

USMCA/MEXICO PROGRAM EVALUATION: PROMOTION OF OSH STANDARDS AND PREVENTION OF CHILD LABOR AND FORCED LABOR IN MEXICO



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BACKGROUND

ILAB has funded technical cooperation projects in more than 90 countries to fight labor exploitation, contributing to international efforts to safeguard dignity at work while ensuring that workers in the U.S. can compete on a level playing field. The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) allocated \$180 million for technical assistance to support the Government of Mexico to implement labor reform, strengthen labor standards, promote acceptable conditions of work, and address risks of child labor and forced labor. Several projects focused on addressing child labor, forced labor, and occupational safety and health (OSH) standards in Mexico's agricultural sector, working closely with state and federal government, agricultural companies and workers, and agricultural communities across Mexico to tackle the root causes of unacceptable working conditions in this sector.

RESULTS AND ILAB CONTRIBUTIONS

Through the Most Significant Change (MSC) method, NORC documented the contributions of ILAB-funded technical assistance to promoting acceptable conditions of work and addressing risks of child labor. The following outcomes and contributions are not representative of the entire sectors studied in the evaluation. It is possible that similar changes emerged in similar and other sectors but also that some states have not experienced similar outcomes. The evaluation focused on identifying funder and other actors' contributions in ILAB's target sectors and communities.

OUTCOME 1. REDUCED CHILD LABOR AND INCREASED PROTECTION OF CHILDREN BY WORKERS

ILAB PROJECT'S CONTRIBUTION

Fields of Hope / Senderos' training and awareness building for workers.

Senderos' adaptability of PPE per worker's feedback.

SUB-OUTCOME

2022-2023: Children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in 24 target sugarcane and coffee producing communities in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz.

"I have harvested tobacco since I was 15 years old. Thanks to Senderos, I received training on forced labor, violence-free work, and child labor. I have learned that I have the right to work freely and also that child labor is not good."

– Agricultural worker in Nayarit

OUTCOME 2. INCREASED MONITORING AND EMPLOYER OVERSIGHT TO REDUCE CHILD LABOR AND OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND ILLNESS

ILAB PROJECT'S CONTRIBUTION

Fields of Hope's training and awareness building.

SUB-OUTCOME

2024: A sugar refinery in central Veracruz created a corporate social responsibility unit, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters among its sugarcane suppliers.

"Within the sugarcane production and quality committees (CPCCs), we created an electronic supervision and monitoring system that is filled out by the monitoring staff of the sugar mill and the sugarcane associations. They go to the fields and administer two short questionnaires on a tablet. The



OUTCOME 2. INCREASED MONITORING AND EMPLOYER OVERSIGHT TO REDUCE CHILD LABOR AND OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND ILLNESS (CONTINUED)

mill inspectors are normally in the cutting groups to see the productive issues. They make their rounds and monitor with the sugarcane cutting groups if at the end of the day there was no incident or if minors were found. The check for any accidents and complaints from any worker about any issue. After they filled out these questionnaires, the data are reviewed by the committee.”

– Agricultural worker in Veracruz

OUTCOME 3. INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF, DEMAND FOR, AND UTILIZATION OF OSH MEASURES BY WORKERS, PARTICULARLY IN AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

ILAB PROJECTS' AND OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Fields of Hope / Senderos' worker training on PPE and awareness building about OSH.

Context. Migration and labor shortage in sugarcane.

SUB-OUTCOME

2024 – 2024: Agricultural workers in 24 target communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz began requiring their employers to adopt occupational health and safety measures, such as access to first aid kits, rest breaks, and hydration. In Jalisco and Nayarit, an average of 53 percent of target farm workers (3,809) increased their knowledge in labor rights, most of them in the sugar sector.

“More recently, we have felt that they consider our needs more, they listen to us more. Our health matters and we know they will listen to us because we have learned about the risks of not drinking water and resting. The bosses [the sugarcane producers] know about it and agreed to what the trainers and the sugar mill staff said about us wearing the equipment and staying hydrated.”

– Sugarcane cutter in Veracruz

OUTCOME 4. INCREASE IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND INCOME GENERATION ABILITIES, AND EMPOWERMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

ILAB PROJECT'S CONTRIBUTION

EQUAL community approach to raise awareness with female and male residents.

EQUAL trainings on trades, coffee production, and entrepreneurship.

EQUAL provision of some equipment to coffee producers.

SUB-OUTCOME

2023 – 2024: 51.7 percent of participating women in target communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz increased their household income by starting or expanding their businesses.

2023-2024: Women coffee producers in 26 communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz expanded their participation in the coffee production process. They increased the sale price from \$1.50 before to \$2.50 USD per pound after the intervention.

“We didn't believe so, we thought this was something we were not able to do ourselves. However, with patience, because [the project] had a lot of patience with us, now we are invested in the selection of the grain, we have learned how to nurture the bushes. The project even taught us a specialized course on coffee growth and processing. The project also provided us the fungicide in drops to kill plagues, told us we had to build traps and encouraged us.”

– Female coffee producer in Veracruz

STRATEGIES TO SCALE UP AND REPLICATE

- Tailor communications, training materials and instruction approach to the needs and preferences of multilingual agricultural workers, especially domestic migrants.
- Work with community members to train actors prominent in agricultural communities and networks to replicate the messaging and increase awareness of labor rights, OSH standards and preventing child labor to further audiences:
 - Ministry of Agriculture-supported “Brigadistas” and “Extensionistas”* and first aid workers to disseminate OSH information to small producers, agricultural organizations, and rural families.
 - Creating and strengthening committees comprised of community members as those established in agricultural communities with ILAB support, to monitor child labor and bring any instances of this practice to the attention of the community to be discussed and remediated.
 - School principals and teachers in agricultural communities to further promote the importance of child education.

FOOTPRINT OF ILAB'S TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON COMBATting CHILD LABOR (AS OF OCTOBER 2024)



92.5% of minors in households targeted by Fields of Hope regularly attended formal education services in the past six months. 189 labor inspectors at the federal level and in Oaxaca and Veracruz completed at least one child labor training.



EQUAL promoted better practices in government and private sector to protect girls and adolescents from child labor. 96.36% (target 90%) of project participant children in Oaxaca and Veracruz were attending school, and less than five percent engaged in hazardous child labor.



Senderos has reached over 6,000 participants in sugar and tobacco companies and plantations with training on enforcement/compliance with child labor prevention laws in target communities of Jalisco and Nayarit.



AccioNNar provided technical assistance to support Mexico's federal Inter-Institutional Commission for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and the Protection of Adolescent Workers of Legal Working Age (CITI). It also designed, presented and trained target state-level CITIs on the Manual and Toolbox for the Creation, Installation and Operation of Local CITIs at the inaugural Annual Meeting of Local CITIs, helping to increase their effectiveness at the national level and in Chiapas and Yucatan.

LESSONS LEARNED

Effectiveness of tailor-made approaches. Agricultural producers of different sizes require affordable strategies according to their capacity and incentives to comply with OSH standards and labor rights. Technical assistance requires creativity and differentiated approaches for different sizes, sectors and contexts.

Workers register considerable information gaps on labor rights. While some communities have improved their awareness about the labor reform and labor rights, many agricultural workers continue facing information asymmetries and little to no incentives to demand better working conditions.

Overlapping labor rights. Labor rights are overlapping and can sometimes interact with each other at the workplace and in worker organizations. When it comes to addressing and strengthening institutions to protect and promote labor rights, it is more effective to have integrated approaches.

Relevance of Program Maturity and Resources on Outcomes. Larger resources and longer project involvement yield more significant outcomes with higher changes of sustainability, especially for certain OSH standards (e.g., monitoring of adherence to OSH conditions, agricultural workers' demand for better conditions).

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND NOTES

The evaluation triangulated sources using the Most Significant Change (MSC) method with project monitoring data and official secondary sources. Through robust narratives, the evaluation detailed who/what changed, how, when and where, as well as the significance of the change. The SC stories also documented the change's impact on populations most at-risk of labor exploitation and evidence of sustainability and ripple effects of these changes.

*Staff members from educational and research institutions, subsidized both by Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and some State Ministries of Agriculture to facilitate access to knowledge, information and technologies, to agricultural producers, rural economic groups, organizations and to other actors in the agricultural, fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

For access to the Evaluation Report and a selection of SC stories, visit [NORC's evaluation website](#).