



Photo: Courtesy of LWESO

Young graduates in Uganda receiving tool kits during World Day Against Child Labour in June 2015

## Tackling child labour in tobacco

Despite having only eight employees, the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT) has helped withdraw more than 22,000 children from child labour since its launch in 2002. After 14 years and 26 projects, TJI finds out how this relatively small organisation goes about tackling such a large problem.

**T**oday, some 168 million children are engaged in child labour. According to data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 59 per cent of them are involved in labour in the agricultural sector.

With tobacco still a major cash crop grown in 124 countries and tobacco growing employing around 40 million people worldwide, it is unsurprising that child labour continues to be a problem in tobacco-growing nations. According to a US Department of Labour report, 16 countries use child labour in the production of tobacco. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the

highest incidence of child labour. A 2008 study in Malawi, the seventh largest producer of tobacco in the world, showed that 63 per cent of children in tobacco growing families were engaged in child labour.

There are numerous reasons for the prevalence of child labour in tobacco-growing nations. These range from household poverty to low awareness and lack of targeted legislation. "In many countries where tobacco is grown, the political and social structures designed to protect children and prevent child labour are lacking," Sonia Velazquez, executive director of

ECLT, told TJI. "From a legal standpoint, international child labour policies can be used as standards, but agriculture is excluded from labour legislation by some countries, or lower minimum age requirements for agricultural work may be set."

Access to education is another problem. "Schools may be hard to reach or families may not have the means to send their children to school," Velazquez said. "As a result, many children grow up involved in labour and without education. Because of health issues, for example HIV-AIDS in Africa, children may become orphans and act as heads of ►



Photos: ECLT Foundation

Village Savings and Loan Association meeting for first savings (Uganda)

households from an early age, adding to the prevalence of child labour.” Set up in 2002, ECLT is a partnership of farmers and companies dedicated to protecting children by tackling the root causes of the problem. Through

projects and advocacy work, the organisation works to advance research, improve situations faced by children and families, and strengthen policies so that tobacco-growing communities benefit from agriculture while ensuring

that their children are healthy, educated, and safe.

Although ECLT employs only eight people in its secretariat in Geneva, the Foundation engages with multiple stakeholders, including members, national governments and international organisations to help achieve its goals. “Because child labour is a complex issue, it needs to be addressed in a way that strategically engages the key participants in the tobacco growing supply chain. This means efforts that involve many levels and actors from governments and international organisations working with policy, to trade unions, tobacco companies and farmers, down to tobacco-growing communities, and children themselves,” Velazquez said. It is, she says, this strategic, multi-stakeholder structure, coupled with a comprehensive focus on the causes of child labour at local, regional, national, and international levels, that makes the Foundation unique and allows for maximum impact.

ECLT’s impact so far has been considerable. According to Velazquez, over 22,000 children have been withdrawn from child labour as a result of its efforts. In 2014 alone, the work of the ECLT Foundation directly benefited more than 500,000 families in tobacco-growing communities.

### Spotlight on: PROSPER Project, Tanzania

ECLT’s PROSPER project, which ran from 2011 to 2015, aimed to eliminate child labour in the Urambo and Sikonge Districts and the Tabora Region in Tanzania.

ECLT project activities included:

- ▶ training 20 volunteers and organizing 20 village child labour committees
- ▶ identifying and monitoring 7,800 children and referring them to other services, such as education, and various PROSPER activities
- ▶ improving access to education by providing family support scholarships and after-school learning opportunities
- ▶ improving access to basic social services such as health, water and sanitation through infrastructure development
- ▶ implementing awareness-raising activities on child labour and children’s rights at community, district, and national levels
- ▶ promoting education, hazard awareness and the elimination of child labour through a national and district media and advocacy campaign
- ▶ providing older working children with vocational agriculture training so they can develop alternative ways to earn income
- ▶ providing mothers and guardians with small loans and business skills training

What do the preliminary results show?

- ▶ In Sikonge, child labour declined from 24.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent
- ▶ In Urambo, child labour declined from 21.6 per cent to 1.8 per cent
- ▶ The Kaliua district did not exist during the project baseline survey however, the prevalence of child labour is at 1.8 per cent in the treatment group compared to 13 per cent in the control group
- ▶ The overall rate of child labour in all three districts has also declined: by 54.4 per cent to 34.2 per cent in Sikonge and from 56.4 per cent to 19.8 per cent in Urambo

### Activities at local level

A main facet of ECLT’s work is funding projects in nations with high rates of child labour. With the help of current implementing partners like Save the Children, Winrock International and the Uganda Women’s Effort to save Orphans (UWESO) the organisation has carried out 26 such projects since its founding. Currently underway are projects in Malawi, Tanzania, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Zambia, Mozambique and Uganda.

“All ECLT projects have a comprehensive approach including the strategic objectives: withdrawal, education, awareness, strengthening communities, and alleviating poverty,” Velazquez explained.

Identifying the reasons for the persistence of child labour in a particular area is the first step to combatting it. Child labour is often linked to a lack of

access to clean water as children are sent to collect water from many miles away rather than being sent to school. In these cases, ECLT projects may involve building wells or facilitating other ways for local people to have a nearby source of water. Other efforts may include building schools or renovating classrooms in rural communities with limited access to educational facilities.

ECLT projects also work towards changing the attitudes of parents or individual farmers. "In many rural communities, people believe that having children help their parents work is a good practice. They do not realise that this help may be child labour and that it can be harmful," Velazquez said. "Though parents want what's best for their children, changing attitudes is not always easy. A variety of tools are used. Drama groups, radio messages, peer group pressure and role modelling are useful tools to get the message across to communities. For individual farmers, it is about consultation, explanation and clarification of the laws, rules and policies around child labour, and agreeing on a remediation plan to ensure that child labour is not used in future," she said. "Local traditional leadership is always supportive of child protection, and this can be called upon if a farmer is continually using children to do hazardous work."

Poverty is often part of what causes child labour. ECLT projects therefore include "livelihood components" to support parents and households where children have been withdrawn from labour to prevent the deterioration of the household economic status. Initiatives include conditional and microloans to mothers and farmers; village savings and loans associations; business training and the promotion of better agriculture practices.

"These all contribute to improved livelihood, so that households have more ways to generate additional income and keep their children in school and out of child labour," said Velazquez.

The sustainability of its efforts is very important to ECLT. The team works to ensure the changes it makes are meaningful and lasting using an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation. According to Velazquez, ECLT has also recently enhanced its project model to

ensure greater stakeholder involvement to sustain efforts after project completion. "Increasingly, staff of the local tobacco companies collaborate with the projects for mutual learning and effectiveness," she said.

### Activities at national level

In addition to implementing specific projects, the ECLT team works with governments, advocating strong national action plans to address child labour and its root causes. A recent example of this was the conference entitled "Pathways to Sustainability: Together We Can Eradicate Child Labour in Agriculture" convened by the government of Tanzania last year.

"The conference was the fruit of months of close preparation," Velazquez said. "It brought together more than 120 participants including key representatives from national and international stakeholders in agriculture." These included the Tanzanian Minister of Labour and Employment, representatives of the private sector, trade unions, the ILO and the ECLT Foundation and its implementing partner, Winrock International. "The result was a document which will guide the Ministry of Labour and other leading organisations to review the National Action Plan and reaffirm government leadership in achieving agricultural productivity without child labour, as well as actions to build thriving rural communities," Velazquez told TJI.

### Activities at international level

ECLT also works with a number of international organisations to develop initiatives which will contribute to the elimination of child labour. A current example of this is the organisation's partnership with the ILO to develop global guidance on the nature and conditions of hazardous child labour in tobacco growing. "The goal of this joint effort is to provide specific, research-based guidance on various aspects of occupational safety and health in tobacco growing, including preventing hazardous child labour," Velazquez explained.

Through its projects, ECLT already trains smallholder farmers in workplace safety and health risk assessment and gives them a tool with which to make safety and health improvements on their farms. Problems related to hazardous child labour extend beyond ECLT's target nations, however. Last year, the US faced criticism about the laxity of its laws regarding the employment of children on tobacco farms. According to ECLT, the global guidance will promote tripartite action to ensure that children do not perform work that is deemed hazardous. It will also support decent employment opportunities for young people between the minimum working age and the age of 18.

### Role of the tobacco industry

Although an independent organisation, ECLT is governed by board advisors and members, many of whom represent the corporate tobacco sector. These include BAT, Philip Morris International, Imperial Tobacco, JTI, Alliance One and Universal Corporation.

The Board of Directors focuses on the organisation's effectiveness and retains the right to dismiss any member for taking actions that are in opposition to ECLT's goals.

Financial contributions made by its members, (amounting to just over USD 6 million – EUR 5.5 million – per annum for the past two years) make up the majority of ECLT's funding.

According to the Foundation, efforts specifically within the tobacco industry have increased in recent years.

A Pledge of Commitment to eliminate child labour in tobacco signed by ECLT Foundation Board Members in September 2014 marked significant progress. Based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights "Protect, Respect, and Remedy" Framework, this pledge affirmed members' sector-wide commitment, not limited to any specific country. "The pledge was to uphold robust policy on child labour, minimum requirements on tackling child labour, and implementation consistent with the UN's Guiding Principles, and is applicable to operations in countries of all



Mothers' group in Malawi takes part in community contribution towards construction of school block for their children in Ntchisi 2014

### Spotlight on: CLEAR Project, Malawi (2011–2015)

ECLT's CLEAR project, which ran from 2011 to 2015, aimed to eliminate child labour in tobacco-growing areas in the Ntchisi, Mchinji and Rumphi Districts of Malawi.

#### Prevalence of child labour in target areas:

In Malawi, over 1.4 million children are estimated to be in child labour. In 2011, child labour in the district of Mchinji was at 87.1 per cent. In the tobacco growing sector, it was at 54 per cent. In Ntchisi, it was at 91.1 per cent overall and 55 per cent in tobacco growing. In Rumphi, child labour was at 93.3 per cent and 39.8 per cent in tobacco growing

#### ECLT project activities included:

- ▶ identifying and registering children engaged in child labour and withdrawing them sustainably
- ▶ providing financial support to families to ensure that children can attend the nearest primary schools
- ▶ constructing and renovating classrooms with a special focus on water and sanitation
- ▶ providing children with meals and basic health care (such as de-worming and vitamin supplements) at school to improve students' performance by ensuring that they are not hungry or sick
- ▶ providing professional development for teachers, and vocational training for children who have dropped out or are working legally
- ▶ engaging communities in identifying and eliminating child labour and advocating for policies that support the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP)
- ▶ training teachers, other professionals and volunteers to show parents, farmers, and children the link between eliminating child labour and obtaining an education and achieving economic improvement.

#### What do the preliminary results show?

- ▶ child labour in tobacco growing was reduced by between 16.64 per cent and 53.6 per cent in the three CLEAR districts
- ▶ 1,485 children were withdrawn from child labour
- ▶ a further 11,272 were prevented from engaging in child labour
- ▶ more than 30,000 people were reached with awareness messages
- ▶ 669 Village and Savings Loans Association (VSLA) groups with 15,966 members were formed. (By the end of the project in 2015, these groups had saved over USD300,000)
- ▶ school attendance increased in all CLEAR districts during project implementation (by 4.3 per cent, 9.6 per cent and 4.9 per cent for Mchinji, Ntchisi, and Rumphi respectively)

levels of economic development," Velazquez said.

### How to get involved

The Foundation says it is open to discussing how to make a difference with any organisation working in the tobacco sector, companies who supply parts or products as well as employees and supporters who would like to be more involved in ECLT's work. Extensive resources and information on ECLT and its projects can be found at [www.eclt.org](http://www.eclt.org).

### What does the future hold?

Despite the Foundation's success so far, the problem of child labour in tobacco growing remains significant. In the hope of eventually eliminating it altogether, ECLT says it will continue to build on its years of experience and promote new developments like the Global agenda 2030 and its 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (which include the eradication of child labour as a priority). In addition to this, it will continue to encourage strong and strategic commitments from all stakeholders, especially in key target countries like Malawi and Tanzania. The organisation is currently working towards the IV Global Child Labour Conference in Argentina in 2017. This conference will draw from existing material as well as gather new information, engaging experts in academia as well as the tobacco and other sectors.

ECLT also plans to start operations in Indonesia, the fifth largest tobacco growing nation in the world, in 2016. "Consultations with the government, farmers, tobacco companies and other stakeholders are ongoing," Velazquez told TJI. So what will it take for child labour in tobacco growing to be eradicated altogether? "We must continue to spread good practices and work together across sectors, levels and areas, working progressively to eliminate child labour by attacking its complicated root causes," Velazquez said. "Together is the only way forward towards eliminating child labour."

Sophie Bullen