

FUNDED BY THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Independent Final Evaluation of the Combating Child Trafficking Through Education in Benin Project: Education First

Catholic Relief Services

Cooperative Agreement Number: E-9-K-3-0062



2007

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APE	<i>Association de Parents d'Elèves</i> (Parent Teacher Association)
AME	<i>Association de Mères d'Elèves</i> (Parents' Association for Mothers Only)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
EFP	Education First Project
EI	Education Initiative
EPCC	Education and Protection Coordination Committees
FCFA	<i>Franc Communauté Financière Africaine</i> (Monetary Unit in Benin)
GTI	<i>Groupe de Travail Informel</i> (Informal Workgroup of NGOs, working on policy issues)
ICLP	International Child Labor Program
IGA	Income-Generating Activity
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
MFEE	Benin Government Ministry of the Family
NCCP	National Committee for Child Protection
NFE	Nonformal Education Centers
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking
PEC	Birth Certificate Program
PRA	Participatory Rapid Appraisal
TdH	<i>Terre des Hommes</i> (partner NGO for EFP)
TPR	Technical Progress Report
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDOL	United States Department of Labor
WE	World Education (partner NGO for EFP)
WFP	World Food Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

The “Education First: Combating Child Trafficking Through Education in Benin” project, or Education First Project (EFP), is implemented through a cooperative agreement between Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), under the Education Initiative (EI). CRS also collaborated with two other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs): *Terre des Hommes* (TdH) and World Education (WE). The EFP is financed by USDOL’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), under the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT). In recent years, OCFT has significantly expanded its activities to include research on international child labor, forced labor and human trafficking; to administer grants and contracts to organizations engaged in efforts to eliminate child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking; and to raise awareness about these issues.

The EFP goal is to combat child trafficking by improving educational opportunities for vulnerable children in three regions in Benin (Zou, Borgou, Alibori), targeting 100 communities in these regions. In addition, the project supports the Catholic Church’s Caritas Centers and TdH’s Oasis Center. The Caritas Centers receive victim and at-risk children and provide vocational training over a three- to four-year period. The Oasis Center is a transit center that receives victim children, provides initial training and counseling, and prepares the children’s return home.

The project activities are divided into four categories, including (1) awareness raising; (2) improved access to education; (3) institutional strengthening; and (4) sustainability.

Raising awareness on child trafficking has taken place through cooperation with local radio stations and discussion groups organized in the target communities. Paralegal volunteers organized by the parish were responsible for conducting awareness-raising sessions. In addition, village facilitators helped local parents’ associations (APEs: *Association de Parents d’Elèves*)¹ to set up EFP-sponsored micro projects in the target communities (e.g., for school infrastructure, school canteens, school supplies, birth certificates, etc.). The APEs, helped by the facilitators, identify local victim and at-risk children and makes a list of these children, who will receive particular attention to ensure their continuous schooling. Also, the project helped set up mothers’ associations (AME: *Association de Mères d’Elèves*) in 46 villages, which work in cooperation with the APEs, focusing on specific issues such as keeping a hygienic and healthy learning environment, and following up on absent children (reasons of absence, and eventual security issues). Additionally, the project has assisted 29 communities in setting up “Study Spaces,” which are spaces in the village where children can gather to attend after-school activities. In all, 176 such Study Spaces have been equipped by the project (with a lantern and blackboard) out of 233 operational study spaces.²

¹ The APE is the African equivalent to the U.S. Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

² Each of the participating 29 communities with “Study Spaces” has organized between 4 to 10 such study spaces in the village.

Evaluation Methodology

The EFP was evaluated at midterm, in April 2006. This evaluation was a final evaluation and took place in Benin from May 15 to May 24, 2007 (nine days of fieldwork).

The final evaluation made use of methods related to the evaluative needs of the project's stakeholders, as identified through discussions with local stakeholders and with the OCFT. The purpose of the evaluation was to proactively help stakeholders in planning future activities (not necessarily linked to this project, since it is in its final stage) and to retroactively judge the project's merit and worth. In addition, an objective-based evaluation approach was used, determining whether the objectives of the project had been achieved. During the evaluation, a mixed approach was used, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Evaluation Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

A number of local NGOs were associated with the EFP during the project's first 18 months. This cooperation was discontinued and the project instead opted, for budgetary reasons, to work directly with community facilitators to implement community activities. The project's main intervention is at a decentralized level, coordinating activities between local actors involved in the fight against child trafficking (defense, police, judiciary institutions, APEs, Caritas Centers, Oasis Center, etc.). At the central level, the project set up an NGO working group (*Groupe de Travail Informel*, GTI) to work on policy issues with central government agencies.

Most of the project objectives have been achieved: the project is reducing child trafficking through awareness raising and improved education opportunities. Project activities have led to an increased awareness about child trafficking and education; better learning opportunities; the detection, rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration of victim children; and the protection of at-risk children through formal and nonformal educational opportunities.

Two project targets were not achieved (i.e., the nonformal education [NFE] centers [19 out of 50 realized]³ and the number of direct beneficiaries [victims], which is expected to reach 1,400 instead of the initially planned 1,500.⁴ The project exceeds its initial expectations in most other targets.

The partnership between the three NGOs has been a productive experience, although the project has experienced some challenges due to differing project visions of these three different NGOs. As a result, instead of benefiting from a coordinated project implementation, the project has evolved into two separate components, one focusing on education, the other on protection.

The project's decentralization strategy has led to a strong local coordination of activities. EFP has also initiated and been a key actor in GTI on policy issues at the national level. GTI's

³ This evaluation has not counted the Caritas Centers among the NFE centers because they were initially classified as vocational centers by the project and have very different characteristics compared to the project-initiated community-driven NFE centers.

⁴ According to the latest data received (June 2007), the number has reached 1,388 victim children withdrawn.

connections with the National Committee for Child Protection (NCCP) and the Ministry of Family (MFEE) have helped to improve awareness and strengthen collaboration at a central level. However, the project's coordination with other central government institutions, such as the Ministry of Education or the Direction of Literacy and Adult Education (*Direction Nationale de l'Alphabétisation et de l'Education des Adultes* within the *Ministère de la Culture et des Communications*) has been very limited, which was attributed by CRS to frequent staff turnover in these institutions, preventing the establishment of regular working relationships.

As a result of the final evaluation fieldwork, three types of recommendations were made:

1. **Recommendations for new project designs:** In particular it is recommended that new project activities offer integrated poverty alleviation services to the beneficiaries, including food security-related services. The projects should use participatory approaches in designing these services. It is further recommended that future projects consider the use of APEs, AMEs, and Study Spaces to enhance protection of children, since use of these groups has led to good results in the EFP. In particular, many communities reported that the creation of AMEs and study spaces led to better monitoring of at-risk children and a greater involvement of community women in protection activities.
2. **General recommendations in the field of education and protection in Benin:** It is recommended that stakeholders discuss which protection function should be implemented by which organization or institution. In particular, it is important to reach consensus on the protection function of APEs, AMEs, Study Spaces, and Vacation programs.
3. **Specific recommendations for this project's ending phase:** More immediately for the current EI project—communicate with local partners, APEs, AMEs, etc. that the project is phasing out. Less immediately, and for future projects, since the AMEs are newly created and need further training, the Study Spaces have just been equipped, and Summer Vacation programs are just beginning—have EFP seek funding to continue at least a minimum of activities in its target villages for some time beyond the project's formal ending date. Further, it is recommended that project management seek to help the Caritas Centers to locate funding for vaccination and medical assistance to treat cases of abuse. Although this was not an objective of the EFP or a part of its budget or implementation plan, it is deemed that such intervention merits urgent attention. Finally, it is recommended to conduct training sessions for both project staff and teachers on the disciplining of children and, in particular, how to interact with victim children.

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I EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

As a part of its implementation cycle, the Education First Project (EFP) was evaluated at midterm, in April 2006. A final evaluation took place in May 2007. The evaluations of Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) projects have four main goals, addressing the needs of different levels of project stakeholders:

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

In addition to the above evaluation goals, the grantee and the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) suggested that the evaluation (1) capture the progress realized since the midterm evaluation until the present; (2) analyze the various inputs/activities and the results realized; (3) capture the general contributions of the project toward the fight against and/or reduction of child trafficking in the target areas, and (4) examine other perspectives that would render the impact of the project more sustainable. These topics were included in the evaluation. Additionally, the evaluation took into account the following issues, all suggested by the grantee:

1. The project placed more emphasis on direct assistance to victim and at-risk children than supporting local initiatives to increase access to education and/or child protection. Does this constitute a sustainable strategy to combat child trafficking and enhance child protection through education?
2. The socioeconomic/cultural settings in which all children are required to work in order to stay in school and also to contribute to the household's livelihood.
3. The challenges with the kind of child monitoring expected of the project, especially during school holidays.

These goals and objectives were addressed using evaluative methods based on the formative needs of the project's stakeholders. In this context, the evaluation was adapted to proactively help the project in its "exit" phase, as well as to retroactively judge its effectiveness in reducing child trafficking in a poverty context. Additionally, an objective-based approach (summative evaluation) was used, determining whether the objectives of the project were achieved. During the fieldwork and subsequent analysis, a mixed-methods approach was employed, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.

As much as possible, the fieldwork used a participatory approach, in which information-gathering was based on the stakeholders' self-assessment, collective knowledge production and cooperative action, stakeholders' involvement in the organization of the fieldwork, the collection and analysis of the data, and the actions suggested as a result of the evaluation findings. Also, a focus group reviewed and discussed the outcomes of the project and the findings of the evaluation after the stakeholders' meeting.

Various sources of information have been used to establish validity. These sources include (1) policy and project documents, including project progress reporting; (2) fieldwork data; and (3) research documents related to child trafficking in Benin.

The interviewees, as well as focus groups and classroom participants, can be divided into the following four broad categories: (1) civil servants, (2) project personnel staff, (3) children, and (4) *Association de Parents d'Elèves* (APE) members and parents (see attached matrix with a list of interviewees and questions in Annex 5). The sample was intended to gather information across a broad spectrum. Sampling of interviewees was therefore stratified, trying to cover all categories involved in the project. The selection of communities to visit during the field trip was based on both random and stratified sampling. The stratified sampling, among other criteria, was based on a Catholic Relief Services (CRS)/*Terre des Hommes* (TdH) classification of the protection situation of each target village. The interviews were based on unstructured and semi-structured questionnaires, and the interviews were conducted in an interactive, dialogical manner. The results of the evaluation were further probed and investigated with key informants.

During the evaluation, 20 interviews were conducted with 11 key project personnel, 4 government officials, and 5 other project stakeholders. Additionally, 12 focus group sessions were conducted with children, parents, AMEs and APEs. In total, about 100 adults participated in these sessions. Of the primary beneficiaries, 35 children in three NFE centers were debriefed, and the evaluator checked the classroom attendance and the project's provision of services to 170 children in school (all of the children were individually met for a short debriefing about their class attendance and the direct educational services they had received). The evaluation mission visited eight schools, two CARITAS Centers, and three nonformal education centers in two regions (Zou and Borgou). The questionnaire matrix in Annex 5 shows which questions were asked to which type of stakeholder.

A special Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) drawing technique was developed to obtain children's participation. Because of time constraints, this exercise, which entails answering questions through drawings, could only be implemented in one village (Tamarou). The questions were adapted to the children's situation and consisted of one or two general question(s) about the child's situation (e.g., "What are you doing after school?"). The facilitator (the evaluator assisted by EFP staff) then inquired about the picture—moving attention away from the person and onto the drawing—allowing for greater depth of analysis. This method is usually more efficient than asking the question outright (in a group, answers will normally be repeated). By having children draw the responses, the individual's perception of his/her own change was demonstrated.

The findings of the evaluation were presented in a stakeholders' meeting (see Annex 1), which was constructed as a member check and a peer-debriefing session to verify whether the

conclusions from data analysis and fieldwork were accurate. Accordingly, the meeting had as its main objective to verify with the respondent groups the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations that resulted from data collected and analyzed. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the stakeholders' meeting are included throughout the evaluation report and constitute an integral part of the findings.

Limits of the evaluation: The scope of this evaluation did not permit any analysis of project budgets and expenditures against implementation needs. Hence, the evaluation did not engage with the project management about the budget items of the project. Evidently, in the space of nine days of fieldwork, the evaluation could only visit a limited number of sites.

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II FINDINGS

The findings are divided into five sections, addressing project design, implementation, partnership and coordination, management and budget, and sustainability and impact of the project. The questionnaire matrix in Annex 5 has been used to organize each section.

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

The EFP has been implemented by CRS (lead), TdH, and World Education (WE). Its goal is to combat child trafficking by improving educational opportunities in three regions in Benin (Zou, Borgou, Alibori). The project's activities are divided into four categories, including (1) awareness raising, (2) access to education, (3) institutional strengthening, and (4) sustainability. The activities under these categories include awareness-raising campaigns, as well as improvement of school opportunities and the setting up of systems for protection of victim and at-risk children in 100 communities. Also, the project participates in local and international initiatives related to child protection and education.

1. *The design complements existing government efforts*

The current Benin Government (elected in March 2006) focuses its policies on human rights and has recently passed laws on free education and restricted modalities of travel for children (to prevent child trafficking). Also, a current program helps parents to establish birth certificates for children.⁵ The project has therefore been active in a period during which the government has increasingly focused on goals similar to those of the EFP. Some of this raised awareness at government level is due to EFP's actions, since the project-initiated Informal Workgroup (*Groupe de Travail Informel*, GTI) has been advising the government on child labor policies and has also been active in mobilizing government efforts against child trafficking.

The Benin Government and the Ministry of the Family (MFEE), in particular, rely largely on NGOs to address the problem of child trafficking. The project thus completes the government's active detection of trafficked children: government agents (police, *gendarmarie*)⁶ bring the children to different NGO reception centers (including the EFP-supported Oasis and Caritas Centers), and these centers then take care of the children. EFP agents facilitate the transfer and subsequent follow-up of the children.

⁵ Beninese children need a birth certificate (or a *Pièce d'Etat Civil*, PEC) in order to attend exams. The establishment of such documentation previously cost at least 5,000 FCFA (or about US\$10). Many children used to drop out from primary school because their family could not afford the additional direct (and opportunity) costs of establishing a PEC. The children who dropped out from primary school because their families could not afford the PEC were vulnerable to being trafficked.

⁶ The police structure in Benin is divided between the urban *police* (depending on the Ministry of Interior) and the rural police or *gendarmarie* (depending on the Ministry of Defense).

The EFP utilizes a comprehensive set of interventions to address child trafficking, including—

- Using APEs and mothers' associations (*Association de Mères d'Elèves*, AMEs) for protection of trafficked and at-risk children at the grassroots level.
- Encouraging the establishment of "Study Spaces," where school children can participate in after-school activities facilitated by older students (see photo in Annex 4).
- Following up on the organization of summer activities for children to prevent trafficking during holidays. This, together with reintegration services, counseling, and awareness raising, has created a set of practical activities that completes the government's policy initiatives.

2. Overall strengths and weaknesses of the project approach and strategy

Some of the project strategy's major strengths include the use of APEs and AMEs to create "protection systems"⁷ and raise awareness among the local population about schooling and child trafficking. Also, the use of three nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Catholic Church as implementation partners has led to a positive outcome since these organizations largely complement each other in the implementation of the project (e.g., World Education has extensive knowledge about Benin's education system, whereas TdH specializes in child trafficking issues).

The project targets school children during class time, and has also developed specific activities for out-of-school children (nonformal education initiatives) and for school children when they are not at school (Study Spaces and holiday activities have been organized). Further, the policy and awareness-raising work of the project has been instrumental in spreading information about child trafficking.

Major weaknesses of the project approach and strategy, according to project stakeholders, are related to not taking into account the poverty of project beneficiaries. For example, a key stakeholder said, "putting them [the children] in school is good," but "we need to address a range of issues that make the parents send them to work." The main challenges faced include poverty and lack of food security. One way the project design could have addressed this, according to stakeholders, is through the set-up of microfinance subprojects. It should be noted, however, that some studies have demonstrated that there is not a one-to-one ratio between poverty and trafficking. In other words, the "not-so-poor" may also be involved in trafficking, and the very poor are not necessarily involved in trafficking.

The one-sided focus on children's education fails to address a range of problems that are conducive to exploitive child labor. Accordingly, the project has chosen to address the trafficking situation "in width," instead of going "in depth." Instead of addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, and offering a more comprehensive package of services to a

⁷ With "protection system," I mean a community-based plan or structure to follow up on children. The plan aims ensure that children are attending school and not being trafficked.

limited number of beneficiaries, the project offers a limited package of services to a large group of beneficiaries. Finally, the one-sided focus on departure zones instead of considering the traffic flow (i.e., departure areas, transit zones, and employment areas of the trafficked children) has limited the effectiveness of the project. There are indications that the trafficking routes in Benin have changed, and that, in view of the new laws and of the awareness raising, it has become more hidden, i.e., child trafficking activities are not taking place overtly, during daytime, any more (these changes have partly come about because of the EFP's activities).

3. Realistic targets

The project targets⁸ were not realistic, because the project's duration was too short to consolidate⁹ its achievements, and its funding¹⁰ was too limited in view of the requested outputs. Most project stakeholders described the project targets as "realistic," but said that *the budget* was not realistic in terms of the output demanded. The project factors that limited the possibility of reaching all the target objectives were (1) insufficient funding in view of outputs required and (2) insufficient time to set up and consolidate efforts.

4. Unrealistic project budget

The budget for implementing project activities was inadequate and the leveraging of funds was a prerequisite for implementation of certain EFP objectives (please see below for details).¹¹ Most direct educational services to the projects beneficiaries have been provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)/TdH's cooperation in distributing school kits to the beneficiaries. The number of school kits was not sufficient to cover all the beneficiaries and, accordingly, the 2,150 kits received in the school year 2006–07 were divided to offer a direct service (in line with the definition of "direct service" of USDOL to 4,200 project beneficiaries).

The project design did not include a risk analysis of the project's ability to raise funds to implement the project's stated objectives. Many activities have stopped or have not been realized because of the inadequacy of the budget, including—

- Awareness-raising cooperation with the Catholic Church, in particular through radio was stopped in 2006.

⁸ It is here referred to the revised project version: 6,000 direct beneficiaries; 1,500 withdrawn; and protection of 4,500 at-risk children). Some targets were not met, particularly for the set up of NFE initiatives and for the withdrawal and reinsertion of victim children.

⁹ With "consolidate activities and achievements," I mean to strengthen certain activities, such as the newly set-up AMEs or Study Spaces.

¹⁰ The term *budget* or *funding* in this document refers to USDOL government and grantee matching funds (where made available).

¹¹ The original budget provision for the activities included US\$697,128 for the three awareness-raising campaigns; US\$585,477 for improvement of school opportunities in 100 communities; US\$576,492 for the set up of systems for protection of victim and at-risk children in the hundred target communities; and US\$128,903 for participation in local and international initiatives related to child protection and education (these numbers refer to the output-by-cost table in the project document, p. 27).

- Capacity-building and cooperation with local NGOs to implement project activities was stopped after 1.5 years of project implementation.
- Nonformal Education (NFE) centers' classes have not been set up according to targets.
- In some villages, very promising local efforts have not been followed up on (e.g., in Tamarou, EFP started an NFE school that was held in a local chapel). The villagers built an NFE school, which will be falling apart during this rainy season because of the lack of financing for a roof. (See photo in Annex 4.)
- The summer activities to prevent trafficking of children have not been sufficiently developed and followed up on since they started in the exit phase of the project.

5. Soundness of design theory

According to the project's computer-generated data system (the Field Monitoring Tracking System), the percentage of at-risk and victim children monitored by the project who have dropped out of school (7% to 9%) is lower than the overall percentage of children having dropped out of school in the project zones (12% to 16%). Since at-risk children are normally understood to have a higher-than-average dropout rate, the low dropout indicates that the project design theory is effective. Also, many respondents to this question noted that the education-based strategy of the project is "sound." Some key stakeholders, however, noted, "the project's strategy of putting children into school is good, but not sufficient to address the poverty situation that leads to trafficking." Therefore, a more comprehensive view of poverty and exploitive child labor should be taken. TdH is currently experimenting with a broader poverty focus in three pilot villages.

During the midterm evaluation, one core partner in the fight against child trafficking (a police officer (*gendarme*) in a high-prevalence area) noted that some projects may encourage trafficking by providing assistance to parents of trafficked children, thereby giving them a bonus in addition to the money received through the trafficking of the child (this effect is popularly known as "the bonus of trafficking"). This serious design flaw may be present in the project's design, since victim children are supposed to receive particular attention and assistance. However, in practical terms, the EFP management has been aware of the possibility of this problem and designed the interventions so as to prevent such effect.¹² Additionally, in the opinion of key project stakeholders, the fact that the project emphasized work through parents institutions rather than directly with victims reduces the tendency toward "bonus" trafficking. Accordingly, this adverse effect was not noted during the evaluation fieldwork.

Project staff criticized USDOL's definition of direct educational services and protection. The provision of a safe school environment, appropriate buildings, and latrines, are not counted as direct educational services; rather, they are counted as indirect educational services. The provision of school supplies to individual beneficiaries is counted as a "direct service," and

¹² The project did not provide general donations to families that had trafficked children in the hope that these gifts would make them stop trafficking children.

therefore, these beneficiaries are counted as direct beneficiaries. As one key project staff stated, “this simplistic view of educational services is similar to saying, ‘I got a pen; now I’m protected.’”

6. Design of summer school classes

The project is currently helping APEs and AMEs with the organization of summer activities for the coming holidays. However, there is no pre-established design for this activity. The project, for sustainability reasons, seeks to facilitate the set-up of vacation programs in interested communities, some of which already organized summer activities on their own prior to the project’s intervention. Also, the project lacks time and financing to systematize and follow up on summer activities. The midterm evaluation recommendation came too late in the project life to experiment and systematically establish summer classes. For details of the summer activities and their design, please see Output 4.1, number 17.

7. Support of the four EI goals

The project design has adequately supported all four EI goals:

- EI Goal 1, awareness-raising and mobilization of actors to improve and expand education infrastructure, has been addressed through a range of awareness-raising efforts, including radio programs, training of APE and AME members, the effort of the church “paralegals,” and micro projects to strengthen local school infrastructure.
- EI Goal 2, strengthening of formal and transitional educational systems that encourage working children (and those at risk of working) to attend school, has been supported through (1) negotiation with local school authorities to accept inscription of children above the normal school age to enter formal schooling programs; (2) follow-up on schooling of victim and at-risk children through the intervention of APEs and AMEs; (3) expanding NFE and vocational training offers for children who are above school age (or for working children in non-WFCL situations); (4) enrollment of at-risk and victim children in the Caritas Centers; and (5) rehabilitation of victim children in the Oasis transit center.
- EI Goal 3, strengthening of national institutions and policies on education and child labor, has been supported through the EFP’s initiation and participation in the GTI.
- EI Goal 4, long-term sustainability of the efforts, is supported through the building of capacity at the APE and AME levels. It should be noted that APE and AME members are elected for a period of three years, renewable once.¹³ This periodic renewal of the members on the APE committee somewhat reduces sustainability at this level, though the project is striving to maintain an information crossover system from older to new members to improve sustainability. The creation of AMEs has had a further beneficial

¹³ It should be noted that the three-year mandate limit is not true for all AMEs, and even APE officers do not always respect the three-year rule.

effect on the sustainability of activities: AME members are frequently seeking election in the APEs during renewal of this latter's bureau. An exit strategy has been developed and is currently being implemented.

2.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project (1) raised awareness of child trafficking through cooperation with mass media and through APEs' and AMEs' work in the communities; (2) set up micro projects in the target communities (e.g., for school infrastructure, school canteens, school supplies,¹⁴ birth certificates, etc.); (3) provided individual attention to victim and at-risk children to ensure, as needed, rehabilitation, reinsertion and continuous schooling; and (4) pursued sustainable policies addressing the problem of child trafficking through cooperation among NGOs (through an informal NGO work group: the GTI).

8. *Effects of the midterm evaluation*

In general, the grantee's response to the midterm recommendations was very satisfactory. Some recommendations could not be implemented due to inadequate budget (e.g., for radio programs and other awareness-raising activities). Also, the recommendation to clarify some on the controversial issues between the project partners, e.g., on the project protection role of APEs and AMEs, was not acted on. In fact, the cooperation between the three implementing NGOs has not improved since the midterm evaluation. However, the less-than-optimal cooperation did not prevent a good relationship between project partners and satisfactory outcomes of the project.

Table 1: Grantee Responses to Midterm Recommendations

Recommendation (Midterm Evaluation)	Project Reaction and Effect
Design: Should be clearly outlined in a project document with realistic objectives in view of financing.	Some unclear design issues (e.g., on the definition of educational services to project stakeholders) were clarified and acted upon.
Design: Should not focus exclusively on the time the children are in school since trafficking often takes place during school holidays.	The project has encouraged and facilitated the organization of activities during school holidays (summer activities) and during teacher strikes (study spaces).
Design: Trafficking flows (not only departure zones) should be considered in future projects, to avoid trafficking routes being changed as a result of project intervention in a departure zone.	Project staff reported that new trafficking-related projects in Benin are increasingly considering trafficking flows (not only departure zones). This is the case, for example, for TdH's new project.
Implementation: Give attention to the nature of services being provided to direct beneficiaries, so as to avoid giving assistance that can be an incentive for parents to traffic children.	All direct beneficiaries have now received at least one educational service (in line with USDOL's definition of direct beneficiaries). The nature of the services was such that they would not encourage parents to traffic their children to obtain project gains.

¹⁴ The school supplies micro project was discontinued, as it gave the appearance of being a revolving fund.

Recommendation (Midterm Evaluation)	Project Reaction and Effect
Implementation: Increase the number of schools or centers offering alternative schooling for out-of-school and unschooled at-risk and victim children.	The number of NFE centers increased from two operational centers during the midterm evaluation to 19 centers at the project's end.
Implementation: Experiment with establishing school-and-work summer programs that prevent trafficking during the holidays.	The project has encouraged and facilitated the organization of activities during school holidays and during teacher strikes.
Implementation: Evaluate the awareness raising messages and strategies to determine if they need to be better adapted to the target group.	The budget did not allow the continuation (or evaluation) of radio and awareness-raising activities.
Partnership and coordination: Improve communication between USDOL and the project, for example, through regular teleconferences between Washington and key project staff.	The previously unclear and/or controversial issues between the project and USDOL (e.g., on educational services) are now understood. Communication between USDOL and the project seemed to be adequate.
Partnership and coordination: Build communication and/or cooperation with central institutions, in particular with the Ministry of Education and with the Direction of Literacy and Adult Education.	The project still had problems with the cooperation with central institutions because the turnover of key civil servants is frequent. However, the Caritas Centers now have an improved connection with central government institutions.
Management and budget: Organize a workshop for key project personnel, with the aim of establishing a work plan for the final phase of the project (this workshop could also address the issue of establishing an exit strategy for the project).	In September 2006, an executive meeting was organized to discuss the exit phase of the project, and the outcomes of the evaluation, and to set up an exit plan for the project. (Please see Section 2.4, numbers 31 and 32 for more details on the exit strategy and its effectiveness.)
Sustainability: Evaluate and, if needed, set up training procedures for new APE members (to ensure former members train new ones).	The creation and training of AMEs will help promote sustainability for the APEs (since many AME members expressed interest in being elected for the APEs).
Sustainability: Evaluate the possibility, and eventually advocate for, the inclusion of protection of victim and at-risk children into the APE mandate. ¹⁵	An agreement between the three implementing NGOs had still not been reached on this subject. This recommendation was not acted upon.
Sustainability: Set up a formal structure for active detection of victim children, rehabilitation, and reinsertion/reintegration.	Although a formal structure did not exist, the interviewees (during the final evaluation) found that the actors (e.g., police) had a possible means for quick intervention and reaction to trafficking problems.

¹⁵ During the midterm evaluation, there was no consensus on this issue among project stakeholders. Some emphasized that the APEs' mandate is exclusively linked to the formal school system, and that APE members should not be given any independent protection role, but could instead be involved in community anti-trafficking associations. Some project managers held the opposite view. It was recommended that the project management teams further discuss this point to reach a consensus, but this recommendation was not followed up on. In fact, the differences in opinion on this issue led to deterioration in the cooperation between the EFP implementation partners.

9. Project achievements¹⁶

Project Purpose (Logframe point B): Reduction of Trafficking¹⁷

At present, according to the project's Field Monitoring Tracking System, more than 7,000 recovered victims and detected at-risk children within the targeted communities are enrolled in formal or nonformal education programs (about 1,400 recovered victims¹⁸ withdrawn and 5,800 at-risk children prevented). School retention targets have been reached (according to the Field Monitoring Tracking System, the project counts a 7% to 9% dropout rate among its direct beneficiaries over the life of the project). The number of at-risk beneficiary children is about 16% higher than the target. The number of victim children is about 7% lower than target.

Project Output 1: Increased awareness about child trafficking and the benefits of schooling¹⁹

The project financed radio programs through cooperation with the Catholic Church's dioceses of Zou and Alibory (in Borgou, the diocese was not directly involved). At the parish level (in the target communities), listening and discussion groups were held by paralegals who were often connected to the Catholic Church. These activities have largely been discontinued since the summer of 2006 because the project budget did not allow the contracts with the radio stations to be continued. Instead, the APEs and AMEs have been educated on the problems caused by child trafficking and are, in turn, raising awareness on the issue in the communities.

Project Output 2: Access to education

Project Output 2.1: Local Education and Protection Coordination Committees improve access to appropriate education programs for recovered trafficked and at-risk children in the targeted communities

Initially, local Education and Protection Coordination Committees (EPCC) were created in many of the target communities. These committees' main constituents were the local APEs. Since many project stakeholders found the creation of a new village committee undesirable, the process of creating new EPCCs was halted and the project focused its main intervention efforts on APEs (and, since the autumn of 2006, AMEs). This evaluation strongly supports the project's strategy of using existing institutions (APEs) for protection and improved education access instead of creating new institutions (EPCC). The evaluator was initially skeptical of the newly created AMEs because they are new, project-created institutions. During fieldwork, it was noted that

¹⁶ The revised log frame of the project document (September 8, 2005) has been used to reply to this question. The project's achievements through means other than USDOL's financing have been considered outside the scope of this evaluation.

¹⁷ Project goal: Six thousand (6,000) recovered victims of child trafficking and detected at-risk children within targeted communities become enrolled and persist in formal or nonformal education programs (1,500 recovered victims withdrawn and 4,500 at-risk children prevented).

¹⁸ Latest project numbers, as of June 2007: 1,388 recovered victims. It is expected that the number get close to the target of 1,500 by the close of the project.

¹⁹ Project goal: Three awareness campaigns are held in the targeted communities during the project through radio programs; community-level listening and discussion groups are held by the paralegals.

these institutions were built on other organizations (e.g., women's tontines, for-profit, income-generating activity (IGA) associations) and the evaluator now strongly supports this new initiative. APEs and AMEs have improved retention in primary schools by monitoring the school attendance of victim and at-risk children (for details, please see Project Output 4.1, number 12). These organizations have also created after-school study spaces in the communities and have organized summer study activities in the communities as well.

Project Output 2.2: Existing formal education programs are strengthened in the targeted communities

All target primary schools have received some form of assistance. This assistance includes micro projects (see Output 2.4), TdH/UNICEF school kits, and school canteen assistance funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Project Output 2.3: Nonformal education (NFE) projects are strengthened or created within the targeted communities

Nineteen NFE centers have been created (total target was 50) in the targeted communities. These NFE centers have received some support from the project in the form of training and supplies.²⁰ The NFE centers enrolled at-risk and victim children who would not have been attending primary school, either because of poverty reasons, because of their age (some were considered too old to be enrolled in primary schooling), or because of cultural reasons (e.g., the families did not attach much value in girls' education).

Project Output 2.4: Community projects are undertaken to create a more favorable environment for the education of victims of trafficked and at-risk children

As noted in the midterm evaluation, the formal education programs have been strengthened through the set up of 76 micro projects, managed by the local APE in cooperation with the World Education fieldworkers. This component was largely finalized by the date that the project's midterm took place. A large majority of the micro projects are related to the improvement or construction of infrastructure; the remaining are related to the establishment of birth certificates (PEC), the creation of school canteens, provision of water supply, construction of school furniture, and the set-up of local shops selling school supplies. The infrastructure-related micro projects included reparation of classrooms, and the building of new classrooms, hangars, or lavatories.²¹

²⁰ At the initial implementation of the project and for subsequent reporting purposes, the project has included the 15 Caritas Centers as part of the nonformal education structures that served the targeted villages. The project progress reports include Caritas Centers when reporting on this target (hence, 39 NFE centers are counted for reporting period 7, covering 09/06 to 02/07, which corresponds to 78% of the target figure of 50 NFE Centers). The log frame states that "50% of [target] communities have nonformal education programs by end of project." Using the narrower definition, one finds that 19 of the target communities have NFE programs (which represent 38% of the target figure).

²¹ The APEs paid a contribution to complement the costs (the contribution varied between 20% to 40% of the total costs).

Project Output 3: Institutional Strengthening

Project Output 3.1: Systems for ensuring the education and protection of at-risk children are strengthened or created within the targeted communities

The APEs and AMEs are at the heart of systems for protection and education of at-risk children created within the communities. The tracking system is now much more reliable than at midterm. However, the data-gathering system is centralized at project management in Cotonou, and is expected to end at the project closing.

Project Output 3.2: Systems for protection and education of victims of trafficking are strengthened or created within the target communities

The system that tracks victim children in the project's 100 target communities is similar to the protection systems of at-risk children and mainly consists of APEs and AMEs following up on the children's school attendance.

Project Output 3.3: An integrated network is developed by the target communities and centers to provide a coordinated response to the challenges of educating and protecting victims of trafficked and at-risk children

The project has set up an informal network connecting project personnel, police/*gendarmerie*, and judicial institutions for active detection and protection of victim children. Current efforts of TdH have assisted the communities in setting up community-managed lists that are not sent to Cotonou (but are kept at the community level). This system, being very recently implemented, was in too early a stage to be evaluated at this time.

Project Output 3.4: The services of the Protection and Education Centers that recover victims of trafficking are expanded and improved

The project provides 14,000 FCFA (about US\$30) for supplies for each at-risk and victim child in the Caritas Centers. This amount covers less than 30% of the needed yearly budget for supplies for a child. The project's provision of this budget leads to marginally better supplies for the children. In addition to the direct funding, the project (TdH) also organized training sessions for Caritas Center staff.

The budget for these centers is inadequate. A particular concern is the health status of the at-risk and victim children. For example, no gynecological follow-up is available for sexually abused children.²² Further, the children do not always receive proper vaccinations. The centers "function like a family; the children receive vaccination when there is a vaccination campaign operating in the area." Vaccinations against tetanus would seem important, since much of the work and learning requires the use of sharp objects. It is also of extreme urgency to ensure that other vaccinations (e.g., polio) are administered to these children. The EFP project does not have any

²² For example, in a multiple-rape case, a girl had been sent to a generalist who could only deal with the symptomatic effects of her (poor) health condition. It was believed that the underlying reasons for her poor condition was a result of problems related to the rape.

health and medical component. The lack of vaccinations and appropriate medical follow-up of certain abused children is not under the scope of the original project design, nor is this intended as a critique of the Catholic Church, which is operating the Caritas Centers under a very limited budget. The reason that this evaluation mentions the health and vaccination problem is that it is a very serious one. It is strongly recommended that USDOL and other concerned donor organizations investigate the possibility for an urgent intervention to help address this problem.

The project covers 50% of the yearly cost of the Oasis Center. The financing is not targeted at improving any specific service, but enables the center to assist an increased number of victim children.

Project Output 4: Sustainability

Project Output 4.1: The project takes an active role in local, departmental, national, and international initiatives related to the protection and education of children.

The project has taken an active role in different policy initiatives related to the protection and education of children, especially through the creation of, and participation in, the GTI. This role includes organizing and attending GTI meetings, as well as engaging in informal follow-up with central authorities (especially with the National Committee for Child Protection [NCCP]) on child trafficking issues. The project has also taken an active role in local and regional work on education and trafficking, but its work with central institutions is limited. One main reason for the lack of connections with the different ministries is the rapid turnover of ministry staff, which makes it difficult to preserve a long-term working relationship between the project and the ministries.

The EFP has also facilitated the research and write-up of a number of studies on the situation of trafficking.

10. Data monitoring tools and systems

The project's M&E Officer developed a data-monitoring system based on Access, which the project used for follow-up on the children's schooling. The tracking system seems to be reliable, and very few problems were found during the field visits.²³ Since the tracking system is centralized at management in Cotonou, it may not be sustainable beyond the project lifetime. It takes time to develop good tracking tools, and it would be unfortunate if the system could not be used beyond the project's end. It is important to note that the sophisticated database is located in Cotonou, but tracking tools (such as user-friendly sheets) are at use at the field level. These tools are then forwarded to Cotonou for integration into the database, which actually means the Caritas Centers, the APEs, and others have gained experience with using these tools, which the EFP staff hopes will be used beyond the project

²³ Some data were not updated recently; a few children indicated as "abandon" had actually returned to school.

In addition to the data-monitoring system, TdH and CRS also codeveloped a questionnaire and monitoring system of each village's child protection system. The questionnaires focused on the community structures for protection (i.e., the existence of a community child protection committee, the existence of APEs and AMEs, etc.). This system has allowed the classification of the 100 target villages according to its level of protection. Currently, the project seeks to increase protection in the villages with low protection scores.

11. Collection of data on direct and indirect beneficiaries

According to the evaluation fieldwork findings, the project has accurately reported on USDOL common indicators. The monitoring lists were up to date: the lists verified during the evaluation mission contained very few errors. Of 170 children investigated during fieldwork, only 11 cases were not accurate, mainly because the child's situation had changed since last follow-up. The changes consisted predominantly of children who were indicated as "abandon," but who had since (1) returned to school; or (2) who had transited to another school. It is believed that the number of dropout (abandon) is actually slightly lower than the number indicated in project statistics and TPRs (7% to 9%, page 8).

All of the direct beneficiaries had received a direct educational service, in line with USDOL's definition of direct services. In most cases, these direct services consisted of provision of school supplies and/or uniforms (provided by a UNICEF/TdH collaboration).

If one is taking a larger view of the project and its design, it is uncertain whether it is worth putting so much energy into the establishment of an effective data system, since it is very difficult to get it "up and running." At the time of the final evaluation, when the system seems to work, the project is over. When project stakeholders were asked, "What now?" about the centralized monitoring system, they stated that it would be a pity to abandon it while it is working.

12. Tracking of the working status of the direct beneficiaries

The APEs and AMEs stated that they followed up on the work status of each child. Their follow-up, however, is mainly school-related and therefore is only tracking the working status of the children during school hours (it is assumed that a child attending school is not working). In most cases, however, the children are helping the parents at home (e.g, with fetching water, cleaning, preparing food, and helping in the fields). This work is considered as a part of the socialization of the child, and not as abusive child labor.

Most of the children attending NFE programs are in full-time employment: in Tamarou, of 20 children interviewed, all the children (average age of 12.6 years) were working. In all, 25% of the children were reported to be above the minimum age of employment. Most children worked for a full working day (8–12 hours) in the fields (35% of the children), to look after cattle (45%), and perform other work (20%). Similarly, in Gbozoun, all except 1 of the 15 interviewed children attending NFE classes were in full-time employment (the children's average age was

13.5 years, and many of the children were reported to be above the minimum age of employment).²⁴ Most of the children (60%) worked in the fields or as collectors of firewood (20%). It should be emphasized that these children were not working as a result of trafficking, and that formal schooling would have reduced their working hours if it were a feasible option for them.

13. Work plan

In general, the project adhered to its work plan. However, in view of the need to leverage funds to implement its planned activities, the project implementation did not always follow a smooth implementation path but instead had to rely on outside partners' contributions (e.g., for distribution of school supplies to the children).

14. Work with communities

One of the project's main outcomes is the training and strengthening of the management capabilities of the APEs. Through the project, APE members have received training in a variety of subjects, including management, identification and enrollment of local children at school age,²⁵ follow-up on victim and at-risk children, preparation for the school year, etc. This capacity-building has generally been successful, since most schools (teachers, headmasters) reported favorably on the improved support they received from the APEs (in terms of children enrollment support, follow-up on the children's schooling; and on logistical issues, including the follow-up and management of school cantinas). In addition, AMEs have been set up, which are reported by project staff to have an even greater capacity for following up on at-risk and victim children than the APEs.²⁶ Finally, the Study Spaces set up by the project since September 2006 may improve the quality of the education received and may also create a security system in case of teacher strikes (which have been frequent during the current school year), though it may be too soon to tell.

The project's work with other community institutions has been limited.

Concerning the project's Field Monitoring Data system (i.e., the lists used for identification and monitoring of at-risk and victim children), it was noticed that these lists were now up-to-date. However, their use has not been institutionalized as a tool for the APEs. Instead, these lists have often been considered as a project requirement. Hence, it is not believed that the establishment and follow-up on these lists are sustainable.

In addition to the aforementioned project Field Monitoring Data system, TdH has distributed notebooks to the APEs (the use of notebooks is probably a better alternative than using loose

²⁴ The age of children (especially unschooled children) is rarely known and is established more or less arbitrarily by the NFE facilitator.

²⁵ As noted above, the age of the children is often not known and must be "identified" (i.e., established more or less arbitrarily by the APE, the parents, or the teachers).

²⁶ During the evaluation mission, it was noted that the AMEs were generally very enthusiastic about the school and protection work, and the associations generally seemed to function very well.

papers) and attempted to train the APE members to keep lists of at-risk and victim children, including those who are out-of-school, unschooled, and in school (the information from these lists is not compiled into the project's data system). However, it is too early to know whether the APEs will perceive such lists as useful and whether they will continue to use them beyond the project life.

15. Project effectiveness in receiving, rehabilitating, reintegrating, and reinserting child trafficking victims

Many respondents found that the strategy of the project was “sound” and “effective.” The project addressed trafficking through a multipronged strategy: (1) awareness-raising on trafficking and education; (2) micro projects; (3) provision of school supplies to beneficiary children; and (4) follow-up of beneficiaries by APEs and AMEs, ensuring they attend school.

Most respondents noted that the main problem with the strategy is that the follow-up is limited to school-related activities and that the project does not address underlying poverty problems. The trafficking problem is mainly cited by stakeholders as a poverty problem, and the project has no way of compensating the opportunity costs for families enrolling their children in school.

16. Changes in education quality, as well as enrollment and dropout in the project communities

The project has improved the quality of education through the establishment of micro projects. For example, new or repaired buildings have made it possible for the children to attend school during rainy days (thereby making it possible for them to attend school more regularly). Also, the newly established Study Spaces are believed to improve the quality of learning, since older children and youth may help their younger schoolmates with their homework and also review the lessons with them after school, although it is too soon to tell. The provision of school supplies to the children may have improved the quality of the educational experience of the children. However, lacking data on the children's grades, it is very difficult to establish to which extent such supplies (or the set-up of Study Spaces) played a role in improving the educational environment of the children.

The enrollment of children has reportedly increased lately, especially as a result of a law rendering primary and pre-primary education free from tuition fees, and the launching of two free programs (RAVEC and PECSCO) to enable children to obtain the required legal status documents (birth certificates and identity cards), without which they could not be enrolled in public schools. These policies brought some new challenges that the project had to deal with, including a massive influx of new students into the limited school structures. It is difficult to assess to what extent the project has contributed to the recent increase of enrollment.

According to the project's Field Monitoring Data system, the dropout rate among the direct beneficiaries was 7% in the school year 2003–04 and 9% in 2004–05 and 2005–06 against an overall dropout rate of 16%, 12%, and 13%, respectively.

Table 2: Direct Beneficiary Dropout Rate, by Year

Dropout (percent)	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Average dropout rate	16	12	13
EFP students	7	9	9

It should be noted that the EFP children, by definition, are children who are vulnerable and likely to drop out. Their dropout rate should therefore have been much higher than the average dropout rate. With EFP intervention, however, their dropout rate is actually lower than the average. This lower rate indicates that the project theory is valid, and that for many students, the provision of school supplies and follow-up indeed constitutes a “tipping point” that makes the children remain in school, despite their general poverty context. It should be noted, however, that the distribution of school supplies came late in the project, and therefore probably may have had little actual and attributable affect on the retention numbers for 2003–04 and 2004–05. It could also be concluded that the provision of direct services may not be as important as the psychological aspect of being followed up on, and possibly, the hope of a future “present.”²⁷

The availability of alternative modes of education, e.g., NFE, is still very limited.

17. Vacation programs

The project did not set up a standard design for vacation programs after the midterm evaluation. Instead, the project focused, rightly (in my opinion) on the creation of AMEs in the villages. These AMEs, in turn, helped set up Study Spaces and were also often involved in setting up vacation programs. In some cases, where the villages did not have AMEs, the APEs would discuss summer activities. The village facilitators helped the APEs to set up activities. For example, the evaluation fieldwork in Tamarou village coincided with an APE meeting to discuss summer activities. An EFP facilitator facilitated discussion and, after an hour-long discussion, the APE came up with the following plan for the summer holidays: the children were to attend classes during August. Older students would teach younger children, and each child would contribute 100 FCFA (about US\$0.20) that would be used to pay for prizes (to be given to the most successful children, i.e., those having the best results from the informal grading). A committee was to be set up to monitor the children’s travels during the summer, to prevent trafficking.

The aforementioned “program” for summer holidays was apparently a fairly common way of organizing summer activities (i.e., many communities in Benin already used to organize these types of summer activities). In many cases, such activities were not created by the project, but had already been organized quite regularly by the community. The project’s follow-up on the issue enabled the communities to include child protection as a component of the summer activities, and also to plan the courses better, because a project facilitator would follow up on the

²⁷ During fieldwork, educational services were invariably referred to as *cadeaux*: “gifts” or “presents” (from the project to the children). Although these “gifts” may not be important in terms of improved school attendance or attainment, they are psychologically important in the communities.

planning sessions for the summer activities and ensure that the activities were well planned and that protection activities were included. It should be noted that the project intended to capitalize on, facilitating the communities' efforts to design holiday programs according to their own capacity for sustainability. As the project's resources were running out, with the project's end approaching, the project could not create new holiday program designs. Therefore it facilitated community efforts to design their own summer programs, which they can continue even beyond the life of the project.

18. Effectiveness of the awareness-raising activities

The awareness-raising activities of the project have been accomplished through several means: (1) The project has bought radio time for awareness-raising messages. Generally, the church dioceses have managed this part of the awareness-raising. (2) Paralegal volunteers (also church-related) have held awareness-raising meetings in the communities. (3) The TdH team has shown the movie, *Anna, Basil, and the Trafficant* in the communities and held awareness-raising sessions related to it. (4) The APEs and AMEs have raised awareness in the communities about the importance of education and the danger of trafficking. (5) At the national level, the GTI helped to raise awareness through its policy work with concerned government officials. At regional levels, the interaction with representatives from police and other institutions helped increase knowledge about the children's plight.

The effect of the awareness-raising initiatives was generally positive inasmuch as it turned public opinion against trafficking. Some respondents said that the messages had a positive impact on families that were involved in trafficking, many of which had not previously realized the danger of trafficking their children. A general saying in the villages (about trafficking) is that "when I eat sand, my children eat sand" (i.e., when I don't have enough food, the children will have to seek work; else they will suffer with me). During fieldwork, a village woman told us that her children would stay home, "even if they would have to eat sand with me." In other words, she had gained a new awareness about the trafficking situation.

Generally, the awareness-raising component of the project has been very successful, as evidenced by numerous interviews. It was inopportune that the project budget did not allow many of the awareness-raising activities to be continued until the end of the project.

During the evaluation fieldwork, interviews with children led the evaluator to believe that teachers frequently used corporal punishment as a method of maintaining their authority during classes. It was confirmed during subsequent interviews with project personnel and children that corporal punishment, although forbidden by law, is a frequent problem in schools. The project did not provide any awareness-raising to teachers on other means of disciplining children. Neither did it provide training and awareness-raising to staff members on how to treat children. Especially for victim children, it is important to have awareness-raising and/or training sessions on how to discipline without using verbal abuse or corporal punishment.

In some areas, the project also helped the local authorities to gain a better understanding of the trafficking problem, resulting in better cooperation between the project and the authorities.

19. Strengthening of national policies

The GTI has been working at the central policy level, especially with the child protection committee in charge of establishing an anti-trafficking law in Benin. The GTI is now working on the application decree of the law, so as to make its actual implementation effective. Some staff members have established a strong working relationship with the MFEE and continue to work on strengthening its role in child protection, particularly as a member of the NCCP, a structure involved in the coordination and supervision of the activities of different governmental and nongovernmental structures that are involved in the fight against child trafficking in Benin. Also, TdH is involved in meetings to discuss the situation of Beninese children who are trafficked for stone works in Abeokuta on the other side of the border in Nigeria. This work has strengthened the bilateral cooperation between the two neighboring countries on issues related to the trafficking of children from Benin to Nigeria.

Many of these activities are parallel to the work of EFP (and some are realized by the EFP staff members), but cannot be said to be a direct result of the project. However, the project has clearly made significant contributions to this result.

The project is mostly operating on a decentralized level. It has not established any special connection with the central ministries and has therefore not had any direct role in strengthening national institutions at the central level other than through its work with the GTI.

20. Factors outside the control of the project: Teacher strikes

A series of teacher strikes virtually stopped schooling for three months in the current school year, from November 2006 to January 2007. Its effect on the current school years' dropout rate is not known. The project-initiated Study Spaces may, in some cases, have helped counter the effect of the strike, since the students had access to learning in these Spaces instead of going to school.

21. Choice of target areas and willingness of local authorities to collaborate with the project

The project's choice of implementation areas did not enable the project to address trafficking flux, but made it almost exclusively focused on departure zones. As a result, there is some evidence that the trafficking routes have changed (i.e., that trafficking is reduced in zones with higher protection and moved to zones with lower protection). Hence it is important to work with trafficking flow, not only with departure zones, which will decrease and ameliorate the overall problem, rather than shift it geographically.

Except for the problem of not focusing on trafficking flux, the target areas were well-chosen, since local authorities in most communities recognized the trafficking problem and supported the activities of the project (at least verbally). Additionally, the Zou region is widely recognized as the region most affected by child labor and child trafficking in Benin.

According to project staff, no local authorities refused to cooperate with the project. The project staff apparently encountered problems in the villages of Agbanweme, Adawèmè, and Za-hla. However, according to interviewees, these problems were not connected to any refusal to

cooperate with the project, but rather to challenges caused by personal relationship issues (e.g., the chief of village and the head of the APE were in disagreement about the project activities).²⁸ In Adawèmè and Za-hla, normal project activities could be implemented, but in Agbanweme, no activity had been realized. When the evaluator visited the latter school, the APE and school headmaster said they had wanted to cooperate with the project, but that the project staff had not provided a regular follow-up. Since no other project implementation area had similar complaints, this does not seem to be an issue. One reason for the lack of interest by this particular school may be that it is located in the urban area of Bohicon, and is therefore a town school that may have different problems than the rural target villages.

22. Activities with greatest and least impact

No consensus existed on this issue. Most local stakeholders (both beneficiaries and community members) said, “All of the project activities are necessary.” Some underlined the project’s provision of direct educational assistance, e.g., school supplies, as a very positive factor (see footnote 27, p. 19 on “gifts”). Others, especially at project management level, said that these direct interventions had the least effect, since they did not address any of the underlying poverty factors that push children into child labor, thereby hindering their schooling (see p. 6). Also, some respondents noted that the micro projects were successful and created a positive local attitude towards the project. However, it is uncertain whether the micro projects’ approaches were the most cost-effective way to improve protection of children. Some respondents said that the micro projects should be components of a general education project, and not a component of a protection project, since they target the improvement of education (and infrastructure) as a whole, and do not focus specifically on protection or reinsertion per se.

During the evaluation fieldwork, it was noted that the AMEs were very enthusiastic and energetic. They seemed to have clear knowledge of the village situation and about the risks faced by the children. One of the most important activities of the project may be the creation and training of these AMEs.

Also, the policy work by the GTI and local policy work with police agents have raised awareness on the trafficking issue. In the villages, work through the radio programs and other awareness-raising means had visible effects (i.e., interviewed community members would often refer to these radio programs). Also, many officials (e.g., regional education representatives and staff) would refer to these programs when speaking about child trafficking.

As for less successful activities, during the evaluation fieldwork, the evaluator did not get any sense of the existence of dynamic EPCC committees. According to the project management, the project halted its focus on creating these committees and instead focused on the APEs. In view of field observations during the evaluation, this seems to have been a very sensible approach.

²⁸ In addition, according to project staff, the village chief and other key community figures were not receptive to the children’s rights-based approach of the project’s anti-trafficking interventions.

2.3 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

The EFP is based on the cooperation between three international NGOs, namely CRS, TdH, and WE. A number of other local NGOs were associated during the project's first eighteen months. Subsequently, this cooperation was discontinued and the project opted to work directly with community facilitators instead. The project's main work is at a decentralized level, coordinating activities between local actors involved in the fight against child trafficking (defense, police, judiciary institutions, APEs, Caritas Centers, Oasis Center, etc.). The project's coordination with central institutions such as the Ministry of Education or the Direction of Literacy and Adult Education has been very limited, if not nonexistent. At the central level, the project has participated and been a key actor in the GTI.²⁹ GTI's connections with the National Committee for Child Protection and the MFEE have contributed to improve awareness and strengthen collaboration at the central level.

23. Issues and challenges in managing the working relationship between the project partners

The partnership between CRS, TdH, and WE has generally been productive and the project has benefited from each NGO's comparative advantage: CRS has a very close connection to the Catholic Church and has been able to use this connection for awareness-raising activities and for cooperation with Caritas Centers for protection of victim and at-risk children. TdH has specific expertise in child trafficking and has been vital in the training of personnel in this area. WE has a long history with APEs in Benin, and has been able to raise awareness and build capacity at the community level, through coordination with APEs. WE has also been the lead agent for the set-up and training of the AMEs.

During the midterm and final evaluation, however, problems were noted in terms of each partner's comprehension of the project: each of the three NGOs brought its own mandate to the project. This has generally been positive, but could also at times be a problem, since each NGO has the tendency to stand up for its own field. While WE specializes in education-related work, TdH mainly works on issues related to trafficking and protection. At times some EFP personnel felt that 'their' mandate was not sufficiently taken into account by the project as a whole. The field activities were largely organized by APEs and local facilitators, who were reporting to WE. A number of project stakeholders held the view that these field activities were not sufficiently protection-oriented, since the training of APEs and the follow-up by the facilitators largely focused on education-related activities. This problem was already noticed during the midterm evaluation. However, it has further evolved since then, and during the final evaluation, there was a feeling of dealing with two different projects: one TdH protection project and one WE education project. CRS was perceived more as a bridge between the two projects than as a leader of the project. It should be noted that the project maintained the common identity of "Education D'Abord (Education first)" of the three partners, which sounded more like an Education project than anti-trafficking. CRS maintained the leadership through active coordination by the Project

²⁹ The GTI was created through EFP support.

Director. CRS's leadership of the project was interrupted for three months when the old PD left in November 2006 and the new one came on board in February 2007.

The aforementioned challenge was partially due to the lack of clear definitions in the project document. For example, the project document was unclear about the APEs' role in terms of protection and reinsertion. Hence, according to respondents from one NGO, the role of the project was to stimulate protection of at-risk and victim children through training of APE personnel, but not through redefining the APEs' educational mandate. Personnel from another NGO understood that the project should work both at policy and local levels to *include* protection in the APEs mandate.

The question of the project's role was discussed among the three collaborating NGOs at the time of the midterm evaluation. However, the issue was not resolved, and each NGO subsequently followed its own path, thereby creating its own project. As a result, some villagers were unclear whether they dealt with one or several projects, i.e., during the evaluation fieldwork, they were unsure whether the evaluator represented World Education and the "Education Project" or TdH and the "Protection Project."

24. Coordination with the host country government

The main problem with collaborating with the host country government was the frequent turnover of key personnel. The project did not establish contact with new government officials and, consequently, several civil servants interviewed at the MFEE and at regional administrative levels claimed that they did not know about the project.

The project established a connection with some central institutions through the GTI, in particular with the MFEE. It should be noted that Benin has a well-developed decentralized system of public administration. If projects are not clearly designed to improve central government capacity, collaboration is often through decentralized government structures such as the Education of Family ministries at the regional level. So with regard to the realization of most outputs, the project collaborated with decentralized government institutions; however, with regard to public and legislative advocacy, GTI worked at the central level. The project's cooperation with local institutions at the school district level (*circonscription scolaire*) has been well established. In general, the project contributed to raised-awareness about child trafficking and the importance of education at local levels, especially among police and legal institutions (e.g., judges).

25. Interest and participation in the project at the level of children, parents, teachers, administrators and other local actors

In the initial stage of project implementation, the APEs were encouraged to create community EPCCs. In general, most respondents were skeptical of externally, top-down created committees such as the EPCC or the UNICEF-sponsored Village Committee Against Child Trafficking. It was believed that the project's strength was linked to its capacity-building work among APEs and AMEs, not as theoretical institution building at the EPCC level and, consequently, the effort to create EPCCs was largely abandoned.

In particular, the project's work among AMEs seems to have greatly stimulated interest among parents and children. The Study Space initiative also generated interest among children. Other interventions, such as the viewing of the film, "Anna, Basil, and the Traficant," as well as radio programs, have also been very effective in generating local interest and buy-in to the project.

Local teachers and school administrators were generally positive about the project, since it helped improve the education environment. The micro projects helped improve the school infrastructure, many children received school supplies, and the APEs and AMEs started to provide better support to the school administration.

However, all the project activities were concentrated on AMEs, APEs, and the children; none were actually targeted at teacher training or curriculum improvement activities. Accordingly, some of the administrators and teachers said they felt left out, and emphasized their need for training and project support. Such support could have been advantageous and stimulated the teachers' commitment to the project. It would have been especially important to offer training on the subject of disciplining the children, especially on how to avoid corporal punishment.

26. Effectiveness of the project's partnerships with the local APEs, AMEs, and other community stakeholders

The APE committees are generally composed of farmers, shopkeepers, and retired civil servants (the latter often function as secretary or treasurer of the group, since they are literate). Generally, very few women participate in the APEs, a problem that WE addressed through stimulating the creation of AMEs in 46 communities. The project's work to create capacity at APE and AME levels is considered sustainable, since these associations are school-related associations that obtain some financing from the government (APEs) or are connected to older IGA circuits (AMEs are often linked to tontines³⁰ and for-profit women's associations). The AMEs may help improve the sustainability of the APEs, since many women in the AMEs state that they are now interested in being elected to the new bureau of the APE. Generally, it was felt that a large part of this project's success was connected to its cooperation with the APEs and AMEs.

27. Cooperation with other regional projects/organizations

The coordination between EFP, other projects, and NGOs active in the field of child protection is occurring through the GTI. (For more details on the functioning and accomplishments of the GTI, please see pp. 5 and 20.) No formal cooperation exists. This evaluation did not find any duplication of efforts between EFP and LUTRENA.

³⁰ Tontines are local community micro-credit associations.

2.4 MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET ISSUES

The project personnel have made use of many planning, budget, and reporting tools to manage the project (these tools are translated into French). The project is well managed and is staffed by a competent team.

28. Management strengths and weaknesses

In general, it was found that the current management team is effective and competent. The partnership between CRS, TdH, and WE has been productive and generally well managed through regular (monthly) coordination meetings. A current divergence on core project definitions, such as the role of the project in relation to the APEs and AMEs, has weakened the coordination and management of the project. Also, the lack of a project manager for three months (while waiting for the new project director), a long absence of the WE manager, and current changes in TdH management have led to increased coordination and management challenges.

It is believed that the current disagreement on project goals could have been overcome through coordination and clear steering from CRS, e.g., through a series of meetings to define better project goals and activities subsequent to the midterm evaluation.

29. Working relationship between the CRS field office and their U.S. headquarters

CRS personnel stated that the working relationship with their headquarters was good. CRS headquarters had no complaints about the CRS field office. The evaluation found nothing in that working relationship that appeared to affect the project in any particular way, positively or adversely. It is believed that the lack of a project manager (for three months) and the absence of some core staff members reduced the management's effectiveness of the project for a period of time (starting with the leave of the former project director), and further reduced the common understanding of the project goals by the different stakeholders. However, the new project director already has a very good grasp of the project and the problems related to child trafficking in Benin, and will further strengthen the management of the project when he becomes more familiar with the project, staff, and environment.

30. Procedures used by CRS for gathering the partners' budgetary and technical information

As for technical issues, the information-gathering context is difficult in an oral society. Sometimes information was not received in time. Accordingly, the project staff used previous numbers (instead of updated numbers) in the cases where they did not get timely reports from the field. In general, the information collection procedures seem to be adequate, and have improved since the midterm evaluation. The three NGOs developed a good cooperation system for tracking data, which CRS centralized and coordinated.

TdH's Cotonou office and WE's Boston office provided budgetary information for USDOL-required reports. The respondents did not indicate any particular problems related to the budgetary reporting process, except that the budgetary and technical information from the partners was occasionally late and led to some minor technical difficulties sending updated, timely information to USDOL.

2.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

The project's objectives seek to reduce child trafficking through improved educational opportunities. Impact is sought in three areas: (1) increased awareness about the problem of child trafficking and about the benefits of schooling; (2) better learning opportunities leading to better instruction and increased number of children in school; (3) detection, rehabilitation, reinsertion, and reintegration of victim children and protection of at-risk children through school structures. Additionally, sustainability is sought through conducting workshops and research-action projects, as well as stimulating other organizations to participate in the struggle against child trafficking.

31. Sustainability and exit strategy plan

The sustainability and exit plan suggest that project activities will be taken over by other projects or institutions: Hence, it is suggested that the direct and indirect beneficiaries in the public schools continue to be monitored by the APE until graduation. This is feasible, especially in the villages with an AME (which, in many cases, seem to be more active in the monitoring of children than the APE). However, their efforts are unlikely to have the same impact in the future, when the project field facilitators are not following up on the work of these associations.

The sustainability and exit plan further suggest that the direct beneficiaries of the Caritas Centers will continue to be cared for and will receive vocational training until graduation, supported by other projects. As noted earlier, many Caritas Centers are functioning on a very low budget, and only receive very little assistance from EFP. When asked about effects of the project's withdrawal, Caritas staff said that they would continue to care for at-risk and victim children, and would not refuse further intake of these children. Lack of EFP support would, however, further reduce the budget for the centers and the services they could offer.

The plan suggests that the Caritas Centers and the Oasis Center now have more complete and improved services for continuing the care of project victims and at-risk children. However, the services offered to children are still not complete or sufficient. Most significantly, medical follow-up of children and vaccination programs are lacking in the Caritas Centers.

Regarding awareness-raising, the Justice and Peace Program of CRS will continue to broadcast radio programs within selected targeted communities to continue awareness-raising about the dangers of child trafficking and the importance of education. Also, the communities received benefits from collaborative initiatives such as the information and materials of the awareness-raising campaign of "Anna, Basil and the Traficant." A positive impact from the awareness-raising efforts was noted during evaluation fieldwork (see pp. 5 and 20), and it is believed that this part of the project is sustainable.

As for other follow-up actions, the exit plan suggests that the APEs, AMEs, and schools are now sufficiently equipped and trained to continue protection of at-risk and victim children on their own, and that the communities have a system and a long-term network for protecting at-risk and victim children. This projection may be a bit too optimistic; fieldworkers and regional project staff at the community and district levels believed that a prolonged project presence was necessary to sustain effects at the community level. Also, it was generally believed that the AMEs needed further training and follow-up, since it was a newly created initiative. Without project follow-up, it is possible that members of the AMEs become discouraged and cease following up on at-risk and victim children.

The national-level long-term impacts include the GTI, which will continue to lobby the government for changes to policy and programs such as the passing of the anti-trafficking law and the creation of a child protection committee within the MFEE. It is therefore believed that interventions at this level are sustainable.

32. Adequacy of the project's strategy for sustainability

While the project's strategy for sustainability is generally appropriate in view of the project's schedule, resources, and budget constraints, further intervention is needed to make the APEs and the AMEs understand that the project is completed and the project field facilitators will no longer visit them and provide training.

The project has many good activities that are just beginning (AME, Study Spaces, Vacation Programs, NFE Classes, etc.), for which any exit strategy would be premature. Hence, it is deemed that the exit strategy is appropriate in view of time and budget constraints, but that on a more general level (i.e., not taking into account budget and time constraints), it is inadequate. In other words, to make the exit strategy and sustainability plan adequate; the project would need more time and resources or to plan certain activities more in advance, etc.

It should be noted that at the time of the evaluation fieldwork, the project was still in its implementation phase (albeit ending soon), and many of the handover and exit actions had not been implemented yet. For example, the field facilitators were still active in the project communities and following up on the organization of the Study Spaces and the vacation programs at the time of the evaluation.

33. Overall project impact

The main project impact on individuals, partner organizations, and government structures include (1) an increased awareness about the problem of child trafficking at all levels; (2) better schooling opportunities for direct and indirect beneficiaries; which is likely to have brought about (3) reduced trafficking in the project zones. However, it is very difficult to establish evidence for reduced trafficking, since, according to project stakeholders, (1) the trafficking routes have changed, and (2) with increased local knowledge about trafficking and especially

with recent police interventions to enforce the law against trafficking,³¹ traffickers are operating more secretly. According to a project stakeholder, “I think the trafficking problem is still very important, but it is less visible now.”

The project used the APEs (and later, the AMEs) as a main entry point for community-related work. This strategy has proved effective, as it has facilitated increased community awareness about education and protection. Also, the schools feel that the APEs and AMEs are now more involved in the schools’ work, and that teachers and the principal are “supported” by these associations.

Likewise, the set-up of school canteens and micro projects, as well as the distribution of supplies through TdH/UNICEF, have generated community interest and buy-in. The provision of some concrete item, be it in the form of school supplies or as a micro project, is seen as very important at the community level. At the same time, the project has avoided provision of a large package of direct assistance to families of trafficked children, which may have had perverse effects (of families involved in trafficking just to receive project support).

34. Change in perceptions at all levels (i.e., community, parents, children, government, etc.) about the importance of education for children as an alternative to child labor

The project has assisted in turning public opinion against trafficking, especially at the community and parental level. However, according to many interviewees, it may also have contributed to a change in trafficking routes and/or made trafficking more hidden. An example of such change of trafficking routes was noticed in the village of Kpokissa (in Zogbodomey), where trafficking generally had not been a problem. In February and March this year (2007), 12 at-risk children monitored by EFP left or were trafficked (allegedly) for stone work in Nigeria. A newly created AME in this village has pledged to try to find the children and is currently searching for them, without success so far. The village had problems with a waterway barring some children’s access to school. Subsequent to the large departure of at-risk children, the AME identified the stream as a risk factor, and managed to address the problem. This example shows the impact of the project in terms of changing trafficking routes and AME awareness of the problem, but also the project’s (and the community’s) limited ability to react when trafficking actually occurs.

Regarding the perception of school benefits, the project has helped to generate a public opinion that supports schooling in the communities. This is very visible at the APE and AME levels because many APE members and most AME members are illiterate. In some villages, the AME members have been so convinced about the necessity of education that they are now attending adult education classes themselves.

At regional administration levels, the project has raised awareness on children’s plights, especially at police and judiciary levels. At national education and child protection policy levels, the project has had an impact through the work of the GTI.

³¹ Traffickers have actually been arrested and imprisoned, which is having an important psychological impact within the communities.

35. Evidence of community stakeholders' and government willingness and ability to carry on project implementation once the project has ended

The project did not work actively to make the government (or other institutions) take over the work in the 100 target communities. At the central level, government officials were not well aware of the work of the project and there was no indication that any institution would take up its work (e.g., the follow-up and capacity building of the APEs' and AMEs' work to protect trafficked and at-risk children). The APEs and AMEs in the target villages are likely to continue project implementation on their own until they (sooner or later) become discouraged (the notion of being discouraged or *découragé*, is an important factor in Benin, which needs to be addressed in the exit plan).

As for detection, rehabilitation, and reinsertion work, informal structures for active detection and rehabilitation of victim children now exist and seem to function fairly well. The police agents who are responsible for protection work know whom to contact (Caritas Centers, Sisters of Mary, EFP project staff, etc., and where to go for each specific situation. One main limitation in the set-up of formal structures (and informal ones) is related to the lack of funds to finance government institutions' interventions, for example, transporting children who are taken out from an exploitative situation to a rehabilitation center. At exit, the project is currently evaluating the feasibility of transferring one or several of the EFP motorbikes to the police or other institutions to facilitate such work.

36. Possibility to replicate the project's work in other regions

The work at the APE and AME levels, the Study Spaces, and the Vacation Programs are initiatives that could be duplicated in other regions. Also, the GTI is an interesting initiative that could be replicated elsewhere. Some of these initiatives are already adaptations from other regions, e.g., the idea of setting up AMEs comes from Burkina Faso.

37. Lessons learned in terms of sustainability of interventions

In terms of sustainability of interventions, the lessons learned are mainly connected to the intervention time, pace, and size. It may have been useful, in view of the limited financing of the project, to concentrate on fewer activities, or fewer beneficiaries, so as to provide a more complete set of services to each APE and AME, as well as to the project beneficiaries. Also, in terms of monitoring lists, it is doubtful that this approach is useful for other purposes than reporting to USDOL if there is not a more long-term follow-up of the children. As it is now, the project is at its end when the monitoring system has improved. For many project initiatives, at the time the activities start to function well, the project is over. USDOL may wish to look into the feasibility of offering five-year projects in the future—or to make it possible to obtain funding for a second phase for deserving projects.

III CONCLUSIONS, BEST PRACTICES, AND LESSONS LEARNED

This project offers many best practices and lessons learned that can be used for future projects in Benin and also internationally. During the final evaluation, it was evident that the project personnel’s knowledge about problems of child trafficking in Africa had further increased. It is strongly advised to make use of this knowledge for future project implementation elsewhere.

3.1 PROJECT DESIGN

3.1.1 Conclusions

The project design completed the government’s policies, in particular, those of the new government. Moreover, the EFP is addressing a protection service gap by its use of parents’ associations (APEs and AMEs) for victim and at-risk children. The education-based strategy of the project is sound, although it does not address the wider poverty causes for trafficking. This lack, together with a definition of direct “educational services” that can appear one-dimensional (since it is focused on the tangible, quantitative service provided to the beneficiaries) has limited the impact of the project.

The project budget was inconsistent with the project goals. As a result, the project addressed certain issues superficially for a large number of beneficiaries (e.g., the question of providing a direct educational service), instead of providing a more comprehensive package of services to a reduced number of beneficiaries.

3.1.2 Best Practices, Lessons Learned

For new projects, more attention should be given to the overall cohesion of the project document to ensure that the project objectives can realistically be implemented within its proposed budget and time frame. Further, all the project objectives and activities should be clearly outlined and understood by all project partners. This is especially important if the project is implemented by a group of partners, to avoid having the project become subdivided into several subprojects (as has been the case of EFP, where the education and protection parts were perceived as two separate activities by many project stakeholders and project beneficiaries).

The services provided need to be well designed and should take into consideration the stakeholders’ poverty situation. In order to adapt the services to the actual needs of each group of beneficiaries, it is necessary to use participatory approaches involving the whole community in the project planning process. The project needs to avoid a simplistic definition of educational services; as was seen in the village of Kpokissa (from where 12 children disappeared in the beginning of this year), the distribution of school supplies does not protect from child trafficking.

The project design should consider trafficking flows, to avoid the alteration of trafficking routes as a result of project intervention in a departure zone. The flow-based work would result in direct contact between the project and users of children’s services. The work with trafficking flows also means that the language of awareness-raising messages should be nuanced according to the

target group. For example, messages need to be specifically adapted to users of children's services.

3.2 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

3.2.1 Conclusions

Both the project's design and its actual implementation have supported the four EI goals, because (1) local stakeholders are now aware of the problems of child trafficking; (2) different initiatives have enabled at-risk and victim children to attend different types of educational activities; (3) the GTI has helped to promote the creation of an anti-trafficking law; and (4) the project has developed an exit strategy that will promote the project's sustainability.

Quantitatively, the number of direct beneficiaries exceeds targets. Only a slight shortcoming in the number of victim children can be noted (7% below target). Most of the project goals have been reached. Project Indicator 1 has been reached: the project has helped increase local awareness about child trafficking and the benefits of schooling. Project Output 2.1 has been reached: local APEs and AMEs have been created and/or strengthened in most of the target communities and have improved access to, and retention in, education programs through the monitoring of lists of victim and at-risk children. Project Output 2.2 has been reached: all target primary public schools have received some form of assistance. Project Output 2.3 has not been reached, since only 19 communities have access to NFE classes (and a limited number of communities have access to Caritas vocational training). The project has made considerable progress on this target, however, since only two NFE classes were operational at the time of the midterm evaluation (April 2006). Project Output 2.4 has been reached: the primary education schools have been strengthened through the set-up of 76 micro projects. Project Output 3.1 has been reached: APEs and AMEs have been trained to follow up on education and protection of at-risk children. Project Output 3.2 has been reached: the APEs and AMEs are following up on victim children. Project Output 3.3 has been reached: the project has set up an informal network for active detection and protection of victim children. Project Output 3.4 has been reached: the project has provided funding for the Caritas Centers and the Oasis Center. The financing is not targeted at improving any specific service, but enables the centers to assist an increased number of victim children. The assistance to the Caritas Centers (in line with the project document and implementation plan) focused on supplies and not on urgent medical services. Project Output 4 has been reached: the work of project staff and especially the GTI has improved knowledge on child trafficking issues among political authorities at both the local and national levels (through the GTI) and developed policies for better child protection. The studies on child trafficking have led to improved knowledge on the subject, especially among project staff.³²

³² The studies include a comprehensive baseline study on trafficking in the project's target area, a study on child trafficking and decentralization, and a study of positive deviance (i.e., identifying and isolating specific characteristics of those not involved in child trafficking).

3.2.2 Best Practices, Lessons Learned

Projects should look into the general well-being of its direct beneficiaries, especially the victim children, which means that not only the children's educational status should be assessed and followed up on, but also their health and psychological well-being. In particular, it is important that children who have suffered physical abuse receive adequate medical attention.

The project's work with the APEs, the AMEs, and the Study Spaces constitute examples of best practices that can be duplicated elsewhere. The vacation programs are interesting initiatives that merit further support and study.

Also, the project has given attention to the nature of the services offered and has avoided the adverse effects of parents trafficking their children to meet the project's criteria and become primary beneficiaries.

3.3 PARTNERSHIP AND COORDINATION

3.3.1 Conclusions

The collaboration between CRS, TdH, and WE has been productive and has only faced minor obstacles, none of which have had significant effect on project delivery. The main challenges in the set-up were connected to the differing understandings of the project's role by the various actors.

The collaboration with the host country government was difficult because of the quick turnover of key personnel. The GTI maintained a connection with certain central actors, such as the MFEE. Cooperation with education institutions at the central level was almost nonexistent. At the local level, the project built capacity among APEs and AMEs. Cooperation with local NGOs had been discontinued and there were no efforts to transfer capacity to local NGOs (the facilitators were hired directly by the project).

3.3.2 Best Practices, Lessons Learned

It is necessary that the partners reach a common understanding of the protection and education roles of the project. Such common understanding is necessary to ensure adequate coordination of project activities.

3.4 MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

3.4.1 Conclusions

Project activities were generally well-coordinated and most of the staff members had a clear view of ongoing activities. Regular meetings were held between the core personnel of the three partners to ensure that the implementation was on track. The main problem noted is related to the different understanding of the projects' mandate by the implementation partners.

Most respondents considered the project highly cost effective, especially since it has been able to leverage funds from other financial institutions. Such leveraging of funds was necessary, since the project lacked funds to implement the scheduled activities. Generally, the budget was inadequate for implementation of the project's objectives.

3.4.2 Best Practices, Lessons Learned

Project management needs to ensure that all project partners gain a common understanding of the project's objectives. If each partner has a different perception of the education and protection component of the project, project management and coordination will meet obstacles in the realization of the project, and each partner is likely to take their own path and implement their own project, instead of contributing to a common project with common goals.

It is possible to implement an ambitious project with an inadequate budget by leveraging funds from other donors. The EFP excelled in this strategy. However, it would be difficult if many of the funding agencies employ the same tactics. Also, it is much more difficult to respect the implementation plan when one is waiting for ad hoc outside funding. A better alternative is to match the project budget with the planned activities, and mobilize external funds to provide additional services to project beneficiaries, or to increase the number of beneficiaries.

3.5 SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

3.5.1 Conclusions

The project has many good activities that are just beginning, for which the exit strategy is premature. To make the exit strategy and sustainability plan adequate, the project requires more time and more resources.

At this point, the main project impact includes increased awareness about the problem of child trafficking at all levels and better schooling opportunities for direct and indirect beneficiaries. These activities likely reduced trafficking in the project zones.

The project's use of APEs (and later, the AMEs) has led to increased community awareness about education and protection. Also, parents who are working through these institutions support the teachers by their involvement in school activities. The establishment of school canteens and micro projects and the distribution of supplies through TdH/UNICEF generated community interest and buy-in. The provision of some concrete item, be it in the form of school supplies or as a micro project, is seen as very important at the community level. According to project staff, it is debatable, however, whether such micro projects are the best way of addressing protection of at-risk and victim children. Instead of addressing the vulnerable children's plight per se, the interventions addressed the quality of schooling for all children. Hence, infrastructure (and other) micro projects may be less appropriate in a protection project than in a quality-education-for-all project.

3.5.2 Best Practices, Lessons Learned

The use of community-based organizations, such as APEs and AMEs, leads to the best and most sustainable results. The creation of new institutions reduces the possibility of sustainability and necessitates a large amount of training of staff to make the new institutions operational.

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IV RECOMMENDATIONS

For this final evaluation, recommendations have been established at three levels: (1) recommendations for new project designs; (2) general recommendations in the fields of education and protection in Benin; and (3) specific recommendations for this project's ending phase. All sections will deal with crosscutting findings related to project design, implementation, partnerships and coordination, management and budget, and sustainability and impact. The recommendations are based on the findings (Section II) and the conclusions (Section III) from the evaluation fieldwork, and also on recommendations established by the group work during the stakeholders meeting (see Annex 2 for a transcript of the outcomes of the group work).

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW PROJECT DESIGNS

A multipronged approach addressing child protection and trafficking through both education *and* poverty may have a greater effectiveness than a project based solely on education initiatives. Poverty could be addressed through micro credit schemes or parents' NFE classes combining literacy and income-generating activities such as micro gardens.

- Make a clear project document with clear definitions that all implementation partners understand and agree upon.
- Ensure the budget is in line with implementation targets.³³
- Go beyond giving simplistic “gifts” (*cadeaux*) to the beneficiaries and instead offer integrated services addressing a range of problems related to the beneficiaries' poverty situation.
- Employ participatory approaches systematically in the design of activities.
- Use APEs, AMEs, and Study Spaces for protection activities, since such use has led to good results in the EFP.
- Consider project implementation areas trafficking flows, not only departure zones.

³³ Project leveraging of funds is not discouraged. However, project implementation should not be dependent on leveraging of funds. If the project can mobilize further funding from other donors, these should be used to offer additional services to the project stakeholders (or help additional stakeholders benefit from project services), and not be used, as was the case in EFP, to enable implementation of the EFP project.

4.2 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND PROTECTION IN BENIN

In a focus group meeting following the final evaluation's stakeholders' meeting, it was agreed that the protection function needed to be seen, not as one function (to be allocated or not to be allocated to the APEs or AMEs), but as a composite of several functions. Protection needs to be segregated into smaller protection "components" and assigned to an institution. In other words, APEs and AMEs could take up protection functions that are appropriate for school-related associations, and institutions such as the chief of the village and police could take up other protection functions that are fitting their mandate.

- Segregate different protection functions and discuss among stakeholders which protection function should be implemented by which organization or institution.
- Determine the protection function of APEs, AMEs, Study Spaces, and Vacation programs.
- Discuss the possibility of setting up emergency educational programs (possibly through the use of Study Spaces) that can be implemented in case of prolonged teacher strikes to ensure continued education of children and to avoid dropout and/or trafficking during such teacher strikes.

4.3 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFP'S ENDING PHASE

AMEs are newly created and require further training; the Study Spaces have just been equipped; and Summer Vacation programs are just starting up. In order to ensure that the 100 communities having received assistance from the project continue to protect and educate its children, it is recommended that EFP seek funding to continue at least a minimum of activities (e.g., continued facilitators' follow-up, continued monitoring of at-risk and victim children). If such funding is unavailable, it is recommended that the project prepare the APEs and AMEs in the target villages for the project's end, so that the members of these associations do not become discouraged by waiting in vain for project staff to follow-up on their work.

Further, it is recommended that project management seek to help the Caritas Centers to leverage funding for vaccination and for medical assistance (from a gynecologist) to treat abuse cases. Although this was not an objective of the EFP or a part of its budget or implementation plan, it is deemed that such intervention merits urgent attention.

Finally, it seems important to conduct training sessions for both project staff and teachers on the disciplining of children and, in particular, on how to interact with victim children.

- Seek funding to continue at least a minimum of activities in the villages, or prepare the AMEs and APEs to operate independently.

- Seek funding for vaccination and for medical assistance especially targeted at victim and at-risk children in Caritas Centers.
- Train staff and teachers on how to discipline children without using verbal and physical abuse.