



A qualitative study of community grievance mechanisms in Ghana

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International
COCOA
Initiative

Protecting children and their families in cocoa growing communities

The International Cocoa Initiative is a non-profit partnership organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults in cocoa growing communities. We are experts on child labour and forced labour in cocoa, advising governments and corporations to inform their practices and influence decisions-making, and working with NGOs in the field. We are committed to achieving sustainable cocoa production that protects the rights of children and adults worldwide.

This external evaluation was commissioned by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI). It was conducted by Ipsos Africa Centre for Development Research and Evaluation.



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Executive Summary

This qualitative study evaluates the implementation and efficacy of community-based grievance mechanisms in Ghana's cocoa sector. Ipsos Limited-Ghana was commissioned by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) to assess the impact of pilot grievance mechanisms interventions implemented since 2022 in cocoa-growing communities. The study sought to generate insights and recommendations to enhance these mechanisms and mitigate labour rights violations in the cocoa supply chain.

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with key stakeholders, including workers, employers (farm owners), community committee members, and local authorities. Data collection was conducted across 12 selected cocoa-growing communities in Ghana, comprising 32 FGDs and 59 IDIs. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key patterns and insights from the qualitative data.

Key Findings

- **Increased awareness of labour rights.** Community-based grievance mechanisms set up by ICI in Ghana and evaluated in this study have enhanced awareness of their labour rights and responsibilities among workers and employers.
- **Effective conflict resolution.** Community-based grievance mechanisms provided an accessible avenue for workers to report complaints. The study revealed that employer-worker disagreements and child labour and protection issues form a significant part of the grievances handled by the committees. Community-based labour protection committees have been effective in mediating conflicts between employers and workers, helping to strengthen relationships between workers and farm owners. Written contracts between workers and employers have clarified expectations and facilitated dispute resolution.
- **Community trust and local ownership.** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of local ownership and community trust in the grievance process. Workers reported learning about the committees through various channels, while users appreciate that the members are from their own communities, making it easier to approach and trust them. Word-of-mouth sharing of positive dispute resolution outcomes further reinforces trust in the system.
- **Challenges and opportunities for improvement.** Challenges persist for these community-based committees, including limited resources, inadequate transportation, and the need for regular training of committee members. Referral systems were present to escalate serious cases to higher authorities. Improved coordination and referral mechanisms among district actors and community-based structures were identified as critical for effective grievance resolution.

In conclusion, the community-based grievance mechanisms showed promise in addressing labour issues in Ghana's cocoa sector but require further support and refinement. Key recommendations include providing regular training and resources to committee members, strengthening collaboration between stakeholders, integrating technology to enhance reporting and monitoring, and ensuring sustainable local funding. With continued improvement, these mechanisms have the potential to significantly advance labour rights protection in cocoa-growing communities and serve as a model for similar initiatives in other agricultural sectors.

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Introduction

1.1 Background

Since 2022, the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) has tested innovative solutions to address adult labour issues in Ghana's cocoa sector. Their pilot program of community-based grievance mechanisms in cocoa-growing communities has shown considerable promise over its initial two-year implementation period. The early data collected has revealed encouraging trends, with workers actively using the system to report grievances, local committees successfully mediating disputes, and authorities intervening when necessary to ensure the proper resolution of complaints.

Building on this promising foundation, ICI has recognized the need for a more in-depth analysis to further refine and strengthen these mechanisms. To this end, they have partnered with Ipsos Ghana to conduct a comprehensive qualitative study of the grievance process. This collaboration aims to delve deeper into the intricacies of the system, exploring its strengths, weaknesses, and potential for long-term sustainability.

A key focus of the research is to generate actionable recommendations that can boost the effectiveness and sustainability of these community-based grievance mechanisms. The ultimate goal is to develop a robust intervention that can significantly mitigate the risks of forced labour and other worker rights abuses that have been observed in the Ghanaian cocoa sector. By empowering local communities to address labour rights violations through these mechanisms, the initiative aims to create lasting change from the ground up. Beyond its immediate impact on ICI's work in Ghana, this study has the potential to yield insights with broader implications. The findings may offer valuable lessons for the implementation of similar localized, community-driven grievance mechanisms in similar agricultural supply chains in Ghana and in the neighbouring region. As such, this research could contribute to the global effort to advance labour rights in agriculture, providing a model for how community-based approaches can effectively address complex labour issues in rural and agricultural settings.

1.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the questions below:

1. How do different stakeholders (workers, employers, community members, cooperative staff, and local authorities) perceive the strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness of the community-based grievance mechanism?
2. What are the key factors that contribute to or hinder the successful resolution of grievances through the mechanism, and what specific implementation challenges need to be addressed to improve its functioning?
3. What elements are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the community grievance mechanism under local ownership, and how can existing structures, such as the "Assess & Address" Human Rights committees under the Rainforest Alliance certification, be leveraged to support its effective operation?

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Methodology

2.1 Study Design

The study employed qualitative research using focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). This approach allowed for a deep exploration of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards the community grievance mechanisms. The combination of FGDs and IDIs provided complementary data, with FGDs capturing group dynamics and consensus views, while IDIs allowed for more detailed individual perspectives. Additionally, this mixed qualitative method enabled the triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research outcomes.

2.2 Sample Size

Data collection took place across the 12 selected cocoa-growing communities in Ghana. The 12 communities were selected using a cluster-based approach. ICI's forced labour grievance committees have been set up in different regions. Each region was considered a cluster. In each cluster (region – Eastern, Ashanti and Western North), four communities were randomly selected. However, in the final selection of the communities, two key criteria were considered: communities with a grievance mechanism committee set up not less than a year and communities with at least one case of grievance reported. The tables below show the sample breakdown for both Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and the Individual Interviews (IDIs).

The 12 selected communities are listed below and are located in the following districts and regions:

Table 1: Communities

S/N	Selected Community	Administrative District	Region
1	Kramokrom	Sefwi Wiawso Municipal	Western North
2	Suhenso	Sefwi Wiawso Municipal	Western North
3	Eteso	Juaboso	Western North
4	Sayerano	Juaboso	Western North
5	Kunkumso	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Western North
6	Amokrom	Ahafo Ano South-East	Ashanti
7	Amakrom	Ahafo Ano North	Ashanti
8	Agogooso II	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti
9	Kwadwo Nkwanta	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti
10	Agogooso	Adansi North	Ashanti

11	Kwaboanta	Ayensuano	Eastern
12	New Alema	Ayensuano	Eastern

Table 2: List of District Stakeholders

S/N	Stakeholder/Department	District	Region
1	CHRAJ	Bia West	Western North
2	Social Welfare	Juaboso	Western North
3	CHRAJ	Sefwi Wiawso	Western North
4	Labour Department	Sefwi Wiawso	Western North
5	Ghana Police Service - DOVSSU	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Western North
6	Social Welfare	Ahafo Ano North	Ashanti
7	CHRAJ	Ahafo Ano South-East	Ashanti
8	Social Welfare	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti
9	CHRAJ	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti
10	Social Welfare	Ayensuano	Eastern
11	Labour Department	Suhum	Eastern
12	CHRAJ	Suhum	Eastern

Table 3: 32FGDs across all districts

Selected Community	Administrative District	Region	Female workers	Community-based labour protection committees	Male workers	Employers
1.Kramokrom	Sefwi Wiawso Municipal	Western North	1		1	1

2.Suhenso	Sefwi Wiawso Municipal	Western North		1	1	1
3.Eteso	Juaboso	Western North	1		1	1
4.Sayerano	Juaboso	Western North		1	1	1
5.Kunkumso	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Western North			1	1
6.Amokrom	Ahafo Ano South-East	Ashanti	1		1	1
7.Amakrom	Ahafo Ano North	Ashanti		1	1	1
8.Agogooso II	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti			1	1
9.Kwadwo Nkwanta	Adansi Asokwa	Ashanti			1	1
10.Agogooso	Adansi North	Ashanti			1	1
11.Kwaboanta	Ayensuano	Eastern	1		1	1
12.New Alema	Ayensuano	Eastern		1	1	1

Tabel 4: 59 IDIs

Region	District	District Stakeholders	Community-based labour protection	Female workers	Male workers	Company representation
Western North	Bia West	CHRAJ	3	1	1	2
Western North	Juaboso	Social Welfare	3	1		

Western North	Sefwi Wiawso	CHRAJ	3	1	1	2
Western North	Sefwi Wiawso	Labour Department	3	1		
Western North	Bibiani-Anhwiaso-Bekwai	Ghana Police Service - DOVSSU	3	1		
Ashanti	Ahafo Ano North	Social Welfare	3	1		
Ashanti	Ahafo Ano South East	CHRAJ	3	1	1	
Ashanti	Adansi Asokwa	Social Welfare	3	1		
Ashanti	Adansi Asokwa	CHRAJ	3	1	1	2
Eastern	Ayensuan o	Social Welfare	3	1		
Eastern	Suhum	Labour Department	3	1	1	
Eastern	Suhum	CHRAJ	3	1		

2.3 Selection of respondents

To ensure a representative cross-section of experiences, a purposive sampling approach was employed in this study. Participants were deliberately chosen based on their history of reporting grievances to the community-based labour protection committees overseeing local grievance mechanisms. This targeted selection of workers and employers with relevant lived experiences generated valuable qualitative insights, allowing for an assessment of the effectiveness, responsiveness, fairness, and trustworthiness of community grievance mechanisms from the perspective of actual users. Due to the predominantly male workforce in cocoa farms and companies, the sample included a larger number of male workers compared to female workers. For committee members, efforts were made to include all members in focus group discussions. However, individual interviews were conducted based on the availability of committee members. Regarding district actors,

individuals who were part of the grievance mechanism and had been engaged by ICI were contacted for interviews. This approach ensured that the study captured insights from various stakeholders involved in the grievance process, providing a comprehensive view of the mechanisms in place. By focusing on these specific subpopulations and stakeholders, the study aimed to gather in-depth information about the functioning and impact of community grievance mechanisms in the cocoa industry.

2.4 Training interviewers

To ensure high-quality data collection and ethical research practices, training was organized for interviewers and note-takers involved in the study. This training aimed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively conduct FGDs and IDIs.

The training was a centralized, in-person training held at the Ipsos Office in Accra, lasting 2 days, which included testing and piloting the moderation guide for the FGDs and interview guide for the IDIs. The training was undertaken by the Ipsos project team lead in collaboration with the ICI team. The training involved 5 interviewers and 5 note takers, with the latter responsible for taking notes during the FGDs.

The **training methodology** included both theoretical and practical sessions - encompassing mock interviews and a hands-on training interview in the field. The training curriculum addressed topics such as:

- An introduction to the study (including its objectives).
- Fieldwork procedures, research ethics, safety, and communication protocols.
- An exhaustive review of each question for all tools.
- Procedures for seeking permission to conduct interviews and strategies for managing interviews effectively.

ICI assisted Ipsos in conducting the **testing/piloting of the moderation guide** in Suhum in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The training manual covers a comprehensive framework for addressing grievances related to forced labour in the cocoa sector, focusing on community engagement and ethical research practices. Here's a detailed overview of its contents:

- **Project Background:** The manual highlights the prevalence of forced labour, noting an estimated 2.61 million people affected globally. It emphasizes the need for coordinated actions to mitigate risks faced by workers.
- **Grievance Mechanism:**
 - Raise grievances through community pathways.
 - Review and acknowledge grievances within 48 hours.
 - Categorize grievances into Red (severe), Yellow (moderate), or Green (inquiry).
 - Investigate and resolve issues through mediation.
 - Follow up on cases to ensure implementation of decisions.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Emphasizes the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical interactions with respondents, including avoiding empty promises and unauthorized discussions.

- Interview Techniques:
 - Introduces personal interaction techniques based on Egan's SOLER model, which focuses on posture, eye contact, and demeanor during interviews.
 - Highlights the significance of probing techniques to elicit comprehensive responses from participants.
- Key Takeaways: Prioritize precision in interviews, maintain a neutral demeanor, and ensure that respondents feel comfortable sharing their experiences without pressure.

2.5 Recruitment of respondents

ICI assisted the Ipsos field team in reaching respondents. ICI field officers' contacts in the various communities and districts were shared with Ipsos. This approach strengthened community entry, promoted respondent buy-in, and reduced the incidence of rejection.

2.6 Main Field Data Collection

Data collection was conducted concurrently in all the districts within the stipulated timeframe. To ensure privacy and reduce incidences of interference, all interviews were carried out in a private section at the premise of the respondent, where applicable. ICI assisted the Ipsos field team in locating suitable venues to conduct the FGDs. Interviews were conducted exclusively by Ipsos enumerators. ICI staff was not present during the interviews to ensure the independence of the study. ICI's role was limited to facilitating community entry and handling logistics.

2.7 Ethical Consideration

Participation in the study was voluntary, with the purpose and methodology fully explained to respondents. All participants signed consent forms. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with no individual names mentioned in the technical report. The research team was trained to respect privacy in data collection, storage, and publication. They ensured that respondents were not identifiable in the dissemination of findings. The team was also prepared to address safety concerns sensitively, reporting sensitive cases to supervisors for appropriate action. During the informed consent process, the limits of confidentiality were clearly explained to all respondents.

2.8 Data Quality Control

All qualitative interviews were recorded using audio recording devices. Following data collection, the audio files were securely stored on a password-protected portable storage device. Access to the recordings was provided to transcribers through a unique, password-protected system, ensuring that only authorized personnel could retrieve the files. Transcribers were granted access to the audio recordings via unique passwords during the transcription process. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, with transcribers also incorporating notes to capture nonverbal communication. To comply with data privacy regulations, personal information was anonymized within the transcripts. The interviewers conducted a thorough review of the transcripts to verify their accuracy and ensure they faithfully represented the interviews or discussions. Additionally, quality control measures were

implemented by randomly rewinding the audio to confirm that the transcriber was capturing the entire conversation. Ipsos ensured the field team who were recruited to collect data had experience in transcription and was fluent in the local languages within the communities where data was being collected. This ensured the accuracy and integrity of the translated content.

2.9 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data gathered through IDIs and FGDs. This involved:

- Development of an initial coding framework based on the research questions
- Identification of key themes and patterns in the coded data
- Refinement of themes and sub-themes through iterative analysis
- Triangulation of findings across different stakeholder groups and data sources
- Selection of illustrative quotes to include in the research report

The analysis aimed to identify commonalities and points of divergence in stakeholder perceptions, as well as to distil lessons learned and good practices. Particular attention was paid to understanding the enablers and barriers to success, and to generating actionable recommendations to enhance the grievance mechanisms.

Table 5: Themes & Codes

Theme	Codes
Roles and Responsibilities	Duties in conflict resolution (e.g., mediating disputes, documenting grievances)
	Training received (e.g., child labour and forced labour awareness, conflict resolution techniques)
	Engagement in grievance processes (e.g., attending mediation sessions, follow-ups)
	Perceptions of contracts and their importance
	Understanding of rights and responsibilities
Types of Grievances	Experiences with the grievance mechanism
	Disputes between employers and workers (e.g., contract violations)
	Child labour and protection issues (e.g., abuse, neglect)
	Sensitive cases (e.g., harassment, discrimination)
	Forced labour or additional duties not specified in contracts (i.e. verbal agreement)
Child abuse cases identified through behavioural signs	

Grievance Handling Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial documentation of grievances Setting dates for mediation sessions Gathering evidence (e.g., testimonies, physical evidence) Involvement of both parties in discussions Mediation outcomes (e.g., agreements reached) Referral protocols for unresolved or serious cases
Coordination and Referral Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with local government bodies (e.g., Labour Department and CHRAJ) Protocols for escalating cases beyond Community Labour Protection Committees' capabilities Involvement of local leaders and organizations in grievance resolution Importance of community trust and education
Impact and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of labour rights through grievance mechanisms Improved relationships between workers and employers Recognition of the value of contracts in preventing disputes Benefits of having a structured grievance process
Challenges Faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation issues affecting case follow-ups (e.g., lack of motorbikes) Financial limitations impacting committee operations Need for increased training for committee members Challenges in educating community members about their labour rights

2.10 Study Limitations

While this qualitative study provides valuable insights into community-based grievance mechanisms, some limitations must be acknowledged. The study's design, which relied on KIIs and FGDs, may introduce certain biases. For instance, the purposive sampling method, while aimed at ensuring representative diversity, may not fully capture the breadth of experiences and perspectives within the cocoa-growing area's landscape. The selection criteria prioritized gender distribution and district representation; however, it is possible that some voices, particularly those from less accessible areas, were underrepresented. Also, respondent bias is another potential limitation. Participants may have provided socially desirable responses rather than candid insights, particularly in discussions about community-based grievance mechanisms quality and practices. This tendency could stem from a desire to align with perceived expectations of researchers or based on subjective lived experiences with the community-based grievance mechanisms process. Whereas the study sought to assess how

existing structures, such as the "Assess & Address" Human Rights committees under the Rainforest Alliance certification, can be leveraged to support its effective operation, the scope of study limited the researchers' ability to fully explore such dedicated groups or bodies responsible for implementing this approach within the communities under study as their implication was limited to inexistent within the grievance mechanisms studied.

3

Findings

3.1 The Grievance Mechanism Piloted by ICI: Description and Functioning

The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) implemented a community-based grievance mechanism in 89 cocoa-growing communities in Ghana to address forced labour risks. This mechanism is a formal process that enables individuals to lodge complaints regarding labour rights violations. It operates through Community Labour Protection Committees (CLPCs), comprising trained adult volunteers who raise awareness about labour rights, receive grievances, and facilitate resolution through mediation. The process typically involves active listening, mediation, and facilitation of formal employment contract signings. While most grievances are resolved at this level, complex cases, particularly those involving threats of violence, are referred to relevant district authorities. This mechanism is proactive, focusing on addressing risks before they escalate to forced labour cases. It aims to uphold workers' rights, foster positive social change, and provide accessible channels for reporting and remediation. The process encompasses several steps, including receiving and reviewing grievances, categorizing them based on severity, investigating, mediating, and conducting follow-ups.

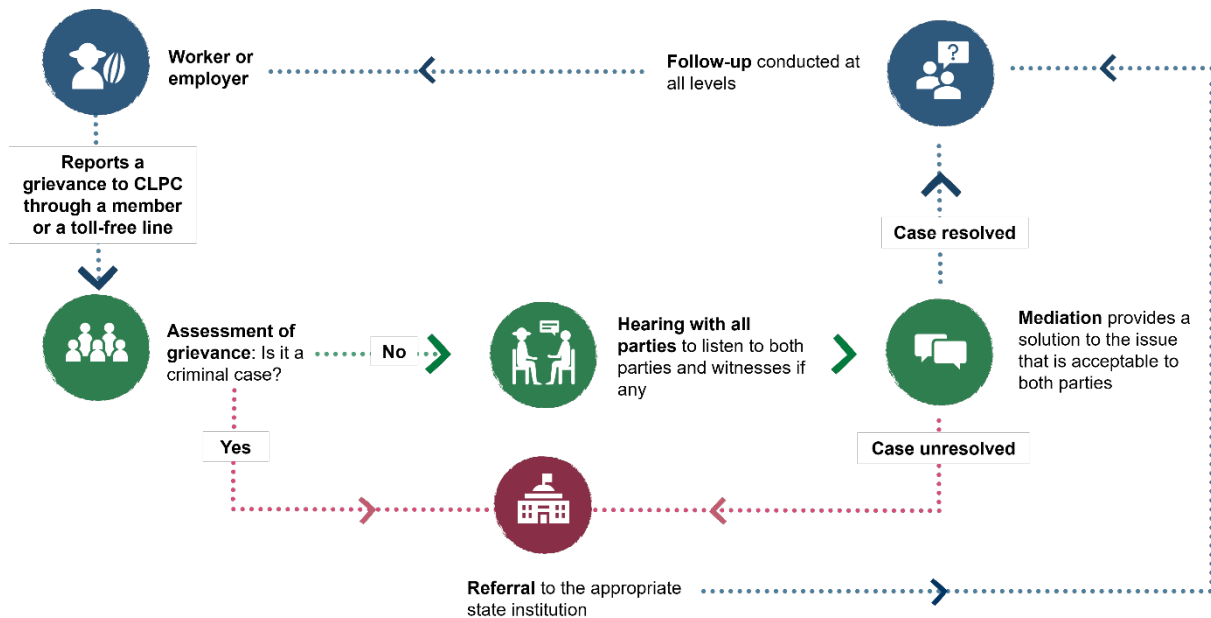


Figure 1: Grievance Management Process

3.2 Community-Based Committee

Establishment Process: The committee is established with significant community involvement to ensure it addresses local needs and garners community acceptance. It utilizes existing community structures where feasible, such as Community Child Protection Committees. The formation process involves presenting the concept to the community and engaging them in the design phase, which promotes community ownership and encourages future utilization of the mechanism.

Committee Composition: The committee's membership is carefully curated to be inclusive and impartial. It typically comprises representatives from various sectors, including worker groups, women's associations, traditional authorities, religious leaders representing different religions, educational institutions, cooperatives, employers, youth organizations, and community-based government representatives. A secretary with adequate educational qualifications is also included to maintain accurate written records.

Training Curriculum: Committee members undergo comprehensive training to prepare them for their roles. The curriculum covers forced labour and labour rights, including the identification of forced labour risks and indicators. It also encompasses awareness-raising techniques, equipping members to effectively educate the community about labour rights. Mediation techniques form a crucial component of the training, preparing members to conduct impartial third-party mediation between workers and employers. Additionally, members are trained in assisting with contract signatures, which is vital for formalizing employment relationships. This thorough training ensures that committee members can independently handle most issues, referring only complex cases to higher authorities. The curriculum also outlines the appropriate institutions to contact for challenging cases, thereby strengthening the referral system. To enhance credibility, this training is often delivered in partnership with competent authorities.

3.3 Grievance handling

The grievance handling process within the ICI piloted structure is designed to address worker complaints effectively. This process encompasses several stages, from the initial intake of grievances to their resolution, and involves careful consideration of the unique circumstances surrounding each case. The insights from committee members provide a detailed understanding of how grievances are managed.

The process begins with the **intake of grievances**. One member explained, "*When an issue is brought before us, I call the executives, and we document it.*" This initial step is crucial as it establishes a formal record of the grievance, which is essential for subsequent discussions and resolutions. The committee then sets a date to meet with the victims and involved parties to discuss the case. The member further elaborated, "*We set a date to meet the victims and settle the case,*" indicating a commitment to timely intervention.

Once a grievance is documented, the committee engages in **thorough investigations**. A committee member emphasized the importance of understanding both sides of the story: "*We (CLPC) first make sure we visit the farm involved and sometimes, other people who may help in the mediation process before making a judgment.*" This impartial approach, which includes listening to all parties to the case, does not only foster trust among community members but also ensures that all relevant information is considered before reaching a resolution. The committee's focus on gathering evidence is further illustrated by another member's claim that they "*make sure to investigate and get videos and pictures evidence to buttress our point.*"

The resolution phase involves **mediation between the parties** involved. A committee member noted that common grievances often arise from misunderstandings regarding contract terms, stating, "*The most common type of case is settling disputes between an employer and worker.*" For example, he described situations where employers impose additional duties not specified in contracts: "*Example is when an employer asked an worker to weed the farm twice or thrice a year but that wasn't involved in the contract.*" In such cases, the CLPC facilitates discussions aimed at clarifying expectations and reaching agreements that satisfy both parties.

The analysis of ICI's piloted grievance process in Ghana, particularly through the lens of the CLPC, revealed a complex interplay of roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by stakeholders in addressing worker rights and child protection issues in the cocoa sector. This narrative assessment delves into the grievance approach employed by the CLPC, the referral systems in place, and highlights areas for improvement based on qualitative insights from committee members. The types of grievances reported to the CLPC in Ghana's cocoa sector reflect a range of issues that impact both workers and employers. These grievances often stem from misunderstandings, contractual disputes, and serious concerns related to child welfare. The narratives provided by committee members, workers, and employers revealed the complexities of these grievances and the mechanisms used to address them.

As seen above, a predominant type of grievance involves disputes between employers and workers regarding contract terms often stemming from the absence of clear written agreements. Child labour and child protection issues also form a significant part of the grievances handled by the CLPC. A committee member noted the committee's commitment to ensuring child welfare: *"Child welfare is one of our core mandates... We are there to ensure all school-going age have access to education."* This commitment often manifests in cases where children are found working under exploitative conditions. A committee member explained how they identify potential child labour cases: *"You can observe such situations from children within the environment... You can see a child carrying goods which are beyond their strength."* Such observations prompt investigations into the circumstances surrounding these children, emphasizing the committee's proactive approach to protecting vulnerable populations.

3.4 Referral Systems

However, not all grievances can be resolved locally. The committee has established protocols for escalating sensitive cases that require external intervention. A committee member mentioned that if disputes cannot be amicably settled or involve serious allegations such as defilement or threats, these cases must be referred to higher authorities: *"If we settle disputes and there isn't agreement from the parties involved, then we have to take it to higher institutions."* This protocol underscores the importance of recognizing when issues exceed their capacity to mediate effectively.

An example of how sensitive grievances are handled was provided by a committee member when discussing child protection issues. He stated, *"Sensitive cases like child labour require us to inform the victims about the implications... If he or she (the parent) refuses to listen to our advice, then we refer the case to higher authorities."* This careful handling ensures that individuals in vulnerable situations receive appropriate support while also maintaining accountability for those responsible for abuses.

The coordination and referral mechanisms among district actors and community-based structures in Ghana's cocoa sector play a crucial role. Effective sharing of information regarding child labour cases, along with follow-ups, fosters collaboration that is vital for resolving these issues. Stakeholders, including the CLPC, local authorities such as the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVSU) and the Department of Social Welfare, employers, and cooperatives must work together to address grievances and protect workers' rights, particularly in relation to child labour and abuse.

District actors emphasize that coordination among themselves and with community-based structures is vital for effective grievance resolution. A committee member of the CLPC, stated, *"When we went for the training, there were church leaders, elders, and representatives from workers who were all part of the committee."* This collaborative training not only fosters understanding among different stakeholders but also enhances the capacity to address grievances effectively. Another committee

member further elaborated, "*When we settle disputes, we have to take it to the higher authority, if necessary,*" indicating a clear protocol for escalating issues that cannot be resolved at the community level.

The integration of various district actors into the grievance mechanism enhances its effectiveness. A member of the CLPC, noted, "*We have their contacts and always get in touch with them,*" referring to local authorities like DOVSU (*Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit*). This connection allows for timely referrals when cases exceed the committee's capacity. Another added, "*Cases like threatening need to be referred to higher authorities according to our leader,*" underscoring the importance of having a reliable referral system in place.

Building trust among workers, employers, and district actors is essential for effective grievance resolution. One member emphasized the importance of education in fostering this trust: "*We mostly educate people at durbar grounds, information centres, and funeral grounds.*" By actively engaging with community members in familiar settings, the CLPC enhances awareness about their roles and functions.

Employers also recognize the value of cooperation in resolving grievances. One employer remarked, "*Having a committee like this helps us avoid misunderstandings; it's easier to resolve issues when both parties know what was agreed upon.*" This acknowledgement reflects a willingness among employers to engage constructively with grievance mechanisms.

4

Findings on the grievance mechanism process

4.1 Overview of how the grievance mechanism is working in the communities

The grievance mechanism has shown significant success in resolving various types of disputes within the community. One of its key strengths lies in mediating conflicts between employers and workers. A farm caretaker recounted how the committee successfully resolved a dispute over work responsibilities: *"I am a caretaker of a farm, and there was a day when my employer and I decided to water the farm. It is the responsibility of the employer to support me in that process, but he refused and imposed all the work on me. I also decided not to do it alone, so when we sent the case to the committee, they called my employer and me to settle the dispute amicably."* This example illustrates the committee's ability to bring parties together and facilitate peaceful resolutions.

The mechanism has also been effective in addressing potential misconduct and improving relationships between workers and farm owners. One respondent noted: *"The last time I had issues with my farm owner, it was settled peacefully, and the relationship between us is much better than before."* This suggests that the mechanism not only resolves immediate conflicts but also contributes to long-term improvements in working relationships.

Furthermore, the committee has been successful in settling land disputes and assisting with documentation issues. An employer mentioned: *"I have two different farms. The necessary documents have been completed for the first one, and the second one is still in the process of being finalized. I can say that the committee has helped me."* This demonstrates the mechanism's role in formalizing agreements and preventing future conflicts.

Despite these successes, the voluntary nature of the committee's work also presents challenges. A respondent noted: *"What is not good is that they don't get support, so resolving cases takes longer because it is voluntary work. When a case is brought to them, it takes time for them to resolve it."* Additionally, the committee's lack of formal authority was identified as a limitation. One suggestion was: *"They should be given identity cards to be recognized properly. Although they cannot judge all cases, they can serve as the first point of contact when there are issues before moving the cases to higher authorities if it is beyond their scope."* This indicates that providing identity cards to committee members could enhance their recognition and legitimacy within the community.

4.2 Awareness and Accessibility

The community grievance mechanisms implemented have been largely well-received by workers, who view them as an accessible and effective means of resolving labour disputes. Based on conversations with workers, several key thematic areas emerged regarding awareness, accessibility, effectiveness, and potential improvements for these mechanisms.

Awareness of the grievance mechanisms was a crucial factor in their success. Workers reported learning about the committees through various channels, including public announcements, community gatherings, and direct outreach. As one worker stated, *"There was an announcement at the information centre that a grievance mechanism in the community that settles disputes between an employer and worker."* Another mentioned, *"They also came to our houses to teach us about their work."* This multi-pronged approach to raising awareness seems to have been effective in reaching a wide range of community members.

The **accessibility of the grievance mechanisms** was generally viewed positively by workers. Many appreciated that committee members were from their own communities, making it easier to approach them with issues. As one worker explained, *"For instance, in court, because of the nature of the environment, you will fear sending cases to them, but because the Community Labour Protection Committee members are mostly our family members and the people we live with, it is easy to send our grievances to them."* The lack of fees and the quick resolution of cases were also highlighted as significant advantages. One worker stated, *"Within a maximum of 4 days, the case would have been settled. If they are not able to settle, they will add an additional 3 days."* This efficiency and lack of financial burden made the mechanisms much more accessible than formal legal processes.

Workers' overall view of the grievance mechanisms was overwhelmingly positive. They appreciated having a local, accessible avenue to resolve disputes without the cost and complexity of formal legal processes. One worker summarized this sentiment: *"We prefer going to the committee. When you go somewhere else, it is a hassle. Because of too much [complexity], we would prefer the committee that is in our vicinity and makes everything faster than that of the police station."* The mechanisms were seen as effective in improving relationships between workers and employers. As one participant noted, *"The formation of this committee has ensured that our bosses are spoken to, which has ended the misunderstandings that occur with our payments."* Another worker added, *"The committee has made our farm owners consider our welfare in a much better way."*

4.3 Trust and fairness of the grievance mechanism

Trust in the fairness and impartiality of the committees was generally high among workers. Many felt that the committees treated all parties equally, regardless of their status or position. One worker explained, *"They make sure to listen to both parties and make judgments without fear or favour so that the one who is guilty is brought to book."* This perceived fairness contributed significantly to workers' confidence in the mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the mechanisms in resolving disputes was widely acknowledged. Workers who had direct experience with the committees reported positive outcomes. One worker shared their experience: *"I remember I had an issue with my farm owner. We made a verbal agreement that I would work on his farm for three years and we would share the profit based on what we all agreed on... People heard of the issue and one committee member decided to intervene. He also informed the other committee members, and the case was resolved."* The mediation process was viewed as helping to address power imbalances between workers and employers. By providing a neutral forum and educating both parties on their rights and responsibilities, the mechanisms helped level the playing field. As one worker noted, *"They are always patient to talk to the two parties who are involved so that the necessary investigations are done to bring judgment fairly."*

The importance of community support was also stressed by many workers. They felt that respecting and encouraging the committee members was crucial for the success of the mechanisms. One worker suggested, *"We should respect every member of the committee so that when an issue arises and we bring it before them, they can provide a swift judgment."* Some workers also highlighted the potential for the mechanisms to address more serious issues within the community. One participant recounted a tragic incident from the past: *"There was a killing in 1995 where a worker was killed by his employer because he reported an issue to the chief."* The existence of the grievance mechanisms was seen as a way to prevent such extreme outcomes by providing a structured, fair process for resolving disputes. The role of the mechanisms in promoting better working conditions and preventing exploitation was also noted by several workers. One participant stated, *"The committee has promoted*

better working conditions, and we no longer have to go all the way to the police stations to make complaints." This comment reflects the broader impact of the mechanisms beyond just resolving individual disputes.

In essence, the community-based grievance mechanisms have been well-received by workers in Ghana's cocoa-growing communities. They are viewed as accessible, fair, and effective means of resolving labour disputes and improving worker-employer relations. While there is room for improvement in areas such as resources, training, and technological support, the overall sentiment is overwhelmingly positive. As one worker succinctly put it, *"The committee has ensured that all grudges and misunderstandings we have with our bosses are worked out and resolved peacefully."* This statement encapsulates the fundamental value that these mechanisms bring to the communities they serve, fostering harmony and fair treatment in labour relations.

4.4 Benefits of Contracts

The implementation of written contracts in the Ghanaian cocoa sector has proven to be a crucial mechanism for resolving conflicts between employers and workers. Written contracts serve as formal agreements that delineate the expectations, rights, and responsibilities of both employers and workers. Many stakeholders recognize that the absence of clear contractual agreements often leads to misunderstandings and disputes. One of the primary benefits of the CLPC is its role in empowering workers through education and awareness about their rights. A committee member, emphasized this when he stated, *"At first, the workers didn't know there should be a contract with the farm owners so that in case of future disagreement they can go back to the contract."* This newfound understanding has empowered workers to demand written agreements, which serve as a safeguard against exploitation.

The introduction of written contracts has significantly improved clarity in labour relations. By stipulating specific duties and obligations, these contracts provide a reference point for both parties in case of disputes. For instance, a committee highlighted a common grievance: *"An example is when an employer asked a worker to weed the farm twice or thrice a year but that wasn't involved in the contract."* In such cases, having a written contract allows the CLPC to mediate effectively by referring to the agreed terms.

The process of conflict resolution facilitated by written contracts typically begins when a grievance is reported to the CLPC. A committee member explained that grievances are documented during intake meetings where all parties involved are called to discuss the issue. The committee then reviews the relevant contract to clarify expectations and obligations. This structured approach aids in resolving disputes while reinforcing the importance of having formal agreements. For example, if a worker claims they were unfairly assigned extra duties not outlined in their contract, the CLPC can reference the document during mediation sessions. This practice ensures that resolutions are based on agreed-upon terms rather than subjective interpretations, fostering a sense of fairness and transparency in the dispute resolution process.

Both workers and employers have expressed their views on the impact of written contracts on conflict resolution. Workers appreciate having a formal document that protects their rights. A worker stated, *"Now we know that we have something to refer back to if there is any disagreement,"* highlighting how written contracts empower them to assert their rights. Employers also recognize the value of written contracts in fostering clearer communication and expectations. One employer remarked, *"Having a contract helps us avoid misunderstandings; it's easier to resolve issues when both parties know what was agreed upon."* This sentiment reflects an understanding that clear agreements can mitigate

potential conflicts before they escalate. Another employer emphasised *"The benefit that we have gotten from the committee is that at first, we didn't know there should be a contract between an employer and workers. We were doing it verbally in terms of agreement between employers and workers. So, the Community Labour Protection Committee has helped us to know that if you are a worker, it is good to have a contractual agreement with an employer to prevent cheating in the future."*

The benefits of implementing written contracts extend beyond immediate conflict resolution; they contribute to a broader culture of accountability and professionalism within the cocoa sector. By formalizing agreements, both employers and workers are more likely to adhere to their commitments. One respondent remarked on this shift: *"At first, workers didn't know there should be a contract with farm owners so that in case of future disagreement they can go back to the contract."* This newfound awareness encourages workers to demand formal agreements before commencing employment, thus empowering them to assert their rights. Additionally, written contracts serve as educational tools for community members about their rights and responsibilities. The CLPC utilizes training sessions to inform workers about labour laws and contractual obligations. A committee member noted that through training provided by organizations like CHRAJ and the Labour Department, they learn how to handle cases involving breaches of contract effectively. This knowledge equips them with the skills needed to advocate for fair treatment within labour relations.

5

Identified gaps & recommendations

5.1 Gaps in Grievance Handling Process

Some gaps exist that hinder the effectiveness of this process. An analysis of these gaps revealed critical areas for improvement, as articulated by committee members and stakeholders involved in the grievance mechanism.

One significant gap in the grievance-handling process is the **lack of resources**, particularly in terms of logistical support. A committee member highlighted this issue when he stated, "*The work is voluntary so we don't have money to follow up on cases that are either referred to higher authorities or make follow-ups on victims.*" This financial constraint limits the committee's ability to conduct thorough investigations and provide ongoing support to victims after initial grievances are addressed. The absence of adequate transportation, as noted by another committee member, exacerbates this issue: "*When a case is brought before us... sending a member to deliver the message becomes difficult due to unavailability of motorbikes.*" Without reliable transportation, timely communication with involved parties becomes a challenge, potentially delaying resolutions and diminishing trust in the grievance mechanism.

Additionally, there is **inadequate clarity regarding the referral process** for sensitive cases. While the grievance mechanism process provides for straight referral of criminal cases such as harassment or child labour issues after assessment, there is uncertainty about how and when (time) to refer these cases to higher authorities. A committee member remarked, "*Cases like threatening need to be referred to the higher authorities according to our leader.*" This highlights an existing protocol but also reveals a potential reliance on the advice of the leader of the committee in its application, as members may not always feel confident about when to escalate cases.

Despite the overall positive reception outlined in section 4 of this report, workers did offer suggestions for improvement. Many emphasized the need for more resources and logistical support for the committees. One worker suggested, "*The committee should be provided with motorcycles and Wellington boots because when an issue happens or a case is brought before them, they need to visit those involved in the villages to inform them to appear before the committee.*" The idea of providing some form of compensation or incentives for committee members was also raised. As one worker pointed out, "*There should be incentives for them. If they are able to settle our disputes, I think we should give them something like money to thank them.*" This suggestion reflects an understanding of the voluntary nature of the committee members' work and a desire to ensure its sustainability. To further improve awareness, workers suggested continued use of public announcements and leveraging existing community structures. One participant recommended, "*They can continuously visit schools, churches, and mosques in the area to raise awareness.*" The idea of using word-of-mouth within the community was also emphasized, with one worker noting, "*Anytime we meet like this, or we visit others, we can let them know about the committee.*"

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings from the qualitative study conducted, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance community-based grievance mechanisms in Ghana's cocoa sector.

- 1. Ongoing Training:** Continuous capacity building of committee members is essential to ensure they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to handle grievances effectively. This includes training on conflict resolution and mediation techniques, communication skills, and understanding of labour rights. Ongoing education for workers about their rights is also crucial

for empowering them to seek redress when needed. Regular workshops and training sessions can help reinforce these principles and ensure that both committee members and workers are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities.

- 2. Collaboration:** Ongoing collaboration and coordination between the committees and cocoa companies are vital for institutionalizing the grievance system and ensuring its continued effectiveness in promoting fair labour practices. Establishing regular meetings between committee members and company representatives can facilitate open communication, address grievances proactively, and foster a culture of mutual trust. Additionally, involving local stakeholders such as community leaders and NGOs can enhance the legitimacy of the grievance mechanisms and ensure that they are culturally appropriate.
- 3. Local Resource Mobilization:** Establishing community development funds can provide a sustainable financial foundation for grievance mechanisms. Advocating for district assemblies to allocate budgets specifically for committee training can enhance the capacity of these committees to function effectively. Furthermore, local resource mobilization efforts should focus on creating partnerships with cocoa companies to secure funding for ongoing training initiatives.
- 4. Provision of Logistics and Financial Incentives:** The CLPCs should be equipped with motorbikes to improve their mobility and accessibility to remote areas where cocoa farmers may reside. This logistical enhancement will enable committee members to conduct timely visits, engage directly with workers, and address grievances more effectively. Additionally, offering other incentives, such as training opportunities or stipends for committee members, can motivate them to perform their roles diligently and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the grievance mechanisms. Moreover, establishing permanent structures for the CLPCs is crucial. These structures can serve as dedicated spaces for meetings, training sessions, and grievance hearings, ensuring that the committees operate in a professional environment conducive to resolving disputes. Such facilities would not only enhance the visibility of the committees within the communities but also signify a commitment to upholding labour rights in the cocoa sector.
- 5. Technology Integration:** Integrating community-based grievance mechanisms with companies' digital monitoring systems can enable better tracking, documentation, and responsiveness to issues. Technology can facilitate data analysis and help identify patterns or recurring problems that need to be addressed systemically. For instance, implementing mobile applications or online platforms for grievance reporting can make it easier for workers to submit complaints anonymously and receive timely updates on their status. The use of technology aligns with modern practices in labour relations where data-driven approaches enhance transparency and accountability.

6

Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

The qualitative study conducted provides a comprehensive analysis of community-based grievance mechanisms set up by ICI in Ghana's cocoa sector. This research emphasizes the critical importance of local ownership and community engagement in addressing labour rights issues, aligning closely with the ILO's principles of decent work and worker empowerment (ILO, 2018).

The study revealed a multifaceted grievance handling process involving a diverse array of stakeholders, including workers, employers, local authorities, company representatives and CLPC members. This collaborative approach reflects the intricate nature of labour relations within the cocoa sector and underscores the need for inclusive solutions to workplace disputes. A predominant issue identified is the prevalence of disputes between employers and workers, often stemming from misunderstandings of contract terms. This finding highlights a broader concern within the ILO framework regarding the enforcement of labour rights and the necessity for clear communication and understanding of employment contracts.

The data collected during the study revealed that many grievances arise from contractual disputes, emphasizing the urgent need for improved education on workers' and employers' rights and responsibilities. This knowledge gap not only leads to conflicts but also perpetuates a cycle of labour rights violations that could be mitigated through targeted educational initiatives.

Child protection issues form another significant component of grievances reported to CLPCs, aligning closely with ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO, 2018). This is essentially so because, where there are existing CCPCs, the CLPCs is leveraging on their activities to include labour rights issues. This enhances dual functionality in addressing both labour rights and child protection issues. While community mechanisms have made progress in addressing these issues, the findings suggest that further training and resources are required to enhance their effectiveness. Committee members noted challenges such as transportation difficulties and financial constraints that hinder their ability to follow up on cases effectively. These practical limitations echo concerns raised in existing literature about resource constraints impacting labour rights enforcement.

The study identifies referral systems used by CLPCs as a critical area for improvement. While local committees play a vital role in mediating disputes, there is sometimes inadequate application of formal protocols for escalating unresolved cases to higher authorities. This gap can lead to inadequate resolutions and may perpetuate violations of labour rights (Löhr et al., 2021). Strengthening these referral mechanisms is essential to ensure that grievances are addressed comprehensively and that workers feel empowered to report violations without fear of reprisal.

Local ownership emerges as a crucial factor for the long-term success of grievance mechanisms. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for greater involvement in decision-making processes and emphasized the importance of community trust and education in fostering effective grievance resolution. This aligns with ILO recommendations promoting participatory approaches in labour governance, suggesting that empowering local communities can lead to more resilient systems capable of addressing labour rights abuses sustainably. By fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, these mechanisms can become more deeply ingrained in local practices and culture, ensuring their longevity and effectiveness over time.

Despite the progress made, the study identifies several challenges that need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of community-based grievance mechanisms. Limited resources and capacity often hinder CLPCs' ability to investigate and resolve cases effectively, with inadequate funding and transportation being common obstacles. The inadequacies of formal escalation protocols for unresolved cases can result in grievances remaining unaddressed, undermining the credibility of the system and potentially discouraging workers from reporting future violations. The need for continued education and awareness emerges as a recurring theme throughout the study. Misunderstandings about labour rights and contract terms highlight the importance of ongoing educational initiatives for both workers and employers. These efforts should not only focus on raising awareness of rights and responsibilities but also on fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding within the workplace.

6.2 Conclusion

The research underscores the necessity of a holistic approach to addressing labour rights issues in the cocoa sector. This comprehensive strategy should integrate the strengthening of community-based grievance mechanisms with broader initiatives aimed at improving working conditions, enhancing supply chain transparency, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. The study's findings emphasize the importance of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, international organizations, and private sector entities. By fostering partnerships and sharing best practices, there is potential to develop more robust and effective systems for protecting labour rights and resolving workplace disputes. A crucial aspect that emerges from the research is the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of community-based grievance mechanisms. Regular assessments can help identify emerging challenges, measure the impact of interventions, and guide the refinement of strategies over time. This iterative process of improvement is essential for ensuring that these mechanisms remain relevant and effective in the face of evolving labour market dynamics and societal changes. The study also highlights the potential role of technology in enhancing the effectiveness of grievance mechanisms. While respecting the importance of face-to-face interactions and local cultural norms, the judicious use of digital tools could streamline case management, improve data collection and analysis, and facilitate more efficient communication between different levels of the grievance handling system.

In a nutshell, the qualitative study on ICI's community-based grievance mechanisms in Ghana's cocoa sector provides valuable insights into the complexities of implementing effective labour rights protection systems in agricultural settings. By highlighting the interplay between local practices and international standards, the research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how to address labour rights issues in a manner that is both contextually appropriate and aligned with global best practices. The findings underscore the critical importance of empowering local communities, fostering transparency, and building capacity at all levels of the grievance-handling process. They also emphasize the need for ongoing education, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts to overcome the identified challenges. As the global community continues to grapple with issues of labour rights and sustainable development in agricultural supply chains, the lessons learned from Ghana's cocoa sector offer valuable insights that can inform similar initiatives.

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