



Evaluation Summaries

Evaluation: Prevention and Reintegration of Children Involved in Armed Conflict: An Inter-Regional Programme

Quick Facts

Countries: Burundi, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Colombia, Philippines, Sri Lanka (Core Countries); Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone (Non-Core Countries)

Final Evaluation: July 2007

Mode of Evaluation: Independent Programme Review

Technical Area: Child Labour

Evaluation Management: ILO-IPEC Design, Evaluation and Documentation Section

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Project Start: September 2003

Project End: May 2007

Project Code: INT/03/P52/USA

Donor: US Department of Labor (USA)
US\$ 7,000,000

Keywords: Child Labour, Armed Conflict, Child Soldiers

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

This programme was a key response of the ILOs International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) to the issues of children involved in armed combat as framed by Convention No. 182. It was an inter-regional programme for the prevention and reintegration of children involved in armed conflict with focused activities in a series of core countries.

The programme was developed after a preparatory phase begun in October 2001 by ILO-IPEC, in collaboration with the ILO-IN Focus Programme on Crises Response and Reconstruction (IFP-CRISIS). During this phase rapid assessments were conducted.

Based on the information from the rapid assessments, a project was conceived with the following development objective: "The programme intends to contribute to the reduction of the incidence of children serving in armies and/or in armed groups."

Its three immediate objectives were:

- 1) An enabling environment in each country, facilitating the prevention, withdrawal and subsequent reintegration into society of children involved in armed conflict;
- 2) Former child soldiers above the minimum working age will be assisted to acquire decent work and achieve a sustainable income; and
- 3) Fewer children will be recruited in armed conflict in targeted countries.

Given the diversity of national contexts, the programme was developed to allow for flexibility and to foster learning through different experiences.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The scope of the final evaluation was in the form of a program review of activities in the seven core countries, plus the non-core countries. The overall purposes of the final programme review were three-fold:

- 1) To assess the degree of achievement of the project in accordance with immediate objectives, as well as its relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability;

- 2) To review and validate, to the extent possible, emerging experiences, lessons learned and models that could inform future work, including making suggestions for how to take these further; and
- 3) To assess, based on collected information and the views of stakeholders, the potential strategic and programming follow-up, including linkages between the project and other initiatives being developed in the targeted countries.

Methodology of evaluation

The review is built around a desk review of project documents and an evaluative process linked to a Global end of project Workshop which occurred in Turin, on May 7 - 11, 2007. The workshop allowed the International Evaluator to conduct direct interviews with the project teams from each country. Workshop participants shared their experiences and lessons learned, and answered questions specific to project design and project implementation.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Design and Relevance

- The focus on economic reintegration of children was a strength of the programme as it allowed ILO-IPEC to find a niche that was appropriate to its mandate and expertise – the programme was viewed as relevant to the country situations and target populations.
- The flexibility inherent in the project design was both a strength and a challenge. While the menu of options allowed country teams to choose what was most appropriate to their context, the indicators could not then be aggregated to determine programme impact in a systematic manner.
- Having the project document (including the logical framework) only available in English did not provide equal access to understanding of project design.
- The flexibility in design that allowed for extension of the age range of the target population was sensible and appropriate to certain country contexts.
- People ‘on the ground’ in the various countries were not significant players in the original project design;
- Processes within countries (such as the strategic planning sessions and round tables) were helpful in tailoring or adapting the programme, thus making it more relevant to local contexts.

Implementation

- Implementation was slow in its inception, as the various country contexts and dynamics presented barriers to the realization of the project.
- The challenging logistics within the countries (for example, lack of infrastructure, continuing conflict, natural disasters) exacerbated delays in implementation.
- The existence of multiple partners was a strength, but in some contexts required additional time and effort to ensure the commitment of the partners.
- Attention to internal communication and scheduling regular meetings facilitated implementation.
- The lack of communication across country projects and regions can be viewed as a detriment to implementation or a necessity in experimental projects.

Creation of an Enabling Environment

- While variation existed, the basic legislative frameworks were in place in all countries; however, the capacity to enforce legislation and protocols remains a question.
- As a result of the programme, ILO-IPEC has a new or additional vehicle for providing governments with technical expertise that enhances existing legislative frameworks, either through advice on implementation and/or assistance in legislative revision and/or reform.
- Where strong governmental or institutional partners existed, the creation of an enabling environment appears more likely. Such partnerships were less likely in most instances in Central Africa, given the situation where social and economic infrastructures had been destroyed and government situations were in flux.
- Initiatives designed to inform public opinion (use of the media) were used in certain countries and were a helpful adjunct to actual programming for children and families.
- A monitoring system which was to support project implementation and, as such an enabling environment, was particularly difficult to establish in Central Africa due to the local conditions. Monitoring in Sri Lanka and the Philippines appears to have been more effective because of the close working relationships between project management and the implementing agencies.
- The data base was problematic and did not reflect the realities of project activity.

- Overall, the programme made a contribution to enhancing and sustaining enabling environments, albeit to different degrees in the various countries.

Acquisition of Decent Work and Sustainable Income

- Many studies commissioned to support project implementation were reported as not being particularly helpful, often because they were not well done and/or were not timely.
- The project was successful in providing vocational training that gave many children and young people occupational skills. However, it should be noted that there was still variability in the applicability of these skills to the local economy.
- While attempts were made to assist young people in choosing a useable and contextually relevant skill/occupation, vocational guidance was not always successful. Incentives and supports (including follow-up) for young people to form cooperatives were beneficial.
- In most cases, employment was in “traditional” occupations.
- Young people were able to gain employment in all of the participating countries, although follow-up to ascertain the sustainability of this employment has not been possible in most cases.
- When a clear understanding of what was realistic and viable, was coupled with private sector partnerships (as in the Philippines), training was more likely to lead to employment.
- Attention was paid to the unique needs of girls. The project was flexible enough to address the very different circumstances of females involved in armed conflict situations.
- Beyond the issues related to females, the project did little to address other groups with special reintegration issues. While some mention was made of minority populations in Congo, there was no apparent attention paid to groups such as children/youth with disabilities.
- True to the experimental nature of the programme, ILO-IPEC found various means of providing training and decent work for youth previously involved as children in armed conflict situations, while recognizing that the total numbers were somewhat below the projected targets.

Reduction of Recruitment into Armed Conflict

- Prevention and reduction of recruitment is difficult to measure and difficult to ascertain.

- Support activities are only relevant where voluntary recruitment is concerned.
- Participation of children in mainstream education often requires provision of other supports/incentives.
- A holistic community approach that involves families and/or networks of families, other vulnerable children, the rehabilitation of community facilities, and the strengthening of existing services, has great potential to prevent and reduce the recruitment of children into armed groups. Such an approach also contributes to an enabling environment at the local level.
- Non-core countries, with one exception, were not influenced by the programme.
- Overall, support for mainstream education and the use of a community approach appear to be logical and viable prevention strategies; however, accurately quantifying their impact remains problematic.

Other

- Through the inter-regional programme, ILO was able to gain knowledge and expertise which could be brought to bear in the global discussion of how to best serve children who had been involved in armed conflict situations.
- Through supporting the development of the module on youth and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), through participation in the 2007 International Conference “*Free children from war,*” and through membership in a working group for the Machel Study, ILO-IPEC has used its mandate and expertise to make an important contribution as to the role economic reintegration can play in the reintegration of children and youth who were previously involved in armed conflict.
- The project was able to encourage economic reintegration without *placing* young people into situations that would be considered WFCL.

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Main recommendations and follow-up

Design and Relevance

- ILO, building on what has been learned in this programme, should continue to pursue projects that focus on economic reintegration of children affected by conflict.

- ILO should continue to allow flexibility within global projects, but ensure a balance with common outcomes and key indicators.
- ILO should involve key stakeholders, teams and participants from implementing countries to have involvement in project design, along side experts who can bring outside perspectives and fresh ideas.
- Exit strategies should be considered and explored at project inception, with reconsideration and adaptation throughout the life span of the project.

Implementation

- Vehicles for sharing project experiences and learning should be built into the ongoing implementation of inter-regional/global projects (at least to the degree that financial constraints will allow).
- A phased approach should be considered that would include a “start-up” or development phase prior to expectations for actual project implementation.

Creation of an Enabling Environment

- ILO-IPEC should continue to work in countries where the basic legislative framework is in place, as this – at minimum – speaks to some desire for national governments to support the principles of ILO.
- Within such contexts, ILO-IPEC should advocate for legislative enhancements (where necessary), while continuing to provide technical advice and assistance.
- ILO-IPEC should continue to pursue multi-faceted partnerships and support enhancement partners’ capacity both to prevent children from engaging in armed conflict and to support their economic reintegration into communities.
- ILO-IPEC projects should maximize the opportunities provided by multiple and complementary funders.
- Strategies to engage the media as partners in support of the reduction of children in armed combat should be part of a comprehensive national strategy.
- More attention should be paid to setting up data bases and monitoring systems that are appropriate to the local context and to the realities of the project.

Acquisition of Decent Work and Sustainable Income

- The necessary time and resources should be spent to understand clearly the local economy and employment context, without limiting the options to only “traditional” occupations. Part of knowing the local context is also assessing opportunities for private sector partnerships that would help to guarantee employment.
- New technologies and private sector partnerships should be explored.
- Sufficient time and attention should be paid to the vocational guidance component, taking into account local realities, children’s interests, as well as the possibilities for ongoing supports and incentives.
- ILO-IPEC should continue to address the specific – and contextually variable – needs of girls.
- More attention should be paid to identifying and programming for other vulnerable groups, particularly children with disabilities as this must be a group whose experience in armed conflict situations has affected their future employability.

Reduction of Recruitment into Armed Conflict

- The participation of children and youth in mainstream education should be supported in whatever ways are appropriate to the local context, including the provision of incentives to children and families.
- A community approach should be used in efforts to prevent and reduce recruitment of children, thus helping to create an enabling environment.

Other recommendations

- ILO-IPEC should continue to support initiatives that use economic reintegration as a key strategy in supporting the prevention and withdrawal of children and youth from situations of armed conflict.
- ILO-IPEC should continue to advocate for decent work for children within the context of economic reintegration so as to avoid placing children in hazardous employment or any WFCL.
- Tracer studies should be considered to ensure that young people continue to be in decent work situations and not in WFCL.

Important lessons learned

An understanding of the context is crucial to programme design, implementation and sustainability. Sufficient attention needs to be paid

to the vocational guidance component, taking into account local realities, children's interests, as well as the possibilities for ongoing supports and incentives.

The participation of children and youth in mainstream education is a formidable ally to prevention of recruitment of children. Coupled with a community approach, support for participation in mainstream education should not be under-estimated. The media can be a formidable ally in this endeavour.

Finally, ILO-IPEC can play a critical role in fostering initiatives that support the economic reintegration of children previously involved in armed conflict. ILO-IPEC has the mandate and expertise, as evidenced by this programme, to make an important and unique contribution.