

IMPACT IN KYRGYZSTAN

Policy Brief

Agriculture is one of the most important economic sectors in Kyrgyzstan, employing about 30% of the total workforce and contributing to 20% of its GDP, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In recent years, tobacco production has consistently decreased, reaching just 4,400 tonnes in 2014 – an amount far lower than the country's three main crops: potatoes (1.3 million tonnes), wheat (570,000 tonnes), and maize (560,000 tonnes).



FAR TOO MANY CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR ACROSS THE GLOBE

152 MILLION CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are still 152 million children engaged in child labour throughout the world, with the majority (72%) of child labourers found in various agriculture sectors, including farming, fishing, forestry, and livestock. In many countries, specifically in rural areas, this problem is exacerbated by widespread poverty, instability, low levels of education, and a deficit of decent work opportunities.

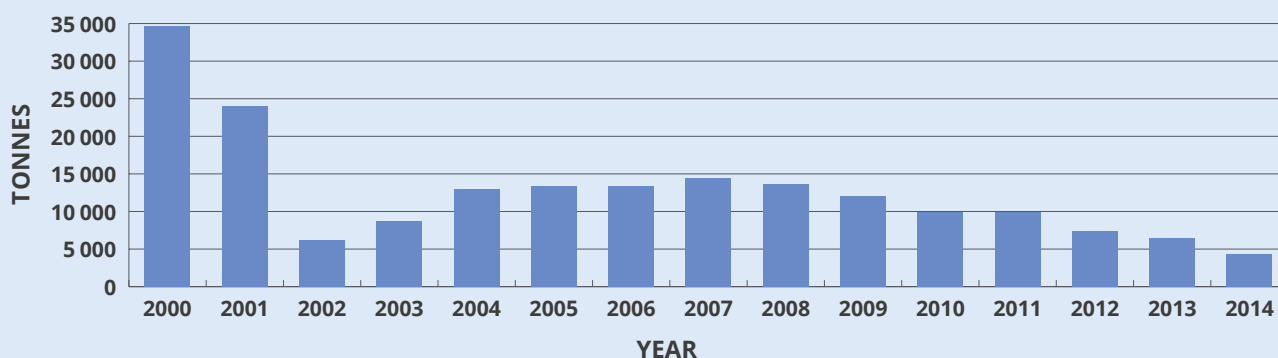
Employing approximately 40 million workers worldwide, tobacco growing is an important agricultural sub-sector and continues to be an inherent part of the history, culture, and livelihood of many societies. Addressing the

root causes and overcoming the complex problem of child labour in tobacco agriculture has been the primary concern of the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT) for more than 15 years.

AN END TO LARGE-SCALE TOBACCO SOURCING IN KYRGYZSTAN

In Kyrgyzstan, tobacco production has steadily decreased since the fall of the Soviet Union. In 2014, industry sources estimated that 4,500 farmers were growing tobacco – just 10% of the total number of farmers that were growing the crop in 2003. According to the FAO, tobacco production in Kyrgyzstan fell from 34,600 tonnes in 2000 to 4,400 in 2014 (-87%).

TOBACCO PRODUCTION IN KYRGYZSTAN



In 2015, tobacco companies in Kyrgyzstan stopped sourcing tobacco from Kyrgyz farmers due to a decrease in global demand and a frozen domestic market.

Suddenly, thousands of farmers, who relied on such tobacco for their livelihoods, were forced to consider the possibility of an economic transition from growing tobacco to growing other kinds of crops. However, the ensuing economic transition did not alleviate the problem of child labour; children still work in the fields to cultivate other crops. Today, UNESCO estimates that 400,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14 (34%) are involved in child labour in Kyrgyzstan, mainly in agriculture (99%).

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

Since January 2005, ECLT has implemented 5 projects in the Nookat and Alabuka Districts (southwestern Kyrgyzstan) to address child labour in tobacco-growing communities. It focused on poverty alleviation to lift families out of poverty and prevent them from using child labour. It supported farmers to create or join cooperatives to share agricultural machinery and good practices.

13 YEARS FIGHTING CHILD LABOUR IN KYRGYZSTAN

ECLT's involvement in the elimination of child labour in Kyrgyzstan started in 2003, when the Agricultural Workers Union reported the widespread use of child labour in agriculture, including in tobacco growing: children were picking, stringing, and sorting leaves, and weeding and transplanting tobacco shoots. The first ECLT project was launched in January 2005.

According to the 2007 National Child Labour Survey, school attendance rates remain very high – 98.9% for children ages 7 to 14 – but do not prevent children from being involved in child labour outside of school hours. The Kyrgyzstan project primarily aimed to address child labour by providing microloans to vulnerable households in tobacco-growing areas and supporting the organization of cooperatives to alleviate poverty.

PHASE 1 (2005-2007): In the Nookat and Alabuka Districts, the project provided loans to vulnerable farmers, furniture to schools, and rehabilitated school canteens.

PHASE 2 (2007-2009): 352 children benefited from summer camps and 280 families were lifted out of poverty through microloans.

PHASE 3 (2010-2012): 11 professional training courses were introduced in schools to teach hairdressing, carpentry, tailoring, and cooking. The project supported 903 low-income families through microcredits and established 93 mutual aid groups, each consisting of 6 to 10 families. The project also formed 3 cooperatives and provided them with technical loans for the purchase of agricultural machinery.

PHASE 4 (2013-2015): Implementation areas were expanded to include one rural community (Too-Moyun) in the Aravan District (Osh Province), and another one (Markaz) in the Kadamjay District (Batken Province), bringing interventions to 8 rural communities overall. The project continued supporting mutual aid groups with microloans, creating cooperatives, providing vocational training to youths, taking children to summer camps, and other flagship interventions.





Children celebrating World Day against Child Labour (June 12)

In 2017, an independent study was conducted to assess ECLT's approach and impact between 2005 and 2015. It reported a reduction of child labour prevalence in tobacco growing, an improvement of farmers' purchasing power thanks to microcredits, and a better understanding of children's rights and the dangers of child labour by children themselves and the communities.

SINCE 2013 AND THROUGH ECLT'S WORK AND PARTNERSHIPS



I think that this is a very successful project, because the default rate of microloans is very low and 100% of microloan receivers are re-paying. Such microloans, which were intended to support poor families, are very important. The most important condition under which one can get a microloan involved an agreement not to use child labour in tobacco growing. Personally, for me this project seems very interesting and it must be studied, and the outcomes must be institutionalized by the Government of Kyrgyz Republic."



Taalaikul Isakunova, Kyrgyz Minister of Labour and Social Development



10,370 CHILDREN were withdrawn from labour and enrolled in school



1,200 CHILDREN benefited from after-school programmes



1,900 TEENAGERS have graduated from vocational training



18,200 PEOPLE were trained on child labour issues



4,900 PARENTS have benefited from microloans



US\$2.5 MILLION invested in Kyrgyzstan to fight child labour since 2005



SUPPORTING FARMERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO ADDRESS THE TOBACCO TRANSITION

TRANSITIONING FROM TOBACCO TO OTHER CROPS

As a consequence of the departure of tobacco companies from Kyrgyzstan, farmers had to reduce their tobacco fields and/or grow other crops. However, other crops are often less lucrative than tobacco and their prices are volatile.

Some solutions have demonstrated to be helpful for farmers in addressing the tobacco transition. Some support has also proved to strengthen their resilience.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS: The farmers themselves have made practical changes, like crop diversification, sometimes while still continuing to grow tobacco and harvesting it together with other farmers.

TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS: Farmers have formed cooperatives to share agricultural equipment, good practices, and their workforce.

FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS: Microloans gave farmers the cash they needed to invest in new equipment and other inputs, such as fertilizers or seeds, to grow different crops.

EDUCATIONAL SOLUTIONS: Building farmers' knowledge of child labour issues and improving their capacity to manage finances helps farmers better use their resources without resorting to using children for fieldwork.



SUCCESS STORY

REDUCING CHILD LABOUR AND IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS THROUGH LOANS AND MECHANISATION

Aizada Salieva, 62, lives in Kadamjay District in Kyrgyzstan. When she was raising her 6 kids, education was not of paramount importance.

“They often missed school, and even if they did not miss classes, they could not do home tasks simply because they were tired from working in the fields. At that time, it seemed to me that the sooner the kids learned how to work in the fields, and earn themselves money, the better they could learn to sustain themselves,” she says.

Since 2013, and with the help of the ECLT project, Aizada and other farmers created a mutual aid group to receive microcredit. Although individual, microcredits are given as part of a collective agreement and with a condition of non-use of child labour in tobacco growing. If only one member uses child labour and/or does not repay the loan, all members lose their loans.

“Thanks to the project, we have significantly increased the family income. Through the training seminars, I developed my business skills; it was during one of them that I learned the project also supports cooperatives.”

Aizada joined the Toguz-Bulak cooperative and gave it a second life through receiving a technical loan from the ECLT project to buy two second hand agricultural tractors. Sustainable mechanisation – the use of appropriate equipment for farmers – not only makes agricultural production more effective, it is also an effective method for eliminating the worst forms of child labour in agriculture.



A TWO-YEAR SUSTAINABILITY PHASE TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOUR

Transition not only affects farmers, but communities as a whole. It can severely destabilise a community and stop its development. To continue addressing broader issues regarding child labour in agriculture, and to support former tobacco farmers' crop diversification efforts, a two-year sustainability phase was put into place, starting in January 2016 and running until the end of 2017.

In 2016, 286 children enjoyed summer camps, which helped prevent them from working during the long summer holidays. ECLT also supported the enrolment of 602 teenagers in vocational trainings designed to help them find decent work opportunities in various professions. Through close collaboration with the ILO Country Office, the ECLT project facilitated a training of 234 people on the ILO-based Child Labour Monitoring System. The project also assessed and strengthened the capacities of cooperatives, which often improve income by saving costs through the sharing of adult labour, tools, and equipment, and which allow for the negotiation of better prices. As shown in the following success story, cooperatives promote mechanisation, which enables them to keep children off the fields and provide space for discussions on the replacement of tobacco with new crops.

THE WAY FORWARD

Transitioning from tobacco to less lucrative crops has been tough. Collaboration is needed to make the transition as smooth as possible. Agronomy-based research, adapted to local realities, is needed to examine optimal substitute crops, farm inputs (including seeds), and ways to mechanise production so farmers can be given fact-based suggestions leading to high yields and low production costs.

The ECLT Foundation is committed to supporting a multi-stakeholder approach in developing a targeted study in the region to provide answers and guidance to these farmers as they transition from tobacco production to other economically viable crops.

In Kyrgyzstan, tobacco production has steadily decreased in recent years, due to declining international demand:

- **hear** the voice of farmers as they discuss the challenges and solutions of navigating through this difficult transition;
- **understand** the complexities of this issue and its repercussions at the local level; and
- **join us** and learn more about what is required to empower farmers in overcoming challenges to their livelihoods that are beyond their control.

Watch our mini-documentary on our YouTube Channel (ECLT Foundation)





THE ECLT FOUNDATION

Created in 2000, the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation is a global leader in preventing child labour in tobacco agriculture, and improving the lives of children in tobacco-growing areas. The Foundation brings together the stakeholders of the tobacco supply chain, including its largest group, the growers, along with leaf suppliers and manufacturers, to leverage impact. With the adoption of the Pledge of Commitment and Minimum Requirements on combatting child labour by member companies in 2014, ECLT continuously promotes and advances responsible business practices that are in line with international standards.

The ECLT Foundation strengthens communities, globally advocates for improved policies, and advances research so that tobacco-growing communities can benefit from agriculture and ensure health, education and safe working environments for their children.

**WITH OUR PARTNERS, WE ARE COMMITTED
TO PROGRESSIVELY ELIMINATING CHILD LABOUR
IN TOBACCO GROWING COMMUNITIES
TO MAKE CHILDREN'S LIVES BETTER**




GET IN TOUCH

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