achieve greater access," – NGO staff member involved in work on child labour.

"*Education International and partners can help teachers unions to reach out to other civil society organisations and NGOs to come together and collaborate better in combatting child labour,"* – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

7.14. There is patchy evidence of successful engagement with employers.

"It is difficult to engage with large employers and we have not traditionally been very good at documenting our efforts in this area. However, local employers have not opposed our efforts as they do not see teachers Unions as a threat," – Education International staff member.

7.15. Some staff at Education International Member Organisations do not seem to have a clear understanding of what advocacy means, in the technical sense of lobbying governments, and sometimes confuse it with awareness-raising. This contributes to an overall sense, formed by the whole evaluation team, that advocacy capacity across the Education International membership needs to be strengthened.

7.16. Nevertheless, some Member Organisations have had real success through their advocacy efforts.

"We are a strong, well-established Union. We have a voice; we have skilled people. We have results that we can point to and we have support from senior people in the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. The latter have already adopted our concept of the 'social dialogue space' by issuing a technical note asking all directors of teaching academies and directors of educational centres in Mali to set up spaces for social dialogue in all schools in their district in order to initiate debate between stakeholders to find appropriate solutions for monitoring school attendance. We are in the starting blocks – all we need now is funding to make it happen," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

"We have been able to establish an annual meeting with the national education authorities around CLFZ progress. We invite district council leaders and NGOs and the Ministry of Education sends a Director. It is a large and important gathering that even gets media coverage. We report on the number of children we have been able to return to school and other achievements. As a result the Ministry of Education has made it compulsory for every 'Chef de Colline' (leader of local administrative area) to undertake baseline studies of school enrolment and child labour. Universal education is not yet mandatory in Burundi but this is an indication that the Government is serious. This represents a great opportunity to push for legislation on universal education," – Education International Member Organisation staff member.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

The National Reports (see Appendix) draw conclusions based on the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda and make recommendations in relation to the local and national contexts of the projects visited. The conclusions and recommendations presented here are broader in nature, drawing on evidence from a wider range of sources (including the fieldwork).

8.1. Conclusions

The broader conclusions below resonate exactly with the conclusions in the National Reports, upon which they are partly based. We are confident that these conclusions are robust and have wide applicability. This section is structured mainly around the evaluation questions agreed with Education International but before turning to them we include two conclusions that do not fit neatly under those headings.

Commitment

It is clear that staff at Education International and across Member Organisations are committed to the CLFZ approach to tackling child labour and have been working with great dedication to implement it in many different contexts over the last two decades. This commitment is also evident among experts from other organisations and is mirrored by many individual local champions involved in specific CLFZ interventions.

Gratitude

It is equally clear that many Member Organisations and the communities they are working with are very grateful for the support and investment in the CLFZ projects and really appreciate the difference they are making. In fact we were specifically asked by one of the key project coordinators to communicate this appreciation and gratitude on behalf of the teachers Union and the communities to Education International, partners and funders.

Efficacy of the CLFZ approach

There is strong evidence from a wide range of sources, across numerous interventions in different countries that the CLFZ approach is very effective at tackling child labour. It cannot remove all the causes of child labour at national and international levels but, when implemented well over three or more years, it can make very significant changes at the community and school levels.

It has proven effective at returning children to school and retaining them in education. The benefits are particularly strong for girls and for older children who are traditionally at greater risk of dropping out into child labour.

By strengthening community structures, improving the school environment and continuing to raise awareness and spread consistent messages about the dangers of child labour and the benefits of education CLFZ interventions reduce the risk of future child labour in the area.

Perhaps most significantly of all, the CLFZ approach, built as it is on social dialogue involving all stakeholders, is very well suited to changing mindsets in a relatively short period of time. It is this change of mindset and the new attitudes and challenges to societal norms that accompany it (especially in relation to the role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty and in relation to early marriage and gender roles) which makes it possible to convince parents to send children to school of their own accord and keep them there.

The typical costs associated with the Education International implementation of CLFZ projects (of around €15,000 per year over three years) represent very good value for money for funders when set against the level of impact which is possible to achieve.

Impact of the CLFZ approach

A well implemented CLFZ intervention can have profound impact on a community, most clearly evident in a change of mindset and attitudes in relation to child labour and increasing acceptance of the idea that all children should be in school. Various inter-connected outcomes flow from this changed outlook, enabled and supported by specific measures taken as part of the intervention.

Children are in school in significantly greater numbers, especially girls and older children. They are much less likely to be subjected to inappropriate working conditions. They are more aware of their right to an education, are happier to be in school and have more freedom to be children, to play as well as learn. As a result academic performance improves.

Parents realise that education can improve their children's future prospects and that this is more valuable than the short-term economic gains that child labour could contribute to the family. They revise their priorities and some even benefit directly from their involvement in serving on revitalised School Management Committees or Parent Teacher Associations. Some also contribute to the school and community through providing labour to help improve school buildings or feeding programmes.

Teachers benefit from training on the principles of the CLFZ approach, on children's rights and on child-friendly pedagogical methods and positive approaches to discipline. This may well be their first experience of professional development and can be very motivational, giving them a new sense of purpose and professional pride.

The impact on schools ranges from strengthened leadership and management structures and better-trained (and in some cases more) teachers, to improved infrastructure and in some cases additional buildings, along with new school materials and equipment and support for extra-curricular activities and feeding programmes. Schools become more child-friendly and the entire learning environment improves.

At the community level, the CLFZ measures undertaken can lead to a sense of ownership of the project and a shared commitment to involve all stakeholders in investing in the future of the next generation – to the benefit of the whole community.

Other outcomes resulting from the CLFZ approach include some instances of positive influence on local and even national education policy and practice, as well as improved image, finances and influence for teachers Unions.

Challenges

Notwithstanding the efficacy and positive impact of the CLFZ approach evidenced in this evaluation it is important to acknowledge that there remain challenges. Some of these relate to the implementation of the interventions and others have more to do with the context in which the projects are being implemented and the scale of the problem they seek to tackle.

It may be helpful to consider the (often overlapping or interconnected) challenges in separate categories; those related to 1) implementation, 2) sustainability, 3) cultural norms and 4) structural problems. Organisations delivering CLFZ projects have some influence over challenges of implementation and sustainability but those which relate to cultural norms and structural problems are very large and deep-seated and require additional approaches as well as the involvement of other actors, especially governments.

1) Implementation challenges include the fact that even in some successful CLFZ projects there may still be some child labour – either because not every single family has been reached/convinced or because of seasonal pressures on family income. There are also sometimes other gaps, for example the inability to include some vulnerable groups such as disabled children. Paradoxically, successful implementation can also sometimes create new problems, for example when large numbers of children are returned to schools which do not have enough classroom space or enough teachers to cope properly.

2) It takes at least three years to establish a CLF Zone, after which the implementing organisation may well wish to withdraw. This raises the question of the extent to which the impact achieved can be sustained. Given that an intervention only focusses on a defined geographical area, there can be negative influence from surrounding areas where child labour is still common. Turnover in teaching staff and among the membership of community structures such as SMCs and PTAs can weaken the knowledge base and the levels of understanding and commitment. Specific measures, such as the provision of remedial classes may no longer be financed and therefore cease to operate and the successes achieved during the active project period may lead to increased pressure on school infrastructure. It seems clear that once the active project period ends it is not possible to ensure that all activities will continue at the same level of intensity. However, there is also evidence that certain benefits do persist, that trained teachers and many local leaders continue to apply the approach and that income generating activities continue to support some key activities. There are also a range of measures which can be taken by the implementing organisation and the community to make it more likely that the impact will be sustained.

3) The challenges relating to cultural norms may continue to affect communities where the CLFZ approach has been successfully implemented but they also define the environments in which Education International, its partners and other organisations are trying to carry out this work. In this regard they serve to illustrate just how difficult it is to tackle child labour and the scale of the barriers which have to be overcome. These challenges include deep-rooted societal norms in many communities, which hold child labour to be normal and necessary and where children's rights have been undervalued or ignored. This means that school environments have often been unattractive at best and intimidating at worst. Early marriage and early pregnancy have been accepted, along with the negative consequences that they bring for young girls and there has also been an acceptance that poverty makes child labour inevitable. Although CLFZ projects have been able to overturn many of these cultural norms it may be optimistic to think that they will never return after a project ends, unless other measures are put in place. And of course, successful CLFZ projects in specific areas cannot change the culture of a whole region let alone a whole country.

4) It is equally true that the operating environments for CLFZ projects are defined by significant structural problems. These affect all low-income countries and most middle-income countries to one degree or another, contributing to the causes of child labour in the first place and also making it more difficult to tackle. These problems often include struggling political and administrative systems and economic frailty which mean that education has often been chronically underfunded along with insufficient provision for other important services such as family protection, social welfare and core infrastructure. The informal nature of many local economies and the prevalence of household subsistence farming in rural areas make child labour harder to identify and to tackle. Furthermore many low-income countries are subject to the impact of climate change, exacerbating natural disasters such as flooding and drought.

Success factors

It has been possible to identify and find evidence for around thirty factors which play an important role in the successful implementation of the CLFZ approach. These success factors are consistent with previous efforts to capture the key elements of the approach, such as the Stop Child Labour Coalition 'CLFZ Handbook'[50] and the research carried out for Education International into 'Transnational Best Practices'[51].

It is clear that the success of interventions depends on a broad mix of measures and effective coordination to maximise synergy between them. Not all success factors need to be present and not all apply to all contexts. The relative importance of different factors and the precise nature of the mix needed, varies from context to context.

[50] "5 x 5 Stepping Stones For Creating Child Labour Free Zones" CLFZ Handbook published in 2015 by the Stop Child Labour Coalition

[51] Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices Research report, Nora Wintour 2020, published by Education International

Nevertheless, the measures which best characterise the CLFZ approach do seem to be the ones which are most universally applicable and perhaps, therefore, the most important, or at least most central. These include: the focus on changing beliefs, attitudes and mindsets (in relation to the value of education and with a special focus on girls in particular); the need to involve all stakeholders in ongoing social dialogue; the importance of the role played by community and other local leaders; the need for ongoing monitoring of school attendance and child labour; the need to improve the school learning environment through teacher training, child-friendly pedagogy, materials and equipment (including for extra-curricular activities) and the provision of remedial classes. These aspects can be further enhanced by collaboration with local authorities and other specific measures, as listed in Chapter 6 'Success Factors'. Overall, the success depends more on changing minds than covering costs.

Sustainability, replication and scaling up

It is important to consider 1) sustainability, 2) replication and 3) scaling up separately as they are different.

1) If the question about sustainability is whether continuing with the CLFZ approach, as implemented by civil society organisations, will eradicate child labour, the answer is no. If the question is whether a CLFZ project can become self-sustaining beyond the funding period in terms of maintaining *all* the activities and *all* the benefits of the approach and continue to keep children in school and out of labour the answer is that this is possible in theory but very challenging in practice. While there is evidence that some activities and benefits do continue, in most settings there are still significant threats.

   If the question is how the impact of a CLFZ project can be maximised and sustained beyond the life of the active project period, the answer is that there are clear measures that can be taken by the implementing organisation and the community that will makes this more likely. These include ensuring that some of the fundamentals are as strong as possible, such as community ownership of the project, supported by local leaders, the training of as many teachers as possible, the mobilisation of community resources (to improve classrooms and support feeding programmes) and the creation and seed-funding of income generating activities and community savings and loan schemes. What can make the biggest difference in this regard though is something which is not entirely within the control of the project, namely collaboration with, lobbying of and eventually handover of responsibility to local authorities.

2) It is clearly possible to replicate the success of the CLFZ approach by continuing to fund and deliver more projects. There is a well-documented methodology, to which this evaluation can add some new learning. Whether this is the best use of civil society funding is another matter – given that although this will undoubtedly make a huge difference to the communities selected it will not in itself eradicate child labour. If Education International wishes to implement further CLFZ projects there are additional approaches that Member Organisations can take to maximise the benefits. These include forming alliances with domestic NGOs, convening members and other teachers to share experience and further sharing knowledge through training and creating materials such as a handbook to guide national implementation. There are also additional roles which Education International can play to support replication, such as continuing to organise visits for Union staff to other countries to witness the success

of CLFZ projects and arranging peer to peer exchanges among staff involved in CLFZ work. Finally, there is a need to ensure that all Union leaders not only recognise the importance of tackling child labour but also embrace the idea that this is a legitimate part of the unions' role.

3) There is noticeable agreement among respondents to this evaluation, reinforced by findings from the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda, that the focus for scaling up the work to tackle child labour should be advocacy. The CLFZ approach cannot be applied at scale – by definition it targets a relatively confined geographical area, involving all stakeholders in an identifiable community – and indeed this is its strength. However, the demonstrable success of CLFZ interventions and learning from the approach can be used to inform advocacy work to influence government policy and practice.

   One of the most powerful tools is to bring civil servants and politicians to CLFZ projects, to meet children, parents, teachers and community leaders and see for themselves the impact that the approach is having at local level and the potential it therefore holds to boost national development. Some Member Organisations have already identified key advocacy focus areas such as the need to introduce and/or enforce legislation around universal education and child labour and to revise government priorities and budgets to enable adequate funding of education, through teacher training and school infrastructure, as well as funding for other relevant departments. And some Member Organisations have already enjoyed advocacy success, for example influencing government to introduce nationwide social dialogue spaces or annual multilateral meetings on the progress of anti-child-labour projects.

   However, advocacy capacity is uneven across the Education International membership and there is an opportunity to strengthen it both nationally and internationally. Education International can also play a role to reach out and convene collaborations between its Member Organisations and other international players such as the European Union, the African Union, major NGOs, development banks, the ILO and other UN bodies.

8.2. Recommendations

The National Reports make recommendations in relation to the CLFZ projects visited in Malawi and Uganda, many of which may be applicable in other countries, especially at the level of the individual CLFZ intervention. These recommendations cover how to sustain current impacts, how to best implement future projects and how to use the evidence from current projects to influence local, district and national authorities. The suggestions range from motivating pupils and families (with attendance certificates or rewards such as solar lamps) and providing re-enrolment kits (comprising school uniform, exercise books, pens, and soap) to the increased targeting of employers and the all-important need to lobby and collaborate with local authorities so that many anti-child-labour measures become institutionalised and to document outcomes to use in national advocacy, positioning the CLFZ approach as an investment in a nation's human capital.

The following recommendations are of a more general nature and are designed principally for Education International and partners/funders to inform strategic planning and funding decisions.

Education International and partners/funders should consider:

A. Continuing to fund some existing CLFZ projects (to maximise the impact of investments already made and continue bringing undoubted benefits to those communities) and implementing a limited number of new CLFZ projects. In doing so, planning and funding decisions should take into account the following:

    1. Firstly, it is worth reiterating and endorsing some key findings of the 2021 study[52] for Rainforest Alliance, which looked at different ways of applying the CLFZ model. It concluded that, "The most cost-effective approach is to implement the full CLFZ in one core zone, with a lighter touch in surrounding regions. Evidence shows that exchange visits between the core zone and surrounding regions greatly enhance the transfer of norms and practices from the core zone to neighbouring regions. Donors who would like to support efforts to eradicate child labour should plan to implement the CLFZ approach in its full capacity for three years, with lighter support in subsequent years to maintain the results."
    2. Apart from bringing benefits to existing and some new communities, the purpose of continuing to implement CLFZ projects is threefold
        a. to enable the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and documentation of achievements as a basis for building and sharing knowledge
        b. to make it possible to invite staff from other Member Organisations and potential collaborators and in particular decision-makers to witness the impact at first hand
        c. to maintain organisational credibility to support campaigning and advocacy work
    3. In future implementation, the learning from this evaluation should be applied as far as possible, at project level and also in terms of how best to sustain impact and enhance replication.

[52] 'The Cost and Effectiveness of Three Approaches to Eliminating Child Labor in the Ugandan Coffee Sector', Deanna Newsom et al (Aid Environment) for Rainforest Alliance, June 2021

B. Directing the majority of available funding in this area, and the accompanying strategic planning and delivery effort towards advocacy to maximise the impact of the very considerable and demonstrable achievements which the CLFZ approach clearly brings and to make the greatest possible contribution to eradicating child labour going forward. In this regard some key areas to pay attention to are as follows:

4. Child labour is a complex problem to which there is no single solution. It requires multiple actions and approaches and the CLFZ approach and the learning derived from it can be an important ingredient in the overall mix. The range of other actions from major actors should inform the formulation of advocacy calls and plans to deliver them. "Countries must combat child labour by addressing it from all its 'demand' and 'supply' side dimensions: by strengthening social protection to combat extreme poverty, by investing in the education to make it an affordable alternative to child labour, and by encouraging the diffusion of technologies that make it possible to do without child labour. While most countries have adopted laws that prohibit child labour, … countries can do more to enforce these laws and regulations, where necessary strengthen labour inspections and monitoring systems, and promote responsible business practices … Despite significant progress in reducing child labour, much remains to be done to meet the goal of eliminating child labour … The evidence … shows that there is no single answer to this question and that only the implementation of varied and coherent measures addressing the root causes of child labour can bring about significant progress."[53]

5. This message is not new and we are not the only ones saying it. The 2017 programme evaluation[54] for the Stop Child Labour Coalition's 'Out of Work and Into School' programme includes recommendations to build capacity in, "Skills on policy analysis, policy lobby and advocacy, and its relevance for working on a CLFZ [and] skills on platforms for advocacy at national level …" Similarly, the research carried out for Education International on 'Transnational Best Practices' makes numerous recommendations to focus on advocacy; "Include advocacy initiatives in the project design to review and strengthen the teacher training curriculum to include modules on children's rights, including definitions of child labour and the role of education in the eradication of child labour; and on child-centred pedagogy … Consider support for mechanisms for national advocacy coalitions on child labour or children's rights with relevant trade unions and NGOs to coordinate advocacy work … With reference to the EI policy framework, it could be helpful to bring greater attention to the inter-linkages between area-based approaches to eliminating child labour and advocacy and programme support for inclusive quality education for all."[55] The fact that so many respondents mentioned the need to focus on advocacy suggests that, five years on from this research, those recommendations have not been implemented.

[53] 'Child labour: Causes, consequences and policies to tackle it' - OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 235, Olivier Thévenon, Eric Edmonds, 2019

[54] 'Out of Work and Into School Programme' - End Term Evaluation report commissioned by the Stop Child Labour Coalition and published in April 2017

[55] Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices

6. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation guided us to explore "approaches to strengthen future collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society organisations". However, when we addressed these topics in evaluation interviews many of the responses we heard were along the lines of, "we need to advocate with the authorities", "we need to do more advocacy" or "we need to collaborate with other international bodies". These responses lead us to conclude that while there is strong awareness of the need to advocate and collaborate there seems to be far less clarity on *how* to do this and what is needed.

7. In light of this it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to produce detailed advice on how to develop an advocacy programme. It is however clear that in order to meet this need Education International, supported by its partners/funders, should invest in advocacy capacity at organisational and Member Organisation level and also in using the organisation's international profile to convene and collaborate with other international actors. An overarching advocacy plan is needed as well as a range of national plans. Targeted advocacy products are needed, such as short and digestible summaries of impact (including facts, figures and typical costs and powerful testimony from community members). Carefully framed and context-specific policy calls based on Member Organisations' experience and knowledge should be developed, addressing overarching topics (for example, the development and application of legislation on universal education and child labour) and particular issues such as including approaches to tackling child labour in initial teacher training, the need for better data, or reducing teacher transfers.

   To support advocacy planning and action there is a specific piece of work which Education International could undertake easily and cheaply and which a number of evaluation respondents mentioned. There is already an abundance of evidence and data on the impact and efficacy of the CLFZ approach and on the expertise which Education International and some Member Organisations have developed. However, this evidence is spread across a large and disparate array of reports, evaluations and website stories. It should be possible to harvest this evaluation and the documents which have fed into it, along with a few additional reports and other sources to produce a single, structured (and updatable) repository or portfolio of CLFZ evidence that would be suitable for advocacy purposes. Staff members from Education International and Member Organisations could draw on this when they need to create targeted advocacy products such as briefing documents, policy calls and press releases.

   Appropriate skills and resources are needed to deliver all of this, along with an organisational commitment to give advocacy work the necessary level of priority.

   > *"I would like to see Education International develop and invest in a really ambitious programme to engage with government officials at very senior levels to open meaningful dialogue and use our experience and knowledge to influence their thinking*," – Education International staff member.

In summary then, whilst CLFZ interventions have successfully been set up as an end in themselves (to eliminate child labour and to facilitate school education in defined areas) they can also be used as a means to an end; namely, to gather the evidence needed for advocacy at different decision making levels but ultimately at the national level. The message needs to be heard again and again by people in relevant ministries and boards that decide on budgets. Demonstrating to politicians and other decision makers that the CLFZ approach works, and letting the voices of communities be heard on the benefits from their perspective, can, over time, have much more far-reaching impact than the immediate impact on a geographical area. The key words here are 'over time' – advocacy is a long term process and requires a vision, long-term funding, dedicated staff with the right skill set and incontrovertible evidence; and of course a strategy, a plan and a MEL framework. Successful advocacy is always a mix between aiming for the almost impossible and reaping low hanging fruit; so the advocacy strategy will state a visionary goal and map out achievable outcomes. Policy calls will be developed, campaigning and lobbying opportunities identified and activities will be planned but there should be plenty of scope to act opportunistically as circumstance allow. In other words: vision and pragmatism must be fruitfully joined up.

9. Appendix

9.1. List of respondents

Participants in interviews and focus groups in Malawi and Uganda are listed in the National Reports. The following respondents took part in online interviews:

Education International	
Samuel Grumiau	Consultant, Project Coordinator on Child Labour, Education International
Dominique Marlet	Research, Policy and Advocacy Senior Coordinator (overseeing child labour projects), Education International
Pedi Anawi	Regional Coordinator, Africa, Education International
Education International Member Organisations	
Gowan Kalamagi	Child Labour Project officer, UNATU (Uganda National Teachers' Union)
Pilirani Kamaliza (via email)	Child Labour Project Coordinator, TUM (Teachers Union of Malawi)
Nevrus Kaptelli	President, SPASH (Independent Trade Union of Education of Albania)
Trudy Kerperien	Head of International Relations, Algemene Onderwijsbond, (Education Union), Netherlands
Stavri Liko	Former General Secretary, and former Child Labour Projects Coordinator, FSASH (Trade Union Federation of Education and Science of Albania)
Soumeila Maiga	Coordinator, Child Labour Prevention Projects, SNEC (Syndicat National de l'Education et de la Culture) (National Union of Education and Culture), Mali
Rémy Nsengiyumva	President and international child labour project representative, STEB, (Syndicat Libre des Travailleurs de l'Enseignement du Burundi) (Education Workers Union of Burundi)
Marlis Tepe	Former Vice President of Education International, currently Board Member of GEW's Fair Childhood Foundation (GEW: Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, (Education Union), Germany)
Juliet Wajega	Former Deputy General Secretary, and Child Labour Project Coordinator, UNATU (Uganda National Teachers' Union)
Hillary Yuba	Child Labour Project Coordinator, PTUZ (Progressive Teachers Union Zimbabwe)
Matilda Zani	International Relations and Child Labour Project Coordinator, SPASH (Independent Trade Union of Education of Albania)

Other organisations	
Akky De Kort	Child rights and Child Labour specialist and consultant, formerly with HIVOS, Dutch NGO member of Stop Child Labour Coalition
Venkat Reddy	National Convener, MV Foundation (Child Rights Organisation), India

9.2. Documents reviewed

The following Education International documents were reviewed:

Education International project documentation

Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education. Final Report, 2021 – 2023

Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education - Application Annex 2, Project Planning Matrix 2021-2023

Budget, Malawi (Promoting Social Dialogue to eradicate child labour and strengthen quality education), 2021 – 2023

Report on Mission to Chigudu Education Zone, Malawi, November 2022

Numerous video interviews with CLFZ stakeholders

Education International website stories on child labour

'Malawi: Coming together across borders to eradicate child labour' - Education International webpage 2025

'What is child labour?' - Education International webpage 2021

'Burundi: over 400 children return to school thanks to education union project against child labour' - Education International webpage 2024

'Albania: Education unions' success in combating child labour' - Education International webpage 2024

'Over 1,880 children brought back to school thanks to education unions working to end child labour' - Education International webpage 2025

'Education International brings hope and effective strategies to curb child labour' - Education International webpage 2025

Education International research on child labour interventions

'Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices and Union Impacts', Research report, Nora Wintour 2020, published by Education International: Child Labour Projects: Transnational Best Practices

9.3. Typical project activity list

Typical CLFZ Project Activity List	
1.1.1	Conducting a 2 day Training for 60 persons
1.2.1	Identify schools' improvement needs and other school needs in respect of addressing the root causes of child labour.
1.2.2	Conduct 2 day training with 60 members of School Management Committees (SMCs) and Chiefs on resource mobilization (Lobby & Advocacy skills) for improved school infrastructure
1.2.3	Assist schools in developing and popularising their Concept notes for funding towards improved learning environment
1.3.1	Establish effective child labour monitoring system between schools and communities for effective Child tracking
2.1.1	Conduct a 3 Day Teacher Training on child labour/SCREAM for 45 teachers, including 15 head teachers
2.1.2	Conduct One refresher teacher training of 2-days on SCREAM methodology with 30 teachers (year two)
2.2.1	Child labour training for members of Child rights clubs
2.2.2	Purchase and distribution of assorted stationery materials for child rights clubs
2.2.3	Conduct Children's SCREAM art competition
2.2.4	Buy & distribute sport materials for the top 3 winning child labour Art Competition Schools
2.2.5	Introduce an anti-child-labour sports tournaments (Football and Netball competition)
2.3.1	Purchase and distribution of assorted scholastic materials for special needs students
2.3.2	Conducting remedial/catch up lessons to children at risk
3.1.1	Conducting community child labour Open Day events to raise awareness
3.2.1	Conduct Training on CL with Senior group
3.2.2	Organise 15 child labour social dialogue sessions & key community actions
4.1.1	Half-Day zonal project Entry Meeting
4.1.2	Baseline Survey
4.1.3	Endline Survey
4.1.5	Project Coordination
4.1.4	Project exit meeting with DCLC (District Child Labour Committee)
4.1.6	Monitoring and Progress Evaluation school Field visits

9.4. National reports

The two National Reports are appended below.

The National Report for Malawi starts on page 105 and the National Report for Uganda follows on page 143.

Education International CLFZ Evaluation 2025

National Report – Malawi

Joshua Wakabi

Contents

This "National Report – Malawi" is part of a larger evaluation of the Child Labour Free Zone approach carried out by DP Evaluation for Education International in 2025 and should be read in conjunction with the main Evaluation Report.

Fieldwork Summary

The table below presents summary of interviews conducted between 23rd to 28th June in Chigudu CLFZ in Malawi. It highlights interviews that I conducted, where, with whom, their role and number of participants where applicable.

Date	Community	Type	Role	Name	Details
23/06/ 2025	Chigudu school	FGD	Community leaders (Village headmen)	N/A	12 (1 Female, 11 Male)
		FGD	School Management Committee, Chigudu school (also parents of children)	N/A	6 (2 Female, 4 Male)
		FGD	PTA, Chigudu school (also parents of children)	N/A	4 (1 Female, 3 Male)
		FGD	Mother support group, Chigudu school (also parents of children)	N/A	6 Female
		FGD	Children	N/A	10 (3 Girls, 7 boys)
		FGD	Children	N/A	10 (3 Girls, 7 boys) [Status: Returned to school 10 (3 Girls, 7 Boys; Anti Child abuse club 10 (3 Girls, 7 Boys) [Grade: Std 5,6&7] [Age: Min 8; Max 16]
		FGD	Head teacher, Deputy head teacher, focal point teachers		4 (2 female, 2 male)
		KII	Primary School Advisor (PEA)	Ellen Kwanjana	1 Female
		KII	Assistant Centre Coordinator (ACCO)	Vincent Chiziko	1 Male
				Sub total	54 (19 female, 35 male)
24/06/ 2025	Thedze school	FGD	Village headmen and senior headman	N/A	7 (1 Female, 6 Male)
		FGD	Mother support group, SMC, PTA and parents	N/A	11 (9 Female, 2 Male) *[PTA (1 Male); SMC (1 Female, 1 Male); mother support group (4 Female); and parents (4 Female)]*
		FGD	Children	N/A	10 (6 Girls, 4 Boys) [Status: Returned to school (3 Girls, 2 Boys; Anti Child abuse club (3 Girls, 2 Boys) [Grade: Std 5,6&7] [Age: Min 12; Max 15]
		KII	Head teacher	Alosi Juma	1 Male
		KII	Focal teacher	Jackline Thausi	1 Female
		KII	Focal teacher	Alex Patrick	1 Male
				Sub total	31 (17 Female, 14 Male)
25/06/ 2025	Chibanzi school	FGD	SMC, PTA and parents	N/A	4 (1 Female, 3 Male) [PTA: 2 (2 Male), SMC: 2 (1 Female, 1 Male)]
		FGD	Village headmen and senior headmen	N/A	9 (2 Female, 7 Male) [3 senior village headmen]

		FGD	Children	N/A	10 (3 Girls, 7 Boys) [Status: Returned to school: 6(2 Girls, 4 Boys; Anti Child abuse club: 4(1 Girl, 3 Boys) [Grade: Std 5,6&7] [Age: Min 11; Max 16]
		KII	Head teacher	Benson Thaulo	1 Male
		KII	Focal teacher	Austin Biziwick	1 Male
		KII	Focal teacher	Linaslas Selemani	1 Male
		KII	Farmer/ businessman in Chibanzi	Banda	1 Male
		KII	District chairperson, TUM	Rodison Ntarimanja	1 Male
				Sub total	28 (8 Female, 20 Male)
26/06/ 2025	Mpatamoyo school	FGD	Village Headmen	NA	6 (1 Female, 5 Male)
		FGD	PTA/SMC	NA	5 (1 Female, 4 Male)
		FGD	Children	NA	10 (6 Girls, 4 Boys) [Status: Returned to school, Anti Child abuse club, remedial classes: 10(6 Girls, 4 Boys;: 4(1 Girl, 3 Boys) [Grade: Std 5,6&7] [Age: Min 12; Max 16]
		KII	Mother support group	Erina Mukuzi	1 Female
		KII	Head teacher	Sakara Bulamena	1 Male
		KII	Focal teacher	Tobia Modesto Joshua	1 Male
		KII	Parent/ farmer/ businessman	Benerd Mwanza	1 Male
				Sub total	25 (9 Female and 16 Male)
27/06/ 2025	Mtenthera school	FGD	Children	N/A	10 (5 Girls, 5 Boys) [Status: Returned to school: 5(2 Girls, 3 Boys; Anti Child abuse club: 4(1 Girl, 4 Boys) [Grade: Std 4,5,6&7] [Age: Min 10; Max 15]
		KII	Head teacher	Emmanuel Martin	1 Male
		KII	Focal teacher	Arinane Linje	1 Female
		KII	Focal teacher	Rodrick Nthondo	1 Male
				Sub total	13 (6 Female, 7 Male)
28/06/ 2025		KII	Programs Coordinator	Pilirani Kamaliza	1 Male
		KII	General Secretary, PSEUM	Falison Lemani	1 Male
				Sub total	2 (2 Male)
				Total	36 interviews [57 Female, 100 Male]
				Focus Group Discussions [FGDs]	17 FGDs [53 Female, 85 Male]
				Key Informant Interviews [KIIs]	19 KIIs [4 Female, 15 Male]

Notes on fieldwork

Chigudu

Among the community leaders' interview (village headmen), there was unease for the single female participant as males dominated the discussion. However, this was not the case in the school governance structure interviews where there was balanced participation. Also, most of the SMC and PTA members were new to their role and only four of them were part of the previous committees. However, this did not impede their participation and sharing of experiences regarding what they knew and had heard about CLFZs.

In the second children's FGD, the girls selected were quite young and sometimes found it difficult to express their views among older girls.

Chibanza

Community activities incumbered the number of participants who could be interviewed. For example, there was a funeral and then a scheduled Area Development Committee meeting. Women and women leaders (mother support group) were central to funeral ceremonies and could not come to the school for the FGDs. Also, other community members especially the PTAs/SMCs were part of the ADCs and only a few of them could turn up for the FGDs in big numbers.

General

Fieldwork proceeded efficiently with a prearranged schedule, field budget, and confirmed logistics for transport and accommodation. Daily debrief meetings reviewed plans, reminded head teachers of the timetable, and clarified participant invitations and expectations.

An experienced translator, who also served as Assistant Centre Coordinator in Chigudu zone's education department, provided consistent Chichewa-to-English translation during fieldwork. This ensured participants understood the questions and felt comfortable speaking, with some interviews lasting nearly an hour.

The participants included stakeholders relevant to the implementation of the CLFZ project in each community. An initial meeting was held at each school with the head teacher to provide information about the research and to coordinate the interview schedule. Head teachers were interviewed first, which enabled them, with the assistance of an interpreter, to communicate the research activities to traditional leaders and other participants. The TUM Programme Coordinator was also present during the fieldwork, responding to questions and facilitating communication among participants.

An important challenge arose from the expectation among traditional chiefs for compensation in exchange for their time. While acknowledging that such expectations are customary in other contexts, the Programme Coordinator took the opportunity to emphasise the significance of their input and clarified that resources were not available to provide compensation.

Fieldwork revealed that many businesspeople and farmers also served as PTA/SMC members, traditional leaders, and parents, making separate interviews redundant. Therefore, each participant was interviewed only once within their respondent category.

Despite these issues, the researcher remained confident in the quality and scope of the data collected. Head teachers, for example, noted concrete project benefits for their schools, including new school rules, bylaws, and constructed classrooms. Traditional leaders also gave examples of key decisions reached and how their influence has been instrumental to date in resolving child labour issues in their communities.

Evaluation questions

The following evaluation questions were agreed between Education International and DP Evaluation to guide the fieldwork in Malawi and Uganda and feed into the main Evaluation Report.

1. How effective has the CLFZ approach in the project zone been?

Data were collected from a wide range of stakeholders, including village headmen (*Mafumu*), school management committees (SMCs), parent-teacher associations (PTAs), mother support groups, teachers (head teachers, deputies, and focal point teachers), children, government officials such as Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), and Assistant Centre Coordinators (ACCOs), and representatives of the Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) and the Private Schools Employees Union of Malawi (PSEUM).

The findings indicate that the CLFZ approach was highly effective across all five thematic areas, largely due to strong community leadership, improved school-community collaboration, and targeted interventions to address the root causes of child labour.

Regarding returning children from child labour to school

The CLFZ project achieved notable success in bringing children out of child labour and back into the classroom. Community leaders, parents, and teachers worked in tandem to identify out-of-school children, address barriers that had led to their dropout, and encourage their return. As a result, **enrolment surged** in the project zone, with one head teacher estimating that about *"30% of the school population"* at a CLFZ school (Mtapamoyo) consisted of children who had **returned from child labour** in the community. Key factors that enabled these returns included community enforcement of school attendance, addressing hunger to reduce dropouts and targeted re-enrolment of girls.

- **Local bylaws to enforce education:** Traditional leaders (*Mafumu*) took strong action by enacting bylaws requiring all school-aged children to attend school. Parents faced fines if they failed to send their children to school, and persistent offenders were referred to higher traditional authorities for punishment. To ensure compliance, each community assigned specific stakeholders (head teachers, PTA and SMC members, chiefs, mother support groups) to monitor and report on attendance as per these bylaws. This community-level enforcement created a powerful deterrent against keeping children in labour.

> **Examples of bylaws enacted in Chibanza included:**
> (i). Teachers and learners should be in school on time
> (ii). Parents not sending their children to school should pay a fine to the chiefs between 100,000 to 150,000 MK
> (iii). The "gule wamkule" traditional dance should not appear near a school or during school hours
> (iv). Teachers should provide school performance report cards to all learners such that parents can check how their children are progressing at school
> (v). There should be thorough investigations about learners who are absent from school every day.

- **Identifying and reaching out-of-school children:** Data collection played a crucial role in returning children to school. After awareness campaigns, all stakeholders were involved in surveys to find children of school age who were not in school. In Chigudu school, for example, this exercise revealed that roughly half of primary-aged children were not attending school, shocking local leaders into action.

Armed with this information, community leaders mobilised parents of these out-of-school children, convincing and helping them to enrol their children. As more children re-enrolled, community-led support systems were put in place to sustain their attendance (*discussed further under "retaining children in school*").

- **Addressing economic and practical barriers (food and infrastructure):** Recognizing that poverty and hunger were underlying causes of child labour, communities intervened to remove these barriers. Village headmen worked hand in hand with parents to provide food for children at school. In Chigudu school, the community started a village garden to grow food for school meals.

  "As a community, we have a village garden. We plant and harvest food that our children eat while at school," explained one village headman.

  By ensuring children were fed at school, this measure reduced dropouts due to hunger and made returning to school more feasible for working children. Communities also contributed to school infrastructure improvements (such as building toilets, urinals and planning for new classrooms) to accommodate the influx of returning students. Overcrowding was addressed by local resource mobilization – parents provided sand, gravel, and labour with the anticipation that partners would help construct additional classrooms as enrolment grew.

  We realised that hunger is a big challenge and often leads to children dropping out. As a community, we have a village garden... our children eat while at school," recounted a male village headman, illustrating how community action addressed a key dropout factor.

- **Community sensitization and cultural tools:** The process of bringing children back was reinforced by extensive community sensitization. Messages about the importance of education over child labour were spread in village meetings, churches, funerals, and door-to-door campaigns. A particularly innovative approach was the use of traditional dance and drama. In each community, **"gule wamkule"** (a traditional masked dance troupe) was engaged to help mobilize parents and children to support schooling. These popular local theatre groups, normally active during cultural events and funerals, took on the role of drawing crowds and delivering pro-education messages. Such culturally resonant methods proved effective in persuading families to send children back to school and in giving the initiative a local flavour of authority and legitimacy. In every community, there was a group of recognised traditional theatre actors who were entrusted with the role of forcefully mobilising members during funerals and other community activities. This was extended to mobilising parents and children for school.

  Because of community dialogues, parents understood the importance and benefits of sending their children to school and not engaging them in child labour. As a result, the number of children enrolled in school went up and there was general awareness that child labour is bad. For instance, in Chibanza, the head teacher noted that awareness about child labour was raised in several community platforms such as PTA meetings, funeral ceremonies, chiefs' meetings, church services, door-to-door campaigns and children's assemblies at school.

  Teachers also encouraged children who had previously dropped out of school or not regularly attending school to return to school. For example, in Mtapamoyo school, the head teacher estimated that 30% of the school population of children returned to school from child labour activities in the community.

- **Focus on re-enrolling girls and older children:** The CLFZ approach placed special emphasis on getting adolescent girls and other vulnerable children back into school. Community members noticed that many girls had left school for early marriage or motherhood, and older children often dropped out to work.

A *female village headman* highlighted this focus: *"We had a policy of targeting girls for readmission in school. Many of them had simply dropped out, had been married or given birth"*.

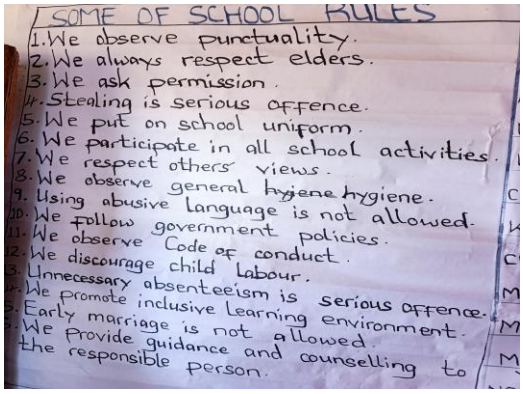
By actively seeking out such cases, the project helped numerous girls return to their studies. Traditional leaders and mother groups also teamed up to tackle early marriages: if a school-age girl was found married off, community authorities would intervene, annul the marriage and bring her back to school, often punishing the adults involved. This focus resulted in a notable reduction in teenage pregnancies and early marriages in the project communities, since girls who stayed in school were less likely to become child brides or young mothers. In Chibanza zone, for instance, teachers reported fewer cases of girls dropping out due to pregnancy or marriage, crediting the vigilance of village leaders, especially the mother support groups, in retrieving girls from such situations when they occurred.

- **Increased enrolment and external support:** As a direct outcome of these efforts, enrolment in the CLFZ schools rose sharply, comprising many former child labourers now in class. Instead of working in tobacco farms or herding cattle, these children were back in schools, a shift widely recognized by interviewed parents as being in the child's best interest. The success in returning children to school also drew support from outside benefactors. Seeing the community's commitment, well-wishers donated school resources: for example, Chigudu primary received new desks from a "Friends of Netherlands" charity, and Thedze primary obtained additional teaching and learning materials from the government. This positive feedback loop further reinforced the value of keeping children in school.

Retaining children (at risk of dropping out) in school

Bringing children back to school is only half the battle: the CLFZ project also placed heavy emphasis on keeping formerly at-risk children in school and preventing repeat dropouts. Multiple support systems were implemented to retain children in school, particularly those vulnerable to leaving again due to economic pressures or other risk factors. As a result, many children who re-enrolled were successfully retained in school full-time, and general dropout rates in the CLFZ communities declined. The critical factors in retaining children and sustaining their attendance were school supplies and economic support, active monitoring of attendance and positive school environments.

- **Induction and ongoing orientation**: Schools recognized that children coming from a work environment might struggle to readjust to school routines and expectations. Thus, when children re-enrolled, parents and the students were given an induction/orientation about school rules and academic expectations. For example, at Chibanzi school, the head teacher held meetings with returnee children and their guardians to clearly communicate what was required for the child to succeed (attendance, child labour, parental support and general behaviour while at school) and what support was available to help them. This process helped re-integrated learners understand the school culture and the importance of persistence, laying the groundwork for better retention. Below is an example of school rules posted on a wall in Mpatamoyo school.



- **Scholastic materials and feeding support for vulnerable children**: To prevent economic hardship from causing dropouts, the project facilitated various forms of support to needy students. Head teachers mobilized resources to provide scholastic materials (exercise books, pens, uniforms) to children who returned from child labour. This addressed cases where students had originally dropped out because their families could not afford supplies or clothing. By equipping these children, the schools relieved the financial burden on parents and removed a potential reason to stop attending. Additionally, as noted earlier, school meal programs (nourishing students with community-grown food) ensured children did not skip classes to find food or work for money. Together, these interventions reduced the push factors that might otherwise force a child to drop out again.

- **Close attendance monitoring and home follow-ups**: A hallmark of the CLFZ retention strategy was the close monitoring of children's attendance in each school. Teachers were encouraged by head teachers to keep thorough records of attendance, especially for those who had a history of absenteeism or drop-out. If a child missed school, Mother Support Groups and PTA/SMC members were informed and they would follow up by visiting the child's home to inquire and encourage the child's return. This community-based attendance tracking created accountability. One outcome was a more responsive support network around each child: minor conflicts or issues could be quickly identified and resolved by the schools and committees, preventing them from escalating into dropouts. For instance, if a child was staying home to help with chores or faced a problem at school, the PTA/SMC could mediate solutions between parents and teachers, ensuring the child got back to class promptly.

- **Improving school environment and discipline**: Schools made a concerted effort to become more child-friendly and safe places, so that children want to stay. Teachers were trained (often by TUM facilitators) on positive discipline and child protection to replace any harmful practices that might drive children away. A CLFZ project staff explained,

  "*We trained teachers on child labour and alternative forms of discipline. We encouraged them to ensure that children love attending school*".

  This training led to greater teacher awareness of how punitive measures or abuse can alienate children. Notably, stakeholders reported that incidents of teacher-perpetrated abuse (such as sexual exploitation or harsh punishments) dropped significantly after sensitization, making the school environment safer and more welcoming. By eliminating abusive behaviours and focusing on encouragement, teachers helped build trust with children. One focal teacher noted that children became more open about their problems, indicating improved student-teacher relationships and a supportive atmosphere in class.

"Children in our school are open to us. They tell us their problems and anything that affects their lives at home and school" – focal teacher.

- **Engaging learning experience and the anti-child-labour clubs**: Boredom or feeling left behind academically can cause at-risk kids to give up, so focal teachers set up anti-child-labour clubs and other engaging activities (drama, music, sports) to keep students interested in school life. In Mpatamoyo school, for example, eight anti–child labour clubs were established, covering various children's interests. These clubs provided counselling, peer support, and fun activities, all of which strengthened students' attachment to school. Moreover, the presence of clubs specifically addressing child labour and child rights gave the students a platform to voice their experiences and advocate for each other, reinforcing their commitment to stay in school. Such positive peer culture was crucial for retention: children encouraged one another and shared advice on balancing school with home responsibilities, further reducing dropouts.

  "I now look forward to attending school every day because of my friends and my role in the club as an actor" – 14-year-old male student.

- **Community resolve and social pressure**: The earlier-mentioned bylaws and community expectations also continued to play a role in retention. Knowing that the entire community from the chief to the mother groups was invested in their education created a social norm where dropping out was not easily tolerated. Parents experienced social pressure to keep their children in school, and children themselves became aware that not attending was unusual and noticed. This social environment was a powerful retention tool, ensuring that once children returned, they remained on the path of education.

  A mother shared a personal change: "*My daughter told me that if someone found out I had given her a heavy load to carry, I'd be in trouble. I immediately did the right thing*," adjusting her behaviour to keep her child safe and in school. These insights show how changes in school practices and parental attitudes worked together to keep children in class and school.

Preventing or reducing the risk of future child labour

Beyond immediate returns and retention, the CLFZ initiative in Chigudu was proactive in breaking the cycle of child labour for the future. This involved tackling root causes, changing mindsets, and establishing safeguards so that children who are in school stay out of labour permanently, and reducing the risk of the next generation of children entering child labour. The project's multi-pronged strategy significantly reduced risk factors for child labour in these communities, creating a more protective environment for children's rights. Key preventive measures and their impacts included enforcing child labour bans, changing community norms and targeting employers and practices.

- **Continued enforcement of bylaws and penalties**: The bylaws introduced by village headmen (described subsection (a)) not only helped return children to school but were a lasting mechanism to prevent future child labour. These rules remain in effect, making it socially and legally unacceptable in the community to keep a child out of school for work. The fact that parents could be fined and shamed for violating the education mandate was a strong deterrent for backsliding. Community leaders and committees continue to monitor compliance, meaning if a child drops out in the future, swift action is likely (home visits, penalties) to correct it. This institutionalization of anti-child-labour norms at the village level greatly reduces the chance that child labour will re-emerge unnoticed. Essentially, the community has set up a local surveillance and enforcement system that will persist beyond the project's timeframe, keeping children in school and out of exploitative labour.

- **Shift in knowledge and attitudes**: Perhaps the most profound preventive impact is the transformation in how the community perceives child labour. Before the project, many villagers did not even understand the concept of child labour or saw it as a normal part of life. Now, through continuous sensitization, all stakeholder groups can clearly define child labour and recognize its harmful forms.

  A Mother Support Group enumerated forms of child labour they learned to identify: "*all forms of abuse such as forcing children into early marriage because their breasts have grown, selling goods in markets, sending children to farms instead of school and generally mistreating children and giving them work in the form of hard labour*".

  This comprehensive understanding that child labour is not just full-time work but any exploitative practice that hinders a child's development empowers community members to guard against it. Child labour is no longer considered a "myth" or an inevitable practice; it is now regarded as unacceptable. As a result, parents are far less likely to knowingly involve their children in child labour, and neighbours or local officials are far more likely to report or intervene if they see it. This attitudinal change is critical for long-term prevention.

- **Community vigilance and reporting mechanisms:** Along with attitude change, the project cultivated community vigilance. Teachers and local leaders noted that community members increasingly speak out and report cases of child abuse or exploitation. For example, if a child is seen doing heavy labour or if an underage girl is rumoured to be in an early marriage, people will bring it to the attention of the village headman, PTA, or child protection committee. In one notable practice, the project engaged respected community theatre groups (like gule wamkule) not only to attract attention but also to implicitly send the message that the community is watching. This social monitoring means that it's much harder for child labour to occur "under the radar" now than before. Even schools became part of the detection net: teachers were trained to notice signs that a child might be working (fatigue, injuries, sporadic attendance) and to flag these concerns for follow-up.

  A local education official noted the outcome: *"the number of children in these schools has increased over time,"* implying that far fewer children are slipping away into labour than before. The social norm in Chigudu has shifted as keeping kids in school is the expected behaviour, effectively safeguarding them from child labour.

- **Targeting child labour demand (employers):** Preventing child labour also meant addressing those who benefit from child labour. The project identified that some relatively wealthier community members (farm owners, businesspeople) were in the habit of employing local children for cheap labour on farms (such as tobacco, maize, or soya fields). To stop this, awareness-raising specifically targeted these "employers", making it clear that such practices are illegal and harmful. In Chibanzi area, for instance, outreach efforts were directed at known farmers who previously hired children, urging them to hire adults or use other means rather than exploiting children. This direct engagement helped cut off opportunities for child labour. Moreover, the enforcement of bylaws meant a negligent parent could no longer offer their child's labour without facing community sanctions. Combined, reduced supply (children kept in school) and reduced demand (employers pressured not to hire kids) create a sustainable decline in child labour risk.

- **Addressing early marriage and abuse**: Early marriage was tackled as a component of child labour prevention, since marrying off young girls is often intertwined with them leaving school (and effectively

being in a labour situation at a household level). The communities, with support from authorities, cracked down on child marriages – as mentioned, any incidences were reported and nullified, with punishments for those responsible. Additionally, it was noted that incidents of sexual abuse by a few teachers significantly decreased due to training and strict repercussions instituted by the community and education officials. By cultivating a protective environment where multiple forms of child abuse are actively confronted, the project reduced the overall vulnerability of children to exploitation, including labour.

- **Empowering children with knowledge**: Another forward-looking element is how children themselves have been educated about their rights and the importance of schooling (covered more in subsection (d)). With this knowledge, children are less likely to acquiesce to exploitative situations. Several children now can articulate why child labour is harmful and know to seek help if pressured into work. This empowerment means the next generation can self-advocate and resist child labour, further decreasing its likelihood in the future.

  "*Child labour is bad because it violates children's rights, can lead to pregnancy, missing school and prevents a child from seeking a bright future*" – Standard 6 male student.

Raising awareness about child labour and the benefits of education

Widespread awareness-raising underpinned all the CLFZ efforts. The project catalysed a massive change in how parents, children, and community leaders perceive child labour versus education. Through continuous sensitization campaigns and inclusive dialogues, the communities developed a shared understanding of the value of education and the harm of child labour. This cultural and mindset shift was evident across different groups through multi-platform sensitization, the use of children as advocates and community-wide attitude shifts.

- **Extensive community sensitization campaigns**: From the very start, raising awareness was a core activity. Community dialogues and sensitization meetings were held in a variety of forums. In Chigudu schools, PTA and SMC meetings were used to discuss child labour, village funerals and religious gatherings saw chiefs and teachers speaking about the value of schooling and door-to-door campaigns ensured even the most remote households heard the message. At school assemblies, children participated in sessions about their rights and the importance of education. This saturation of messaging meant that the concept of a "child labour free zone" became commonly understood in the community. Repetition in different venues reinforced the ideas and allowed sceptics to gradually be convinced. Parents heard consistent messages from figures they respect: chiefs, teachers, church leaders, and even other children thus creating a united front of influence.

- **Clarifying the benefits of education**: A part of the awareness campaign was helping parents and children visualize the long-term benefits of education. Discussions highlighted how schooling can lead to better opportunities: reading and writing skills, chances for formal employment or better farming knowledge, and generally an improved future for the child and family. Community members noted that educated children could secure jobs or incomes that help lift the family out of poverty, whereas child labour keeps families trapped in short-term subsistence. Education was also linked to intangible benefits like personal development, pride in the community, and reduced crime/exploitation. As a result, many parents who

previously saw immediate financial gain in a child's labour came to see greater benefit in the child's long-term education, aligning their actions accordingly.

One parent remarked "*We now understand the importance of sending a child to school. When a child is educated, they can easily travel to another community. They can read a signpost that this is the road to Lilongwe instead of asking other people*"

- **Children's awareness and advocacy**: One of the standout changes was that children themselves became advocates against child labour. Through school clubs and lessons, children were taught what child labour is and why it's harmful, and they took this knowledge to heart. There are anecdotes of children reminding their parents about the new norms.

  For example, a mother confessed, "*Me and my daughter were carrying sacks of maize from the garden. She told me that if someone found out that I had given her a heavy load to carry, I would be in trouble. I immediately did the right thing*."

  The daughter's boldness in correcting her mother shows how empowered children have become to speak up. Children now widely agree that "child labour is bad" and can enumerate reasons: it violates their rights, can lead to health problems or early pregnancies, and destroys their future prospects. "*Child labour makes a child fall sick and even die because a lot of work is given without adequate rest*," explained a 14-year-old female student. Another student, added, "*It violates children's rights, can lead to pregnancy, missing school and prevents a child from seeking a bright future*." These strong views from children demonstrate that the next generation is highly aware and likely to resist or report child labour if they encounter it.

- **Changed roles for SMCs, PTAs, and Mother Support Groups:** The school governing bodies (SMC/PTA) and Mother Support Groups underwent a transformation in their understanding of their roles. Previously, many members of these committees were unclear about child protection issues. Now, they see themselves as bridges between the school and community in advocating for education and against child labour.

  One female SMC member noted, "*Views about child labour changed because it is the responsibility of teachers to monitor children and ensure that they are in school after we have identified them and sent them to schoo*l."

  This indicates a collaborative mindset: community committees identify and encourage children, and teachers ensure they stay. SMCs and PTAs actively raised parental concerns (like if a child was complaining about a teacher or a financial issue) to the school so it could be resolved, rather than letting it fester into a reason to drop out. Meanwhile, mother support groups championed girls' education, persuading other parents to avoid early marriages and instead keep their daughters in school. The net effect was a strong advocacy network at the grassroots level, all promoting the message that every child belonged in school.

- **Leaders and institutions spread the word**: Traditional leaders and local institutions have continued to spread awareness messages, even as the project winds down.

  A head teacher confirmed, "*The community is now happy about this project. Leaders have continued to raise awareness about child labour*."

  This continuity suggests a lasting commitment. Teachers' unions (TUM and PSEUM) also played a role by leveraging their structures to inform teachers and through them, parents, about child labour issues. They identified "gatekeepers", individuals whose buy-in was critical (like influential elders, or even older children

known to lure peers into work) and specifically engaged them to become allies rather than obstacles. This strategic awareness-raising ensured that even potential dissenters were co-opted into supporting the cause.

- **Community ownership of the message**: Perhaps the best evidence of raised awareness was that the message was internalized and owned by the community. It's no longer an external organisation telling people about child labour; it's neighbours reminding neighbours, children reminding parents, chiefs setting rules, and parents encouraging each other. What was once tolerated is now stigmatized. Community-wide attitude shift is apparent: child labour is broadly seen as an affront to community values, while educating children has become a point of pride. Teachers observed that many children now come to school earlier and more regularly than before, often with parents ensuring they are punctual. This reflects an increased enthusiasm and priority for education among both students and parents, a direct result of the intense awareness efforts.

  An SMC member shared the new cooperative attitude: "*It is the responsibility of teachers to monitor children are in school after we (community) have identified them and sent them to school*." A head teacher also noted local leaders' ongoing commitment: "*Leaders have continued to raise awareness about child labour*."

Bridging classes to reintegrate children in school

A critical component of the CLFZ project's effectiveness was the provision of bridging classes (remedial education) to help children who had been in labour catch up academically and smoothly reintegrate into formal schooling. Many returnee students had fallen behind in their studies or even forgotten things they learned before. The project introduced special measures to boost their learning and confidence, ensuring that returning to school was not only socially positive but also academically sustainable. The bridging efforts were very effective, benefiting not only the former child labourers but also improving the overall school culture of support through remedial lessons for returnees, teacher incentives and motivation as well as holistic reintegration activities.

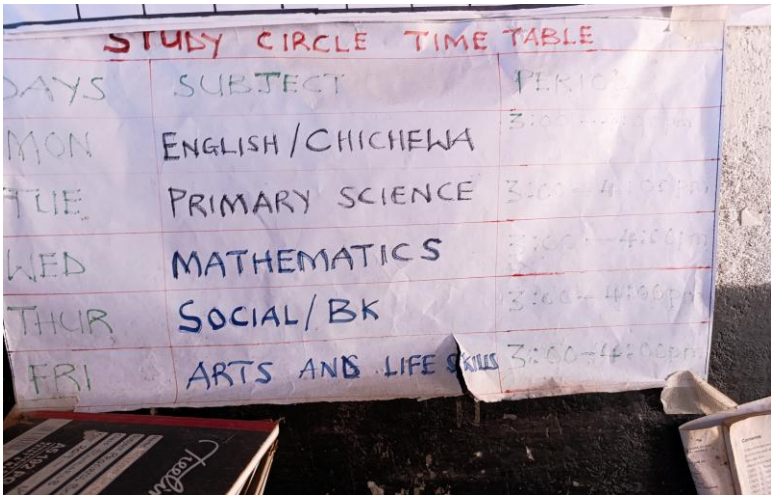
- **Establishment of remedial classes**: Each target school launched remedial lessons specifically for children returning from child labour. Focal point teachers (teachers appointed to lead CLFZ activities in school) took charge of these classes. The bridging classes were inclusive of all grades; meaning whether a child was in standard 2 or 7, if they had fallen behind due to time out of school, they had access to extra instruction to catch up.

  For example, a focal teacher explained it was their responsibility to ensure all returning children attend remedial classes and get the support needed. The content of these classes aimed to close learning gaps. By levelling up the children academically, the project made sure that returning to school did not frustrate or embarrass them; instead, they could gradually reach the expected competency for their age.

- **Inclusivity in support**: Notably, schools did not limit remedial lessons only to former labourers. If any student in regular classes was struggling (even if they had never dropped out), they were often allowed to join the remedial sessions as well. This inclusive approach prevented resentment and stigma. The extra classes, commonly known as "study circles" in Thedze school were seen as help for anyone who needed it, not a label for "child labour children." It also improved overall class performance, as weaker students got reinforced learning.

A head teacher explained, "*remedial classes are for Standard 1 to 8 children who are slow learners in class and have just returned from child labour. However, study circles happen when children voluntarily stay behind after school and either study on their own or with support from a teacher.*"

Teachers also reported that some non-dropout students who participated showed academic improvement, which validated keeping the program broad. This flexibility strengthened the reintegration, as returnees weren't isolated but mixed with peers in these after-class groups, fostering peer learning and solidarity. Below is an example of a study circle timetable in one school.



- **Teacher incentives and engagement**: To ensure the remedial classes were high-quality and consistently held, focal teachers received a monthly stipend as compensation for the extra hours spent on this coaching. This modest financial incentive had a dual benefit: (1) it rewarded teachers for the additional workload and thus kept them motivated and enthusiastic about the cause, and (2) it implicitly emphasized the importance of these classes to all staff, elevating the priority of helping at-risk children. Teachers saw that engaging in anti-child-labour activities (like running clubs or remedials) was recognized and valued, which encouraged a school-wide culture of support. Many teachers went beyond just the stipend duty and took personal pride in seeing these kids improve. As a result, the bridging classes were regularly conducted and well attended, rather than being treated as an ad-hoc or low-priority activity.

- **Extended school day and safe time**: An interesting positive side-effect of the remedial lessons was that children stayed at school longer into the day. Normally, after school, some at-risk kids might return to work (e.g., do manual labour in the afternoon). With the introduction of after-school remedial sessions and club activities, these children's afternoons were occupied with learning and play. This reduced the time window in which they could be involved in labour. Parents and community members noted that "*when children are busy in school until later, they are less likely to be sent on errands or jobs during daylight hours*". Thus, bridging classes indirectly helped cut down child labour opportunities simply by engaging the children longer in an educational setting.

- **Extracurricular and peer support**: Reintegration wasn't only academic. The project leveraged extracurricular activities (like clubs, sports, drama) as a means to integrate returning children socially. As mentioned, many schools formed Anti-child-labour Clubs which doubled as peer support groups. Returnee students often took active roles in these clubs – sometimes even becoming peer educators themselves.

The General Secretary of PSEUM noted, "*we involved these children in poetry, music and drama activities to raise awareness about child labour because when you hear a message from peers, it is more impactful*".

By engaging returnees in performing dramas or composing poems about their experiences, the project accomplished two things: it gave those children a voice and purpose within the school community (enhancing their confidence and sense of belonging), and it spread the child labour awareness message further in an authentic way. Other kids could learn from their returned peers, and the returned children gained status as champions against child labour, which is a powerful motivator to stay in school. Additionally, sports and games provided informal settings for former child labourers to bond with classmates, overcoming any stigma and building friendships that anchor them to school.

2. What has been the overall impact?

Impact on children

- **Children in Chigudu have left child labour behind to return to school in large numbers, and they are thriving in a more supportive, engaging educational environment**. Thanks to the CLFZ initiative, many children who had dropped out to work (for example, on farms or as domestic help) are now back in the classroom and attending regularly. In fact, a concerted data collection by village headmen found that about "*only about half of the children of primary school going age were not attending school*" initially meaning half the kids were out of school. Mobilization efforts targeted those children, and as a result, overall student enrolment has dramatically increased across the area. For instance, one head teacher estimated that "*30% of the school population of children returned to school from child labour activities*" in the community. This significant influx of returning students is a clear indicator of the project's success in reclaiming childhoods from labour and re-integrating kids into education.

- **With the creation of child labour free zones, many formerly out-of-school children attend classes regularly**. This consistent attendance is a marked change from before, when children skipped school for work or community events. Now, even when community events occur, schools stay open, and children attend classes as normal. This indicates a new norm where education comes first, benefiting the children's stability and routine.

- **Children are enjoying school more and developing new skills and talents**. The introduction of anti-child-labour clubs and other engaging activities made school more appealing. "*As a result of the anti-child-labour clubs, more children enjoyed and loved staying in school*," according to a focal teacher. With higher participation, schools have been able to tap into children's talents in extracurricular areas. For example, because of increased enrolment, one school was able to form strong sports teams. "W*e were able to win sports competitions for both the girls' and boys' categories*," said one head teacher. This shows that children are not only present but actively participating and excelling in school life.

- **Academic performance and progression have improved among the children**. Teachers reported that with regular attendance and support, students' basic skills like reading and counting improved significantly. Some children who were previously working instead of learning have made notable academic progress. At one school, "*four learners who were previously in tobacco farms have now reached Standard 7*," the head teacher noted, highlighting that children who returned from labour are advancing through grades. In another case, a child who had returned to school excelled in her primary school examinations and even sat her junior certificate exams recently, demonstrating how returning to education opened doors to achievement.

- **Crucially, children feel more supported by their families and community now.** With parents and leaders backing their education, children have better access to the materials and encouragement they need. A 14-year-old female student observed the change in her parents' attitude: "*Parents are now able to support me with school uniform and books. In the past they did not want to give me anything*," she said. This quote exemplifies how children are directly benefiting from parental support in tangible ways. In addition, schools have created child-friendly mechanisms like suggestion boxes to hear from students about any issues, including child labour and violence. Such steps empower children to speak up and ensure they learn in a safer, more supportive environment. Overall, the child labour free zones have given children in Chigudu the opportunity to be children again; to learn, play, and grow in school rather than work in fields.

- **Most impact for girls and over-age children**: The CLFZ approach appears to have been especially effective for girls and older children who were out of school. According to project observations, in most communities (e.g., Mthenthera, Thedze and Chibanza), the majority of children who returned to school were girls and children above the typical primary school age. This suggests that the interventions resonated strongly with these groups. For girls, the project directly tackled barriers like early marriage, providing a pathway back to education after life events that usually end schooling. For older children (who might have felt too old or embarrassed to return), the welcoming environment and bridging classes helped them slot back in despite their age. This outcome is significant because these two groups often represent the hardest-to-reach populations in education initiatives. The success here means the project not only increased enrolment but did so in an equitable manner, reaching those who needed it most.

Impact on parents

- **Parents in the community underwent a significant mindset shift, now recognizing education as invaluable for their children's future**. Early in the project, community meetings and dialogues made parents confront the importance of schooling over child labour. One parent from Mpatamoyo admitted that he used to send his four children to work on farms and do other jobs, with only one child attending school irregularly. After the sensitization, in 2023 he enrolled all four children in school, and notably one son achieved 12th position out of 45 learners in class, an academic success that motivated the parent to actively seek support and better education for his children. This story is echoed by many: "*We now understand the value of education and educated people in the community because they are respected. We want the same for our children in future*," said a father. Parents now aspire for their children to be educated and respected, which marks a dramatic change in attitude.

- **Having embraced education, parents have largely stopped sending their kids to work and instead actively support their schooling**. The project helped parents differentiate between child labour and acceptable child work at home. Many realized that keeping children in school is actually the way to break the cycle of poverty, contrary to their previous beliefs. As the General Secretary of PSEUM noted, "*at the beginning, the understanding was that children were in child labour because of poverty. However, after engaging them, they learnt that children being in school would break the chains of poverty*." This enlightenment led to a voluntary change: most parents no longer engage their children in child labour. Instead, they ensure their children attend classes and study. Some parents even became advocates, volunteering to speak to other parents and lead community dialogues about ending child labour. This peer influence helped spread the new mindset across the community.

- **Parents are contributing to a supportive educational environment through their actions**. They now take concrete steps such as providing school necessities, participating in school activities, and enforcing attendance. In some villages, parents and community leaders together enacted local by-laws to discourage

absenteeism for instance, in Thedze area, any parent who doesn't send a child to school faces penalties (a fine equivalent to a goat for a first offense, escalating to a bull for repeat offenses). These rules, backed by the chiefs, show parents that the community expects everyone to prioritize schooling. Additionally, parents have been reminded of their responsibilities to care for their children's needs. Community dialogues pointed out, for example, that "*instead of fathers drinking the local brew (kachaso), they could instead provide food for their children*," emphasizing redirecting resources towards children. Many parents have heeded this message: they contribute food and labour for school programs, such as the home-grown school feeding program at Mpatamoyo where parents donated food and helped build new classrooms. Parents have also set up local sponsorships and funds. In Chibanza, village chiefs established a fund for buying books, pens, and uniforms for children from the poorest households. All these efforts by parents demonstrate their full buy-in and support: they have become partners in their children's education.

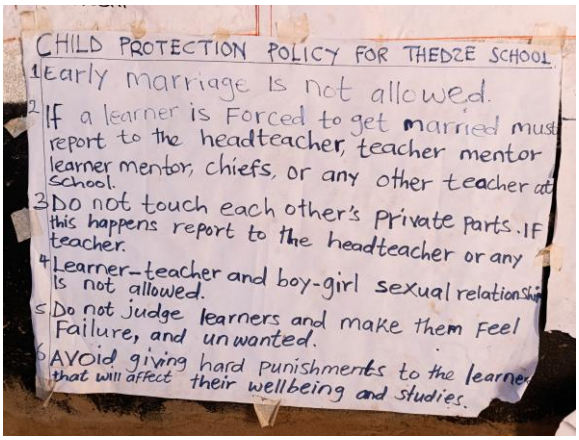
- **Ultimately, parents now see educated children as a benefit to the whole family and community**. They speak proudly of this impact change. One parent remarked, "*We now understand the importance of sending a child to school. When a child is educated, they can easily travel to another community. They can read a signpost that this is the road to Lilongwe instead of asking other people*." This reflects a new appreciation that education gives children independence and opportunities that were previously out of reach. The parental perspective has shifted from short-term gains of child labour to the long-term benefits of schooling. This profound change in attitude among parents is a cornerstone of the child labour free zones' impact.

Impact on teachers and schools

- **Teachers and schools in Chigudu have taken proactive steps to accommodate returning students and improve education quality, resulting in stronger, more child-friendly schools.** With the surge of children returning to class, schools faced both an opportunity and a challenge. School staff rose to the occasion by developing action plans to handle increased enrolment and prevent child labour from recurring**.** The fact that the community was sensitized to children's rights meant more eyes and ears were tuned to the well-being of children. The protective network (mother groups, PTAs, chiefs, teachers, unions) means children are safer not just from labour, but from other harms as well. School staff rose to the occasion by developing action plans to handle increased enrolment and prevent child labour from recurring. As one head teacher explained, "*After the child labour training workshops, we developed action plans to establish anti-child-labour clubs, allocate teachers to remedial classes and to work with the school governance structures to sensitise parents about child labour and their children's education. We also constructed four toilets for our children*." This quote highlights several initiatives: creating clubs to keep students engaged and aware, providing extra lessons for those who fell behind, working with parent committees to spread the message, and even expanding infrastructure to accommodate the children (building new toilets in this case). Such comprehensive school-level planning ensured that returning students were welcomed and supported, not lost in crowded classrooms.

- **Schools introduced innovations that made the learning environment safer and more supportive for children**. For example, teachers and administrators adopted new feedback mechanisms and child protection measures. At Thedze school, a suggestion box was placed for learners to report concerns about child labour and violence anonymously. The same school also developed a child protection policy and rolled it out to all teachers and pupils, making it clear that the school is committed to students' safety and rights. These measures empowered students to voice issues and ensured teachers were aware of proper, non-abusive disciplinary methods. In fact, across all the schools in the project, corporal punishment and other abusive practices sharply decreased. Teachers learned through training and dialogues that harsh punishments and sexual abuse contribute to dropouts and eventual child labour. As a result, many schools like Chibanzi

stopped practices like caning or forcing children to lift heavy objects. A head teacher noted that such harsh punishments have stopped, and alternative, non-violent discipline methods have been adopted. For instance, misbehaving students might be asked to bring a parent to school or read a passage aloud to the class as a corrective measure. This change has made schools more welcoming places for children, removing a former driver of child labour (students running away due to fear of punishment). Also, **an emboldened child or parent is now more likely to report a case of abuse to authorities**, whereas before it might have been ignored. This holistic improvement in child welfare is a crucial impact of the CLFZ approach.



- **Heightened enrolment also spurred schools to secure additional resources and improve facilities, often with community and government help**. Recognizing that they needed more capacity for the influx of learners, school leaders actively sought support. Many schools utilized School Improvement Grants (access and equity funds) to support vulnerable children for purchasing exercise books, pencils, uniforms, and other scholastic materials.

Impact on the community as a whole

- **The broader community in Chigudu has become actively engaged in protecting children's right to education, reflecting a collective cultural shift against child labour**. Local leadership by village headmen was a driving force in this change. The project initially enlightened traditional chiefs about child labour, its forms, and their role in stopping it. Empowered with this knowledge, the chiefs took strong ownership of the issue. They realized they could influence community norms and parent behaviours to ensure children go to school. Early on, these leaders facilitated community dialogues and helped pass bylaws that make it unacceptable to keep children out of school. Notably, these by-laws are "still in existence" and being enforced. In practice, if a parent in areas like Thedze fails to send their child to school, they face fines (initially a goat, then a bull for continued non-compliance) and even escalation to higher traditional authorities for repeat offenses. In extreme cases, persistently non-compliant parents were excluded from community activities as punishment. Such measures, though strict, underscored that the entire community stood behind the principle that every child belongs in school. As one village headman emphatically put it, "*Previously many children used to work as herdsmen and gardeners for money and food. However, this has changed. We know that all children belong to school*." This powerful statement from a community leader signals that employing children in labour is now socially unacceptable in the community.

- **There is now strong teamwork and collective effort in the community to support education and prevent child labour**. Various community groups such School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher

Associations (PTAs), Mother Support Groups, and other volunteers have defined roles and collaborate closely. For example, in Chibanza community, SMC and PTA members took charge of gathering materials for constructing additional classrooms and toilets at the school. Meanwhile, head teachers and teachers focus on tracking student attendance and reporting any absences or child labour suspicions to the community leaders. In turn, village headmen and other community leaders follow up directly with families of children who are not attending to resolve the issues. This coordinated system means everyone works together and holds each other accountable. A result of this teamwork is that problems are addressed holistically: if a child stops coming to class, teachers alert the community, who then intervene to get that child back in school. The communal support network extends to material help as well. Recognizing that many returning students were from very poor households (and thus at risk of dropping out again), leaders in communities like Chibanza set up a special fund to provide scholastic materials to needy children. Through this fund, vulnerable children receive notebooks, pens, and even school uniforms so that they are not embarrassed or disadvantaged at school. Such local initiatives ensure that poverty is less of a barrier to education, and they exemplify the community's collective commitment to keeping kids in class.

- **The community's perceptions about child labour versus education have fundamentally changed**. Before the project, it was commonly believed that children had to work because families were poor, and some even thought that if children didn't do hard work, they would grow up lazy. The intensive dialogues and awareness campaigns challenged these beliefs. Over time, people came to see that keeping children in school is a better long-term solution to poverty than sending them to work. Education is now viewed as a right and a necessity. According to the General Secretary of a local education union (PSEUM), "*after engaging them, [the community] learnt that children being in school would break the chains of poverty*", which directly addressed the poverty justification for child labour. Additionally, the project clarified the distinction between harmful child labour and harmless tasks (child work) that children might do at home. Parents came to understand that asking children to help with mild chores is fine, but work that interferes with schooling is not. With this new understanding, most parents now voluntarily refrain from involving their children in labour that would keep them out of school. The norm has flipped: it's now expected that children attend school, and any who don't stand out as exceptions to be promptly helped.

- **Local businesses and farms also adjusted their practices in line with the community's stance**. Previously, it was not uncommon for farmers or small business owners to hire children as helpers (herding cattle, gardening, etc.) especially in peak agricultural times. But with village authorities and the community united against child exploitation, there was a clear shift in mindset among employers. They stopped employing school-age children. The earlier quote from the village headman ("all children belong to school") encapsulates the new reality: community members now discourage each other from hiring children and instead encourage the children to study.

- **The project fostered a strong partnership between the community and government officials, leading to supportive policies and resources.** The active involvement of district education officials and other government representatives in project activities helped align community efforts with formal policy. Government officials (such as Primary Education Advisors and Assistant Coordinators) attended community meetings and publicly committed to supporting the cause, which added credibility and accountability. This collaboration yielded concrete results: the Ministry of Education issued a directive in 2023 abolishing the practice of expelling children for non-payment of school fees (the school development fund). Such fees had previously been an obstacle causing poorer children to drop out and possibly fall into child labour. Removing this policy barrier enabled more children especially those reintegrated by the project to continue their education without fear of being sent home for fees. The government also responded to needs identified by the community, like deploying more teachers to understaffed schools and investing in school infrastructure,

as noted earlier. Moreover, local school heads learned to lobby NGOs and donors; for instance, Chigudu school reached out to an organization called Friends of Netherlands, which donated mats and desks for all its classrooms. By the end of the project, education was firmly on the community's agenda and had support at every level from village bylaws and volunteer groups on the ground, to district and national policy changes. The community as a whole now enjoys a culture that values education and vigilantly guards against child labour, making the "child labour free zone" a sustained reality, not just a temporary project.

- **Community leadership and ownership**: One of the strongest themes cutting across all areas is the high degree of community ownership of the CLFZ project. Village headmen, parents, and local committees did not treat this as an external program; they actively shaped and led it on the ground. They created bylaws, used local cultural practices, invested labour and resources, and essentially made it their project. This local ownership boded well for sustainability even after the project formally ended, the norms, rules, and support systems established have continued. Indeed, village headmen expressed openness to participating in future development projects in the community, thanks to the positive experience with CLFZ. This indicates a lasting capacity has been built at the community level for child protection and education promotion. The use of "local solutions to resolve local challenges" as the project documents put it such as involving local chiefs and volunteers, means the approach was culturally appropriate and more likely to endure.

3. What challenges still remain in the community in relation to child labour?

The establishment of child labour free zones in Chigudu in July 2021, led to remarkably positive transformations for children, their families, schools, and the wider community. The evidence shows a holistic impact: children are back in school, learning happily and progressing; parents have become champions of education rather than contributors to child labour; teachers and schools have improved their practices and capacity to accommodate every child; and the community at large has galvanized around the principle that no child should have to work at the expense of their education.

However, once the project ended after 2023, some challenges started emerging as discussed below. Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests the project found innovative ways to handle most difficulties (like hunger addressed by meal provision, or community resistance countered by targeted engagement, etc). Still, amidst the challenges, there is enough evidence to show that the project made gains and child labour has been drastically reduced, if not eliminated, in the target communities. It is no longer socially acceptable for a child to be kept out of school for work and many older children who used to toil in farms are now catching up academically and even outperforming expectations. The challenges identified also serve as lessons for future interventions thereby highlighting the need for holistic interventions.

Challenges faced by children

Children in Chigudu still confront numerous hardships that hinder their education and well-being. Many of these challenges stem from economic hardship and lack of supportive environments, forcing children to make difficult choices between schooling and survival. Below are the key issues affecting children:

- **Hunger and food insecurity**: In many villages there is only one main harvest per year, leading to seasonal hunger during the lean periods. When school meal programs run out of food outside the harvest season, children are tempted to quit school and seek work to eat. Hunger has thus become a major deterrent to children staying in class for the full year.

- **Lack of basic scholastic materials**: Orphans and children from very poor households often cannot afford essentials like uniforms, exercise books, and pens. This lack of supplies directly contributes to dropouts. Parents' inability to provide these items means children view working for money as the only way to buy what they need for school. Indeed, there are isolated cases of older children willingly engaging in labour to earn money for school materials. These children face an agonizing trade-off between immediate needs and long-term education.

- **Exclusion of vulnerable children**: Children with special vulnerabilities such as those with disabilities or girls who become pregnant are frequently left behind. Schools in the area were not adequately prepared to accommodate Children with Disabilities (CwDs), resulting in their exclusion from education. Similarly, there have been no clear guidelines or policies on the re-admission of pregnant girls or young mothers into school. In practice this means when an adolescent girl becomes pregnant or marries, she often cannot return to complete her education without adequate support from the mother support groups. The lack of a formal re-entry policy is a serious impediment for mother support groups and educators trying to help such girls continue schooling.

- **Violence and bullying**: Some children reported unsafe conditions either at school or on the way there. Bullying by older students is commonly cited. Younger pupils have been kicked or beaten, and they fear retaliation if they report it. For example, a 10-year-old male student described routine harassment: "*Incidents of bullying by older boys are common here. They sometimes even kick and beat us, and we cannot report them because they will still beat us on the way back home*." In addition, children who arrive late due to long walking distances risk punishment, and there are occasional threats of violence in the community. These safety concerns create an environment of fear that can deter attendance and concentration on learning.

- **Loss of remedial support**: Selected teachers provided remedial lessons to help children catch up in school. However, after the project's conclusion, many teachers did not continue these remedial lessons with the same enthusiasm as a result of discontinuation of the monthly stipend paid to them. The abrupt end of special support disproportionately affects struggling students (often former child labourers), leaving them without the additional help they need to succeed academically. As a result, some of these children risk falling behind again and dropping out.

Challenges faced by parents and families

Parents and caregivers were often forced by circumstances to make choices that can perpetuate child labour. Severe poverty and lack of resources constrain parents' ability to support their children's education, despite their desire to do so. The following are the main difficulties parents face:

- **Chronic poverty and reliance on child labour for survival**: Most families depend on small-scale farming and face extreme economic uncertainty. With only one rain season and harvest per year, food and income can run out for months. Parents have few alternative livelihoods as local small businesses are considered unprofitable and thus struggle to feed their families year-round. In such conditions, children are viewed as contributors to household survival, not just dependents. As noted by the Secretary General of a primary education union, the depth of poverty has warped perceptions: many parents come to see child labour as a "means to survival" for the family. This mindset, born out of desperation, leads parents to withdraw children from school to work whenever ends don't meet.

- **Inability to afford education expenses**: Even when schooling is officially free, there are indirect costs (uniforms, notebooks, exam fees, clothing, soap, etc.) that poor parents cannot cover. Households living in poverty or those with orphans simply lack the cash for these necessities. For example, in very extreme cases such as in Mtherera, children dropped out and returned to work because their families couldn't afford uniforms, books or even basic clothing and soap. Without these items, children feel unable to attend school and parents feel helpless to provide them. This economic barrier directly translates into lost education for the poorest children.

- **Household responsibilities pulling children from school**: When basic services falter, families sometimes have no choice but to involve their children in laborious tasks. One prominent example is water. In villages where the communal water pump breaks down, it is often children who are tasked with walking long distances to fetch water. This chore can consume hours each day, during which the child misses classes. Parents may also keep children home to watch younger siblings or help in the fields during planting and harvesting seasons. These competing responsibilities, while necessary for family survival, conflict with school attendance.

- **Lack of awareness and support for keeping kids in school**: Some parents, especially those who never had schooling themselves, may not fully recognize the long-term value of education versus the short-term gains of child labour. The absence of strong social support programs exacerbates this. Currently, social safety nets or welfare programs do not reach the most vulnerable families in these communities. According to a project staff, "*current social security [programs] do not reach the most vulnerable families at the moment*." This means parents in dire need have no cushion if they choose to keep their children in school. Without food aid, cash transfers, or other external support, a parent's decision to prioritize immediate income (via a child's work) over schooling is often a matter of survival, not ignorance.

Challenges faced by teachers and schools

Local schools and educators are on the frontline of sustaining the project, yet they face immense challenges in providing quality, inclusive education. Resource constraints and motivational issues in the teaching force threaten to undermine the gains made in getting children back to school. Key challenges for teachers and schools include:

- **Decline in teacher motivation after project incentives ended**: During the anti-child-labour project period, select teachers (known as focal point teachers) received a stipend to conduct remedial classes for struggling students. This incentive boosted teacher effort and student support. However, once the project concluded, the stipends stopped. As a result, many teachers have not continued the same level of effort in conducting extra lessons now that they are unpaid for it. The loss of financial motivation has led to a noticeable drop in remedial education activities. Moreover, other teachers who were not part of the stipend program previously had expressed discontent about not receiving allowances while being involved in anti-child-labour activities. This created some resentment and fatigue. In the aftermath, teachers overall feel less driven to go above and beyond standard duties, which negatively impacts students who need additional help.

- **Overburdened infrastructure and resources**: With more children returning to school (a positive outcome of the CLFZ efforts), many schools have struggled to accommodate them. Classrooms are overcrowded and essential facilities like toilets and desks are insufficient for the increased enrolment. The sudden rise in student numbers has not been matched by an expansion in resources. For example, some teachers have been allocated to schools, teacher houses and classrooms constructed and water sources constructed.

However, these are isolated cases and the resources being provided by parents and the community are not matched by government.

- **Teacher shortages and high turnover in rural areas**: Several schools report chronic vacancies or rapid turnover in teaching staff. A major factor is the lack of proper housing and incentives for teachers posted to remote community schools. In one case (Matanda school), even when new teachers were assigned, they left after a short time because there were no accommodation for them in the area. The hardship of living far from home without facilities leads to transfers or resignations. It should be noted that the project was able to bring about the drilling of a borehole near Matanda Primary school to ease water problems which had previously contributed to teachers not wanting to stay.

- **Insufficient funding for inclusive education needs**: Although government grants to schools exist (such as School Improvement Grants (SIGs), which include an access and equity fund), there have been limited deliberate efforts to tap these resources to support children returning from child labour. The teachers' union and school management have advocated for more support, but they often lack the capacity and resources to mount effective lobbying. This means schools do not receive extra budgets for things like counselling services, learning materials for poor students, or facilities for disabled learners. The absence of targeted funding leaves teachers struggling to assist vulnerable returnee children with no extra materials or training.

- **Lack of training and support to handle special cases**: The changing student population includes older children who have returned to school after working, as well as teenage mothers. Many teachers feel ill-prepared to support these students' unique needs. For example, when over-age learners or young mothers are re-enrolled, they are often placed in lower grades with much younger children, but teachers have not been trained in handling the social or psychological adjustments required. There are no specific safeguards or support systems in place at school for these vulnerable children. Teachers also noted the need for psychosocial support training to help children who have been through trauma or exploitation. Without guidance, educators may unintentionally marginalize these students or be unsure how to keep them engaged, which can lead to those children dropping out again.

Challenges affecting the whole community

At the community level, the findings highlight systemic issues that perpetuate child labour risks despite local commitment to change. Poverty and lack of institutional support form a difficult environment for sustaining child labour free practices. The entire community – from village leaders to local employers – faces the following challenges:

- **Seasonal livelihoods and community hunger**: The economic base of these communities is fragile. As noted earlier, agriculture is rain-fed with one major annual harvest. Community leaders (village headmen) observed that widespread hunger during off-season months leads to higher child labour incidence. When food is scarce and families are desperate, children are sent to work on farms or in homes to earn food or money. The village headmen acknowledge that hunger is a powerful force undermining school attendance. School feeding programs operate only during the harvest season (when food is more available) and not in the lean season, which is precisely when children most need encouragement to stay in school. This mismatch leaves a critical gap: when the community's food stocks run low, school meals stop, and child labour becomes a coping mechanism.

- **Water scarcity and infrastructure breakdowns**: Many of these communities suffer from inadequate infrastructure, such as a lack of safe water year-round. Community leaders reported that when wells or

borehole pumps fail, children are the ones typically tasked with walking long distances to fetch water. This is not just a household issue but a community one. Without reliable water systems, education suffers as multiple families pull their children from class to secure water. Chronic water problems thus translate into chronic interruptions in schooling for a significant number of children.

- **Limited community capacity to sustain improvements**: While the CLFZ project was active, communities had external support and resources (training, modest funding, etc.) to enforce anti-child-labour activities. Once those projects ended, villages often lacked the capacity to keep interventions going at the same intensity. A majority of families did not have the means to sustain the gains made during the project's implementation phase. As one program coordinator noted, the most vulnerable households currently receive no social assistance. This means initiatives like providing school materials to needy children, or community monitoring of at-risk families, have dwindled post-project. The community structures (like Child Protection Committees or Mother Support Groups) remain, but without funding or clear policy support (for example, on re-admitting teen mothers), their impact is limited.
- **Insufficient advocacy and external support**: The broader environment – from district government to employers – has not yet fully aligned to support these communities. Schools mentioned that teacher unions and local leadership tried to advocate for more resources (such as utilizing the School Improvement Grants for returnee children), but they lack leverage and funding to make it happen. Likewise, local businesses and employers are expected to cooperate by not hiring school-age children. While many comply, in practice impoverished small businesses sometimes still engage children informally, especially during peak agricultural or market seasons, because enforcement at the community level is challenging. There is also a gap in policy enforcement, such as the absence of clear guidelines for punitive action when parents or employers break child labour norms. Community leaders have even resorted to informal by-laws (for instance, issuing warnings or small fines to parents who keep children out of school), but these measures need formal backing to be truly effective.
- **Minimal direct government role**: Local government officials (PEAs and ACCOs) participated mostly in meetings and got updates, but they were not deeply involved in implementation. One government education staff admitted, "*we mostly participated in education meetings... we see that the number of children in these schools has increased over time*," implying they observed improvements but did not drive them. This could be a limitation for sustainability if government support (in terms of funding, policy enforcement, scaling) doesn't increase in the future. It's an area to address by better integrating such initiatives with formal government programs.

4. In relation to the positive impact and benefits what have been the key success criteria?

IMPORTANT NOTE

It is essential to understand the basis for the ranks and scores in the following success factor tables.

The researcher was asked to rank potential success factors under five headings based on evidence gathered and to give a score out of 10 for each, where 1 = 'not at all significant' and 10 = 'fundamental – the approach cannot work without this'. This was intended to give a subjective, context-sensitive indication of the possible relative significance of various success factors. The researcher in Malawi decided to ask respondents to give ranks and scores on paper and then took a mathematical average. The researcher notes that the type of respondent will have significantly influenced the scores given and that some respondents were not able to comment on or give scores to some success factors. Therefore it was decided not to include the actual scores in the tables as these could be misleading. The ranks must be treated with considerable caution.

It is clear that in many (if not all) CLF Zones it is a combination and synthesis of many factors which leads to success and increases the likelihood of sustainability. It is therefore important that funding decisions, strategic planning and conclusions about the CLFZ approach are **not** based on the rankings presented here.

The researchers for the two National Reports (Malawi and Uganda) as well as other international respondents were also asked to give their own ranks and scores and the outcome of this exercise is discussed in more detail in the main evaluation report.

Start Up (preparation and "project management")

Table 1: Success factors scores for 'start up (preparation and project management)'

Rank	Success factor
1	Key roles – Focal Point Teachers, village headmen, community/religious leaders, others
2	Initial baseline data-gathering (of school attendance, levels of child labour)
2	Early stakeholder mapping to identify key people
4	Ongoing monitoring of school attendance, children returning from child labour, etc.
5	Involvement of the Union (including follow-up contact)

The data from Table 1 above provides a rich narrative about how different participant groups in Chigudu prioritized success factors, overall. For instance, participants from the Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) and Private Schools Employees Union of Malawi (PSEUM) emphasized the critical importance of "**key roles**" particularly focal point teachers, village headmen, and community leaders. This success factor was also ranked highest amongst schools and their governing structures. They also valued "**initial baseline data-gathering"** and "**early stakeholder mapping"**, suggesting a structured and informed approach to project implementation. Their rankings reflect a belief that success hinges on having the right people in place and understanding the community context from the outset. Anecdotally, union representatives spoke of how head teachers, focal point teachers, PTAs and SMCs acted as bridges between schools and communities, ensuring that children at risk of child labour were identified early, returned to school and supported consistently.

In contrast, businesspeople and employers placed the highest priority on **ongoing monitoring**, underscoring their interest in measurable outcomes and accountability. This was echoed by government officials such as PEAs

and ACCOs, who also ranked monitoring as the top factor. Their focus on tracking school attendance and child labour trends reflects their administrative roles and the need for data to inform policy and resource allocation. Meanwhile, schools including head teachers and deputy head teachers ranked "**key roles**" highest, but also gave significant weight to "**early stakeholder mapping"**, indicating their awareness of the need to coordinate efforts among various actors. School governing structures like SMCs, PTAs, and Mother Support Groups showed a balanced view, valuing leadership and data but ranking Union involvement lower, possibly due to limited direct engagement with Union activities.

The differences in rankings across groups can be explained by their distinct roles, responsibilities, and perspectives. Traditional leaders such as village headmen emphasized leadership and teamwork, often citing their influence in mobilizing communities and enforcing norms. Educators focused on data and monitoring, linking these to improved school attendance and reduced child labour. Government officials prioritized systems and sustainability, while unions were seen as less central to day-to-day implementation. These variations reflect not only organizational priorities but also lived experiences with the CLFZ interventions.

Communities in Charge (community involvement and awareness-raising)

Table 2: Success factors scores for 'communities in charge'

Rank	Success factor
1	The community meetings / social dialogue
2	Information and awareness-raising on education, harm of child labour, and distinction between child labour and child work (via meetings, radio, theatre, etc.)
3	The Parent Teachers Association, The Mothers Association
4	Establishment of child protection committees
5	Training for community leaders

A clear emphasis emerges on the importance of **community engagement and awareness-raising** in the success of Child Labour Free Zones in Chigudu. The most highly ranked success factor across all participant categories was **"community meetings and social dialogue"**. This suggests that regular, inclusive conversations within communities were seen as the most effective way to build consensus, share information, and mobilize action. Anecdotes from village headmen and school governing structures in other sections of this report highlight how these meetings served as turning points, where parents began to understand the long-term value of education and the risks of child labour. These dialogues were not just formal gatherings but dynamic spaces for storytelling, problem-solving, and collective commitment.

The second most valued success factor was **"information and awareness-raising"**, particularly through creative and accessible methods such as street theatre, door-to-door campaigns, and music. The ranking of this factor reflects the belief that changing mindsets requires more than just meetings but persistent, culturally relevant messaging. Government officials (PEAs and ACCOs) emphasized how these strategies helped clarify the distinction between child labour and acceptable child work, a nuance often misunderstood in rural communities. They shared examples of how community awareness programs reached remote households and how street performances captured the attention of both children and adults, sparking conversations that continued long after the interventions ended.

Other factors such as the "**involvement of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Mothers' Associations"**, the "**establishment of child protection committees"**, and "**training for community leaders"** were ranked lower

but still recognized as important. These were seen as supportive structures that sustained the momentum generated by meetings and awareness campaigns. For instance, teachers noted that PTAs helped monitor school attendance and followed up with families, while community leaders mentioned that trained individuals were better equipped to mediate conflicts and advocate for children's rights. However, the slightly lower rankings suggest that while these elements were valuable, they are most effective when built upon a strong foundation of community dialogue and awareness.

Time for School

Table 3: Success factors scores for 'time for school'

Rank	Success Factor
1	Remedial classes (other factor emerging from fieldwork)
2	Training for teachers on child labour, community engagement, and new teaching methods
3	Better school buildings (toilets, repainting, etc.)
4	Focus on gender equality and special support for girls (menstruation, pregnancy, etc.)
5	The School Management Committee
6	Better teaching (child-centred, music, sports, theatre, no corporal punishment)
7	Following up and monitoring teachers
7	Establishment of anti-child-labour clubs (other factor emerging from fieldwork)
9	School books, sports and music equipment
10	School feeding programme
11	More teachers, more female teachers
12	Actions on child labour (other factor emerging from fieldwork)

Participants across various stakeholder groups identified a range of success factors that contributed to ensuring children stay in school and are protected from child labour. The most highly ranked success factor was "**remedial classes"**. This finding suggests a strong consensus that providing extra academic support was viewed as essential for helping returning children who had fallen behind due to child labour or other challenges. Teachers and school leaders described how after-school sessions such as remedial classes and study circles helped reintegrate children who had missed significant school time. These sessions were often community-driven, supported by the project and they played a key role in boosting learners' confidence and academic performance.

The second most valued factor was "**training provided to teachers"** on child labour, community engagement, and innovative teaching methods. This reflects a belief that teachers were seen as frontline agents of change and needed the right tools and understanding to support vulnerable learners. Participants shared stories of how training helped teachers identify signs of child labour, engage with families more effectively, and adopt child-friendly teaching practices. "**Better school infrastructure"**, such as improved toilets and classroom conditions, followed closely, with school governing bodies and parents noting that a clean, safe, and welcoming environment encouraged attendance, especially for girls. "**Gender equality and special support for girls"** was also emphasized, with anecdotes about providing more opportunities for girls to return to school.

Lower-ranked but still important factors included "**school feeding programmes"**, "**more female teachers"**, and "**anti-child-labour clubs"**. While these were not top priorities, they were consistently mentioned as supportive elements that enhanced the school experience. For example, head teachers and focal teachers noted that feeding programs helped reduce absenteeism, especially in food-insecure households. The presence of

female teachers was seen as encouraging for girls, particularly in conservative communities. Anti-child-labour clubs were described as platforms where children could learn about their rights and support each other. These insights show that while academic and structural interventions were prioritized, holistic and inclusive approaches are also valued.

Stronger Families, Stronger Communities

Table 4: Success factors scores for 'stronger families, stronger communities'

Rank	Success factor
1	New bylaws
2	Help with school fees
3	Help with scholastic materials (other factor emerging from fieldwork)
4	Income generation activities
5	Community savings schemes

A set of interventions were identified as essential for supporting families and communities in the fight against child labour. The most highly ranked factor was the introduction of "**new bylaws"**. This reflected a strong consensus that formal, community-endorsed rules were a powerful tool for protecting children and reinforcing family responsibilities. Village headmen and school governing bodies described how bylaws have helped establish clear expectations around return to school, school attendance and discouraged exploitative child labour practices. These rules were often developed through community dialogue and are seen as legitimate and enforceable by local leaders.

The next most valued success factors were "**help with school fees"** and "**help with scholastic materials"**. These reflected the economic realities faced by many families, where even small costs were a barrier to education. Parents and teachers shared stories of children who were able to return to school after receiving uniforms, notebooks, or fee waivers. These forms of support were not just financial; they also signalled to families that the community valued education and was willing to invest in its children. Participants emphasized that such assistance reduced the pressure on children to work and allowed them to focus on learning.

Further down the rankings, and considered less important, were "**income generation activities"** and "**community savings schemes"**. These initiatives were especially valued by women's groups and local leaders who saw them as empowering tools that strengthened both families and the broader community. However, these success factors were not broadly discussed, and a lot of emphasis was not place on their importance in fighting child labour and returning children to school.

The bigger picture

Table 5: Success factors scores for 'the bigger picture'

Rank	Success factor
1	Involvement of education authorities
2	Advocacy and lobbying at local level (teachers, community leaders)
3	Advocacy at national level (by Union staff)[56]
4	Involvement of employers

Interestingly, for the bigger picture success factors, only the schools and TUM/PSEUM participants provided concrete rankings, while the rest did not rank any factors. Among the ranked factors, the most frequently highlighted were the involvement of education authorities, local advocacy by teachers and community leaders, and national advocacy by union staff. For example, school leaders emphasized that collaboration with education authorities was pivotal in implementing educational reforms, receiving the required support to retain children in school and ensuring accountability. Similarly, union representatives shared anecdotes of how grassroots lobbying by teachers and community leaders helped mobilize support for educational initiatives.

Each group's perspective reveals unique priorities though. The schools ranked "**involvement of education authorities**" as the most critical success factor, followed by "**advocacy and lobbying at local level**". TUM and PSEUM mirrored this pattern but added "**advocacy at national level**" as their third priority. These rankings suggest that both groups valued structured institutional support and community-driven advocacy. In contrast, village headmen, school governing structures, children, businesspeople, and government officials did not rank any factors. This could be due to a lack of direct involvement in the implementation of the project or a hint that these factors were outside their sphere of influence.

The involvement of employers was not ranked by any group, possibly indicating that participants did not see employers as central to the success of the project. This absence may also reflect a gap in stakeholder engagement or a lack of awareness about the potential role employers could play.

[56] Ranked only by TUM and PSEUM

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- **The Child Labour Free Zones approach was highly effective in achieving its goals**. Across all the project effectiveness themes; returning children to school, retaining them, preventing future child labour, raising awareness, and reintegrating children through bridging classes, the project yielded positive outcomes. Hundreds of children who would otherwise be working are now in school, protected and learning, and the entire community's attitude towards child labour has turned sharply negative. The success owes much to the active involvement of community structures and leaders, the empowerment of children and parents with knowledge, and targeted solutions to practical problems like hunger and learning gaps. While some challenges (economic constraints, limited government involvement) were noted, the community-driven nature of the initiative provided local solutions and a sense of ownership that bodes well for long-term sustainability.

- From Union leaders detailing the importance of focal point teachers, to businesspeople stressing the need for regular check-ins and monitoring, and village headmen advocating for community-driven leadership, this collectively paint a vivid picture of how diverse perspectives shaped the understanding of what made the CLFZ project successful.

- **The experience in Chigudu showcases how a holistic, grassroots approach can combat child labour** by not just removing children from work, but by transforming the community into a safe and supportive environment for children's education. The insights and lessons from this project from enforcing bylaws to engaging cultural traditions in advocacy can inform future efforts in other regions seeking to eliminate child labour and ensure every child's right to education is fulfilled.

- **Overall success with strong community support**. There is evidence in the continuity of bylaws, more children being brought back to school and efforts to keep them in school. Village headmen, mother support groups, parents, SMCs and PTAs respectively were ranked as having played a key role in ensuring that child labour is reduced, with more girls returning to school as the focus of the role played by the mother support groups.

- **There is a collective mindset shift viewing educated children as an asset and child labour as a liability**. This is perhaps the most significant achievement, because it lays the foundation for sustaining the change. Importantly, the community did not just change opinions; they changed behaviours and institutions. From village chiefs down to mothers and fathers, people took concrete actions: enforcing school attendance, volunteering in school activities, mentoring other families, and continuing initiatives like the anti-child-labour clubs and mother support groups. The social norm in Chigudu is now firmly in favour of keeping children in school.

- **The proactive efforts of the community did not go unnoticed.** They attracted external goodwill and support. As mentioned, NGOs or donors provided things like desks and learning materials when they saw local commitment. Additionally, the Teachers Union and Education Union's involvement (TUM/PSEUM) brought in technical support, training, and advocacy that strengthened the project's effectiveness. These partnerships show that a mobilized community can leverage more resources. It also reflects well on the project, as it likely encouraged stakeholders beyond the immediate community (like district education officials or even national bodies) to pay attention to the CLFZ model. This could pave the way for scaling up the approach to other areas, using Chigudu as an example of success. The political

will was also fostered – the project team worked with politicians and district leaders to ensure they were supportive, which can have longer-term policy benefits.

- **Several challenges were identified to still exist**. Each of these challenges whether born of poverty, identity, or school environment undermine children's ability to attend regularly and benefit fully from education. The net effect is that children in these zones remain at risk of sliding back into child labour if their basic needs, safety, and learning support are not met. Addressing hunger, providing learning materials, enforcing inclusion policies, and ensuring a safe school climate were all critical steps to secure children's futures. Parents were generally willing and prioritized education. However, economic hardship forces their hand. Also, teachers and schools are strained by both the success and the gaps of the CLFZ initiative with more students to teach, but not more support to teach them. If these issues are not addressed, the quality of education will suffer and children might once again lose interest or be pushed out. Strengthening teacher morale (through incentives or recognition), improving facilities, filling teaching posts, and equipping staff with training and resources are urgent needs to consolidate a child labour free environment.

- **Overall, the community context is one where structural poverty continuously threatens the goal of eliminating child labour**. Even with strong willpower from community members, without improved infrastructure (food security, water, schools), stronger social protection, and consistent policy enforcement, the environment will keep pushing children towards labour. The community challenge, therefore, is to break out of these structural constraints by securing more robust support from government and development partners while strengthening local initiatives.

Recommendations

Sustaining the benefits of the current CLFZ

- **Engaging and relevant curriculum:** To keep students interested, schools should offer an engaging curriculum and co-curricular activities. The introduction of anti-child-labour clubs, drama, music, and sports in the CLFZ schools gave students positive reasons to attend. Continue supporting these clubs, ensure they meet regularly, have materials (like sports equipment, magazines, posters or drama costumes), and are inclusive of returnee students. Expand clubs if possible (e.g., introduce academic clubs like reading clubs or science clubs) that can cater to varied interests. Additionally, integrate practical life skills or vocational components into upper primary classes (with Ministry approval) so that older children see direct benefits in what they learn (e.g., basic agriculture, carpentry, or tailoring projects). When children find school enjoyable and useful, they are far less likely to drop out. As one focal teacher noted, children became more open and eager at school when they felt cared for, fostering that atmosphere is key.

- **Peer support and child empowerment:** Leverage the power of peer influence to bolster retention. Establish peer-to-peer mentoring, where older students (especially former dropouts who returned and are doing well) "adopt" a younger at-risk child to encourage and help with homework. Also, preserve the space for children's voices: periodic *children's assemblies or forums* where they can freely discuss issues they face. In Chigudu, children themselves started advocating (e.g., a child telling their parent not to give them heavy loads). Encourage such empowerment by perhaps creating a *Student Council or Child Rights Club* that works with teachers to identify and solve problems causing dropouts. The anti-child-labour clubs can serve as the first entry point. When children are stakeholders in their own school experience,

they are more committed to staying. Also, keep track of role models to champion child labour activities in each school community

- **Flexible education options:** Recognize that a rigid school schedule might not fit all at-risk children, especially older ones with family or work obligations. While generally the project discourages any child labour, transitional flexibility can help retention. For instance, if a child must help during harvest season, work with the family to have the child attend a half-day or ensure they catch up after.
  Introduce remedial classes or tutoring for students who miss school due to extenuating circumstances (without normalizing absence). For over-age learners who feel uncomfortable in lower grades, consider multi-age learning groups or fast-track programs (in collaboration with the Ministry) to help them complete primary education more quickly. By showing willingness to accommodate challenges (within limits), the school system can retain students who might otherwise drop out because they can't meet a strict timetable.

- **Celebrate attendance and progress:** Motivation plays a big role in keeping kids in school. Implement a system to recognize good attendance and improvement, especially for former dropouts. This could be simple acknowledgments in school assemblies, a certificate for "Most Improved Attendance" each term, or small rewards (books, solar lamps) for families whose children maintain full attendance. Community leaders can also publicly praise families or children who have turned around their school participation. Such positive reinforcement strengthens social norms around staying in school. It also shifts the community narrative from shaming those who default, to celebrating those who commit making retention a point of pride

- **Target "employers" and the local economy:** Some wealthier community members would hire and rehire children for farm work. Future prevention must involve changing the behaviour of these demand-side actors. Organize meetings with local farmers, shop owners, and other potential employers. Educate them on the legal implications and community bylaws. Make it socially unacceptable and shameful to exploit children. Encourage them to instead support the CLFZ effort (for instance, by hiring older youth above 18, or supporting apprenticeships for school graduates, but never children). In parallel, coordinate with labour inspectors or child protection officers to keep an eye on known hotspots (e.g., tobacco farms) and take action if violations occur. By cutting off opportunities for children to work, the CLFZ projects can further solidify the norm that school is the only acceptable place for a child.

- **Handing over project activities at project closure to government authorities to continue monitoring the project benefits is important**. For example, District Education Managers (DEMs), Primary Education Advisers (PEAs) and Assistant Centre Coordinators (ACCOs) are key to monitoring and providing feedback to the central ministry. However, there were no deliberate efforts to involve these key government actors during implementation phase. At closure, they would have played a key role in ensuring that benefits of the project are maintained at school level.

Implementing future CLF Zones

- **Formalize community bylaws:** The bylaws introduced by village headmen (*Mafumu*) in Chigudu which legally oblige parents to send children to school and impose fines for non-compliance proved highly effective. These should be maintained and formally integrated into local governance structures. For future projects, work with Traditional Authorities to expand this model to new communities, ensuring each village has a similar rule. Train local leaders on how to enforce the bylaws fairly, and assign specific

stakeholders (e.g., head teachers, PTA/SMC members, mother groups) to track attendance and report violations. Such enforcement should continue indefinitely, making school attendance a norm backed by local law. Additionally, engage government child protection officers to align these bylaws with national laws, giving them additional legitimacy and support.

- **School based Continuous Professional Development** (CPD) offers an opportunity for integrating child labour training for teachers. Established and guided by the National Framework for Continuing Professional Development for Teachers and Teacher Educators, developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2018 and anchored in the Education Act of 2013 (Chapter 30:01), this framework offers an opportunity for the Teacher's Union of Malawi (TUM) to lobby for inclusion of CPD activities such as peer learning, seminars and portfolio development for schools, districts and central government. This is also in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on quality education and lifelong learning.

- **Sustain & scale school feeding programs:** Hunger was identified as a major factor driving children into labour. Chigudu's community responded by creating a village garden to provide food for children at school, which was directly credited with enabling children to return and stay in class. This practice should be continued and scaled up. Ensure current community gardens remain productive through provision of seeds, tools, or technical farming advice. Encourage every CLFZ community to adopt a similar school meal initiative, or partner with organizations (like WFP or local NGOs) to support daily school feeding. This not only encourages re-enrolment but also improves concentration and learning, reinforcing the message that school is a better option than child labour.

- **Provide re-enrolment kits:** To remove financial barriers for returning students, the project should budget for **"**back-to-school kits" for each child rescued from labour. These kits might include a school uniform, exercise books, pens, and soap as was done ad hoc in the initial phase. By proactively providing these, the project will prevent situations where a child stays working simply because the family can't afford school supplies. As seen in Chigudu, even modest material support can be decisive in convincing parents to let their children return to class. Coordinate with district education offices or other partners to fund these supplies.

- **Targeted re-enrolment of girls and vulnerable children:** The Chigudu experience showed that adolescent girls and older children benefited greatly from re-enrolment efforts. Continue to prioritize these groups. For instance, conduct girls' education campaigns and provide mentorship or peer support for girls returning after marriage or childbirth. Every community should have a *Female Champion* (perhaps a mother support group member or a female village head) tasked with identifying girls who left school and diplomatically working to bring them back, as was successfully done. Similarly, map out other vulnerable groups (children with disabilities, orphans, etc.) and tailor support (e.g., assistive devices, linkage to social welfare programs) to facilitate their return. By focusing on those most likely to be left behind, the project ensures equity in re-enrolment.

- **Community cultural mobilization:** Leverage local culture and influencers to promote re-enrolment. The project's innovative use of traditional theatre (gule wamkule) to draw crowds and champion schooling should be a standard strategy. In each target area, identify popular cultural or religious groups and involve them in messaging. For example, organize community events where drama, songs, or dances carry the theme of "education first." These events not only spread awareness but also create a social environment where sending children to school is celebrated. Continuously engage tribal and religious leaders to advocate in their forums (e.g., include "no child labour" sermons in churches or mosques,

have chiefs publicly commend families that bring children back to school). Embedding the notion of a child labour free community into local culture will keep up the momentum of re-enrolment.

- **Regular community data collection:** Institutionalize the practice of community-led child mapping that was done at project outset. At least annually, task PTAs and village heads with updating the list of all school-age children and their enrolment status. Use this data to guide interventions. If new dropouts appear, quickly follow up; if new children move into the area, engage their families early. This data-driven approach, combined with outreach, ensures that *no child falls through the cracks*. It also helps set targets (e.g., "Our village will enrol 100% of children next year") that communities can rally around.

- **Community child protection committees:** Establish or strengthen "Child Protection Committees" at the village level, composed of community members, teachers, and local officials. Their mandate: to monitor, report, and intervene in any child labour or abuse cases. Such committees are part of the broader framework for safeguarding children's rights and welfare. In Malawi specifically, the child protection committees were established under the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act of 2010 (Act No. 22 of 2020). With the CLFZ project's adoption of the social dialogue model, integrating local and government authorities will go a long way in identifying more cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation and referring them for appropriate care and support. Equip these committees with training on child rights and basic case management, and connect them with the district social welfare office for serious cases. A formal committee structure means that when the project ends, there's still a dedicated local body keeping an eye out for child labour violations. Encourage them to meet regularly (e.g., monthly) to review any incidents or risks. This complements the bylaws by adding an organized watchfulness and response mechanism.

- **Supporting transition from primary school to secondary school levels is a worry for most parents and children**. With many children already being older and in primary school, they have clearly understood the value of education and a lot of them have dreams to complete school. However, household poverty and general society norms such as early/ forced marriage are an impediment to achievement of these dreams. Even existing support mechanisms such as local organisations providing support for this transition have stringent selection processes that eliminate some children. As a result, there is potential for such children to return to child labour activities after primary school.

  "*I was told by my parents that once I complete primary school, I will not continue with secondary education because they do not have school fees for me*" - Standard 7 14-year-old male pupil from Thedze school.

  Although there were emerging solutions to this challenge in Chibanzi school where parents negotiated with the secondary school to pay tuition fees for their children in instalments, it was revealed by parents that this applied to few children. Also, Ministry of Hope, a faith-based organisation in the community provided fewer bursaries for high performing students. For example, in 2023, two learners from Chibanzi school passed their primary examinations but could not continue to secondary school due to lack of school fees. They instead opted to repeat standard 8 for another year as their parents looked for resources.

- **Economic strengthening for families:** In many cases, future child labour is tied to household poverty. To break the cycle long-term, couple the CLFZ project with livelihood initiatives for parents. For example, introduce *Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)* so families can save and borrow for emergencies, reducing the need to send children to work for extra income. If possible, coordinate with

NGOs or government programs to provide skills training or micro-grants to families of returned children, allowing them to start small businesses (gardening, poultry, tailoring, etc.). Promote modern agriculture practices such as kitchen gardening by equipping parents with basic farming skills that does not rely on rainfall. Target mother support groups as a channel for reaching more women, especially whose children are already in school. This was noted among men who took on other roles in schools such as construction and leadership whereas majority of women in communities did not. Also, provide pilot provision of improved seed varieties as motivation for such farming practices to take effect and for better yields. In Chigudu, some parents sent children to relatives or farms for labour due to economic desperation. If those parents have alternative income sources, they are less likely to resort to such measures. Additionally, link ultra-poor or labour dependent families with any available social protection schemes (cash transfers, food aid) for which they qualify. The project could work with local authorities to prioritize these families. Lastly, parents who are part of the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) can be encouraged to invest in agriculture or small businesses that can raise funds to cater for food and children's school needs. The SCTP aims to improve school enrolment and attendance and reduce poverty and hunger among households that are extremely poor and have limited ability to work.

- **Leverage legal frameworks and partnerships:** Connect the community-level prevention efforts to national child labour frameworks. For example, Malawi has laws against child labour and possibly National Action Plans. Ensure that the project in Chigudu aligns with these and that the community knows higher authorities back them. Invite labour officers or child welfare officials to community meetings to talk about enforcement. If resources allow, organize joint patrols during peak farming seasons to ensure no underage children are working in fields. Additionally, partner with organizations like the Ministry of Labour, ILO, or NGOs focused on child rights to possibly expand interventions (like offering transitional schooling for child labourers or rehabilitation programs for rescued children in other areas). Aligning with broader efforts will sustain momentum and might bring additional support or scale for the CLFZ model.

- **Update and adapt messages:** As awareness grows, the nature of the conversation might need to evolve. While initially it was about defining child labour and its harms (which people now largely understand), future messaging can focus on deeper themes: the long-term community benefits of education (better jobs, less poverty), sharing success stories (e.g., "Because this child stayed in school, now they do XYZ instead of working in fields"), and addressing any new misconceptions. Also, tailor messages to different audiences. For instance, specific sessions for fathers on their role (since mother groups have been very active, involve fathers more), or youth-friendly messaging for teenagers who might be tempted to drop out. Continuously gather feedback on persisting beliefs or questions and address them in sensitization content.

- **Use media and technology:** To broaden reach, collaborate with local media. Many rural Malawians listen to radio. Consider getting spots on community radio for jingles or discussions about child labour free zones. A short radio drama series could be developed, echoing the project's themes, to reinforce learning in an entertaining way. Documenting the project's successes on video and sharing at district or national events can also raise awareness beyond Chigudu, creating a ripple effect.

- **Educational materials and signage:** Develop simple but powerful visual aids to keep awareness high. For example, post permanent posters or murals at schools and public places with messages like "Every child in school – our pride, our future" (in local language) and warnings against child labour. These constant visual reminders reinforce the norm. Additionally, print and distribute posters, brochures or comic-book style booklets that illustrate through stories what child labour is and why education is crucial. These can

be given to parents during meetings or taught from in school. Including quotes from local people (like the mother who changed after her daughter scolded her) can personalize the material.

- **Develop structured remedial curriculum:** Provide focal teachers with more structured curriculum and materials for remedial classes. In the first phase, teachers likely improvised based on their knowledge of student gaps. Going forward, create or source simplified learning materials specifically designed for catch-up education (e.g., condensed literacy and numeracy modules, levelled reading books, multilingual resources if needed). Possibly engage curriculum specialists or NGOs that work in accelerated education to tailor a program for these Malawian rural contexts. Having a clear syllabus for remedial classes (covering key competencies a child should have in each grade) will help teachers target instruction better. It also allows measuring progress, for example, pre and post learning tests to show how much a child has caught up. Training teachers on using these materials and on managing multi-age remedial groups will further enhance effectiveness. When teachers feel equipped with the right tools and techniques, their confidence and success in bridging children will improve, which in turn keeps students engaged and in school.

- **Infrastructure and capacity expansion:** With rising enrolment, capacity issues like overcrowded classrooms can emerge. Proactively address this by advocating for additional infrastructure. Work with the District Education Office to include these schools in government construction programs. Meanwhile, community-driven contributions (funds, sand, bricks, labour) should continue, but now with an aim to secure a partnership (maybe with a charity or corporate social responsibility program) to build new classrooms or latrines. The Chigudu community anticipated the need and started mobilising materials; now, turn that into actual construction through appropriate channels. Also expand capacity in terms of teachers. Push for deploying more trained teachers to these schools since enrolment is up. If teacher allocation by government lags, consider continuing the engagement of volunteer or retired teachers from the community on interim basis (possibly with a stipend) to ensure class sizes remain reasonable. Adequate infrastructure and staffing will prevent quality from dropping, thereby keeping the community's trust in the value of education high.

- **Enhance government involvement:** One limitation noted was the relatively peripheral role of government officials (PEAs and ACCOs) in the project. To address this, form a *Project Steering Committee* that includes these officials (as well as the District Education Manager and Child Protection Officer if possible). Hold regular coordination meetings where government representatives can provide input, oversee progress, and plan how to integrate CLFZ activities into their regular work. Encourage PEAs to treat CLFZ schools as pilot sites for best practices. They can then champion these in their reports and recommend scaling to the Ministry. Additionally, brief the Ministry of Gender, Community, and Social Welfare on the project's outcomes regarding child protection, to align with national child labour elimination goals. The more the government feels ownership of the successes, the more likely they are to invest resources and sustain efforts (for example, by continuing monitoring or supporting bylaws enforcement through community development officers). Ultimately, aim to have the CLFZ approach (holistic community-driven child labour elimination) be incorporated into district development plans or education sector plans, which will provide a policy anchor and budget line for continued work.

- **Exit strategy and sustainability plan:** Develop a clear sustainability and exit strategy that identifies how each crucial activity will continue after initial project funding. For instance, if the project currently provides school meals or teacher stipends, determine who will pick up these costs: can the government's school feeding program be lobbied to include these schools? Can PTAs organize income-generating projects (like communal farms or small businesses) to fund school needs? The earlier the

planning for this is done, the smoother the transition. It's also worthwhile to continue seeking external support as there is evidence that the positive results already attracted foreign donor interest (e.g., Friends of Netherlands donating desks). So, maintain those relationships and share ongoing needs. Often, demonstrating a clear community contribution and track record of success makes a strong case to government, donors and other potential funders for additional support.

- **Monitor, evaluate, and learn:** Continue to monitor key indicators: enrolment numbers, dropout rates, instances of child labour, academic performance, etc. Establish community-based monitoring (like the data collection exercises, but more routine) and also periodic external evaluations to gauge impact. Use this data to adapt strategies. For example, if one school still sees higher absenteeism, investigate why and address that specifically. Share findings transparently with the community and celebrate improvements, while collaboratively troubleshooting any areas of concern. A data-informed approach will keep the project dynamic and responsive. Moreover, documenting results (with citations, testimonies, statistics, pictures etc) is crucial for advocacy whether to government for support or to new communities for replication.

Using this evidence to persuade education authorities, governments and employers to take action

- Dissemination activities need to be carefully planned, targeting different stakeholders at different levels.
- Design dissemination materials that cut across different categories of stakeholders to ensure that the message is not lost. For example, at school or zonal level, different materials might be needed compared to district and national level engagement activities.
- First point of dissemination and engagement is government. Consider more meetings with high level government authorities in line ministries such as education, children and youth, labour etc to 1) validate the findings 2) as a channel to gain overall understanding of the magnitude of the problem 3) check appetite for policy reform and implementation, including if nationwide implementation is possible and if specific aspects of the project can be implemented or sustained in schools with minimal Education International support.
- Consider continuing to celebrate the World Day Against Child Labour with themes around the benefits and emerging themes to raise awareness among all stakeholders. Where possible, engage more media and relevant outlets and channels to amplify the message, using key findings from this research compared to previously.

Education International CLFZ Evaluation 2025

National Reports – Uganda

Michael Nangulu

Table of Contents

This "National Report – Uganda" is part of a larger evaluation of the Child Labour Free Zone approach carried out by DP Evaluation for Education International in 2025 and should be read in conjunction with the main Evaluation Report.

A. Fieldwork Summary

Site	Type	Role	Name	Details
Erussi	KII	Political Leader—LC III Chairperson	Orom Collins	Male
Erussi	KII	Political Leader—LC II Chairperson (Padolo)	James Parmu	Male
Erussi	KII	Political Leader—LC II Chairperson (Pajur)	Onyero Francis	Male
Erussi	KII	Former Headteacher—Ramogi Primary School	Komaketch Peter Robinson	Male
Erussi	KII	Formerly employed child worker (Parent)	Olul Christine	Female
Erussi	KII	Head Teacher, Erussi Primary School	Sr. Berocan Mary Immaculate	Female
Erussi	KII	Political Leader—LC I Chairperson (Erussi)	Opoki Richard	Male
Erussi	KII	PTA Chairperson—Erussi Primary School	Sally Anyulito	Female
Erussi	KII	Focal Teacher—Erussi Primary School	Pacutho Christine	Female
Erussi	KII	Focal Teacher	Ogenwoth Ronald	Male
Erussi	KII	Officer in Charge (OC)—Erussi Police Post	Louis Adirubi	Male
Erussi	KII	PTA Representative—Aor Primary School	Cleto Jacan	Male
Erussi	KII	Religious Leader	Rev. Michael Olangi	Male
Erussi	KII	PTA Chairperson—Oboth Primary School	Oyer Obia Albert	Male
Erussi	KII	PTA Representative—Aor Primary School	Odaga William	Male
Erussi	KII	Political Leader—LC I Chairperson—Pajur Parish	Ongiera Francis	Male
Paidha	KII	Political Leader—LC I Agengo Village	Oridi John	Male
Paidha	KII	Chairperson—SMC—Pagisi Primary School	Komaketh Brian	Male
Paidha	KII	Headteacher—Pagisi Primary School	Onyenyboth Dorothy	Female
Paidha	KII	Chairperson—PTA	Cwinyaa Richard Komando	Male
Paidha	KII	CDO—Paidha Sub County	Awachango Grace	Female
Paidha	KII	Political Leader-LC III—Paidha Sub County	Okethi William	Male
Paidha	KII	District Inspector of Schools—Zombo	Jalar Silvio Fred	Male
Paidha/Abanga	KII	Field Officer—Kyagalanyi Coffee Limited	Ocan Francis	Male
Paidha	KII	PTA Representative	Janega Ivan	Male
Erussi	KII	Former Child Labourer	Parmu Albert	Male
Paidha	KII	Police Officer—Family and Child Protection Unit	Sergeant Apio Irene	Female
Paidha/Abanga	KII	Senior Education Officer—Nebbi District	Onegiu Innocent	Male
Paidha	KII	LC I—Chairperson—Jopomwoco	Kethi Gabriel	Male
Paidha	KII	Religious Leader	Innocent Mangena	Male
Paidha	KII	SMC Chairperson—Amei Primary School-Paidha	Okurboth Fred	Male
	KII	Focal Teacher—Amei Primary School- Paidha	Santa Maria Mwachan	Female
Abanga	KII	Focal Teacher—Asina Primary School-Paidha	Odiodou Emmanuel	Male
Abanga	KII	PTA Representative—Asina Primary School	Onenchan Richard	Male
Abanga	KII	SMC Representative— Asina Primary School	Opar Patrick	Male
	KII	UNATU Project Officer	Kalamagi Gowani	Male
Erussi	FGD	Children—Erussi Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 3 Female
Erussi	FGD	Children—Pajur Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 3 Female
Erussi	FGD	Children—Oboth Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 3 Female
Erussi	FGD	Children—Aor Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 3 Female
Paidha	FGD	Children—Amei Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 3 Female
Abanga	FGD	Children—Pakadha Primary School	N/A	3 Male, 2 Female

Notes on fieldwork

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with community leaders were largely successful, as most participants demonstrated strong familiarity with the CLFZ project. However, in a few cases—particularly involving PTA/SMC and police representatives—participants had limited knowledge due to recent appointments, school transfers, or institutional turnover.

In a few school-based interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) especially in Pajur, Aor, and Oboth, pupils displayed limited understanding of the project and struggled to articulate their views. This may be attributed to either short involvement with the initiative or challenges in expressing themselves clearly during interviews.

The planned interview with the Labour Officer of Nebbi District did not take place due to a lack of prior notice and scheduling conflicts. However, engagements with the Senior Education Officer and the Family and Child Protection Unit indicated that the officer was new (Had been around for less than a year) and likely lacked historical insight into the project's early implementation.

Overall, fieldwork was conducted efficiently with strong participant turnout. Logistical support—particularly for transport and accommodation—was well managed with help from the UNATU Project Officer, the Project Coordinator in Erussi, and the Focal Teacher in Paidha/Abanga.

While many participants communicated comfortably in English, some struggled to respond logically and in detail to the evaluation questions. Although translation was provided, it did not fully address these issues, likely due to recall limitations and the short duration of participants' involvement in the project. All interviewees were relevant stakeholders in their communities, and interviews typically began with headteachers and focal teachers before proceeding to PTA/SMC members.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the researcher is confident in the quality of the evidence collected and the robustness of findings.

B. Evaluation Questions

1. How effective has the CLFZ approach in the project zone been?

a) Returning Children from Child Labour to School

- **Increased School Enrolments**

The CLFZ project has contributed to a significant reduction in child labour, particularly in coffee-related activities. This positive trend was widely acknowledged by teachers, PTA/SMC representatives, education officials, and political leaders. As a result, schools have seen a noticeable increase in school enrolment, with children returning to school and new learners attracted by the improved school environment. One former primary school head teacher in Erussi reported an increase of more than 100% over a couple of years *"…the enrolment was only 300... Last year, it reached 700."* Similarly, a focal teacher in Paidha also pointed out that they have seen an increase in the enrolment *"…right now, enrolment is 1,000, yet earlier it used to be around 400 to 500. So the numbers have been growing…"*

Key drivers of this increase include community awareness about what constitutes child labour, making the practice increasingly unacceptable among parents, local leaders and children. The enforcement of school attendance by local leaders, police, and other stakeholders has also heightened parental accountability as one parent in Erussi noted: "*Now, when UNATU came, most of them (children) went back to school... Because even now, if you move in the community, you will not get children outside during school hours…"*

Additionally, many children who participated in the focus group discussions shared that they had previously been involved in child labour and had spent one to two years out of school. However, as a result of the anti-child-labour campaign, their parents were encouraged to support their return to school. One child from Erussi Primary school explained: *"I was just doing housework… I used to dig for people. I didn't attend school for two years. I was 14 then… now I am 16… my parents are now supporting me to attend school."*

In Zombo District, where Kyagalanyi Coffee Ltd remains active, strict enforcement of anti-child-labour policies has further reinforced this increase. The company monitors its registered farmers through community agents and local leaders. It provides economic incentives such as premium prices to farmers who comply with the child labour policy. The threat of exclusion from this scheme has made farmers more compliant in ensuring their children are in school. One respondent reported: "*We happened to get around 53 cases of child labour in our first year... Close to 80% of the children are now attending schools.*"

- **Role of Teachers in Re-integration**

Apart from acting as role models to children who were returning to school, teachers actively followed up with children who had dropped out in the community due to child labour or poverty. They engaged their parents and families, sensitised them about what constitutes child labour, its dangers and the benefits of education. They also encouraged them to bring their children back to school. While working with child labour committees, local leaders, the police and other security organs, they enforced community policies regarding school attendance as explained by a Headteacher from Erussi: *"…we formed a child labour committee, who are involved in addressing child labour in the villages. They identified children who were in child labour, talked to the parents, and also went to school to ensure they come back…this increased enrolment".*

Additionally, teachers also played a key role in supporting the re-adjustment of pupils who had returned to school. Teachers held meetings with "returnees" and provided information about the current school environment, culture and expectations. They also provide guidance and counselling to support pupils in addressing the daily challenges they experience. By easing their reintegration into the formal school system, this initiative helped minimise potential adjustment challenges, supported a smooth transition back to learning, and promoted continued attendance. This is explained by a former child labourer who returned to school: *"…and because of that counselling and the guidance that the teachers were giving me, it made me work harder and excel at academics."*

Teachers also provided supportive measures for young mothers who returned to school, particularly after the COVID-19 school closures, which saw many girls become pregnant and drop out. To accommodate their needs, teachers allowed them to attend classes in casual clothing to make breastfeeding more manageable. They were also permitted to leave school early when necessary to care for their children. In addition, teachers collaborated with nearby health facilities to ensure young mothers had access to essential services such as immunisation. This is explained by the Headteacher from Erussi: *"We give them preferential treatment so they get time to go back home early to breastfeed or look after the kids…We also have a linkage to the nearest health facility, for example, this one here [Orussi Health Centre] to reduce repeat pregnancies because these young mothers need more Sexual and Reproductive Health Services like immunisation…"*

- **Use of Data and Follow-ups**

The introduction of cluster registers to monitor both pupil and teacher attendance has significantly contributed to reducing absenteeism. By being integrated into the daily school routine, these registers have strengthened peer-to-peer accountability and improved teacher monitoring. In addition, UNATU and Kyagalanyi have utilised data to estimate the number of out-of-school children and identify "hot spots" where school absenteeism is most prevalent. This data-driven approach has enabled targeted mobilisation of resources to support the re-enrolment of these children and ensure consistent follow-up on their continued attendance. These are explained as below…

"We have registers... it is that classroom leader who is the one to take care of that register…every morning they record the pupils who are present…It reduces the absenteeism of the pupils…and the teachers " (Former Headteacher, Erussi)

"One of the things we do is to identify cases of child labour…we collect data, analyse and identify cases of child labour among our farmers…We agree with them that these children have to go back to school to remain registered farmers. They commit themselves, and we reach an agreement…After that, we follow them up to school" (Field Officer, Kyagalangi Coffee Limited, Zombo)

b) Retaining Children (At Risk of Dropping Out) in School

- **Child-friendly School Environment**

Most participants acknowledged that the project contributed to creating more child-friendly school environments where learners could actively participate in engaging activities such as sports, music, and debates. These co-curricular activities appealed to children's interests and provided alternatives to the labour-intensive tasks often associated with child labour. Teachers and PTA/SMC representatives reported that such activities not only encouraged previously out-of-school children to return but also improved the retention of enrolled learners. Support from UNATU in the form of sports and music supplies—such as

balls, jerseys, and drums—was especially instrumental in making the school environment more conducive to both learning and play. As noted by an Education Officer from Nebbi: *"...balls were also given. And to me, I saw that one increased enrolment and retention. Because some learners are interested in playing games and sports. So, other children returned to school because of the drums (MDD). Others came back because of ball games. And because of that, Erussi performed very well in co-curricular activities."*

In addition, UNATU's capacity-building efforts among senior male and female teachers to equip them with skills and knowledge to promote inclusive, non-violent classroom environments also promoted conducive learning environments. Training on positive discipline, aligned with modern pedagogical practices, helped reduce reliance on corporal punishment—an important step in promoting enrolment and ensuring long-term retention of pupils as pointed out by a UNATU project officer *"…the project has enabled the teachers to gain more knowledge and skills on how to ensure conducive, inclusive environment for learners that could enable them to stay at school."*

In addition, the initiation of counselling by teachers instead of corporal punishments, and the cordial interaction with parents, politely urging them to encourage their children to remain in school, was also instrumental in promoting a conducive environment. Cordial parental engagements and sensitisations about the long-term benefits of education increased an appreciation for education, thus ensuring that their children have a conducive environment both at school and at home. According to the Local Council III chairperson—Erussi, this conducive environment has promoted love for education and school among learners, something which improves retention and completion as noted: *"The school environment has increasingly become friendly. Teachers previously caned these children. Now there is more counselling given to pupils…and to some parents. There is love…we have the love for education now, which has been created in the children."*

- **Addressing Barriers (Feeding and Menstruation)**

One of the most important aspects of the retention of learners is their ability to eat at school. The majority of schools in Erussi, Paidha and Abanga revealed that their school-initiated feeding programs, particularly in upper primary classes in motivate children to remain in school throughout the day, reducing hunger for those who previously needed to walk long distances to have something to eat. When parents make contributions towards their children's feeding—in the form of foodstuffs (posho and beans), firewood and cash—it strengthens their involvement in their children's education. With access to meals at school, there is improved attendance, punctuality and pupil engagement, especially during afternoon lessons as mentioned by the Focal Teachers:

"…when we were beginning the school feeding programme, they took it positively, because they are also contributing food items, and the school is supporting some learners. So, the parents are fully engaged in the learning of their children." (Focal Teacher, Erussi)

"We have some children who don't go back for lunch… But now, as I talk, many of them are feeding in the school." (Focal Teacher, Erussi)

In addition to addressing hunger through school feeding, UNATU supported schools in tackling menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) challenges. This was done by training teachers to educate pupils about menstruation and how to produce reusable sanitary pads. Training on pad-making and the allocation of funds for emergency MHH supplies helped reduce absenteeism among vulnerable girls and contributed

to improved retention. As noted by the Focal Teacher at a Primary School in Erussi: *"…every week, there is a schedule for girls with their senior woman teacher. She advises them on how to manage their lives and ensure they feel secure. She also teaches them about menstruation. The school provides sanitary pads, and we have a washroom available for them."*

And the UNATU project Officer *"…the issue of menstrual hygiene management was emphasised since the teachers were trained, especially senior men and senior women teachers. They were trained on how to make reusable sanitary pads, and as of now, many of the schools have taken action…some schools make reusable sanitary pads as well as a good number of them that are currently using the UPE funds, at least to buy some sanitary pads to cater for emergencies. Just in case of that, that has promoted attendance because many girls could miss school during their periods."*

c) Preventing or Reducing the Risk of Future Child Labour

- **Shifting Community Attitudes**

Before the project intervention, community members, including teachers, parents and even the project, viewed child labour, especially in agriculture, domestic work or petty trade, as normal or even beneficial for a child. However, as the School Management Committee chairperson of a Primary School in Erussi explained, *"...in the past, people never knew what constituted child labour. But through sensitisation, even the children now know. They know that when they do a certain category of work and it interferes with their school, it is child labour…"* This growing awareness helped communities begin to distinguish between acceptable household chores and exploitative labour that interfered with school. As attitudes shifted, many parents and other community members started to prioritise education over the short-term economic gains of child labour. The Local Council III Chairperson of Abanga observed that, *"parents started realising that even if a child brings in some money today, they lose more when that child misses school."* The PTA representative for one Primary School mentioned that *"child labour interferes with a child's future."* This realisation led to a change in behaviour, with more parents ensuring their children stayed in school consistently rather than engaging in short-term income-generating activities.

The change in mindset also strengthened community-based mechanisms for child protection. Local leaders and ordinary community members began actively monitoring children's attendance and alerting authorities when children were seen working during school hours. A Religious leader in Erussi Parish noted: *"I move within the centre and whenever I get children, maybe sorting coffee during school time. I send them to the nearest school… because it is not their time to do that…"* This shift marked a move from passive acceptance to active prevention, reinforcing school attendance as a community responsibility. These changes contributed to a broader transformation in community norms. Education became more valued and normalised, while child labour became stigmatised.

- **Community Mobilisation and Advocacy**

The CLFZ project carried out effective mobilisation and community advocacy by engaging directly with parents, local and religious leaders, schools, and children to address the root causes of child labour. The most common strategies used included community dialogues, home visits, and radio talk shows. The child labour steering committee played a critical role in this mobilisation and advocacy within the community. Comprised of teachers, local leaders including religious leaders, community champions, and NGO staff, the committee sensitized parents through dialogues, encouraged them to enrol their children in school,

actively monitored villages through door-to-door visits to ensure all school-age children are enrolled. They also worked with security agencies to stop child labour activities during market days and participated in organising community events like the 'child labour free week', and 'day of the African child' as explained by one NGO staff member **"***As a committee, they would go through the whole village looking for children that are home… during market days, they move around to ensure no children are involved in child labour. This increased school enrolments."*

In schools, the establishment of clubs to disseminate information and counter child labour activities, such as the debating clubs and the demonstration gardens by Kyagalanyi, empowers children to continuously learn about child labour within school settings.

Additionally, the involvement of the local leadership structures, such as the Local Council Leaders, police and district social welfare officials, not only helped increase awareness but also supported the enforcement of child protection laws. The Community Development Officer—Paidha Sub County noted that *"…the pressure is on us to ensure that we support communities to keep children in school".*

- **Byelaws, Ordinances and Anti-child-labour Policies**

While there is currently no legally binding by-law or ordinance in place in Erussi, Abanga, and Paidha, significant progress has been made in recent years to institutionalise anti-child-labour efforts through local legislation. In Erussi—Nebbi district, work has been underway to develop a bye-law and according to the LC III chairperson, the law is currently under translations and was sent to the district level to be debated and enacted as reflected below; *"We have passed the bye-law at the level of the sub county…we have sent it now to the district. So, we are waiting for the blessing from the district. Then we shall come back. We are already doing some translation."* In Abanga and Paidha—Zombo district, the District Education Officer (DEO) also reported that the bye-law passed through a council resolution, is currently under translation into the local language and also awaits gazetting by the central government.

Though these initiatives are at different stages, they represent a promising foundation for future legal enforcement of child labour prevention. Once in place, these legal instruments will help clarify what constitutes child labour and establishes the legal responsibilities of parents and community members to ensure children are enrolled and attend school. They will also empower local leaders, such as LC officials and parish chiefs, to take action on violations, whether by issuing fines or referring cases to higher authorities such as the Police and Probation and Social Welfare Offices. As the Community Development Officer of Paidha Sub-County explained, *"…in the ordinance, we put a fine of 50,000 Uganda Shillings if a parent does not take their child to school during school hours."*

Likewise, Kyagalanyi Coffee Limited is actively implementing its anti-child-labour policy in line with the Rainforest Alliance child labour standards. One of the key enforcement measures includes suspending farmers from their supply scheme and refusing to purchase coffee from those found engaging in child labour. This form of economic sanction has proven effective, as many farmers comply out of concern over losing access to a reliable market and the premium prices offered for their coffee, as reported by their field officer in Zombo: *"We suspend you from the scheme. We don't buy your coffee. And if we don't buy your coffee, you don't get these bonuses that we pay to farmers who comply. That is the thing farmers*

would not want to lose. If we suspend them, they start committing because we are going to send this child back to school."

d) Raising Awareness About Child Labour and the Benefits of Education

- **Community Campaigns (Child Labour Free Week; Day of the African Child)**

Public events such as school marches during Child Labour Week and the Day of the African Child have played a vital role in raising awareness and mobilising communities around anti-child-labour efforts. These celebrations have not only amplified the visibility of the issue but also fostered solidarity among schools, parents, and community leaders. Their fun-filled, participatory nature brings together diverse stakeholders to reflect on progress, share experiences, and draw lessons for continued action. This collective engagement is critical in reinforcing community ownership and sustaining momentum to prevent child labour. As the Local Council Chairperson of Erussi explained: *"…we celebrate the Child Labour Week every year… the preparations are on. Next week, the Child Labour Free Week is on. We are integrating two activities—the Stop Child Labour campaign and also commemorating the Day of the African Child. So, having a structure and making people part of it—celebrating, talking about it, sharing successes—you create an environment where people believe this is realistic. It can be done. If they have done it, it can be done."*

- **Influence of Community Leaders**

Political and religious leaders played a central role in mobilising and sensitising communities about the dangers of child labour and the long-term value of education. Through the use of different platforms such as community dialogues, church meetings, funeral services and public events, they passed down information to different audiences. Apart from educating communities, local leaders, specifically political and religious leaders, played a key role in enforcing school attendance and intervening when children were found outside school during class hours. Beyond monitoring their communities, they engaged parents and collaborated with law enforcement agencies such as the police to stage road blocks to the market, check teacher attendance, among others as pointed out by a police officer in Erussi *"We moved in the field for community sensitization…we interacted with the LCs, community members, and clan chiefs…yes, sometimes I am called upon by teachers or local leaders to come and speak with or arrest a parent who does not want to take their children to school."*

Political leaders have also used their offices, financially supported and organised public events such as the Child Labour Week and the Day of the African Child. These events have created opportunities for different stakeholders to celebrate, reflect and commit themselves to ending child labour. The most notable and influential political leaders included Orom Collins, the current LC III of Erussi, and Oketi William, the LC III Chairperson of Paidha. Based on the collected data, these leaders not only mobilised resources but championed and embedded anti-child-labour policies in their political careers as echoed in the following remark by the LC III Chairperson of Paidha: *"My wish and for my voters is to have people who are literate…people who are educated. I think at this point, I care less about not being given votes. We must prioritise education for a better future…The idea that politicians should have illiterate and ignorant voters is wrong. It reduces them to beggars. I would like to see a future where most people in my village are highly educated..."*

- **Integration of Child Labour into Existing Programs**

The CLFZ project strategically integrated child labour messages into school events and child participation activities, using them as powerful tools for raising awareness about child labour. Events such as sports, music, debates, and drama not only actively engaged learners but also attracted large community audiences. These gatherings provided valuable platforms to deliver anti-child-labour messages, often embedded in performances. Through this approach, children are empowered to advocate for their rights—a message that resonates strongly with both parents and peers.

School-based clubs also played a critical role in identifying, addressing, and preventing child labour. For example, the Child Labour Club provides a safe space where learners voice their experiences and identify peers facing challenges at home or within the school. As a Focal Teacher in Erussi pointed out, "...*we always identify children who are in child labour, those who have problems at home, and even in the school, because child labour does not only happen at home."* Several clubs go beyond advocacy to implement practical solutions that improve learner welfare. The Art and Craft Club in Erussi, for instance, produce items such as tablecloths, sells them, and uses the proceeds to buy food, helping to contribute to the sustainability of a school feeding program.

Similarly, the Coffee Club—which was also implemented in Zombo by Kyagalanyi designs school garden projects to learn best practices for growing coffee, as noted by their Field Officer, *"At the school level, we opened some four demonstration gardens in different schools. We were training even children on the best coffee farming practices... So that it boosts the production on our side.* The Music, Dance and Drama (MDD Club) uses creative performances to sensitise pupils and parents about the dangers of child labour, especially during community events like annual general meetings. Meanwhile, the Children's Parliament (Debating Club) helps learners build confidence, express their concerns, and advocate for their rights—sometimes even engaging with local leaders and community officials. These clubs not only promote peer support and practical problem-solving but also empower learners to become active participants in the fight against child labour within their schools and communities.

Additionally, the integration of child labour awareness into the routine work of the Community Development Officer in Paidha holds strong potential for sustainability. By mainstreaming child labour messaging and funding into official community forums and government outreach budgets, this approach ensures continuous public engagement and strengthens long-term prevention efforts. She explained this as below: *"We have a budget allocation of 200,000 Uganda shillings for child labour activities at the sub-county level…"*

2. What has been the overall impact? What benefits have been enjoyed by:

a) Children

- **Increased Access to Education**

One of the most visible and significant achievements of the CLFZ project has been the improved access to education for both boys and girls. However, many focal teachers observed that girls have benefited the most, particularly those who had previously dropped out due to cultural norms and economic challenges. The project's efforts to redirect children from labour-intensive activities such as coffee

farming and petty trade to classrooms have been reflected in higher school enrolment and improved regular attendance. These gains were driven by a combination of community sensitisation and mobilisation, consistent follow-up by local leaders, and active engagement and support from teachers. More than that, the project has also increased retention of children in school who have been able to transition and progress to upper primary classes, where dropout rates were reported to be the worst due to child labour activities, teenage pregnancies or early marriage. Children themselves expressed a strong desire to continue with education, reflecting the project's success in promoting a culture of school as exemplified in the quote below: *"I am in primary seven…I want to go to the secondary level (Focus group discussion child participant, Pakadha Primary School—Abanga)*

- **Increased Awareness, Participation and Protection**

Information from teachers, local leaders and children themselves showed that the project has made them more aware of their rights—especially right to access education, and long-term risks of child labour as detailed in this quote from a focus group discussion (FGD) participant in Pakadha Primary School-Paidha: *"Child labour is denial of children's rights which may lead to dropping out of school"*

Through school-based discussions such as debates, music, dance and drama, public events such as during the Child Labour Free Week, among others, children have been exposed and learn more about child labour and its harmful effects on their future. In addition, these activities have also built their confidence to be active participants in the fight to improve their future.

Most importantly, the project has strengthened child protection networks both within and beyond schools to detect and respond to absenteeism, abuse, and signs of exploitation. Teachers, local leaders, community volunteers, and project staff now actively monitor children and intervene when they miss school, face abuse, or are at risk of exploitation. As a result, children are better protected through coordinated community mechanisms that ensure timely support and response.

- **Reduce Teenage Pregnancies and Early Marriages**

Apart from raising awareness about children's rights, particularly for girls, the project has contributed to a notable reduction in teenage pregnancies by keeping girls in school for longer periods. Teachers, local leaders and PTA/SMC members consistently noted that the longer girls remain the school, the lower the likelihood of early pregnancies and marriages. Moreover, collaborative efforts by local leaders have also

reduced the participation of unmarried schoolgirls in the traditional "Keny" marriage celebrations, as explained by a Focal Teacher: *"…from these events… some are raped. Others get married from there. A lot of things happen, including sexual harassment…But these days, you will not get any primary girl, any schoolgirl, participating in those [Keny] activities…Teenage pregnancy has reduced, early marriage has also reduced…you will not get any primary girl… participating in those [Keny] activities."*

b) Parents

Mindset Change

The CLFZ project has significantly improved parental awareness of the dangers of child labour and the importance of education. Through various platforms—including community dialogues, home visits, church sermons, funeral gatherings, and events like Child Labour Free Week—parents have been consistently sensitised about their role in keeping children in school. These outreach efforts have helped shift perceptions: many parents no longer view child labour as a necessary economic activity but now prioritise education as a gateway to better opportunities for their children. As a Focal Teacher and the Coordinating UNATU Officer for Paidha and Abanga noted, *"Their attitude towards education as well as child labour has significantly changed."*

Personal Empowerment

Parents—especially those in leadership roles such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) chairpersons and School Management Committee (SMC) members—have gained increased confidence and a deeper appreciation for the importance of education. Some have been trained on issues related to child labour, while others have been continuously engaged in school resource mobilisation efforts. In addition, they have acquired skills in mobilising fellow parents, which has strengthened their role as advocates for children's education and protection both within and beyond school environments.

As a result of these efforts, several teachers reported improved collaboration with governance bodies. PTA and SMC members now interact more frequently with school administrations, actively participate in school monitoring, and follow up on learners more consistently than before. This shift is illustrated by the PTA Chairperson of Erussi Primary School, who remarked, *"As an individual, the project has also made me learn more about education… sending children to school is good. In the past, I was not as active, but these days I come to school regularly to monitor the children, talk to them, and engage with the teachers. It has given me a different understanding of education."*

c) Teachers/schools

Better Academic Performance

The CLFZ project has significantly contributed to consistent school attendance among learners, driven by a more supportive learning environment, the introduction of school feeding programs, and increased monitoring of attendance. Additionally, ongoing parental involvement strengthened through community sensitisation has motivated children to stay in school and perform better academically. These factors have gradually led to improved academic outcomes, including better performance in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) and higher progression rates, particularly among girls. As emphasised by the Focal Teacher of Erussi Primary School: *"We have seen that performance at the end of the primary level has*

increased. In the past, we would only get second and third grades, but now we are beginning to see first grades. For example, last year we had 17 learners, including two girls. All of them performed well and are now in secondary school."

- **Teacher Capacity Building**

  The project has significantly strengthened teachers' professional capacity through targeted training and continuous support. Teachers were equipped with practical knowledge and skills to identify cases of child labour, engage parents during home visits, follow up with children at risk of dropping out, and collaborate with key community structures. This training expanded their role beyond classroom instruction to include active involvement in child protection and learner welfare. In addition, teachers received training on positive discipline, menstrual health and hygiene, and the production of reusable sanitary pads. These topics have contributed to improved classroom management, enhanced learner engagement, and a more supportive school environment, particularly for girls. As a result, teachers are now better prepared to support learners both academically and emotionally while helping prevent school dropout linked to child labour. According to a Focal Teacher from Erussi, teachers have gotten closer to learners and vice versa. This is detailed in the quote: *"So, the teachers have become more friendly to these learners. They teach them. They bring them closer and can find out their issues and even help them."*

- **Strengthened Documentation**

  Record-keeping on learner enrolment and dropout has improved in many schools as a result of the CLFZ project. A closer review of school records shows that enrolment, academic performance, and retention are now being tracked more systematically, giving a clearer picture of progress. These improvements in documentation make it easier for PTAs and SMCs to monitor trends and assess progress over time. With continued support, schools can build on these gains to ensure that data is effectively used to guide decision-making and provide credible evidence for mobilizing resources such as additional infrastructure and teachers from government and development partners to address overcrowded classrooms resulting from increased enrolments.

- **Increased Parental Involvement and Attractive Partnerships**

  As a result of widespread mobilisation and increased awareness about the value of education, many parents have become more actively involved in supporting school initiatives. This support has included financial contributions to school feeding programs and participation in infrastructure development. In Paidha and Abanga, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and School Management Committee (SMC) representatives reported that parental contributions have enabled the construction of teachers' staff quarters, school kitchens, and classrooms.

  Moreover, the project's visible successes—such as increased learner enrolment and consistent local resource mobilisation—appear to have attracted additional development partners. Local leaders, including Orom Collins, the LC III Chairperson of Erussi Sub-County, have played a key role in this. For instance, organisations like Plan International, UNICEF, and Aruwe have joined efforts to complement the project by providing vocational training for out-of-school girls, distributing scholastic materials to young mothers, training parental support groups (Baba Groups) to address violence against children, and constructing girls' washrooms and latrines. As Orom Collins explained: *"We again talked to Aruwe, with support from SignPost International, they are providing vocational training to out-of-school girls. All we*

did was give them space… But what UNICEF is now doing is to give them free scholastic materials. It is motivating young mothers to return and complete primary school."

In addition to partner support, participating schools have also benefited from increased Universal Primary Education (UPE) capitation grants due to higher enrolment figures. As the former headteacher of Ramogi Primary School in Erussi noted: *"You know, we receive funds from the government—these UPE funds—based on the enrolment. The more enrolment a school has, the more funds the school will receive to ensure it runs smoothly. So, the increased enrolment has also increased the capitation grants we receive. So, we have benefited from the project."*

d) The community as a whole

- **Reduced Social Issues**

With more children consistently attending and remaining in school, local leaders have observed a noticeable decline in risky social behaviours such as petty theft, arguments, conflicts, and physical fights among children and their parents. This positive shift is largely attributed to the increased engagement of learners in structured school activities and the sense of routine and discipline promoted through education. Moreover, the project established and strengthened key community-based child protection structures, including Child Protection Committees, Child Labour Ambassadors, Child Labour Committees, and local task forces. These structures have built trust and legitimacy within communities, promoting greater vigilance, community involvement, and collective responsibility in safeguarding children. As the Community Development Officer (CDO) in Paidha noted, *"When children are in school, communities also somehow benefit. There is reduced insecurity, and you find that even cases of street children have reduced. So petty stealing and fights are minimised."*

3. What challenges still remain in the community in relation to child labour?

While the CLFZ has demonstrated several positive impacts, including improved school enrolment, academic performance, and changed mindsets, these achievements are at risk of being erased if structural challenges are not addressed. Challenges such as persistent poverty, large class sizes, inadequate school infrastructure, frequent teacher transfers, limited government support and integration of project activities, and lack of operational Bye-laws or Ordinances continue to undermine the sustainability of the achievements. To a large extent, the success attained so far is largely dependent on the ongoing commitment of the project, which has provided essential training and increased coordination of child labour activities within schools and communities.

Without continued efforts to institutionalize child protection measures and integrate them into the local government systems, there is a risk that child labour, school dropout, and related issues such as teenage pregnancies and early marriage will re-emerge. The limited integration of CLFZ activities into local government structures and the absence of a fully functional anti-child-labour law indicate that the progress is unsustainable and that these challenges might reverse the achievements gained. Therefore, while the project has made a significant impact in Erussi, Abanga, and Paidha, its sustainability and long-term success are delicate and greatly depend on addressing these structural challenges through sustained, multi-sectoral collaboration.

a) Challenges Faced by Children

- **Inadequate Scholastic Materials and Risk of Child Labour**

  Across nearly all focus group discussions (FGDs), learners expressed concern over the lack of essential scholastic materials such as books, pens, school uniforms, and money for school meals. As a result, many children reported resorting to short-term child labour activities to earn money needed for school-related expenses before they could return to class. One child from Pakadha Primary School-Paidha shared: *"Sometimes I miss school… I go and dig somebody's garden… to pay my money for examination."*

- **Inadequate Knowledge of Child Labour**

  Despite widespread sensitisation efforts, a significant number of children still lack a clear understanding of what constitutes child labour or have not heard about the CLFZ project. This limited awareness among the primary beneficiaries weakens their ability to recognise exploitative practices and advocate for their rights. Focus group discussions revealed inconsistent knowledge levels, with some children unable to distinguish between acceptable work and harmful child labour. In some cases, children confused the child labour project with a UNICEF project, which provides scholastic materials.

b) Challenges Faced by Parents

- **Inadequate Knowledge and Negative Attitude:**

  While the project has significantly shifted parental mindsets in many communities, gaps remain among certain individuals who either lack adequate knowledge about the dangers of child labour or continue to hold negative attitudes toward education. These resistant attitudes are often rooted in a limited understanding of how education can create future opportunities for children. According to many participants, the most difficult parents to reach tend to be those who are illiterate and see no value in schooling, often because they never attended school themselves but still perceive themselves as successful. As the LC III Chairperson of Paidha explained, *"There are some stubborn parents who refuse to acknowledge that education is important for a child's future. They still have a negative attitude towards the project..."*

- **Persistent Poverty**

  Despite the establishment of a Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ), financial hardship continues to hinder some children's access to education. The most affected are households with large families, single or divorced parents, and orphans living with grandparents, who struggle to meet the costs of scholastic materials and other school-related expenses. Participants noted that children from these vulnerable households are at greater risk of engaging in child labour, as economic pressures to meet basic needs often push them into work as a means of survival. Additionally, some parents remain unaware of what constitutes child labour and continue to involve children in excessive work, such as vending during market days or gardening, either due to cultural norms or economic necessity. The root cause is frequently linked to families' overdependence on subsistence agriculture, with the most affected being orphaned children and those under the care of elderly grandparents. As a Field Officer from Kyagalanyi Coffee Ltd in Zombo District observed: *"Sometimes you find the children are saying they lack the scholastic material. The parents are also saying we don't have money."*

c) Challenges Faced by Teachers and Schools

- **Large Classroom Sizes**

Although the project has significantly increased school enrolment, this positive development has not been matched by corresponding investments in infrastructure and staffing. Many classrooms are now overcrowded, with insufficient desks to accommodate all learners, making classroom management more challenging for teachers. Furthermore, the rise in learner numbers has not been accompanied by a proportional increase in teaching staff, resulting in high pupil-to-teacher ratios. This has placed a heavy workload on the existing teachers, limiting their ability to provide effective instruction, individualized support, and adequate monitoring of learners, as pointed out by the Focal Teacher in Pajur Primary School—Erussi: *"In P4 class, we have no access to reach the children behind… learners are very many"*

- **Frequent Teacher Transfers**

The CLFZ project places strong emphasis on equipping teachers with skills to create safe and supportive learning environments, identify cases of child labour, and monitor the reintegration of children back into school. However, frequent transfers of trained teachers to other schools undermine the project's impact. Each transfer results in the loss of valuable human resources, weakening the continuity of child protection efforts and threatening the long-term sustainability of the project's gains.

d) Challenges at the Community Level

- **Negative Influence of Surrounding Community**

Even though significant reductions in child labour have been achieved in target areas like Erussi and Paidha, neighbouring non-targeted communities where child labour persists pose a threat to this progress. The normalisation of child labour in these areas can influence children and families within CLFZ communities, potentially reversing the gains made. This challenge is further compounded by negative attitudes and language barriers, among some Congolese immigrant communities nearby the border who primarily speak Lingala and don't see the value of education. Even if sensitisation messages were to reach them, language barriers still persist as they predominantly speak Lingala while sensitisations are carried out in English and Alur. Ongoing social and economic interactions between these neighbouring communities expose children to peers still engaged in child labour, increasing the risk of relapse. As the UNATU project officer observed, *"The surrounding communities can easily come to negatively influence the community we have already targeted."*

- **Political Interferences**

Although the CLFZ project has engaged local political leaders, including LC I, II, III officials and councillors, the enforcement of child labour policies is often undermined by political interests, especially during election periods. Many leaders fear that taking a firm stance against child labour could alienate voters, particularly since they live in the same communities as the perpetrators. The desire to retain political support discourages them from reporting or taking action against violators, weakening the implementation of protective measures. Concerns also exist regarding the possible loss of influential leaders such as Orom Collins and William Oketi, who have actively used their positions to champion child labour-free communities. If such leaders are not re-elected, communities risk losing critical voices that have helped mobilise resources and advocate for child protection. As the Officer in Charge at Erussi Police Post noted: *"They fear their community, because they want votes. And also, they live in the same*

communities where child labour is occurring. If they enforce child labour policies and take their neighbours to the police, who is going to protect them after that? How will they convince them to vote for them?"

- **Limited Government Support**

  While the CLFZ project has been active for a significant period in Erussi, Paidha, and Abanga, its long-term sustainability is at risk due to limited government involvement and weak integration into formal child protection systems. The project continues to rely heavily on external funding, with little to no financial support from the government, making it difficult to scale up or sustain activities over time. Key government departments—such as the District Labour Office and the Office of the Probation and Social Welfare Officer—are not actively engaged in monitoring or sustaining anti-child-labour interventions. While the Nebbi District Education Office has expressed support for the project, structural challenges remain. For instance, the current Education Management Information System (EMIS) does not routinely capture data on children who are re-integrated into school. This gap affects planning and may result in continued under-allocation of resources to schools that support vulnerable learners. Additionally, the Child and Family Protection Unit, though engaged in child protection, currently has no concrete plan to adopt or continue the initiatives introduced by the CLFZ project, which hinders its scalability.

- **Lack of an Operational Bye-law or Ordinance**

  The absence of a formalised operational bye-law or ordinance at sub-county or district level in Erussi, Paidha and Abanga is a central barrier to long-term enforcement of anti-child-labour policies. While major progress has been made in drafting a bye-law in both districts, its legal enactment is still incomplete. This delay is partly due to weak collaboration among key district departments such as education, labour, and probation/social welfare, which limits the integration of anti-child-labour measures into broader district programs. Furthermore, political interests, including the desire to appease voters during election periods, also contribute to limited budget allocations for child labour initiatives, further slowing the process. Additionally, frequent changes in district leadership and bureaucratic inefficiencies complicate the operationalisation of these laws. Some officials may prioritise short-term political gains over long-term structural reforms. Additionally, the CLFZ project's heavy reliance on donor funding adds to the uncertainty. Without guaranteed financial support for implementation, some district leaders may hesitate to operationalise the byelaws, expecting NGOs to cover both enactment and implementation costs. This is noted by the Senior Education Officer in Nebbi: *"The education by-law is still not yet operational… I have never seen any collaborations between the labour, education or probation offices."*

  In the absence of a legally binding policy, current enforcement of anti-child-labour policies depends on voluntary compliance. This presents legal risks, as parents may challenge local leaders for enforcing a non-operationalised law.

4. In relation to the positive impact and benefits what have been the key success criteria?

IMPORTANT NOTE

It is essential to understand the basis for the ranks and scores in the following success factor tables.

The researcher was asked to rank potential success factors under five headings based on evidence gathered and to give a score out of 10 for each, where 1 = 'not at all significant' and 10 = 'fundamental – the approach cannot work without this'. This was intended to give a subjective, context-sensitive indication of the possible relative significance of various success factors.

The researcher in Uganda asked respondents to give ranks and scores and then made an approximation based on the range of inputs given. The researcher notes that the type of respondent will have significantly influenced the scores given and that some respondents were reluctant to give scores and often only scored one or two success factors or sometimes stated that a success factor was important but would not give a score. Therefore it was decided not to include the actual scores in the tables as these could be misleading. The ranks must be treated with considerable caution.

It is clear that in many (if not all) CLF Zones it is a combination and synthesis of many factors which leads to success and increases the likelihood of sustainability. It is therefore important that funding decisions, strategic planning and conclusions about the CLFZ approach are **not** based on the rankings presented here.

The researchers for the two National Reports (Malawi and Uganda) as well as other international respondents were also asked to give their own ranks and scores and the outcome of this exercise is discussed in more detail in the main evaluation report.

a) Start Up (preparation and "project management")

Rank	Success Factor
1.	Key roles – Focal Point Teachers, village headmen, community/religious leaders, others
2.	Ongoing monitoring of school attendance, children returning from child labour, children retained in school, and children remaining in child labour
3.	Involvement of the Union (including follow-up contact)
4.	The early stakeholder mapping to identify key people

Most stakeholders acknowledged the vital roles played by teachers, as well as local and religious leaders, in the success of the CLFZ project. Teachers served as key focal points—sensitising parents and learners about the dangers of child labour, monitoring the attendance of children who had returned to school, and supporting their adjustment. They also played an active role in establishing and running school clubs, offering guidance and counselling, and promoting a child-friendly learning environment. Local and religious leaders were similarly instrumental. They mobilised communities to reject child labour and worked closely with law enforcement agencies to help ensure that children remained in school.

The involvement of UNATU was also cited as a key success factor. The Union played a strategic role by mapping key stakeholders, delivering teacher training, and supplying schools with items such as balls, jerseys, and drums, contributing to the creation of more engaging and supportive school environments.

b) Communities in Charge (community involvement and awareness-raising)

Rank	Success Factor
1.	Information and awareness-raising on the benefits of education, harm of child labour and distinction between child labour and child work (e.g. through community dialogues, radio talk shows, door-to-door, social and cultural events such as weddings, funerals, church, etc)
2.	The community meetings / social dialogue
3.	Training for community leaders
4.	The Parent-Teachers Association

In all intervention areas, key stakeholders emphasised that information sharing and awareness-raising among community members were the most critical success factors. This approach led to significant mindset shifts within communities, ultimately driving positive behavioural change. As the UNATU project officer noted, "The number one activity is community awareness campaigns. For example, the Go Back to School campaign." The effectiveness of this strategy was amplified by using diverse communication platforms and engaging trusted local figures. These elements increased the reach and credibility of the messages, fostering a cultural shift that prioritised education.

While ranked lower, the training of community leaders and the involvement of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) remained significant. Frequent engagement, support, and monitoring by PTA and School Management Committee (SMC) representatives were noted as crucial in supporting teachers and school administrators. Their active involvement in returning children to school—including following up with them in their communities and collaborating with law enforcement to ensure they remain in school—was a key enabler of sustained school attendance.

c) Time for School

Rank	Success Factor
1.	The training provided to teachers on child labour, community engagement and new ways of teaching
2.	Better teaching, including: more child-centred, music, sports, theatre, no corporal punishment (conducive child-friendly school environment)
3	School feeding programme

One of the most significant success factors contributing to increased enrolment and retention of learners was the creation of a conducive, child-friendly school environment. This was largely attributed to teacher training on child labour issues and sustained community engagement efforts. Equally important were the improvements in teacher practices—particularly the adoption of child-centred teaching methods, the use of positive discipline, and the integration of play-based activities such as music, sports, and drama. These approaches not only made learning more engaging but also encouraged learners to stay in school.

While ranked lowly, the initiation of the school feeding programs was also mentioned as a key success factor in ensuring a conducive learning environment. Apart from reducing hunger among learners during afternoon lessons, school feeding improved attendance and classroom attention and concentration, which are crucial for long-term academic success.

d) Stronger Families, Stronger Communities

Rank	Success Factor
1.	New bylaws
2.	Help with school fees

Though generally advocated by local leaders, this success factor (bye-laws) remains non-operational due to the absence of a formal bye-law or ordinance on child labour in all intervention areas. Nonetheless, stakeholders highlighted that existing government policies, particularly the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, have been leveraged to promote school attendance among children of school-going age. In the absence of specific local legislation, the UPE policy has provided a practical framework for informal enforcement. Participants also reported ongoing efforts to advance the formalisation of anti-child-labour measures at the district level. These efforts have included community sensitisation and mobilisation, which have contributed to increased public awareness about the definition of child labour, the importance of education, and the long-term risks associated with child exploitation.

Moreover, support from complementary organisations such as UNICEF and Compassion International—through scholarships, school feeding, and provision of scholastic materials—was credited with helping children, especially girls, return to and remain in school.

e) The Bigger Picture

Rank	Success Factor
1.	Advocacy and lobbying at the local level (by head-teachers, teachers, and community leaders)
2.	Involvement of employers
3.	Involvement of education authorities

Advocacy and lobbying by political leaders have played a crucial role in attracting development partners to support participating schools and out-of-school children. For example, the LC III Chairperson actively facilitated partnerships between implementation schools and organisations such as UNICEF, Compassion International, and ARUWE.

In addition, the engagement of employers, particularly Kyagalanyi Coffee Limited in Zombo, has been pivotal in addressing child labour. Their collaboration has focused on raising awareness and enforcing child labour standards among the more than 1,500 farmers they work with, contributing significantly to the project's impact.

C. Conclusions and recommendations

The CLFZ project has been largely effective in achieving its core implementation goals. It has successfully returned children to school, supported their retention, and raised community awareness on the dangers of child labour. The project's multi-stakeholder approach, particularly its collaboration with schools, community structures, and local and religious leaders, has yielded promising results in addressing child labour at the grassroots level.

However, the project continues to face critical challenges at the learner, parent, school, and community levels, which pose risks to its long-term sustainability and potential for scale-up. These include inadequate knowledge about child labour among some learners and parents, poverty, large class sizes, poor school documentation, limited local government buy-in and support and lack of an operational bye-law. These threaten the long-term sustainability and scalability of the intervention.

Moving forward, the effectiveness of the CLFZ approach can be strengthened by institutionalising its gains within district systems and leveraging evidence of positive outcomes to mobilise resources. Key priorities include securing political buy-in, operationalising local bye-laws, and sustaining collaboration with schools and community-based child protection structures. This should also involve closer collaboration with government agencies such as the police, the Child and Family Protection Unit, the labour office, and the probation and social welfare office.

Recommendations for…

a) Sustaining the benefits of the current CLFZ

- **Institutionalise Community-Led Prevention Mechanisms:** To preserve current gains of the CLFZ, UNATU and partners could formalise community-based child protection structures. This includes recognising and training more focal teachers, local council leaders and religious leaders and frontline monitors. Working with them to embed child labour messages and discussions in schools through assemblies, debates, and other events such as churches, PTA meetings and LC gatherings will strengthen and make awareness raising sustainable.
    - Additionally, UNATU could actively pursue and formalise strategic partnerships with key stakeholders such as Kyagalanyi, Kawacom, District Education Offices, Probation and Social Welfare Offices, Labour Offices, and the Child and Family Protection Units in both Nebbi and Zombo. These collaborations can help secure local buy-in, align efforts with district priorities, and integrate child labour prevention into official plans and budgets. This will enhance the legitimacy of the project and support its long-term sustainability.
- **Strengthen Reintegration and Retention Pathways for Vulnerable Children:** To prevent re-entry into child labour, particularly for high-risk groups such as adolescent mothers, orphans and child heads of households, schools need embedded support systems. These include a flexible school schedule, especially for young mothers, peer mentorship, school-based psychosocial support, and remedial learning sessions. Learner cluster systems, guided by focal teachers, should continue tracking attendance and identifying learners at risk of dropping out. In addition, after-school social enterprise projects can offer both educational and financial support to economically vulnerable pupils:

- Coffee demonstration gardens in partnership with companies like Kyagalanyi can serve dual purposes: educating learners on child labour and sustainable agriculture, and generating income from coffee sales to support learners' school-related needs.

- Reusable pad-making initiatives, already introduced by UNATU, should be expanded into well-structured school clubs with a social enterprise component. These clubs can be contracted by schools to produce high-quality pads for emergency use or sale to parents and local partners, creating income opportunities for at-risk learners while addressing menstrual hygiene needs.

b) Implementing future CLF Zones

- **Design Appropriate Advocacy Strategies:** Future CLFZ interventions should incorporate well-structured advocacy strategies that clearly outline who to engage, when to engage them, and for what purpose. These strategies should also guide the planning and execution of Go Back to School campaigns and other community mobilisation efforts. By fostering targeted and meaningful engagement with influential stakeholders such as political leaders, policymakers, and community gatekeepers, the project can generate stronger political and community buy-in and support. This, in turn, can create an enabling environment for the development and enactment of local bye-laws or ordinances aimed at preventing child labour.

- **Institutionalise CLFZ Approaches in Education Sector Planning and Financing**: For scalability, CLFZ practices must be integrated into local government education systems. District Education offices could embed proven CLFZ strategies like learner tracking, school-community engagement, and child rights education into district sectoral planning tools. District and sub-county budgets could include specific allocations for child protection, follow-up and enforcement. Continued training of teachers and district staff on child labour prevention will help embed CLFZ as a standard practice, not just a project.

- **Engage Local Business Communities:** Future CLF Zones must proactively involve the private sector, especially in areas where child labour is driven by local agriculture or market demands, as early as possible. Local agreements with business actors, codes of conduct, and community sensitisation should be implemented early. Offering youth-friendly economic opportunities and encouraging businesses to support schools (e.g., via uniforms, bursaries, or materials) can strengthen community buy-in and long-term sustainability.

c) Using this evidence to persuade education authorities, governments and employers to take action

- **Use Evidence for Resource Mobilisation:** UNATU should support participating schools not only in collecting data on child labour and related outcomes, but also in analysing and packaging this data into actionable insights. This evidence can empower school management committees and local education stakeholders to engage proactively with local and international development partners focused on education, child protection, and child rights. Clear data on school retention, re-enrolment, and reduced child labour can strengthen funding proposals and advocacy efforts.

- **Use Evidence to Gain Political Buy-In:** The CLFZ project has demonstrably reduced child labour and improved key education indicators such as enrolment, attendance, academic performance, and transition to secondary school, particularly among girls. UNATU should work with schools to compile and disseminate this evidence to district-level authorities, including education officers, the Labour Office, the

Family and Child Protection Unit, the Probation and Social Welfare Office, and the Police. Presenting this data can help secure essential political support, increase teacher deployment, and unlock district and partner funding to replicate the initiative in other areas.

  - Furthermore, UNATU should use the project-generated evidence demonstrating the positive outcome of the project to advocate for the urgent enactment of a local bye-law on child labour, showcasing its necessity and potential impact on community enforcement.

- **Position CLFZ as a Strategic Investment in Human Capital:** CLFZs contribute to a more literate, skilled, and empowered generation, aligning with Uganda's Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To ensure long-term sustainability, UNATU should position CLFZs as a strategic investment in human capital development. Local government officials and employers—especially those benefiting from a better-educated workforce—should be engaged as co-investors in maintaining safe, inclusive, and child-friendly learning environments. Anchoring CLFZ outcomes within broader national development frameworks will enhance the project's visibility, legitimacy, and sustainability.