CHILD LABOUR CASE STUDY

THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Integrating child labour into humanitarian needs assessments

Photo: REACH initiative

This case study describes (i) how child labour has been integrated into (multi-sector) humanitarian needs assessments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and the Philippines and (ii) the main challenges and lessons learned.

Integration of child labour in humanitarian needs assessments

1. **In March 2014 in the Philippines, the Education Cluster and the Child Protection Sub-Cluster** conducted a joint assessment that included child labour as a priority concern for children and adolescents. Data collection methodologies included key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The assessment mostly focused on changes in "harsh and dangerous labour", asking generally about the types of work children were doing, whether new forms of child labour were emerging and whether there had been a perceived increase of child labour in the community. In nearly all assessed communities, key informants reported a perceived increase in child labour, including worst forms of child labour (WFCL). Although the assessment did not collect prevalence data, the trends identified during the assessment led to the development of an inter-sectoral regional child labour response strategy.

2. **In 2019 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the Education Cluster with support from REACH initiative** conducted an education assessment, using a child protection lens, to identify the barriers to school enrolment and attendance for children and adolescents. The assessment used a household roster mixed module approach whereby an initial household survey identified every child in a household and asked, for each child, questions about school attendance, disability, economic child labour and household chores. For each child who had worked or done household chores in the past seven days, additional questions were asked about the type of activity, the number of days and hours worked in that week and whether the work involved exposure to hazardous conditions.

Cox's Bazar Education assessment

In this assessment, school attendance of less than four days per week was measured, and children with disabilities were identified using the Washington Group Question/UNICEF module on Child Functioning. Child labour was defined as engagement of children aged 5 to 17 years in any activity during the seven days prior to data collection in return for income in cash or in kind, with specific prompts including work or help on the household's plot, farm, food garden, or looking after animals, helping in a family business or a relative's business with or without pay, or running his/her own business, producing or selling articles, handicrafts, clothes, food or agricultural products. Household chores specifically explored fetching water for the household, collecting firewood for the household, shopping for the household, cooking for the household, washing dishes or cleaning around the house, washing clothes for the household, caring for children in the household, caring for someone sick in the household, or carrying out other miscellaneous household tasks conducted by children for more than 28 hours per week.

3. **In 2018 and 2019 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, UNHCR with support of REACH conducted two rounds of a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)** using a household roster approach whereby elements of children's work were integrated into broader livelihoods questions. The survey identified all household members over five years old who had worked in the past 30 days.[1] For each household member who had worked to earn an income, additional questions were asked about the type of work, whether the work was paid by an NGO, how much the income was and, if the household member was under 18 years, whether the work involved hazardous conditions. Under the protection section of the survey, questions were asked about the most serious risks facing children; common responses included child labour, kidnapping (connected to trafficking) and risk of recruitment by armed groups/forces.

4. **At the end of 2017 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the Education Cluster and the Child Protection Working Group** conducted a joint assessment to look at the dynamics of child protection risks and education. Through key informant interviews the assessment identified whether there were school-aged children who were out of school, what the barriers to their attendance were (such as work, marriage or household chores), children's engagement in paid or unpaid work and the types of work children were involved in. The assessment also identified trafficking risks, including persons unknown and known in the community who were offering to take children away to promising jobs, better care or other incentives.

5. **In 2017 in Afghanistan, the Education in Emergencies Working Group and Child Protection Sub-Cluster, with the support of REACH, conducted a joint Education and Child Protection assessment** through household-level surveys (quantitative) and focus group discussions (FGDs) (qualitative). It asked both indicative and direct questions about child labour.[2] Direct questions included identifying whether households relied on child labour as a coping strategy and noted the main barriers for children in the household to attend school, including leaving school to work and leaving school to help at home. The survey also identified children, particularly girls, who were married and not in school.

6. **Annually, since 2018 in Iraq, Child Protection and other Working Groups, OCHA and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group, with the support of REACH,** have conducted an MSNA using a household roster approach for every household member, with additional focused area assessments. Given concerns around the protection of affected populations (civil documentation, freedom of movements, etc.) a strong protection lens and child protection lens were adopted, including analysis of school attendance rates and the presence of child marriage among boys and girls.[3]

---

1   In the 2019 Bangladesh MSNA child labour was defined as any work in exchange for income in the past 30 days.

2   In this assessment, child labour was defined as any work outside of the home by boys or girls aged under the age of 18 years in exchange for monetary or in-kind income.

3   In the Iraq MSNA, school attendance rates were identified based on attendance of fewer than four days per week; child marriage included any boy or girl aged under 18 years, married at the time of data collection.

Challenges

The following challenges have been identified by staff members involved in the assessment and write-up of this case study:

Enumerators and respondents

- Questions that require complex calculation by enumerators, for example, when they have to add up the total number of hours worked in a given number of days for each child, can affect accuracy of data. (Bangladesh)

- Questions that require calculation by respondents, such as the total number of hours worked or household income earned in a given period, can be challenging for respondents to answer, especially when they are illiterate or have low levels of education. (Bangladesh)

- Asking primary caregivers to answer survey questions on behalf of the whole household may lead to less reliable data on child labour. (Bangladesh, Iraq, the Philippines)

Context, cultural practices and beliefs

- Situations of insecurity and high protection risks may lead to parents/caregivers and heads of households being unwilling to share information about their families. (Iraq)

- In contexts where child labour and child marriage are illegal yet common, posing questions about these practices at the household level may be sensitive. (Iraq)

- It can be difficult to assess how much time children spend working if these activities are not considered to be "work" by the household, for instance, domestic work or supporting a family business. As a result, hours and conditions of paid and unpaid household work and domestic labour are generally difficult to capture. (All four countries)

Lack of detailed data

- To determine whether a child's work is acceptable work, child labour or a WFCL, more detailed information is required about the type of work (including activities and tasks) and conditions (including hours and hazards). Without this information, hazardous forms of labour are difficult to identify, particularly in the agricultural sector and in domestic work.

Successes and lessons learned

Clarification of concepts, values and legislation of "work" and "child labour" in context

- Clearly define "child labour" prior to the assessment. Use the national legal age for work as a cut-off point for data disaggregation in order to identify how many children are involved in child labour and how many children are in legal forms of work. Collect further information about days/hours, types of work and conditions in order to determine whether children are involved in WFCL. (Afghanistan, Iraq)

- Establish how affected populations understand concepts of "work", especially in settings where population groups (such as refugees) do not have the legal right to work, when a significant amount of work takes place in the informal economy or where work is used to exchange or pay for goods or to repay debt.

- In settings where the legal framework(s) does not apply – or only partly applies – to affected populations (such as refugees and host communities), use the national legal framework of the country where the affected population resides. During analysis and reporting, it is important to highlight these gaps and discrepancies in policy and legislation. (Bangladesh)

- Determine the risk of child labour being under-reported by assessing the adult workforce rate. If adult labour rates are low because work is largely restricted or taking place within the informal economy, it is likely that child labour rates will also appear to be low due to under-reporting. (Bangladesh)

- In settings where child labour is a sensitive issue, avoid asking households direct questions about child labour, but speak about work in general terms or ask questions about child labour within the community rather than the household.
- Always test the (local translations of) assessment questions in the local context. (Afghanistan, Iraq, Bangladesh)

Selection of respondents and enumerators

- During the research design stage of an assessment, specific objectives and research questions should be identified which may indicate a preference to include adolescents and/or children as respondents in the study. If this is the case, during the research design phase, alternative methods reliant on consenting adult participants must firstly be explored. If the inclusion of adolescents and/or children is deemed essential, a clear justification must be presented, and a specific set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be developed to protect respondents in question.[4]
- If adolescents and/or children are being included as respondents in an assessment, it is critical to ensure that involved enumerators receive appropriate training on child protection and communication with children from child protection experts and professionals in the context. (Bangladesh)
- Involve frontline workers in the design of assessments in order to ensure the sensitivities and specific terms used in the context are reflected.

Selection of assessment tools and methodologies

- Recognise that the subject of child labour, and protection issues more generally, should be captured through mixed methods assessments. An in-depth and contextualised understanding of child labour findings tends to generate more relevant results than prevalence findings for humanitarian information needs.
- Integrate standard questions on age, gender, school attendance and work into household surveys to identify initial child labour trends. (Iraq)
- Use secondary data reviews to identify data gaps and inform the design of new assessments. Include findings from the desk review into analysis and reporting. (the Philippines, Bangladesh, Iraq)
- Compare data from multi-sector needs assessments and household surveys against other sources of information such as developmental studies and case management data, which often indicate considerable under-reporting of child labour in needs assessments. Case management data may reveal a more accurate picture of the prevalence of child labour among the most vulnerable families.(Iraq)
- The most vulnerable families may get excluded from needs assessments as a result of random sampling due to marginalisation and invisibility in the community, or because members do not have time to participate in surveys, focus groups or interviews. (Iraq)

Dimensions of child labour: trends, conditions, "push and pull" factors of children's work

- Collect information about "push and pull" factors of child labour such as (i) the main reasons why children work or are more vulnerable for trafficking, and (ii) how children manage to combine school and work. (the Philippines, Afghanistan, Bangladesh)
- Where possible, collect information about the conditions of children's work to determine whether it is hazardous work. This includes, but is not limited to, the hours that children work, the conditions under which children work, existing hazards and safety regulations such as the availability of protective equipment.

---

4   These SOPs must include a request for permission from the participating adolescent or child's primary caregiver, provided they are available. Furthermore, data collection among adolescents or children should only be conducted in locations where a referral mechanism is in place for protection concerns; thus, the SOPs must include the gathering of consent to refer the participant to specific humanitarian actors as required.

- Where feasible and relevant, data should be collected on a wide range of labour-related conditions faced by children. Building upon more prevalent research topics, such as conventional child labour and household chores, information should also be sought on widespread issues such as child-bonded labour and child trafficking.

- Quantitative surveys may not always capture the underlying attitudes, cultural practices or coping strategies that drive child labour. To differentiate why households are using child labour, questions are needed around when children stopped attending school and started working, as well as reasons for work – for example, whether it was due to displacement, and whether children are working paid or unpaid, etc. (Bangladesh)

Assessing child labour promotes a multi-sectoral approach to addressing child labour issues

- Child labour is a cross-cutting issue, relevant in highlighting protection concerns, education needs, coping strategy use and economic vulnerability among affected populations. For instance, child labour data can provide direct or indirect findings on the causes of psychosocial distress experienced by working children; the child protection risks experienced by girls and boys in and on the way to the workplace; the underlying causes for school dropout and the extent to which child labour is a coping mechanism for family income poverty; and a range of other topics. As such, by integrating child labour questions into an assessment, a multi-sectoral perspective of the underlying causes and consequences of child labour can be analysed, providing an evidence base for inter-sector strategic planning. (Iraq)

Resources

Philippines:

- Unicef (2014). Education Cluster and Child Protection Sub-Cluster joint assessment Child Protection and Education Cluster Joint Needs Assessment. Education and Child Protection sub-Cluster Philippines. **Mid-term and Phase one reports** and **Final report.**

Bangladesh:

- REACH (2019). Education Needs Assessment. REACH in partnership with the Education Cluster. **Findings Report.**

- UNHCR and REACH (2019). Bangladesh - Multi-sector Needs Assessment: Cox's Bazar, Rohingya Refugee Response - January 2019. UNHCR and REACH Bangladesh. **Findings report.**

- Unicef (2017). Education and Child Protection Joint Rapid Needs Assessment, Education Sector and Child Protection Sub-Sector Cox's Bazar. **Findings report.**

Afghanistan:

- REACH (2017). Joint Education and Child Protection Needs Assessment, Education in Emergencies Working Group and REACH, Afghanistan. **Findings report.**

Iraq:

- REACH (2018). Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment, Round VI, REACH and the Iraq Assessment Working Group, Iraq. **Findings report.**

More information and resources are available at:
https://alliancecpha.org
https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force