

Educating Child Workers in Côte d'Ivoire

RATIONALE

In Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, the prolific use of inefficient agricultural practices increases the incidence of child labor on farms, particularly in the cocoa industry. A high rate of child labor is an indicator of weak economic systems and is linked to low levels of rural development. Although it is often acceptable (and necessary) for children to engage in light work or to work part-time to assist with family expenses, their well-being and safety must be of greatest priority. Child labor is problematic because it perpetuates an unskilled labor force; children grow up untrained and uneducated, thus continuing poverty's vicious cycle. Non-formal vocational training, as part of the community school system, is an innovative educational alternative for these at-risk children. Winrock's Child Labor Alternatives through Sustainable Systems in Education (CLASSE) project has provided training and educational alternatives for children. CLASSE provides data on school retention, transition, and completion, as well as spotlight stories and best practices. In partnership with the World Cocoa Foundation, Winrock will now expand on the previous successful efforts of CLASSE.

OBJECTIVES

Lack of access, poor quality, and the perceived irrelevance of education to real-life all remain a barrier to combating child labor in Côte d'Ivoire. The objectives of the CLASSE expansion project are: to strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage school attendance for working children in and around cocoa farms, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts. While not the only possible solutions, education and school attendance are the primary factors that can mitigate the harmful cycle of child labor and poverty.

ACTIVITIES

Activities include: adapting vocational education in community schools, (including quality farming practices, agro-marketing), and functional literacy for students and community members. Under the new expansion, Winrock and the Ivorian Ministry of Education will develop new modules of curriculum for grades 7 to 9 (middle school) that address agricultural education, child labor, health and HIV/AIDS. The expansion will enhance the current CLASSE community school in Ehouéguié, Côte d'Ivoire, and will expand CLASSE components in three additional schools.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Twelve hundred children aged 5 to 14 living in a 100-mile radius of the model school project have been cited as the direct beneficiaries of CLASSE. At least 100 families have been targeted through community focus groups, mobilizing resources for community needs and literacy training, as well as information on addressing child labor at the local level.

Since November 2005, a Winrock field agent has taught education classes to 629 students from 3 schools such subjects as: plant biology, agriculture in Cote d'Ivoire, garden cultures, garden nursery development, the fabrication of bio-pesticides, and cocoa plot development.

On land donated by the schools, 3 communities have planted small cocoa nurseries and gardens. The resulting produce has been used to enrich the diet of students eating at the school canteen. Each one of these schools has a school management committee which oversees these activities and manages the profits from the plots.

The CLASSE project has been able to support such school improvements as: canteen, latrine, and school structural renovation.

As part of an innovative micro-credit scheme, the 30 students that have received scholarships as part of the CLASSE project have been allocated part of their scholarship towards income generation. The parents or guardian of the student beneficiary receives part of the scholarship as a loan towards improving their already-existent small business. This activity was highlighted by the World Cocoa Foundation in their Christmas newsletter.