

## Doing certification differently: an example from Uganda

### Situation before



In West Nile, a remote region in the Northwestern corner of Uganda, many families are poor and some parents do not see the relevance of schooling being illiterate themselves. Consequently, too many children do not go to school or drop out of school somewhere during the year. They then work on the family farm, do household chores, look after younger children or are sent to the market.

In a large part of West Nile, coffee is the main cash crop. Almost every family grows 0.5 – 1 acre of coffee. The coffee income takes care of the large(r) financial needs of the family: a new roof, a solar panel or even a new house. Farmers sell their coffee to local traders or directly to some international coffee exporters that have local buying units in the area.

### A CLFZ in the coffee value chain

In 2014, one of the international coffee exporters started a farmer support programme in West Nile to assist households to improve coffee production and to certify the purchased volumes under the international UTZ standard. During the first year, the field staff observed quite a number of households that were facing issues of child labour. This posed a challenge for UTZ certification. The company decided not to hide the child labour cases, but to look for a solution.



With assistance from Hivos/Stop Child Labour and supported by UTZ, the company worked together with CEFORD, a regional NGO, and UNATU, the Ugandan Teacher Union to develop a Child Labour Free Zone (CLFZ) in one parish in West Nile. In the CLFZ, CEFORD is responsible for building community relations, setting up village committees to fight child labour and Village Saving and Loan Associations; UNATU is responsible for interventions improving the quality of the schools in the area; and the coffee company is responsible for identification and remediation of child labour with member households.

## Reasons for success

The West Nile CLFZ has become a huge success. Within 2 years around 500 children have returned to school and the CLFZ is used as an example on how MNCs and certification standards can form an entry point to practically combat child labour in an agricultural value chain together with local partners. There are several reasons for this success.

Firstly, even though all implementing partners come from different backgrounds, they all bring the same message to the community: children have to be in school. This has intensified community engagement. Secondly, the social, educational and economic approaches used by the implementing partners complimented each other: the NGO involves local leaders, the teacher union engages students, while the coffee company trains households to increase (coffee) income. Thirdly, working with a private sector certification scheme ensures continued support and follow-up by field staff after specific funding for the CLFZ has come to an end. The coffee company benefits through increased loyalty of its farmers and having gained respect in the community.



## Some things to think about

The CLFZ in West Nile has brought out some aspects that need to be taken into consideration when working in an agricultural value chain. Firstly, for MNCs and certification standards working on child labour – without hiding the issue - presents a possible reputation risk. Donors and partners should be aware of this sensitivity and act accordingly, locally, nationally and internationally. Secondly, child labour definitions are rather general. Partners need to agree on a local, simple and workable interpretation of what is child labour and what is not. Thirdly, setting up a water-tight monitoring and evaluation system to track hundreds to thousands of children is not easy. Different organisations have different entry points (head of household; student, teachers) and different operational areas, names are spelled in several ways and some names are very common.



## Future

MNCs working in agricultural value chains source their products from a large number of farmers. A CLFZ that covers one parish may only cover a small percentage of their operational area. In the next years, the partners in West Nile will therefore experiment with and compare the (cost) efficiencies of high, medium and low intensity approaches to stop child labour in agricultural value chains.