



International
Labour
Organization

Elimination of the worst forms of child labour in sugarcane sector: A different world is possible (El Salvador)

BACKGROUND

The activities to eradicate child labour in sugarcane were initiated in the year 2002 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Association of Sugarcane Producers, the government of El Salvador and the ILO. This document established specific commitments for the parties to intervene in the sector and develop a set of demonstrative programmes that would demonstrate the viability of eradicating child labour in the sector.

Activities began in 2003 with a baseline survey that was conducted for a target population of 5,000 boys and girls, followed by a second intervention in 2007 with a target population of 1,500 boys and girls. The first intervention came to an end in November 2006 and the second in September 2009.

ACTION

The process to eliminate child labour was based on a strategy founded on two principal areas of intervention:

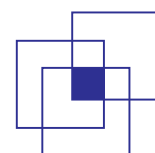
1. The creation of an enabling environment

Which was oriented towards the establishment of appropriate national conditions, by improving the available information base, building the capacities of key public and private actors, as well as a large-scale awareness-raising campaign.

2. The development of direct interventions

Which was conceived as the development of community action programmes in areas with high incidences of child labour. The basic strategy aimed to raise awareness in the target communities (especially among parents, community leaders and organizations from the sugar sector), to improve the quality and relevance of educational services (including vocational training) and to provide services to improve the revenue and organization of community-based active monitoring mechanisms.

Good practice



ACHIEVEMENTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Direct interventions in the sugarcane sector have led to the withdrawal of more than 7,000 children between 2003 and 2009. According to data from the enrolment census of the Ministry of Education, the number of child labourers in sugarcane has been reduced from 12,380 children in 2004 to 1,559 children in 2009.

These positive results have been validated in various evaluations of time-bound programmes developed in the country. According to the findings of the final evaluation of Phase I of the Time-Bound Programme: “Some positive external variables and context seem to have had a favourable effect on raising public and business awareness as well as on the political will of governments to advance the elimination of the WFCL. Thus, the need to enforce the provisions of the labour chapter of CAFTA, the pressure from foreign opinion regarding the use of child labour in certain sectors of El Salvador’s economy (including the paradigmatic case of Coca Cola), changes of political will regarding the WFCL caused by the change in the national government and the adoption of a clearer code of conduct by the Sugar Association of El Salvador, are all factors that have positively contributed to a more proactive attitude in addressing child labour in the last two years, compared to that observed in the first two years of the time-bound programme.”

Furthermore, the team responsible for the final evaluation of the second phase also shared its views: “The business sector has been showing a growing commitment to the subject, largely due to the need to comply with the contents of the “white book”, which is linked to the Free Trade Agreement of Central America with the United States (CAFTA).”

SUSTAINABILITY

The process has enabled employers’ organizations to have a clear and concise strategy to address child labour in the sector. In addition, the development of pilot interventions by some workers’ organizations has been scheduled.

Public sector entities have adapted their service offerings and specific tools for dealing with the problems of the sector. These are managed with their own resources and are sustainable over time without resorting to external financing.

In particular, the experience’s progress has been developed on the basis of constant dialogue between the government and the Sugar Producers’ Association, made possible by support from IPEC, especially in terms of the generation of a reliable information base, direct interventions in the field and the capacity building of the social partners involved.

LESSONS LEARNED

In developing the process, it was found that success is determined by progress in the following aspects:

Political commitment at the highest level. The Sugar Producers' Association adopted a Code of Conduct on Child Labour that included a Zero Tolerance policy. This policy defined specific clauses in the purchase contracts for sugarcane. The aim was to avoid child labour by raising awareness among actors in the production chain and by establishing specific protocols for actions to be taken when children are found working. This includes designating staff adequate time to complete this task. The elaboration of a document that records the experience and that will be used as a basis for replication of activities at an international level is in process.

Improving the capacity for labour inspection. This included focusing on the early detection of cases, the modification of the agricultural inspection protocol and the modification of work schedules to coincide with the start of activities. This practice has been extended to other sectors such as the coffee sector.

Improving the quality and relevance of community services. This consisted primarily of the provision of educational services and skills training, in addition to including other non-traditional recreational and artistic activities in rural zones.

Strategic role of community-level monitoring. This was developed by community leaders and was complimented by other information-management tools involving the active participation of child-protection and labour-inspection agencies.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

This practice is most easily applied to products exported to developed countries that require compliance with labour standards throughout the production chain.

Furthermore, the political commitment (from employers, workers and governments) should come from the highest level, so that intentions translate into operational actions that include sanctions for those that fail and clear procedures for carrying out the strategy.

Finally, a community monitoring system and the participation of stakeholders from all sectors facilitates the verification of operational progress and compliance with pre-planned targets.

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