

GOOD PRACTICE

Eliminating Child Labour: Lessons learned from Belize's Sugar Cane Sector

NOVEMBER 2021



GLOBAL DEAL



INTRODUCTION

70% of all children involved in [child labour](#) are found in the agricultural sector, and sugar cane production is no exception. In fact, [multiple studies](#) from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, have identified children as young as five working on sugar cane farms.

Children are often introduced to cane production by family members running their own farms. Others are employed directly or indirectly by job contractors or adult workers. Many of these children are excluded from school and denied a quality education. They are also exposed to multiple workplace hazards, including insect and snake bites, machete cuts, and respiratory ailments, among others. In other words, they live in unacceptable circumstances.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Fairtrade has developed an inclusive program to eradicate child labour. It includes relevant Standards for Small Producer Organizations, Fairtrade Minimum

Price and Premium, as well as protection policies for children and vulnerable adults when the worst forms of child labour, forced labour and/or gender based violence identifications are detected.

Fairtrade also has projects to prevent child labour by tackling its causes, such as a signature monitoring and remediation system, called the Youth Inclusive Community Based Monitoring and Remediation System, or [YICBMR](#). Designed as a three-phased approach, YICBMR starts with the involvement of the producer organization, farmers, farm workers and their families, and then scales up to involve supply chain actors sourcing from these producer organizations. In phase 3, the monitoring and response system becomes part of the government's child labour monitoring system. Fairtrade's YICBMR system is inclusive and necessitates social dialogue and engagement with involved stakeholders.

The key driver of the YICBMR system are the youth monitors, young men and women from

target communities spanning from the ages of 18 to 28. Youth monitors co-run, together with producer organizations, the YICBMR system through a child labour committee. These are selected through a formal recruitment process after which they are trained in rights-based data collection, analysis and decision making. They play key roles in both formal and informal stakeholder engagement by presenting findings on child labour and identifying what worked and did not work effectively in terms of remedial actions. They also co-lead advocacy efforts targeted to governments. Fairtrade's YICBMR system has already been piloted in 17 countries across multiple products such as cocoa, sugar cane, coffee, gold, vanilla and flowers.

Fairtrade's approach is to enable producer organizations in partnership with involved youth to develop a youth policy and guidelines to promote decent youth employment, skills development and business opportunities. The engagement of youth in agriculture is critical to Fairtrade's global strategy in enabling and empowering the next generation of agrarian farmers, workers, traders and leaders.



BELIZE: SUGAR CANE PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Predominantly produced in the northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk, sugar is one of Belize's most important agricultural exports. A full 94% of the sugar cane produced in the northern districts of Belize is Fairtrade certified. Yet, the 2013 [ILO and Government of Belize's National Child Activity Survey](#) showed an increasing rate of children's employment in agriculture, with Corozal having the second highest rate and Orange Walk the third highest.

Belize's Families and Children Act (2000) defines a child as "a person below the age of 18" and Article 7 of the Act prohibits children under 18 from being employed or engaged in any activity that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical or moral development. However, the law does not specify which employment activities are detrimental to children, and neither have the types of light work permissible for children been identified in Belizean law. Moreover, Article 169 of the Labor Act places the general minimum age of employment at 12 years, whereas Article 3(1) of the Shops Act sets the minimum age at 14 for work in wholesale or retail trade or business. Thus, children at the age of 14 can obtain a Social Security ID Card and are permitted to work, and some indeed do cut cane. Belizean law is therefore inconsistent with international standards on the minimum age for employment and on the definition of hazardous work and light work permissible for children have not yet been identified. This inconsistency is exacerbated by the socio-economic realities on the ground, particularly as children between the ages of 15 and 18 years have few employment and skills development opportunities in the sugar cane growing areas of Corozal and Orange Walk.

The Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association (BSCFA), with active members in Corozal and Orange Walk, became Fairtrade certified in 2008. At the time of initial certification, they represented more than 5,000 sugar cane farmers. In 2014, BSCFA was suspended by FLOCERT, Fairtrade's certification body, for child labour and was issued corrective actions. After a short initial period of denial and disbelief, the BSCFA took action in correcting the child labour problem in its operations and obtained recertification status six months later.

As a first step, BSCFA used the 2013 Report of the National Child Activity Survey to understand children's employment involvement in the country and referred to a [report issued by the International Trade Union Confederation \(ITUC\)](#) on Core Labour Standards in Belize, as a basis towards recognizing that child labour does indeed occur, especially on family farms. This, in and of itself, was an important step. In 2015, most Belizean stakeholders, including the government, did not admit to child labour in sugar cane production.

This was followed by BSCFA implementing Fairtrade's YICBMR system, alongside an internal control system, for the elimination of child labour starting in 2015. These systems are still in place and continue to operate to this day. Through YICBMR, the BSCFA:

- Developed and published a commitment and policy on child labour and child protection.
- Mapped community risk hotspots.
- Hired local youth monitors and trained them on awareness raising, risk assessment and monitoring through household surveys and community outreach.
- Supported access to remedies in individual cases of child labour.
- Insisted with the government and the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry to prioritize a legally binding national child labour monitoring and remediation system.

At the end of 2015, using findings from its YICBMR system, BSCFA launched the [first-ever multi-stakeholder social dialogue forum on child labour in Belize's sugar cane production sector](#) with participants from farmers' groups, the Governments of Belize, the US, Mexico and Honduras, the ILO, UNICEF, the National Teachers Union, industry and civil society organizations, and educational institutions. Fairtrade also passed on the forum's takeaways to the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). A second multi-stakeholder forum was hosted in 2016 by BSCFA to call attention to the need to develop effective and time-bound remediation actions that lead to sustainable solutions to the child labour problem on family farms. Importantly, this also included a further call to the Government of Belize



to adopt a list of a hazardous work prohibited for all children in the sugar cane sector. In 2017 the Ministry of Labor announced the activation of the Labor Advisory Board, Tripartite Body, National Child Labor Committee, and Interest-Based Bargaining Stakeholders (Labour Sub-Council).

In 2018 and on the basis of an EU-funded study that used Fairtrade's YICBMR system in combination with farmer inputs, BSCFA together with other producer organizations drew up their own draft proposal for a Hazardous Child Labour List. BSCFA was invited to represent other Fairtrade producers and discuss their proposal at the Belize Chamber of Commerce and the Labour Sub Council.

Finally, BSCFA is working together with Fairtrade to generate guidelines for enabling decent youth employment, skills development and business opportunities throughout its operations, including enabling opportunities for youth farmers and youth workers to hold management level positions. To do so, BSCFA has formed a working youth group, composed of involved staff, farmers and farm workers, and has recently approached the National Trade Union Congress of Belize, Belize Workers Union and the Belize National Teachers Union to request trainings and capacity building for the youth in the Working Group.



INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

In the case of the Belize's sugar cane sector, Fairtrade and its certified producer organizations have contributed to promoting social dialogue and spotlighting the views of involved farmers, farm workers and their families, including children, youth, women and migrants. The work in Belize illustrates the progress that can be made when small producer organizations and involved youth are enabled to lead the fight against child labour. Since 2015, BSCFA has reported less incidents of child labour, and has publically called upon the government to rigorously enforce its child labour standards in the sugar cane sectors of Orange Walk and Corozal and encouraged the Belize sugar industry to report any child labour allegations occurring on its members' farms to the BSCFA's Committee of Management for follow-up.


THE GLOBAL DEAL FOR DECENT WORK AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The Global Deal is a multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to address the challenges in the global labour market to enable all people to benefit from globalisation. It highlights the potential of sound industrial relations and enhanced social dialogue to foster decent work and quality jobs, to increase productivity, and to promote equality and inclusive growth. The Global Deal welcomes governments, businesses, employers' organisations, trade unions, as well as civil society and other organisations to join the partnership.

GOOD PRACTICES FROM GLOBAL DEAL PARTNERS

The Global Deal encourages its partners to share examples of effective and innovative experiences in the area of social dialogue. These are published on the website in a repository that enables knowledge sharing and facilitates peer learning, helping Global Deal partners and other actors to improve social dialogue and sound industrial relations. It provides a valuable resource that illustrates different forms of social dialogue from a variety of regions and countries. Partners are welcome to send relevant experiences and working practices to the Global Deal Support Unit.

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