



GETTING CHILDREN OUT OF WORK AND INTO SCHOOL

COMBINING BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN STRATEGIES TO STOP CHILD LABOUR

Position paper for the Global Child Labour Conference in Argentina, Nov. 2017

Combining Bottom-Up and Top-Down Strategies to Stop Child Labour

Every child deserves a childhood. All children have the right to learn, play, and grow and are deprived of these rights when they are working. However, simply removing children from the workplace is not enough. Any meaningful action against child labour must be part of broader efforts to rehabilitate children and guarantee their fulltime education. Combating child labour is not only a labour issue, but also an issue for many others outside the 'world of work'.

It is crucial that all the forces that push children to work – social norms in favour of child labour, exclusion and discrimination, inadequate provision and quality of education, lack of decent work for adults, gender inequality and so forth – are addressed in order to create lasting change. They need to be approached with policies, strategies, and programmes both from the bottom-up and top-down.

Local communities, civil society organisations, and trade unions are often the initiators of bottom-up approaches to combat child labour. They not only work together towards freeing communities of child labour (more on this below), but also:

- Advocate for laws, policies, and programmes to ensure that all forms of child labour are banned, and every child enjoys her/his right to education in full-time formal schools at least until the age of fifteen. Furthermore, children between the ages of fifteen to eighteen should complete upper primary education and where possible receive secondary education and/or vocational training, or enter decent youth employment.
- Advocate and campaign on the eradication of child labour and engage and work with governments, companies, and individual employers to stop allowing or using child labour, and instead rehabilitate these children and make sure they are offered a viable alternative in the form of full-time formal education.

These efforts of local communities, civil society organisations and trade unions help to inform and give shape to more top-down policies and their implementation. Local, regional, and national governments as well as international actors are needed to realise systemic and sustainable change.

STOP CHILD LABOUR COALITION: FACTS AND FIGURES

The Stop Child Labour Coalition is an alliance of six Dutch NGOs and trade unions¹, working closely together with local organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

By working closely with local communities and community-based organisations, the SCL coalition has thus far been involved in creating 122 child labour free zones in India, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Ethiopia, Mali and Nicaragua. In the past five years, SCL withdrew more than 63,000 children from labour, and (re-)integrated them in the formal education system and/or prevented them from dropping out of school. Local and sometimes national governments are now using the same approach, and SCL is also working with companies in various sectors such as garments, natural stone and coffee.

Governments have a crucial role to play. It is their duty that basic systems and facilities are in place to ensure the realisation of every child's right to education and protection from work. This includes providing sufficient educational infrastructure and well-trained teachers, transitional education for 'late learners' (often ex-working children), and a well-functioning labour inspection. In addition to governments, a wide range of other actors - international organisations, companies and employer's organisations, multi-stakeholder initiatives, academics, faith-based and cultural institutions and many others - can complement the work of governments in combating child labour.

Bottom-up approach: creating child labour free zones

The main strategy for eradicating child labour is providing access to quality education for all children. Using a community-based approach has proven to be effective in getting children in a certain area out of work and (back) into school. Implementing this approach enables the creation of 'child labour free zones'. A child labour free zone is a specific area (village, neighbourhood, plantation etc.) where all stakeholders involved - community-based organisations, teachers, parents, children themselves, companies and local authorities - work together around the norm that 'no child should work - every child must be in school'. In a child labour free zone, every child not attending school is tracked and then sent to school. Within the schools themselves, every child is monitored to ensure they do not drop out and continue to receive quality education.

Child labour is a problem caused by various social, economic, and political factors. Contrary to popular belief, poverty is often not the decisive factor in pushing children into work and keeping them out of school. Child labour stems from many factors besides poverty, such as lack of access to education, traditional harmful practices, and failing labour inspections. Experience shows that, despite all the obstacles, people always want what is best for their children and are willing to act accordingly when given the opportunity.

¹ Stop Child Labour - School is the best place to work' is a coalition coordinated by Hivos. The coalition consists of the Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOB), Mondiaal FNV, Hivos, the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), ICCO Cooperation and Kerk in Actie, Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland. www.stopchildlabour.org / www.stopkinderarbeid.nl

When a community puts children at centre stage and rejects child labour, this new norm leads to many more positive developments:

- Children are seen, heard, valued and taken seriously, and their educational and career aspirations are supported.
- In the process of getting their children to school, parents demand quality education.
- Governments take responsibility for providing better educational services.
- Teachers reach out to working children and help them go (back) to school.
- Teachers are more motivated to keep children in school, leading to zero tolerance of dropouts.
- Employers find themselves convinced or pressured to stop using children and start hiring adults.
- Adults who no longer need to compete with children for jobs, are in a better position to demand higher wages and make more income.

It takes approximately three to five years to work towards a new child labour free zone, but once the approach has gained a foothold, it quickly gains momentum in nearby communities². Thus, the impact of the child labour free zone is twofold: governments can harness, strengthen, and standardise this approach as part of their wider anti-child labour and education policies, and individual stakeholders become agents for lasting change in their own homes and communities.

Top-down approach: the role of governments, businesses, and international organisations

While the above can primarily be seen as a bottom-up strategy where communities and local organisations take the lead, it is important to emphasise that local, regional and national governments are crucial to make this approach a systemic and sustainable success. This is slowly but surely happening in, for example, India where transitional education has become part of the Right to Education Act. This gives a former working child, who is too old to enrol in the first class, the option – through accelerated transitional education – of joining a class appropriate for his/her age so they finish primary education. In these cases, where the Act is put into practice, local organisations work closely with local village councils and government agencies. Also in some African countries, local organisations are engaging and cooperating with local, regional, and national authorities to create child labour free zones through the strengthening of local (school) systems.

² See also the recent (2017) external evaluation of Stop Child Labour: <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/successes-and-lessons-from-stop-child-labour-evaluation/>

OUT OF THE MINES: A CASE FROM MALI

Growing up in a small village in Mali, Soumba attended the local school. However, when she was fifteen years old, her parents decided that she should quit school and start earning money for the family. She started working in a nearby goldmine, where she carried heavy stone for ten hours a day. Her salary? One euro a day.

At the time, the Stop Child Labour related local organisation was developing a child labour free zone in the area and had set up a Stop Child Labour Club at her school. The school sent a few club members to visit the goldmine to persuade Soumba to come back to class. Her parents, however, were harder to convince. The family needed the money. Nevertheless, the club members persisted, explaining that an educated daughter was a better long-term investment for the family. Her parents started to realise that their friends and neighbours were all making sacrifices to keep their children in school, and that they should do the same for Soumba. In the end, the peer pressure had a positive effect. Soumba returned to school and graduated. The child labour free zone proved to be an enabling environment for parents and children to take decisions in favour of children's wellbeing.

Alongside the crucial role of national governments in combatting child labour, the role of and cooperation with international stakeholders – governments from importing countries, trade unions, companies, CSR initiatives and aid agencies – is also essential for creating a global and systemic impact. These stakeholders are increasingly, though still not sufficiently, interested in a community-based approach to tackle issues in ‘deeper supply chains’. They are looking for effective strategies to complement their own policies and efforts to implement human rights, including child rights.

Companies are not always aware that child labour exists in their supply chains, or they lack the expertise and local resources to properly address the issue. Hence, Stop Child Labour published an *‘Action plan for companies to combat child labour’*³, based on widely shared international norms such as the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. It requires time, effort and commitment from companies – as part of their due diligence process – to build a relationship of trust with community stakeholders. To date, several companies have joined child labour free zones facilitated by Stop Child Labour partners. In the zones, it is necessary to know local facts regarding the number of child labourers and form of work they perform, and to agree on what role each stakeholder will fulfil to eliminate the practise⁴.

International organisations such as ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO, FAO, and Education International all play a crucial role. ILO, as a tripartite organisation of governments, employers, and unions is leading the fight against child labour in the international arena. Closer cooperation of these actors with community-based organisations could reinforce or lead to institutional policies to mainstream a community-based approach to tackle child labour. Thus, while the bottom-up/community-based approach evidently helps to mobilise communities to demand the right to education for their children, the top-down approach – inspired and encouraged by the experiences ‘on the ground’ - can enforce the implementation of plans to effectively ban child labour through comprehensive education and social protection policies.

³ Action Plan for Companies to Combat Child Labour:
[http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/assets/2015/06/
actionplanchildlabour.pdf](http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/assets/2015/06/actionplanchildlabour.pdf)

⁴ See also: ‘Cooperating with the private sector in child labour free zones in Africa’: [http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/
cooperating-with-the-private-sector-in-child-labour-free-
zones-in-africa/](http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/cooperating-with-the-private-sector-in-child-labour-free-zones-in-africa/) and ‘Cooperating with the private sector in chil labour free zones in India’: [http://www.stopchildlabour.
eu/34035-2/](http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/34035-2/)

SUPPORTING COMPANIES TO ACT: A CASE FROM UGANDA

One of our successful corporate partnerships has resulted in a thriving child labour free zone in Uganda. In 2014, a major international coffee company came to Stop Child Labour because it acknowledged that child labour was an issue in the coffee sector, and was determined to undertake sustainable action towards its eradication. The company sourced its coffee from West Nile, a remote region in north-western Uganda where most local residents work on coffee farms. Knowing that child labour was a major problem in the area, the company asked SCL’s help to develop a child labour free zone in one West Nile parish. The SCL coalition was able to join forces with local NGOs to set up village committees, engage teachers’ unions, and improve the quality of education.

Meanwhile, the company received guidance on how to eradicate child labour in its own supply chain. Within two years, 500 children had quit harvesting coffee and returned to full time education. Today, the parish-area is seen as a model for others in the region. This example illustrates how multi-stakeholder initiatives, such as private-sector certification standards, can encourage corporations to include anti-child labour action in their policies and practices, while working with local NGOs to mobilise communities to promote bottom-up change. This double-edged strategy has proven effective for creating lasting change.

The pitfall of the quick fix

The case from Uganda runs contrary to the worrying way in which many companies deal with the issue of child labour in their supply chains. When confronted with child labour, companies tend to immediately cut ties with their supplier. A number of certification agencies reinforce this tendency by using the 'no child labour norm' to put sanctions on those producers and farmers that are 'caught' using child labour. In the Ugandan case, this initially led to hiding the problem instead of looking for a solution. Now the company and others involved have changed their mindset and work together to help children and their families to find viable alternatives.

In other cases, where companies push suppliers to 'just comply' on a pass or fail basis, children often disappear from the workplace without serious efforts to get them into school. Such 'quick-fix solutions' do not guarantee lasting change; if these children are not supported they can easily enter into other work. Systemic change will only happen when all actors start working together from the same social norm that 'no child should work – every child must be in school'. It is encouraging to notice a growing trend of certification agencies moving away from the pass/fail model towards proactively identifying child labour issues and addressing them. Many companies do still find this difficult though, as they fear a damaged reputation. However, some companies have taken that course, like the Ugandan coffee company and some companies working in the natural stone sector in Rajasthan, India. The latter even write about it on a dedicated website.⁵

Another positive development in The Netherlands are the so-called multi-stakeholder sector covenants where companies, sector associations, trade unions, NGOs and the Dutch government cooperate to implement the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Companies in, for example, the garment, banking and gold sectors. The garment sector covenant includes mandatory due diligence for companies and a complaint mechanism making binding decisions in cases where covenant members have violated rights.⁶

Time to scale up the bottom-up approach

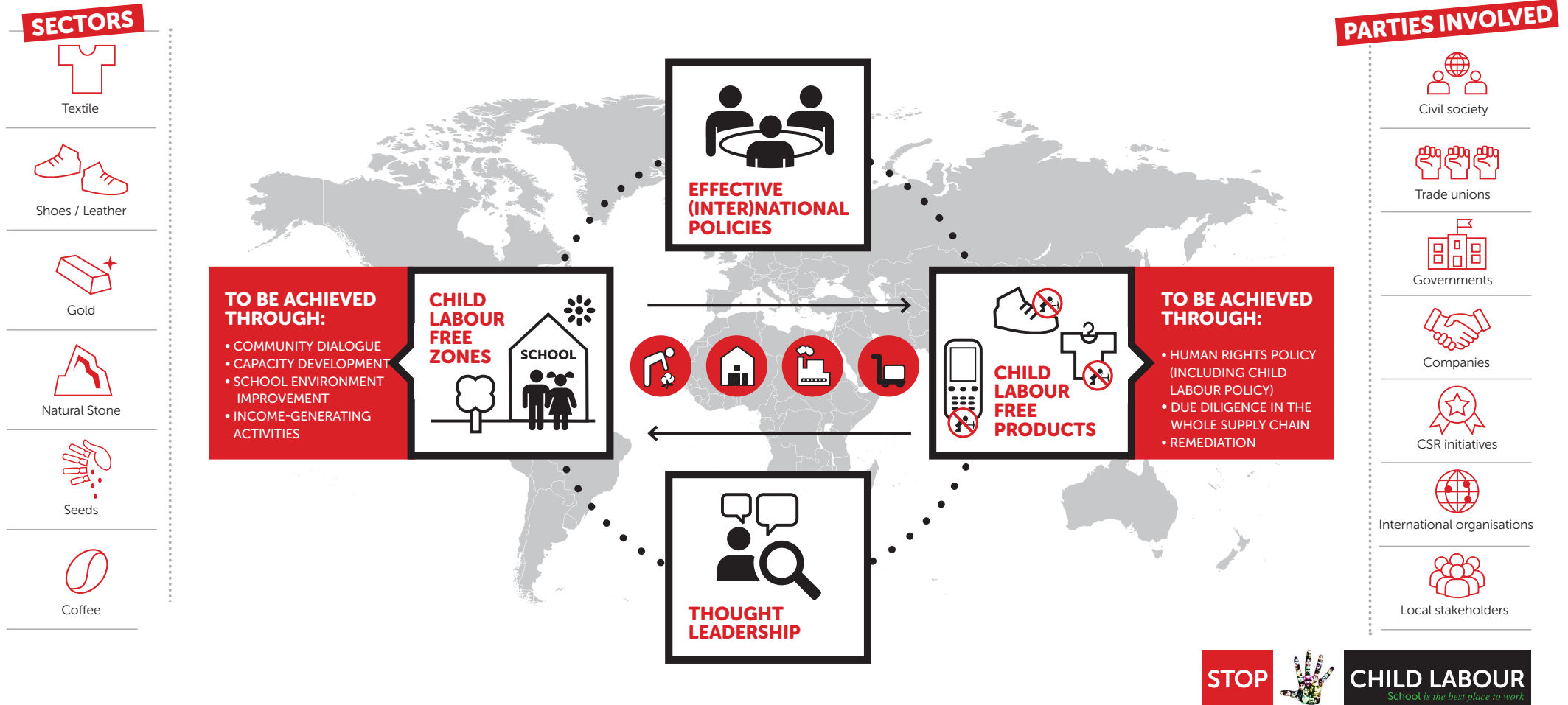
In April 2017, SCL commissioned an independent evaluation of our 'Out of Work and Into School' programme, which concluded that 'overall, the Stop Child Labour coalition has been very successful in effectively setting up child labour free zones around the world, thereby significantly reducing child labour and increasing school attendance.' This reinforced our conviction that now is the time to deepen and scale up these efforts. We are therefore actively seeking new opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.

As stated above, we are convinced that it takes a large variety of stakeholders to create a thriving child labour free zone and to mainstream its results in national policies and programmes. While the ILO serves as an umbrella organisation for connecting governments, employers and workers, we believe there is room for a more united voice complemented by civil society actors. In this regard the Alliance 8.7 is an important initiative. At the same time it is crucial to have more combined action at the policy-level and 'on the ground'. We hope that the Global Child Labour Conference will lead to fruitful new partnerships, which can help us strengthen our strategy and achieve greater impact.

⁵ See: <http://nochildleftbehind.co.uk/>

STOP CHILD LABOUR COALITION **THEORY OF CHANGE**

GOAL The total elimination of child labour and the provision of formal quality education for all



Recommendations

Based on experiences and lessons learnt we would like to submit a number of recommendations to the Global Child Labour Conference in Argentina, November 2017. We hope they will be taken up by all relevant stakeholders to strengthen global, national, and local initiatives in our joint fight against child labour.

1. A lot of ILO's work prior to 2016 – including most project work – has focussed on the worst forms of child labour, in line with the global goal to eradicate these forms by 2016. We know this goal has not been achieved and has been replaced by the goal to end all child labour in 2025. It is now of crucial importance to further develop comprehensive strategies and programmes focussed on all forms of child labour, and directly link this to providing formal, full-time, and quality education. The 'Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016' adopted by the participants at The Hague Global Child Labour Conference 2010, already stated in its preamble that "action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour is most effective and sustainable when it is situated within action to eliminate all child labour, including through area-based and sector-based programmes". In addition, tackling hazardous child labour in the age group between fifteen and eighteen should receive more attention combined with efforts to provide continued education and/or vocational training and create decent youth employment.
2. Structural long-term financial support, to both community-based and governmental programmes, is needed if 'upscaling from bottom to top and vice versa' is to be achieved. This two-way approach involves local community mobilisation and organisation, as well as a strong role by local and national authorities, to embed this in broader labour, education, and social protection policies and programmes.
3. Civil society organisations should be more explicitly recognised as essential partners in the fight against child labour. The ILO can consider more systematically involving and making use of their experiences. Their roles vary from implementing area and sector based approaches, lobbying with governments to improve and implement legislation, and researching on and engaging with the private sector on child labour. A more formalised recognition of these roles by the ILO – without calling the tripartite structure of the ILO into question - as well as more cooperation at various levels, would be very useful.
4. Combating child labour by companies requires much more than just removing children from the workplace. It also involves a responsibility to rehabilitate them and get them into school. Too often, joint industry and multi-stakeholder initiatives still use a pass/fail model of compliance. NGOs should be careful not to evoke such a short-cut reaction of companies and instead encourage sustainable solutions, such as encouraging transparency on the problem and developing a time-bound action plan. All stakeholders in supply chain issues – be they governments, international organisations, or civil society – should make sure that efforts to eradicate child labour are combined with access to quality education and other forms of prevention and remediation, including social protection measures and labour inspection.

⁶ See: https://www.internationalrbc.org/garments-textile?sc_lang=en

5. Companies should – based on international agreements like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – also work on the realisation of other labour rights in their supply chain, such as freedom of association, collective bargaining, and decent wages. Often, however, this does not happen. In specific programmes, of both companies and NGOs, the focus is often only on child labour. This can be a strategic choice to start with, but it is of crucial importance to also address issues like paying fair prices to local producers and paying living wages to employees. This is part of the strategy to improve the lives of parents, which in turn also benefits their children.
6. Child labour free and fair public procurement by government agencies, municipalities and also other (often government funded) institutional buyers like hospitals and schools, could be a very important driving force against child labour and for decent work. However, due to lacking policies and/or legislation on the issue and existing competition laws, child labour free public procurement is far from being a standard practice for government agencies. State governments, but also international agencies, should acknowledge fair and child labour free procurement as an important instrument in working towards a child labour free world.
7. Governments should reflect on their present laws on child labour, education, and labour rights to make sure that all forms of the practise are prohibited, that formal education is in place for all children at least up to the age of fifteen, and provide maximum possibilities to fully or partly continue their education at least until there are eighteen. Where the implementation of present laws is lacking, it should be a priority to ensure that they are implemented. But also in countries that are importing products of child labour – partly overlapping with countries with labour - , due diligence legislation should be considered making it mandatory for companies to combat child labour (and possibly human rights abuses) in their full supply chain and be transparent about its results. The Dutch draft Child Labour Due Diligence Law⁷ is an example of such legislation.

⁷ See: <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-new-dutch-child-labour-due-diligence-law/> and <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/child-labour-due-diligence-law-for-companies-adopted-by-dutch-parliament/>

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