



**AfriChild**

Research. Policy. Impact.

*The Centre for the study of the African Child*

# **Child labour in the coffee sector in Bugisu Sub- region, Eastern Uganda**

A Child-Friendly Report



Terre des  
Hommes  
Netherlands



This report highlights findings from a scoping study on child labour in the coffee supply chain (CSC) in four eastern Uganda districts of Mbale, Sironko, Kapchorwa, and Bududa. This study sought to ascertain the prevalence and identify drivers of child labour in the coffee supply chain, landscape the regulatory framework, map stakeholders, identify key service providers, and highlight promising interventions to address child labour.

The study was jointly implemented by the Centre for the Study of the African Child (AfriChild Centre) and Terre des Hommes Netherlands and was commissioned by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.



## **Child labour in the coffee sector in Bugisu Sub-region, Eastern Uganda**

### **What is this report about?**

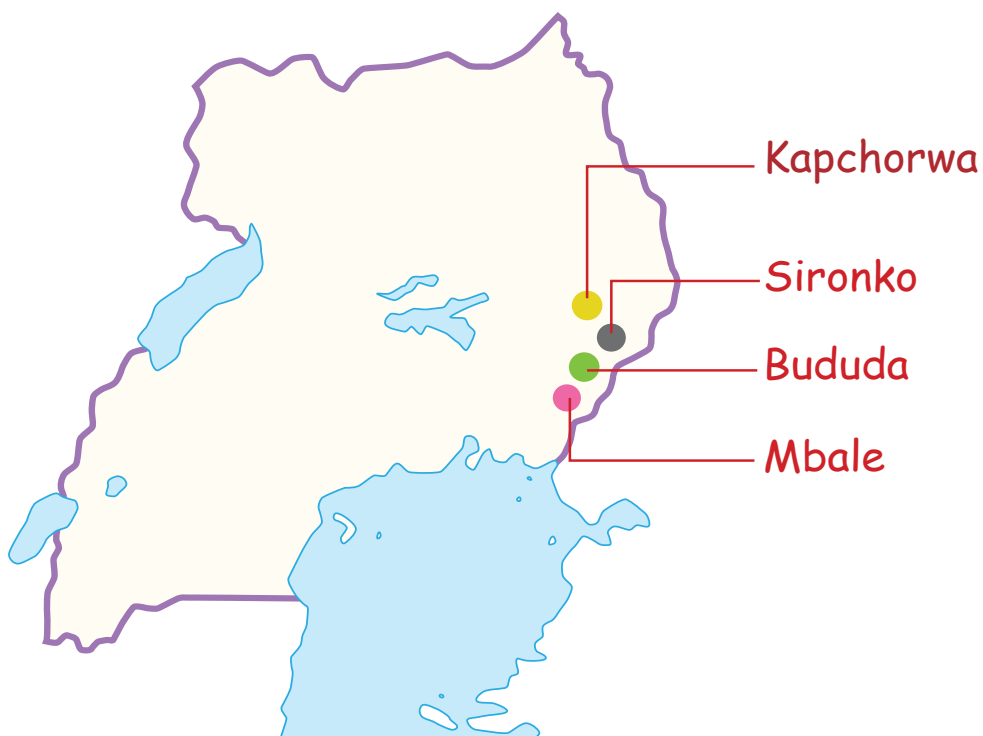
This report is about child labour in the coffee sector.

It is based on a study conducted in four districts in the Bugisu sub-region. The districts are Kapchorwa, Bududa, Sironko, Mbale

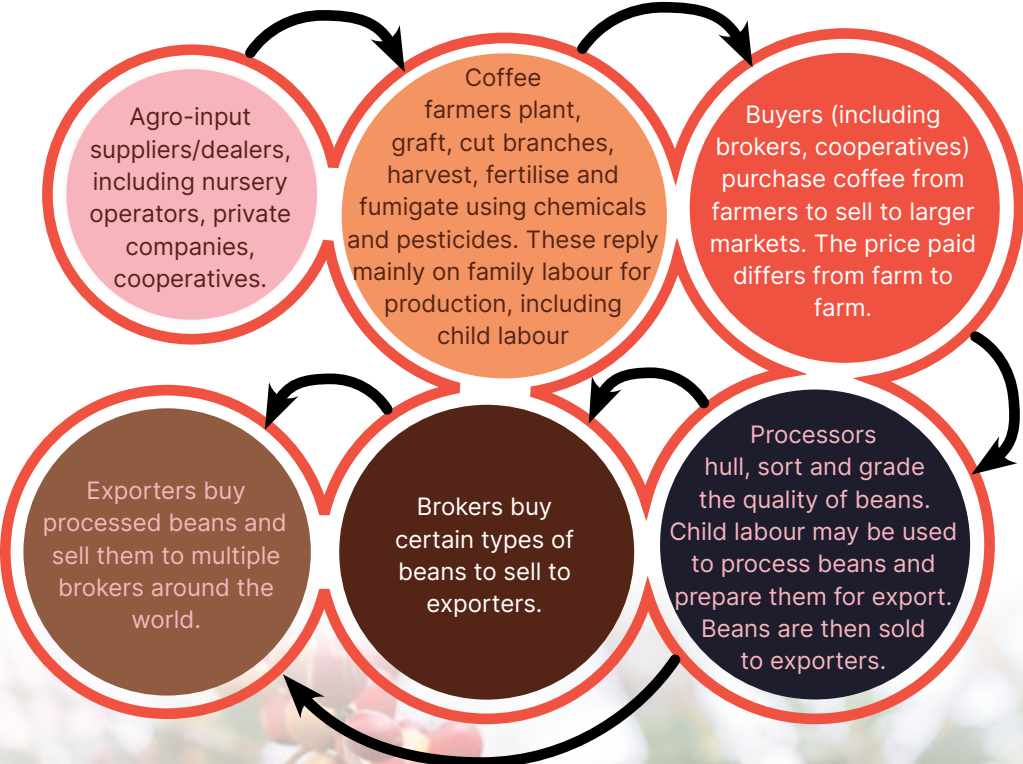
### **What is child labour?**

Child labour is work done by children that is harmful or interferes with their education, development, and well-being.

In Uganda, it is not allowed for children to do work that is harmful or stops them from going to school and enjoying their childhood.



# The coffee supply chain in Eastern Uganda



## What we found out

Child labour in the coffee sector is widespread in the Bugisu sub-region, Eastern Uganda.

- Almost half of the children (48%) involved in the coffee supply chain are engaged in child labour. Among boys, the prevalence is 51%, while among girls it is 42%.
- Child labour is more common in Kapchorwa (65%) and Bududa (50%) compared to Sironko (35%) and Mbale (30%)

**48%**

PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOR IN THE COFFEE-GROWING AREAS WAS 48 PERCENT: 51 PERCENT AMONG BOYS AND 42 PERCENT AMONG GIRLS.



CHILDREN AGED 5-17 WERE ENGAGED IN HAZARDOUS WORK, INCLUDING THE USE OF SHARP TOOLS, WORKING LONG HOURS, EXPOSURE TO AGROCHEMICALS, AND CARRYING HEAVY LOADS.



## Who decides that children should work?

Out of every 10 children working in the coffee sector, 6 of them do so because their parents tell them to



# What kind of work do children do in the coffee sector?

Children engaged in the coffee sector carry out various tasks. Some of the common types of work performed by children include weeding, pruning trees, applying fertilizers and spraying, picking coffee cherries from trees, transporting coffee cherries or processed coffee beans, sorting, drying, packaging coffee into sacks, and engaging in other activities such as roasting and grinding, among others.

“ In addition to picking coffee and carrying sacks of coffee, children are also assigned other tasks on the coffee plantations. One of the most dangerous is the application of pesticides - Key Informant, Mbale ”

“ Me I am now used, I can do weeding, apply fertilizer and spray the coffee trees, pick the coffee berries and also in pulping activities.”

In-depth Interview (IDI) with a boy, Kapchorwa

“ Me and other children we do work like weeding, watering coffee, Putting manure or fertilizers in the coffee plantations” FGD with boys, Mbale District

“I prepare the nursery bed, put soil in the seedling pots, I also weed, apply fertilizer and spray the coffee trees and participate in sorting and cleaning, among others.”

IDI Boy Kapchorwa District



# Why do children work in the coffee sector?

## Poverty and economic hardship

It is mostly poverty that makes us work in the coffee sector.... I work because there is not enough food at home; after being paid I buy food  
- IDI with a boy, Sironko

We must wake up very early in the morning before sunrise. When the sun is hot, it's harder to move across the hills, but this is the only way I can earn something to support my mother at home  
- IDI with a boy, Sironko

When sometimes we are chased from school because of school fees, our parents make us work in the coffee sector, especially when harvesting coffee red cherries, which they sell to get money and pay our fees  
- FGD with boys, Kapchorwa

## Challenges in getting an education

Some children do not have access to schools or cannot afford to attend, which leaves them with few options for their future. Working on coffee farms may seem like the only available option for some children and their families.

When sometimes we are chased from school because of school fees, our parents make us work in the coffee sector especially when it is harvesting coffee red cherries, which they sell to get money and pay our fees -  
- FGD with boys, Kapchorwa

Some are paid money, especially those that skip school for a year so that they can accumulate enough money to return to school. So, they can work this season of coffee then once the season is done, they save that money that they use to go back to school  
- FGD with Caregivers, Mbale

## Societal beliefs and expectations regarding children's involvement in work

In some communities, child labour is seen as a normal and necessary part of life. It is seen as acceptable for children to work and contribute to the family's income, even if it means missing out on education and other opportunities.

Some children work because it is a directive from their parents. Many homes take their children to do coffee picking, pulping, washing and even packaging for sale with the reason of training them to be hardworking and responsible in the future

- FGD with Teachers, Sironko

## COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic made child labour worse because it made more families poor, and schools had to stay closed for a long time. Because of all this, many children had to leave school.

The outbreak of the coronavirus. Many children end up refusing school because they looked very old for their classes and some feared repeating their previous classes, so they resorted to working

- FGD  
with girls,  
Kapchorwa

As you know COVID brought so many negative implications and children are now working to make sure they earn a living

- Key informant,  
Sironko

Due to Covid19, so many children are being forced out of school, so they must look for cheap labour. They found themselves working in coffee plantations

- FGD with teachers,  
Mbale

## Poor enforcement of laws and policies on education and child labour.

".... If for instance, all school going age children were compelled to be in school, or all parents forced to take their children to school, the problem of child labour would be no more. It would only be adults to work in coffee factories." - FGD with Teachers, Mbale

There is less awareness about these laws and then also the enforcement of these laws is very minimal. So I feel the communities should be empowered much in awareness and then also ensuring there is enforcement right from sub county -  
Key informant, Mbale

It's really important to have strong enforcement, particularly in the education sector, to ensure that schools provide a great environment for children to stay in and learn, instead of being forced to work

- Key Informant, Kapchorwa



# How does child labour affect children?

Working in the coffee sector hinders children's education. It affects children's ability to attend and stay in school.



Children who work may not have time to attend school or may drop out to work full-time. This can limit their future opportunities and leave them without the skills they need to build a better life.

Children should be in school; they should not be working. It robs us of our childhood, and it robs the country of adults that can be more productive. But we are out of school because we are forced to help support the family  
- FGD with boys, Kapchorwa.

Children's work in the coffee sector poses enormous risks to their safety and mental and physical well-being.

Children may work long hours in difficult and dangerous conditions, often without protective clothing or equipment. They may also be exposed to pesticides and other hazardous chemicals, which can have serious long-term health consequences.



Working coffee sector can lead to serious injuries. Children who work in hazardous conditions or for long hours may suffer from physical problems such as injuries.

**38%**

**REPORTED BEING PUNISHED WHEN THEY MAKE MISTAKES OR FAIL TO FULFILL THE REQUIRED TASKS.**

The type of punishment, among those reporting punishment, ranged from

**68%** being shouted at    **34%** insulted    **47%** physical assault

**ONLY**

**25%**

**OF CHILDREN IN HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOR REPORTED USING ANY PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE).**

Long work hours, lack of protective gear, and lack of training in the handling of tools were all reported to increase the risk of injuries. The most widely used PPE were gloves (91%), followed by safety boots (4%) and face masks (3%).

**54%**

**REPORTED SUFFERING/ EXPERIENCING AT LEAST ONE WORK-RELATED INJURY OR ILLNESS OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS.**

Children engaged in hazardous work were **36x** more likely to get injured than those not exposed to any hazard.

Among children who reported work-related injuries,



**38%** temporarily stopped working



**16%** temporarily stopped going to school

At work, I get many cuts and wounds because of carrying heavy loads on my head, and often I suffer from shoulder aches. This is a risky job.  
- FG with girls, Bududa



Children work using sharp tools such as pangas, hoes, slashers, and pruning saws which put them at risk of injuring themselves and they get wounds in most cases, it happens to the young ones who are below 10 years because they don't know how to handle dangerous tools

- FGD with boys, Kapchorwa



## Children working in the coffee sector are prone to exploitation.

Children who work may be exploited by employers who pay them very little money or subject them to abusive or dangerous working conditions.



"We are happy you have come to talk about this issue of child labour. It is like a disease here! Children work the whole day because people have coffee, and the children much come into sort grade, load... find children there throughout the coffee season. Yet, they are paid very little money, maybe to afford them to buy food at home."

-KII District Production Officer-Mbale.



"...Some coffee is smuggled across the border, and when it moves with the children, people do not easily become suspicious as they would do with adults.... So, it is easier for children to move it across than adults."

-FGD teachers, Mbale



## What needs to happen?

Some ways to end child labour include:

- Taking action to help families who are struggling with poverty by implementing programs that offer assistance, such as providing income-generating opportunities.
- Making sure that children can go to school.
- Providing vocational skills training for young people who are not in school and have left child labour.
- Teaching everyone involved in the coffee industry about the dangers of child labour and their responsibility to stop it.
- Governments should make sure that labour laws are enforced.
- Children are not made to do dangerous or unfair work.
- Raise community awareness about the costly effects of child labor on children's health and well-being.
- Provide support and appropriate services to children who have been withdrawn from child labour. This includes ensuring their access to education, healthcare, counseling, and other necessary forms of support.
- Creating opportunities for different groups to collaborate, like governments, employers, workers, and organizations, can help find solutions and plans to end child labour.



## Research Methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Primary data collection was collected in the four districts of Mbale, Sironko, Kapchorwa, and Bududa between July and August 2022. For the child labour survey, a representative sample of 771 households containing children aged 5-17 years were selected in the four districts, using a multi-stage stratified cluster sampling technique. After completion of a household roster, interviews were conducted with the household head or primary caregiver and 1871 children aged 5-17 years. The median age of child respondents was 11 years, with an almost equal proportion of male and female child respondents.

### Qualitative data was collected through:

- focus group discussions (n=32) with child workers, community leaders, school teachers, and parents.
- key informant interviews with national and local government, private sector, worker associations, and CSO representatives (n=33).
- in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of children with lived experience of child labour (n=16).
- and participatory workshops (n=8) with survivors, working children, and key stakeholders in the coffee supply chain.

Estimates of child labour from the survey include (a) children working below the minimum age (if they are under 12), (b) children exceeding the number of working hours allowable for their age group based on the ILO framework (if they are between 12 and 17 years), and (c) children in hazardous work <sup>i</sup>.

A survivor-led advisory board (SAB) was established in each district, comprising children and adolescents with lived experiences related to working in the coffee sector, including forced labour (as defined within the ILO convention 29). Each SAB comprised 8-12 children and adolescents, aged 10 -17 years; drawn from at least two coffee-growing sub-counties in the district <sup>ii</sup>. Members of the advisory boards were invited to (a) review the study instruments to ensure questions are relevant, logical, and coherent, (b) to identify the appropriate study participants, and (c) to review and provide feedback on the study findings to ensure they accurately reflect children's lived experiences and priorities.

<sup>i</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2021

<sup>ii</sup> These were identified with the help of local council members and selected NGOs providing service to survivors of child labour. During the recruitment process, all members of the survivor-led boards (SAB) were informed of the purpose and objectives of scoping a study, and all elements of the study (including their roles and eligibility criteria for membership). Consent was also sought from members of the SABs to participate in the research process. Members were informed that no additional people (outside the study team) would have access to their personal information, and what the research team would do with their information.



**AfriChild**  
Research. Policy. Impact.  
*The Centre for the study of the African Child*



**Terre des  
Hommes  
Netherlands**

**The AfriChild Centre**  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University  
Plot 103, Mary Stuart Road  
P. O. Box 72427 Kampala - Uganda  
Telephone: +256 414 532 482  
Email: [info@africhild.or.ug](mailto:info@africhild.or.ug)  
website: [www.africhild.or.ug](http://www.africhild.or.ug)