

Child Labor In The Coffee Sector In Eastern Uganda:

Findings And Policy Recommendations

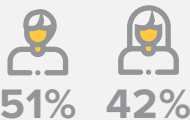
Introduction

This policy brief highlights findings from a scoping study on child labor in the coffee supply chain (CSC) in four eastern Uganda districts of Mbale, Sironko, Kapchorwa, and Bududa. This study sought to measure levels and identify drivers of child labor, landscape the regulatory framework, map stakeholders, identify key service providers, and highlight promising prevention and prosecution interventions. The study was jointly implemented by the Centre for the Study of the African Child (AfriChild Centre) and Terre des Hommes Netherlands and was commissioned by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Key Findings

Child labor in coffee production in selected districts of eastern Uganda is widespread.

48%



PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOR IN THE COFFEE-GROWING AREAS WAS 48 PERCENT: 51 PERCENT AMONG BOYS AND 42 PERCENT AMONG GIRLS.



CHILDREN AGED 5-17 WERE ENGAGED IN HAZARDOUS WORK, INCLUDING THE USE OF SHARP TOOLS, WORKING LONG HOURS, EXPOSURE TO AGROCHEMICALS, AND CARRYING HEAVY LOADS.

Child labor in the CSC is more prevalent in Kapchorwa (65 percent) and Bududa (50 percent) than in Sironko (35 percent) and Mbale (30 percent).

61%

MOST CHILDREN WORKING IN THE COFFEE SUPPLY CHAIN DID SO ON THE INSTRUCTION OF ONE OR BOTH PARENTS.

13 percent of children (aged 5-17 years) in coffee production reported working more than the allowable number of hours for their age group.

Children take on a variety of tasks including picking and sorting berries, pruning trees, weeding, fertilizing, and transporting beans and other supplies.

The prevalence of child labor reported in this study is comparably higher than reported in a previous study conducted in two districts (Kasese and Bunyangabu) in the Rwenzori Region (48% and 30%, respectively), which computed child labor based solely on age-specific hourly thresholds.¹ It is also almost three times the national child labor prevalence rate.²

Almost all child labor in the CSC happens close to production, either on or near the small family-run farms.

The nature (activities) and extent (regularity of participation) vary depending on the stage in the supply chain and season. Boys, more than girls, participated in more physically demanding activities such as spraying, pruning, carrying, and loading and offloading coffee.

Financial and material poverty and difficulties in accessing education were identified as the key drivers of child labor.

The risk is further exacerbated by systemic poverty: familial livelihoods depend largely upon the contributions of their children. **The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated child labor** due to pandemic-induced poverty, the rising cost of living, and prolonged school closures, which caused many children to drop out of school.

Working in the coffee supply chain hinders children's education.

Children's work in the CSC comes at the cost of time spent in school. School-going children might be forced to miss school to work, especially during harvest season, sustain

injuries that have negative health consequences and prevent attendance, or be too tired from coffee production activities to engage in school-related activities.

Children's work in the CSC poses enormous risks to their safety and mental and physical well-being.

38%

REPORTED BEING PUNISHED WHEN THEY MAKE MISTAKES OR FAIL TO FULFILL THE REQUIRED TASKS.

The type of punishment, among those reporting punishment, ranged from

68%
being shouted at

34%
insulted

47%
physical assault

ONLY

25%

OF CHILDREN IN HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOR REPORTED USING ANY PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE).

Long work hours, lack of protective gear, and lack of training in the handling of tools were all reported to increase the risk of injuries. The most widely used PPE were gloves (91%), followed by safety boots (4%) and face masks (3%).

54%

REPORTED SUFFERING/ EXPERIENCING AT LEAST ONE WORK-RELATED INJURY OR ILLNESS OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS.

Children engaged in hazardous work were

36x more likely to get injured than those not exposed to any hazard.

Among children who reported work-related injuries,



38% temporarily stopped working



16% temporarily stopped going to school

1 Terre des Hommes Netherlands (2021). Situation Analysis Report on Child Labour in the Coffee Sector in Kasese and Bunyangabu Districts (Uganda). Kampala : Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL).

2 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS

Government regulations contain gaps and enforcement efforts are weak.

While the government of Uganda has enacted laws and regulations to combat child labor, this legislation contains inconsistencies. For example, the minimum working age is lower than the required age for compulsory education. Other workplace regulations do not include provisions on decent working conditions for workers, child labor, or forced labor. The country's occupational safety and health (OSH) regulatory framework³ is not fully applicable to the agriculture sector and therefore does not provide adequate safeguards to protect workers in the coffee sector, including children.

Institutional mechanisms for enforcing child labor laws and regulations exist, but weak government oversight at all levels of the coffee supply chain hinders adequate enforcement.

- ▶ The Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA)⁴, is understaffed and underfunded the research suggests that there are currently four UCDA staff working in the entire eastern sub-region, which covers eight districts.
- ▶ Government oversight tends to focus more on the midstream (e.g., aggregation and processing) and downstream (e.g., buyers and exporters) levels, despite findings that work in the upstream supply chain (e.g., coffee planting, harvesting) poses higher risks.
- ▶ Lack of government-backed multi-stakeholder initiatives also hampers meaningful efforts to address child labor in the CSC. Such initiatives would provide a platform for collaboration between government agencies, businesses, trade unions, and civil society organizations to share best practices and implement shared action to address child labor.

The complexity and opacity of the coffee supply chain hamper private regulatory efforts.

Private regulatory efforts that seek to enhance environmental and social sustainability (such as Fair Trade or Rainforest Alliance) have gained traction in the coffee sector in eastern Uganda. However, these initiatives are vulnerable to market pressures and competition from producers with lower standards. In addition, audits and checks are oftentimes done with enough advance notification that suppliers can hide problems.

Participants reported critical barriers to leveraging regulatory efforts to uphold supply chain integrity in the coffee industry:



- ▶ **Liberalization of the coffee industry.** Striking a balance between production and commitment to social compliance and environmental responsibilities remains challenging, especially with limited government oversight.



- ▶ **Inaccessible certification processes.** Not all coffee-buying companies and cooperatives have embraced certification. Confusion remains regarding the certification processes⁵, particularly for direct producers.



- ▶ **Civil Society efforts to address child labor are limited in their scope.** There is still a dearth of interventions focused on strengthening the enforcement of child labor laws and regulations, withdrawal and rehabilitation of victims, and prosecution of child labor offenders.



- ▶ **Complexity and nature of business relationships in the coffee supply chain.** Coffee-sourcers and buyers are challenged to address these complex and hidden issues with suppliers with which they may not hold direct buying relationships. Traceability efforts can be constrained by traders' unwillingness to disclose sources for fear of getting cut out of value chains.



- ▶ **Difficulty enforcing labor standards with smallholder farmers, who depend on household members, including children, for labor.** Labor legislation does not extend to work on family farms, and the difference between child work and child labor is often hard to distinguish.

3 Relevant provisions can be found in the Occupational Safety and Health Act, No. 9, 2006, the Employment Act, 2006 Employment Regulations, 2011, and National Employment Policy for Uganda 2011.

4 UCDA is mandated to regulate, promote, and oversee the coffee sector under the National Coffee Act 2021.

5 Coffee Production in The Face of Climate Change: Uganda. Available at: [Uganda_CountryProfile_Climate_Coffee_6-12.pdf \(sustaincoffee.org\)](https://sustaincoffee.org/uganda-country-profile-climate-coffee-6-12.pdf)

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

1. Address socio-economic vulnerability and support access to education. To develop resilient and consistent interventions to meet the entrenched vulnerabilities that drive child labor in the CSC, funding should be guaranteed, long-term, and coordinated. An integrated, systems approach to addressing household vulnerabilities and child labor may include:



▶ **Strengthening social protection systems.** Stronger and child-sensitive social protection systems can offset the vulnerabilities that lead families to send their children to work.



▶ **Promoting and enabling access to education.** Interventions could include working with civil society and the government to access birth certificates, covering school costs related to supplies and uniforms, and helping children who have missed significant amounts of schooling to catch up.



▶ **Support vocational skills training** for out-of-school youths and adolescents withdrawn from child labor.

2. Strengthen multi-sectoral child labor monitoring mechanisms. Local actors should be mobilized and trained to identify children in or at risk of child labor, obtain information, and follow up on identified instances in family-based and other informal economy workplaces. Measures should be taken (by CSOs, for example) to raise community awareness about the costly effects of child labor on children's health and well-being. This approach requires the involvement of the entire community: parents, village leaders and local authorities, teachers, employers, and children. Messaging should focus on forced labor conditions, longer-term consequences to children's physical and mental health, and employers' tactics in targeting children to do dangerous work.

3. Address enforcement gaps. Robust government enforcement of relevant national laws and regulations is needed. Child labor concerns should be integrated within wider national policies and instruments, such as the Education and Agriculture Policy. Improved coordination among relevant government agencies and bodies in both agenda-setting and enforcement activities is essential.

4. Identify and address gaps in legal and policy frameworks for child labor. Study results show that the existing OSH legislation and policies do not adequately protect workers, including children. A gap analysis of existing Ugandan laws and regulations would identify improvements needed to bring them in line with international legal standards.

5. Train and empower local labor inspectors. The low number of prosecutions and convictions relative to the estimated number of child labor victims suggests that law enforcement capacity is weak. Strategic investments are required to train different enforcement actors and ensure they have adequate resources to fulfill their mandates.

In particular, district labor inspectors are uniquely equipped to detect and act on labor rights violations, but the traditional inspection model focuses too narrowly on enforcement. To broaden the focus to include strategic compliance, inspectors should be trained appropriately and given extensive discretion to bring firms into compliance. Government can extend the reach of labor inspectorates by linking them with community-level child labor monitoring systems or child protection networks and establishing advance agreement on the modalities of collaboration, including roles and procedures, child-oriented protocols for inspections and follow-up, and reporting systems.

6. Promote ethical sourcing and social compliance in the coffee supply chain. The government must ensure that companies address labor rights violations across their operations. Several options exist for government to support the coffee sector's due diligence and compliance efforts:

- a. Develop a comprehensive social compliance system that compels key coffee buyers and exporters to monitor their supplier's operations.
- b. Endorse third-party certification processes.
- c. Raise awareness about companies' responsibilities to assist child labor victims, including in partnership with civil society.
- d. Monitor and independently verify companies' social compliance practices.
- e. Promote appropriate technologies and digital tools to support companies' social compliance audit efforts and ensure traceability in the coffee supply chain.

Research Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was collected in the four eastern Uganda districts of Mbale, Sironko, Kapchorwa, and Bududa between July and August 2022. For the child labor survey, a representative sample of 771 agricultural households in the coffee-growing areas containing children aged 5-17 years was selected in the four districts, using a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling technique. After completing a household roster, interviews were conducted with the household head or primary caregiver and 1,871 children aged 5-17. The median age of child respondents was 11 years, with a similar proportion of male and female respondents.

Qualitative data was collected through:

- ▶ focus group discussions with child workers, community leaders, schoolteachers, and parents (n=32);
- ▶ key informant interviews with national and local government, private sector, worker association, and civil society organization (CSO) representatives (n=33);
- ▶ in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of children with lived experience of child labor (n=16);
- ▶ and eight participatory workshops with survivors, working children, and key stakeholders in the coffee supply chain.

Estimates of child labor from the survey include (a) children working below the minimum age (if they are under 12), (b) children exceeding the number of working hours allowable for their age group based on the ILO framework (if they are between 12 and 17 years), and (c) children in hazardous work.⁶

The study established a survivor-led advisory board (SAB) in each district, comprising children and adolescents with lived experiences in the coffee sector, including forced labor (as defined within the ILO convention 29). Each SAB comprised 8-12 children and adolescents aged 10-17 years, drawn from at least two coffee-growing sub-counties in the district.⁷ Members of the advisory boards were invited to (a) review the study instruments to ensure questions are relevant, logical, and coherent, (b) to identify the appropriate study participants, and (c) to review and provide feedback on the study findings to ensure they accurately reflect children's lived experiences and priorities.



Norad

The opinions, findings, and conclusions herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery or the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

⁶ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2021. Uganda National Household Survey 2019/2020. Kampala, Uganda; UBOS Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2018. National Labour Force Survey 2016/2017. Kampala. June 2018.

⁷ SAB members were identified with the help of local council members and selected NGOs providing service to survivors of child labor. Informed consent and safeguarding procedures are detailed in full report.