



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Voices from cotton fields

**FIGHTING CHILD LABOUR
IN BURKINA FASO, MALI AND PAKISTAN**





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Introduction

Child labour is present in cotton value chains worldwide. Child labour, including **hazardous work** – one of the worst forms of child labour – is found in particular where cotton production systems are labour-intensive or are dominated by smallholder farms.

Child labour in **cotton production** is particularly difficult to tackle due to factors such as the seasonality of production, migration, lack of technology, workplace hazards, limited access to schools, weak labour inspection and enforcement in rural areas, and ingrained attitudes about the roles of children.

The work that children perform is often **invisible** and unacknowledged because they assist their parents, often in family enterprises, which are not viable enough to hire paid adult labour and rely instead on the unpaid labour of their children.

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Not only does child labour infringe on the rights of a child, affect their educational attainment and can be harmful to their physical, mental and emotional development, but it also perpetuates the **cycle of poverty** among families and communities.

The **CLEAR Cotton project** “Eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains: an integrated approach” (2018–2023) supports the elimination of child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains in target producing countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Pakistan). It is funded by the **European Union (EU)** and is implemented by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** in collaboration with the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**.



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This compilation of **stories** from Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan showcases how FAO is having a direct impact on the elimination and prevention of child labour in agriculture by supporting livelihood improvement in cotton-growing communities.

Burkina Faso

Ouaro Lamoussahan

“I can now contribute to improving the life of my children and family.”

Kamitié Issouf Konate

“Now I understand better the negative effects of child labour and share my learnings with others in my village.”

Mali

Oumar Diarra

“We were told that the place of children is in school.”

Salimata Diallo

“This will be for the good of all.”

Pakistan

Rafiqa Bibi

“I immediately enrolled my children in school.”

Rabia Yasmeen

“It was a blessing that we got educated on the harmful effects of pesticides on our body and how to prevent them.”



Eliminating child labour and forced labour in cotton production

How can we make cotton production free of child labour?

Can we make the elimination of child labour an integral part of **sustainable cotton production**, where the use of hazardous chemicals is reduced, small-scale farmers produce better, and have diversified and enhanced livelihoods?

The **challenge** and the **ambition** of the CLEAR Cotton project were at the same time daunting and compelling. Child labour is mostly found in the lower tier of the cotton value chain and in informal, smaller-scale production settings, making it more complex to understand and address. Yet, helping the transition towards sustainable and **gender-sensitive** agrifood systems is at the core of FAO's mandate.

Therefore, FAO and the ILO embarked on this project funded by the European Union in order to empower agricultural actors by providing them with knowledge and concrete means to help end child labour in cotton farming.

The project implementation was marked by an unforeseen crisis, underestimated challenges and incredible opportunities, which all shaped the human stories described in this document.

The unforeseen crisis was the outbreak of the global **COVID-19 pandemic**. FAO's work mostly consists in supporting far-from-reach rural communities: the containment measures to avoid spreading the virus have further pushed us to find new ways to maintain a direct contact with the beneficiaries of the project – namely women, men, youth and children who live in remote rural areas. It was both a setback and an opportunity: what was planned in terms of livelihood support to cotton-growing communities was more needed than ever, but we had to postpone some component of the implementation. For instance, we had to delay the field visits aimed at providing livelihoods support to targeted households. As others in our situation, we identified **new ways of operating**, such as using rural radios and phones to send relevant messages encouraging parents to help their children studying, while schools were closed and keep them away from harmful agricultural tasks.

The **barriers that women face** in cotton-growing communities, and how these influence the numbers of children getting into harmful work were the underestimated challenges in our project planning. Women are time-poor and their contribution to the agricultural work of the family is sometimes invisible and unaccounted, even if they shoulder most of the work burden during peak times. Furthermore, they

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Thus, the project sought to eradicate the systemic forms of gender-based discrimination by strengthening equitable gender norms, dynamics and systems that support gender equality

play a decisive role in children's education within their household. Thus, the project sought to eradicate the systemic forms of gender-based discrimination by strengthening equitable gender norms, dynamics and systems that support gender equality. It did so by **empowering women** economically to help them improve the livelihoods of the whole household. It allowed them to play a positive transformative role in children's lives by diminishing the dependency of families on child labour and allowing them to support their schooling. As it is demonstrated through the following stories, this approach challenged unequal gender relations and discriminatory norms and practices. To further support these efforts, the project included a strong emphasis on **school attendance**, through raising awareness amongst stakeholders on the importance of education for both boys and girls and working with school reintegration programmes of children in or at risk of child labour (under the leadership of the ILO).



The United Nations General Assembly declared 2021 as the **International Year on the Elimination of Child Labour** which offered an incredible opportunity to raise awareness on the topic and mobilize additional resources to help us better understand the impact and outreach of FAO's contribution to the CLEAR Cotton project.

During the project implementation, we reached more than **10 000** men, women, youth and children. Community-level engagement activities helped improve the livelihoods of about 1 500 households across the targeted cotton-growing areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan. The project touched many lives, bringing changes that make a difference in the **future** of children and their families. This document presents a snapshot of some stories embodying the main outcomes of the project's efforts.

The FAO CLEAR Cotton team



Community-level engagement activities helped improve the livelihoods of about 1 500 households across the targeted cotton-growing areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan





Burkina Faso

Exploring new horizons and improving livelihoods through capacity development

Scan the QR Code and watch the video on "Ending child labour among cotton growing communities in Burkina Faso"



Download the document "Approche sur l'élimination du travail des enfants et le travail forcé au Burkina Faso" here: www.fao.org/documents/card/fr/c/cc3484fr



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Over 55 percent of children aged 5 to 17 living in cotton-growing areas in Burkina Faso are working (62.5 percent of all boys and 48.1 percent of all girls). Almost half of them engage in activities prohibited or not suitable for their age. Under the CLEAR Cotton project, FAO implemented a twofold strategy to reduce the economic and functional dependency of cotton-growing communities on child labour, in the Boucle du Mouhoun region of Burkina Faso.

First, FAO raised awareness among producers and communities about the risks and effects of child labour, including hazardous work, and promoted viable livelihood alternatives. This was done through the creation of **50 farmer field schools (FFS)**, which train farming communities on sustainable production practices, and **116 Dimitra clubs**, which are voluntary discussion and action groups that bring together women, men and young people, who decide to work together to bring about changes in their communities. The Dimitra clubs collaborated with three community radio stations.

Under the CLEAR Cotton project, FAO implemented a twofold strategy to reduce the economic and functional dependency of cotton-growing communities on child labour, in the Boucle du Mouhoun region of Burkina Faso





Secondly, FAO supported the diversification of sources of income for **500 vulnerable households**, with a focus on supporting **income-generating activities** for women. A unique feature of this intervention is a conditional cash mechanism with direct cash transfers, which allows women to purchase the inputs needed to start or develop an economic activity. This was combined with business management and technical training, and the creation of **village saving and loans associations** (VSLAs). The beneficiaries were selected according to the community approach using the criteria of the household economy approach (HEA), a methodology for assessing groups of households' vulnerabilities to economic shocks and changes over large rural areas, based on livelihood patterns and market information.



One of the conditions to benefit from the cash mechanism was to send children back to school. The collaboration with the ILO was crucial for the success of this intervention, notably through the ILO-implemented accelerated school re-enrolment strategy, which supported the access to education for children. With the support of FAO, several communities have established their own lists of **hazardous agricultural tasks** that children cannot undertake, while cotton producers are now aware of the negative impact of child labour and have improved their yields, through better and safer agricultural practices. The additional income generated by agricultural activities led by women contributed to improving families' livelihoods as well as their ability to support the education of their children.

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Ouaro Lamoussahan

Village of
Fakouna

Department of
Dédougou

Region of
Boucle du Mouhoun

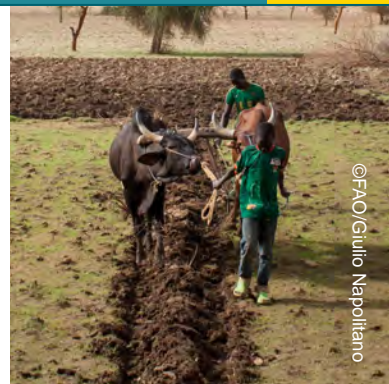
Western **Burkina Faso**

*“I can now
contribute to
improving
the life of my
children and
family.”*



Locust beans are native West African trees, with dramatically spreading crowns and globular bright red flowers that decorate the region of Boucle du Mouhoun, which is the home to the largest cotton basin of Burkina Faso. The seeds contained in locust beans' flowers produce the pungent seasoning known as **soumbala**, which provides the distinctive flavor of West African cuisine. *Soumbala* is used for countless dishes, which makes its production very profitable.

Before dedicating herself to the production and commercialization of *soumbala*, Ouaro Lamoussahan used to work in the fields of cotton, like many other women in the village of Fakouna. Her income was not sufficient to provide for her eight children. Ouaro and her husband struggled to cover the family expenses and could not afford to send their children to school.



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Ouaro and her husband struggled to cover the family expenses and could not afford to send their children to school



©FAO/Olympia de Maismont



©FAO/Olympia de Maismont



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In September 2020, Ouaro was one of the **500 women** that took part in the agribusiness training provided by FAO and the NGO Organisation Catholique pour le Développement et la Solidarité – Dedougou (OCADES), as part of the CLEAR Cotton project. Thanks to the training, Ouara learned how to run an agricultural business. This is when she decided to get into the commercial production of *soumbala*. The project helped her develop a **business plan** and open a bank account at GRAINE SARL, a microfinance institution that serves mainly rural women. Besides the technical support, Ouaro benefited from a grant of 100 000 CFA franc (BCEAO) (CFAF) (about 150 USD). With this money, she was able to purchase the raw materials and equipment needed to start her business.

Today, her business is going very well, also thanks to the skills acquired through the training. The CLEAR Cotton project improved the livelihoods of Ouaro's family and stimulated her entrepreneurial spirit. Using the profits

made with *soumbala*, she has started an additional activity: the sale of loincloths. Thanks to these two businesses, she is now making a profit of CFAF 15 000 per month (about 25 USD). She puts that in perspective: **“It is usually very hard for a woman to save CFAF 10 000, even over long period of time,”** she says.

With this additional income, Ouaro and her husband can now support the education of their children. One of Ouaro’s sons, who had left school to work in the cotton fields, is now back in the educational system thanks to the **school reintegration** programme embedded in the CLEAR Cotton approach and led by the ILO.

Ouaro is committed to expanding and diversifying her businesses. Her goal is to ensure that all her children can get an education and a **better future**.



The CLEAR Cotton project improved the livelihoods of Ouaro’s family and stimulated her entrepreneurial spirit





Department of
Dédougou

Region of
Boucle du Mouhoun

Western **Burkina Faso**

*“Now
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better the
negative
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and share
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with others in
my village.”*

Kamitié Issouf Konate



“Cotton cultivation is hard work and labour-intensive, consisting of ploughing, sowing, applying fertilizers and pesticides, weeding and harvesting” explains Kamitié Issouf Konate, looking at his ten hectare field in the department of Dédougou, with his forehead beaded with sweat. He is 66 and has been working on cotton for the last 20 years.

Support and adult labour is scarce in the area. This is one of the reasons why Kamitié had to involve his five children to help on the farm. In addition, like many others in his village, he believed that farm work was beneficial for his children. Traditionally, working in the fields is considered an important way to pass on practical knowledge and values to a child.

Throughout the years, Kamitié has experienced a decline in his cotton yields and incomes. **“This is mainly due to soil depletion, severe pest attacks and the high cost of inputs,”** he explains.

In June 2021, together with other members of a cotton cooperative, Kamitié participated in a farmer field school (FFS) for cotton producers, established by FAO in the context of the CLEAR Cotton project.



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He learned about good agricultural practices in integrated cotton-grain-legume systems. He also learned about child labour in agriculture, its harmful effects, and how to contribute concretely to its prevention in his village.

As a result, Kamitié increased his cotton production from less than 1 ton to 1.3 tonnes per hectare, a minimum of a 30 percent increase, and expects an even better harvest this coming year. He was able to reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides in his field, thanks to a better understanding of pest management. He explains that he used to treat his cotton fields every two weeks, whether he noticed a problem or not. Thanks to the FFS, he pays attention and observes more carefully his field every week, before deciding whether to apply a treatment. **“Now I know how to differentiate pests from useful insects.”**

The training provided by the CLEAR Cotton project was also a real eye-opener on the risks and implications of child labour. Kamitié understood the reasons why a child should not carry heavy loads, apply fertilizers and pesticides, plough with oxen, or stand for long hours during the cotton harvest. **“I was ignorant about these matters, but now, I understand better that parents should not subject their children to a work that is hard or dangerous for their age.”**

Today, the vision of Kamitié as a farmer and as a father has changed. He limits his area of production according to the adult workforce available within his family. Improved agricultural practices, combined with a reduced use of pesticides, led to higher yields and incomes. Kamitié started to share his learnings with others in his village. Little by little, mentalities are starting to change. He concludes: **“On my side, I re-enrolled in school my 11- year-old son, who used to take care of animals and help me in the field.”**



The training provided by the CLEAR Cotton project was also a real eye-opener on the risks and implications of child labour





Mali

Raising awareness on child labour through community-based approaches

Scan the QR Code and watch the video on "Ending child labour among cotton growing communities in Mali"



Download the document "Éliminer le travail des enfants et le travail forcé dans les zones cotonnières au Mali" here:
www.fao.org/documents/card/fr/c/cc2898fr



In Mali, the cotton sector supports around **4 million people**. Children are often engaged in diverse tasks such as land preparation, ploughing, applying pesticides and harvesting. The CLEAR Cotton project was implemented in the regions of Ségou and Sikasso, the two main cotton-growing areas of the country. The interventions included raising awareness of producers and communities on the negative impact of child labour and how to prevent it. In particular, cotton producers were sensitized on the risks of **exposure to pesticides** and how to produce biopesticides. They were introduced to labour-saving equipment, such as seeders and cotton pickers, and how to train oxen for ploughing in a way that does not require a child in front to guide (*un homme – un attelage*).



The Dimitra clubs have proven to be a transformative instrument to increase the understanding of child labour and to trigger changes in the mind-sets and behaviours of the participants, and the different social circles touched by them

CLEAR Cotton established **Dimitra clubs**, through which participants discuss community problems and how to address them, including the issue of child labour in agriculture. The clubs have proven to be a transformative instrument to increase the understanding of child labour and to trigger changes in the mind-sets and behaviours of the participants, and the different social circles touched by them. It thereby supported preventive actions, including the identification of hazardous tasks, as well as monitoring and sanction measures. The **157 clubs** have formed a network to exchange information and help each other. Some young members of the Dimitra clubs have set up self-managed saving groups, which – amongst others – are used to start small **income-generating activities**.



FAO's support also included the promotion of income-generating activities (IGA) for **611 women** and the creation of self-managed **village saving and loan associations (VSLA)** to access small loans in case of emergency. The choice of criteria and selection of beneficiaries were made by a multi-stakeholder committee composed of elected government officials, technical services of agriculture, private sector actors and civil society organizations. Based on the results of an evaluation of the available skills, it was agreed to conduct income-generating activities combined with the vulnerability criteria. As a result of the increased awareness on the risks of child labour and improved income, families are less dependent on their children to work and can now afford to send them to school.

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Village of
Zangrouna

Commune of
Dièna

Ségou
region

Southern-central **Mali**

*“We were told
that the place
of children is
in school.”*



In the rural village of Zangrouna, commune of Dièna, 15-year-old Oumar Diarra steps out of the sunbaked street and through a doorway into the school. The agriculture of the region is predominantly based on cotton and cereal production, with many small producers struggling to make ends meet.

As the eldest of four siblings, Oumar had to work to support the household's income and production. He used to work in making bricks and in the fields. The work was **hard and painful**. **"I used to carry heavy bricks and spend many hours in the farmland, under the sun,"** he explains. Often, at the end of a workday, he felt chest pain. The **COVID-19** pandemic made the situation worse: schools closed, food markets were disrupted, and prices of basic goods went up, hitting hard on his family's livelihood. Oumar had to work harder and dropped out of school.

His parents did not perceive the relevance and importance of **school** for Oumar's future. Working in the fields was considered a normal practice and part of an informal education. Binafou, Oumar's father, explains that his son had to abandon school to be a **shepherd** in another village to support the family.



The agriculture of the region is predominantly based on cotton and cereal production, with many small producers struggling to make ends meet





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In the framework of the CLEAR Cotton project, **Dimitra clubs** were established in the local cotton-growing areas, including Zangrouna. Oumar and his parents were invited, like all other community members, to join the club. **“Through the club, we learned about the negative consequences of child labour and the importance of school for children’s future,”** Oumar says. **“We were told that the place of children is in school.”**

Oumar’s father explains that the project made him aware of the hazards related to certain tasks, in which children engage in and why they should go to school. His **perception** changed and he is now supportive of his son’s education. **“The project taught us improved agricultural practices to prevent child labour and to allow children to flourish,”** he says. The family also benefited from the **village savings and loan association** created during the project, which enabled them to invest and diversify their sources of income.



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Awareness-raising activities on child labour, coupled with livelihoods improvements, proved to be essential for the success of the project. Today, Oumar doesn't engage anymore in hazardous work and is no more involved in field work during the school year. His father hires adult labour to help on the farm, when needed.

Thanks to the project's support, Oumar resumed school in the seventh grade and is now in the ninth grade. This year, he will pass the test for the **diploma** of basic education (*Diplôme d'Études Fondamentales*).

Today, Oumar doesn't engage anymore in hazardous work and is no more involved in field work during the school year. His father hires adult labour to help on the farm, when needed





Salimata Diallo

Commune of
Dièna

Ségou
region

Southern-central **Mali**

*“This will be
for the good
of all.”*



For the first time, Salimata Diallo, a 19-year-old young woman, feels in charge of her life.

When she heard about the CLEAR Cotton project from the chief of her village, Diéna, in the Ségou Region, she had already abandoned school and had been forced by her parents into marriage at the age of 15. Like her mother, Salimata used to sell *attiéké* at the local market, a side dish made from fermented cassava that has been grated or granulated. Her future perspectives were limited.

“Before the CLEAR Cotton project, parents would wake their children up very early to go water the vegetable gardens or to harvest or pound the millet, before going to school. Children would feel cold and tired and would be late for school,” says Salimata.

She joined the **Dimitra club** set up in Diéna by FAO and the NGO Alphalog. She attended **training sessions** on the negative impacts of child labour, sustainable agricultural practices, public speaking and gender-sensitive communication. She soon felt confident enough to speak up and lead discussions. Gradually, she rose to become a **leader** of her club. **“I did not propose myself to be the president of the club, I was selected by the other members,”** she underlines.



When she heard about the CLEAR Cotton project from the chief of her village, Diéna, in the Ségou Region, she had already abandoned school and had been forced by her parents into marriage at the age of 15





Thanks to the project and the Dimitra clubs, parents became aware of the consequences of child labour and understood the importance of schooling

In total, **eight clubs** (five in the village of Diéna and three in the neighbouring areas) were created, including 40 members each. Salimata's club meets every Friday to **share information**, discuss issues faced by the community and identify solutions. The awareness-raising activities on child labour that took place during these meetings made an impact on many community members. Thanks to the project and the clubs, parents became aware of the consequences of child labour and understood the importance of schooling.

“Every Friday, the club members contribute CFAF 500,” says Salimata. **“The money is used by participants to start small income-generating activities, but also in case of emergency, if someone gets sick, or a child is born.”** Members have six months to one year to reimburse their loans.



In addition, a solidarity fund was established to support the community, with a contribution of CFAF 25 per week. **“With this fund, we bought notebooks that we distributed to students to reduce parents’ burden; and last year we bought and distributed corn seeds to the poorest families.”**

Salimata highlights how the Dimitra clubs and the saving groups strengthened the **bonds** and the solidarity between the community members of Diéna. When people understood the benefits of the clubs, they joined massively. Today, Salimata trains people from the neighbouring towns of Touna and Ségou on the Dimitra club approach. She is eager to continue learning and contributing to the development of her **community**, so that children can be in school for better prospects. **“This will be for the good of all,”** she concludes.



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Pakistan

Unlocking women's capacity to become agents of change

Scan the QR Code and watch the video on "Protecting children from pesticides in Pakistan"



Download the document "Unlocking women's capacity to become agents of change in the fight to reduce child labour in agriculture in Pakistan" here: www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc3327en



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Pakistan is heavily dependent on the cotton industry, which is characterized by a high number of incidences of children working under hazardous conditions. The CLEAR Cotton project worked to improve the livelihoods of cotton smallholder farmers in the country and reduce their dependency on child labour. To this purpose, it adopted a holistic approach by engaging a wide range of agricultural stakeholders, including key governmental departments, smallholder producers and producers' organizations, civil society and media.

Through widespread **awareness-raising** campaigns, the project empowered agricultural extension workers, women and youth. For instance, it strengthened the capacities of extension workers to integrate child labour prevention measures in the programming of agricultural activities.



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The CLEAR Cotton project worked to improve the livelihoods of cotton smallholder farmers in the country and reduce their dependency on child labour



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Safe agricultural practices were promoted also through a dedicated farmer field school module focused on the risks connected to children's exposure to pesticides, which was used to train **4 940** farmers across the provinces of Sindh and Punjab.

As part of the module, the project produced the Urdu and Sindhi versions of the FAO-ILO visual guide *Protect Children from Pesticides!*, a handy booklet that can be used by a wide range of professionals engaged in agriculture to teach farming families how to identify and minimize the risks of pesticides and hazardous agricultural tasks. The visual guide can be understood by anyone, no matter what their literacy levels are.



In addition, the CLEAR Cotton project worked on addressing the drivers of child labour through a livelihood diversification programme targeting women in cotton-growing communities. The **rural women** engaged in the programme benefited from training sessions, aimed at developing the technical and soft skills needed to start alternative remunerative activities in agrifood value chains. These additional income streams helped to reduce their dependency on child labour. As a result, in the Punjab province, 500 women committed to continuing the schooling of their children.

These additional income streams helped to reduce their dependency on child labour. As a result, in the Punjab province, 500 women committed to continuing the schooling of their children





Rafiqa Bibi

Village of
Chak 165 Murad
Hasilpur Tehsil of
Bahawalpur District
Southern **Punjab**
Eastern **Pakistan**

*“I immediately
enrolled my
children in
school.”*



Rafiqa Bibi looks to the future with hope. She has faced challenges, constraints and deprivation in her life, but things have changed.

Like many other women in the village of Chak 165 Murad, in the tehsil of Hasilpur, Rafiqa takes care of the house, her six children, and the family livestock. She also used to work in cotton fields as a seasonal worker. Her husband, Arshad Ali, works as a daily wage labourer at a nearby brick kiln and earns between 12 000 Pakistan rupees (PKR) (55 USD) and PKR 16 000 (73 USD) per month. **“Our family had multiple income sources, but all were meagre and unstable,”** Rafiqa says.

She strongly believes that education is imperative for the secure future of her children. **“It is compulsory for children to attend school so that they can have a financially independent life.”** Yet, two of Rafiqa's children, a son and a daughter, had to drop out of school, as the family could not afford their schooling and work to support the household income and production.

Like many other women in the village of Chak 165 Murad, in the tehsil of Hasilpur, Rafiqa takes care of the house, her six children, and the family livestock. She also used to work in cotton fields as a seasonal worker



Through technical and life skills training, Rafiqa learned how to run a business. She also received direct support in the form of a flock of eight hens and two cocks

In 2021, the first steps towards a **change** were taken. Rafiqa's eyes sprinkle with joy when she explains how she was selected, along with more than **500 women** from rural Punjab, to be part of the CLEAR Cotton project.

“I accepted the offer without hesitation,” she says. One year later, she applauds herself for having done so. Through technical and life skills training, Rafiqa learned how to run a business. She also received direct support in the form of a flock of eight hens and two cocks.

Since then, her flock has grown fairly quickly from 8 to 19 hens. She is grateful not only for the farming package, but also for the **training** received on vaccination, medication, flock management, sale and marketing of eggs. **“It is due to this training that the mortality rate so far is zero,”** she says. **“I immediately enrolled my two children in school.”**



Rafiqa can now enjoy being an **equal** partner in the development of her family. As a result of her activities supported by the CLEAR Cotton project, she now gains PKR 200 (0.90 USD) per day by selling eggs. This stable and **additional income**, although apparently modest, makes a difference, as it allows Rafiqa to send her children to school. **“I am using this money to purchase copies, pencils and other stationary items for my children,”** Rafiqa says. She also adds that if and when needed, she has her children eat these eggs that contribute to their nourishment and good **health**.

Rafiqa's aspiration is to expand the flock over the course of time. She proudly points towards a little mud house, which she had built for her hens. She says she would expand it further as the flock grows in size. Rafiqa's eyes are radiating hope and promises when she tells us that eight to ten neighbouring households have replicated her **business model**, using their own resources.



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Village of
Chak 206/E-B

Vehari Tehsil of
District Vehari

Southern **Punjab**

Eastern **Pakistan**

“It was a blessing that we got educated on the harmful effects of pesticides on our body and how to prevent them.”

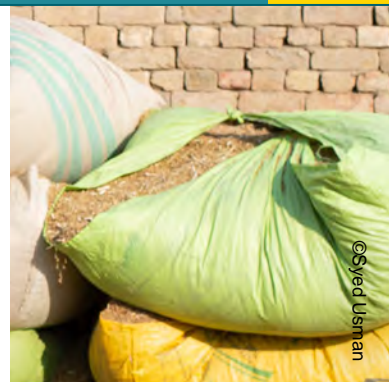
Rabia Yasmeen



Dotted with lost-in-time marketplaces and crumbling forts, the Vehari District has a rich history in agriculture and cotton. In village Chak 206/E-B, one of the remote areas of the district, 41-year-old Rabia Yasmeen and her husband cultivate 32 acres of land as **sharecroppers**.

Under the conventional sharecropping and land tenure system, the cost and benefits of production are meant to be shared equally between the landowner and the tenant(s). However, sharecroppers are vulnerable due to the risks associated with farming, which traps them in a vicious cycle of **subsistence-oriented** farming, low yields and insufficient profits, and prevents them from making better investments.

Like many women and girls in rural Punjab, Rabia remains engaged in manual tasks in the fields, from land preparation to sowing. She does cotton-picking by hand and harvests other crops. She is also responsible for the household livestock and poultry, including feeding, cleaning sheds and fodder collection from the fields, and looks after the vegetables for household consumption.



Like many women and girls in rural Punjab, Rabia remains engaged in manual tasks in the fields, from land preparation to sowing. She does cotton-picking by hand and harvests other crops





In this remote area, farmers use low-technology methods and household labour to produce a small output of crops. Rabia and her husband were not aware of the hazardous impacts of **pesticides** and how to use protective measures against them. Then, Rabia got involved in the CLEAR Cotton project.

She was selected, along with more than **4 900 farmers** across Sindh and Punjab provinces, to be part of the FAO farmer field school module titled “Protect Children and their Communities from Exposure to Pesticides”. This module provides farmers with **knowledge** about pesticide use and safety, such as preventing and minimizing the exposure of children and their families to their negative impact, thereby reducing associated **health and environmental hazards**.

“Before attending the training sessions, in my community we were unaware of the harm of poisons contained in pesticides,” says Rabia. They used to take children to the fields to help spray different pesticides and generally be in the cotton fields without any **precautionary measures**. Empty bottles of pesticides would also be reused at home and in the kitchen. They were completely unaware of the fact that toxins could cause short-term, gradual or permanent harmful effects on men, women and children. Rabia notably narrated an incident during which a boy got pesticides in his eyes, mouth and ear. Although he received urgent treatment, it caused long-term harmful symptoms to his health.

“It was a blessing that we got educated and found out that, without preventive measures, we would always get harmful effects of pesticides on our body,” explains Rabia. After the FFS training, she became a community activist and started to share the knowledge she acquired, raising awareness among other women in the village. Her entire village is now aware that pesticides may cause cancer and diseases and that it is dangerous to handle them without personal protective measures. Most importantly, they now know that children should be kept away from pesticides at any cost.

Rabia suggests that **“the Government should include such awareness-raising material in the curriculum of elementary schools”**. Nowadays, women and children do not go near the fields when they smell pesticides.

After the farmer field school training, she became a community activist and started to share the knowledge she acquired, raising awareness among other women in the village





Child labour, including hazardous work, one of the worst forms of child labour, is present in cotton value chains in multiple countries across the globe. Not only does child labour infringe on the rights of a child, but it also perpetuates the cycle of poverty among families and communities.

With funding from the European Union, the CLEAR Cotton project “Eliminating child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains: an integrated approach” was launched in 2018 to support the elimination of child labour and forced labour in the cotton, textile and garment value chains in target producing countries.

As demonstrated through **six human stories**, FAO is making a difference in Burkina Faso, Mali and Pakistan, by addressing the linkages between livelihoods improvement and the elimination and prevention of child labour in agriculture.

**Voices from
cotton fields:
Fighting
child labour in
Burkina Faso,
Mali and Pakistan**

**CLEAR Cotton
project
“Eliminating child
labour and forced
labour in the cotton,
textile and garment
value chains:
an integrated
approach”**





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Notes: Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

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