



Local Civil Society Organizations as Key Actors to Reduce Child Labour in Rural Colombia

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Policy Innovation

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At first glance, San Martín de Loba, reachable mainly by river transport (Figure 1), may seem like a forgotten river town tucked away in rural Bolívar province, but its gold mines have lured fortune hunters from throughout Colombia and beyond. Rather than bolstering the economic fortunes of its residents, however, gold mining has entrenched conditions of poverty and chronic violence. Some children in San Martín engage in mining, especially in artisanal and small-scale gold mines (ASGM).



Figure 1: San Martín de Loba is reachable through river boats

San Martín de Loba is one of four municipalities where [Pact](#) has been implementing the Pílares project. Funded by the United States Department of Labor [\[1\]](#), Pílares's main objective is to build the capacity of local civil society organizations (CSOs) to better understand and [address child labour](#) and other unacceptable working conditions (OUWC). To achieve this goal, it uses the Collective Impact Model (CIM), through which organizations collaborate to solve complex problems. For the [CIM to function](#), organizations must prioritize a common agenda, continuous communication and coordination via Solidarity Networks. In this article, we will outline the work and impact of the Solidarity Network in the Department of Bolívar.

Building Capacity

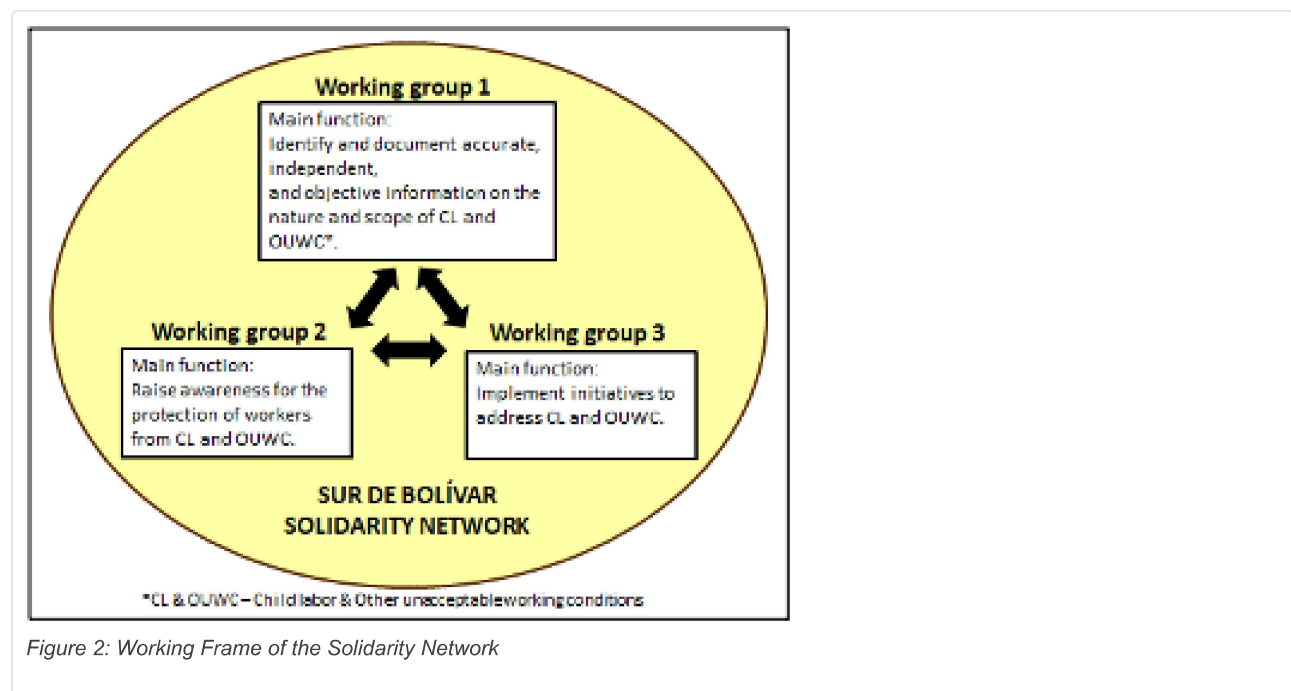
Pact [\[2\]](#) and the Alliance for Responsible Mining [\[3\]](#) (ARM) developed plans with CSOs to build their capacity to address child labour and OUWC. Through the solidarity networks, members of CSOs enhanced their understanding of government policies and laws concerning child labour as well as their awareness of institutions and local committees that work to eradicate this issue. The project used different types of capacity development tools and activities, such as trainings and workshops, complemented by direct mentorship and coaching, so CSOs could participate in public events

and meetings in their municipalities on combating child labour. Additionally, during the pandemic, Pilares launched different virtual courses via the local radio station and free virtual platforms such as [Genially](#). The CSOs also built their capacity in areas such as conflict resolution, stakeholder engagement, project and financial management and establishing safe and healthy workplaces.

The CSOs that collaborate with Pilares have expanded their understanding of youth rights, participated in dialogues with local and departmental governments and proposed alternatives for change, which are shared at the Interinstitutional Committee for the Eradication and Prevention of Child Labour (CIETI). CIETIs are organized by the local government for stakeholders to share their ideas and ways to collaborate towards the eradication of child labour in their municipalities.

Leveraging their enriched knowledge of child labour and workplace security and safety, the solidarity networks created an information system based in Google Suites to identify and document child labour and other unacceptable working conditions. For example, using Google Forms, they developed a survey to identify risks of child labour in communities and three surveys to identify occupational safety hazards associated with mining in their communities and in mines. The survey to identify risks of child labour was reviewed by the Ministry of Labour and the National Institute for Family Well-Being (ICBF in Spanish). The tools do not replace government instruments to collect information on child labour, but rather complement them as used by local organizations.

Case Study: The Southern Bolívar Solidarity Network Working Approach



The Southern Bolívar Solidarity Network (SBSN) comprises 14 CSOs, which include miners, agriculturalists and fishers. Since its inception in October 2018, three working groups (Figure 2) formed to enable specialization and greater collaboration among CSOs. Working Group 1 ensures the proper use of identification tools and accuracy of reports. Working Group 2 uses these reports to raise public awareness via radio programs, pamphlets, posters with local news (Figure 3), and other formats. Working Group 3 uses the reports to engage other stakeholders, including the local government.



Figure 3: Poster with news developed by the Pilares Solidarity Network of Sur de Bolívar

Working Group 1 found that children begin engaging in various economic activities between the ages of 12 and 14, primarily due to poverty, insufficient economic and educational opportunities, the absence of cultural or sports activities and the enticing—but remote—possibility of becoming rich with gold.

Working Group 1 is now able to consistently [collect and analyse data](#) and produce reports that highlight local risks of child labour (Figure 4).

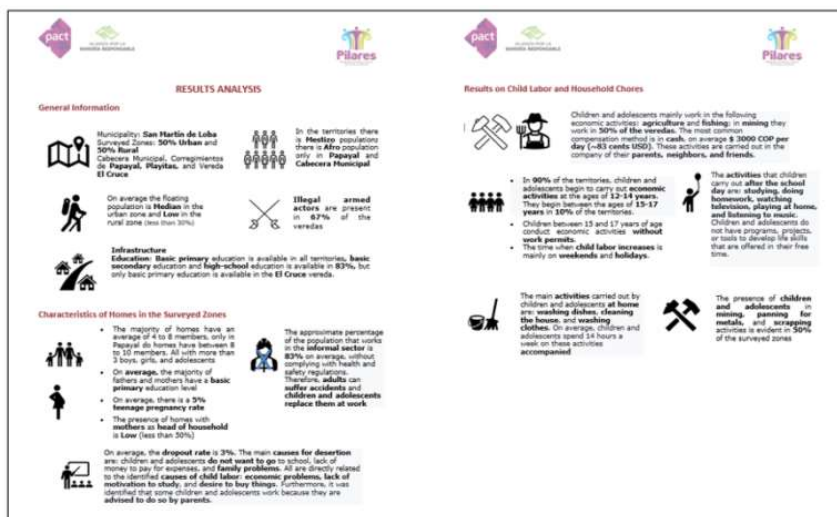


Figure 4: Figure 4. Example of a section of the report created by the working group 1 to the local CIETI. (Original in Spanish)

CSO leader Euripides Cardoso, who is a part of Working Group 2, learned how to use communications and technology to promote research findings and combat child labour. Cardoso worked with a skilled photography editor and writers to produce the posters (Figure 3). The posters include news, interviews and other items related to the eradication of child labour and other unacceptable working conditions. These posters are placed throughout the village to raise awareness among villagers about these forms of exploitation and to familiarize them with the Pilares SBSN.



CSO Leader, Euripides Cardoso

With the information collected by Working Group 1, Working Group 3 helps to embed the Pilares network within local governments and other institutions and support the sustainability of the project. The data collected is an important asset for alliance building, helping Working Group 3 advocate for joint collaboration with the local government and the private sector to mitigate the risks of child labour and other unacceptable working conditions identified in their communities. The reports created from the locally collected data also encourage other national and regional government institutions to participate in efforts to address and combat labour exploitation. In the past two years, the SBSN has been represented at eight CIETIs, has engaged with the National Learning Services to secure training for network members and is cooperating with the Secretary of Mines and Energy of Bolívar to implement a project to diagnose the risks of child labour and of security and safety in artisanal gold mining in the municipalities of Barranco de Loba and San Martín de Loba. With their work, CSOs participate actively towards improving the conditions of children and youth in their communities.

The Work Continues

After over three years of Pilares' implementation, CSOs now actively engage with coordinating bodies to address child labour and other unacceptable working conditions and mainstream these issues through educational and awareness-raising activities. The Solidarity Networks now maintain and deploy warning mechanisms that help address these forms of exploitation and use pedagogical training aids to transfer knowledge received from Pilares to others. CSOs also increasingly advocate for the inclusion of child labour and workers' rights issues in social policies and programs. While CSOs have achieved significant progress in combatting child labour, the Pilares project's work continues.

With the goal of aiding struggling municipalities like San Martín de Loba, the Pilares Solidarity Networks are now entering a second subaward phase, under which network CSOs can propose innovative projects to combat child labour and improve work conditions in artisanal and small-scale mining. This second round of subawards will benefit more CSOs and leaders like Euripides Cardoso, who can produce impact with the proper resources.

Successful community development must be driven by local actors. Through their deep understanding of local contexts, the Pilares Solidarity Networks have earned the trust of their communities. Thanks to Pilares's capacity building efforts and mentorship, the SBSN continues to deliver powerful messages on combatting child labour and to build alliances with local governments, the private sector and other institutions for greater project sustainability over time.

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[1] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking. Pilares funding is provided by the United States Department of Labour under cooperative agreement number IL-31477-1-75-K. 100% percentage of the total costs of the project or program is financed with USG federal funds, for a total of 2,500,000 dollars. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labour, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.

[2] Pact is an international development organization at work in nearly 40 countries to end poverty and marginalization. Pact partners with local organizations, businesses and governments to build lasting solutions for thriving, resilient communities. Pact's vision is a world where everyone owns their future.

[3] ARM was established in 2004 and is a leading global expert on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). ARM works to transform the ASM sector into a socially and environmentally responsible activity, while improving the quality of life of artisanal miners, their families and communities.

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