

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES:

# Mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education

### 1. PREFACE

The Work: No Child's Business programme aims to address the increasingly urgent need to fight child labour by ensuring that children and youth are free from child labour and enjoy their rights to quality education and (future) decent work. In addition to socio-cultural norms, poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, poorly functioning child protection systems, laws and/or law enforcement, lack of decent work for adults, failing labour inspections - poorly functioning education systems are one of the main root causes of child labour. To address child labour and ensure children enjoy their rights to quality education (and future decent work), we must address the gaps in education systems and infrastructure. This paper zooms in on approaches to mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education.

Throughout the WNCB programme, inspiring approaches to lead to this outcome have been undertaken across all six countries. In this paper, however, we share and highlight examples from two countries, India and Ivory Coast, in efforts to keep this paper detailed and informative, while still being manageably short.

### 2. WHAT? - mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education

According to the International Labour Organisation<sup>1</sup> (ILO), an integrated and holistic policy and programming is needed in order to provide universal, quality and free education, which is accessible to children from poor backgrounds where most child labourers persist. To do so, mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children into formal education is crucial. Evidence has demonstrated that it is not a guarantee that children will withdraw from working when provided basic literacy and numeric skills through non-formal education. Additionally, a more systematic link between formal and non-formal education systems is needed to ensure easier transitions from the non-formal education sector to the formal education sector. That being said, both education systems also often need to be improved (i.e., quality) as such that education is (and will be viewed as) a promising route to build livelihoods. Bridge classes are key to helping children bridge the gap between non-formal education systems and formal education, facilitating the mainstreaming of children in formal education (in classes appropriate to their age). Bridge classes, courses and schools should, however, not pose as an alternative education system. The government remains responsible for providing formal quality education to all children.

In the following sections, when referring to mainstreaming into formal education, the term ‘children’ will be used to encompass child labourers, out of school children and children who have been in formal education previously. Please note that the complexity of different contexts and circumstances of families and their children varies.

### 3. WHY?

All over the world, in spite of differences between child labourers (i.e., age, gender, background, paid/unpaid work, self-employed or receiving wages etc.), all have one thing in common: the work which they do, has negative implications on their education. Child labourers are often deprived of basic child protection as well as the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills needed for future access to decent work, a safer transition into adulthood and ultimately building a sustainable livelihood.

Contrary to popular belief that a lack of accessibility to full-time formal education and poverty push children into working, experience has shown that poorly functioning education systems and environment (i.e., social norms and traditions normalizing child labour, social exclusion and discrimination) are key (i.e. root cause) in understanding why children are working instead of attending school. To address child labour, we must therefore understand how to address the gaps in education systems and enabling environments. But, how?

How have WNCB alliance partners worked on mainstreaming children (back) into formal education? What major obstacles did they face, and how did they navigate and rectify these? What was learned from the approach(es) taken and what lessons or main take aways can be learned from by other actors in different contexts and countries working on mainstreaming children (back) into formal education? Answers to these questions are presented in the following section, through highlighting approaches in two countries: Ivory Coast and India.

### 4. HOW? - inspiring WNCB approaches to overcoming obstacles in mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education

Below, two examples of how alliance partners mainstreamed children (back) into formal education are presented. Both examples embody WNCBs area-based approach. Highlighted in both examples are the obstacles faced by alliance partners, how these were rectified, and recommendations.

#### Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast is one of the foremost producer and exporter of cocoa amounting to 40% globally. The largest farming areas are found in the Nawa region where smallholder farmers from remote settlements work. Child labour is prevalent on many cocoa plantations for several reasons. Lack of formal, quality schools and sufficient resources is one of the main reasons these children do not attend school and end up in work. Schools in the region are often limited, are understaffed, lack

sufficient educational materials and located very far from settlements where children live with their parents. Attendance levels are low and dropout rates are high.

Alliance partners UNICEF, Save the Children and teachers union SYNADEEPCI, together with relevant stakeholders and rightsholders, have worked in the Nawa region to mainstream children (back) into formal education. Some key strategies and approaches include:

- Setting up bridge classes, also known as second chance schools, where children gain necessary knowledge, skills and learning capabilities to integrate (back) into formal education
- Working with local education authorities to train, monitor and evaluate volunteer teachers to operate the bridge classes
- Awareness raising and sensitisation on issues of child labour and the importance of education to parents, teachers, communities, community- and religious leaders
- Facilitating access for families to social service, economic empowerment- and learning opportunities in efforts to strengthen child protection services to respond to children at risk
- Local and national level collaboration and advocacy

Through these strategies, alliance partners, together with relevant stakeholders and rightsholders, successfully implemented 100 bridge classes providing access to children in remote areas (10 of which have been officially turned into community schools as education authorities have formalised these). Moreover, 38 classrooms have been built across 27 villages and countless community mobilisation efforts over the years have positively reinforced communal efforts to get out of school children (back) into education.

With all successes, commendable efforts and results achieved [\[link: story of change\]](#), in the journey of mainstreaming children (back) into formal education, WNCB alliance partners faced their share of obstacles, which they worked hard to overcome. These obstacles and alliance partners' approach to overcome them offer valuable lessons and insights which others can consider and adapt to their context in foresight of similar challenges. WNCB country teams<sup>1</sup> shared their thoughts and reflections. The table below categorises obstacles which WNCB alliance partners in Ivory Coast faced at three levels; at community or grassroot level, local (i.e., regional) level and national level. The second column outlines contributions to how these obstacles were overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Consisting of UNICEF, Save the Children and SYNADEEPCI

Obstacle(s)	Approach to overcome obstacle(s)
<b>Community and Grassroot Level</b>	
<p>One major obstacle at this level was the challenge to convince parents to send their children to school, particularly girls. Due to social norms, lacking of educational opportunities in remote areas, quality and infrastructure, and lack of job opportunity (after finishing studies ) for youth, many parents find it difficult to see the added value of education for their children.</p> <p>Another obstacle at grassroot level is the rising presence and preference of informal Madrasa schools (Islamic Educational Structures - SIE), by some parents and religious leaders. These parents and leaders were therefore reluctant to the WNCB alliance partners' strategies regarding bridge classes to transition out of school children into formal education.</p>	<p>Sensitisation was key to overcoming social norms perpetuating child labour and out of school children. Frequent visits were required from WNCB alliance partners and aligned stakeholders such as child protection services and social workers, to parents, communities, teachers, religious and community leaders to meet and discuss child labour issues and the importance of formal education for all children. The <b>frequency</b> and <b>diversity</b> of actors meeting parents, communities and leaders on these issues strengthened the support for change.</p> <p>Additionally, it was important for parents to understand that the expectation of going to school and getting an education is not so that their child must necessarily become a doctor or minister - but rather that their child learns how the world works, how to make sense of it and navigate their futures, whether this be in cities or in their villages. Also, with regards to their farming livelihoods it is useful for their children to learn about new developments and technologies which change in farming over time. As such, parents understood the value of children developing their knowledge, numeracy and literacy.</p> <p>Alliance partners also worked closely with community and religious leaders to discuss possibilities to balance education opportunities for children between Madrasa teaching and bridge classes. In doing so, allowing children to develop their religious knowledge and practice next to integrating French and topics from formal education. This offers these children the chance to integrate (back) into formal education. However, this is an ongoing process which requires a more structured approach to balancing these systems to ensure it does not overburden children in their education.</p>

Local Regional Level	
<p>At local regional level, the question at large was how to adequately integrate children into the formal education system. Generally, bridge classes aim to transition out of school children into the formal system within a maximum of 2 years. This required WNCB alliance partners to prove that these children develop the necessary knowledge and capabilities to follow their age-appropriate grades in formal schooling.</p> <p>In addition, formal schools at local and regional level face several challenges: insufficient classrooms, teachers, working staff and teaching materials, and no canteen in schools. Given these persisting challenges, a rise in transitioning children into formal schooling, through WNCB alliance partners' bridge class initiatives, posed an increased burden on educational authorities to accommodate more pupils - despite this overall being a positive development at large.</p>	<p>Together with local education authorities, WNCB alliance partners - particularly SYNADEEPCI - brought education stakeholders together to mobilise volunteer teachers from communities through training and capacity building to teach bridge classes. The local education authorities guided, monitored and evaluated the training of these volunteer teachers throughout the years to ensure the quality of teaching in the bridge classes was up to standard and that children educated by these teachers would be prepared to enter (back) into formal education.</p> <p>WNCB alliance partners and local education authorities also worked together to successfully turn 10 bridge classes into formal community schools in remote areas. This entailed official recognition from authorities whereby these schools were then allocated formal teachers and materials. This is one of the ways by which bridge classes can be sustained when taken over and institutionalized by governments. However, the role of the trained, volunteer teachers beyond this point requires more thought.</p>
National Level	
<p>To set up bridge classes, gain support and accreditation for these, WNCB alliance partners faced some obstacles at national level. To ensure the adequate transitional nature of the bridge classes, and that formal schools recognise this, WNCB alliance partners needed to advocate to and collaborate with national authorities to develop a 'arreté' (legal order) to organise bridge classes and provide norms and standards to govern and operate these.</p>	<p>Particularly Save the Children worked consistently on advocacy efforts towards national authorities. Advocacy eventually led to the collaboration on devising appropriate guidelines for the operation of bridge classes, which was eventually approved by the minister of education in the form of an <i>arreté</i>.</p>

Close collaboration and alignment between WNCB alliance partners and relevant stakeholders and rightsholders, both locally and nationally, was key in overcoming the main obstacles faced. Inspiring successes in overcoming obstacles include the formalisation of bridge classes into community schools which brings education closer to where children and their families live and achieving a national mandate for bridge classes to mainstream child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education.

Reflecting on alliance partners' work on mainstreaming children (back) into formal education WNCB country team offers the following recommendations:

- Understand that change is not coming overnight, particularly cultural and social norms change. This is a long process which requires trust, building a mutual understanding and developing other norms.
- Involve children in mainstreaming efforts. SYNADEEPCI facilitated pupil-led clubs where children are responsible for educating their peers, parents and communities through, for example, drama and theatre at schools or villages. This was impactful in efforts to sensitise parents and communities to child labour issues and the importance of (formal) education.
- Understand the crucial role which community- and religious leaders play and engage them accordingly in initiatives that involve their communities.
- Training child protection committees is crucial, to ensure they further develop a clear message and have support for awareness raising and their continuous work at community level (i.e., outside of- and beyond projects and initiatives such as WNCB)
- Instrumental to sensitising parents and communities and changing certain social norms around child labour and education was providing practical and tangible support. The combination of this and WNCB's message of sensitisation through awareness raising and dialogue reinforced a shift in perspective of, particularly parents, towards formal education and the opportunities for their children. Such tangible support included cash transfers, Village Savings and Loan Associations, access to social service and income generating activities.

## India

With the highest population worldwide, a large production and export position, and significant socio-economic challenges that come with it, India faces a severe extent of child labour across various states and sectors. WNCB alliance partners<sup>2</sup> in India have focussed on three sectors across three states where child labour is rampant, largely hidden and operating in informal and unorganised workplaces. Alongside the challenges to tackle child labour under these circumstances, migration is a key factor increasing risks of child labour and exposing vulnerable positions of

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<sup>2</sup> Consisted of Manjari, Aravali, Arisa, MV Foundation, Nav Jagriti, FSS, ICCSPL, AIPTF and Bal Raksha Bharat

children. Migration and the nature of child labour landscapes in India pose significant challenges to mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education.

WNCB alliance partners in India have adopted various strategies to mainstream children (back) into formal education, including some of the following:

- Setting up bridge courses to transition out of school children back into formal education
- Multi-activity-, motivational- and remediation centres
- Working with education stakeholders on practicalities that increase access to formal education: admission procedures, obtaining necessary registration documents etc.
- Income generating support for parents
- Awareness raising on child labour issues and the importance of children’s education
- Training and capacity building of teachers and education stakeholders
- Stakeholder engagement to collectively tackle child labour

These approaches have resulted in successful achievements in tackling child labour and mainstreaming children (back) into formal education. However, over the years of the programme, WNCB alliance partners faced numerous obstacles to do so [\[link: story of change\]](#).

The example from India presented in the following section is from WNCB alliance partners in Bihar in their efforts to mainstream children into formal education, the obstacles they faced and how these were addressed. Insights, reflections and recommendations from India follow in the next section.

Obstacles	Approach to overcome obstacle(s)
<p>Migratory status of parents and children:</p> <p>Due to a lack of opportunities, many parents (particularly fathers) migrate from Bihar in search of employment opportunities. Children are either brought along, left behind with other care takers or risk being trafficked. In each situation, these children are at a high risk for entering child labour to support their families or themselves. The possibility to complete formal education, mandated for all children by law, reduces significantly once children enter child labour.</p>	<p>Identifying who these children are, what their specific, individual situations are as these are often not homogenous (e.g., whether these children might be orphans, single parent families differ also in which parent is present, where these children migrate to, what kind of work their parents do etc.) is fundamental to devising specific plans to cater to their individual needs. Together with WNCB alliance partners, community mobilisers work with all members of a community (i.e., children, their parents and family, teachers, education stakeholders etc.) to raise awareness about the importance of every child's education as well as keeping track of children attending school and following up when there are children missing their education obligations. Mobilisers are highly motivated community members who offer a listening ear to parents struggling to</p>

	<p>send their children to school and offer motivational support to ensure all children can attend to their education.</p>
<p>Gaps in education system and infrastructure:</p> <p>Where there is often demand for education, there is a lack of adequate education available to children. This includes a lack of schools, classrooms, teachers and teaching materials. On a policy level, WNCB alliance partners are in constant negotiations to organise better quality education, available teachers and materials in areas where education opportunities for children are limited.</p> <p>Lack of official data (on child labour):</p> <p>Linked to the point above, there is a lack of current consensus data on child labour and out of school children in Bihar (and India at large).</p>	<p>To address these two points, WNCB alliance partners in Bihar have conducted door-to-door surveys, visited and collected data from relevant stakeholders in order to present a clear and current depiction of the education system gaps and the realities of children who are engaged in child labour or are out of school for various reasons. With clear and current data, better interventions and policies can be implemented and resources allocated. WNCB alliance partners in Bihar consistently gather up-to-date data, through community mobilisers, to inform their negotiations with local and state authorities for better education infrastructure and systems.</p>
<p>Caste discrimination:</p> <p>In addition to social norms (e.g., largely girls who are removed from school early on to help with domestic work), Bihar is a heavily caste-affected state where caste discrimination poses significant challenges for Dalit children, and families, of oppressed caste groups. Dalit children are often not permitted in certain schools, or schools find that parents of dominant castes remove their children from a school when they find out Dalit children have been enrolled. Practices of untouchability severely limit employment, education and other social services for Dalit families and their children.</p>	<p>With high Dalit communities in Bihar, WNCB alliance partners have specifically focussed on their positions in communities in order to support all children, especially the most vulnerable at high-risk of entering child labour. One way to tackle caste discrimination observed in schools is through setting up child committees in schools, where the school is made responsible for sensitising teachers, students and parents on caste discrimination. Enabling schools to implement this internally ensure sustaining results and a change in school culture. Open dialogue and discussions on caste discrimination is a sensitive topic, and must be handled with care. WNCB alliance partners observe that with a multi-stakeholder approach, where children, parents, communities, authorities, private sector and others are engaged in understanding and addressing issues together, slow but gradual progress can be made towards offering equal opportunities to both Dalit children and their families.</p>



Based on the obstacles and approaches to overcoming these, WNCB India team shares the following recommendations with regards to mainstreaming child labourers and out of school children (back) into formal education:

- Everyone must be on board to mainstream all children into formal education. This is the most effective way in accordance with WNCB area-based approach and Child Labour Free Zones.
- Data and information on current realities of children, families and communities is a crucial tool in getting everyone on board. Clear data and evidence open doors for dialogue and collaboration on child labour issues and challenging social norms
- Pay close attention to highly vulnerable children and groups, such as Dalits who face discrimination with implications on their opportunities
- Building confidence and hope in (former) child labourers and out of school children is important. These children may have grown insecure, often feel that they are academically 'slow'. Setting up motivational centres to support and train children to build their confidence was key
- Breaking and re-building social norms around child labour and education systems is a long and slow process, engage meaningfully with all stakeholders and rightsholders on a regular basis. Following up on engagement and adapting strategies accordingly to tackle the issue of child labour is necessary

## 5. Concluding remarks

From the insights, reflections and recommendations of Ivory Coast and India on how to mainstream children into formal education, the following key take aways are extracted:

First, mainstreaming children into formal education is the responsibility of all stakeholders in (fluencing) a child's ecosystem. Meaningfully engaging with different stakeholders, building and strengthening the capacity and knowledge of relevant government bodies, unions and teachers, and rectifying negative experiences relating to formal education and challenging social norms around child labour is crucial to this. That being said, governments remain solely responsible for providing formal, quality education to all children. Other stakeholders do, however, have their role and responsibility to prevent and eliminate child labour, and support the transition of children from work into formal education. An example of this is engaging with the private sector for gifts or donations, and funding for infrastructure.

Second, schools are a uniting spaces for all children, who have diverse backgrounds, living (and working) situations and family structures (or lack thereof). Whether informal or formal education, and the transition between the two, it must be considered that each child requires a tailored approach to continuously motivate and educate them successfully. That being said, it should be noted that such approaches should not serve as alternative education to formal, compulsory education, to which every child has a right to. Furthermore, in these uniting spaces, identifying child leaders who motivate their peers as role models can also have a significant impact on the

mainstreaming of their peers. Issues relating to mainstreaming children into formal education should therefore also be taken up in and by schools (i.e., committees, awareness groups, peer-to-peer initiatives etc.) and children themselves.

Finally, national and regional government prioritisation and support is ultimately needed to improve and sustain the quality and infrastructure of education available to children.