

FUNDED BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Independent Midterm Evaluation of the Combating Exploitive Child Labor Through Education in Niger Project

Catholic Relief Services

Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-4-0058



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTREN	<i>Action Contre le Travail des Enfants</i>
ALTEN	<i>Association pour la Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants au Niger</i>
ATEN	<i>Action contre le Travail des Enfants au Niger</i>
APE	<i>Association des Parents d'Elèves</i>
APP	<i>Activités pratiques et productives</i>
CADEV	CARITAS Development
CAPED	<i>Cellule d'Animation Pédagogique</i> (pedagogical outreach unit)
CASEC	Supplier of electronic components in Niger
CECLE	Combating Exploitive Child Labor through Education
CDTN	<i>Confédération Démocratique des Travailleurs au Niger</i>
CFDC	<i>Centres de Formation en Développement Communautaire</i>
CNDHLF	<i>Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés Fondamentales</i>
CNT	<i>Confédération Nigérienne du Travail</i>
COGES	<i>Comité de gestion des établissements</i>
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DGENF	<i>Direction Générale de l'Education Non Formelle</i>
DONGAD	<i>Direction des ONG et Association de Développement</i>
DREBA	<i>Direction Régionale de l'Education de Base et de l'Alphabétisation</i>
DREN	<i>Direction Régionale de l'Education Nationale</i>
EJFAD	<i>Equipe de Jeunes Formateurs et Animateurs pou le Développement</i>
GPRA	Government Performance Results Act
GON	Government of Niger
ICENF	<i>Inspection Communale de l'Education Non Formelle</i>
ICCLE	International Center on Child Labor and Education
ICLP	International Child Labor Program
IDENF	<i>Inspection Départementale de l'Education Non Formelle</i>
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-IPEC	International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
LOSEN	<i>Loi d'Orientation du Système Educatif Nigérien</i>
MEN	<i>Ministère d'Education Nationale</i>

NIGELEC	Niger Electric Supply Company
PIEN	Nomadic Education Initiative Project
Plan	Plan International in Niger
PRA	Participatory Rural Assessment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RELTEN	<i>Reseau de Lutte Contre le Travail de l'Enfant du Niger</i>
SCREAM	Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media
UGTN	<i>Union Générale des Travailleurs du Niger</i>
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor
USTN	<i>Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger</i>
UGTN	<i>Union Générale des Travailleurs du Niger</i>
VIE	<i>Volontaires pour l'Intégration Educative</i>
WFCL	Worst Forms of Child Labor
WV	World Vision

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) received a four-year Cooperative Agreement worth US\$2 million from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) to implement an Education Initiative (EI) project in Niger aimed at expanding access to, and improving the quality of, basic education for working children and those at risk of working. CRS is working with World Vision (WV) and Plan International in Niger (Plan or Plan Niger) to implement the project in three regions: Dosso, Maradi, and Tillabéri. The Combating Exploitive Child Labor through Education (CECLE) project represents one of the most systematic efforts to address child labor through awareness-raising and the provision of educational alternatives for child workers or those at risk of becoming child workers. Its strategy is designed to achieve four goals:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures.
2. Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school.
3. Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
4. Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

The project has increased the local and national consciousness through a variety of awareness-building strategies, using tools (Supporting Children's Rights Through Education, the Arts and the Media, [SCREAM]) developed by International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) at all levels; educating parents, community leaders, employers, the media, and a variety of civil society organizations.

In order to tailor educational services specifically to child laborers or those who have never (or rarely) been to school, CECLE works to strengthen the capacity of non-formal education systems to create meaningful educational alternatives. It works with school administrators, teachers, parents, and communities to ensure that education is seen as relevant to the socioeconomic needs of the community. Community-based organizations contribute to the building of classrooms for non-formal literacy and vocational centers and to the housing of trainers, as well as to the management and functioning of the schools.

At the national level, CECLE advocates, along with international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), for the adoption of a national policy on community schools, and specifically second chance schools, including the elaboration of a protocol for transitioning such schools into the government's basic education ministry. To set the basis for its objectives, the project has created a multisector steering committee jointly with the government and meets twice a year.¹ The committee is attended by the representatives of six ministries, by representatives of the three EI

¹ The first meeting was held in August 2006.

partners, and by other key education stakeholders in the fight against child labor.² Its role is to monitor the project's progress toward the goal of reducing child labor, help reorient activities to meet this goal, and to ensure that the project conforms with Government of Niger (GON) policies. It thus ensures an ongoing bridge of dialogue between the USDOL project and GON.

The project's main strategy to promote sustainability is to build the capacity to advocate against child labor and promote education at all levels: community structures (COGES, APE, and other committees), local NGO partners, teachers, literacy agents, and government partners at the district and national levels. Capacity-building initiatives are well under way in all three areas, as well as in the capital where EI partners actively participate in various committees and networks that focus on child labor.

The purpose of the midterm evaluation was to assess progress in relation to the project's goals and the relevancy of project objectives and strategy to the country-specific situation. The evaluation was guided by a set of questions organized under six headings: project design, project implementation, data collection and monitoring issues, partnership and coordination issues, management and budget issues, and sustainability and impact. Input from participants at two stakeholder meetings conducted at the end of the fieldwork are incorporated into the findings.

Project Achievements and Strengths

CECLE uses a two-pronged approach, contributing to discussions at national policy levels and implementing its educational support programs and advocacy initiatives in some of Niger's most challenging areas.

The CECLE partners' close collaboration with government structures has helped to create a multisector mechanism that encourages ongoing dialogue with the various ministries (representing the interests of labor, basic education, literacy, community development, social protection, and justice) that helps to prevent inconsistencies between the policies of the different actors within the country's social service structure. The project's strategy is very promising in this regard.

The project has integrated well with the government's establishment of community management structures (COGES) that partner with the ministries' district-level educational services. EI provides a united front with the government in defining the COGES role and provides training that strengthens their role and capacities in the fight against child labor through education.

The project's selection of the nomad zone, despite the enormous challenges that this area presents, demonstrates leadership in dealing with what has been one of the toughest problems in Niger's strategy to bring literacy and basic education to its populations and reduce harmful child labor practices. The project's consolidated attempt to bring transhumant and nomad parents into the fold of modern education constitutes what could be considered a historical turning point for the Dakoro-Bermo population.

² Ministries represented include Basic Education, Literacy, Community Development, Social Protection, Labor, and Justice.

The project has involved children in its advocacy against child labor through creative activities that help to render the concepts more concretely and meaningfully in the local context and give the issues greater visibility and weight. These children will be parents in the not-so-distant future. The strategy therefore promises to strengthen intergenerational sustainability of the message and its implications.

Other examples of best practices

- The project's handling of communication among the three partners is systematic and transparent in spite of unanticipated challenges and changes.
- The use of traditional events in the nomad zone has been successful in reaching a broad and hard-to-reach audience in this very challenging area.
- The establishment of community-level vigilance committees to monitor children's activities and maintain community awareness of exploitive child labor has helped to integrate child labor concepts into community life.
- The use of PRA (Participatory Rural Assessment)³ techniques to create community action plans facilitates community appropriation of project objectives and ownership of related initiatives.
- The establishment of school herds in collaboration with the communities helps to support school sustainability and improves the relevance of formal education to the child's cultural and socio-economic environment.
- Student governments provide children with practical experience in applying the rules of good governance to their school and the opportunity to learn about civic rights. CRS and WV are planning to introduce the same practice in their schools.

Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

Given the project's ambitious mandate and limited budget, many of the areas identified for improvement in this report are related to resource constraints rather than lack of awareness at the project level. Since most of the recommendations have resource implications, they need to be considered by the donor agency that controls budget allocations as much as by project management, taking into account each partner's ability (or inability) to contribute resources from alternative and/or internal sources.

- **Teacher quality:** The post midterm phase should place more emphasis on teacher training through the strengthening of the Ministry's pedagogical outreach process (CAPED) at the district level. A pilot teacher strengthening project is proposed, building upon experience in other African countries (such as that of United Nations Educational,

³ PRA is an assessment approach that enables rural people to share, analyze, and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan and to act accordingly.

Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The experience and information gained can contribute to the national process of revising the current teacher training approach. Teacher absences should be monitored systematically on a monthly basis in collaboration with the COGES.

- **School infrastructures:** The condition of some classrooms is deplorable and fails to provide adequate protection for children, teachers, and equipment. Sturdy hangars might be considered, such as those used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugee camps, or covered metal frames such as those used for literacy classes. Such structures would provide more protection than the current straw/thatch huts. The project should also consider including funds for school construction in its budget.

If the project is determined to prevent children from slipping back into their former situation, it will need to ensure the existence of dormitories in areas where families are mobile such as in the CRS zone and in Komabangou. This assurance must be done in close collaboration with local community structures and leadership who will need to manage them in accordance with cultural practices and concerns (e.g., the protection of girls).

- **Data collection and monitoring issues:** The current monitoring system for direct beneficiaries is not fully functional and reliable, nor sensitive enough to capture ongoing movements within each month. The monitoring system for indirect beneficiaries is inadequate given the degree of movement in schools on a monthly basis. Neither system allows disaggregation and verification by an outside observer. The analysis of the baseline data, as presented in the report, is flawed and incomplete and needs to be redone by a skilled analyst. A more detailed plan of action is proposed in Section 6.3.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability in the fight against child labor through education in Niger requires four basic elements: awareness-raising and institutional support, teacher capacity, durable school infrastructure that provides protection, and support to find economic alternatives for households that forego the labor contributions of their children. The project provides funds for two elements out of four. Its strategy is appropriate for the first element and it only partially addresses the second element. It is inadequate to ensure the sustainability of progress made in relation to its goals without independent contributions from the three CECLE partners.

A proposed plan of action that prioritizes recommended improvements is presented at the end of Section 6.3.

The fieldwork for this evaluation was conducted during April 2007 in Niger, primarily in the project zones of the three CECLE partners. The report was prepared by Macro International Inc., according to guidelines prescribed by the USDOL International Child Labor Program (ICLP). The evaluation was carried out by Linde Rachel, independent evaluation consultant, assisted by a note taker/translator, and in collaboration with USDOL/ICLP staff and in-country project staff and stakeholders.

I **CONTEXT**

Situated within the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) has been allocating some US\$205 million since 2001 to international efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor (WFCL), channeling these through the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) and its Child Labor Education Initiative (EI).⁴ Focusing on countries having a high rate of abusive and exploitive child labor, EI projects work toward the elimination of the WFCL through the provision of basic and/or alternative non-formal education. In addition to providing direct education and training opportunities to actual or potential child workers, the EI has four strategic objectives:

1. Raise awareness of the importance of education for all children and mobilize a wide array of actors to improve and expand education infrastructures.
2. Strengthen formal and transitional education systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school.
3. Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor.
4. Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

The issues of child labor in Niger came to the national forefront of attention in 1999 when the government adopted the ILO Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Child labor takes many forms in Niger, including commercial activities, domestic servitude (often under the label of “family assistance”), gold mining, agricultural labor, soil conservation, construction work, work in tanneries and slaughter and meatpacking houses, prostitution, and begging for the marabout.⁵ A study conducted in 2005 by United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) also indicates several forms of child trafficking for various purposes (domestic servitude, exploitive dead-end apprenticeships, begging) and including the interstate trafficking of women and children for indentured services as domestic laborers or prostitutes. Another study conducted by the International Labour Organization’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) on child labor in 1999 found that of the 600 working children under the age of 15 that it identified, 30 percent were only 10–12 years old and 53 percent were 13–14 years old.

In 2004, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) received a four-year cooperative agreement worth US\$2 million from USDOL to implement an EI project in Niger aimed at expanding access to, and improving the quality of, basic education and supporting the four strategic objectives cited above. CRS is working with World Vision (WV) and Plan Niger to implement the project in three regions: Dosso, Maradi, and Tillabéri. The Combating Exploitive Child Labor through Education (CECLE) in Niger project represents one of the most systematic efforts to address child labor through awareness-raising and the provision of educational alternatives for child workers or those at risk of becoming child workers.

⁴ The USDOL’s definition of the WFCL is consistent with ILO Convention No.182 and can be found in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 71, No. 233. Tuesday, December 5, 2006.

⁵ Marabouts are Koranic teachers that take on the Koranic education of children entrusted to them.

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II PROJECT DESCRIPTION

According to the Education for All (EFA) statistics published in 2003, Niger ranks lowest in its net education ratio (NER): 30.4 percent compared with 58.2 percent for sub-Saharan Africa in general.⁶ The results of the recently conducted Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) of 2006 shows a net enrollment rate in primary education of 36.9 percent (32.4 percent in Tillabéri). Adult literacy rates, closely related to the enrollment of children, are even less encouraging: 16 percent in Niger compared with the overall rate of 60.3 percent for sub-Saharan Africa. From almost any modern standpoint, Niger's children are educationally the most neglected of the world.

Ranking already as the poorest country on the United Nations (UN) development scale (Human Development Report, 2006), Niger has repeatedly suffered severe food security crises over the past five years caused by a combination of environmental and market factors and leading to a further erosion of its traditional productive base in the agricultural sector. As survival becomes more desperate, the coping strategies of rural households rely on an increased exploitation of its own members, including its children. There are no hard figures on the extent to which child labor is exploited in Niger, but the various faces of the phenomenon are evident in both the urban and rural environments. In the urban environment, they include work in meatpacking, construction, street peddling, domestic servitude, begging, and prostitution. In the rural areas, child labor is used in the artisanal mining of gold and includes prostitution at the sites, for wood cutting and hauling, for work in livestock raising (guarding or pulling water for animals), and household labor (e.g., hauling water in oversized buckets) that threatens the child's physical well-being.⁷

While economic reasons prevail, there are also sociocultural practices, such as that of sending girl children into the homes of relatives to provide domestic labor.

Aïssatou has lived in Komabangou for five years and is now in her first year at the CECLE training center. She is 18 years old and has never been to school. At the age of 7, she was sent to her older sister, where she performed household duties. At the age of 13, she began to sell food in the streets. (Komabangou)

Fatou is 17 and has never been to school. She worked for her aunt, helping with housework and selling items in the street before starting to come to the training center. Note: Trucks stop in Tera on the way to Komabangou and often pick up girls for prostitution at the sites. (Tera)

Other reasons are that the school fails to appeal to the population because it lacks relevance to its needs and that there is nothing else for children to do but work.

⁶ NER Net enrollment ratio. Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.

⁷ For a full typology of the worst forms of child labor based on the ILO Convention 182 and produced specifically for the children of Niger, see USTN et al., 2004.

Amadou is 16 years old and has been at the center for one year. He had one partial year at the elementary school and left because it “didn’t make sense to him.” At the age of 12, he started to work in the mines. He descended into the pits and he crushed and ground rocks into sand. There was nothing else for children of his age to do and he was too old to return to formal school.

The goal of the USDOL-EI project in Niger is to reduce exploitive child labor by providing educational opportunities to children *withdrawn* from child labor or to children at risk of becoming involved in exploitive labor and who are thereby *prevented* from engaging in it.⁸ The basic definition of child labor used in Niger refers to any work performed prior to age 15, and any work that can harm the physical, mental, and moral health of children (CECLE Animator’s Guide, 06). The worst forms of labor include slavery, debt servitude, prostitution, pornography, and the use of children for armed conflict or drug trafficking. The project’s messages are careful to distinguish between exploitive work and work performed under the supervision of parents and relatives, but clearly the line can be a fine one in a society where children, especially girls, are sent to the households of relatives to assist with household labor.⁹

The project distinguishes between direct and indirect beneficiaries. Direct beneficiaries are children whose specific needs are being targeted by the project in order for the child to (a) be withdrawn from, or prevented from entering, exploitive labor, and (b) to be enrolled in an educational activity. Indirect beneficiaries are children enrolled in the formal school system in geographic areas in which EI intervenes. Whereas direct beneficiaries are tracked individually on their status (withdrawal, prevention, abandons, working status, etc.), indirect beneficiaries are monitored at the class level via enrollment data.

The project’s implementation strategy focuses on four key outputs:

1. *Institutional strengthening: National institutions support actions to combat exploitive child labor.*

While the Government of Niger has ratified various international instruments that militate against child labor, the translation of those instruments into effective laws and their enforcement and implementation within Niger remains weak. The CECLE project tries to strengthen the national capacity for the enforcement of child labor laws and for the tracking of children who are removed from child labor and those at risk of entering the labor force. The project works toward providing data based on good monitoring practices that will provide a basis for appropriate education policies at national and local levels.

⁸ In 2005, ICLP-USDOL revised its indicator terminology from *enrollment* (in educational opportunities) to *withdrawn/prevented*, not only to maintain consistency with the ILO-IPEC terminology, but also to ensure that the children being counted under this indicator were indeed withdrawn or prevented from exploitive work. (USDOL, January 2006).

⁹ For example, the evaluator found a case where the girl child had been working for a relative since age 7 while the relative’s own children were sent to school.

To set the basis for its objectives, the project has created a multisector steering committee jointly with the government, which meets twice a year.¹⁰ The committee is attended by the representatives of six ministries, by representatives of the three CECLE partners, and by other key education stakeholders in the fight against child labor.¹¹ Its role is to monitor the project's progress toward the goal of reducing child labor, help reorient activities to meet this goal, and to ensure that the project is in conformity with Government of Niger (GON) policies. It thus ensures an ongoing bridge of dialogue between the USDOL Project and GON.

The project also collaborates with a broad range of agencies and initiatives at the national level:

- The ReNE (*Reseau Nigerien pour l'Enfance*) a national network of more than 12 associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in the prevention and monitoring of child labor and the protection of children's rights in general.
 - The country's major trade unions (*Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger*—Union of Labor Unions of Niger, USTN; *Union Générale des Travailleurs du Niger*—General Union of Laborers of Niger, UGTN; *Confédération Démocratique des Travailleurs au Niger*—Democratic Confederation of Laborers in Niger, CDTN; and *Confédération Nigérienne du Travail*—Niger Confederation of Labor, CNT) who, in collaboration ILO-IPEC, engage in child labor awareness-raising activities targeting workers and employers.
 - A national child labor survey funded jointly with UNICEF, ILO-IPEC, USDOL, and Government of Niger (GON) with the intent to provide reliable data to help guide policies of national institutions in charge of combating child labor.
 - The June 12 World Day Against Child Labor celebrations at the national level is used as an opportunity to bring together key figures such as traditional and government leaders, women's associations, teachers, religious leaders, and opinion leaders.
2. *Community mobilization: Community awareness of exploitive child labor and the importance of education is increased and communities take actions to promote education.*

Community awareness of the damaging effects of the WFCL and the importance of education for all children is the cornerstone of the CECLE strategy. It has increased the local and national consciousness through a variety of awareness-building strategies, using tools (Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts, and the Media, [SCREAM]) developed by ILO-IPEC at all levels, to educate parents, community leaders, employers, the media, and a variety of civil society organizations. CECLE uses Participatory Rural Assessment (PRA) techniques¹² to

¹⁰ The first meeting was held in August 2006.

¹¹ Ministries represented include Basic Education, Literacy, Community Development, Social Protection, Labor, and Justice.

¹² PRA is an assessment approach that enables rural people to share, analyze, and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan and to act (Chambers, 94).

create community action plans, which, in turn, provide the basis for community action against child labor and in favor of basic and nonformal educational opportunities. A similar program is used by Plan in all villages with an established COGES. CECLE agents closely follow students who have been withdrawn from the labor force or who are at risk of entering the labor force, and work together with teachers and school management committees (*Comités de gestion des établissements*, COGES) to monitor school attendance and student absences. Communities are encouraged to participate in school and training center construction and in providing shelter for teachers in the more isolated areas.

3. Access to and quality of formal education: Both access and quality of formal education are improved.

The project develops formal and transitional educational systems that encourage working children and those at risk of working to attend school. Activities include infrastructure improvements such as the completion of new formal school classrooms with the contributions of the community and/or the partner's own resources.¹³ Classroom equipment such as desks, globes, maps, and sports equipment is provided, as are school supplies. School supply stocks are managed by the school management committees. Teacher quality is strengthened through pedagogical in-service training provided periodically by the district-level school administration.

The curriculum is broadened to include practical training in livestock management and gardening (where water is adequate). School herds and gardens not only help to make the educational experience become more relevant and meaningful to the children's own environment, but potentially provide a source of income to the schools. Other extracurricular activities such as sports and drama are also promoted, making the school experience more appealing to children.

4. Access to and quality of nonformal education: Children at risk of or involved in exploitive labor practices participate in nonformal education programs; communities actively participate in the management of nonformal education activities.

In order to tailor educational services specifically to child laborers or those who have never (or rarely) been to school, CECLE works to strengthen the capacity of nonformal education systems to create meaningful educational alternatives. It works with school administrators, teachers, parents, and communities to ensure that education is seen as relevant to the socioeconomic needs of the community. Community-based organizations contribute to the building of classrooms for nonformal literacy and vocational centers and to the housing of trainers, as well as to the management and functioning of the schools.

¹³ At this time, school construction is not included under the CECLE project's budget.

At the national level, CECLE advocates, along with other international NGOs, for the adoption of a national policy on community schools,¹⁴ specifically second-chance schools,¹⁵ including the elaboration of a protocol for transitioning such schools into the government's basic education ministry.

A very important concern is the long-term sustainability of all of the above efforts. CECLE promotes local and national ownership and works to strengthen local capacity to mobilize resources and manage the continuity of these efforts.

¹⁴ Community schools are defined as schools that are “private nonprofit establishments for basic education, created by communities to meet their educational needs.” These schools do not benefit from the teacher pool maintained by the national educational system, but receive support in the form of advice and monitoring from the Ministry of Basic Education. They are managed by local committees that receive their mandate from the local Parent Teacher Association. There are three types of community schools: preschools, vocational schools, and schools of second chance that help older children to become integrated into the formal system after three years of alternative schooling. Previous or older students (“companion educators”) are often used to provide tutoring to these children. The fact that the government is unable to reach all potential students has contributed in a large part to the development of community schools.

¹⁵ Second-chance schools are community schools that provide children who missed out on mainstream education with another chance to get a formal elementary education.

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III EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this evaluation is to learn what works and what does not work as the project moves toward the end of the current phase in September 2008. It highlights project achievements, points out best practices, and provides recommendations for the improvement of project implementation. Its objectives, as listed in the evaluation's scope of work, are as follows:

1. Help individual organizations identify areas of good performance and areas where project implementation can be improved.
2. Assist OCFT to learn more about what is or is not working in terms of the overall conceptualization and design of EI projects within the broad OCFT technical cooperation program framework.
3. Assess the degree to which objectives relevant to the country-specific situations they address have been achieved.
4. Assess progress in terms of children's working and educational status (i.e., withdrawal and prevention from the worst forms of child labor; enrollment, retention, and completion of educational programs).

Six specific areas for inquiry have been identified:

1. **Program design:** The evaluation assesses the relevance of the project's design to the local situation, the needs of the population, to existing capacities and constraints at local and national levels. It examines the logic and coherence in the proposed strategy for ensuring that children are protected from the worst forms of child labor.
2. **Project implementation issues:** The evaluation determines whether the project's stated goals, purpose and outputs are realistic and to what extent project implementation is on track. It examines the effectiveness of project implementation and the influence of external factors on project strategy. It notes the use of innovative and best practices and identifies areas for improvement.
3. **Data collection and monitoring issues:** The evaluation assesses the effectiveness and reporting accuracy of the project's monitoring and data collection tools and systems. It points out the problems encountered and provides recommendations for improvement.
4. **Partnership and coordination issues:** The evaluation looks at collaboration and coordination issues within the project's three-partner core group, between the group and its partners at the national level and between individual members of the core group and their local partners in the field.
5. **Management and budget issues:** The evaluation looks at the strengths and weaknesses of management practices and tools used.

6. **Sustainability and impact:** One of the most important issues is the sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluation assesses the adequacy of the project's sustainability strategy and recommends steps to promote sustainability.

IV EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation process consists of three phases: the desk review, the field phase, and the reporting phase.

4.1 DESK REVIEW

The principal methodology used during this phase is document analysis: a systematic review of available documents related to the implementation of the project and the institutional and global context of implementation. In addition, this phase includes preliminary interviews with key stakeholders based in the United States (CRS, USDOL), the development of a data collection methodology, and preparations for the fieldwork.

The documents reviewed and analyzed include the following:

- Cooperative agreement
- Project logframe
- Management procedures and guidelines
- Performance monitoring plan
- Problem analysis diagram
- Project progress reports and donor responses
- Baseline report
- Literacy centers assessment report
- National study on the traffic of persons in Niger
- Global reports recommended by USDOL
- Various anecdotal stories
- Correspondence items of interest, internal memos, etc.

4.2 FIELD PHASE

This phase involved 10 days in the field for the collection of data based on interviews and observations and one day in Niamey for the six-hour debriefing process. It excludes the two to three days that were expected to be available for interviews in the capital (see explanation in Section 4.5).

The evaluator recruited an assistant for notetaking and translation who joined her on the third day of the field phase. Adamou Hamadou, the assistant and a journalist by training, was himself a Peulh from the Diffa region who had been raised in a nomad household. He was thus also able to contribute his cultural expertise in nomadic and transhumant life and values.

The content of the interviews was guided to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the type of informant, by a series of 31 questions that had been prepared by the donor and by project staff in Niamey. Many of these questions came out of a project management perspective and were not appropriate for actors at the community level. The interview process in the community setting thus used a “causerie” approach to get the population’s perceptions of strengths and weaknesses and on sustainability potential. The interview process was thus very open-ended, guided more than anything by the responses obtained. In the case of children, a short set of questions was addressed individually to each child in a randomly selected sample of students.

Notes were reviewed with the assistant when the time and circumstance permitted it on an ongoing basis.

Field interviews were conducted with the following:

- Project/partner staff in Niamey and in the field
- Government administrators based in the region
- ILO-IPEC staff (one brief encounter)
- Local/national NGOs involved in the fight against child labor
- School staff (teachers, head teachers) of formal and nonformal schools at selected project sites
- Parents and members of parent–teacher associations (APE) and community-based management structures (e.g., COGES)
- Children, including actual and potential beneficiaries and those who have left the Program.

Visits to each of the three program areas began with a staff briefing, followed by subsequent interviews, individual and/or group, with field agents. The selection of project sites was based on special donor interest (Komabangou mining sites, remote nomad sites), random choice or practicality given a short time frame, long distances, and often difficult terrain. The visits also provided an opportunity to observe children at work, for example in mining, livestock watering, and herding.

Site visits included direct observations, individual interviews, and focus groups.

Direct observations took note of the physical conditions of the buildings and classrooms (space, light, seating capacity, etc.), posted attendance rates, materials and tools used by teachers and children, canteen facility, sanitary facilities, and provisions for extracurricular activities.

Individual or group interviews were held with the following:

- **Teachers, literacy agents, and trainers:** Key questions focused on their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of project implementation, obstacles encountered and solutions tried that did or did not work, and their perceptions of the impact of project activities and the sustainability potential of results.
- **Members of the COGES and the APE:** The discussion with this group focused on how they perceived their roles, problems encountered, local perceptions of education and child labor, the relevancy of project activities to the needs of children and the community, perceived benefits, and potential for the sustainability of the results.
- **Children enrolled in nonformal education programs (“direct beneficiaries”):** This group included children removed from work situations or prevented from engaging in child labor. A sample of 5–10 of these children were individually asked a few simple questions, including what they had done before joining the program and what they were hoping to do when it ended.
- **Children enrolled in formal elementary schools or community schools (“indirect beneficiaries”):** Similar individual interviews were held in a few selected elementary classrooms.¹⁶

The preliminary results of the field visits were shared on two occasions before the evaluator’s departure: (a) a debriefing with local staff in Bermo in the Dakoro district, and (b) a broader-based stakeholder meeting in Niamey. The intent was to obtain staff and stakeholder responses to the evaluator’s preliminary observations. The results of the two debriefings are presented in Section VII.

4.3 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Analysis is always an iterative process. It occurs on an ongoing basis as new information is gained that may confirm prior information, add new perspectives, reveal new meaning, or, in some cases, contradict it.

As requested by the donor, the analysis and presentation of the results will consecutively address each of the specific questions. Additional observations have been added or integrated on an ongoing basis, as appropriate.

¹⁶ In the nomad zone of Dakoro, the distinction between “direct” and “indirect” beneficiaries is less clear in that, due to the support provided to the formal schools, many children were prevented from joining their siblings and parents when they moved with their herds, thus kept from engaging in the traditionally associated labor.

4.4 TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITIES

The number of days allocated to the evaluation process, including the writing of the final report, is 29 days, of which 13 days were spent in Niger. The timetable is presented below:

Table 1: Timetable of Evaluation Activities

Activities	Work Days	Dates
Desk review of project materials and interviews with OCFT staff	5	March 12–16
International travel	1	April 16
Fieldwork	9	April 17–26
Brief initial conclusions to project stakeholders in Bermo	1	April 27
Travel back to Niamey for staff debriefing	1	April 28
Initial conclusions to project stakeholders in Niamey	1	April 30
International travel	1	May 1
Draft report	8	Due to Macro May 21, to USDOL May 24
Comments due from USDOL	-	June 10
Finalization of document	2	Due to Macro June 17, to USDOL June 30
Total Work Days	29	n/a

4.5 LIMITATIONS OF DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The greatest limitation imposed on the collection of data for this evaluation was amount of time available. Of the 11 days in the country, only about five were available for the actual collection of data. The rest of the time was used for travel and two debriefings, which left little time to conduct interviews in the capital with, for example, government representatives and national NGOs. Thus, the evaluator had to continue to contact resource persons in Niger after her departure. Total travel time took approximately 51 hours. The evaluation fell into the hot season and temperatures reaching 115 degrees slowed the process down further. Nevertheless, the extra effort made to visit the hard-to-reach nomad zone gave the evaluator a better understanding of the full scope of the project. Because of time constraints, the interview data are based more than anything on field encounters in selected areas (excluding Plan Niger's Tillabery zone) and may also neglect the more global perspectives of informants based in the capital where the evaluator spent less than eight hours on interviews.

V FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the evaluation are organized under six main headings:

- Project Design Issues
- Project Implementation Issues
- Data Collection and Monitoring Issues
- Partnership and Coordination
- Management and Budget
- Sustainability and Impact

The findings are further guided by a set of key questions posed by USDOL within each of these categories. Additional observations are either integrated into the responses or else provided at the conclusion of each of the six subsections.

5.1 PROJECT DESIGN ISSUES

5.1.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

- 1. Was the project designed to be relevant to the local situation concerning the educational needs of the children engaged in the worst forms of child labor and for those at risk of entering exploitive work? Please consider specifically the needs of the target groups, the local capacities to address these issues, and the overall government policies/plans to combat child labor?*

Project Relevance to the Needs of the Target Groups

The local context varies considerably across the three partners' intervention zones, as does the definition of the WFCL and exploitive child labor in general.

In the World Vision area of Tillabéri in and around the mining sites of Komabangou, instances of WFCL correspond very clearly to the definitions provided by the ILO Convention No. 182 of 2002. They include mining work and prostitution. Mining work in Komabangou is dangerous. It involves the descent into deep and narrow (10–20 meters) shafts where the air is oxygen-deprived and polluted and where the danger of collapsing walls is ever-present. Mining works includes filling buckets of earth, which are then hauled to the surface, the backbreaking job of crushing rocks brought to the surface, and the sifting and washing of the sand and gravel that remains. The settlements that contain the sites are densely populated and anarchic, having sprung up spontaneously for the pursuit of gold. Prostitution flourishes in and around the mine sites. The sites have been in place for years, but the population comes and goes. During the rainy season,

mining activities slow down. The Government of Niger forbids mining during the rainy season because it becomes too dangerous. Many parents return to their villages to tend to their fields at this time, taking the children with them. There is limited possibility for the follow-up of direct beneficiaries when this happens, since project resources provide for tracking activities within the project area only.¹⁷

The Plan area in Dosso is a relatively stable sedentary area. Plan Niger has been operating in this area since 2002 with an integrated community-based approach that includes the building of schools and literacy centers, and the strengthening of local organizational capacity. Plan Niger's influence on CECLE project design may explain the strong complementarity that is evident between the project and the Plan approach. In the Dosso area, awareness-raising with regard to exploitive child labor fits well into Plan's emphasis on the rights of the child and the awareness-raising strategies it has used. The child labor focus in the Dosso villages is on household work that might exceed the strength of the child, such as the size of water buckets carried by girls.

The CRS zone of intervention is in an area dominated by nomadic herders, primarily the Peulhs with some presence of the Touareg. This population has historically been resistant to formal education. Its children are raised to continue the family traditions of livestock-raising based on a lifestyle of transhumance or nomadism.¹⁸ They are thus expected to be involved in related labors from an early age. Work that is most likely to fall within the boundaries of exploitive child labor includes the watering and guarding of animals. Work at the pastoral wells involves long hours and exposes children to certain dangers. There have been isolated incidents of children falling into the wells. The guarding of animals, likewise, involves long hours of work and is incompatible with the provision of a full basic education program. For girls, it is household labor, especially pounding grain and hauling water, that constitute what can be defined as exploitive child labor in this zone.

In all of the three settings, the project has tried to adapt to the needs and capacities of the local population. In some of the CRS villages, children work as herders in the morning and attend literacy classes in the afternoon. The project tries to transition these children from part-time to full-time school attendance. According to the local tradition, children are used for herding and the population does not consider this an undue hardship, nor see it as a hurdle to exposing these children to basic literacy classes. Thus, constant awareness work is needed to change attitudes in favor of an adequate basic education of the child.

Parents in the Komabangou area are quick to withdraw their children from school without further notice when they leave the mining sites to return to their own villages for fieldwork or for other reasons. This withdrawal seems to occur in part because there is no housing provided for their children when the parents leave. Close collaboration is needed between teachers, the COGES, and the CECLE field agents so that the rate of abandonment is reduced through adequate monitoring and follow-up with parents.

¹⁷ Field agents charged with tracking activities in the WV and CRS areas felt that they already had difficulties in covering the assigned project area.

¹⁸ Transhumance involves routine seasonal migration. Nomadism involves year-round movements in search of pasture.

Local Capacities to Address Exploitive Child Labor

The concept of taking issue with the exploitation of child labor is new, especially at the local levels. Historically, the use of child labor is almost intrinsic to the division of labor within households in Niger, especially in the rural areas. It is reinforced by sociocultural practices such as sending children to the households of relatives where they become little more than indentured servants and it becomes intensified when the household's livelihood security is threatened, as has been the case during the food security crises of the past five years. Because children's contributions to household labor are widely accepted, the practice and its risks and excesses have received little attention to date. Even experienced staff at child-centered agencies such as Plan Niger admit that they had not given the idea much thought before. Another factor that contributes to conceptual constraint is the lack of opportunities that exists locally for the application of a formal education. Children, when asked what they wanted to do after school, almost uniformly had either of two answers: (a) become a teacher or (b) go away to secondary school. Visions for alternative applications without leaving the area were limited. Thus, the local capacity to identify and address exploitive child labor through education may remain a challenge for some time to come, and constant vigilance and follow-up will be needed.

Partner capacities are related to prior program experience and internal funding structure. Plan Niger has clearly the strongest basis for partnering with USDOL because of its strong independent funding base, long-standing intervention experience related to the rights of the child, and integrated community-based programming. World Vision also applies integrated community-based programming within its so-called Area Development Program (ADP) areas.¹⁹ This programming includes the construction of educational infrastructure, which gives it a viable complementary resource base.

CRS appears to be the weakest of the three in terms of resource complementarity and experience in child-focused programming.²⁰ It has only limited independent funding sources compared with sponsorship agencies such as Plan Niger and World Vision and its programming lies in food security, health, and peace building more than basic education. At this time, CRS is still in the process of trying to find an external funder for the construction of classrooms in the Dakoro area.

Government Capacities to Address Exploitive Child Labor

The government agencies and representatives encountered did not lack the capacity to comprehend the scope of the problem and the needs to address it. Their capacity constraints are linked to resources. The most critical of these is teacher capacity. The country has a severe shortage of professional teachers because of a World Bank policy to retire all trained teachers who had reached 30 years of service in order to cut costs. This policy resulted in a massive reduction of skilled teachers from about 18,000 in 2001 to 9,736 in 2006. The average age of the

¹⁹ World Vision's ADPs are designated areas that receive the agency's long term (10–15 year) commitment to community-based development, using multisectoral interventions and a child-focused approach (i.e., children are included as agents of change in communities).

²⁰ By child-focused programming, we refer to a multisector approach that is focused specifically on the well-being of the child.

departed hovers around 49–50 years, which indicates a considerable brain drain within the economically active labor force in education. The trained teachers were replaced by largely untrained contractual hires who work at lower salaries with fewer benefits, and of which a majority lacks even basic pedagogical training. Today's teacher force in Niger consists of approximately 70 percent of these contractual hires. As a review of the national educational plan points out, the management of this teacher category presents serious problems for the administration because the precariousness of their (the teachers) status renders them unstable. With little training and motivation, their services are characterized by inferior applications. It goes without saying that the consequences will be felt where the quality of education and training is concerned (LOSEN, 2005).

The evaluator encountered school directors and teachers who were incapable of responding even to the simplest questions and noted the absence of enrollment data because the school director was “new.” The current situation clearly hampers the government's capacity to combat child labor by addressing the educational needs of Niger's children. Its policy in this case stands in direct contradiction to the fight against child labor that is promoted by the CECLE project.

2. How has the project's design fit into overall government programs to combat child labor and improve the quality of and access to formal and nonformal education in the target areas?

The Government of Niger ratified the international convention on the Rights of the child in 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Well-being of the Child in 1996, and Convention #182, which addresses itself specifically to the WFCL in 2000. More recently, the Government of Niger has taken steps to harmonize national laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the reform of texts on child protection. A national study on the extent of child labor has been launched by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) of Niger in collaboration with the ILO-IPEC and the financial support of USDOL and UNICEF. The results of the study will provide a basis for the development of a national child labor action plan.

The government collaborates closely with international interventions such as those of the ILO-IPEC, UNICEF, and the CECLE project of USDOL. The fit of the CECLE project with the government's programmatic commitments is supported by the existence of a steering committee that includes key representative from six ministries, a representative of ILO-IPEC, a representative from the office of human rights, and a representative from each of the CECLE partners. The committee meets twice a year, in February and in August. Collaboration between the CECLE team and its government partners at various levels appears to be strong and positive.

The fit between the project's objectives for an improved quality of education and the government's national educational plan is limited by the World Bank policy mentioned above, which aims to have 85 percent of the classes taught by contractual hires.²¹ This policy, viewed as

²¹ *Reducing primary education recurrent costs* through (1) multigrade teaching and (2) decreasing teacher salaries from 8.8 times to 3.5 times the per capita income by recruiting contract teachers. Starting in 1986, full *instituteurs* were to be reduced to 14 percent of the teaching force, and “volunteer” teachers with short-term contracts and no benefits were to be recruited to staff about 85 percent of the classes (World Bank, 2005).

catastrophic by many national educational experts, compromises the quality of education in several critical ways:

- The teaching capacity of these hires is vastly inferior to that of trained and certified teachers.
- The precarious nature of the contract and lack of benefits makes these hires unstable; as soon as they find a better offer, they leave.
- Contractual hires also tend to be volatile and strike-prone.

Given the current shortage of certified and experienced teachers, the Ministry of Basic Education offers in-service pedagogical training opportunities to its contractual hires through its pedagogical outreach unit (*Cellule d'animation pédagogique* [CAPED]) service.²² The CECLE partners support the CAPED programs and provides teachers with pedagogical guides and manuals.

3. Did the project's design fill an existing gap in services that other ongoing interventions were not addressing?

The main gap addressed by the project's design is that of the population's awareness of the problem of child labor and of the importance of education. Its emphasis on awareness-raising is shared by the ILO-IPEC intervention in Niger, but exceeds it in scope and reach at the community level. Gaps that it is not addressing are the need for durable classroom buildings and seed funds to initiate income-generating activities that compensate households for sending children to school.

4. Was the project design logical and coherent in ensuring that children removed from or at risk of entering the worst forms of child labor are educated in relevant programs?

The proposed program strategy notes that “the steps necessary to improve the educational opportunities for at risk and exploited children are many and will vary within the different project areas.”²³

Accordingly, the strategies vary from partner to partner area, though they always emphasize the core activities of awareness-raising, strengthening educational opportunities for children, and involving the collaboration of local community structures.

The criteria of what is defined as WFCL and exploitive child labor are thus interpreted for each of the intervention zones and operationalized accordingly. Within the context of household labor, the line between acceptable workloads and workloads that fall outside the boundaries of

²² The CAPED program brings together the teachers of 5–10 schools for training sessions supervised by pedagogical counselors hired by the state or by government inspectors.

²³ USDOL & CRS. Project Document, 2004.

acceptability as defined by the criteria of what constitutes exploitive child labor can be a fine one. The consensus is that parents do not wish to exploit their children but are forced to out of economic necessity (or cultural norms, as is the case in the nomad zone). In many cases, the child removed or prevented from exploitive child labor is likely to have siblings who are less fortunate. In the nomad zone, where child labor is an important part of family labor, sending a child to school is considered a sacrifice. In some cases, this sacrifice makes it difficult to ask parents for additional contributions. As one COGES president in the Dakoro area noted, “why do you want us to provide housing for teachers when we are already making the sacrifice of sending you our children?”

1. Children removed from the worst forms of child labor: for the project areas, these include mining work, domestic servitude, prostitution, and herding. Child workers are often too old to enter the standard educational track. Niger’s national educational plan offers two nonformal options for young adults who have had none or very little education: Vocational training centers for youth aged 15–25 and functional literacy classes for adults that have been expanded to include youth aged 9–15 years. The project budget supports both of these non-formal options by providing equipment and materials and by training literacy teachers and vocational trainers, etc.

The project’s impact indicators are (a) the reduction of children engaged in gold mining and associated activities; and (b) reduction in the number of work hours of children involved in limited cattle breeding, agriculture work, and domestic chores. These measures are coherent with the situation found in the three project areas, as is the proposed strategy for reducing these forms of child exploitation. What is not expressed in the project design is the likelihood that the work load within households is shifted from one child to another when one specific child is withdrawn from labor and designated for education.²⁴ Moreover, in the Tillaberi area, cases were found where children were sent to work in the households of relatives whose own children were sent to school. Another issue related to labor allocation within households is the migration of women in the Dakoro zone. When women leave, the work of caring for the youngest and the household falls to relatives, including children.

2. Children prevented from the worst forms of child labor: these are children who reside in areas susceptible to the use of WFCL. The project’s main strategy for such children of school age is to improve access to and the quality of elementary schools. Children who have passed that age and are no longer accepted into the formal system are steered to second chance schools or functional literacy centers.

As an educational response, given the resource context of Niger, both approaches are relevant to the children’s needs. They do not address the household’s needs. Parents make it clear that there are economic sacrifices to sending a child to school. Without economic alternatives, households may reallocate labor so that a greater burden falls on

²⁴ In her interviews with selected children, the evaluator usually asked what the child did before entering the educational program, followed by the question of who did the work now. The answer to the second question was usually the mother or a sibling.

women and the remaining children. The CECLE partners are aware of the need for complementary income-generating activity programs. CRS provides funding for some (35) women's groups (200,000 FCFA per group), which is considered largely insufficient. Plan already had a fairly comprehensive IGA program in place prior to the project and WV has reinforced its support for IGAs for women over the past two years. There is a general consensus that the sustainability of the project is at risk as long as households are not offered viable alternatives such as micro-credit and/or income-generating opportunities.

Educated labor, in certain areas, becomes an economic asset only if the person migrates. This is probably not a very appealing option for families. These conceptual challenges are especially evident in the CRS and WV zones, where they are being addressed by the project's ongoing program of awareness-raising.

5.1.2 Conclusions

The relevancy of the project design to the local situation is achieved through the adaptation of each partner's field implementation strategy to the local conditions in which it is applied.

Capacities at the community and parent levels are constrained in some cases by a conceptual incompatibility with a long-standing tradition according to which the child forms an integral part of the household's available labor force. They are also hampered by a lack of vision for viable future alternatives and by parent skepticism of the practical returns of formal education to the household when all children are sent to school. In the CRS and the WV zones, there is evidence that the allocation of labor within households and families is shifted from one child to another when one or more designated children are sent to school.

I used to pound grain, haul water and wood. It's my sister that does the work now.

Bintou, 14 years old

I don't work anymore. It's my brothers who do the work.²⁵

Daouda, 13 years old

Government capacities are constrained primarily by lack of resources, including a severe shortage of trained teachers because of its national policy of retiring skilled teachers and replacing them with contractual hires.

Partner capacity can be constrained when access to independent funds for the construction of educational infrastructure or the seeding of income-generating activities are not readily available, since CECLE does not provide such funding.

²⁵ Real names have been replaced with fictional names.

As to the strengthening of national institutions, the CECLE initiative has a strong degree of acceptance and legitimacy within the national government. Its design ensures an ongoing dialogue at the national level and includes provisions that help to strengthen communication, networking, and access to information at the different levels.

5.1.3 Recommendations

In the CRS zone where traditional (and practical) blocks to combating child labor in favor of education are strongest, the most compelling argument is a vision of long term development for the area and access to knowledge for its population. Awareness-raising strategies should make sure that this vision provides the context for arguments against child labor and in favor of education. As the inspector in Dakoro noted, “the population has understood that education is the engine of development” and this is the basis upon which the fight against child labor can be fought. It is telling that it is the poorer families in the nomad zone that are the greatest contributors of the schools. These are families where less is gained by perpetuating the nomadic/transhumant lifestyle and where education offers doors to alternatives such as migration or entering civil service.

Awareness-raising activities need to be strengthened in the Komabangou area so that parents understand what is lost when they withdraw their children without notice. But from a more practical standpoint, when parents are mobile, children will need to have a place to stay when the parents leave. If the project is determined to prevent children from slipping back into their former situation, it will need to adopt a boarding school approach in areas where families are mobile.

Teacher capacity: To the extent possible, school directors should be drawn from the ranks of retired teachers. They can raise the standards and provide on-the-job training and supervision to the contractual hires. Incentives should be provided for teachers, such as status within the community, recognition for good services at other occasions (meetings, community events, etc.), and one or two animals managed as part of the school herd. They should also become involved as leaders of the CAPED training sessions. Such sessions should be held on a more regular basis, allowing teachers to take a break from tough and isolated living conditions, exchange ideas, and build motivation. The post midterm phase should place more emphasis on teacher training through the strengthening of the CAPED process. The contractual teaching staff has rights to one month of vacation per year, while school vacations are much longer. The summer vacations should be used to provide elementary school teachers with intensive pedagogical and other remedial training.

Concerned actors are looking toward the results of the upcoming national survey, which should provide the basis for a national action plan. National surveys take an enormous amount of time to be completed. Since USDOL is a major contributor to the survey, the CECLE partners could negotiate the timing of the survey activities such that the data are collected first in the three regions where the CECLE projects are located: Dosso, Maradi, and Tillabéri. Since the data will have to be disaggregated, at least to the regional (preferably district) level to be meaningful, the analysis of the data could proceed without waiting for the data from the remaining regions. The study will hopefully provide a better view of the actual situation of labor allocation within

households. The project should consider indicators that focus on the children's households, aiming to increase the number of households that are free of child exploitation practices. Counting the number of children withdrawn from exploitive labor on the basis of school or training center attendance does not adequately capture the problem in Niger.

Sturdy hangars could be considered to improve school infrastructure, such as those used by the UNHCR for refugee camps. Such structures would provide more protection than the current straw/thatch huts. The project should also consider including funds for school construction in its budget.

5.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

5.2.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

1. *Does the project design seem to be adequately supporting the four EI goals? If not, which ones are not being supported and why not?*

Goal 1—Awareness-raising: The project has had a clear impact on the awareness of its target populations with regard to child labor and the importance of education. The adequacy of support received for related activities varies by zone. In the Plan area, awareness-raising activities are carried out by a local NGO that has been collaborating with Plan since 2005. The program is comprehensive and well-structured and coverage appears to be altogether satisfactory. In the World Vision area, the field agents cover some 10 villages within a 25 km radius of the main mine site by means of motorbikes. They found this mode of transportation to be difficult due to the presentation materials that they need to carry. They would prefer to use a shared vehicle.

The challenge of covering the project sites and providing services, including awareness-raising sessions was clearly the greatest in the CRS area. Target sites can be up to 85 km apart and out of 24, 17 (71 percent) are more than 50 km apart. Each animator covers a total of six sites (including three with schools) where activities are guided by the community's own action plan. The terrain is hard on the bikes (DT 125s) and when breakdowns occur (averaging about two per year) it can take considerable time to get the bike up and running again due to the extreme isolation of the area and the total lack of local resources for repair.²⁶

Goal 2—Strengthening of formal and transitional educational systems: This goal is at its most advanced in the Plan area, where related initiatives have been integrated into Plan's own program strategy since its inception in the Dosso area. World Vision has also made considerable strides in this area, though the capacity of teaching staff for both the formal and the nonformal system is often very low because of a lack of experience. The director of the elementary school in Komabangou, though three years with the WV program, seemed to be incapable of providing clear information about awareness-raising themes and activities and extracurricular school projects. His coteachers, in place only since January 2007, were also unable to answer even the

²⁶ If the bike cannot be repaired by the animator himself, a mechanic has to be brought from Maradi, which is four to five hours away. Since there is no means of communication, this process can take many days.

simplest questions on project activities, messages, and effect.²⁷ Likewise, newly recruited literacy trainers appeared to be poorly informed. The exception was a literacy trainer who had been recruited from the ranks of retired teachers. His grasp of the project's importance and the context within which it was being implemented was far superior.

The CRS zone is, once again, the most challenging in terms of needs for strengthening. Three main areas stand out for immediate improvement: teacher stability, school infrastructure, and length of the school year.

- **Teacher stability:** Most of the teachers are contractual employees who are felt to have relatively low levels of long-term commitment and who are eager to explore other employment opportunities. Almost none of the teachers are from the area itself. The one exception that the evaluator is aware of is the current Mayor of Bermo. For teachers coming from the sedentary zones, the conditions are extremely difficult and they do not receive a hardship supplement. Due to the absence of any transportation and communication infrastructure, it can take three to seven days a month for a teacher to obtain his monthly salary from the administrative offices in Dakoro. Teacher absences appear to be frequent, especially at the beginning of the school year, as is teacher/director turnover from one year to the next. There is virtually no handover when a new director takes over and thus no continuity where student profiles and needs are concerned. The desired length of service for primary school teachers in Niger is six years, which permits teachers to stay with at least one cohort through to their exit examination.²⁸ The nomad schools are deprived of such teacher longevity.
- **School infrastructure:** One of the more glaring shortcomings of the project is the state of some of the classroom buildings. Some classrooms visited were built of millet stalks and were on the verge of collapse; others were built of adobe but had thatched roofs that were caving in. In the CRS zone, the population has to travel long distances to find millet stalks and thatch outside the zone. These classrooms offer no protection during the cold season and children get sick. At the time of the evaluator's visit, there were reports of whooping cough making the rounds. Such reports are not likely to motivate parents to send their children to school. In areas where parents are mobile (CRS and WV), the absence of dormitories discourages parents from leaving their children behind when they move. Children were sometimes placed with families living near the school, but that was clearly no guarantee for shelter from the elements. Millet stalk walls and thatch roofs do not survive the rainy season and have to be rebuilt each year. In some cases, the beginning of the school year is delayed until these make-shift shacks are rebuilt. None of these structures contain school furniture for the students due to the lack of protection from wind and rain.

²⁷ Due to our late arrival at the school and the little time available, it was not possible to talk to the children directly.

²⁸ There was only one known case of a school director staying for this length of time and that was at a school at the edge of the nomad area, which served the sedentary Hausa population, as well. In this case, the director had been allowed to construct his own dwelling, attaching it to the existing student dormitory.

Other infrastructure needs include the following:

- Dormitories for those children that are left behind by their parents²⁹
 - A well providing safe water³⁰
 - School latrines in most instances
 - Access to some basic health care provisions, such as a pharmaceutical kit and health emergency training for teachers
- **Length of school year:** The desired length of the school year in Niger is 960 hours or 160 six-hour days. The actual school year is considerably less (about 110 to 120 days) in the nomad zone. Factors that combine to shorten the school year include teacher absence, insufficient infrastructure to protect against wind and rain, parents returning late from their northward migration, and tribal ceremonies held during the month of October after their return. The impression at CRS and at the district offices is that the children are not available at the beginning of the school year. According to teachers and the records of the school canteens, children are present during the month of October when school begins. These contradictory assertions should be further investigated.

Goal 3—Strengthen national institutions and policies on education and child labor: A steering committee was formed in 2006 that includes representatives from six ministries and from the three CECLE partners. It meets twice a year to discuss joint concerns and coordinate strategies. In addition, quarterly meetings are being organized for government ministries and local and international NGOs to discuss current initiatives and approaches with regard to the reduction of child labor. A nationwide network of organizations, agencies, and actors that address the protection of children's rights, including child labor issues, has been created to facilitate the sharing of information and the monitoring of child labor in Niger. The annual events of June 16th, the day dedicated to the subject of child labor, becomes an occasion where government representatives at all levels participate and collaborate with project staff to give maximum visibility to child labor across the nation. Finally, a national survey on child labor is being conducted by the National Statistics Institute with USDOL–CECLE funding to provide a sound empirical basis for developing a nationwide strategy in the fight against child labor.

Goal 4—Ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts: The project places strong emphasis on local structures as vehicles for the continuation of awareness-raising and the mobilization of community contributions to the education of its children. At this point, these structures will need further training, especially in the CRS area, where at least one COGES does not seem to understand its role. In general, their collaboration and commitment appears to be solid across all three partner zones, but especially in the Plan zone.

²⁹ CRS and WV are aware of this need, but have problems finding (non-USDOL) funds for dormitories.

³⁰ Though this was mentioned only in one case, the need for potable water is enormous. The population, including the schools, gets its drinking water almost exclusively from unprotected pastoral wells.

Sustainability issues also vary to some extent by partner zone.

- **WV area:** One advantage in the WV zone is the longevity of the WV presence. WV usually commits a minimum of 10 years to its Area Development Programs. In the WV zone, the professional training program is the most advanced: about 45 children are being trained this year in sewing, embroidery, and batik and about 30 in carpentry. However, the numbers fluctuate due to frequent abandons. There are very few provisions offered to help newly trained adolescents find outlets for their services and products.³¹ Most of these children have never been to school and the staff feels that once they are used to earning money, their motivation for training without further support weakens. Their attendance is not stable and they often arrive late or not at all. A visit by the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer in January found that only 15 out of 30 students were present.
- **Dosso area:** The CECLE project in the Plan area is well-positioned for long-term sustainability. Structures are well-organized and members know their roles, the school infrastructure is solid and durable, teachers are well-housed and well-informed about the project objectives, and school children are eager to enumerate the worst forms of child labor. Plan is currently investigating the possibility of providing adolescents in its training centers with micro-credit services. It has established a live-in home in Dosso that enables girls to continue their education at secondary schools in town. The transfer of capacity to community structures is more advanced than elsewhere and the roles within communities with regard to the prevention of child labor and the promotion of education are clear. Plan's programmatic approach also includes the establishment of community water fountains that decrease the work load for women, and a number of income-generating initiatives for women such as cereal banks, gardening, and the raising of small livestock.
- **CRS area:** The main asset with regard to project sustainability at this time is the population's strong commitment to send its children to school, which represents a major shift from its historical reluctance. As one participant at the debriefing put it: "We used to flee the noise of planes and any talk of education. Now we have understood. Our children are able to read our letters" (when it took 150 km to get a letter read before). A sense of commitment was evident at the community level and at the debriefing, which assembled some 75 representatives of the USDOL schools and communities. Families have increasingly settled in the vicinity of these schools, where formerly there would have been no more than a well and one single family camp, at most. There are economic hurdles to sustainability: women continue to migrate in large numbers to earn money and bring back goods for themselves and their children; there are no provisions for children who learn sewing and embroidery to continue on their own, nor for graduates of the primary schools to continue on to secondary school.

³¹ Staff at both WV and CRS are working on this. Wares produced by the children were on display and for sale in Komabangou, and CRS mentions opportunities for selling craft products in the Bermo area.

2. *At midterm, is the project on track in terms of meeting its stated purpose and outputs in the project document? If not, what seem to be the factors contributing to delays?*

The project appears to be on track at this time, in spite of delays at the outset, according to various actors and according to the Technical Progress Reports. The evaluator was not able to verify this timetable, as there was no evidence of an updated monitoring system that could provide a clear and verifiable basis for the information. For the tracking of direct beneficiaries, the Student Tracking System (STS) is not yet able to provide reliable, complete, and updated information. For the indirect beneficiaries, the only evidence of a project-level monitoring process were reports of field visits conducted in October 2006 and from December 27, 2006 to January 7, 2007. The first visit report was accompanied by a data collection table for CRS-Maradi. The second report indicated numerous cases of abandonment and of transfers in its narrative, but there was no summary table of figures. The enrollment figures for the formal system are taken from the district inspector's office at the beginning of each school year. With the amount of abandons, transfers, and class cancellations (in one case the CI class was cancelled because the teacher didn't show up), these annual figures hide more than they reveal. There was no evidence of keeping records on a monthly basis.³²

3. *Were the project purpose and outputs realistic?*

Yes, the purpose and all of the outputs were realistic, in part because the purpose and output language is not very specific. Where the indicators are concerned, the numbers must be verified. The analysis of the baseline survey on which the enrollment numbers are based is not complete and is flawed in many places (see comments on M&E below). Thus, it is not clear just where the project stands, both in terms of its direct and its indirect beneficiaries. The most reliable monitoring information is likely to come from the Plan area where families and school staff are relatively stable and where project staff is in continuous and close contact with the target population.

4. *The TPR from March 2005 indicated that official enrollment in "nomad schools" is limited to once every two years. What progress is being made by the project on addressing this issue, and does the implemented strategy seem appropriate?*

One of the main reasons for this is that there are not enough children to justify annual enrollment. In one case, it was found that there were zero children available, and in a second case, there were four children for whom no teacher could be found. It is difficult to obtain teachers even where there are sufficient children each year. When the number falls below five, it is even harder, though clearly efforts are being made. Officially, according to the government plan, there should be one teacher per elementary grade and cohort who sees the children through to their final examination. The project began with only one teacher per elementary school

³² In order to compensate for insufficient time in the field, and especially in the capital, the evaluator sent several e-mails with questions after her departure. Most of these remained unanswered and to date, no additional project-related information has been obtained. A physical inspection was not possible in the time allocated to the midterm evaluation, thus without the existence of a functioning and transparent monitoring system, this question cannot be fully answered beyond what information is provided by the Technical Progress Reports.

covering all grades and has now reached two teachers per school. A request for a third teacher is in process. It should also be remembered that these teachers are not trained for multigrade teaching. Adding a grade every year in this context would not be appropriate.

5. *Are there any examples of best practices or especially innovative approaches developed under the project that should be highlighted?*

From the standpoint of the various actors, the very idea of taking issue with child labor is innovative.

Where project implementation is concerned, there are several examples of innovative practices. They include the following:

- **The school herd:** All of the 12 schools in the CRS area have school herds where 30 head have been given by the project and 10 head have been contributed by the community.
 - **Student government:** Plan has established student governments in its elementary schools to provide children with a practical opportunity to apply the rules of good governance to their school and to learn about civic rights.
 - **Design contests, songs, and theater productions:** Design contests and theater skits have served to make the concepts of child labor more concrete from the children's perspective while giving children a creative outlet.
 - **Collaboration with the COGES and other community structures in the monitoring of school attendance, absences, teacher performance:** This practice has been a success for the most part according to the various sources.
6. *Comment on the impact of external factors on project implementation and progress. How have these factors affected the participants in this project (both project partners and beneficiaries)?*

The project got off to a slow start because of the 2004 and 2005 food security crises in Niger and the national teacher strike in 2004. It has been able to proceed with its activities since then and is currently on target according to its performance monitoring plan (PMP) and Technical Progress Reports (TPRs). According to its records, the enrollment of children in the non-formal education programs has already surpassed the project target of 3,200 because of the strong demand for this type of program.³³

³³ It was not possible for the evaluator to verify this information via the Student Tracking System database, partly due to the lack of time available in Niamey.

The count of direct beneficiaries was very low in some of the nonformal schools visited in the CRS area. At the second year literacy class in Djaho Bizo, Dakoro, it was 4 (direct beneficiaries) out of 21 students for the previous year, and 2 out of 16 students during the current year (the remaining students are adults).³⁴ This was also a site where female migration was very high as evidenced visibly by the number of women's *armoire* bundles left behind.³⁵ It is very possibly the case that the higher the female migration, the less likely children will come to, or stay in, educational programs.

One external factor that is likely to substantially influence the project's goal of strengthening the quality of education is the low level of teacher capacity and stability. While hiring large numbers of contractual staff might have increased access to elementary education, the retiring of skilled teachers represents a clear set back where the quality of classroom instruction is concerned. A transition where the contracted hires work under the systematic supervision and tutoring of experienced school directors would have been a preferred option.

Similarly in nonformal education, literacy trainers were drawn from the ranks of the jobless or some other unrelated profession and provided with a maximum of one month of training—and often less. WV has attempted to hire in some cases retired teachers from the same area for their literacy centers. The difference in capacity was immediately evident to this evaluator in speaking to different teaching personnel. Teacher quality in the Plan area appears to be good, ensured by the collaboration of experienced former teachers as advisors. The biggest challenge is in the nomad area. The use of Touaregs might have mitigated teacher flight due to living conditions, but the quality of instruction is bound to be compromised when inexperienced teaching staff is confronted with multigrade teaching without having received any training for it. The project uses indicators to measure quality in terms of innovation and extracurricular activities when, in fact, it is the quality of basic instruction that will be the fundamental issue given the current situation. For the coming phase, quality indicators should be revised accordingly.

Certain conditions, such as the mobility of parents in the WV zone and the migration of women in the CRS zone, may not have been sufficiently anticipated by the project. Field animators can monitor direct beneficiaries within the communities but not once they leave with their parents. The migration of women undoubtedly involves an additional work load on those who are left behind, including children and especially girls. This workload became quite evident in our discussion with some of the children withdrawn from child labor.

7. Assess the effectiveness of the project's awareness-raising activities. How have attitudes toward exploitive child labor and education been affected at various levels—community, regional, and national?

The effect has been considerable, but varies across the three zones.

³⁴ Nonformal education programs are currently offered for a duration of two years.

³⁵ Women who migrate bundle up their belongings and place them, covered, in the court yard.

In the Plan zone, the effect is visible and actors at all levels are well-informed and well-harmonized on related issues. Children have incorporated the concepts into their vocabularies and creative activities; local vigilance committees are established with representation on the COGES; collaboration among teachers, trainers, and the various local structures is strong. The effect is demonstrable on the quality of life and education of children. For example, girls are no longer allowed to carry the heavy 30-liter water buckets and children's educational activities have become the focal point of village life.

In the WV area, the effects are evident in the very strong demand for nonformal education programs in an area where children were formerly absorbed into the adult work life at an early age. The concepts have been well-understood and assimilated by the communities as represented by the COGES and the Parent-Teacher Associations. Collaboration between project staff and these structures is good. There is evidence of insufficient capacity among teachers and literacy trainers, which needs to be addressed if potential gains in the quality of education programs are not to be compromised.

In the CRS zone, the effect on the population has been exceptional by all accounts of various local actors. Where schools used to stand isolated, they are now surrounded by communities that contribute actively to their functioning. The zone has made remarkable strides in the population's attitude toward education, which can be directly attributed to the project's awareness-raising activities in this highly isolated area. However, much remains to be done to solidify the demand for education among parents to the point where they are willing to provide all of their children with a basic education. The process is slow and an early cessation of awareness-raising activities could have very regrettable results.

At the regional and district levels, attitudes were found to be positive and supportive and staff/officials well-engaged (with one rare exception), evidenced by their active participation in this evaluation, including the presentation of preliminary results.

A widely expressed interest in the results of the upcoming national survey also conveys the importance given to the topic, as does the new formation of a nationwide network of organizations and agencies engaged in the fight against child labor.

8. Does the extent to which the project relies on three independent organizations implementing the grant have a positive or negative impact on the delivery of services?

The three intervention zones are far apart and entirely independent. In the WV and Plan zones, the CECLE project is seen as an extension of the partners' prior activities. The longevity of their engagement, their integrated approach to development, and the coherence of CECLE objectives with prior involvement in education can only strengthen the impact of CECLE service delivery in these two zones. The nomad zone is almost virgin territory for development activities outside of livestock-related initiatives (by The Association for the Regeneration of Animal Breeding in Niger—AREN, for instance). Though it is CARITAS Development (CADEV) that is the

implementing agency for CRS-EI,³⁶ it is CRS that has name recognition communicated by its logo.³⁷

The impact of relying on three independent organizations is felt more negatively at the internal M&E level. The division of labor and the internal restructuring of key positions have had a negative impact on the CECLE group's ability to produce reliable baseline data, an activity that requires strong and unified technical leadership. The current monitoring process lacks cohesion and clarity and is in desperate need of revision. Related problems will be further discussed in Section 5.3 below.

9. *At the national level, is this project perceived as a campaign, a unified group effort, or as a series of independent projects? Does this perception have an impact on the ability to achieve sustainable results or on the ability to function at the national level?*

In general, the project is perceived as a unified group effort at the national level. The collaboration of three major international NGOs on one single issue tends to lend the CECLE mission more visibility and weight at the national level. This perception was confirmed during the stakeholder meeting when approximately 45 participants from various partners and government agencies spent almost six hours on a discussion of the preliminary evaluation results. It is further reinforced by the partners' consolidated contributions to the Annual Day of the Fight Against Child Labor on June 12. The perception of a consolidated group effort can only have a positive effect on achieving visibility and results at the national level.

5.2.2 Conclusions

It became clear during the debriefing in Niamey that the sustainability of the project's achievements is on everyone's mind as it moves toward the closure of the current phase.

The project appears to have recovered from a slow start because of a two-year food security crisis in 2004–05 and a national teacher strike in 2004. One external factor that threatens to compromise the project's goal to improve the quality of school instruction is the massive retiring of experienced teaching staff in Niger. To some extent, the ranks of retired teachers can and should be used to staff nonformal educational programs and advisory positions. But such a strategy becomes more difficult in the more remote areas of project intervention. Parent mobility and female migration also appear to be more pronounced than anticipated by the project.

The effectiveness of the project's awareness-raising activities is evidenced in the reduction of child labor in the project areas and in the increased demand for formal and nonformal education. Attitudes toward the project's awareness-raising objectives and achievements are positive and supportive at all levels.

³⁶ CRS has a formal agreement (*Protocol d'Accord*) with CARITAS, whereby responsibility for the implementation of the EI project in the Maradi region is assumed by CARITAS.

³⁷ The population, being largely illiterate, recognizes the partner's logo rather than the letters of USDOL.

5.2.3 Recommendations

Teacher stability: provide in-kind incentives to teachers, such as housing and possibly a camel, that gives them greater mobility. Assist teachers in obtaining their salaries without losing days of class time. Strengthen the frequency and quality of CAPED training. Such training can provide opportunities where teachers can exchange notes and get advice from experienced advisors.

Infrastructure: CRS should do whatever is needed to include construction in its budget.

Length of school year: Collect monthly information on school attendance to determine the length of the school year in the CRS zone. Attempt to lengthen the school year by ensuring make up periods during the Christmas and/or Easter vacations and possibly during part of the long summer break.³⁸ Targets should be set for the number of days spent in the classroom. Teacher absences should be reduced and parents should be encouraged to respect the beginning of the school year.³⁹

Strengthen the support of teacher training in the WV and CRS zones by—

- Hiring retired teachers for the supervision and tutoring of contractual hires.
- Improving CAPED-based pedagogical training (the current curriculum is inadequate for the needs of the new hires).
- Providing incentives for teachers and trainers posted in isolated hardship posts.
- Improving the monitoring capacity of the COGES and APE, so that shortcomings can be corrected before the end of the school year.

Awareness-raising and monitoring activities should be increasingly assumed by local structures, as appears to be the case in the Plan area.

Guidelines should be developed for school herd management. There were several instances where it was not clear who was in charge. In Komabangou, a dispute had developed between the APE and the COGES over who was supposed to manage the school herd. Meanwhile, the school director did not seem to know anything about it. In the CRS area, at least one school director was still waiting for a formal handover of the herd. In one case where the director/teacher had the formal agreement, he had no other information on the herd. In Koulouwa, the COGES had assigned the management of the herd to one of its members. This seemed to be by far the most reasonable approach, provided there was close collaboration between the COGES-assigned herd manager and the school director. In some cases, loss through theft and death was fairly elevated,

³⁸ It should be remembered that contractual teachers get only one month per year vacation time and are therefore available for special vacation classes.

³⁹ Comments during the briefing in Bermo indicated that parents were willing to adapt to the school year and make sure to return the children by October 1 when the school year begins.

especially for goats and sheep. This problem could also be dealt with through training and improved management practices.

5.3 DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING ISSUES

5.3.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

1. *Has the project developed tools and systems to monitor and evaluate project performance? How effective are these tools and systems?*
- **Monitoring of direct beneficiaries:** To date, the project does not have a fully operational tool for the monitoring of direct beneficiaries.⁴⁰ The current STS is being maintained by the CRS M&E Manager who is an information technology (IT) technician by training. The project's M&E officer has not been trained on this system and has no experience in managing data systems. Given the unfortunate departure of the previous M&E person, the current one should have been given the time and the space to assume mastery and control of the M&E system. This did not occur.

One major component of the monitoring system is the STS. CECLE initially adopted the EI-Benin system, which was in Excel. After receiving training on the Access-based STS in Accra, the data was transferred from the Excel-based system. What remains now is the cleaning and updating of the system, which should be the responsibility of the M&E person. However, the new M&E officer has not been trained on the system and does not have experience in managing data systems. Moreover, the M&E officer does not have an office at CRS where the system is currently maintained.

In and of itself, the STS seems to be quite adequately, though it could use further adaptation (there appears to be no initial entry date, payments are listed as dollars rather than in the local currency). The content needs to be thoroughly cleaned from the start (duplicates, invalid entries such as pre-project drop-outs) and updated (filling in missing data, etc.).

A separate visit to the educational facilities conducted by the M&E officer in January found that only 50 percent of a total of 30 students were in one training center at Komabangou and that abandons were frequent. Another center in a neighboring village had not yet started due to the absence of training staff. It appears that abandons are quite frequent. Children are used to earning money. They are illiterate and possibly see more immediate returns to their current activities.

⁴⁰ According to the last TPR, the actual number of direct beneficiaries was 2,086 at latest count (February 2007). Of these, almost half, or 1,018, are in the WV zone (WV M&E Officer). It was not possible for the evaluator to verify these figures.

- **Monitoring of indirect beneficiaries:** For the formal system, there is no monitoring tool aside from the information that is obtained from the district-level inspection offices of the Ministry of Basic Education. The system thus only provides the numbers for the beginning and the end of the school year. There is reason to believe that in both the WV and the CRS zones, there is considerable movement during the school year as children and teachers come and go. A recent tour of the schools noted teacher absences at several of the CRS schools, considerable student movement between schools, and cases where the students did not show up a single time since enrollment.⁴¹ Student abandons, absences, and transfers should be recorded on an ongoing basis, as should the presence of volunteer (not officially enrolled) students. The same holds for days when no classes are held due to the absence of the teacher or for other reasons. In the CRS zone, the World Food Program (WFP) canteen monitoring tool can serve as a good substitute, but there is no equivalent at those schools that do not have the canteen system. The need to do close and regular monitoring is even greater where untrained teachers are required to teach several grades in the same classroom.

The government's educational inspection offices at the district level (Dakoro, Dosso, and Tillabéri) share class enrollment and other information with the CECLE partners. Class enrollment and attendance data are taken at the beginning and at the end of the school year. The data are notoriously slow in coming since the inspection does not issue them until all of the schools have submitted the information—a process that is hampered by distance, logistics and, not least, the school director's capacity.

- **Baseline study:** The project's baseline study remains incomplete. The last version of the report contains serious analysis errors and omissions that are in need of correction.⁴² It is unclear whether there will be any further work done on the data. Responsibility for the analysis and the report seems to have been passed from partner to partner, a process that is entirely incompatible with the production of reliable data.
2. *USDOL considers direct beneficiaries those children who are withdrawn or prevented from exploitive child labor and provided with direct educational services through the project. Has the project been able to accurately collect data on its direct beneficiaries and report on USDOL common indicators (withdrawal, prevention, retention, and completion) thus far?*

The project has the field mechanisms in place for following the status of its direct beneficiaries, which is the case during the school year only (see below). There appears to be good collaboration between training staff and field animators that follow up with parents on any absences or irregularities. A field visit conducted by the M&E officer in January noted a considerable degree of abandons and absences. Also, there are cases where withdrawal is partial

⁴¹ Teacher absences include cases where the teachers left for Tabaski at the end of December and had not returned to class in January.

⁴² Large number of cases of nonrespondents (missing values) not explained, percentages based on nonresponses, incomplete analysis, etc.

as is the case with children who herd in the morning and go to literacy classes in the afternoon for three hours.⁴³

The STS was not ready to incorporate this type of information at the time of the evaluation visit. The CRS M&E Manager requested that records be verified and completed in the field, but does not have the time for a systematic follow-up and cleaning of the database. The STS system now awaits the arrival of a new M&E officer to be brought to full functionality.

3. *USDOL requires grantees to track the working status of each direct beneficiary, including during school breaks and on weekends. Please assess how the project has been doing this thus far.*

Each partner uses field agents to track the working status of the direct beneficiaries, in collaboration with instructors and community structures such as the COGES. Agents keep individual notes on each direct beneficiary and the project coordinator collects the information by means of a form every six months. The information is then sent to the CRS M&E manager, who has it entered into a database by an external data entry agent.

The existing tracking system works when parents remain in the area or leave their children behind when they migrate. In the case of the WV and the CRS zone, where parents are fairly mobile, the project's field agents and animators do not have the resources to follow children who leave the area with their parents—not during the school year nor during vacations. The report of the monitoring trip of January 2007 indicates numerous cases of abandons due to the movement of parents or the parents' needs for the children at home in the WV and CRS zones. The STS database does not yet have those instances registered (and it was not possible for the evaluator to follow up on such cases). The tracking of direct beneficiaries should be considerably easier in the Plan Niger zone where the population is relatively stable.

4. *Is there a common understanding of the definition of common indicators and data collection requirements by CRS, Plan Niger, and World Vision?*

There is an understanding on the common indicators and on the data collection requirements carried out in the field by the field agents. The information on direct beneficiaries is sent to an external data entry agent. There is no clear system for verifying the data once it is entered or for identifying gaps. The M&E function with regard to database management is nonexistent, aside from what appears to be voluntary work by the IT person at CRS. A new candidate for the M&E position has been identified. Unless the new person has practical experience with database management, he or she will need intensive support until the system is up and running.

⁴³ This is clearly a compromise between the educational program and parents who are reluctant to free up their children completely. The active interest expressed by the participants at the Bermo debriefing strongly suggested that attitudes are changing and that such partial commitments will give way to fuller commitments.

5.3.2 Additional Observations

There is a lack of clarity with regard to the current M&E officer's status. Formerly with WV full time, he has been allowed no more than 25 percent of total time for the CECLE M&E position. His office remains at WV which is not conducive to the intensive ongoing communication he should have with the CRS M&E person who is the current guardian of the STS. Part of the problem seems to be linked to the internal restructuring at WV. The current M&E situation is completely fragmented. The baseline study also fell victim to internal fragmentation (WV responsible for data collection, CRS responsible for analysis, Plan responsible for commentaries). The result is a study that is incomplete and incoherent and needs major revisions. The evaluator's fear is that the new M&E officer will be overwhelmed with unrealistic expectations. The current description of tasks includes "overseeing the baseline study, analyzing the statistics, monitoring the quality and validity of the various data collected, and carrying out evaluations of the various project components, including the midterm and final evaluations; putting into place a system of information management and creating data collection tools to complement those tools already developed by CRS, Plan, and WV; and conducting at least one field visit per quarter." Without providing reasonable resources that include assistance with field visits and with the establishment and management of the monitoring system, the task requirements constitute a set up for failure.

5.3.3 Conclusions

At this point, the monitoring system for direct beneficiaries is not fully operational, the monitoring system for formal schools is inadequate, and the baseline study remains to be corrected and completed. It should be emphasized that the current level of inadequacy is not due to lack of efforts in the field, but rather to a lack of M&E leadership at the project level. Good M&E requires internal stability and commitment. The former division of labor assigned M&E responsibilities to World Vision and it is the evaluator's impression that World Vision was not able to provide the required stability for, and commitment to, this responsibility.

It is one of the project's aims to strengthen national capacity for the tracking of children who are removed from child labor and those at risk of entering the labor force in the hope that good monitoring data will provide a basis for appropriate education policies at national and local levels. The need to demonstrate the project's own capacity for establishing and managing an effective monitoring system is therefore more than urgent at midpoint of its duration.

5.3.4 Recommendations

A thorough analysis needs to be made of the current situation, given that the STS does not contain this information in a reliable form. The current or new M&E officer should undertake another tour of the areas with the specific purpose of analyzing withdrawals, prevention, absences, abandons, and transfers.

Because of the time lost during the school year, vacations could be used for follow-up work since trainers and contractual hires are supposed to work 11 months out of the year. For example, in the village of Koulouwa, 15 out of 18 children are repeating the first year of the literacy

course and only one child was able to continue on to the second year. Vacation courses, supplemented with other activities (for example, practical activities such as producing cheese), would help prevent children from returning to their former work life. However, to do this, project resources would have to be increased. Whether this is feasible is another question.

There is an urgent need for an M&E officer with strong data analysis and database management skills to be engaged at 100 percent. The project's current needs are the most immediate in the area of system monitoring and the M&E person should have excellent skills in this particular area. It is not sufficient to get someone with broadly general evaluation skills unless that person collaborates closely on an ongoing basis with someone who has a thorough understanding of the conceptual and technical aspects of project monitoring. Adamou Dambadji, the CRS M&E Manager, should be freed up to provide the new M&E person with a thorough review of the current system, what variables it contains, and what needs to be updated or revised.⁴⁴

The indicators measuring the quality of educational experience should be reviewed. One of the best indicators of quality is teacher capacity. A former grocery clerk or casual laborer who gets 10 days of training cannot deliver good literacy instruction.⁴⁵ It is no wonder that the rate of failure and/or abandon is high when that is the case. A contractual hire with no certification and an occasional course in lesson planning cannot manage a multigrade classroom environment and provide even basic quality instruction, much less generate the curriculum innovations that the project promotes. Because of constant movement during the school year (transfers, abandons, teacher and student absences) more needs to be known on a month-to-month basis. Indicators of the quality of education should include number of half days of class, teacher absences, and teacher turnover.

5.4 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION ISSUES

5.4.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

1. *Has the relationship between CRS, World Vision, and Plan Niger been a productive partnership? Are there positive aspects and results due to this relationship? What have been the major issues and challenges involved in managing this relationship?*

The relationship between the three partners has benefited from the different approaches they bring to the problem of child labor. However some major issues have placed a burden on this relationship:

- The loss of the prior M&E person at WV (the predecessor of the current one).

⁴⁴ Additional note: Adamou Dambadji demonstrated an excellent grasp of the issues at the debriefing and a thorough understanding of the data base. He should take a lead role in bringing the incoming M&E person up to speed.

⁴⁵ These are actual cases encountered by the evaluator in the CRS zone, where it is extremely difficult to attract able teachers without special incentives.

- The loss of the current CECLE field coordinator for WV.⁴⁶
 - An internal restructuring process within WV-Niger that seems to have created disruptions throughout the system. According to various accounts, the CECLE field coordinator for WV was under-resourced and overworked, finding it difficult to cover his responsibilities in Niamey on the one hand and in the field on the other. A more reasonable work load is recommended for his replacement.
2. *What is the impact of the hiring of key personnel from among the three organizations implementing the project? Do key personnel share the same office? Is there a clear line of authority? What are their reporting and coordination protocols? Are these followed?*

The impact of hiring key personnel from each of the three partners was generally positive where CRS and Plan Niger were concerned. It was problematic where WV was concerned. The impression of the evaluator is that the demands of WV upon certain of its staff were such that they prevented a fully productive collaboration. The M&E person felt isolated from CECLE, in part because he continued to be engaged at 75 percent by his responsibilities at WV. The remaining 25 percent were only sufficient to attend meetings and to conduct a one-week field tour in January 2007.

Key personnel do not share a common office and this complicates their collaboration. The project coordinator keeps her colleagues informed at all times, using a dedicated phone networking system. Despite these efforts, too much time is lost to commuting between offices. The coordinator's office is small and cramped and not particularly conducive to the regular group meetings that the collaboration requires.

The lines of authority appear to be clear and correspond to a democratic structure where no decisions are made without informing the others. One understandable complaint was about the amount of e-mails this required. However, communication channels appeared to be open and functioning well in line with the established communication protocol, at least between CRS and Plan Niger. The group is scheduled to meet every week at the CRS office in Niamey.

3. *Is the dispersed nature of project sites problematic for coordination or data collection and monitoring purposes?*

As this evaluator's own experience attests, project sites that are remote, isolated, and hard-to-reach require considerably more resources than their more accessible counterparts. There seems to be a consistent underestimation of this fact at the level of project design and administration. Where the collection of data is concerned, several factors combine to make the task particularly challenging: informants (teachers, trainers) are not always in place when needed; inadequate quality of information requires further probing; the means of communication are often absent altogether; heat, exhaustion, and time pressure can lower the needed attentiveness to detail.

⁴⁶ Tragically, Mr. Illia Souley died unexpectedly in April 2007.

The monitoring system requires a considerable amount of work, including verifications, follow-up, and training in the field. The project's M&E function will need to be field focused until the system delivers good reliable data, and even after that, routine follow-up checks will be needed. Competing responsibilities in Niamey will make this a very difficult, if not impossible, task for one single person.

4. *As USDOL is also funding an ILO-IPEC project in Niger, is there successful coordination between the USDOL-funded projects? What have been the major challenges and opportunities of coordinating with ILO-IPEC?*

The ILO-IPEC project, funded by USDOL in 2005 for US\$3 million over a period of three years in Niger and Burkina Faso, intervenes in the Komabangou area where it aims to provide basic education services to 620 children, vocational training to 100 girls, and extracurricular activities for about 1,108 children.⁴⁷ At the end of February 2007, it reported 526 children enrolled in primary school and thus prevented from performing hazardous work. The overlap in target population looks to be considerable, but no one seems to know the extent to which that is the case. It is hoped that the national survey that (should be) currently under way will provide a better basis for coordination.

The ILO-IPEC project also proposes providing income-generating activity (IGA) support to families in the Komabangou area. If this is so, it could provide important complementary support to the CECLE project. However, no mention was made of such a possibility during the debriefing when IGAs were discussed, although the representatives from the ILO-IPEC were present.

The CECLE partners and the ILO-IPEC collaborate closely in the development of awareness-raising and training materials and in the training of local NGOs and community leaders.

5. *How successful is the project in collaborating and coordinating with the host country government and local NGOs working to combat the worst forms of child labor in the regions where the project is being implemented? What coordination challenges did the project face?*

The project has a fairly broad array of partners in Niger that it collaborates with.

1. Government of Niger:

Collaboration with the Government of Niger and with national and local NGOs appears to be strong and productive. The challenges faced are primarily in the area of teacher allocation and in the sharing of data. Teacher allocation is problematic for the reasons discussed in Section 5.1 (in response to Question 1 in Section 5.1). The provision of enrollment data is not without problems either, because of the difficulties of collecting the data in good time that are encountered by the District Inspection Offices, which often

⁴⁷ Project title: Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor in Artisanal Gold Mining Sites in West Africa (ILO 2007).

lacks the most basic transportation resources such as fuel. At the time of the evaluation, the enrollment data for the current school year was still incomplete at the Dakoro District Offices. Such problems are understandable, given the difficulty of the terrain and a constant shortage of resources.

Other examples of collaboration at the government level are as follows:

- The Ministries of Labor and Social Protection are planning to organize a child labor network of different actors involved in child labor issues together with UNICEF and have asked the CECLE partners to participate.
- The national steering committee.⁴⁸
- Plan has been invited to represent the CECLE group on a national committee that will follow up on the Multilateral Cooperative Agreement for Combating Child Trafficking.

2. Major local and national NGO partners:

- CADEV has assumed the role of project implementation agency for CRS in the Maradi Region.
- Team of Young Trainers for Action and Development (Equipe de Jeunes Formateurs pour l'action et le Développement, EJFAD): This NGO provides animation and awareness-raising services for all EI villages in the Plan area.
- NIGETEC: World Vision in Komabangou has signed a nine-month agreement with this NGO to provide carpentry training for its training center.
- CASEC: World Vision in Komabangou has signed a nine-month agreement with this NGO to provide training in sewing, embroidery, cloth dying, batique, and knitting for its training center.
- The CECLE partners are discussing a partnership with RELTEN, a network of 12 national NGOs involved in the fight against child labor and child trafficking, around advocacy activities.

3. International agency partners:

- **ILO-IPEC:** Provides training materials and services.
- **WFP:** Provides dry foods for the school canteens of the 12 CECLE schools in the CRS area.

⁴⁸ A committee attended by the representatives of six ministries, representatives of the three CECLE partners, and by other key education stakeholders in the fight against child labor.

5.4.2 Conclusions

Certain internal developments such as staff turnover and organizational restructuring within WV have placed an unanticipated burden on the relationship between the three CECLE partners:

- The loss of the prior M&E person at WV (the predecessor of the current one) has disrupted the completion of the baseline study and the establishment of an adequate and functional monitoring system.
- The recent loss of the CECLE-WV field coordinator for WV has left a vacuum in a position that was already overloaded.
- An internal restructuring process within WV-Niger continues to drain resources from its contributions to the CECLE partnership.

More clarity is needed to determine the overlap between CECLE-WV and the USDOL-funded ILO-IPEC project in Komabangou.

The project's coordination capacity with other external partners, on the other hand, seems to be strong, active, and productive across all of its collaborations.

5.4.3 Recommendations

The recruitment of a new M&E officer is currently in process. Care should be taken to be realistic about the tasks assigned to this position. The monitoring system should have top priority and resources allocated should ensure the quick and effective establishment of a complete system that takes into account the instabilities within the formal and nonformal education programs. To deal with the considerable dispersion of intervention zones, the M&E officer will need to have an assistant who can ensure the proper functioning of the monitoring system in the field, at least until the procedures have become fully routine and reliable.

The ILO-IPEC project in Komabangou could provide complementary resources to the CECLE project. This possibility should be explored and the conclusions well-documented. The division of responsibilities between the two projects should be made clear to project staff and the local population.

5.5 MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET ISSUES

Questions on management and budget issues are best answered by project management. During the evaluator's visit, the time available for probing into these questions in a detailed manner was severely constrained. The evaluator spent about two to three hours with the coordinators trying to address the extensive list of 32 questions requested from USDOL. In short, the finer details of management and budget issues were not as fully explored as a longer period with coordinators and in the capital might have allowed.

5.5.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

1. *What are the management strengths of this project? Which management practices could be improved?*

Management procedures for the CECLE project are guided by the Management Procedures and Guidelines document (the project “bible,” according to one). Some respondents found the required procedures to be more exacting than those of other funding agencies, but felt that the guidelines were clear and helpful. A management and coordination strength of the project was its ability to deliver, jointly with all partners, a very detailed progress report every 6 months.

One requirement that was found to be problematic by one coordinator was the timesheet requirement. It was felt that a timesheet developed for office hours and based on an eight-hour day schedule took up valuable time to complete without being able to reveal the actual situation.⁴⁹

2. *How effective has the working relationship been between the CRS field office and their U.S. headquarters?*

CRS has a desk officer at their US Headquarters that provides liaison services between the field and USDOL. By all accounts, the relationship is a productive and helpful one that provides clarifications and facilitates communication. Its effectiveness is strengthened by the fact that the current officer is thoroughly familiar with the USDOL-CRS cooperative agreement, having followed it from the beginning. This stability has been beneficial, especially in view of the changes in key personnel at the project level.

3. *How effectively has project management used management tools, such as the project work plan and the PMP, to enhance strategic planning and target setting?*

According to project staff at the management level, the management tools provided by USDOL were considered helpful for planning and target-setting purposes. The work plan provides information on which partner is planning what types of activities and when, in order to address the various project outputs. It is updated on an annual basis. The PMP clearly encourages target-setting, although the evaluator found it impossible to verify the cumulative quantities presented by the PMP.⁵⁰ The PMP needs to be backed by a transparent monitoring matrix that provides the breakdown of the numbers and percentages by partner, educational program, gender, etc., which provides the sources of the information, and which permits an outsider, such as the evaluator, to verify both the cumulative information as well as selected sources of the information. The PMP should flow directly from the monitoring system.

⁴⁹ For example, at the time of the evaluator’s visit, the CECLE-CRS Coordinator was working 14–18 hour days, and this was not considered unusual.

⁵⁰ The suggestion that the evaluator recruit a surveyor team to collect a sampling of quantitative data was not feasible given the time and budget constraints of this evaluation. More importantly, it should not be necessary.

5.5.2 Conclusions

The management guidelines provided by USDOL were found to be comprehensive and useful, the project “bible,” as one respondent referred to it. Tools that facilitate planning and target-setting such as the annual work plan and the PMP were also considered helpful, if more demanding than tools used for other projects. Tools that address the donor’s own institutional requirements, such as the timesheet, were considered less useful. The biggest shortcoming of these management tools is that they fail to be linked to and backed by a transparent monitoring system.

5.5.3 Recommendations

The PMP should be explicitly informed by some form of monitoring matrix or system. The donor should require that the quantitative content of the PMP be verifiable, assisting project management in determining what type of breakdown is required to facilitate verification by an outsider. The donor should consider attaching one or two persons to the audit team that will conduct operational audits, whereby the PMP quantities can be verified.

Timesheets should be adapted to reveal the actual situation. The hours worked by a field coordinator goes well over the boundaries of the workday as we know it, including night time and weekends. Unless the timesheet is able to accurately communicate this situation, the time taken for filling it out becomes a meaningless exercise that takes up valuable time from more informative activities.

5.6 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

5.6.1 Responses to Specific Questions Raised by USDOL

1. *What steps have been taken so far to promote sustainability and continuation of education strategies for combating child labor beyond the life of the project? What lessons could be learned to date in terms of the project’s accomplishments and weaknesses?*

Steps Taken by the Project

Capacity building: The project’s main strategy to promote sustainability is to build the capacity to advocate against child labor and promote education at the various levels: community structures (COGES, APE, and other committees), local NGO partners, teachers and literacy agents, and government partners at district and national levels.

Capacity-building initiatives are well under way in all three areas, as well as in the capital where CECLE partners actively participate in various committees and networks that focus on child labor.

When village committee members were asked how they perceived the continuation of the educational initiatives after the departure of the project, most of them assured us that sustainability would not be a problem. In the CRS area, more work will be needed to

communicate the idea that child labor is a problem. Child labor is a central element of household-based pastoral survival strategies.⁵¹ Care should be taken not to isolate the interests of the child from those of the household. CRS appears to be sensitive to these issues, as indicated by the provisions made in some cases to have children who herd in the morning attend literacy classes in the afternoon.

The collaboration between field agents and community structures such as the COGES appears to be good, which is not always the case between the COGES and the teachers.

At the community level, the appropriation of the project and the commitment to its continuation were clear, as was the involvement of actors at different levels who shared the same interests and visions.

School herds: School herds can contribute to sustainability in that they can provide income for the school and milk to students (this is especially important in the nomad zone). They also render the schools more appealing to children and parents because of its greater relevance to the children's own economic and cultural environment.

Threats to Sustainability and Steps To Be Considered

School canteens: In the CRS area, the saying goes: “no canteen, no school.” Dependence on the WFP should be phased out in the CRS area. As the herds mature, they can provide milk products, and some can be sold for grain, etc. The wealthier families that leave the children behind should be asked to contribute more.

Quality of formal school instruction because of low teacher capacity: A recent tour of the various schools indicated problems with teacher absence on the one hand and class repetition on the other.

In one case, the entire class had to be repeated (20 children). Several teachers were found to be absent during this tour, which took place midyear. Teacher absences are attributable to lack of commitment on the part of contractual teachers who are poorly paid and eager to pursue more promising opportunities, to lack of means of communication and transportation, and to the difficulty of obtaining teacher salaries. Whether due to poor commitment or to the difficulty of the environment, teacher absence translates quickly into poor student performance. Combined, these realities are discouraging for parents who are already on the fence about the benefits of education. After school, ball games are not going to convince them to send children to school instead of keeping them home for work.

Teacher quality and commitment must be improved. Contractual teachers should get quality training during school vacations and should be supervised by experienced teaching professionals (of whom so many have been retired). Their working conditions should also be improved and the

⁵¹ This includes keeping several species of animals to spread the risk of loss due to drought or disease. Since each species has different husbandry needs, additional labor is needed to tend to the various types of animals. Pastoral tradition assigns much of this labor to children (Krätli, 2000).

payment of their salaries should be structured to minimize the number of days needed each month to get paid. The COGES has, in some cases, already taken on the task of monitoring teacher performance and reporting it to the inspection. It could be provided with simple recording tools (adapted for use by nonliterate persons) that can take note of teacher absences, and these could then be discussed and noted during the project field agent's visits.

Quality of nonformal instruction due to low capacity of literacy educators: The quality of literacy instruction was recently tested in the CRS zone. Performance at the end of the learning campaign was found to be poor for 72 percent of the learners who had remained in the program. Reasons for the poor rating were largely attributed to the instructor's performance and included the following:

- The poor level of and/or the lack of commitment and initiative of some educators
- The length of the educators' initial training deemed too short given their rather poor (educational) level
- Educators' absences
- Inability of educators to mobilize and maintain learners
- The lack of efficient educational control from facilitators who themselves did not receive sound and sustained training in the field (PIEN Literacy Center Assessment, July 2006)

Parent movement: Many children were transferred midyear from one school to another because their parents moved. Across 20 formal schools, 41 abandons were counted; and across four community schools, 76 abandons were counted. Abandons are also frequent in the training centers.⁵² In the CRS area, they are especially frequent where mothers migrate. In the latter case, children abandon the educational program to work at home (according to their own testimony).⁵³

Parents move for economic reasons. Given this reality, dormitories need to be attached to the schools so that parents can leave their children. The COGES should be encouraged to mobilize the community for the construction of adobe shelters for children who are left behind by their parents. The thatched roof can be covered with heavy plastic sheeting until a more durable construction is possible. Each school/dormitory should have a medical emergency box and at least one teacher trained in the provision of first aid care.

Need for income-generating activities: Project staff realized early on the primarily economic nature of child labor: children in Niger are exploited because of the parents' need to supplement household income. Since project funds could not be used to provide financial or material support for income-generating initiatives, each partner attempted to find independent alternatives. CRS provided seed funds to at least 35 women's groups to start income-generating activities;

⁵² In one carpentry training shop (Komabangou), only 15 out of 30 were found the day of the reported visit.

⁵³ The evaluator cannot check this information against the monitoring data. The Excel sheet received has no code entries for abandons; the STS is not yet ready.

Plan Niger expanded its existing micro-finance program into some of the CECLE project areas in Dosso and Tillabéri regions; World Vision launched credit activities for 240 women in the Tillabéri region. It is widely recognized that project sustainability is unlikely without such support, a point that was made repeatedly during the midterm evaluation debriefing in Niamey. In the CRS zone where female migration can reach more than 80 percent or more during certain seasons, the risk of children reverting back to labor is evident as it is in the Komabangou zone, where, in one case, 8 of 19 girls recently abandoned a single class for reasons of helping with household work.

A strong and comprehensive IGA component will be essential if the project is to be sustainable in the long term. The project continues to seek complementary funding for micro-credit interventions. The project is also researching community-based savings and lending systems (SILC) that group parents together to invest savings and provide access to small loans.⁵⁴ What is clear is that the project is not sustainable without complementary funding, which is not assured at this time.

Post-training support for beneficiaries of vocational training programs: Without support for their transition into a viable work life or career, graduates of the training centers are likely to revert back to the work they were doing before. In the nomad zones, there are no viable options for such training graduates, aside from migration.

Plan Niger provides support for some income-generating activities and is investigating a micro-finance program for adolescents that can be linked to the startup needs of children who have received vocational training. In the absence of USDOL funding for financial support, the partners should pursue complementary follow-up options such as that of Plan. The project itself could provide business training for the graduates.

School infrastructure: In the CRS area, inadequate infrastructure puts children at risk during the cold season. Reports of illness will discourage parents from leaving their children and lack of school furniture puts these children at a disadvantage where writing is concerned. The school year ends the moment the first rain falls because the classrooms do not provide protection against the elements. It cannot begin until classrooms that have disintegrated during the rainy season are re-erected, a process that can take time since the millet stalks have to be imported from outside the nomad zone.

The school year needs to be lengthened: The length of the school year in the nomad zone is reduced due to parent movement, teacher absence and inadequate infrastructure. Parents need to be motivated to respect the school year calendar. When teachers themselves fail to do so, and when the infrastructure cannot ensure adequate shelter for the child, parent motivation is likely to remain weak, as well. Length of school year (hours/days per school year) is an important indicator of quality of education. Where teachers and parents are motivated and concerned, the length of the school year is likely to increase.

⁵⁴ This methodology has been successfully used in Niger by CARE and is internationally known as Mata Massu Dubara (MMD).

Assistance to help local leaders apply for funds: To improve future supports such as local radio stations, mobile health checks for children, outlets for training center products.

Lessons learned: See Section VI.

2. *Was the project's initial strategy for sustainability adequate and appropriate?*

The project proposal focuses on awareness-raising and institutional-strengthening at national, regional, and community levels. Sustainability in the fight against child labor through education in Niger requires four basic elements: awareness-raising and institutional support, teacher capacity, durable school infrastructure that provides protection, and support to find economic alternatives for households that forego the labor contributions of their children. The project provides funds for two elements out of four. Its strategy is appropriate for the first element and it addresses itself only partially to the second element. It is inadequate to ensure the sustainability of progress made in relation to its goals without independent contributions from the three CECLE partners.

3. *Are physical conditions of schools and nonformal education centers problematic to the sustainability of the project? Do teachers or students cite school conditions as a reason for absenteeism?*

In the CRS zone, teachers cite cases of illness (whooping cough at the time of the midterm evaluation) among children due to the physical condition of the classrooms. The absence of dormitories exposes children whose parents move to precarious conditions and abandons when parents move are due in part to the absence of dormitories. Among parents who are already ambivalent about the benefits of education, the absence of adequate shelter is likely to further reduce their motivation.

CRS submitted a proposal to the Department of Defense at the U.S. Embassy in Niamey in an effort to leverage funds for the construction of six classrooms for nomad schools in the Maradi region. This funding was to complement CECLE project activities in the area, but at the time of the midterm evaluation, no source of funding had yet been identified.

For the Tillaberi area, WV submitted a proposal to the UK Embassy in Abidjan for the construction and equipment of three classrooms in Komabangou, where only two formal school classrooms were available. There was no indication that any funding had been received.

Plan Niger uses its internal resources to construct classrooms, as well as housing for teachers.

4. *Does the occurrence of strikes by teachers threaten the project's sustainability? Are any steps being taken to address this issue?*

The strike of 2004 was in response to the massive retirement of professional teachers. In 2006, it was the union of the contractual hires who staged a strike because they had not been paid. Teachers in the CRS area continued to work simply because they did not know about the strike

due to their isolation from events in the capital. In the WV area, local “companion educators” were used while the teachers were on strike.⁵⁵ Because of low salaries and no benefits, observers predict that strikes will become a regular occurrence among contractual hires. If the strikes result in better working conditions for contractual hires, they may improve sustainability through reduced teacher absence or abandon.

5.6.2 Conclusions

The project provides funds for awareness-raising and institutional-strengthening of capacity at national, regional, and community levels, which includes teacher training. It underestimates the need for teacher capacity-building for both formal and nonformal education. Nor does it fund the construction of durable infrastructure or provide seed funds for economic alternatives for households that forego the labor contributions of their children. At the present time, USDOL funding cannot ensure the sustainability of progress made in relation to its goals without independent contributions and initiatives from the three CECLE partners.

5.6.3 Recommendations

Dependence on the WFP should be phased out in the CRS area. As the herds mature, they can provide milk products, and some can be sold for grain, etc. The wealthier families that leave the children behind should be asked to contribute more since the burden of contributions most likely falls on families that have settled around the schools.

Teacher quality and commitment must be improved. Contractual teachers should get quality training during school vacations and should be supervised by experienced teaching professionals recruited from the pool of retired teachers. Their working conditions should be improved and the payment of their salaries should be structured to minimize the number of days needed each month to get paid. The best defense against strikes in the long term is to improve working conditions. Strategies for mitigating the problem of teacher strikes where their effects are felt (WV and Plan Niger areas) have been proposed by the partners and include the development and use of companion teachers. Using contractual teachers during school vacations when they are available (if it is true that they only get one month per year) to make up for instruction time lost could be another line of defense against the damaging effects of strikes during the school year.

Literacy educators should receive support in the form of on-the-job training, close monitoring, and supervision by trained teachers drawn from the pool of retired teachers. Extra incentives will be needed for those who are willing to work in the nomad area. Since the interest in literacy and education is increasing in this area, community contributions in the form of livestock might be considered as a strategy for improving teacher/educator quality.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ “Companion educators” are former students who have reached an acceptable level and who are trained to provide tutoring support to current students.

⁵⁶ The project could make a proposal to the communal leadership in Bermo (mayor, tribal chiefs, etc.). Concern with teacher quality has already been expressed by various COGES leaders in this area.

Given the reality that parents move for economic reasons in the CRS and WV zones, dormitories need to be attached to the schools so that parents can leave their children. The COGES should be encouraged to mobilize the community for the construction of adobe shelters for children who are left behind by their parents. The thatched roof can be covered with heavy plastic sheeting until a more durable construction is possible. Each school/dormitory should have a medical emergency box and at least one teacher trained in the provision of first aid care.

A concerted effort should be made to lengthen the school year in the nomad zone through reduced teacher absence and improved infrastructure.

The startup needs of children who have received vocational training should be addressed through market analysis and micro-finance initiatives. In the absence of USDOL funding for financial support, the partners should pursue complementary follow-up options such as that of Plan. The project itself could provide business training for the graduates.

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VI LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

6.1 STRENGTHS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The CECLE project is an ambitious four-year project on a relatively low budget (relative to expected reach and achievements). A major strength of the project is the extent to which it works with limited resources.

The CECLE partners' close collaboration with government structures has helped to create a multisector mechanism that encourages ongoing dialogue with the various ministries (representing the interests of labor, basic education, literacy, community development, social protection, and justice) that helps to preempt inconsistencies between the policies of the different actors within the country's social service structure. The project's strategy is very promising in this regard.

The project has integrated well with the government's establishment of community management structures (COGES) that partner with its district-level educational services. CECLE provides a united front with the government in defining the COGES role and provides training that strengthens their role and capacities in favor of the fight against child labor through education. The project has seized the moment and has benefited from the government's promotion and legitimization of these structures within the national educational plan.

The project's selection of the nomad zone despite the enormous challenges that this area presents demonstrates leadership in dealing with what has been one of the toughest problems in Niger's strategy to bring literacy and basic education to its populations. The project's consolidated attempt to bring transhumant and nomad parents into the fold of modern education constitutes what might be a historical turning point for the Peulh population in the Dakoro area. With more time and patience, the fight against child labor will be fully appropriated by this population.

The project has involved children in its advocacy against child labor through creative activities that help to render the concepts more concretely and meaningfully in the local context and give the issues greater visibility. These children will be parents in the not-so-distant future. The strategy therefore promises to strengthen the intergenerational sustainability of the message and its implications.

6.2 OTHER EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

The project's handling of communication between the three partners is systematic and transparent in spite of unanticipated challenges and changes.

The project has learned to use traditional events in the nomad zone as opportunities for reaching a broad audience that is otherwise very hard to reach.

The project established community-level vigilance committees to monitor children's activities and maintain community awareness of the exploitive and/or the worst forms of child labor that apply specifically to the local context.

CECLE uses PRA techniques to create community action plans, which, in turn, provide the basis for community action against child labor and in favor of basic and nonformal educational opportunities.

Raising school herds is an excellent way to support sustainability, especially in the nomad area. Herds supply milk, which is an essential element in the children's diet; they offer opportunities for the generation of income through the sale of offspring, and they can expand the school's curriculum to include APPs (practical and productive activities) that are relevant to the children's cultural and economic environment.

Each of the 12 CRS schools has a school herd, and many of the WV schools have them. Plan intends to introduce this activity in its schools, as well. There remains some confusion about how to manage them in certain communities.

Plan has established student governments in its elementary schools to provide children with practical experience in applying the rules of good governance to their school and to learn about civic rights. CRS and WV are planning to introduce the same practice in their schools.

6.3 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the project's ambitious mandate and limited budget, the evaluator realizes that many of the weaknesses or areas for improvement identified throughout this report are related to resource constraints rather than lack of awareness. Most of the following recommendations have resource implications. They therefore need to be considered by the donor agency that controls budget allocations as much as by project management, taking into account each partner's ability (or inability) to contribute resources from alternative and/or internal sources.

1. Teacher quality:

Teacher quality is a widespread concern and one that was specifically expressed by members of the COGES in the nomad zone.

The post midterm phase should place more emphasis on the training of contractual teachers through the strengthening of the CAPED process in the project areas. The CAPED training approach and content should be reviewed and strengthened to provide intensive pedagogical training, including multigrade teaching techniques.⁵⁷ UNICEF has considerable experience in this area and should be consulted. The possibility of using the project zones as a model area for demonstrating the feasibility of improving teacher quality in the short term might be considered. Selected retired teachers should become involved as leaders of the CAPED training sessions. CAPED sessions can be held during school vacations (Christmas, Easter, and part of the long June–October vacations), allowing

⁵⁷ Organizations such as UNICEF have developed materials and guidelines for such techniques and applied them in nomad zones in Ethiopia (UNICEF 2001).

teachers to take a break from tough and isolated living conditions, exchange ideas, and build motivation.⁵⁸

To the extent possible, school directors should be drawn from the ranks of professional teachers who can provide guidance and mentoring to contractual hires under their supervision. Incentives should be provided for teachers, such as occasional study trips, recognition for good services, access to one or two animals for personal benefit, and decent housing. The project might consider joining forces with the GON at regional and district levels and local communities in providing certain manageable incentives.

2. Length of school year:

The second part of September should be used for preparations for the coming school year, making sure, together with the COGES and/or APE, that structures, equipment, and supplies are ready.

In the CRS zone, teachers and COGES should collectively find ways of reducing the number of days lost each month to obtain salaries. No more than 7 to 10 days school leave should be allowed for the tribal festivals in October (e.g., Warso). According to several informants, it is quite possible to begin the school year in mid-October instead of November as recommended by some. The possibility should at least be explored.

The COGES capacity to monitor teacher absences and performance and record them on a systematic basis should be strengthened.⁵⁹

3. School infrastructures:

The condition of some classrooms is deplorable and fails to provide adequate protection for children, teachers, and equipment. If the project is determined to prevent children from slipping back into their former situation, it will need to provide dormitories in areas where families are mobile, such as in the CRS zone and in Komabangou.

Sturdy hangars might be considered, such as those used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugee camps, or covered metal frames such as those used for literacy classes. Such structures would provide more protection than the current straw/thatch huts.

With regard to dormitories, it is important that communities contribute to them and manage them, keeping in mind the deeply ingrained cultural concerns about the

⁵⁸ Contractual teaching staff has one month of vacation per year only.

⁵⁹ Simple recording sheets that do not require literacy should be developed for this purpose.

protection of girls. The issue should be thoroughly discussed with community and parents.⁶⁰

Each school should be provided with an emergency medical kit and one teacher per school should receive first aid training.⁶¹ The supplies of the kit could be replenished through proceeds from the school herd. Initiatives such as these will also reassure and motivate parents. Each school should have access to latrines.

4. M&E capacity at project level:

The recruitment of the new M&E officer should emphasize strong data analysis and database management skills. A thorough analysis needs to be made of the STS, together with the CRS-IT person, to determine what is required to render the system complete, reliable, and functional.

The new M&E officer should undertake a tour of the three project areas with the specific purpose of analyzing absences, abandons, and transfers and their causes for all CECLE classes (formal and nonformal), as well as withdrawals and prevention in the case of the indirect beneficiaries. School directors and literacy teachers should be trained to maintain this information at the class level so that it can be collected by field agents on a monthly basis. The COGES should keep track of teacher/trainer absences during the school year, using a recordkeeping format that is manageable by nonliterate persons.

The baseline data need to be corrected and reanalyzed. For example, the large amount of missing responses needs to be examined for systematic bias and removed from the final calculation of percentages.

5. Monitoring of direct beneficiaries:

Based on her discussions with field agents, the evaluator feels that with existing resources, it is not realistic to track children who move out of the project area with parents or relatives. Instead, the monitoring system should register the extent to which this happens and the reasons. This information can become the basis for a strategy for stabilizing families and their children in the least stable areas (WV and CRS zones). In the case of WV, such a strategy would be consistent with its own child-focused ADP approach and could be integrated into its internal programmatic commitments. In the case of CRS, it should be realized that the nomad area, where the problem of child mobility (geographical as well as in and out of educational programs) is the greatest, the donor should take into account the additional resources required to achieve lasting improvements in children's access to basic education in one of the most challenging areas of Niger.

⁶⁰ While the COGES and others frequently expressed a demand for dormitories, there may also be apprehension among some that go back to the 1980s when Wodaabe pastoralist children were forced to go to government-run boarding schools.

⁶¹ CRS provides health supplies for some communities and schools, and Plan provides medical kits and training to its schools in Tillabery.

6. Sustainability:

A strong and comprehensive IGA component, including seed funds, research, and training, will be essential if the project is to be sustainable and meaningful in the long term. Without this support, the workload within households will continue to be shifted from the child who attends the educational program to other members of the household, especially women and siblings. The project should continue to seek complementary funding for micro-credit support to communities and IGA seed funds to women's groups. In the Komabangou area, WV should investigate a closer collaboration with the ILO-IPEC project that has funds for IGA initiatives.

Without support for their transition into a viable work life or career, graduates of the training centers are likely to revert back to the work they were doing before. Market and outlet options should be investigated where the project provides vocational training. In the absence of USDOL funding for financial support, the partners should pursue complementary follow-up options. The project itself could provide business training for the graduates of vocational training centers.

7. Proposed plan of action:

In view of limited resources, including time, and the need to prioritize proposed actions during the remaining period of the project's current phase, the following plan of action is proposed:

Teacher quality:

- Consider initiating a teacher capacity-building pilot project in the nomad zone where the challenges are the greatest—to be led by the project's education specialist.
- Discuss with UNESCO Teacher Education Network representatives: (a) UNESCO's experience with multigrade program and related materials for nomad education,⁶² and (b) other teacher education proposals for Niger.
- Consider partnering with UNICEF on a pilot initiative in the CRS zone, focusing on nomad education.
- Develop indicators of teacher quality in the CRS zone, including a simple monitoring tool for the COGES.

⁶² The UNESCO-IICBA Multigrade Programme is aimed at "providing a replicable model of high quality, relevant, and cost-effective one-teacher schools suitable for remote rural areas in Africa," and has been tested at length in Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2006)..

Infrastructure:

- Explore options in constructing low-cost reinforced temporary structures to replace straw classrooms (as discussed in Section 6.3).
- Discuss the pros and cons of dormitories and their management with the COGES, APE, and other community members. Consider erecting reinforced temporary structures on a trial basis in selected communities.

Monitoring system:

- Conduct a thorough review of the current STS to exclude invalid entries, duplicates, etc., and add data such as the number of half days spent in class each month by the beneficiary, number of siblings in school or at work, etc.
- Provide detailed explanations for absences and recode the current reasons listed.
- Ensure that the new M&E Officer is trained on the STS system and is able to manage content and structure in order to supervise and verify data entry, or else is able to delegate this work in an efficient and effective manner.
- Establish a systematic monitoring procedure (including data collection and entry) for indirect beneficiaries on a monthly basis. Variables should include the following:
 - Number of half days of classes held
 - Reasons for class cancellations
 - Number of half days of teacher attendance
 - Reasons for teacher absence
 - Class attendance of enrolled students - in half days
 - Reasons for absence
 - Number of non-enrolled students per month
 - Transfers in—from where?
 - Transfers out—destination?
- Create data entry system using a software (preferably in Access, but Excel can be used also) that facilitates disaggregation, analysis, and verification.

- Collect start and end of school year data directly from each school director.⁶³

Sustainability:

- Consider hiring a local consultant to investigate employment and market options for graduates of vocational programs
- Design a module for business training and marketing
- Continue to pursue complementary support options such as local micro-finance strategies.

⁶³ This is because delays at the Inspection can take up to six months. The school-by-school data help to identify school-specific problems. The individual school visits at year begin and end can be used to collect other, more qualitative and contextual information, as well as inputs from teachers, the COGES, and the APE.

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VII **STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS**

At the end of the field phase, two stakeholder meetings were held. Given the remoteness of the nomad area, one meeting was held with the local population in Bermo. This meeting focused on the results of the evaluation in the CRS area specifically. A second and broader-based meeting was held in Niamey, attended by representatives from the steering committee, various ministries, representatives from ILO-IPEC, local NGOs, and the three CECLE partners.

7.1 STAKEHOLDER MEETING IN BERMO

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the preliminary findings of the evaluator in the Dakoro area specifically. The meeting was attended by 75 persons, including community and tribal chiefs; the mayor of Bermo; representatives of the COGES and other local committees; the district administration of the Ministries of Basic Education and of Literacy in Dakoro; school directors and teachers from the surrounding communities; and CRS staff, including the education specialist and the project director. A considerable effort had been made to bring everyone to Bermo since the area is devoid of roads as we know them.

The presentation summarized the findings and focused specifically on the strengths and weaknesses of the CECLE process and outcomes. The meeting lasted for three hours, during which 35 persons spoke eloquently of their thoughts and concerns in response to the findings and to each other's comments. The main points made during the discussion included the following:

- The historic importance of the project due to the fact that for the first time, parents were beginning to see the importance of education for their children.
- The importance of continuing what has been started, in spite of difficulties, because change takes time.
- Concerns with getting good teachers who will stay.
- Concerns with the health of children, especially during the cold season, due to the state of certain classrooms and the absence of dormitories.
- The fact that the life of transhumance does not need to block education and that parents can and should adapt.

The mayor of Bermo closed the discussion with an appeal to integrate other communities into the project's canteen program. The demand is strong, and he has currently 30 requests for integration. He placed particular emphasis on the importance of vocational education, specifically in sewing, for the local population.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ It should be mentioned that one of the main reasons given for the migration of women is the acquisition of clothing for themselves and their children.

7.2 STAKEHOLDER MEETING IN NIAMEY

The second meeting was held in the capital and was organized to allow maximum time to the discussion of the main issues in plenary and in groups. The meeting was attended by 60 participants and lasted six hours with one break for lunch and one short coffee break. The first part of the meeting was dedicated to opening statements, the evaluator's presentation of preliminary findings, and immediate responses taken in plenary.

The second part of the meeting identified the three main concerns that emerged from the plenary discussion and assigned these for a more concentrated discussion to three subgroups. The participants separated into groups by project area since it had been noted that issues varied according to the cultural and socioeconomic context of the respective zones.

Three related issues were selected for a more concentrated group discussion that would result in specific suggestions: project sustainability, income-generating activities, and the challenges of nomad education.

Sustainability was seen to have an organizational dimension, a sociocultural one, and an economic one where the last two were closely interlinked. The group sessions proposed suggestions for the following categories of the issues discussed:

Organizational aspects of sustainability:

- Recognize the importance of involving local chiefs and religious leaders, as well as women and youth.
- Extend partnerships to organizations that can address needs and activities that are not covered by the CECLE project.
- Reinforce the capacity of local structures and provide them with notebooks that record specifically alternatives to child labor.
- Facilitate exchange between teachers at discussion centers (for instance in Bermo).
- Create conditions that render the school more appealing such as APPs (practical and productive activities) and APS (practical and sportive activities).
- Create structures and systems for monitoring the children's activities outside of school.
- Engage local NGOs to implement activities in the field.

Economic and sociocultural aspects of sustainability—income-generating activities:

- Implement income-generating activities consistent with the local sociocultural context.
- Emphasize livestock-raising, cereal banks, livestock feed banks, small village shops, local cheese production—activities that reduce the need for movement.

- Compensate for the opportunity costs involved in sending children to school through well-targeted and well-organized income-generating activities.

Nomad education:

- Make allowances for the difficulties of the zone (communication and transportation).
- Stabilize teachers by establishing a protocol with the regional administration to include hardship allowances and motivational activities such as study trips and professional training.
- Provide teachers with additional training to manage extracurricular productive activities.
- Build dormitories, which are badly needed for the students.
- Encourage cultural activities such as theatre sketches, soccer matches, and festivals.
- Make allowances for the Warso festival of the Peulh population at the beginning of the school year.

Members of the Steering Committee were particularly interested in the idea of reviewing past experience with nomadic education as a basis for developing a new policy that is specifically adapted to the nomad areas.⁶⁵ The education of nomad children has historically presented one of the biggest challenges for Niger's Ministries of basic education and literacy. This is not only because of the population's constant movement in search of pasture and water, but also because of the importance of child labor to its production system. CECLE-CRS in Niger is working at the frontiers of this issue.

Coming from another policy perspective, the need for establishing a protocol with the regional administration with regard to the stabilization of contractual teachers was mentioned. It should be added that the government, together with partners from the international community, has been involved for some time in discussions dealing with teacher quality and the training needs and working conditions of contractual teachers (Somana, 2006; ILO, 2006). However, there are many obstacles to the implementation of proposed strategies and protocols (funding issues, inadequacies of pedagogic materials at the level of ENI and CAPED, lack of financial support to the CAPEDs).

There were no major disagreements with the findings presented aside from some minor corrections. The findings were used as a platform for what became an animated and intensive discussion aimed at proposing possible approaches to the challenges discussed, both for the medium and the long term. Certainly the CECLE experience contributes valuable field-based insights into the more immediate practical challenges as well as longer term issues of institutional, economic, and sociocultural sustainability.

⁶⁵ To date, there are no policy texts that regulate nomadic education.

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