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FINAL EVALUATION BRIEF | February 2022

FINAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF THE *PILARES* PROJECT

Photo credit: Pact

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Awarded in 2017 to Pact, the project "Building the Capacity of Civil Society to Combat Child Labor and Forced Labor and Improve Working Conditions" or "*Pilares*" is intended to forward progress in reducing Child Labor (CL) and promoting acceptable conditions of work (ACW) in Colombia's artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector through the work of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Applying a *collective impact* approach, the project aimed to improve the capacity of CSOs to better understand and address CL and promote acceptable conditions of work in the ASGM sector. The project was implemented in four municipalities: El Bagre and Zaragoza in the Bajo Cauca region, department of Antioquia; and Barranco de Loba and San Martín de Loba in the Sur de Bolívar region, department of Bolívar.

USDOL commissioned IMPAQ International LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the American Institutes for Research to conduct an independent final performance evaluation of *Pilares* Project. Full report results and learning: [Link]

KEY RESULTS

OUTCOME 1: Improved capacity of civil society to identify and document accurate, independent, and objective information on the nature and scope of child labor and on violations of acceptable conditions of work with a focus on the ASGM sector.

➢ 100% of CSOs improved capacity to identify and document CL and Other Unacceptable Working Conditions (OUWC).

➢ *Pilares* united 44 CSOs and conducted 372 trainings, workshops, and mentorships to build organizational capacity which led to demonstrated skills in building alliances and generating new funding.

OUTCOME 2: Improved capacity of civil society to raise awareness for the protection of workers from child labor and from violations of acceptable conditions of work with a focus on the ASGM sector.

➢ 100% of CSOs improved capacity to raise awareness about CL and OUWV.

➢ The CSOs formed three Solidarity Networks (SNs) that collectively addressed each of the three project objectives: (i) identify and document accurate information on CL and OUWC; (ii) increase awareness on CL and OUWC; and (iii) implement initiatives supporting policies that address CL and OUWC.

OUTCOME 3: Improved capacity of civil society to implement initiatives to address child labor and violations of acceptable conditions of work, including facilitated access to grievance mechanisms for victims of labor exploitation.

➢ 100% of CSOs improved capacity to implement initiatives to address CL and OUWC.

➢ *Pilares* created special committees in each SN and trained them how to develop proposals for sub-awards, manage small grants addressing CL and OUWC, and form alliances with the public and private sector. The increases in organizational capacity were reflected in both CSO and community behavioral changes such as youth transmitting knowledge to distant communities, local government's increased support for CL prevention, and less conflict with armed groups which recognize and respect leadership from CSOs.

DETAILED RESULTS

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH
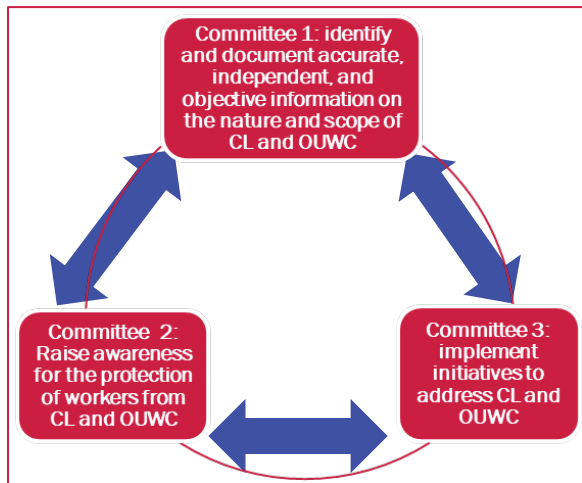
The *Pilares* project used a *collective impact* approach, which convened local CSOs to align their existing scopes and develop mutually reinforcing activities towards achieving common goals. The CSOs implemented this approach by organizing into three Solidarity Networks and measuring their collective progress and performance towards collective goals. Each SN was divided into three working committees to support specialization and collaboration relevant to the *Pilares* outcome areas. The approach and SN structure contributed to the relevance of the CSOs' work, enhancing their recognition among public and private institutions and their ability to achieve better results through joint actions and new alliances.

OUTCOME 1

The Civil Society Actor Performance Indicator (CSAPI) results for Outcome 1 showed that 100% of Committee 1 members assessed (n=18) across SNs increased their capacity to identify and document CL and OUWC. The SN in Sur de Bolívar demonstrated the largest growth/change, with several capacity-building benchmarks reaching Levels 3 and 4 such as using and sharing reporting mechanisms to identify and document CL and/or OUWC.
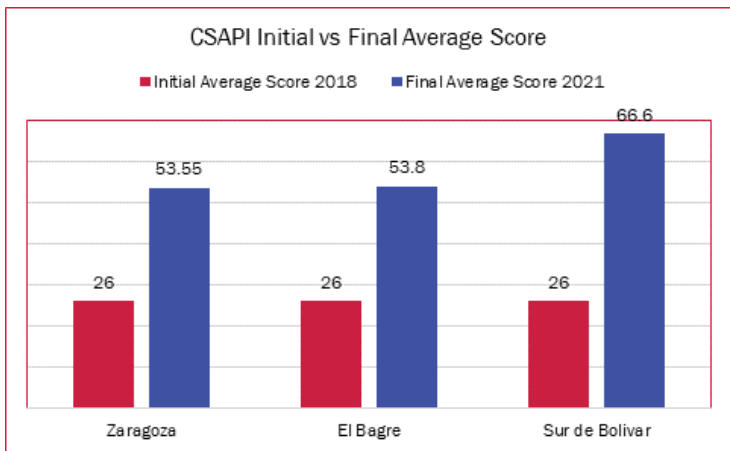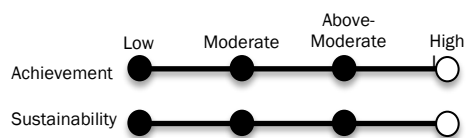

Implementing a methodical process to teach CSOs how to conduct their own research on issues that impact their communities instead of hiring an outside consultant to conduct research and share their findings with community members was a successful approach. The working committees were trained to accurately identify and document CL and OUWC, to develop data collection tools, to conduct community research, and to create and implement reporting mechanisms.

Committee 1 members across the SNs reported feeling empowered by the knowledge and skills gained and valued that they were able to gauge what is happening in their communities. This was the first time that many of the CSOs had experienced success through collaboration, which has inspired continued engagement with the community to develop and implement solutions to prevent CL and OUWC. While CSOs' attentions are split between multiple interests, they have demonstrated a sustained commitment to integrating CL and OUWC within their scope of work through actions and rhetoric in interviews. Local authorities recognized the importance of CSOs' roles in identifying and documenting CL and OUWC, as much of this work occurred in rural areas where government institutions have less access and where the community tends to be apprehensive towards working with the government.

OUTCOME 2

The CSAPI results for Outcome 2 showed that 100% of Committee 2 members assessed (n=16) across the SNs increased their capacity to raise awareness about CL and OUWC. Each SN Committee 2 members reached the maximum score on the benchmark pertaining to successful activities. The SNs' capacity to plan and execute
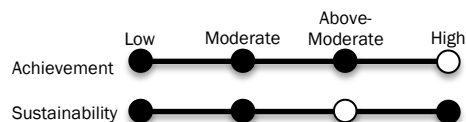
awareness-raising activities was evidenced through the implementation of 56 activities, twice the established target.
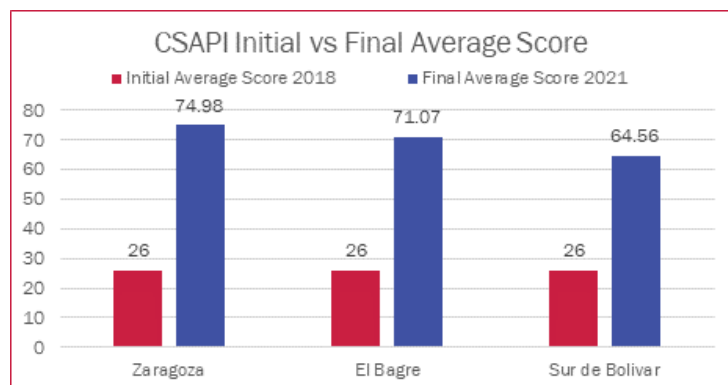

CSOs integrated members of all ages, creating an opportunity for youth to facilitate the use of social media platforms, and for older members to take pride in promoting traditional communication methods such as radio and village-to-village messengers. These activities resulted in enhanced community awareness of CL and OUWC, and an increased sense of community responsibility for addressing the issues. Including youth members and building their capacities as future agents of change contributed to the success, growth, and sustainability of the project. Additionally, *Pilares* provided extensive training in the use of communication technology to support and improve project communications during the COVID-19 pandemic. The enhanced knowledge and incorporation of digital communication tools is likely to contribute to the sustainability of project efforts in *veredas* (rural villages) given its perceived value as a link to spread advocacy between communities, no matter the distance.
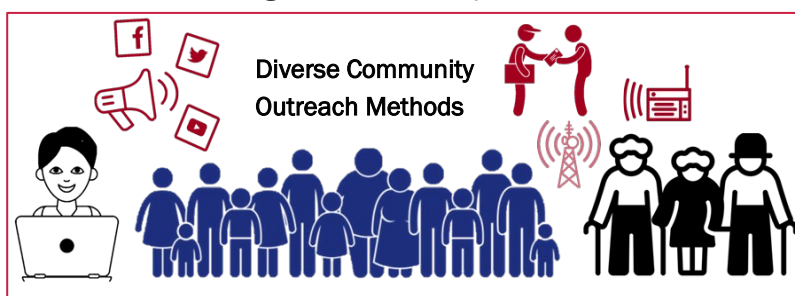
OUTCOME 3

The CSAPI results for Outcome 3 showed that 100% of Committee 3 members across the three SNs assessed (n=16) increased their capacity to implement initiatives to address CL and OUWC. All networks reached the maximum score on the benchmark related to engagement.
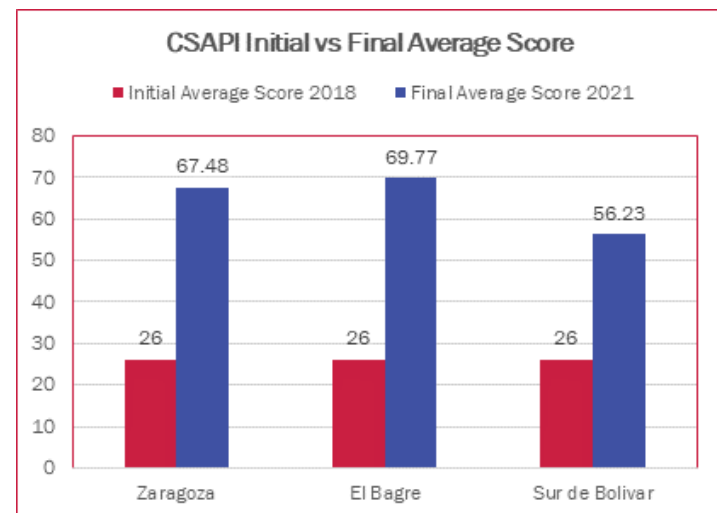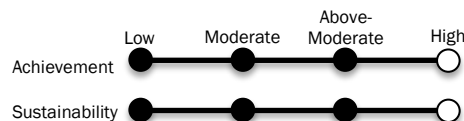
The project surpassed the target for the number of joint activities conducted between SNs and relevant actors by more than double. An example of this increased capacity is the SNs' participation in the Inter-Institutional Committees for the Eradication of Child Labor, a critical collaboration for addressing CL and OUWC. The CSOs also forged alliances with private- and public-sector stakeholders and exceeded the target number of alliances with academic institutions, which contributes to the project's long-term sustainability to continue to address CL and OUWC.

Through the small grants mechanism, CSOs acquired skills in developing project proposals for small grants, and at least 10 sub-awards were granted to carry out initiatives to address CL and OUWC. CSOs then gained experience managing small grant projects, which increased their capacity to negotiate with other actors and train others using participatory methods. This has enabled CSOs to acquire further funding, in-kind contributions, and collaborative work to sustain the long-term mission of the project. While alliances with public and private sector partners are likely to be sustained, there is some risk due to the frequent changes in municipal leadership, which have led to the need to frequently rebuild alliances and continuously conduct awareness-raising activities.

PROMISING PRACTICES

This final performance evaluation identified the following promising practices:

1. The *collective impact* approach was successfully adapted to the Colombian context. This approach is comprised of five conditions: a common agenda, continuous communication, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities and backbone support. The *Pilares* project adapted the concept of "backbone support," because there were no natural leaders among the CSOs, so instead, each SN nominated a group of organizations to form the "anchor". This structure worked very well; the CSOs proved to be very motivated and to have a high level of commitment to work collectively to achieve the project outcomes.

2. The M&E system created excitement among CSOs about measuring progress. The project-developed system was unique in its scope and in the way it engaged CSOs to participate in data collection activities. This free, accessible monitoring system allowed the CSOs to see the data and to measure the extent of the strengthened capacities of their organizations. The CSOs' commitment to project activities and outcomes grew, as did their desire to keep using independent systems based on the same platform. In the last phases, project staff evolved into the role of coaches, providing follow-up as the SNs developed their own M&E systems

3. Building the capacity of the CSOs was strategically planned with the intention that the participating CSOs would define their own skills and knowledge that required strengthening. CSOs were asked what they needed, instead of being told. The comprehensive capacity-building strategies were implemented as building blocks, with the goal of creating self-sufficient networks.

4. The small grants process gave CSOs the opportunity to develop proposals, build budgets, and build their own M&E systems. Once the CSOs were able to manage a small grant, they were capable of leveraging resources and negotiating with public officials.

5. The *Pilares* project field staff provided a valuable human connection. The field staff lived in the target communities and were able to provide close follow-up with the organizations and with the families in the distant *veredas*. They provided technical guidance and mentorship to the CSOs in developing their capacity strengthening plans, managing their M&E plans, coordinating their events, and developing their proposals for the subawards. This connection with the communities was an essential part of creating trust and promoting the effectiveness of *collective impact*.

LESSONS LEARNED

This final performance evaluation identified the following lessons learned:

1. Alliance-building should start earlier, by finding opportunities for the SNs to engage with potential allies and maintaining communication with allies as opportunities for collaboration increase.

2. Focusing on both CL and OUWC in one project is not an "organic mix." There was no natural alignment in the strategies to address CL and those to address OUWC. From the project design, the prime grantee focused on CL issues and the project's *collective impact* strategies, while the sub-grantee, ARM, focused almost exclusively on labor issues related to OSH in the ASGM sector. This created a natural separation in strategies addressing both issues, and there were few opportunities to fully integrate the two issues as part of the larger *collective impact* approach.

3. There was a tendency to overburden the more motivated individuals in the SNs who knew how to get things done. The more interested and driven individuals in the SNs tended to

take on too many responsibilities, leading to burnout. Project staff began monitoring the distribution or delegation of labor to other members of the CSOs to help prevent burnout.

4. The ability to provide income-generating activities offers a tangible solution to address root causes of CL in the ASGM sector. The income generation activities that were part of the small grants initiative demonstrated the interest in and need for offering feasible alternatives such as the beekeeping/honey production activities to generate sustainable income for vulnerable families where there is a high risk of CL.

5. The training information given to anchor groups and committees should be transferred to their respective CSOs in a timely manner. The project's adaptation of the *collective impact* approach to capacity building focused on training the SN anchor groups and committees 1, 2, and 3, who were then expected to share or replicate the information with their CSO constituents. However, the process of transferring information did not always occur in a timely manner throughout the project implementation period. It is important to place more focus on the anchor groups from the start of the project, especially on aspects of knowledge transfer, facilitation, and leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This final performance evaluation identified the following recommendations, organized according to the intended audience:

GRANTEE

1. Expand the project's reach to new territories, led by SNs. Pact should facilitate the process of scaling up to new municipalities using the *collective impact* approach. Look for strategic areas for expansion in new territories or new *veredas* within the existing target region. Pact should take an advisory role only, and the SNs should lead the expansion, as locals training locals, with Pact continuing to provide training for SNs including the application of the monitoring tools developed and on technology to keep up with advances.

2. Amplify the scope of the alliances component. Pact should focus on fomenting alliances from the beginning through training, mentoring, and follow-up. Facilitate the process for detecting opportunities to engage with public- and private-sector stakeholders and increasing the visibility of the CSOs with potential allies. For private sector alliances, CSOs should develop projects that are of interest to the private sector and communicate ideas at the regional or national levels. National-level alliances should also be encouraged with public sector institutions, including universities, SENA, ICBF, MOL, and the National Agency of Mining, especially when regional level offices are not responding to local needs.

3. Improve the capacity of CSOs to mentor/coach community members and CSOs who have not yet participated in the project's capacity-building strategy

4. Initiate the small grants component earlier in the project. Pact should make an earlier start on the subaward implementation process to provide real-world practice in the application of skills obtained through the project's capacity-building activities. The six-month period to implement the small grants process left little time to use this mechanism for building alliances and searching for additional funding. A quicker start would create a longer grant cycle to ensure that the SNs can establish alliances and secure additional funding.

5. Ensure anchor group members share or replicate information and training continuously. Pact should ensure anchor group members are continuously sharing information and tools with other CSOs in their respective networks, and as the project scales up, ensure that the transfer of information occurs early in the extension period. Implement a training of trainers for anchor groups early to facilitate the replication of workshops and pedagogical tools to build the capacity of other CSO members earlier.

6. Strengthen the ACW component. Pact should expand OSH training so that the content is adequately aligned with the needs of those participating in ASGM. The training should address not only occupational safety and health issues, but also the most pressing labor issues in the ASGM sector. These include labor laws, workers' rights and the structural barriers to formalization. These issues should be acknowledged and addressed to formulate alternative strategies to reach acceptable conditions of work. A specific line of work could be developed within each SN (as an additional working group, for example) with CSOs that are directly related to the ASGM sector. This group could guide the implementation and scope of ARM interventions.

7. Include income generation as a component in projects that address ACW and CL. Pact should include income generation activities in the design of any expansion of *Pilares*. It is important that the activities are prioritized through community discussion, and that they address the common burdens of commercial activities in the region, e.g., risk of theft of tools and produce, produce decaying due to the lack of an immediate market, and difficulties in locating effective commercial produce channels. Single mothers, who usually risk leaving their children alone to obtain income outside their homes, could benefit the most.

USDOL

8. Consider funding a continuation of the work implemented under *Pilares*: Given the extraordinary success of the project, USDOL should fund a continuation of the work implemented by *Pilares* to scale up the process of building the capacity of CSOs to address CL and OUWC using the *collective impact* approach.

9. USDOL should indicate in the Funding Opportunity Announcements the percentage

of time to spend on ACW versus CL. ACW "success" should be defined as more than just an increase in awareness and an ability to identify risks. The absence of a natural alignment between these two issues may require USDOL to clearly define ACW expectations, and in order to do so, examine more deeply the context of the labor rights issues in Colombia.

EVALUATION METHODS

This performance evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The evaluation approach was qualitative and participatory in nature and used project documents including CMEP data to provide quantitative information. Qualitative information was obtained through field visits, interviews, and focus groups as appropriate. Opinions coming from stakeholders and project participants improved and clarified the use of quantitative analysis. The participatory nature of the evaluation contributed to the sense of ownership among stakeholders and project participants.

To the extent that it is available, quantitative was drawn from the CMEP and project reports and incorporated in the analysis. In particular, project monitoring data was triangulated with relevant quantitative or qualitative data collected during fieldwork in order to objectively rate the level of achievement of each of the project's major outcomes on a four-point scale (low, moderate, above-moderate, and high).