

Regional initiative to combat the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms

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1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Belgian Government asked the SWAC/OECD Secretariat to coordinate a regional initiative on the issue of combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms. Over the last 10 years this issue has generated very strong international¹ and domestic West African mobilisation, and programmes and initiatives carried out have obtained considerable results. In particular, the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are strongly involved.

This initiative carried out within the framework of the SWAC/OECD aims to build upon these existing experiences and promote a complementary regional child labour approach. The SWAC Secretariat set-up a Task Force, composed of the main actors involved in combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms², to discuss the initiative's value added and propose concrete ways for follow-up activities.

The 1st Task Force meeting reviewed the conclusions of a desk study [SWAC/D(2009)14] examining the broad regional context of child labour and the myriad of programmes and activities underway. The study analysed: the structural and regional dimensions of the problem; the current situation of (regional) political dialogue; actors and programmes and their approaches, results and level of coordination. The ensuing discussions centred on the initiative's objectives and the proposals for follow-up activities.

2. OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

2.1 Definitions and terminology

The participants agreed to use the definitions of child labour and worst forms of child labour as set out by the ILO conventions 138 (minimum age) and 182 (worst forms of child labour). These are widely accepted and provide for sufficient flexibility in terms of adaptation to local socio-cultural contexts.

The term "farms" is to be used in English wording (*exploitations* in French), which better takes into account realities on the ground, i.e. small-scale and traditional farming practices.

2.2 The pertinence of the "cocoa approach"

The problem of child labour in West Africa is a complex and widespread issue and has to be viewed within the general context of the future of youth, poverty and economic development. The use and abuse of child labour occurs in all economic sectors and activities. However, the large majority of child labour in West Africa is in agriculture (60-80%). The phenomenon is witnessed in many agricultural activities such as pineapple, banana and cotton farming, and does not only concern the cocoa sector. The analyses and programmes undertaken on the cocoa sector confirm that child labour is not a sectoral problem and that many cross-sectoral dimensions have to be included. These range from legal aspects, community level dynamics, and failures of educational systems to purely economic aspects. However, there are strong

¹ Notably GTZ, ILO, UNICEF, US Government-led initiative (the Harkin-Engel Protocol), cocoa industry coalitions (*International Cocoa Initiative, World Cocoa Foundation*), etc.

² For Task Force members see annex.

justifications for continuing with the sectoral approach cocoa. Over the last years these programmes and initiatives combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms have obtained considerable progress, often with more rapidity than in other sectors. This underlines the fact that the cocoa approach can provide an efficient entry to target the problem on a broad basis³. The specificity of the cocoa sector in combating the worst forms of child labour can be explained by:

- ▶ its dominant economic position in the region (in particular in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) and consequently strong political leverage;
- ▶ the direct associations many people, in particular consumers, have with the cocoa sector;
- ▶ the strong international involvement – public and private (also due to people's direct association).

The progress achieved and lessons learnt in the cocoa sector provide a solid basis with which to develop a regional West African initiative on the broad child labour problem. Also, the cocoa sector's cross-border and regional features can serve as a strong leverage to integrate the regional level.

2.3 The relevance of a regional approach

The regional dimensions and cross-border features of the West African cocoa sector are a key element in favour of promoting a complementary regional approach in combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms. The regional dimensions of the cocoa sector are geographic: all main cocoa production basins being cross-border – transnational in nature and also economic; accounting for 46% of West Africa's agricultural exports. These characteristics explain that production methods, social structures and broader socio-economic contexts are similar across countries.

In addition, some of the issues related to child labour have a clear regional context, such as child trafficking. This issue can only effectively be tackled by designing regional strategies.

To effectively address the regional dimensions of combating the worst forms of child labour, regional institutions, in particular ECOWAS (and ECCAS), but also UEMOA and CILSS should be involved. However, until today, regional actors are absent from most strategies and programmes combating the worst forms of child labour. The absence of a coordinated regional approach is also a handicap to the many efforts at national level aimed at combating child trafficking.

The Task Force members confirmed that the particular value added of this initiative carried out within the framework of the OECD's Sahel and West Africa Club is its regional approach. The development of a complementary regional approach to combating child labour in West Africa will:

- Promote capitalisation of experiences and best-practices developed in some countries;
- Promote broad progress in countries of the region that so far lag behind;
- Facilitate political dialogue and avoid stigmatisation of individual countries;

³ Some broad progress on child labour issues can already today be linked to the "cocoa dimension" such as the acceleration in ratification of international conventions after 2000.

- Allow integrating issues related to regional mobility, and involve non-cocoa producing countries that are departure zones for children working on cocoa farms, notably Sahelian countries;
- Promote capacity building at regional level: e.g. joint training of security services at borders allowing for inclusion of cross-border characteristics;
- Integrate concerns of non-major cocoa producing countries that are facing child labour problems; etc.

2.4 The need for an inclusive and proactive approach

The initiative aims, through a concerted approach, to promote the development of a complementary regional approach and the emergence of a regional political leadership. It is conceived as a dialogue process for the main actors involved in the issue. To become an efficient tool to combat the worst forms of child labour it is crucial to involve all key actors – national, regional, and international – to promote their achievements, disseminate and share the good practices, and to propose and follow-up jointly on activities at regional level.

Hence, the involvement of all main stakeholders has been agreed as the core pillar of this initiative. Particular efforts will be geared at closely involving all key actors in the initiative, in particular, GTZ, Harking-Engel, ICI, ICCO, ILO, UNICEF, USAID, WCF, etc. The inclusion of a wider range of actors, in particular children via youth organizations, has also been recommended.

The facilitation and coordination of regional political dialogue processes should specifically aim at promoting synergy and proposing complementary regional programmes combating the worst forms of child labour. These programmes should involve the cocoa producing countries as well as countries of origin of children working on cocoa farms, predominantly Sahelian countries. Therefore the involvement of regional actors, in particular ECOWAS, is crucial.

The initiative will in particular aim at involving:

- All international and bi-lateral organisations involved and wishing to get involved;
- Regional organisation and associations: ECOWAS, ECCAS, UEMOA, CILSS, the ECOWAS' Youth and Sports Development Centre, producer organisations, etc.;
- All concerned national governments (cocoa producers and non-cocoa producers), its technical agencies, control and enforcement services (notably as regards the issues of child trafficking);
- Local level: involve all concerned local actors in developing strategies and promoting programmes and activities.

2.5 The benefits of better coordination

A considerable wealth in terms of experiences and best practices exists on the ground. However, given the numerous international and national programmes being implemented, efforts in terms of improved coordination are needed at country level as well as at regional level.

The issue of coordination and cooperation is of particular importance to programmes aimed at combating trafficking of people. This issue can only successfully be addressed if national programmes and actors define and agree joint activities and promote the development of regional programmes.

In addition, better coordination of actors on the ground will also facilitate the coordination of interventions at government level. At regional level, coordination will allow for a better inclusion of the cross-border characteristics of the problem.

Improved coordination will result in:

- Valorisation of experiences and best practices and their dissemination on the ground;
- Promoting dialogue between the various actors involved and thereby ensuring stronger synergies and more efficient programme design;
- Facilitate host government coordination of actors and programmes active in its country;
- Improve incorporation of regional and cross-border characteristics;
- Facilitate and assist in the emergence of new actors.

To facilitate and contribute to an improved coordination of actors and programmes, a platform at regional level needs to be launched to provide an opportunity for discussion and joint activity development. The members of the Task Force support the SWAC/OECD in its efforts to assure an active involvement and participation of the regional institutional level.

3. THE WAY FORWARD: PROPOSALS AND FOLLOW-UP

Based on the desk study conclusions and discussions during the meeting the following proposals have been identified as providing the most value added of this regional initiative. The overall objective of the initiative is to accompany the very successful work undertaken by the many partners on the ground with a complementary joint approach targeting the regional dimensions. The proposals share the objectives of:

- i. promoting the inclusion of the problem's regional context;
- ii. accelerating combating worst forms of child labour in all sectors of the economy;
- iii. promoting progress in all countries in West Africa.

3.1 Promote and facilitate regional leadership – regional reference framework

Building regional leadership is a priority of this programme and a condition to effectively develop and implement a complementary regional approach.

The expected outcomes of regional leadership are:

- a) To develop regional economy-wide approaches and policies on child labour and trafficking and thereby facilitate the implementation of national, cross-border and regional programmes;
- b) To improve the coordination among national and international actors and promote good practices and programme effectiveness;
- c) To help countries benefit from successful experiences, notably in the main cocoa producing countries, to accelerate progress in combating worst forms of child labour in West Africa;
- d) To prevent the stigmatisation of one particular country;
- e) Promote regional capacity building.

Facilitation of regional leadership

Next steps:

1. Intensify dialogue with ECOWAS (which covers all countries concerned, except Cameroon), and ECCAS (Cameroon) and, as a second step with, UEMOA and CILSS. In July 2006 ECOWAS and ECCAS⁴ signed a “Multilateral Cooperation Agreement to Combat Trafficking in Persons, in particular Woman and Children in Central and West Africa”⁵. The agreement states in its Article 1, that it encompasses exploitation of children and thereby provides a political mandate for ECOWAS to pursue its efforts in combating the exploitation of children. The first issue to be addressed with the ECOWAS Commission is the identification of a focal point (institution/directorate) which could officially be charged with the dossier. The ECOWAS’ Youth and Sports Development Centre (EYSDC) seems well placed to be this focal point;
2. Consensus building on the leadership issue at national and regional level, political support for regional action;
3. Identification of capacity requirements for more effective regional action.

Development of a regional reference framework

As part of a regional approach combating unacceptable child labour activities, ECOWAS should engage its member countries to work on the definition of a regional reference framework on hazardous child labour activity. This reference framework should set out economy wide recommendations for child participation and define general age and work intensity standards for permissible work.

In particular such a regional framework would allow:

- a) To develop economy-wide legal frameworks, taking into account the problem’s cross-sectoral dimension;

⁴ Economic Community of Central African States.

⁵ Available at: www.ceeac-eccas.org/img/pdf/Multilateral_Agreement_Trafficking-1184251953.doc

- b) To take into account the various cross-border and regional dimensions of the problem, notably with regard to trafficking;
- c) To facilitate and support the implementation of national programmes.

Next steps:

1. Start discussions with ECOWAS (and ECCAS) on the modalities of drafting a regional reference framework;
2. Start discussions and awareness campaigns with governments of the region on the proposal, in particular engage Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire to play a "lead" role in a network of governments and actors most involved;
3. Discuss the modalities of launching expert work on a reference framework (under the auspices of ECOWAS in collaboration with Task Force).

If the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre is officially mandated to act as focal point, a joint high-level mission EYSDC plus SWAC should introduce the initiative to national governments (Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria) and to ECCAS; these meetings should also lobby for the countries' willingness to work on a regional reference framework. After completion of the political awareness mission the SWAC will organise a stakeholder meeting to prepare the official launching of work on the regional reference framework.

3.2 Create a regional knowledge and information database on child labour

Over the last ten years a lot of data and knowledge has been produced on child labour on West African cocoa farms. This information has mostly been collected at national level and is available from ministries and/or international organisations.

The benefits of setting-up a regional database (within ECOWAS) would be:

- a) Broad and centralised information access;
- b) Facilitate evaluation and monitoring of programmes on child labour;
- c) Promote and facilitate over the medium-term work on coherence and methodological problems of national statistical databases;
- d) Promote the development of new tools and systems for analysing trafficking of persons in the region;
- e) Feed directly into/inform regional policy making;
- f) Capacity building of key partner institution.

The collecting of information and analysis, training and specialised capacity development, and monitoring and evaluation of implementation are part of the seven point Joint Plan of Action of ECOWAS and ECCAS

signed in July 2006⁶. Therefore, the regional knowledge and information database should be managed by the ECOWAS Statistics Department and be part of the Permanent Regional Monitoring Commission foreseen in the ECOWAS-ECCAS multilateral agreement.

Next steps:

1. Start dialogue with ECOWAS and ECCAS on the proposition, and identify requirements and capacity needs;
2. Dialogue with international (in particular ILO) and national partners already collecting data and jointly agree on information and data sharing mechanisms;
3. Launch a feasibility study on the setting-up (in collaboration with key actors such as ILO, UNICEF, etc.);

3.3 Produce a regional practical guide/manual on combating the worst forms of child labour

The aim is to assemble successful West African experiences and best practices and publish them in the form of a practical guide book. A lot of this work has already been done at country or partner level⁷ and needs merely be collected and presented in a regional compilation.

The benefits of a regional practical guide on combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms are to:

- a) Promote best practices and lessons learnt from a wide range of programmes;
- b) Facilitate progress in countries and sectors that are less advanced (also by facilitating the entry of new actors);
- c) Facilitate and promote dialogue between actors;
- d) Improve synergy of interventions and effectiveness of programmes.

Next Steps:

1. Draft terms of reference for the practical guide (including an extensive list of programmes in all countries which are being or have been implemented, list of persons to be interviewed, etc.) and validate with Task Force members;
2. Identify expert(s) to carry-out work on programmes in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Cameroon.

⁶ ECOWAS and ECCAS adopted a bi-regional plan of action for the period 2006-2008. This plan reaffirms the ECOWAS Initial Plan of Action against Trafficking in persons (2002-2003).

⁷ For instance the GTZ's "Manuel de l'animateur".

3.4 Publish a joint position paper of the initiative

The Task Force Members agreed to publish a joint position paper of the initiative. This position paper will highlight the initiative approach, its complementary regional nature and its objectives. Validated by all members⁸ it will in particular describe: (i) the context of child labour in West African agriculture: definitions, concepts, challenges and stakes; (ii) the activities underway, “best practices” (projects, programmes and actors) for combating the worst forms of child labour on West and Central African cocoa farms; (iii) the approach of initiative, highlighting the role of actors at the national and regional level as well as the complementarity and synergy between national and regional approaches.

The benefits of the position paper are:

- a) Easy access to the initiatives background and objectives (easy access for new actors);
- b) Promote a joint vision of the issue and improve coordination;
- c) Improve visibility and political leverage.

Next Steps:

1. Draft joint position paper (this document can serve as starting point);
2. Validate with Task Force members.

4. CALENDAR OF PLANNED ACTIVITIES

The calendar of planned activities (Table 1) provides an initial overview for the following six months. However, given the strong interconnections between activities, or in certain cases the necessity to finalise one activity before launching the next (e.g. agree with ECOWAS, ECCAS and concerned governments on the modalities of the reference framework before launching the expert work), this schedule is flexible and may be adapted as necessary.

Also, some proposed activities require the mobilisation of additional funding, which could delay the launching.

⁸ Including key organisations and partners that will be contacted over the coming weeks to join the initiative, in particular UNICEF and ICCO.

Table 1: Calendar of planned activities

Activity		Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09
1	Facilitate Regional Leadership and reference framework									
1.1	Organise high-level meetings with ECOWAS, ECCAS, CILSS, UEMOA									
1.2	Start discussion with the ECOWAS Youth and Sport Development Centre (EYSDC) (After official mandate by ECOWAS)									
1.3	Political mission EYSDC + SWAC to concerned Gov. (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria): Presenting the initiative, Lobbying for regional approach & ref. framework									
1.4	Stakeholders meeting: evaluate progress, define modalities for ref. framework with parties									
1.5	Launch work on draft regional reference framework									
1.6	Discuss 1 st draft regional reference framework with involved parties									
2	Produce a regional practical guide									
2.1	Draft Terms of Reference, identify experts									
2.2	Launch work									
2.3	Finalize 1 st draft with the Task Force and validation committee									
3	Create a regional knowledge and information database									
3.1	Start discussion with ECOWAS									
3.2	Engage dialogue with national, regional and international partners (organisations already collecting data)									
3.3	Feasibility study									
4	Publish a joint position paper									
4.1	Draft and finalize the joint position paper									
4.2	Dissemination/Communication									
5	International policy dialogue and action									
5.1	International workshop co-organised by ECOWAS – SWAC (with the participation of UEMOA, CILSS, ROPPA, etc.), evaluation 1 st phase, proposals and recommendations of 2 nd phase									

ANNEX. LIST OF TASK FORCE PARTICIPANTS

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