



International  
Labour  
Organization

the  
LAB

MARKET SYSTEMS  
DEVELOPMENT FOR  
DECENT WORK

# ► All work and no play

## Using a systemic lens to determine the economic root causes to child labour



Find out more  
about the Lab:

Website:  
[www.ilo.org/thelab](http://www.ilo.org/thelab)

Email:  
[thelab@ilo.org](mailto:thelab@ilo.org)

Twitter:  
[@ILOTheLab](https://twitter.com/ILOTheLab)

By Ines Bentchikou,  
December 2020

## ► Introduction

Today, around 152 million children are victims of child labour (see Figure 1), with 73 million of them working in its worst forms (see Box 1).<sup>1</sup> At the current pace, [Sustainable Development Goal](#) target 8.7, which includes the elimination of child labour by 2030, will not be achieved.

So why does child labour persist? Essentially, it is still difficult to effectively determine and address the root causes of child labour, especially since they can range from

family culture and societal norms to laws and regulations or even simply necessity for family survival. As the causes of child labour are complex and diverse, a multi-pronged approach – working on multiple angles through a variety of stakeholders – could help tackle the issue.

Although some projects have been successful in addressing child labour through mainstreaming international standards into national legislative frameworks, facilitating access to education, increasing labour inspection capacity or raising awareness, many have struggled to address one of its key drivers, namely low household incomes. Several ILO projects have tried to take this on by conducting systemic value chain analyses coupled with socio-economic assessments of families with incidence of child labour, to identify the different determinants of child labour.

<sup>1</sup> ILO, 2019. "Update on the Alliance 8.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", *Governing Body, 335th Session, Geneva, 14-28 March 2019*, Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---rel-conf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_670573.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---rel-conf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_670573.pdf)

Figure 1. Prevalence of child labour globally<sup>2</sup>



Drawing some lessons from their experience, this brief from [the Lab](#) aims to deliver technical guidance on the ways in which a systems approach (see Box 2) can be used to identify and evaluate the economic root causes for the existence of poverty-induced child labour more effectively. It will adopt the following structure:

- ▶ **Part 1.** Why incorporate a livelihood lens to identify child labour?
- ▶ **Part 2.** What are the systemic causes of child labour?
- ▶ **Part 3.** How can a systems approach be used to assess the economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour?

<sup>2</sup> ILO, 2019.





### Box 1. What is child labour?

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), child labour is defined as “work that harms the child’s well-being and hinders his or her education, development and future livelihood. Child labour is work which, by its nature and/or the way it is carried out, harms, abuses and exploits the child and deprives the child of an education.”

In line with the provisions of the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182),<sup>3</sup> child labour may be divided into three categories:

- ▶ Work carried out by children and adolescents **below the minimum legal working age**.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ **Hazardous work** (for adolescents aged between 14 and 17): labour that jeopardizes their physical, mental or moral well-being, either because of its nature or because of the conditions in which it is carried out.
- ▶ The specific categories of **slavery, trafficking, forced labour**, the use of children in armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, pornography and other illicit activities.

<sup>3</sup> The Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation (no. 190) notably mentions work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools; work in an unhealthy environment or which involves manual handling or carrying heavy loads; among other forms of child labour.

<sup>4</sup> The ILO Convention no. 138 sets the minimum legal working age at 15 years or at 14 years in special circumstances. Countries shall specify a minimum age for admission to employment or work, which shall not be below the minimum age set by the ILO Convention no. 138.

### Box 2. What is a systems approach?

A system is made up of the many ‘**supporting functions**’ and ‘**rules**’ that shape how well a value chain works for poor women and men. Supporting functions – such as information, skills, infrastructure, finance and access to markets – inform, support and shape the value chain. The ‘rules’ – such as policies, business standards, social norms and culture – guide daily attitudes and behaviours within the value chain.

The [systems approach](#) aims to address the underlying reasons why a problem exists in a sector, which means understanding and tackling the issues that create problems in the first place. It focuses on selected sectors<sup>5</sup> (be they commodities, like the soybean value chain, or whole sectors like construction) to address specific decent work deficits. To achieve this, projects invest in promising innovations, involving existing public and private stakeholders that can spur more inclusive growth. The objective is to generate an impact that is both:

- ▶ **Sustained.** Projects achieve lasting behaviour change with public and private actors by aligning interventions to stakeholders’ incentives and capacity. Impact continues long after interventions end because actors see organisational value in continuing the new way of working; and
- ▶ **Scaled.** Since constraints to industry growth are removed, change is replicated and mainstreamed across the sector – rather than being only confined to the actors that the project directly works with.

<sup>5</sup> In the market systems development approach, markets, sectors, supply chains and value chains terms are used interchangeably. They are the core part of the system chosen by the project for implementation. The breadth of a system can be different from project to project, hence having an impact on the position of rules in the system.



## ► Part 1. Why incorporate a livelihood lens to identify child labour?

The ILO has worked to address child labour, notably through its [IPEC+ flagship programme](#) and now through projects collaborating under the [Alliance 8.7](#). To tackle the issue, the ILO has traditionally used a human rights-based approach<sup>6</sup> focused on advocacy for policy changes, capacity building, awareness raising and direct support to communities, children and families (see Box 3). Increasingly using more integrated and holistic approaches involving a wide range of stakeholders, these various projects have proven to be successful in diminishing child labour incidence.

### Box 3. Reflecting on the sustainability and impact of a child protection system in Kyrgyzstan

*The ILO IPEC project in Kyrgyzstan (2012-2018) led and co-ordinated the development of national action plans against child labour and provided technical and financial assistance to ILO constituents in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to support implementation of the ILO child labour conventions.*

In 2012, the government of Kyrgyzstan attempted to set up a child protection system to promote the early identification and assessment of children's needs with the objective of referring them to specific public services already in place. This system enabled working children to benefit from adult employment services (e.g. skills development opportunities) and social protection (i.e. social assistance). The IPEC project also monitored working children and, in an attempt to improve the sustainability of its results, developed the capacity of the Ministry of Social Development to embed the child protection system in the country.

Although the project successfully implemented the child protection approach, the population of working children did not decrease. In addition, the programme was never truly viable for the government to drive independently, as the ILO provided the initial financial support and no public budget could be allocated to fund it going forward.

Despite the positive results emerging from ILO child labour projects, there has been a lower impact in the actual reduction of child labour than hoped. This may be due to the fact that these projects tend to focus more on policy development (e.g. through standards application) and child protection systems, which may produce results that are difficult to measure. This may also be due to the lack of action-oriented measures tackling child labour at its roots.

Oftentimes, livelihood interventions only represent a small segment of child labour projects' portfolios, despite the fact that poverty remains the major underlying cause of the existence of child labour. Livelihood interventions are often not prioritized partly due to the lack of capacities of child labour project staff, who are often specialized in policy development and standards application and do not have expertise in poverty alleviation. Because of this, projects tend not to consider micro-level socio-economic analyses and economic viability when designing livelihood interventions, thus making them impractical and not leading to sustainable impact results (see Box 4).

### Box 4. Reducing child labour through poverty reduction in El Salvador

*In El Salvador, the ILO Elimination of Child Labor in El Salvador through Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion project was designed with a new and innovative strategy to reduce child labour through poverty reduction, strengthen the capacities of national institutions to design and implement public policies, and implement targeted actions addressing all forms of child labour.*

This project worked at three levels: macro (national policies and institutional framework), meso (municipalities and schools) and micro (working children's homes) in rural and urban areas, seeking to propose an integrated strategy articulating work with municipalities, schools and families. It has contributed to developing mechanisms for the application of the legislation on child labour by supporting various governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop norms and instruments that indicate the role and actions that they must comply to prevent and eradicate child labour and protect working children.

One small component of this IPEC project developed a livelihood intervention aimed at supporting families with incidence of child labour to increase their household income, so they avoid resorting to child labour. The project supported the set-up of a buyback system by supplying chickens to families, building their capacities to grow them and helping them sell their eggs to buyers. However, when the project team monitored the results a few months later, the chickens were nowhere to be found, because the selected families had eaten them all, as the latter could not see any economically viable benefit to this intervention. The team had failed to identify families' socio-economic incentives to pursue this alternative economic activity, which led to the failure of this intervention.

This case displays how child labour project teams often fail to investigate the socio-economic context of families with incidence of child labour, which impedes their ability to identify viable long-term and viable solutions to sustainably improve their livelihoods.

<sup>6</sup> ILO, 2016, "SDG Alliance 8.7, Joining forces globally to end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour", *Sub-regional consultation workshop on achieving SDG Target 8.7, 14-15 September 2015, Bangkok, Thailand*, Retrieved from: <https://www.alliance87.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Alliance-8.7-Bangkok-Workshop-Report.pdf>



Accordingly, child labour projects sometimes tend to adopt a top-down approach, notably through their work in [global supply chains](#), through macro-level analyses, high-level advocacy with governments and multinationals, or the set-up of social protection and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Despite the importance of these activities in the long term, their benefits tend not to trickle down as easily to the bottom of the value chain, therefore not fully impacting families with incidence of child labour. Using such a top-down approach can of course be beneficial to raise awareness and advocate for the responsibility of lead firms in tracking their supply chains and taking responsibility for their suppliers' misconduct. However, [working on corporate responsibility](#) does not directly address the problem of poverty, which is at the forefront of child labour.

Nevertheless, some child labour projects have also incorporated successful bottom-up livelihood interventions, with the application of the Get Ahead business management training programme targeted to women entrepreneurs for example. Despite these solid efforts, these activities seem not to provide effective results in the long term, when not embedded in local institutions with local public or private stakeholders. This lack of sustainability in solutions leading to poverty alleviation would need to be further solidified and complemented with a systemic approach to identify and systemically address the fundamental economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour<sup>7</sup>.

## ► Part 2. What are the systemic causes of child labour?

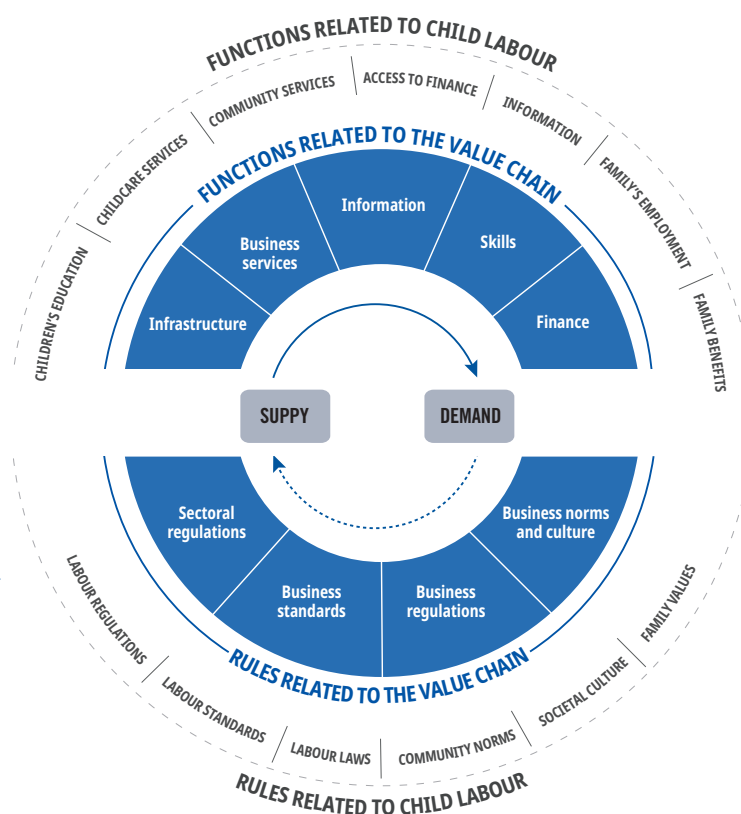
The underlying causes of child labour are complex, interlinked and context based<sup>8</sup>. They encompass a range of constraints including permissive institutional frameworks, limited access to schooling and childcare facilities, restricted livelihoods, low sectoral productivity, low access to public goods and services, limited access to finance and demand for the involvement of children in productive activities. In an effort to unpack the various causes of child labour, the Lab has identified major categories of child labour determinants, namely [unapplied labour rules and regulations](#); business environment and; socio-economic pressures faced by families (see Figure 2). A few of the major child labour causes are listed in this section.

<sup>7</sup> Some ILO child labour projects recognize the need for integrating a livelihood lens within their projects as it could bring complementary benefits if successfully combined with a Human Rights-based approach.

<sup>8</sup> ILO et al., 2019. *Alliance 8.7, Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains*, Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/-ed\\_norm/-/-ipec/documents/publication/wcms\\_716930.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/-ed_norm/-/-ipec/documents/publication/wcms_716930.pdf)



Figure 2. Systemic representation of a value chain with a child labour lens



## Unapplied labour rules and regulations

**Gaps in legislation.** Despite the almost universal ratification of both ILO conventions on child labour<sup>9</sup>, these international standards sometimes are not incorporated into national legislative frameworks in a way that governments can apply in their country context.

**Low capacity to enforce national child labour laws.** Even when national labour legislations integrate laws on child labour, countries often do not have the enforcement capacity to ensure that they are well applied. Budgetary restrictions often limit labour inspection resources, and this disables the government's ability to identify and punish violators of child labour laws.

<sup>9</sup> ILO, 2020. *Normlex*, Retrieved from: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12001::NO::>

### Lack of coordination between government ministries

Developing relevant, concrete and applicable national laws against child labour across different government ministries cannot be effective if it is not well coordinated across the national legislative framework (e.g. labour code forbidding it and criminal code providing concrete punishment measures against it). As child labour is a cross-cutting issue, it needs to be embedded in a coherent way across various relevant ministries (e.g. labour, social welfare, justice, etc.), but oftentimes, inconsistencies can arise (e.g. different legal definition of child labour), creating legal loopholes, which can encourage a lack of compliance.

### Business environment

**Lack of awareness.** Oftentimes, micro, small and medium businesses, may not be aware of how child labour is defined, nor of its adverse impact on children's development. This is related to the societal culture and general perceptions that child labour is acceptable and can be used to educate children or pass on knowledge about the family's occupation.

**Lack of capacity to address child labour.** Even when businesses know child labour is detrimental, they may not have the time nor financial resources to chase after their suppliers and identify the ones that use or push for child labour. They may not know how to identify, let alone address, such a complex issue within their own operations.

**Poor incentives to address child labour.** Despite their responsibility not to violate Human Rights, the main purpose of enterprises is to develop their business and focus on their end clients, while paying attention to their costs. When they do not see the business case to take responsibility for their supply chain, they tend not to spend resources to do so and believe it is the responsibility of the state to enforce such violations.

**Businesses' demand for competitive labour.** Some businesses might prefer to recruit children to save on labour costs, due to their low bargaining power to negotiate their salaries (if they are getting paid at all), working conditions and rights. Some businesses might even perceive children as an adequate replacement for a lacking adult workforce.

**Businesses' demand for children's specific skillset.** Some businesses might be willing to recruit working children for their specific physical characteristics and skillset to improve their productivity. For example, they may see a benefit in recruiting children as their smaller fingers or smaller size overall might make them manually dexterous for specific activities such as harvesting and deep mining.

**Power imbalances and economic pressures.** Larger businesses may hold more power, especially with regards to price setting, thus exercising pressure to force market prices downwards to reduce their supply costs and improve their competitiveness. In domestic value chains, these buyers are often large processing companies in a situation of monopoly or oligopoly. In view of their extensive market power, they can only be prosecuted by the government, who may not be capable to

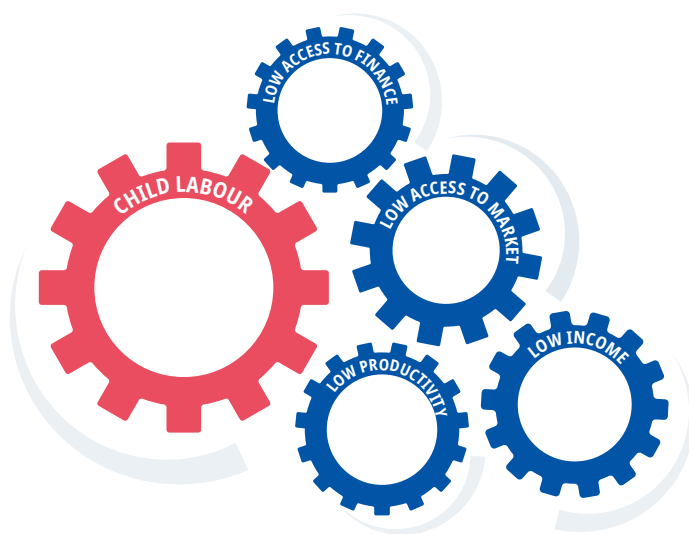


do so, either due to a lack of capacity (time and financial resources) or due to the importance of these businesses for the national economy.

### Socio-economic pressures faced by families with incidence of child labour

Even if the above determinants of child labour are important, **it is undeniable that in most cases child labour is rooted in poverty**<sup>10</sup>. More often than not, children have no other choice but to work to support their own livelihood or that of their families. Therefore, poverty and the socio-economic vulnerabilities that it brings should not be overlooked. The vulnerabilities induced by poverty reinforce each other around a vicious cycle (see Figure 3). The most frequent causes of child labour which relate to poverty are listed below.

Figure 3. Child labour and poverty are interrelated



<sup>10</sup> ILO, 2020. *Child labour causes*, Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/moscow/articles-of-work/child-labour/WCMS\\_248984/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/moscow/articles-of-work/child-labour/WCMS_248984/lang--en/index.htm)





- ▶ **Limited livelihood.** When families have limited income, they are often required to bring their children to work. Families' lack of income is itself often rooted in other factors of poverty (e.g. low productivity, limited access to market, limited vocational skills, etc.), which will be described in further detail below. For example, in Central Asia, cotton supply chain development, which is high on the political agenda, has been driven by government efforts, which has pushed the crop's prices down. Lower prices and hence lower incomes impede the ability of farmers to invest in modern agricultural production techniques to improve their productivity and ultimately earn a better income. Therefore, due to low income-generation opportunities, families have no other choice but to bring their children to work, to improve their agricultural returns, make ends meet and cope with uncertainty and shocks, despite the national legislation forbidding child labour. The most important underlying causes for families' limited livelihood are explained below.
- ▶ **Poor household productivity.** As families cannot access modern productive techniques, either because they cannot afford to buy new machinery (due to a lack of savings or access to finance), or because they do not have access to skills development opportunities, they remain less productive than other micro and small enterprises (MSEs). Therefore, they have no other choice but to require their own children's support to participate in income-generating activities, to increase their production and earn a sufficient income.
- ▶ **Restricted access to markets.** Vulnerable and unproductive families – particularly those involved in rural agricultural production – tend to have few buyers to sell their products to. As a result, these buyers have the bargaining power and can set the prices and pay less than market value for the goods. This limits income and partly explains the need for child labour to boost income.

- ▶ **Limited access to adequate financial services** constrains families in managing their income, spending and savings. Without the ability to plan ahead, they have to resort to child labour to boost their income in times of crises. In addition, the lack of available tailored financial support services reduces their ability to fund schooling for their children. Lastly, as limited access to finance is a constraint for MSEs the world over, families cannot invest in equipment or machinery to upgrade their income-generating activities, and do not have access to entrepreneurship opportunities, leaving them with no alternative income-generating options.

## Impaired social functions

**Lack of social protection (i.e. social services and social welfare).** Oftentimes, vulnerable families own an informal micro or small business, or [work informally](#). This limits their access to social assistance and national welfare services. This reinforces their vulnerability and may trigger a need to earn more to save for unforeseen circumstances, which may necessitate them to put their children to work. It is worth noting that some developing countries do not have effective or adequate social protection programmes, thus putting vulnerable families even more at risk.

**Lack of access to education (i.e. schooling).** Child labour and poor-quality education are often interconnected in two major ways. First, child labour often comes from children's time not being allocated to adequate schooling activities, pushing them into work from a very young age<sup>11</sup> to fill in their day productively. Second, children with less educational attainment are more vulnerable in the labour force and more prone to informal and indecent work.

<sup>11</sup> Boys tend to perform productive work, while girls tend to stay at home doing care work.





### ► Part 3. How can a systems approach be used to assess the economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour?

**Lack of access to organized [childcare](#) services or facilities.** When mothers need to work and do not have access to childcare services, they sometimes rely on the eldest children, especially daughters, to care for younger siblings, often leading them to miss school. Mothers also might have to either bring their children to work or bring their work to their home, to arrange for both their care and productive work. In both cases, children are exposed to work from a very young age and might even get involved in work sooner, limiting development and potentially their health. The more children work, the more parents rely on them working, therefore making it difficult to switch to schooling.

#### Unhealthy informal context and norms

**Vulnerable context at home or at school.** When children face violence and abuse at home or at school, work becomes an escape and provides a degree of independence. Moreover, in the context of armed conflicts, disasters and other major disruptions, children often find themselves required to work to cope with livelihoods losses.

**Informal norms and culture accepting child labour.** In most regions of the world, child labour is not perceived as detrimental to personal development; it may even be viewed as beneficial for the value it brings to their upbringing. Parents may feel that work helps pass on traditional knowledge and techniques of the family's occupation. Additionally, as they are less aware of the risks tied to child labour, parents identify some activities as children's responsibility (e.g. water carrying, care work, feeding poultry, wool spinning, etc.) due to cultural norms and traditional attitudes.

Child labour projects are increasingly interested in building more effective livelihood components within their project strategy. A systems approach can help identify and build strategic action plans to address the economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour. It can also help identify risks of incidence of child labour and gaps relative to mitigating measures in policy or in the value chain. The lessons learned below explain how to use a systems approach to determine the major economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour, based on the experience of a few child labour projects which have tried the approach.

**Figure 4. The process towards integrating a systemic lens to child labour analyses**

1. Build the productive profile of families with incidence of child labour
2. Comprehensively map the value chain(s) in which child labour is pervasive
3. Identify the systemic functions and rules around the value chain
4. Identify the root causes of the economic determinants leading to child labour in the value chain
5. Prioritize field-based research to identify actors' incentives, capacities and power in the value chain
6. Use a participatory approach, inclusive of the private sector



**Build the [productive profile of families](#) with incidence of child labour.** A productive profile is an analysis which provides context to the beneficiaries as well identifies the economic causes of, and conditions surrounding, poverty-induced child labour. This step can inform projects on a household's socio-economic situation, general characteristics, aspirations and incentives, skillsets and resources. While this is a good first step, it is important to go beyond the social determinants and characteristics of child labour and analyze the economic incentives at hand.

**Comprehensively [map the value chain\(s\)](#) in which child labour is pervasive.** Increasingly, child labour projects adopt a sectoral approach to address child labour, with the objective of having more targeted interventions. However, most projects lack technical capacities in mapping and analyzing value chains and tend to focus on the stages of the value chain in which child labour is present. In doing that, they miss the opportunity to involve a wider array of public and private stakeholders that can address the issue, potentially from another part of the chain. It is therefore critical to:

- ▶ Identify the different **types of stakeholders and activities** present in the value chain;
- ▶ Identify the **value chain stages** in which child labour is more present;
- ▶ Pinpoint the **socio-economic constraints** permeating the value chain, and
- ▶ Evaluate the **potential opportunities** which would need to be harnessed to boost the beneficiaries' livelihoods. Livelihood interventions can have a positive impact on families' poverty, even if they are developed with actors further along the chain, where child labour might be less present.

**Identify the systemic functions and rules around the value chain.** Just as the constraints and opportunities to address child labour can be found all along the value chain, they can also be identified in the functions and rules that influence how the value chain operates. These functions are made of "business supporting functions" which can include skills development, business development services, information, and finance among others, and "social supporting functions" which include education, childcare, community services, information, and families' social protection among others. If these functions are deficient, inadequate or lacking, they drive households into poverty and in turn, their children into the workforce. Likewise, businesses' low awareness of child labour risks or the inadequate application of labour standards in the national legislative frameworks can be one of the core determinants of child labour.

**Identify the root causes of the economic determinants leading to child labour in the value chain.** Using a systemic approach to analyze the value chain allows to have a deep but practical understanding of the context in which child labour is prevalent, including the economic causes that encourage the existence of poverty-induced child labour along the chain. Instead of simply looking at the challenges permeating the value chain, the project needs to dive deeper into the reasons why these constraints happen in the first place. In doing this, the

project will have a better understanding of the economic root causes of the socio-economic determinants of poverty-induced child labour specific to the researched value chain. This will help design adequate interventions to address the socio-economic root causes of child labour in the lower tiers of the value chain (see Box 5).



### Box 5. Improving logistics to eliminate child labour in the cocoa value chain in Brazil

*The ILO project “Promotion and Implementation of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in Brazil” (2017-2021) aims to promote effective enforcement of the fundamental principles and rights at work, through human rights-based and livelihood interventions. More specifically, the project was designed to tackle synergistically slave and child labour in the cocoa value chain.*

After conducting a thorough value chain analysis of the cocoa value chain, the project identified that child labour was mostly prevalent at the production stage. It also found that addressing constraints at the transport stage would support the productive inclusion of small-holder farmers, which could ultimately help reduce incidence of child labour in their midst. Indeed, although certainly not a traditional child labour intervention, the project found that working to make the transport system more affordable could rebalance the power dynamics in the lower tiers of the value chain, which were dominated by powerful price setting intermediaries. As a result, farmers would be less harmed by the pricing exploitation which in turn, would increase their incomes and reduce their reliance on child labour. If combined with Human Rights-based interventions supporting social protection measures, the interventions would have the potential to drastically reduce child labour in the region.

The development of this intervention was stopped due to Covid19, but has been eye-opening for the project and its understanding of the potential that livelihood interventions could have on the existence of child labour. In the words of the project manager: “if we analyzed it in another way, we would not have found this problem in the first place. If we did not follow the systemic approach, we would have proposed a solution which would not be enough to solve the problem.”

**Prioritize a field-based research to identify actors’ incentives, capacities and power in the value chain.** If a project can understand the various linkages and power imbalances along the chain, it can recognize the power relationships between actors and therefore build more actionable recommendations. Doing this helps uncover the incentives that private actors have and the socio-economic power they may hold vis-à-vis their buyers and suppliers. This may help uncover the rationale behind the vulnerability of the stakeholders at the bottom of the value chain and therefore for the existence of poverty-induced child labour. It can only be done through a practical field-based research and is critical to identify the potential role that some actors could play to facilitate change in order to set up meaningful interventions addressing the “right” issues with the “right” stakeholders in the value chain (see Box 6).

### Box 6. The importance of an action-based value chain analysis – Example from Brazil

*The ILO project “Promotion and Implementation of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in Brazil” (2017-2021) aims to promote effective enforcement of the fundamental principles and rights at work, through human rights-based and livelihood interventions. More specifically, the project was designed to tackle synergistically slave and child labour in the cocoa value chain.*

At the beginning of the project, the ILO project commissioned researchers to visit the main cocoa producing areas of Brazil, to conduct a series of interviews with local communities. The research objective was to map the different activities, understand key players’ relationships, determine working conditions and identify the existence of child labour along the cocoa value chain. After one year of research, the ILO project found it difficult to design actionable recommendations for the following reasons:

- ▶ **The research was too descriptive.** The project focused on the value chain mapping and on the identification of decent work deficits but dismissed the assessment of the value chain structure and characteristics or the underlying causes for the existence of decent work deficits.
- ▶ **The research was too concentrated.** The researchers failed to collect field data at all stages of the value chain and only focused on farmers and producers.
- ▶ **The research focused more on social aspects than economic ones.** While it was critical to have a heightened focus on decent work and more generally on social constraints, the research did not focus on the economic dimension. As a result, the findings did not take stock of the linkages, structure, organization or power dynamics in the value chain.

As a result of this observation, the project decided to use a systemic approach to effectively determine the economic root causes of poverty-induced child labour. Thanks to this, the project was able to elaborate an action plan in partnership with the Cocoa Action Initiative and through several dialogue roundtables involving a wide range of stakeholders.





**Use a participatory approach, inclusive of the private sector.** Child labour projects find it critical to involve key private players at the outset. This approach is conducive to raising awareness on child labour risks and encourages engagement throughout. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, two years after the ILO IPEC project conducted analyses, the employers' organization, JIA, and its members are still interested and engaged in the fight against child labour. They continuously defend the results of these analyses and push for the implementation of the analyses' recommendations without any support from the ILO.

## ► Conclusion

Child labour programmes have always been using a Human-Rights based approach with the objective of eradicating child labour. Despite the real success of these methods, the reduction of child labour is currently stagnating at 152 million working children globally, and at this pace child labour will not be eradicated by 2030. Due to the multifaceted nature of child labour determinants, there is a clear need to find innovative solutions to accelerate progress on this front. As poverty remains one of the most prevalent causes for the existence of child labour, interest has grown among child labour projects to integrate a more effective livelihood intervention component to their project. This brief has demonstrated how a systems approach could be especially effective to understand and identify more actionable ways to address the economic determinants of poverty-induced child labour in value chains. This aims to support projects to build more practical and effective interventions for the productive inclusion of families with incidence of child labour, and therefore for the reduction of poverty-induced child labour.

Starting off a project by effectively analyzing the socio-economic determinants of child labour is critical to develop solid and results-oriented livelihoods interventions, which may then also pave the way and build momentum for more impactful human-rights based interventions. These different features of the systems approach are not meant to replace the human-rights-based approach, but rather complement and strengthen it. Only addressing the social or the economic aspects of child labour will not be enough to eradicate child labour by 2030. As demonstrated above, the socio-economic root causes of child labour are multidimensional and it is only through a multidimensional response that a solid impact will be witnessed.

## Acknowledgements

The paper was written by the ILO Lab project. Ines Bentchikou was the lead author, and worked with Maria Claudia Falcao, Amina Kurbanova, Jesus de la Peña and Freddy Guayacan to extract the above findings. She is thankful for their key contributions on their expertise and valuable insights on their practical experiences. The author would also like to thank Merten Sievers, Stephen Hartrich, Elisa Mandelli and Aatif Somji for their key technical contributions and review.







International  
Labour  
Organization



MARKET SYSTEMS  
DEVELOPMENT FOR  
DECENT WORK



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
**State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO**