**Lessons from initial implementation of an Integrated M&E Strategy in Child Labour projects in Ghana and El Salvador by the**

**International Labour Organization- International Programme**

**for Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC)** [[1]](#footnote-1)

Draft version (not for quotation)

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**Abstract**

This paper discusses lessons generated from design and current implementation of a Theory of change, Results-oriented, and Participatory Integrated M&E Strategy focus on national and local stakeholders’ ownership in two Child Labour projects in Ghana and El Salvador (International Labour Organization-International Programme for the Elimination of Child labour –ILO/IPEC) with support from the US Department of Labour (USDOL).

The paper provides an overlook of child labor, IPEC strategies to work on it, a brief description of the projects concerned and a discussion of what we have learned so far from implementing an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (IMES) in two IPEC projects in El Salvador and Ghana.

The most relevant lessons covered include that stakeholders’ involvement from the Theory of change design is central to build a common language for implementation and ownership; but in any case “learning by doing” process is needed to have a real appropriation of the IMES by stakeholders (i.e. implementing agencies and local stakeholders).

The IMES provides opportunity to look at project contextual factors and the project “black box”, that will be key to provide qualitative evidence to understand how impacts have been achieved (i.e. impacts identified through the impact quantitative evaluation).

The IMES contextual factors analysis also facilitate the identification of project contribution beyond project outcomes, but in a broader perspective in the project target areas and at national level,

The focus on learning in M&E is still a challenge that has to be addressed. For this, we have the buy-in of the project coordinator and the M&E officer and we are working on it.

1. **Introduction**

This document intends to present a reflection on the current on-going experience of the development and implementation of an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (IMES)[[4]](#footnote-4) for projects in elimination of Child Labour (CL) in two pilot projects an its application in new IPEC projects since then.

The paper is based on interaction between the Evaluation and Impact Assessment section (EIA) of International Labour Organization-International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) and two IPEC projects: “Eliminating Child Labour in El Salvador through Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion” (ELS), and “Towards child labour free cocoa growing communities in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana through an integrated area based approach” (CCP).

After a short introduction of the concept of Child Labour and IPEC approach to work on it, including specific El Salvador and Ghana Projects description, the IMES is introduced. Then, a section discusses what is working well, what could work well with an enhanced environment and what the opportunities for the implementation of the IMES are. Finally, major lessons are identified.

1. **Child labour concept[[5]](#footnote-5)**

In this section, we introduce briefly the concept of Child Labour, just to give some context to the discussion that we are going to have below. For more precise information, you can consult [www.ipec.org/childlabour](http://www.ipec.org/childlabour).

Considerable differences exist between the many kinds of work children do. Some are difficult and demanding, others are hazardous and morally reprehensible. Children carry out a very wide range of tasks and activities when they work.

Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour that is to be targeted for elimination. The term “child labour” is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling.

Whether or not particular forms of “work” can be called “child labour” depends on the child’s age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

1. ***IPEC contribution to Child Labour elimination***

Child labour is a complex decent work deficit that must be challenged through a rights based decent work approach to economic and social development, emphasising the enabling as well as the human rights qualities enshrined in the ILO Conventions referred to this subject (i.e. 138 and 182) and various ILO Declarations (i.e. 1998 and 2008)

The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), a programme of the International Labour Organization, is operational in over 80 countries. Its objective is the effective abolition of child labour, assisting member States in designing and implementing policies and programmes to prevent and eliminate child labour. IPEC works to enhance the awareness of member States, workers' and employers' organizations, the international community and a wide range of actors about the problem of child labour. It assists countries in implementing international labour standards on child labour and in taking the necessary comprehensive and integrated measures for sustained and effective action. The National Action Plan acts as the political frameworks that encompass the whole range of activities oriented to the elimination of child labour.

IPEC delivers technical and operational support to countries through its projects under integrated complementary strategies to target child labour:

* Legal framework and enforcement
* National capacities development, policies and mainstreaming
* Supporting the social partners in the “real economy”
* Targeted direct action (i.e. livelihoods schemes and social services)
* Evaluation and Impact Assessment
* Research
* Data collection and analysis
* External partnerships
* Advocacy, awareness raising and social mobilisation
  1. **The project in Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire**

The goal of the Cocoa-growing Communities Project (CCP) is to prevent and eliminate child labour, particularly its worst forms, in the cocoa sector in Ghana (and Ivory Coast), by strengthening local mechanisms for community action and social surveillance of child labour, enhancing and linking national and local stakeholders’ efforts against child labour and by improving households’ livelihoods situation and children’s access to education.

The project is implemented through 44 months between January 2011 and August 2014.

* 1. **The project in El Salvador**

This project focuses on improving livelihoods opportunities for households and sensitizing them on the dangers of child labour and in providing direct support to schools, but no direct support to children. In this way there will be a more closely integration of child labour elimination concerns with anti-poverty and social inclusion policies, in particular job-creation (i.e. transition to decent work through active labour market policies), education, and other social safety net policies and programmes funded by the national government.

The project works in three levels of engagement: macro (national policies and institutional framework), meso (15 target municipalities and 75 schools) and micro (6,500 child labourers’ households and 16,250 children) in rural and urban areas. It follows an Integrated Area-based (IABA) approach, which means reaching out to all children working or at risk, empowering local communities and improving their livelihood

The project is implemented through 48 months between January 2011 and November 2014.

**The Project Integrated M&E Strategy (IMES)**

The Child labour projects, implemented by ILO-IPEC since 1993, have been designed with an M&E component, from the very beginning. This component has been evolved in terms of reflecting the complexity of these projects, the necessity of rigour in data collection and the evolution of the demands to the M&E field.

The elements of M&E in IPEC projects have included strategic planning through the Strategic Programme Impact Framework (SPIF) methodology, a predecessor of the project Theory of change; Project Monitoring Plan (PMP), Baselines, Monitoring of services and immediate results (project outputs and, in particular number of children prevented and withdrawn from CL), Independent mid-term and final evaluations, and in some cases, ex-post tracking and tracer studies of target children have been central to most of IPEC projects.

While these elements were included in most projects, they were not clearly and systematically articulated as part of an integrated plan. At the end of 2010, with funding from the Department of Labour of United States (USDOL), ILO-IPEC-EIA led a process to design an M&E strategy that articulates all M&E elements of a project. This becomes the Integrated (or Comprehensive) M&E Strategy IMES/CMES.

The IMES has been designed initially as a pilot experience for 3 IPEC projects, under USDOL funding, in El Salvador, Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire and Thailand. Since late 2011, IPEC projects have integrated an IMES in all new projects (tailoring it to capacities and needs in each project), due to the clear value-added of the initial experience in 2010/2011.

In this paper we will concentrate on the implementation of the IMES in two countries: El Salvador and Ghana**[[6]](#footnote-6)**.

The IMES can be defined as an expanded M&E strategy with the following adds-on:

1. It is focused in results, from outputs to impacts
2. It strongly articulates monitoring and evaluation components (including quantitative impact evaluation)
3. It looks at the project in its interaction with the whole social, political, economic, etc. setting;

The components of the IMES are the following:

1. Theory of change
2. An Outcome Measurement Framework (that covers indicators for the 3 levels of results: outputs to impact, context indicators/factors and the way data will be collected: who, when and how?)
3. Baseline study (at target direct beneficiaries and at institutional level)
4. Data collection Plan (i.e. quality assurance)
5. Monitoring component (i.e. services to beneficiaries, capacity building, and context)
6. Evaluation component (i.e. Independent Mid-term and Final Evaluations -the first one might be replaced by a Project Implementation Review-, an Impact evaluation, a follow-up survey –after the baseline study and ad hoc qualitative and quantitative studies)

Regarding the impact evaluation it should be noted that a challenge has been to integrate it from the start to the M&E strategy. In ELS the impact evaluation is quasi-experimental and focused in 3 different selected interventions, while in Ghana, the approach is experimental assessing the whole intervention package. These approaches were decided based on the government and other key stakeholders’ demands.

1. **What is working well and what could work well with an enhanced environment and what are the opportunities for the implementation of the IMES?**

In this section we have organised the analysis of this experience in three areas:

* 1. *Positive developments*: those aspects that could qualify as good practices
  2. *It need more incentives to happen*: aspects that key actors are committed to, but it requires changes in the workload, generating methodologies and tools, and providing technical support in M&E
  3. *Opportunities*: factors that come up when project stakeholders have been exposed to the IMES and demonstrate an enhanced environment to move forward IMES effectiveness in increasing projects significant changes
  4. **Positive developments**

1. P*roject stakeholders have developed a common Theory of change that is acknowledge by them as product o their own reflection*. This is a big step to generate ownership of the project IMES. While more have to be done, the first step is an excellent point of departure.
2. *The M&E strategy has grounds in a planning process that has included stakeholders inputs reflected in a Project* Theory of change: the indicators and other elements of the IMES are explicitly articulated in the Project Theory of change and can be seen as a horizontal development process.
3. *The CMES provides an opportunity to look at the project in an integrated systematized manner*, build the possibility to have a common language among partners and to communicate within key stakeholders
4. T*he M&E strategy looks beyond project intervention, by including data on external factors (i.e. role of other actors in the field), and the monitoring of context*. The application of this systematic monitoring of context is a new dimension of M&E for stakeholders that are appreciating its value –added for project efficiency and effectiveness.

In Ghana context monitoring has made aware project staff and implementing agencies (IAs) –NGOs and government organizations- of how to avoid duplication with other organizations in services support to communities. Additionally, it has also helped IAs to identify partners they can work with towards influencing project efficiency and effectiveness.

In ELS, in addition to promote coordination with other organizations present in the area, it has provided the possibility to monitor the level of violence (i.e. the “maras” implications) in the target communities, a serious issued that affects the projects in various ways (i.e. field visits and project training activities)

1. *The ownership and understanding of the IMES is a necessary “learning by doing” process*. For example, in Ghana IAs have attended a training workshop on CMES operation at the launch of it. The reaction from them was that the CMES was too ambitious and complex, but once data collection started the attitude changes. Then, the project M&E officer, with support of the project team[[7]](#footnote-7), revised critically data/information on a quarterly basis, to make it more analytical and useful for the agency itself. In this way, it was found that the IAs have started to understand the value-added of the CMES.
2. *The process of validating indicators identified during the planning phase has taken more than a year in an incremental process of quality improvement, but it was necessary*. The staff and IAs can start to appreciate the value of the information if they participate in the identification of their own information needs. Building ownership is a process that requires its own pace. After understanding the usefulness of specific indicators it could make sense to discuss their value and to do the data collection or training required.
3. *Technical support from the M&E officer, and the rest of the project team, to implement the IMES has looked beyond the one-shot workshop.* It was clear from the beginning that more personal and customised (demand-based) support within a smaller group setting should be done. On-going technical support have been based on a number of informal way such as meetings on the side-lines of other project meetings/workshops, conference calls (i.e. Skype use) with project field staff and implementing agencies and field missions.

In Ghana an e-platform (through an electronic list) has been set up as a learning tool. While at initial stages, it is expected to be integrated to the IMES beyond exchange of information

1. *Development of impact evaluations has showed that there is a demand from national key stakeholders regarding evidence about achievable significant changes and particularly what works (i.e. how and why) in child labour* (i.e. understanding the complexity of the problem). There is a gap in this area of evaluation, especially in national stakeholders. IPEC is well prepared to contribute to close that gap.
2. *The detail-monitoring component of the IMES that goes through a process of downsizing through adjustment during validation, generate the basis to unpack the project black box (the how)*. Therefore, through this monitoring component the impact evaluation should be able to answer how far the project has played the expected key role in the identified impacts.
3. *The project in Ghana and ELS is supporting the use of simplified IMES or elements of it at local level in government new project or policy actions*: in ELS to build the IMES of a small CL project management by the government. In Ghana through contributing with identification of indicators at outcome level (and how to collect data) for national and local government agencies on CL.
4. *Grounds for an IMES for CL projects has been developed*: IPEC and USDOL-funded project with other organization are developing a IMES based on the model designed for these projects, In ELS, government has already asked support to build a simplified IMES for a government funded project targeted in 300 households with children working (ISNA and DIGESI). In Ghana, a local government has requested for support to analyse baseline data on child labour towards its preparation of a medium term development plan.
   1. **It needs more incentives to happen**
5. IMES systematic use is still focussed in reporting (i.e. to ILO HQ and the donor) and improving upon project management. Methodologies and tools to work on learning are required, such as guides of questions for periodic analysis meetings, ways to approach to results-based analysis of information and self-learning modules on how to question data. This issue has been identified as a weakness on the IMES implementation. Tools and organizational incentives, such as more learning oriented reporting and facilitation of analysis based on the Theory of change by the project M&E officer are required to encourage learning.

1. *The implementation agencies (government organizations, NGOs, etc.) are focused in delivery (outputs). There is limited strategic analysis for further sustainability of CL interventions outcomes. Analysis should be included as a key component of assignment to implementation agencies*, whatever government, employers or worker organizations, or NGOs. Currently what matters to implementers is outputs delivery; hence analysis is, at best, at the how level (outputs), makes difficult to find spaces for comprehensive results-analysis. Along this, the IAs use to have a fragmented vision of the multi-pieces of the strategy. Incentives should come from developing their own capacities and requirements from any assignment request by the project or further by the government itself.

**5.3. Opportunities**

1. *There is a demand for in-country training in CL at national level including the various aspects to implement CL National Action Plans, and specific interventions within this framework. These demands comprise M&E.* National and Local Steering Committees are requested to be accountable and to replicate and scale-up successful strategies. LO-IPEC is seen as the expert organization in CL, IPEC is well positioned to introduce the IMES approach (customising it to local capacities and needs).

In ELS the project developed a 4 months Diploma on CL that included one module in M&E and another one in Impact evaluation methodology. In Ghana there are several training workshops sponsored by development partners in collaboration with government agencies as part of the implementation of the National Plan of Action on child labour that are opportunity to explore the inclusion of M&E components.

1. *Semi-annual reports to HQ and donor request information at outcome and results level (i.e. outcome)*: the current semi-annual project report that goes to the donor is based now in the IMES indicators. As the IMES indicators cover results at the various levels, this is an opportunity to increase commitment in project staff, and indirectly into key stakeholders, to drive analysis towards results rather than activities and outputs. Additional skill and time allocation may need to be provided as well.
2. P*roject team is aware that a big challenge is the use of IMES for learning:*  to moving from “traditional” M&E to IMES approach focussed in reporting to a combined one of learning-management-reporting-building knowledge base.
3. **Major lessons**

* Involvement of stakeholders

1. P*roject stakeholders involvement in development the project Theory of change is central to reflect their views in the IMES*
2. *The IMES provides an opportunity to* have a common language among partners and to communicate with key stakeholders
3. *The ownership and understanding of the IMES is necessary “learning by doing” process*.
4. *The process of validate indicators identified during its planning phase has taken more than a year in an incremental process of quality improvement, but it is necessary to respect the pace of the process*.

* Monitoring context

1. T*he M&E strategy looks beyond project intervention; by including external factors data (i.e. role of other actors in the field), the named monitoring of context*.

* Linking monitoring and impact evaluation

1. *Development of impact evaluations has showed that there is a demand from national key stakeholders regarding demonstrating significant changes.*
2. *The detail-monitoring component of the IMES, that goes through a process of downsizing through adjustment during validation, generate the basis to unpack the project black box (the how)*.

* Replication of the IMES by national and local government

1. *There are clear indicators that there are grounds for replication. Tailor-made, IMES for CL projects is on demand*
2. *The project in Ghana and ELS is supporting the use of simplified IMES or elements of it at local level in government new project or policy action*

* The IMES focus on learning

1. *IMES systematic use is still focussed in reporting* (i.e. to ILO HQ and the donor). Methodologies and tools to work on learning have to be improved (e.g. guides of questions for periodic analysis meetings, ways to approach to results-based analysis of information and self learning modules on how to question data).
2. *There is a demand for in-country training in CL at national level. This is an opportunity to include M&E modules.*
3. *Project team is aware that the focus on reporting versus learning is a gap to be addressed*. They are working with EIA in that direction There are also some trade-offs with the needs to speed up implementation given the late starts of projects field work.
4. *M&E officers available in intervention countries for CL projects are mostly formed for M&E focused in reporting*. Capacity to orient M&E for learning, particularly for complex thematic areas like CL, has to be built. On-site training and mentoring are some positive strategies implemented in IPEC. Other ways like training modules may be explored.
5. *Applying IMES as a learning and knowledge tool requires close interaction of the M&E officer and other project staff with implementing agencies and stakeholders, and resources for it* to take advantage of the data collected. Enough resources for field visits, data use workshops, and so on, should be considered for implementing the IMES.

**References[[8]](#footnote-8)**

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2. Senior Evaluation Officer ([furman@ilo.org](mailto:furman@ilo.org))Evaluation and Impact Assessment section, the evaluation function of IPEC [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. M&E Officer ([chachu@ilo.org](mailto:chachu@ilo.org)) Cocoa Communities Project (Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The M&E Strategy is called Integrated in El Salvador and Comprehensive in Ghana. This reflects some discussion at initial stage about where we put the emphasis. Even though the CMES name (Comprehensive M&E Strategy) is most used by IPEC and by others like the US department of Labour; we find that “Integrated” is more accurate to the spirit of the M&E Strategy proposed. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This section comes from www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In this paper we focus only in Ghana because due to different reasons the project and the IMES implementation is more advanced [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ILO/CCP staff including Project Managers/Officers and Field Coordinators [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Project internal documentation is available upon request [↑](#footnote-ref-8)