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Child Labour, a symptom of deeper issues: Cooperatives as engines for Decent Work



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BACKGROUND



Our findings from Child labour studies reveals that child labour remains a critical barrier to achieving sustainable development in Ghana's cocoa and small-scale gold mining (ASM) sectors despite national and international commitments. Our data reveals that household poverty, limited access to education, lack of decent employment opportunities for adults are key drivers.

Evidenced from the ACCEL Africa programme, a qualitative assessment was conducted across Ghana's Western and Western North Regions identified cooperatives and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) as key vehicles in addressing root causes of child labour.



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KEY FINDINGS

1. Role of Cooperatives in Reducing Child Labour

Cooperatives are providing peer support, training, credit access, and child labour sensitization.

Some cooperatives double as VSLAs, offering flexible, low-interest loans to members.

Through sensitization activities, child labour cases are reducing

2. Persistent Challenges

Absence of alternative livelihoods remain the primary driver of child Labour in supply chains

Constrained by high interest rates, weak documentation, and limited collateral, access to finance is still a major challenge.

Infrastructure deficits reduce farmer profitability and push households to rely on child labour.



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3. Market and Governance Gaps

Current selling strategies make cocoa farmers vulnerable to price manipulation.

The low digital and financial literacy limits access to wider markets and digital finance tools.

Low capacity of Governance structures still affects cooperative sustainability.

Policy Implications

1. Child Labour Elimination



Cooperative strengthening can directly addresses root causes of child labour by increasing household income, access to social protection, and awareness of children's rights.



Enhanced cooperative capacity enables communities to monitor and report child labour more effectively.





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2. Decent Work Promotion



Cooperatives are creating dignified jobs through skills training, communal labour systems, and income-generating activities such as palm oil processing, poultry farming, and soap making.



In the mining sector, training on safe mining practices and financial literacy is laying the foundation for formalized, safer jobs.

3. Resilient Local Economies



Cooperatives when strengthened can improve economic inclusion, especially for women and youth.



Ensuring alternative livelihoods, they reduce economic dependency on cocoa and gold, and improve resilience to seasonal shocks and market fluctuations.





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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND ACTION

1. Strengthen Cooperative Development



Subsidize legal registration and offer administrative support to informal cooperatives.



Scale up leadership, ethics, and governance training for cooperative leaders.

2. Improve Access to Finance



Promote financial literacy and digital record-keeping tools.



Expand support for VSLAs and connect them with rural banks and microfinance institutions.





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3. Promote Alternative Livelihoods



Fund vocational training and provide start-up grants for viable non-farm livelihoods (e.g. tailoring, beekeeping, fish farming).



Prioritize youth engagement and entrepreneurship in community development plans.

4. Expand Infrastructure and Market Access



Invest in feeder roads and rural market centres in cocoa and mining zones.



Support cooperative-led transport initiatives to reduce post-harvest losses and transport costs.





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5. Institutionalize Child Labour Protocols



Finalize and roll out standardized national child labour monitoring systems.



Empower community-based task forces to monitor farms, track school attendance, and report violations.

Conclusion

To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth" Ghana must invest in cooperative-based approaches to eliminate child labour and build inclusive local economies. Empowered cooperatives offer a sustainable and scalable path to protect children, enhance livelihoods, and formalize decent jobs in rural communities.



Ready to collaborate in the elimination of child Labour in supply chains in Ghana?



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