



REVIEW BRIEF | FEBRUARY 2022

SYNTHESIS REVIEW OF OCFT WORK IN COCOA AND FISHING/SEAFOOD

Key project factors were linked to effectiveness in fighting labor abuses

Photo credit (from left): Borney, Mardinal. iStockPhoto.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

With 160 million children engaged in child labor and 25 million adults engaged in forced labor worldwide, developing and implementing effective strategies to combat labor abuses is a critical effort (International Labor Organization (ILO) 2020, 2017). The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), part of the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), has invested in programs over the last 25 years to eliminate child labor and forced labor globally. Since 1999, the ILAB Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) has funded projects that seek to address child labor, forced labor, trafficking, and unsafe working conditions. As part of its work, OCFT procures performance evaluations and syntheses of its projects to generate credible evidence on effective strategies to combat and eliminate labor abuses. This brief presents findings from a synthesis review of 19 OCFT-funded projects in the cocoa and fishing/seafood sectors.

USDOL commissioned Mathematica to conduct a synthesis review of performance evaluations of cocoa and fishing/seafood projects. Full synthesis review report may be found online at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/research-impact-evaluation>

KEY FINDINGS ON PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

OVERALL FINDINGS

- Across both sectors, project effectiveness appears closely associated with key *design* factors: project funding and duration; tripartite structure; family, community leader, and union engagement; and subcontracting through local organizations to build capacity and ensure relevance.
- Similarly, *implementation* factors were related to project effectiveness across the portfolio: grantee capacity, performance monitoring practices, and planning processes.

COCOA SECTOR FINDINGS

- Cocoa projects designed with various components or close links between components were more effective than projects designed with fewer components or linkages.
- Multi-country, multi-sector cocoa projects struggled to provide adequate funding and administration for sets of subprojects. However, they generally succeeded in raising awareness of labor issues among stakeholders, mobilizing national governments to address labor abuses, and disseminating and cross-pollinating effective strategies.

FISHING/SEAFOOD FINDINGS

- In contrast to cocoa projects, fishing/seafood projects designed with fewer components or fewer links between them were, on average, more effective than fishing/seafood projects designed with more components or close linkages.
- Projects in this sector also performed better when heavily engaging employers.
- Fishing projects with more logical, coherent theories of change were more effective in achieving their targets than those with gaps in elements or logic of their theories of change. Projects integrating their efforts with outside initiatives were also more effective. These findings likely apply to cocoa as well, but in our small pool of cocoa projects, the association was not apparent.

DETAILED RESULTS

Characteristics of projects included in the synthesis review

Within each sector, projects were similar in terms of geography and strategic partners. Projects differed most in their funding amounts and scopes of work.





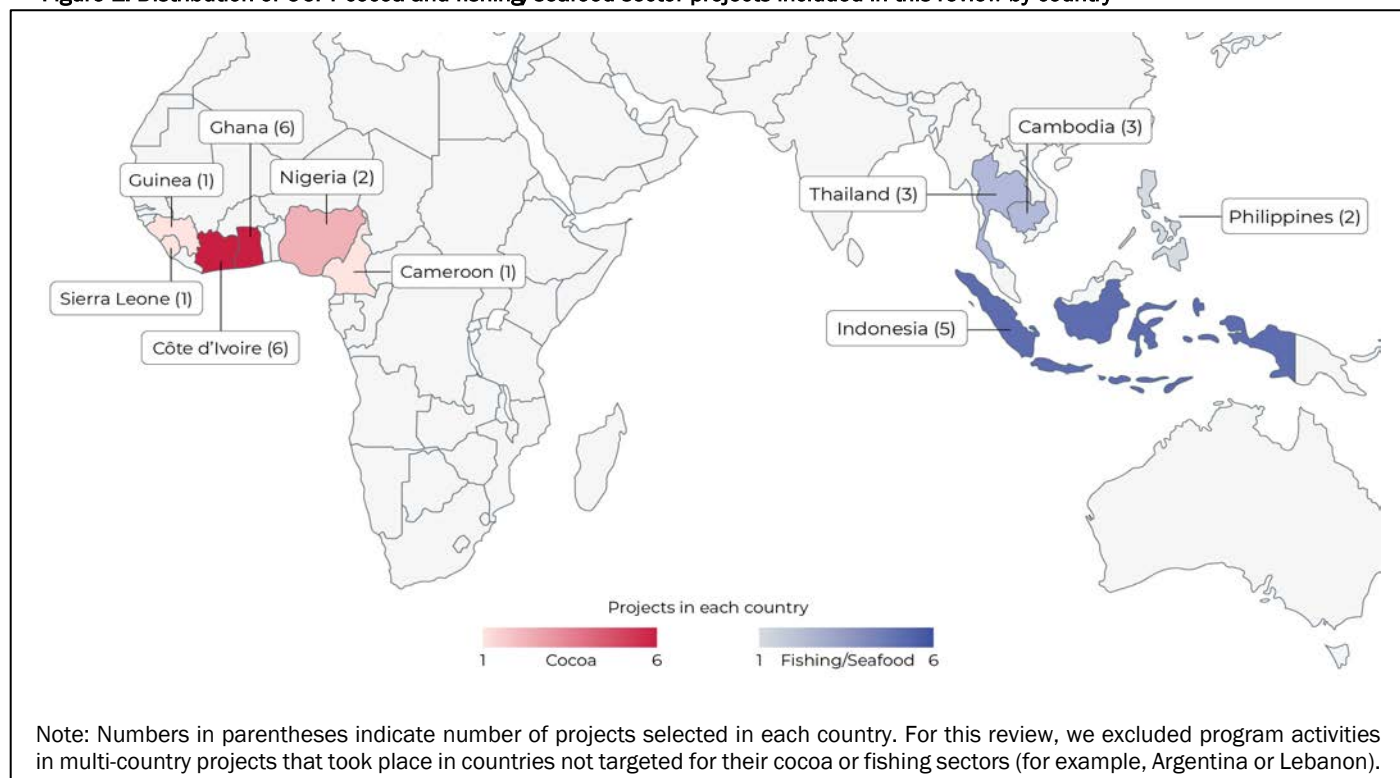
Geography 	The 9 cocoa projects were concentrated in West Africa (particularly in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire), and the 10 fishing/seafood projects took place in Southeast Asia.
Strategic partners 	All projects engaged governments (typically in capacity building and policy guidance areas) and nearly all engaged children, youth, and families with education, training, or income generation programs. Just over half of projects engaged unions, and a subset of projects, particularly in the fishing sector, also engaged employers in education and compliance activities.
Budget 	Project value varied from \$900,000 to \$13.0 million (for ECOWAS I & 2, a multi-phase project in West Africa). Average project value was \$5.7 million.
Scope 	Several projects in the portfolio had small scopes and few goals, such as supporting stakeholder institutions in using ILO child labor monitoring systems. Other projects had wide-ranging interventions and ambitious goals, including direct actions to immediately address labor abuses and technical assistance to build government capacity and advance policy.

Figure 1. Distribution of OCFT cocoa and fishing/seafood sector projects included in this review by country



FINDINGS

Our analysis of data extracted from evaluations and project documents revealed associations between project design, characteristics, context, and effectiveness (defined here as *success in delivering planned inputs, producing planned outputs, and achieving desired outcomes*). Desired outcomes included reductions in labor abuses, increases in partner capacity, and improvements in educational enrollment, among others. Our analysis provides insights on general trends across the project portfolio; however, individual projects may defy larger patterns. Given the small sample size of projects and the limits of our methodology, portfolio-wide findings should be interpreted in light of individual projects' distinct characteristics and implementation experiences. Findings related to sustainability are discussed in full in the synthesis report.



Cross-cutting findings

In our analysis of factors that may influence project effectiveness, we found that most associations were present in both the cocoa and fishing/seafood sectors.

Larger projects (both in terms of budget and duration) appeared to be more effective than smaller projects (see Figure 2). Qualitative information from evaluations suggests projects with smaller budgets struggled to overcome delays and challenges and produce sustainable outcomes.

Projects that **heavily engaged families, community leaders, and unions** were more effective than projects that did not engage those groups to the same degree.

Across both sectors, there was **no apparent association** between whether a project **engaged investors, consumer groups, or buyers** and the project’s effectiveness.

Projects with a **strong tripartite approach** (engaging unions, government partners, and the private sector) were more effective than those with less explicit tripartite approaches.

Projects that **subcontracted programming to local organizations for small, locally relevant subprojects** were more effective than projects that did not subcontract programming to local organizations.

Projects that set up **long-term, outcome-based planning with partner governments** were more effective than projects that planned primarily for shorter term results, without close government collaboration to produce concrete plans that extended beyond the project scope to reduce and eliminate labor abuses.

Partner and participant enthusiasm for project goals and activities was associated with effectiveness, as were reported **public attitudes in support of labor rights**. However, pressure and influence from non-project stakeholders does not appear to be associated with project success.

Projects targeting **countries with low gross domestic product (GDP)** per capita at project outset were more effective in meeting planned goals than projects targeting countries with high GDP.

Implementer capacity and management quality were associated with project efficiency, higher levels of partner and participant buy-in to project activities, fewer severe delays, and project effectiveness.

Projects where **implementer capacity grew** or where implementers used thorough planning, a well-researched initial approach, strong service delivery systems, or deliberate alignment with similar projects were more effective.

Implementers with moderate to strong **monitoring and evaluation processes, participant targeting, and planning with partners for continuity of efforts** after projects closed tended to be more effective.

Figure 2. Project size and average effectiveness

Funding group	Project value per year, per country (millions)	Effectiveness score (range: 3-9)	Avg. group score
Projects allocated <\$1m per year, per country	\$0.2	4	5.0
	\$0.3	7	
	\$0.7	6	
	\$0.8	3	
Projects allocated \$1m or more per year, per country	\$0.8	5	6.5
	\$1.0	7	
	\$1.1	6	
	\$1.1	5	
	\$1.1	9	
	\$1.2	7	
	\$1.3	8	
	\$2.0	4	
	\$2.8	6	

Note: Projects for which we only have interim outcome information are not included in this figure. Evaluations of multi-country, multi-sector projects which did not provide adequate detail on cocoa or fishing-related results achievement are also not included in this figure.

Cocoa sector-specific findings

Given the small pool of six comparable cocoa-sector projects included in our synthesis review, our analysis at the cocoa-sector level can only detect strong associations between variables. The bulk of the insights relevant to cocoa can be found in the cross-cutting findings of this brief.

Cocoa projects designed with **various components and/or close links between components** were more effective than projects designed with fewer components or linkages.



Our qualitative assessment of the three cocoa-related projects that were multi-country and multi-sector (SY@W, CLEAR, and CIRCLE I & II) suggests that such **global initiatives had mixed results**. These projects generally struggled with inadequate funding and duration of country-level programs, difficulties with global project administration and supporting country-level staff, and difficulties with host governments or other local partners. In some cases, these challenges limited projects' achievements in direct services, such as income generation activities, and in government capacity-building, such as policy reform activities. Nonetheless, these projects generally succeeded in increasing awareness of labor issues among stakeholders, mobilizing national governments to address labor abuses, and disseminating and cross-pollinating effective strategies.



Fishing/seafood sector-specific findings

Fishing and seafood projects differ from cocoa projects in several key dimensions. Whereas cocoa projects tended to offer comprehensive interventions in a small number of sites, fishing/seafood projects tended to be more dispersed, at times engaging diverse employers, provincial governments, teachers, unions, and children. Fishing and seafood projects may not require such close linkage of components and investing in fewer components could increase the funding available for (and thus the intensity or dosage) of each activity. This helps to explain our first finding below.



In contrast to cocoa projects, fishing/seafood projects designed with **fewer components and/or fewer links between them** were more effective than projects designed with more components and/or close linkages.



Fishing/seafood projects that **heavily engaged employers** were more effective than projects that did not engage employers or did so to a lesser degree.



Projects with more **logical, coherent theories of change** were more effective than those with substantial gaps in the elements or logic of their theories of change.*



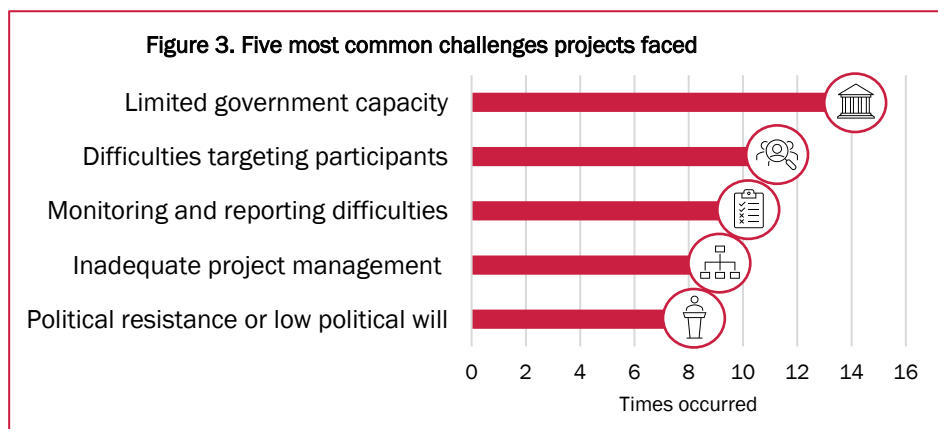
Implementers that **integrated their project activities** with government or other donor-funded initiatives were more likely to achieve their goals, including in reducing labor abuses and in areas of policy change, migrants' rights, women's and girls' empowerment, and education enrollment.*

* These findings also likely apply to cocoa sector projects, but we did not observe a clear association between these factors and project effectiveness in our small pool of 6 comparable cocoa sector projects.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

We found that the 19 projects encountered 90 challenges—reported by evaluators and identified in this review—that threatened overall effectiveness; projects applied solutions 49 times.

The most effective solutions in overcoming observed challenges involved increasing flexibility, planning for contingencies, incentivizing the participation of stakeholders, and providing key administrative supports for subcontracted implementers.



SUSTAINABILITY

Projects generally had **partially adequate sustainability strategies**, with results varying by outcome type. Evaluations suggested that across all outcome types, projects' impacts on the outcome of reducing child labor, forced labor, or human trafficking were hardest to sustain past project end.



Impacts on outcomes related to **awareness of labor issues** raised across communities, relevant government agencies, and other project partners were likely to be sustained, as were increases in local ownership over labor issues.



In most cases, impacts on the **withdrawal and prevention of target populations** from engaging in child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking may not be fully sustainable without continued support from donors and implementers, as evaluations suggested the conditions that drive labor abuses may re-emerge after the project concludes.



We also found that **delays of key project activities**, regardless of the projects' durations, threatened sustainability of project achievements because projects were less likely to be able to deliver programming to the extent that would allow participants and stakeholders to absorb program benefits.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

This synthesis review identified the following key considerations, organized by the intended audience:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR USDOL

1. DOL may wish to build in **more time and funding** (from the project award) or **consider using a multi-phase funding model** for implementers to deal with unpredicted delays, consolidate results, and build local stakeholders' capacity. Building in more time and funding could also help grantees develop partners' capacity, supporting sustainability of local knowledge. DOL may also choose to reduce the scope of some projects to better align with the available resources and time.
2. Cocoa projects may benefit from a design with **comprehensive components and linkages between them**; fishing/seafood projects may not benefit from such strong linkages.
3. Ensuring **strong tripartite approaches that engage unions (or the communities of workers they represent), governments, and the private sector** could support effectiveness across both sectors.
4. Heavily engaging **families and community leaders** could support effectiveness in both sectors.
5. **Listing and interrogating assumptions behind theories of change** (before and after award) could support project effectiveness.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR GRANTEES

6. Grantees focusing on **maintaining and building their capacity and management quality** (and that of their local sub-grantees) may enjoy greater partner and participant buy-in, greater project efficiency, fewer delays, and greater overall effectiveness.
7. Grantees dedicated to **carefully researching and planning an initial approach; developing strong monitoring, participant targeting, and service delivery systems; and deliberately aligning their work with ongoing, outside initiatives** could be more successful in achieving their objectives.
8. To support sustainability across both project sectors, projects can **target country government actors**, particularly national ministries, to embed programming, and **allocate greater resources to monitoring and enforcement** components.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

9. Projects may wish to **choose sites after conducting brief assessments of local enthusiasm** for project goals from partners and participants, as this factor may support project effectiveness. Similarly, general positive public opinion toward children's and workers' rights could support project effectiveness, with implications for country or region selection or the need for advance work to boost awareness.

10. Projects that take place in **countries with low GDP per capita could be more effective** than those in higher-income countries, though such projects may also require greater funding, stronger project management, and stronger partner and participant buy-in to be effective.

SYNTHESIS METHODS

OCFT commissioned a study to synthesize findings from performance evaluations and monitoring data from 19 ILAB-funded projects implemented from 1999 through 2021 to reduce child labor and/or forced labor in the cocoa and fishing/seafood sectors. The overarching goals of this synthesis were to:

- (1) highlight common trends in findings, lessons learned, and key considerations for future programming;
- (2) gain insights on the theories of change (TOCs), types of interventions, and promising strategies for DOL and others aiming to reduce labor abuses around the world; and
- (3) determine the high-level results of these projects.

To reach these goals, we extracted information from project documents and external performance evaluations to a detailed rubric, coded it to categorical variables, scored projects by effectiveness, identified relationships between project factors and effectiveness (as well as sustainability), and examined project challenges and solutions discussed by evaluators. We then drew out findings identified across the portfolio and paired them with specific examples from projects to illustrate relationships more clearly. Three multi-country, multi-sector projects were not suitable for comparison in our categorical analysis and were analyzed through a qualitative review (available in the forthcoming main report).

The findings of this synthesis should be interpreted with caution, given that evaluations and project documents on which it is based were of variable quality and completeness and our methods do not prove causal relationships.

To contextualize OCFT's programming, we also produced an annotated bibliography of evaluations of programs funded by donors other than USDOL to address child labor and forced labor in cocoa and seafood/fishing sectors. This annotated bibliography is summarized in our report and included as an annex.

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