



IDEAS IN ACTION

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

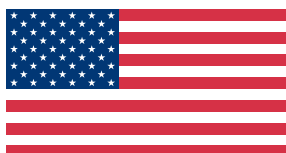
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DEVATOP CENTRE FOR
AFRICA DEVELOPMENT



Center for the Advancement
and Protection of the Rights
of Vulnerable People
(CAPRIGHTS-VP)



 **NORC** at the
University of
Chicago

T K G
THE KHANA GROUP

THE  **FREEDOM FUND**

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 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 Nigeria.

Implementation was carried out by three grassroots CSOs: Devatop, CAPRIGHTS, and Street Project Foundation. 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
Devatop	Strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks on CDW-related issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct gap analysis of legal, regulatory, finance and policy frameworks. • Hold policy dialogues to address gaps.
	Improve community attitudes toward exploitative child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and disseminate CDW rights advocacy messaging through various channels and media. • Organise sensitisation forums with CDWs and employers/caregivers. • Train “influencers” to sensitise communities on CDW rights.
CAPRIGHTS	Improve collaboration among state and non-state agencies on child domestic work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct stakeholder visits/workshops to sensitise them on CDW safeguarding. • Develop referral pathways for CDWs in exploitative conditions.
	Increase coordination of accountability platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collate, share, and assess existing CDW case data and reports with stakeholders. • Sensitise communities on reporting and referral pathways. • Formally recognise CDW rights champions.
Street Project Foundation	Improve community awareness of CDW rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train youth to identify and assist exploited CDWs. • Engage youth in staging theatre performances on child domestic work. • Film/screen mini-documentary on child domestic work. • Train “influencers” to sensitise communities on CDW rights using social media.



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 Nigeria was conducted by The Khana Group and involved 30 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with CDWs, employers/caregivers, 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 Awareness-raising—driven by community dialogues, media campaigns and mobilisation of local influencers—helped shift knowledge and attitudes among employers/caregivers, local leaders and community members.



In the past, I used to do a lot of work, I had no resting time or time to play with friends. But now [my caregiver] has started giving me breaks, and I don't have to do as many chores because she has passed some chores on to her own children.
Child Domestic Worker

I learned the referral pathway in reporting child domestic worker cases...that when such a case is noted in the community you first get to the community leader and [make] the community leader aware that there is a child abuse...and gradually get to the nearest police station that [is] responsible for...child abuse cases.
Community Influencer

4 While further time and sustained investment are essential to fully embed protections for CDWs within national policy frameworks, these initial efforts established a crucial foundation for future system-level change.



2 Leveraging existing social infrastructure, including places of worship, schools and marketplaces, proved especially effective for gaining trust and encouraging participation. Stakeholder interviews and partner reports included early evidence of community and individual behavioural change, increased willingness to report cases and stronger local engagement with CDW issues.



3 Implementing partners built relationships with child protection authorities and contributed to policy dialogues and advocacy efforts focused on legislative and regulatory reform.



The pilot project was deliberately designed to explore and test localised approaches

This evaluation, therefore, revealed valuable insights into the enablers and constraints of implementation, documenting effective practices in community mobilisation, such as youth-led theatre and documentary screenings. The pilot demonstrated how strategic deployment of modest resources through existing structures can catalyse progress on previously overlooked issues. 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 exploitative 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. In urban contexts, social media also offers strong potential for engagement.
- **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 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. In addition, work to critically review and remove the existing child labour protection exemptions for CDWs in the Labour Act and the Child Rights Act (CRA), including those loopholes related to the definition of family work, wages/payment, and rest breaks.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity through training and technical support.** Future interventions should ensure that frontline actors such as labour inspectors, law enforcement, magistrates and school counsellors 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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