



Bridging academic research & programme practice on child labour

Research recommendations based on program practice and literature found in the six countries the Work: No Child's Business programme is operational in: Côte d'Ivoire, India, Jordan, Mali, Uganda and Vietnam.

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Colophon

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Work No Child's Business (WNCB).

The WNCB alliance is an alliance of Save the children the Netherlands, Unicef the Netherlands and the Stop Child Labour Coalition working with local partners in six countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Mali, Jordan, India and Vietnam).

The alliance aims to achieve that children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work.

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Introduction

The “Work: No Child’s Business” is designed to contribute to concerted global efforts to end all forms of child labour by 2025. In six focus countries, through an alliance of three global partners (UNICEF, Save the Children and Stop Child Labour coalition) and with local partners, the programme works on achieving that children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and future decent work, hereby contributing to Social Development Goal (SDG) 8.7. The programme is developed in collaboration with country offices and partners in these six countries: Côte d’Ivoire, India, Jordan, Mali, Uganda and Vietnam.

Through baseline research and practical implementation experience, alliance partners have gained a good understanding of child labour dynamics in their context. At the same, time implementing activities and advocacy campaigns is continuously raising new questions. Some of these questions have been asked before and are answered in existing academic literature, while new research might be needed for others. To map what academic evidence is available, annotated bibliographies were produced of (academic) child labour related research in each programme country by students of Leiden University in the Netherlands in 2020. In 2021, the bibliographies were updated and re-organised by students in the countries where the WNCB programme operates.

This document builds upon the six annotated bibliographies that bring together academic evidence from 293 sources and links these to the research needs that have emerged from program implementation. Academic and practical research needs are presented below in concerning each of the key asks raised towards international actors in the [WNCB position paper](#), which was prepared based on our implementation experience for the 2022 global conference on child labour¹. The three key asks based on WNCB’s implementation experience are:

- **Invest in (inclusive) quality formal, full-time education for all children** up to the age of 15 across the world. In addition, all children from 15 to 18 years old should be supported to continue formal, full-time quality education
- **Support and promote the norm that children should not work, but be in school;**
- **Enhancing company and government responsibilities to respect human rights,** including the creation, implementation and enforcement of mandatory due diligence legislation that holds all players in the international supply chains accountable for the violation of human rights in general and children’s rights in particular.

The section below provides an overview of academic evidence and research gaps combined with emerging research needs from WNCB’s implementation experience. By combining both available academic literature with practical research needs, this document aims to contribute to setting a future child labour research agenda based on local needs and realities while building on existing evidence². The analysis and research questions presented aim to inspire both academicians as well as practitioners.

¹ <https://www.5thchildlabourconf.org/en>

² The WNCB programme aims to localize it’s approach for research and conducted research how to advance research through localization in 2021 in Collaboration with Wageningen University & research, results are published on the [WNCB website](#).

Invest in inclusive quality, formal full-time education

The fundamental assumption behind the WNCB program is that access to formal quality education for all children is one of the most effective strategies to eradicate child labour. This section starts with an analysis of academic literature about the root causes of child labour, followed by WNCB implementation experience and emerging research gaps.

That specific determinants have gotten the most attention in academic literature and are considered to be the most robust causes of child labour. First of all, many argue that child labour is fueled by poverty. Secondly, when educational quality is (perceived as) low, children are more prone to engage in child labour activities or are forced to do so by family members. Research also demonstrated that when the educational level of parent's is low, child labour occurs more.

When having a closer look at the two main determinants, **poverty is both presented as a cause and a result of child labour**: parents who are faced with severe economic hardship do not send their children to school, which has long-term repercussions on children's chances of finding well-paid work in the future. In other words, poverty causes child labour, and child labour perpetuates poverty. It also points out **a close relationship between poverty and education**, presenting that these determinants are not independent of each other but rather are characterised by direct reciprocal interaction. Through the annotated bibliographies, it has become clear that in all WNCB focus countries, **girls face more barriers to attending school** from poor and big households, representing education and poverty and gender and household composition as factors influencing the risk of child labour engagement.

The compulsory schooling policies in the WNCB focus countries of Cote d'Ivoire and Uganda highlight the importance of recognising the reciprocal relationship in order to plan interventions sustainably: the compulsory school policies have been implemented without a poverty alleviation outlook and families turn to child labour activities when school fees cannot be afforded. A multidimensional approach in intervention design is desirable.

Domestic or agricultural child labour remains the norm in contexts with limited economic activities and inaccessible, poor-quality education. In other contexts, with higher economic activities, work in a more formalized sector is often perceived to yield a better future for the family and child than engagement in low-quality education. Over the past years, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the WNCB program has observed an increase in child labour. The combination of school closure and economic insecurity caused by the pandemic makes labour a more attractive alternative for children and their parents.

While academic literature and WNCB implementation experience show that the interaction of limited income opportunities and lack of quality education is the root cause of child labour, international donor attention seems to shift increasingly towards the role of international companies. Therefore, evidence is required to show which multi-dimensional approaches work that best address the interaction between poverty and lack of quality education.

Possible research questions to be further elaborated:

- Which multidimensional and single-dimensional approaches to eradicate child labour have been applied and which lessons learned can be drawn from them within and across contexts?
- What is the relationship between parents education and child labour?
- What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on child labour and how to alleviate this impact?

Supporting & promoting the norm that children should not work but be in school

The previous section shows that poverty and lack of quality education are key determinants of child labour. Academic literature confirms that various international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, advocate for ensuring that children and youth are free from labour, enjoy their rights to participate in schooling and have the chance to engage in decent work in the future. This perspective of child labour as always harmful and, therefore, needs to be eradicated, is **sometimes challenged to be too western**, superficial and incomplete.

Views of child labour as a way to grow up and a continuation of ancestors' traditions are identified in the literature in Vietnam. In India, some forms of child labour are profoundly ingrained and legitimised within the community, where it is seen as a regular part of childhood prior to marriage and adulthood. Sources from Mali and Côte d'Ivoire mainly, present child labour as a socialisation process where parents and relatives pass on traditional livelihoods to the next generations. It is believed that child labour is an integral part of a child's education and training for the future. Moreover, while there are various sources on child labour on the African continent demonstrate how the phenomenon is perceived as embedded in cultural attitudes where negative consequences are not questioned or addressed, there are also sources that identify a differentiation between exploitative and non-detrimental child labour practices. To make such a distinction recognizes the negative and harmful consequences, as it is globally acknowledged that child labour is a barrier to a child's development, while it also provides space to include local perspectives on the value of labour for children.

Researchers show that the term "employment" is in no way synonymous with "work" as defined by most African societies. This results in a paradox where few children are employed but many work.

Some scholars found that (paid) work can give children some bargaining power to take control of their lives and assert themselves in power relations with elders. Nevertheless, the economic and physical exploitation of children certainly exists. There is no doubt that harsh and exploitative working conditions must be abolished and that full-time work can have a negative impact on schooling and development. Follow-up research on the apprenticeship system could then provide additional information on how traditional work training and school can be reconciled.

By providing space for local perspectives, attempts to eradicate or eliminate child labour can be consolidated. Local perspectives and communities become part, or even initiators, of the solution, and such a bottom-up approach is been presented in many sources as a must. Furthermore, most sources that discuss interventions, argue for a combination of approaches in the quest for eradication and emphasise the importance of awareness-raising campaigns on the harmful consequences of child labour practices.

WNCB program implementation confirms that social norms favouring child labour are an essential barrier to addressing the issue. From the perspective of children and their parents' social norms favouring child labour are understandable as the lack of quality education and outlook to future decent work are missing. Therefore, a challenge for the WNCB program that may inspire future research is how social norms that promote child labour can be addressed effectively.

Possible research questions to be further elaborated:

- Which social norms drive child labour and how do they interact with other social-economic factors that may conserve child labour as a norm in a specific context?
- How can interventions build on local perspectives in addressing (the worst forms of) child labour?
- What effective strategies can address social norms, and what can be learned from them across contexts?

Enhancing company and government responsibilities to respect human rights

The annotated bibliographies present limited information on child labour/child protection and responsible business themes. Also, the effect of legalisation for companies to do their due diligence on their value has not been researched.

It would be interesting to have an in-depth analysis of what businesses across the full value chain do to eliminate child labour practices, especially as there have been numerous attempts to apply various industrywide monitoring, verification and certification systems to eradicate child labour.

The focus of governments and businesses on child labour often goes to the most visible forms of child labour, e.g. children in factories; as a result, children working in hazardous labour and as home workers are often overlooked. The risk that repressive laws and policies make child labour go underground must be further studied. How to balance between law enforcement to reduce child labour and ensure sufficient alternatives for children.

Possible research questions to be further elaborated:

- *Is there a link between repressive execution of child labour policies and the occurrence of child labour in the informal sector?*
- *What is the link between the income of parents and child labour?*
- *What are the effects of company schemes on the eradication of child labour?*

Getting the data and programme design right

The annotated bibliographies presented a multifold of research data on the various determinants of child labour, often categorized into economic and non-economic or socio-economic explanations. These determinants are gender, overpopulation, natural disasters, unemployment, place of residence, large family sizes, (cultural) traditions, and discrimination (of minority groups).

Including local perspectives and voices from local communities would be a first step in getting the data right and correlates to what is presented by the sources in all the WNCB programme countries' annotated bibliographies. If there are formal databases on child labour occurrence, they are often incomplete and more often there is no database at all. Child labour is a hidden practice and the logistics of uncovering child labour are complex. Most child labour is present in the informal sector and hazardous industries, and as child labour is an illegal practice, it is covert and concealed. In other instances, some types of labour are considered unproductive work (like e.g. domestic work, often done by girls) and therefore not measured by government statistical surveys. This is the case for domestic work, often performed by child labourers, where, as a result, policies do not take domestic labour into account as a problem to be solved. It must be noted that child labour in the domestic sector has long been invisible and it is one of the most hidden forms of the various child labour types in all WNCB focus countries. Furthermore, even when domestic work is legally constituted as work, as is the case of Jordan because it is located in personal households, it remains hidden from the public eye and governmental oversight.

There are good reasons to pressure databases on child labour prevalence. First of all, the more hidden child labour is, the more exploitive it can be. Multiple sources across the WNCB focus countries present a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse in the more hidden sectors than others. Secondly, a database of child labour prevalence is often mentioned as a way forward to develop and implement interventions accordingly. The national strategies and plans to reduce child labour are often considered ineffective, rightly because of a lack of accurate statistics on the phenomenon.

Various areas need more direct attention than others to develop such an official database. In all the annotated bibliographies of the WNCB focus countries, , there is preliminary data on cross-border migration and (cross border) child trafficking. However, there is no clear picture of the extent of both phenomena and how they influence prevalence numbers specifically and the child labour situation generally.

The attention given to intervention design is essential not only to achieve the desired impact but also to prevent a worsening of the child labour situation. Some sources in the annotated

bibliographies demonstrated how poverty alleviation programs had poverty rates increased rather than decreased, and child labour practices continued to occur. Poor national enforcement of treaties, (inter)national frameworks and laws is another factor identified as a barrier to achieving positive results.

When there is an official and comprehensive database with more accurate and transparent data on the child labour situation interventions can be targeted more effectively.

Possible research questions to be further elaborated:

- *What are the most effective ways to build national and international child labour databases in collaboration with governments and governmental organisations?*
- *What is the current state of cross-border migrations and (cross-border) child trafficking in the WNCB focus countries? of Cote d'Ivoire, India, Mali, Uganda and Vietnam? What is the role of the countries where the children come from?*
- *Why is there poor enforcement of (inter)national treaties and frameworks? Is strengthening enforcement an effective way to eradicate child labour?*
- *How does climate change have an effect on child labour?*
- *Balancing: laws and policies with attention to norms change (avoid victim-blaming)*

On a last note, it is critical that follow-up research spell out the relationship between pandemic/climate change and child labour. While there is a clear idea that the current COVID-19 pandemic has worsened child labour practices, scientific research will create a clearer understanding on what these consequences exactly are and will provide input in developing a strategy to minimize those negative effects.

WNCB focus themes and sectors

Regarding the WNCB focus themes of education, child protection, responsible business, and gender, further research must be conducted on the themes of education and responsible businesses.

The limited parental education is often determinant in sources discussing child labour's social and economic factors. However, this factor is barely mentioned in the intervention programs discussed, and follow-up research on parental inclusion in awareness-raising campaigns could be beneficial. Also, multiple sources mention the Universal Primary Education law (UPE). It is mentioned that these effects are different across families by income, region and ethnicity. It is recommended to dive deeper into why that is the case. More and more attention is only recently on what responsible business entails. Businesses have their policies, and an analysis of how these could be addressed concerning governmental policies can be an exciting exploration field. It is recommended to look into the lessons from businesses that have successfully eliminated child labour in their supply chain. The link between the income or wages of parents and child labour is hardly explored. The hypothesis that when parents earn a decent income, child labour is less needs to be further researched.

In both the garment and domestic work sectors, child trafficking practices have been

identified. However, only limited information is provided on the phenomenon and how it ties into the child labour situation. Follow-up research on trafficking will then provide more accurate insights into the child labour situation prevalence.

On the last note, related to the WNCB focus sector of domestic work, there seems to be a rural-urban divide in what child labour entails in those localities. What are the differences for girls working in this sector? Accordingly, a complete understanding of these differences is appreciated in drafting child labour elimination policies.

Specific WNCB country recommendations

India

Some sources present an inextricable link between caste and child labour activities, with children from the lower castes working in more hazardous environments. While it seems to be clear that these discriminatory practices are present, a more in-depth exploration of caste relations and interactions could provide new insights into the extent of their influence. It is recommended to do so, especially as the caste system in India is intrinsically linked to its cultural norms and principles.

Related to the geographic localities, some sources outline the prioritisation of children's welfare and development, derived from the national standards in Rajasthan. While projects resulting from this prioritisation have not been very successful due to limited resources, it would be interesting to explore other regions' intervention implementations and compare results and achieved impact.

Jordan

The annotated bibliography presents many sources focused on child labour practices within the Syrian refugee communities in Jordan. Because of their vulnerable position, these communities must be considered when research is done. It is also recommended to have a deeper dive into the child labour situation before the Syrian refugee influx of 2011 and how the child labour phenomena have been shaped by the influx besides the increase in child labour rates.

Côte d'Ivoire

Concerning the legal frameworks and governmental policies, it seems that the enforcement of child labour laws in Côte d'Ivoire is considered poor. It is recommended to apply further research in this domain to identify the gaps in governmental child labour policies. It would also be valuable to explore lessons learned from neighbouring countries on the implementation of policies concerned with educational quality improvement and whether these have affected on the decrease of child labour activities. At last, specific attention can be applied to the industry-wide certification system in the cocoa sector that has never gone beyond the pilot phase: have similar approaches been applied in other industries and what have their effects been?

Various sources mention how child labour in Côte d'Ivoire is sometimes perceived as embedded in cultural attitudes where potential negative consequences are not questioned or addressed. Instead, child labour activities are considered socialisation where parents and relatives pass on traditional livelihoods to the next generations. Child labour involvement is seen as valuable for a child's education and training for the future. It would be beneficial to explore the perceived positive impacts of child labour activities on a child's development: what are these positives, and how are they beneficial? An analysis of such can be fruitful in consolidating international norms or frameworks with those of the local communities concerned. In addition, the limited parental education is often presented as a determinant in sources discussing the social and economic factors of child labour. However, this factor is barely mentioned in the intervention programs discussed, and follow-up research on parental inclusion in awareness-raising campaigns could be beneficial.

Mali

The annotated bibliography has limited sources on the country's prevalence and history of child labour. It is, therefore, recommended to have follow-up research focused explicitly on the child labour situation in Mali. Most of the sources where research is located in Mali discuss the western understanding of child labour in the Malian context. These sources state the *lived experiences of children* and the *reality experienced by children* as opposed to western understandings. Further ethnographic research will provide a more detailed insight into how children in Mali experience their (work) circumstances. Follow-up research on the apprenticeship system could provide additional information on how traditional work training and the school can be reconciled.

It is stated that policy recommendations are often too abstract to be implemented and that, instead, such policies should be developed together with local entities. It would be interesting to have follow-up research conducted on such practices in the region and draft lessons learned.

The last recommendation is related to the practice of human trafficking for child labour purposes. Further research on the agreement signed by Mali and Cote d'Ivoire on the fight against cross-border child trafficking can explain the current state of this phenomenon.

Uganda

While poverty is considered one of the main determinants of child labour occurrence, the vulnerability to poverty in Uganda has significantly decreased between 1992 and 1999. In the meantime, child labour occurrence has not seemed to decrease. Further research could explore this discrepancy and conclude whether that trend has continued when looking at the situation after 1999. Follow-up research could also dive deeper into the causes of poverty as various sources conclude that climate change and urbanisation have increased poverty rates. A more detailed exploration of the causes of poverty and its relation with child labour can help in address child labour elimination more sustainably.

The elimination of child labour in Uganda has been attempted through various national frameworks, policies and projects. Uganda has also ratified the necessary treaties, complying with international obligations. Nevertheless, poor enforcement to combat child

labour practises is a reality that seems hard to tackle. It is recommended to stimulate follow-up research on corruption, as one of the potential factors causing the attempts not to reach the desired impact.

Further research can focus on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the COVID-19 measures on child labour. Uganda has had the most extended school closure globally and most children have not attended any form of education for two years.

On the last note, the impact of child labour on children's mental health has been researched in the refugee communities in Uganda. It is recommended also to apply such research in the host communities and generally in the Ugandan population.

Vietnam

Various economic and social development in Vietnam has affected child labour occurrence and the interventions that have been implemented. It is for the acknowledgment that child labour does not occur in isolation, but rather in reaction to, or as an effect of, the context it is found in, that it is recommended to research the effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The renovation policy of 1986 and the introduction of a free and compulsory public education system, examples of those earlier mentioned developments, have had positive results. However, the number of children engaged in economic activity remains high, and poverty is the primary determinant. Kim (2018) dives deeper into the multidimensional character of poverty explicitly, exploring an intersectional approach. Follow-up research where such an intersectional approach is taken into consideration can provide a greater understanding of the reactional character of various determinants.

Taking a step back, follow-up research could also focus on the continuous discussion on defining child labour and how to distinguish between "child labour" and "children engaged in work". Some sources mention that the latter might even be beneficial and it is needed to further analyse these benefits. It is recommended to place this follow-up research in the context of local perspectives on the phenomenon.

When resources discuss the effects of interventions and propose recommendations, it is often related to preventing and eliminating child labour. Research on reintegration plans of child labourers would be a valuable addition.

Concluding remarks

The work on the annotated bibliographies shows that child labour has received little attention from the academic world. Much more scientific and practical research is needed not only to unravel the prevalence of child labour but to also understand the underlying dynamics and strategies to address these. The fact that it is noted by some scholars that few children are employed, but many work is a paradox that needs urgent attention also from the academic world. The eradication of child labour doesn't have to wait before poverty is eradicated. The list of actionable measures to eradicate child labour is long and exhaustive.

The literature emphasizes local and multi-pronged approaches to work best. The approach the WNCB programme uses: a combination of area based approach focussing on child labour free zones as well as ensuring systems and processes created through laws, policies and regulations would also benefit from more scientific research to assess its long-term effectiveness.