



Alternative Pathways: Digital Skills Training and Employment Opportunities

FIFTY EIGHT



Partnership Against
Child Exploitation

Sustainable Development Goals



OECD Due diligence actions

2. IDENTIFY & ASSESS ADVERSE IMPACTS IN OPERATIONS, SUPPLY CHAINS & BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS
3. CEASE, PREVENT OR MITIGATE ADVERSE IMPACTS
6. PROVIDE FOR OR COOPERATE IN REMEDIATION WHEN APPROPRIATE

A key outcome of the Partnership Against Child Exploitation programme was to identify and make recommendations on alternative pathways for children and households, where children are currently engaged in or at risk of worst forms of child labour in North and South Kivu artisanal mining (ASM) regions in Democratic Republic of Congo.

Recommendations take into account age, gender and ability levels. Although focused on specific locations in DRC, they have broader implications for other fragile contexts where children are engaged in or at risk of worst forms of child labour (WFCL).

These recommendations also support efforts to:

- Reintegrate or encourage children into school and traditional education
- Strengthen business, financial and other key skills for youth and their households
- Engage the private sector

PACE research identified the lack of economic opportunity as a core contributor to worst forms of child labour. Not simply because mines are actively



trying to exploit children, but due to a number of contextual variables, social norms and the lack of suitable alternatives – either within education or safer employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of the ASM ecosystem in Eastern DRC. The closure of mines and trade routes, shut down at the height of lockdown restrictions, brought the extraction, trade, and transportation of raw materials to a standstill. While global mineral prices rose, they plummeted at the local level. Many ASM miners were unable to receive payment for their extracted goods, which lay stranded at national borders or African ports. The immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic presents a key opportunity to introduce new economic opportunities and investment in the region.

Most crucially, income levels from alternative pathways must compete with or match those currently being earned in the mining sector, if they are to have any impact.




The recommendations are coded to signify the key stakeholders that must be engaged to ensure any alternative pathway programmes are well researched, designed, effective and sustainable. See the key at the footer of each page.

Where there is application for other fragile contexts outside of DRC, you will see this icon:

-  Partners
-  Beneficiaries
-  Other fragile contexts

A: DEVELOPING VOCATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Skill development and support for enterprise activity will be most successful if it can be provided in conjunction with interventions to:

- Improve Infrastructure 
- Remove structural barriers to education 
- Harness the potential of the private sector 

In implementing vocational training recommendations, the following should be considered:

Selecting Appropriate Locations to Pilot



Rubaya and Nzibira could be preferable, as the central mineral supply chain hubs are in their respective territories.

Identification of Key Actors



This should include local chiefs, religious leaders, CSOs, public services, cooperatives, and transporters in the cities that have local interests, relevant government officials, and members of the Congolese diaspora who may have interest in investing in these communities.

Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation








Crucial to addressing issues related to infrastructure, finance, transparency, and other barriers to growth in these communities. Partners must be committed to long term and sustained investment and implementation in order to mitigate risk, maximise resources and increase the chances of long-term community transformation.

Identify scenarios where community stakeholders may stand to be disadvantaged or left behind by alternative pathways, working closely with relevant partners to reduce adverse impacts.








Relevant to

Other Fragile Contexts 

Sector Partners

- Local governance 
- Civil society organisations 
- National Government 
- Business 
- Investors 

Beneficiaries

- Children (age 2-14) 
- Youth (age 14-18) 
- Adults (age 18+) 
- Accessible to all 
- Gender neutral 
- Female focused 
- Male focused 

Development of Vocational Training Curriculum and Tracks



Ensuring sustainability, replicability and clear routes to market for the skills acquired.

Hiring and Training of Staff



Teaching expertise and experience, methodology and appropriate staffing to learner ratios are critical to the success of any vocational approach, particularly in light of the failings within formal education to attract and retain young people in schools.

Vocational Facilities



Ensuring facilities for training and development of youth and adults are well equipped, safe and appropriate to the needs and development of the community. Security around use of and access to machinery, equipment and learning materials must also be ensured so that trainees and their households are not targeted for theft or other criminal activity.

Assess Social Norms and Other Potential Barriers to Entry and Engagement



All vocational training must be appropriate to the skills, geography and resources of the target learners. Low economic barrier to entry must be ensured to eliminate hidden overhead costs such as transport or data usage. Explore options that can add value to the whole community to ensure collective buy-in.

Partnerships with Schools



Vocational training must differ significantly from the traditional schooling experience. A professional working environment, potential bursary payments and access to appropriate technology and the hands-on skills training are significant factors in giving youth and adults the confidence that what they are learning will create credible job opportunities in the near future. Vocational programmes must not be placed in competition with traditional schooling if they are to successfully support removal from WFCL. Instead, opportunities to bridge school curriculum and learning into vocational programmes should be created wherever possible, encouraging children who move through the primary stages to continue the journey into vocational learning as an alternative to leaving education entirely.

Corruption Proofing





Clear accountability and continuous monitoring and evaluation must be put in place within programme design to ensure resources are used appropriately and proposed outcomes benefit and prioritise children and youth at risk of WFCL.








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I. BASIC SKILLS



Transferable skills that have practical application across multiple sectors and work opportunities will enable participants to maximise the benefits of vocational learning, particularly in fragile contexts where the economic landscape is in a constant state of flux.

Key areas for development could include:

- Personal finance and savings training
- Soft skills: focus on customer service and communication
- Basic numeracy

II. DIGITAL SKILLS PATHWAYS



Developing digital education and career pathways to offer attractive, well-paid employment opportunities, requiring low-barrier to entry digital skills such as AI image annotation and basic coding






Partnering with private sector IT companies who source from the region to implement rural internet/device access and/or provide access to digital jobs, creating 4 key pathways:

1. Pathway to education: Access to education not already available in the community
2. Pathway to vocational training (e.g. AI image annotation and coding skills training in partnership with successful schemes in other contexts)
3. Pathways to livelihoods (access to digital work opportunities to compete with earnings from mining)
4. Pathways to entrepreneurship (creating long-term benefits from digital skills development)








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WHY DIGITAL SKILLS?

Companies (particularly IT and electronics) who source from Eastern DRC are well placed to invest expertise and resources in ASM communities, by partnering with local organisations and employers to both deliver digital skills vocational training to youth and adults and provide remote employment opportunities for digital skills 'graduates.' This enables ASM communities to diversify their economic opportunities, create wealth and build resilience in the region, placing themselves in a stronger position to withstand political and economic shocks by counter-balancing some of their reliance on mineral extraction and further growing a fledgling digital industry.

Several digital skills have a low barrier to entry but can still attract earning potential and hold value for employers. They are also typically not as reliant on traditional educational backgrounds to learn.

Stakeholder Benefits

Community Livelihoods

Opportunity for adults and youth to earn money outside of mining and develop employable skills

Bolster the local economy and household earning potential

Increase employment levels among adults, reducing the need for migration (which in turn leads to less children missing education) and lessening vulnerability to enlistment in armed groups or criminal gangs

Government

Potential to support and nurture the development of a fledgling tech industry in DRC

Benefit from higher GDP levels from overseas investment

CSOs & Organisations

Safe and viable earning and learning alternatives to offer families and youth in WFCL

Educational Institutions

Building digital skills into the teaching curriculum, schools and further education institutions can provide tangible pathways to employment opportunities within a growing digital economy and incentivise school attendance for children of all ages.

Private Sector

Private sector actors have a practical alternative to offer young people who are typically attracted to artisanal mining to earn money.

Companies can evidence their commitment to the safe removal of children from WFCL

Companies can create a stronger link to commodity origin communities through provision of infrastructure and alternative pathways directly linked to their core products or business model.

A Note on Engaging Younger Children



The digital skills vocational training is not suited to the removal of younger children from WFCL, for whom appropriate measures should be taken to develop a safe and stimulating learning environment within school and /or other structured educational settings. However, when combined with and supported by a series of other interventions, introducing digital skills learning earlier within traditional schooling has the potential to incentivise school attendance and significantly add value for children who are already in or returning to full time education from a child labour environment.

Engagement points could include:

- Inclusion of digital skills into the primary curriculum, providing clear opportunities to access future employment within the local and global digital economy as they grow older.
- Facilitating free wifi hotspots and solar charging facilities in school grounds to incentivise school attendance to add value and facilitate digital access for families.

III. SERVICES & COMMERCE WITHIN THE MINING INDUSTRY








Youth agency in leaving dangerous work in the mines and engaging in alternative pathways should be handled sensitively, through the offer of attractive incentives rather than punitive measures for non-compliance. Where young people are already engaged in non-harmful or non-hazardous forms of small commerce and supporting services in the mining industry, teaching vital entrepreneurial and vocational life skills and other enablers to help them access decent livelihood opportunities should be considered.

Where youths are being removed from harmful work by law enforcement and other organisations, vocational training routes that support the mining industry have the potential to provide a more viable and attractive alternative to direct re-integration into formal education or other vocational training opportunities. Particularly in situations where drawing a young person away from the mining environment can have more dire consequences for dependent family members in the mines.








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PACE research In Rubaya and Massisi identified opportunities for the expansion of safer vocational and entrepreneurial opportunities for adults and young people within artisanal mines, where artisanal miners typically have the most money to spend in these communities.

This includes:













- Small commerce of commonly demanded items such as airtime cards, batteries, torches, bandages, and even some luxury items.
- Transportation of goods and mining products, predominately done on foot (carrying parcels) or by motorbike.
- Loading or unloading trucks
- Washing vehicles (a common job in the bigger villages and at selling points like Rubaya)
- Affordable personal protective equipment production/procurement and sales.

IV. SERVICES AND COMMERCE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY



Below are eight primary entrepreneurship opportunities identified by PACE research for youth and adults in Eastern DRC that have the potential to provide a safer alternative to working in the mines, develop into a skilled trade and provide greater opportunities for increased wealth creation.

Crucially, any alternatives must ensure proper protections, policies and supervisions are put in place. PACE's baseline studies reveal that children and youth can be just as much at risk of WFCL in other industries where children are not safeguarded from both short and long term physical, psychological and emotional harm.

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