A holistic approach for the elimination of child labour and its roots causes in supply chains:
Mainstreaming the promotion of the MNE Declaration in the ACCEL-Africa project

Key points

- Adopting a holistic approach is key to address child labour and its root causes. In the very early stages of its implementation, the ACCEL Africa project - ‘Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa’ (2018-2023), implemented by the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS), established a collaboration with the ILO Multinational Enterprises and Enterprises Engagement Unit (MULTI). The objective of this collaboration was to promote and support comprehensive strategies and actions from business for the elimination of child labour and address its root causes based on the guidance provided by the MNE Declaration.

The ACCEL Africa project - ‘Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labour in Supply Chains in Africa’ - completed in June 2023 its first phase of implementation to accelerate the elimination of child labour in target supply chains (cocoa, coffee, tea, cotton and gold) in Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, Malawi and Uganda.

Since its inception, the project mainstreamed the promotion and application of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) in its programmes and interventions in the countries covered by the project, equipping and assisting constituents as well as enterprises in gaining a better understanding of this important instrument for responsible business conduct, and applying its principles to address decent work deficits in supply chains and to tackle the root causes of child labour.

In relation to the project output aimed at strengthening the capacity of the private sector in the targeted supply chains for improving compliance (due diligence and remediation) on child labour, the project has raised awareness on the MNE Declaration, supported the development of guidance tools for employers’ organizations and their members, and promoted the services of the ILO Helpdesk for Business on International Labour Standards, an operational tool of the MNE Declaration and the ILO’s one-stop shop for company managers and workers on how to better align business operations with principles of international labour standards.

As a result, references to the MNE Declaration and/or the ILO Helpdesk for Business, have been included in the implementation agreements signed with the national
Employers’ organizations in Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda, and Malawi.

In Côte d’Ivoire, country that appointed in 2018 national focal points for the promotion of the MNE Declaration (in accordance with annex II of the Declaration), a guidance note was developed to inform more comprehensive strategies and actions that businesses can take based on the principles of the MNE Declaration for the elimination of child labour and its root causes. The guidance note ‘L’abolition effective du travail des enfants en Côte d’Ivoire: Les orientations offertes par la Déclaration de principes tripartite sur les entreprises multinationales et la politique sociale de l’OIT’ was used as a reference framework for the study that looked at identifying and analysing the capacity building needs of employers’ organizations and private sector companies in the fight against child labour in the cocoa and gold mining supply chains. The Côte d’Ivoire specific guidance note served then as a basis for the development of a global policy brief “The elimination of child labour and its root causes – the guidance offered by the ILO MNE Declaration” launched during the 5th Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in Durban in May 2022.

“Ending child labour in supply chains by promoting and supporting transparency, due diligence and remediation in private and public supply chains and procurement policies, including those of multinational organizations, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (…)” is one of the forty-nine immediate and effective measures to take included in the Durban Call for Action for the Elimination of Child Labour (2022), highlighting the relevance of a number of principles of the MNE Declaration to address decent work deficits and tackling the root causes of child labour.

Mali is developing a country-specific note similar to the one produced in Côte d’Ivoire with examples of companies operating in the country and organized sessions to promote the ILO Helpdesk for Business in 2022.

In October 2021, forty governments officials, representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations and businesses from Mali and Côte d’Ivoire engaged in a dialogue and capacity building to discuss and learn about strategies and actions that foster the elimination of child labour and its root causes through a holistic approach. The training ‘Formation ACCEL ’21: Les entreprises responsables et les normes internationales du travail’, introduced participants to the key role of responsible business practices and human rights due diligence as well as to the principles of the MNE Declaration and its

Principles of ILO MNE Declaration directed to enterprises relevant for the elimination of child labour and its root causes

- Carry out due diligence and provide means of remediation for negative impacts of their activities (paragraph 10 and 65)
- Align enterprise activities on public policies and initiatives (paragraph 11)
- Contribute to the creation of direct and indirect employment (Paragraphs 16, 18, 19 and 20)
- Contribute to formalization (Paragraph 21)
- Contribute to employment security (Paragraphs 33-36)
- Complement public social security systems (paragraph 22)
- Provide adequate wages, benefits and conditions of work (paragraphs 41)
- Be guided by the principle of non-discrimination (paragraph 30)
comprehensive approach to tackle child labour including aspects related to social dialogue, social protection, formalization and apprenticeship, labour inspection and remediation mechanisms, occupational safety and health, and allowed participants to develop a roadmap for integrating the MNE Declaration approach into the project activities and programmes.

In Uganda, the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) has developed a tool to assist employers in addressing issues related to child labour. The tool - FUE MNE Elimination of Child Labour Tool for Employers - provides employers with a comprehensive guide on how to create and update organizational actions to combat child labour in the workplace and implement practices in accordance with the MNE Declaration. The tool was widely disseminated among FUE member companies.

In addition, FUE featured the ILO Helpdesk for Business on their website and sensitized top management from their member companies.

**ILO Helpdesk for Business featured on the FUE website**

In October-November 2020, key constituents from Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi and Egypt participated in the annual course ‘International Labour Standards and Corporate Social Responsibility: the labour dimension of human rights due diligence’ thus strengthening their understanding and knowledge of the broader responsible business conduct agenda, including international labour standards, the MNE Declaration as well as due diligence processes as they related to labour rights. This training was organized by the ILO with technical and financial support of the MULTI Unit.

In Nigeria, the Nigerian Employers’ Consultative Association (NECA) in collaboration with the ILO ACCEL Africa project, introduced during a High-Level Dinner in June 2022, the MNE Declaration’s holistic approach as framework of reference on how enterprises can contribute to tackling child labour and its root causes and foster decent work opportunities by aligning their business operations with principles of international labour standards and national policy priorities. To promote a top-down approach and inform good business practices on the elimination of child labour, 62 CEOs agreed to increase Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives towards eliminating child labour in their operations.

In **Egypt**, 60 representatives of 37 textile and ready-made garment factories participated in the “Transition from Corporate Social Responsibility to Responsible Business Conduct” training that examined the importance and the business case of responsible business conduct and introduced them to ILO’s key instruments such as the MNE Declaration. The objective of the training was to better equip companies to comply with national law and respect international standards in their operations, thus facilitating their integration into global supply chains. In addition, project stakeholders participated in the workshop on ‘The promotion of sustainable and responsible business practices for the realization of decent work in Egypt: the approach of the ILO MNE Declaration’, organized in 2022 that aimed at building a common understanding of the MNE Declaration and its principles in view of developing an overarching coherent and coordinated approach for the promotion of sustainable, responsible and inclusive investments and business practices for the realization of decent work in Egypt.

Finally, at the regional level, with the objective of sharing the project experiences and lessons learned and contributing to the implementation of the African Union's “Ten Year Action Plan to Eradicate Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (2020-2030)”, the African Union Commission and ILO jointly organized in April 2023, the Forum ‘Harnessing Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives to address Child Labour’. The Forum brought together representatives of governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations,
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business associations, private sector companies, NGOs, and UN organizations as well as embassies representing development partners and home countries of multinational enterprises operating in the continent. Thirty African Union's member States were represented in the event, which highlighted the importance for businesses to adopt holistic approaches and strategies to eliminate child labour in supply chains taking into account key international frameworks such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and the ILO MNE Declaration. The guidance note ‘The Elimination of child labour and its root causes – the guidance offered by the ILO MNE Declaration’ has been presented at this occasion.

By promoting the overarching ILO framework on responsible business conduct: the MNE Declaration, the application of its principles and the information and guidance offered by the ILO Helpdesk for Business, the ACCEL-Africa project has put in place key milestones for the sustainability of the project interventions. The MNE Declaration sets out a unique tripartite agreed framework encouraging continuous dialogue on the impacts and potential of multinational enterprises for sustainable development and the realization of decent work. It provides a reference framework for policy coherence and a coordinated approach for the promotion of responsible and sustainable business practices at the country level. Beyond the ACCEL Africa project duration, the ILO Helpdesk for Business remains a key reference and contact point for business on how to align their practices with principles of international labour standards and the MNE Declaration and advance decent work.