



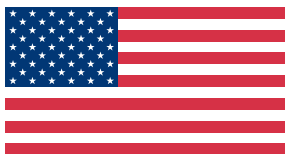
IDEAS IN ACTION

Evaluation results of a pilot program tackling exploitative child domestic work in Liberia

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DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN
LIBERIA



NORC at the
University of
Chicago



PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The *Tackling Exploitative Child Domestic Work in West Africa* initiative aimed to identify and pilot locally grounded strategies to reduce the exploitation of child domestic workers (CDWs). Drawing on formative intervention development research (IDR) conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) in 2023, the Freedom Fund co-created three intervention prototypes in collaboration with Liberian civil society organisations (CSOs) and government stakeholders, as well as survivor and youth representatives. These prototypes were piloted from November 2023 to October 2024. As the final stage of the IDR process, NORC evaluated the pilot to identify how the interventions are working to reduce exploitative child domestic work. The objective of this evaluation is to produce evidence-informed recommendations that can be shared with local and national decision-makers to foster greater investment in reducing exploitative child domestic work in Liberia.

Implementation was carried out by three grassroots CSOs: ANPPCAN, DCI, and SEARCH. As part of the program, local stakeholders co-developed an overarching Theory of Change (TOC) to guide efforts to address exploitative child domestic work. Partner organisations then received funding and technical support from the Freedom Fund to implement a range of activities aligned with the TOC, as summarised in the table below.

Organisation	Intermediate outcomes	Activities
ANPPCAN	Mobilise communities to better understand exploitative child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Launch community awareness campaigns on CDW rights.• Identify “change agents” to support community action plans for reducing exploitative child domestic work.
	Support communities in implementing action plans to address exploitative child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Train “change agents” to gather data on CDWs and use it to inform action plans.• Monitor and provide ongoing support vis-à-vis action plan implementation.
DCI	Increase reporting, monitoring, and response to cases of exploitative child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce and disseminate CDW rights advocacy messaging through various channels and media.• Hold stakeholder dialogues to discuss CDW issues and response strategies.• Host workshops and talk shows on government and community response to exploitative child domestic work.
SEARCH	Mobilise child welfare committees (CWCs) to better monitor and report exploitative child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mobilise and train CWCs on monitoring and reporting.• Produce and disseminate CDW rights advocacy messaging through radio.• Hold community dialogues to discuss CDW exploitation and prevention strategies.



METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the above activities used a qualitative design grounded in a formative realist evaluation approach, aiming to understand how, for whom and under what conditions the pilot interventions contributed to change.¹ Outcome harvesting was used during the first phase to identify meaningful shifts in awareness, behaviour and engagement related to exploitative child domestic work, and to inform the design of field-based primary data collection in the second phase. This process was complemented by a comprehensive review of partner reports, monitoring data and learning summaries, which were synthesised thematically to guide analysis and shape the development of data collection tools.

Primary data collection in Liberia was conducted by The Khana Group and involved 29 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with CDWs, government stakeholders, law enforcement, community members, religious leaders and implementing partner staff. Preliminary findings were validated through a virtual participatory workshop with stakeholders and implementing partners, during which results were reviewed and recommendations co-developed to inform future programming.

¹ BetterEvaluation. (n.d.). Realist evaluation. In BetterEvaluation. Retrieved 3 October 2025, from <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/realist-evaluation>.

KEY FINDINGS

1

Implementing partners built relationships with law enforcement and child protection authorities, many of whom received training on monitoring, identifying and responding to exploitative child domestic work.

Some of us did not really know what child exploitative domestic work is, and the different laws that protect children... these reports [and] trainings [the partner] brought has broadened our minds... when we see an issue that is child domestic work we will be able to identify it and be able to make an intervention.

Government Stakeholder

2

Awareness-raising helped shift knowledge and attitudes among employers/caregivers, local leaders and community members.

Community dialogues, media campaigns and the mobilisation of trained change agents and Child Welfare Committee members drove these gains.

[Caregivers] walked away with knowledge in the sense that some of them changed the way they treat people's children. The way they never had other people's children going to school, they started sending them to school.

Community Change Agent

3

Existing social infrastructure, such as places of worship, schools, and marketplaces, was reported as highly effective in fostering trust and encouraging participation. Stakeholder interviews and partner reports highlighted early signs of behavioural change, increased willingness to report cases and stronger local engagement with CDW issues.

One of the people that was actually influenced was the Imam, who we invited because their religion and background...he was into it and he also expressed his involvement that he will also use his little respect as Imam within his locale to see how best to educate people. And [another] person we recruited is the resident pastor of this place, he saw the need and said, 'this will be something I will preach.'

Community Change Agent

4

Stakeholders reported growing recognition of CDW exploitation as a child protection concern addressed under existing legal frameworks.

5

Early steps by the CSO partners helped lay the groundwork for future system-level change. However, more time and investment are needed to fully institutionalise protections for CDWs within policy environments.

The pilot was intentionally designed to explore and test localised approaches.

Within that context, the evaluation surfaced useful lessons about implementation enablers and constraints and documented good practices in community mobilisation through avenues such as the reactivation of dormant Child Welfare Committees. The pilot demonstrated how modest resources, when strategically deployed through existing structures, can catalyse progress on a previously invisible issue. These experiences underscore the importance of leveraging existing child protection systems for CDWs and continuing to invest in frontline organisations that enable children to access these systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The following recommendations reflect key learnings from the pilot and its evaluation. While they do not represent the full spectrum of potential solutions, they offer practical guidance informed by the experiences of Freedom Fund staff, implementing partners and other key stakeholders who reviewed findings and identified opportunities to strengthen future interventions targeting exploitative child domestic work.

For service providers

- **Invest in mass awareness using trusted platforms.** In settings where child domestic work is widespread but socially normalised, it helps to leverage widely accessible channels such as radio and noticeboards in locations frequented by CDWs and employers/caregivers, including markets, schools and places of worship.
- **Craft messaging that is participatory, culturally sensitive and grounded in local realities.** When addressing tradition-linked practices such as exploitative child domestic work, it is helpful to use participatory approaches to ensure messaging is non-alienating, audience-tailored and avoids legitimising exploitative norms. Engaging religious and traditional leaders as allies can help further tailor messaging to the local context and boost credibility within communities.
- **Integrate CDW messaging into existing programs and community structures.** In contexts where exploitative child domestic work is prevalent, CDW-specific content could be incorporated into broader child rights initiatives, such as those focused on children's rights, trafficking, child labour or abuse.
- **Consider incorporating creative, community-based and emergency support mechanisms in future interventions.** The evaluation surfaced several promising approaches that may strengthen results for similar projects in the future. These include establishing emergency funds for CDWs, investing in livelihoods for vulnerable families, and engaging communities through the creative arts.
- **Invest early in trust-building and contextualisation.** When addressing sensitive and unfamiliar issues such as exploitative child domestic work, partners needed time to build trust and adapt interventions to local realities. Approaches rooted in constructive engagement with employers/caregivers proved more effective than enforcement-led strategies, particularly during early phases.

For policymakers

- **Strengthen legal and budgetary frameworks to protect CDWs.** Future efforts should support the integration of CDW-specific language into existing laws and action plans (such as the National Action Plan for Child Labour, which is currently being drafted) and ensure sufficient budgetary allocations to enforce child protection laws and deliver services that guarantee the full rights of all children working in domestic settings
- **Strengthen institutional capacity through training and technical support.** Future interventions should ensure that frontline actors such as law enforcement, labour inspectors and officers, immigration services, magistrates and Child Welfare Committees receive ongoing training on recognising and responding to exploitative child domestic work.
- **Prioritise funding for protection and psychosocial support for CDWs experiencing extreme abuse.** Ensure sufficient access to safe shelters, counselling and psychosocial services for CDWs in crisis. For longer-term and more sustainable impact, explore safe family-based care options where appropriate, in line with global best practices in child protection.

For future IDR initiatives

- **Allocate sufficient time and resources for pilot implementation.** The CDW pilot successfully generated buy-in from communities and government actors, but the 12-month implementation period was too short to fully test the pilot strategies. Future pilots should span two to three years to allow sufficient time for co-creation, adaptation and sustained delivery.
- **Be realistic about what short-term pilots can achieve.** The pilot successfully tested activities suited to limited timeframes, such as awareness-raising and reactivating existing community structures. In contrast, interventions such as educational support, case management, shelters and policy reform require long-term commitment and can be challenging to wind down responsibly.
- **Design pilot activities with realism, sustainability and exit in mind.** Ensure that program theories of change and project-level goals are appropriately aligned to the context, budget, scope and timeline of the planned activities.
- **Consider system capacity when selecting and promoting interventions.** Before piloting new approaches, assess whether child protection structures can handle increased case identification and referrals. In addition, ensure that referral pathways and support services are in place before promoting reporting mechanisms to avoid raising expectations that the system cannot meet.

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VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

MISSION

We invest in frontline organisations and movements to drive a measurable reduction of modern slavery in high-prevalence countries and industries.

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