



► Child labour and forced labour in Mali

February 2023

Eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains: an integrated approach Results from the CLEAR Cotton project

Key points

- Project co-funded by the European Union and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- Duration: 5 years (March 2018 - February 2023).
- Regions covered: The cotton-growing areas of the regions of Sikasso, Koulikoro, Ségou and Kayes, as well as the capital, Bamako.
- Beneficiaries: Children and their families working at any level of the cotton, garment and textile production chains; victims of forced labour and workers at risk of forced labour; key ministries and other governmental agencies; public regional authorities; employers' and workers' organizations; enterprises; media.
- Implementation: by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and local implementing partners.
- Partners: Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Dialogue (National and Regional Labour Directorates, National Cell for the Fight against Child Labour - CNLTE); Ministry of Education (Division of the Strategy for Accelerated Schooling - SSA/P - of the National Directorate of Basic Education); National Employer Council (*Conseil National du Patronat du Mali* - CNPM); National Trade Union of Education and Culture (*Syndicat National de l'Éducation et de la Culture* - SNEC); Nation Workers Union (*Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali* - UNTM); Malian Company for the Development of Textiles (*Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement du Textile* - CMDT); National cotton cooperatives federation (*Confédération des Sociétés Coopératives de Producteurs de Coton* - C-SCPC); National Employment Agency (ANPE); civil society organisations; and media.

Situation of child and forced labour

In Mali, cotton has a strategic importance because the cotton sector generates regular cash income for a significant portion of the rural population and contributes to the well-being of more than four million people. In 2019, it represented 15 per cent of GDP and 12 per cent of the country's budgetary revenues.

Child labour in cotton

In Mali, the issue of child labour remains a major concern and the country is committed to combating this scourge through several legislative and policy measures. The country has ratified the main international conventions on child labour, notably Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The minimum age for employment is 15 years, with an exemption for

apprenticeship for children aged 14 years or older. The country has a list of dangerous work prohibited to children (Order No. 2017 4388/MTFP-SG of 29 December 2017 supplementing the list of dangerous work prohibited to children under 18 years). It has also established the *Cellule Nationale de Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants* (CNLTE), a national body in charge of fighting child labour, to ensure the coordination of all actions in this regard.

However, despite these efforts, the eradication of child labour, particularly in the agricultural sector, remains a challenge. Child labour prevalence is high in rural households, regardless of their profile or livelihood. Indeed, the prevalence of child labour in Mali in 2020 is of great concern. Of the 7 million children aged 5 to 17 listed in 2020, 2.5 million (or 35 per cent) are engaged in economic activity. Of these, 80.7 per cent are engaged in child labour, which should be eliminated. Of the working children, 75 per cent are aged 5-14 and 25 per cent are aged 15-17¹.

The large number of children working in the cotton sector in Mali is mainly due to the labour-intensive cotton production system and small family farms, as well as poverty, lack of access to education and alternative income-generating activities. These children work long hours, well beyond the limit set by the national legislation, and may receive little or no pay. They may also handle harmful pesticides and work in isolation, exposed to extreme temperatures, without adequate food or rest, and in conditions that can seriously impair their physical and psychological development. Often this work is done at the expense of their education.

Child labour in cotton growing, as in most agricultural activities, is particularly difficult to combat due to factors such as the seasonality of agricultural production, migration, lack of technology, workplace hazards and limited awareness, limited access to schools, weak labour inspection and law enforcement in rural areas, and ingrained social attitudes about the role of children. Children's work is often invisible when they assist their parents. Children also work on a piecework or quota basis on large farms, sometimes within migrant worker families.

Forced labour in cotton

Mali is also committed to combating forced labour, by ratifying ILO Conventions No. 29 (on forced labour) and No. 105 (on the abolition of forced labour), Protocol No. 29 of 2014 relating to Convention No. 29, international and regional conventions on human trafficking, by including the prohibition of forced labour in the Constitution, and by adopting a legislative arsenal on the subject (Labour Code, Child Protection Code, Penal Code).

The study carried out within the framework of the project² has shown that forced labour remains a very marginal practice within cotton production. However, it is difficult to say that forced labour is non-existent on cotton farms, as it is hidden and the majority of farms operate on a family basis.



A woman holding a bowl of shea nuts, village of Solomani Bougouni Sikasso, Mali, June 2021 © ILO

¹ Government of Mali, 2020, *Rapport National sur le travail des enfants au Mali en 2020*.

² ILO, 2022 : *Les principes et droits fondamentaux au travail dans les sociétés coopératives de producteurs de coton au Mali: une évaluation des besoins* (OIT: Genève, 2022). Only available in French here: www.ilo.org/global/topics/child-labour/publications/WCMS_865660/lang--fr/index.htm.

The CLEAR Cotton project

Project objectives

The project aimed at contributing to the elimination of child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains in target producing countries. The project worked following an integrated approach, both by production area – covering all producing regions in the target countries – and by value chain – acting at all levels of the national cotton value chain. This approach allowed the project to address the basic needs of children and families at risk, working with local and national actors in the cotton sector. The specific objectives were:

- Enhanced compliance with legislative and regulatory frameworks and implementation of policies to eradicate child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains.
- Reduced recourse to child and forced labour by local communities with enhanced economic opportunities in selected cotton growing/processing districts.

In implementing many of the interventions, the CLEAR Cotton project worked closely with the [ACCEL Africa](#) project ("Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa") funded by the Netherlands, and the "Promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in the Cotton Supply Chain" project funded by the multinational company INDITEX.

► The collaboration between the ILO and FAO

Child labour has been at the heart of the ILO's mandate since its creation in 1919. As the originator or member of multiple programmes and initiatives (IPEC+; the Alliance 8.7), the ILO works to address the needs of the 160 million children still in child labour worldwide. In the framework of the CLEAR Cotton project, the ILO decided to rely on the FAO's expertise in rural community development and its tools, such as Dimitra Clubs, Farmer Field Schools (FFS) or Village Savings and Credit Associations. The two organizations therefore acted together through complementary interventions, targeting the same villages or communities.

Main results

Policy and research

- Support to the development and validation, through a participatory process, of the new **National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour in Mali (PANETEM) 2023-2027**.
- Support to the **national survey** (EMOP 2020) and the **national report on child labour** in Mali in 2020.
- Study on the **capacity building needs of cotton producers' cooperatives in terms of fundamental principles and rights at work**.
- A **roadmap was adopted by the C-SCPC** for the development of cooperatives and the elimination of child labour in cotton production, based on the study.
- The **capacity of labour inspectors** was strengthened for the implementation of international labour standards.

Capacity building

- **Training tools**, through a "training of trainers" approach, for the fight against child and forced labour in the cotton value chain were developed and adapted to each partner.
- **100 employers' representatives (CNPM) and 116 workers' representatives (16 trainers and 100 members) from SNEC** and their partners have built their capacity on techniques for identifying and managing children in child labour in the cotton value chain and health and on safety issues related to child labour.
- A **training plan was adopted by CMDT and C-SCPC** for trainers and agricultural advisors on the fight against child labour, and **20 trainers trained**, thanks to new tools developed for this purpose.
- **120 women in CMDT subsidiaries were trained** on fundamental principles and rights at work and in leadership for gender equality in cooperatives and the fight against child labour.
- **20 trainers from CMDT and C-SCPC and 120 grassroots agents in the 4 CMDT subsidiaries** were trained on the fight against child labour on the basis of the manuals developed.
- **100 agents from partners are trained on forced labour** through a **digital distance learning tool** developed with VIAMO Mali.
- A **group of 20 resource trainers** was created for the implementation of the [ILO SCREAM approach](#) for the

protection of children's rights, and **20 education stakeholders were trained** as a result.

- **21 key trainers** (CMDT, C-SCPC, local authorities, NGOs) **are trained in the use of the [ILO SYOB methodology](#)** to support young entrepreneurs.
- **25 agents and managers** from partner organisations **are trained in the implementation of the [ILO TREE programme](#)** to help empower rural populations.
- **35 agents** (including 3 women) from NGOs, CMDT, Agriculture Services and local radios are trained in the **Dimitra Clubs** approach.

Awareness-raising

- **Communities and cotton producers in the target regions were made aware of the need to abandon child labour and to send children to school**, through a multitude of actions and the use of various means (peer-to-peer awareness-raising, Farmer Field Schools, celebration of the World Day against Child Labour, music competitions, forum theatre, Dimitra club, radio broadcasts, etc.).

Direct support to affected communities

- **57 village committees and 10 communal monitoring committees** were set up in the villages of intervention.
- **1,422 children (721 girls and 701 boys)** aged 8 to 12 **are withdrawn from child labour** and re-enrolled in the mainstream schools thanks to the **57 SSA/P centres opened**.
- **300 children** aged 13-17 **are removed from child labour and reintegrated through vocational training and apprenticeships** in their chosen trades.
- **265 adolescents are trained** in life skills and entrepreneurship (SYOB1).
- Establishment with ANPE Mali of an **economic insertion fund of 15 million FCFA (25,000 USD)** to facilitate access by young entrepreneurs to financing for income-generating activities.
- **71 groups formed by the trained children**, developed **business plans** to access the economic insertion fund, benefited from **mentoring**, in partnership with the *Réseau de Micro-Institutions de Croissance de Revenus* (RMCR), which is part of VisionFund International; and **received basic production tools**.
- **611 households have benefited from training** in the development of income-generating activities (IGAs).
- **131 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) were created**, with 4,155 members (96% women), and 20 of them have been provided with kits.

- **84 facilitators and 372 producers** were trained in Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to intensify awareness against child labour.
- **243 beneficiaries trained in efficient low labour-intensive technologies** for agricultural work.

► Success story

Ousmane Sanogo is 13 years old and lives in the village of Kouoro-Barrage, north of Sikasso. Before the CLEAR Cotton project arrived, he had never attended school.

In October 2019, the project and the NGO GRAADECOM, in partnership with the local authorities in charge of education, opened an accelerated schooling centre (SSA/P) in his village. Ousmane was able to benefit from nine months of accelerated training and then joined the mainstream school. He is now in the fifth grade of the first cycle, and is among the best students in his class.

Ousmane plans to continue his studies up to secondary school level, in order to become a construction technician. SSA/P has offered him the opportunity to do vocational studies that will lead to a qualification. This will give him access to a decent job, enabling him to support his family.

Good practices

- The implementation of the SSA/P has proven to be an effective strategy in the fight against child labour through the (re)integration of out-of-school or drop-out children, thanks to the involvement of parents.
- The complementarity between the schooling and IGA offers, in particular the cash modality targeting women and conditioned on the schooling of children, is a factor in the sustainability of the project's results.
- The capacity building of local actors will contribute to the sustainability of the actions on the ground. Some of them have already planned awareness-raising actions.
- The inclusive approach has enabled a strong involvement of the project beneficiaries and the information and expectations provided by the beneficiaries themselves have been integrated into project's interventions.



Issouf Sanogo, formerly in child labour who benefited from reschooling programme through the SSA/P, Solomani Bougouni, Sikasso, Mali, June 2021 © ILO

Lessons learned

- Eliminating and preventing child labour in agriculture requires an integrated approach, including through close collaboration between labour, agriculture, education and social protection actors, social partners and civil society organisations.
- In cotton production, child labour is linked to the social understanding of the role of the child, not just to poverty. It is important to complement livelihoods support with broader awareness raising actions.
- Involving producers, smallholders, small and medium sized enterprises and their umbrella organisations in the direct implementation makes it possible to mobilise actors at the grassroots level so that they take ownership of and adhere to the fight against child and forced labour.
- Changes in perception and behaviour take time. It is essential to continue and reinforce the project's good practices.
- Integrating the project's tools and lessons into local and national action plans will increase the sustainability of results.
- The flexibility of programming in the face of the COVID crisis and security challenges has contributed to the resilience of the project.

Next steps and challenges

- Support the expansion of SSA/P as an effective instrument to (re)integrate displaced children, who are at high risk of child labour and forced labour, into the formal education system.
- Apply the integrated approach and lessons learned from the CLEAR Cotton project to address the growing problem of child labour in other sectors, including gold panning. Gold panning is considered hazardous work and one of the worst forms of child labour.
- Provide adequate social protection for farming families, to mitigate their vulnerabilities to shocks.

► Resources

- [Project results in Mali](#)
- [Results of the FAO component](#)
- [Video testimony of the impact of the project](#)
- [Music Against Child Labour competition 2021](#)

► www.ilo.org/clearcotton



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