

Promoting vocational skills development in Malawi's informal tea sector

Good practices



Responds to the following criteria

- Ownership
- Replicable
- Rapid



Main stakeholders

- Households
- Youth
- Children
- Local government
- Community mobilisers and structures
- Skills development line-structure at the national level
- Industry associations
- Social partners

► Description

Child labour is a persistent and pervasive problem in Malawi, a country where around 70% of the population lives under the international poverty line ([UNCTAD, 2023](#)). Due to traditional ideas and the cycle of poverty, the number of children engaged in child labour in Malawi continues to increase over the years. Based on the 2015 National Child Labour Survey, 38% of children aged 5 to 17 years old in Malawi are involved in child labour, 67.6% of which are found in the agricultural sector. This indicates that around 2.1 million children are providing cheap labour on farms and plantations instead of going to school, not only violating their rights as children but also exposing themselves to various hazards and risks in the workplace ([ILO, 2023](#)).

One of the most crucial ways to combat child labour is by extending access to quality education and providing children with the skills and knowledge needed to access decent work opportunities and end the cycle of exploitation and poverty ([ILO, 2006](#)). Specifically, the provision of vocational skills development could help promote income generating activities among youth, help them gain the necessary income at the household level, and prevent resorting to child labour.

To this end, ACCEL Africa decided to provide vocational skills development opportunities to vulnerable children aged between 14 and 17 years old in Malawi's tea supply chain, with a focus on smallholder tea-growing families in the informal sector. The vocational skills development intervention, which was done under the ACCEL Project, involved training the youth in five trades, namely: (1) welding and fabrication; (2) tailoring and fashion design; (3) carpentry and joinery; (4) motorcycle mechanics; and (5) bricklaying.



► Process

Concept development and awareness raising



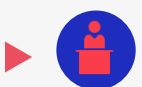
Concept development

Vocational skills development for the youth in Malawi's tea supply chain started as a good practice concept under the ACCEL Project. The idea was to implement vocational skills interventions for the youth in the Mulanje and Thyolo tea-growing districts, with the objective of tackling the root causes of child labour in the tea supply chain. Since household poverty is recognised as a key driver of child labour, the implementers of the ACCEL project realised that empowering youth with vocational skills could go a long way in preventing them from engaging in child labour for survival. The project aimed to target 150 young people in the two districts.



Presentation of concept to District Child Labour Committees (DCLCs)

The implementers of the ACCEL project presented the concept to the District Child Labour Committees (DCLCs) of the two districts for endorsement. The DCLC is a subcommittee of the District Executive Committee (DEC), the main governance committee at district council level that is composed of the district council secretariat, elected ward councilors, parliament members of the district, traditional leaders, all government sectors at decentralised levels, and interest groups that represent youth, women and people with disabilities. When the ACCEL project team met with the DCLC, they discussed the concept of vocational skills development, which was then fully endorsed.



Presentation of concept to District Executive Committees (DECs)

Once the concept of vocational skills development was endorsed by the DCLCs, it was mandatory for the DEC of the two districts to be briefed and to endorse the concept in order to make it a legitimate intervention recognised by the councils. This endorsement meant that the councils were fully aware of the intervention and that they would support it whenever necessary.



Sensitisation of the informal tea sector

After the endorsement of the concept by the DEC, sensitisation efforts were conducted in Malawi's informal tea sector in order to better integrate the efforts of the tea sector at the district council level. More specifically, because the tea sector is not represented at the DEC level, there was a need to orient its members regarding the vocational skills development concept. The informal tea sector, comprised of smallholder farmers who grow their tea in smaller gardens and sell to tea companies, is where most youth engaged in child labour are found in Malawi (ILO, 2018). They were therefore the target of the skills development initiative, and sensitisation efforts in this informal sector were led by the National Smallholder Tea Growers Association (NSTGA), who endorsed the intervention. The NSTGA played a leading role in the sensitisation efforts, as they had a presence in all the communities, worked closely with the traditional leaders, and were an entry point to reach out to the smallholder farmers in the community. The NSTGA and the ACCEL project team went to blocks (i.e., three to five clubs of smallholder tea farmers) in Mulanje and Thyolo districts to talk to the leaders about the intervention. They also talked to parents to help them understand the links between education and the elimination of child labour.

► Process

Selection of beneficiaries



Development of criteria

The ACCEL project implementers, the district labour officers and the district community development officers (DCDOs) developed a set of criteria for the selection of beneficiary youth – an important step to ensure that only vulnerable youth beneficiaries were enrolled in the program. The criteria indicated that the intervention would target children aged between 14 and 17 years old, as this age group is considered legally employable in Malawi (although not in hazardous work), and that they are children from families who are smallholder tea growers at the lower tiers of production. They must also have been withdrawn from child labour or were at risk of engaging in child labour due to their current living conditions. Other criteria for selection include whether they were from a single family, had parents with disabilities, had parents older than 65 years old, or came from child-headed families.



Selection and verification of the list of children

Based on the criteria, the NSTGA selected the beneficiaries of the vocational skills development programme in consultation with the block leaders from the Mulanje and Thyolo districts. After the list was developed, a team composed of officers from Impact Centre for Economic Empowerment and Development (ICEED), NSTGA, the District Labour Office (DLO), and the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) verified the list of beneficiaries to ensure that the list conformed to the selection criteria. They did this by talking to the block leaders or chiefs to confirm the children's situation in the household, as well as by visiting the households of the 150 beneficiaries using resources from the stakeholders, including vehicles from the government, in order to cut costs. A few beneficiaries who did not meet the criteria were replaced.



► Process

Identification of training needs and centres



Labour market analysis

Before the children were sent to the vocational training centres, ICEED, with the help of an independent consultant, conducted labour market analysis to identify the vocational skills which are marketable in the impact communities of the intervention. The idea was to match the skills identified as marketable with the aspirations of the youth. This was important to ensure marketability of the beneficiaries in their own communities after going through the vocational training programme. A survey was distributed and a list of skills was developed based on the responses.



Choice of skills and parental consent form

Based on the labour market analysis, five skills were identified: (1) welding and fabrications; (2) tailoring and fashion design; (3) carpentry and joinery; (4) motorcycle mechanics; and (5) brick laying. This list of skills was presented to the selected beneficiaries to choose from. Once the beneficiaries had chosen their skill of their interest, the parents or guardians signed a guarantor form, indicating their acceptance of the programme.



Selection of schools

The survey used during the labour market analysis also found that the selected youth beneficiaries were spread far geographically. Due to their vulnerability, they could not afford to travel long distances for pairing with artisans, as advised by the Technical Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA). The best option was to therefore use a boarding training facility located within the project district. However, since Mulanje and Thyolo do not have technical schools with boarding facilities, the youth were sent outside the project district, to Kamuzu Vocational Training Centre in the Chiradzulu district. The transportation costs for the beneficiaries were covered through financial support from the ACCEL project.



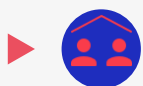
► Process

Implementation of the training programme



Provision of training

Once the training facility was selected, the selected youth beneficiaries underwent a three-month training programme. During the training period, TEVETA visited the training centre twice for monitoring purposes. During the first visit, TEVETA recommended the provision of learning materials that were in short supply, such as pens and notebooks. During the second visit, assessors representing the five vocational trades tested the learners for certification. The learners were given certification for attendance by the training centre, as well as a TEVETA certificate.



Capacity building on child labour and children's rights

In addition, during the training, a team of district labour officers visited the learners and offered capacity building on child labour and rights. The ICEED team also visited the learners and trained them on social assets building, skills on how to start businesses, assertiveness, team building and gender issues. These topics were deemed important for building the agency of the learners.

Monitoring and sustainability

The vocational skills development programme reached out to 150 youth beneficiaries in the Mulanje and Thyolo districts of Malawi. Its notable intermediate outcome was the change in behaviour among the trained students, who demonstrated enhanced social skills. Their communication abilities and assertiveness were also visibly transformed, and they were able to freely talk about their ambitions, interests and even fears. There was also anecdotal evidence that children were already able to use available machines in the community (e.g., from parents) to build furniture and sell them.

As stated earlier, the vocational skills development programme has the objective of eliminating child labour in tea plantations. The belief is that vocational skills will promote access to decent work among the youth and ensure that they live productive and dignified lives. Given that vocational skills are likely to increase the income of the trained youth, the desired outcome is the trickle down of financial resources to support school-going children as families become more self-reliant in terms of cash flow. It is also anticipated that the trained youth will be able to train others, helping further expand the pool of vocational skills in their communities. The trained youth are role models who will encourage and inspire other youth to acquire vocational skills.

To ensure the sustainability of the intervention, NSTGA members decided to collect a certain amount of money from the graduates. This money will be used to finance training programmes for future batches of beneficiaries, helping ensure outcomes over the long term. The graduates were also linked to local artisans in the community so that their skills could be put to good use after completion of the programme.



► Enabling Factors

► Support from NSTGA

The influence of the NSTGA ensured that the vocational skills development programme was accepted among the youth in the impact communities. They also played an important role in selecting beneficiaries for the programme, as they had local knowledge and close ties with the communities and their leaders.

► Enthusiasm among youth beneficiaries

The willingness and enthusiasm of the youth to participate in vocational skills development was critical to ensuring that they attended their training sessions regularly, contributing to their eventual completion of the programme.

► Support from government

Functional government structures at the local level, such as the DLOs, allowed for effective coordination of stakeholders. TEVETA also played a role in the implementation of the programme, particularly in the provision of certificates to the youth beneficiaries, which could help improve recognition of their skills in the labour market.

► Support from parents, guardians and leaders

The willingness of the guardians, parents and community leaders allowed the youth beneficiaries to participate in the vocational skills development programme.

► Community sensitisation campaign

The sensitisation campaign done by the ACCEL project increased community members' and stakeholders' understanding of the importance of the vocational skills development programme in the fight against child labour. Due to these efforts, the intervention was able to gain the buy-in and approval of the community members and leaders, as well as other stakeholders.

► Sustainable programme design

The intervention was designed to be self-sufficient over the long term. For instance, NSTGA members agreed that they will be collecting a certain amount of money from the youth graduates, and this money will be used to finance training programmes for future batches of beneficiaries. They also tried to link the youth to local artisans to help put their skills to practice.

