

Prevalence and Drivers of Child Labour among Coffee Farmers in Uganda and Policy Implications

Child labour, defined as “employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, or that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful”, remains one of the major concerns affecting millions of children worldwide (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). In Uganda, just like in many developing countries, child labour is more prevalent in the agricultural sector (UBOS, 2021). The coffee industry stands out not only as a cornerstone of Uganda’s economy and a vital source of livelihood for many, but also as one of the sectors where child labour is widespread (AfriChild Centre, 2022). Children in coffee-farming communities are often involved in various stages of coffee production from land preparation, planting and harvesting through processing and other forms of value addition, frequently under hazardous conditions. Hazardous conditions entail children carrying heavy loads, being exposed to chemicals and sharp tools that can lead to fatalities and serious health consequences (INTPA, 2023). This policy brief presents summary findings from a comprehensive study on the prevalence and underlying drivers of child labour among coffee 491 farmers in 15 districts of Eastern, Central, and Western regions of Uganda. The study did not examine child labour at secondary and tertiary nodes of the coffee value chain.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 23% of child laborers are exposed to hazardous work conditions, but there are significant variations across the districts.
- Girls aged 5 –15 are more likely to engage in domestic chores, while boys aged 15–17 dominate in farm labour.
- Higher education levels for both children and the household heads are associated with lower rates and extent of child labour.
- Effective regulation and enforcement of laws is required to address child labour issues.
- There is need to incentivize child-labour-free practices by providing labour-saving technologies and supporting school attendance.
- Raising awareness among parents and the communities about the risks and consequences of child labour is key in minimizing child labour.

Prevalence...

Child labour is most prevalent among children aged between 15 to 17 years compared to other age categories but gender differences exist within age groups. More girls than boys are engaged in child labour among children aged between 5 to 15 years while boys dominate in age bracket 15 to 17 years. But even children of 5 to 11 and 12 to 14 years of

age engage significantly in child labor (12-14%).

The Eastern region has a higher rate of child labour than other regions. About 15.6% of children in the eastern region participate in child labour compared to 11.8% and 13.6% in the Central and Western regions, respectively. This is attributed to more Arabica coffee-growing

farmers in the region which is labour-intensive in all its agronomic and management practices compared to Robusta coffee. As such, the Eastern region experiences not only higher rates of child labour but also more hazardous working conditions. Overall, nearly a quarter (23%) of child laborers are exposed to hazardous labour conditions, but significant variation in prevalence across the districts is observed.

Household chores dominate farm tasks on what constitutes child labour. On average, child labourers work approximately 11 hours per week on household chores compared to 8 hours on farm tasks. Notably, some children reported to have worked for more than 35 hours per week highlighting serious concerns of child labour on educational attainment among coffee farmers.

...and Drivers

Share of coffee cultivated land has a crowding-out effect on child labour dynamics

among coffee-growing communities. An increase in the share of land devoted to coffee cultivation shifts child labour from household chores to farm activities.

Education breaks the chains. Higher education levels for both the children and their household heads are associated with lower rates and extent of child labour, both on farms and in household chores.

Traditional gender roles play a role in shaping child labor dynamics. The type and intensity of work performed by children are determined by cultural norms where household chores are primarily done by girls while boys are often engaged in agricultural tasks.

Higher income reduces hazardous child labour. The prevalence of hazardous child labour is highest in poorer households and higher income is associated with a lower rate of engaged in hazardous work activities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- ❖ **Monitor and enforce child labour laws.** Effective regulation is required to address child labour. This should include promoting child-labour-free certifications among coffee exporters and buyers and establishing robust monitoring systems to ensure adherence to ILO standards across the coffee value chain.
- ❖ **Incentivize child-labour-free practices.** Educational initiatives need to be supported. These include: needs-based scholarships and stipends; conditional cash transfers to families; and elimination of school-related costs through provision of required school materials like textbooks, uniforms, and meals. Also, support to small-scale coffee farmers for mechanized tools and equipment to minimize manual labor can reduce the reliance on child labour.
- ❖ **Raise awareness among parents and the communities about the risks and consequences of child labour**

This study is part of the FOODCoST project funded by the European Union.

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