

SUSTAINABILITY BRIEF

JUNE 2020

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 *A Case Study in Wilmar's Operations in Malaysia*

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The Importance of Education in Safeguarding Children's Rights

Child labour is an issue that exists within the agriculture sector, especially in rural underdeveloped regions. However, preventing child labour is not just about stopping the employment of children - it is very much linked to the overall safeguarding of the child. Recognizing this, and as part of our partnership with Verite¹ on improving our internal human and labour rights efforts, Wilmar developed and launched our [Child Protection Policy](#) in 2017, which superceded our 2007 policy on no child labour.

Since 2017, we have brought our suppliers to the table to discuss child protection and relevant human rights issues, through collaborations with Earthworm Foundation (previously The Forest Trust)² and Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)³. One specific outcome from these engagements with suppliers is that there is a pressing need for more guidance materials, focussing on practical implementation. To help address this, in 2019 we have partnered again with BSR together with a few palm oil buyers to develop a 'Child Protection and Safeguarding Implementation Manual' as well as a series of capacity building workshops to enable suppliers to learn, discuss and implement pragmatic measures to strengthen the rights and protection of children⁴. We expect to be able to launch the manual as a publicly available document before the end of 2020.

Providing access to education is a key component of ensuring child protection and the safeguarding of their rights. Education is a powerful deterrent to child labour, and it also helps break the cycle of poverty. The ILO has consistently reported that children with no access to education are more likely to be involved in an exploitative and dangerous labour market⁵. It is for this reason that a key tenant of our Child Protection Policy is to provide all children of our staff and workers with the best possible opportunity to access primary and secondary education. Our workers have over the years consistently fed back to us that the provision of education for their children is one of the biggest deciding factors influencing their decision to choose to work with Wilmar.

¹ <https://ir-media.wilmar-international.com/app/uploads/2018/07/8.Wilmar-and-Verit%C3%A9-Confront-Systemic-Labour-Issues-in-the-Indonesian-Palm-Oil-Industry.pdf>

² <https://toolsfortransformation.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TFT-Children-in-Plantations-Info-Sheet.pdf>

³ <https://www.wilmar-international.com/sustainability/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Wilmar-Supplier-Workshops-Overview-2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.wilmar-international.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sustainability/news-release-17-june-19-protecting-the-rights-of-children-living-in-plantations.pdf>


⁵ <https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Action/Education/ChildlabourandEducationforAll/lang--en/index.htm>


Safeguarding Children's Rights to Education in Times of Uncertainty

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen schools across the globe close, and many lessons moving online. In many countries globally, we see school children moving from classrooms to virtual classrooms. However for those children in oil palm plantations – trying to maintain education access in these times of mass school closures is more difficult than most. As of 1st June 2020, school closures are affecting more than 9,000 children of school going age who live in our estates in Indonesia, Ghana, Malaysia, and Nigeria. This is a case study of how Covid-19 has affected schools attended by children of Wilmar's workers in Malaysia.


In Malaysia, Wilmar have estate operations in the Borneon states of Sabah and Sarawak. In these states, the concerns with regard to child protection in oil palm estates take on an added complexity because of the added immigration restrictions on foreign nationals and their children⁶. Here the majority of our workers are from Indonesia, and their children attend what are effectively private schools, that are run jointly between Wilmar and the NGO [Humana](#) Child Aid Society Sabah, for the Humana primary schools, and Wilmar and the Indonesian consulate, for the [Community Learning Centre \(CLC\)](#) junior secondary schools.


The Malaysian announcement was quite clear – that all schools, including private schools, would be shut from 18 March 2020 until further notice. But what was not anticipated was the closure of borders to non Malaysians – this meant that in a few of our estates, our Indonesian national teachers, who had been travelling overseas or to different states, were not able to return to their schools. Where the teachers were in-situ – school plans and programmes are generally in place. The CLC has provided their teachers with official programmes during the school closure period. Lessons have also moved online.





CLC 4 Sapidua
@clc4sapidua
Halaman Utama





My Video
CLC Sapi 2 - assignment cuci tangan dengan betul
Dora merendang yang benar
saudara AND

Mr Ferry, the CLC teacher in Wilmar's Sapi 2 Estate, relies on an online quiz platform for tests, and also free online educational resources. He is also getting students to submit assignments in short video format in efforts to get them comfortable with working online. He has also created a Facebook page, like many other teachers, to allow him to connect to his students and their parents.

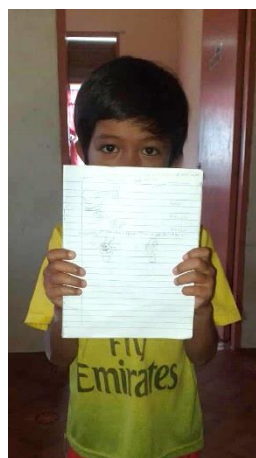
The key challenge here is internet connectivity. Rural areas struggle with connectivity at the best of times, and many of our schools and their programmes were not designed with mobile connectivity in mind. Some of our schools (and even our estate offices for that matter) are located in areas with very bad mobile phone connectivity. Bandwidth is also a challenge especially during the current period, where demand for internet connectivity is high. So solutions like video conferencing classrooms will not work.

⁶ For more information on complexities relating to children in oil palm estates in Sabah, please see the Earthworm Foundation guidance document '[Services for Vulnerable Children in Sabah: What Businesses and Employees Need to Know](#)'. The document also contains some useful background on the educational set up as described in this case study.



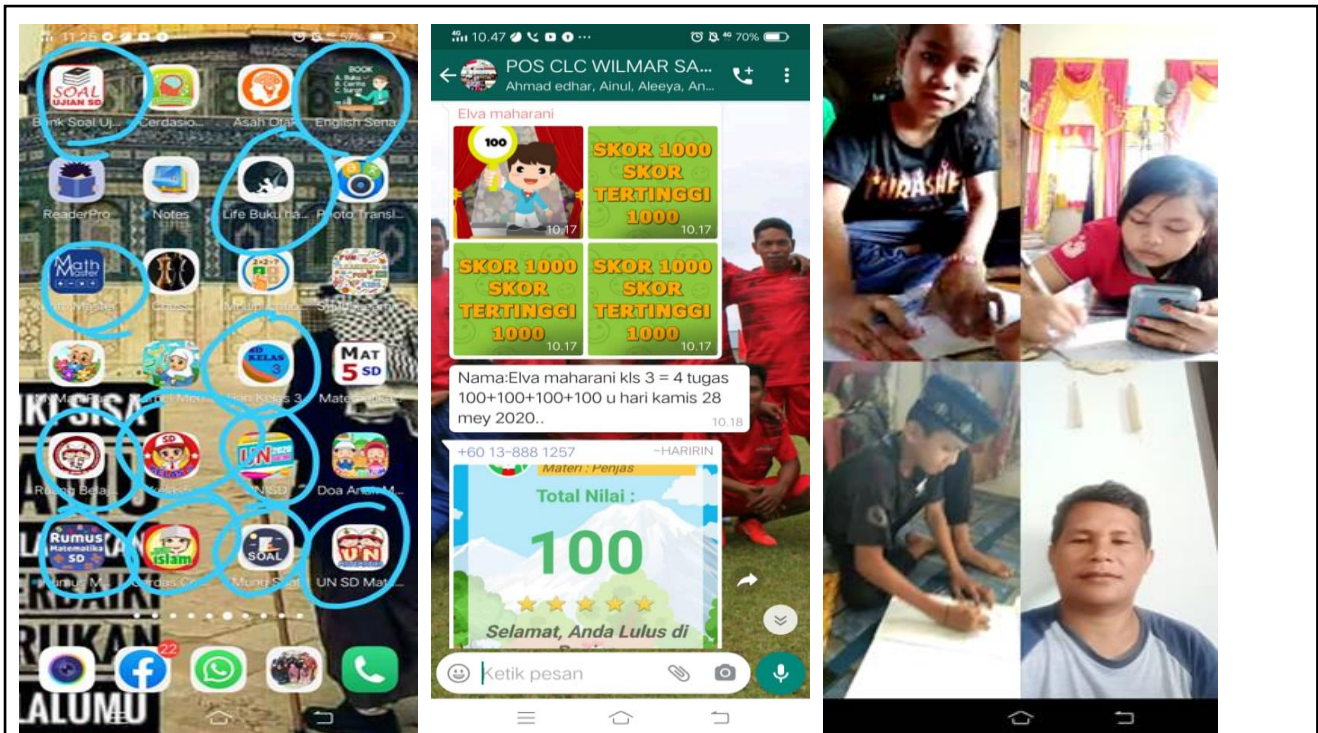
Mr Mumun (left), the CLC school principal at Wilmar's Segarmas estate, opted for a low-tech approach. He and his teachers ensure that school books are collected from children with limited cellular or internet connectivity for checking and grading before being delivered back to the students. However, Mumun also ensures that those with connectivity complete their studies through the formal online programmes available for CLC schools.

Added to the challenge is that very few of our students have access to laptops. In regular times our schools provide the children access to computers – but these are usually desktops and as they are located in the schools are non accessible during this period. However most children will have access to a basic smartphone.



The Humana school in Wilmar's Sapi 2 Estate has opted for a mixed approach. Ms Yati from the Humana School sends schoolwork via messages to parents. Students are then able to copy and complete the work assigned in their exercise books. She then collects the books for grading. When possible, she also seeks active feedback directly from students and their parents.

The CLC teachers and children have had to adapt to a workable online lesson plan – by relying on basic apps accessed on smartphones, where work is submitted. This approach is generally working well. The key is that the teacher must be on-site in the estate to check on the children and their work. With the Malaysian movement control in conditional phase since 18 May 2020, teachers are able to do walk-about to check in on the children. Messaging apps, notably Whatsapp, are also being used to provide immediate feedback to homework, and to inform parents on exams and other relevant issues. Whatsapp groups were being used actively by the government schools that are near our estates.

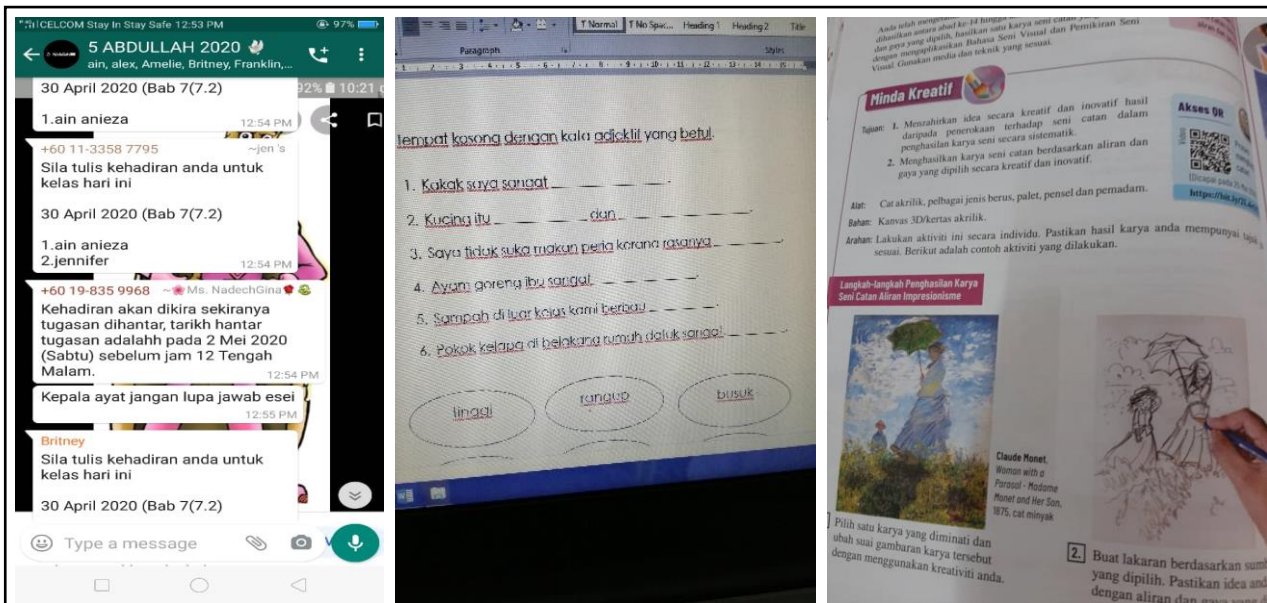


Teachers and students in the CLC school in Wilmar's Saremas estate use various educational apps (first photo) while Mr Salim, a teacher in the school, grades his students and provides them with feedback via Whatsapp on their parents' phones (second photo). He uses a mixed approach of apps and written exercises for his students to mitigate the challenges of network and internet connectivity. Similar approaches are taken in most schools in Wilmar's estates.

In the CLCs, key exams are still running. However in our most remote estate we are facing the problem of lack of connectivity. This means that our children have to resort to taking the exams where they can get a phone signal – and this is in our plantation blocks on the highest hill! To ensure exams are more comfortably taken, we have arranged make-shift covered seats and tables – so the children will not need to resort to taking their exams on the ground.



Lower secondary students from the Sekar Imej CLC school taking an online test in an estate block. The school is located in one of our most remote estates, and the children are in the estate block as it is one of the only locations with stable internet connectivity, compared even to the school and our office site. Following discussions between the teacher Mr Radin, and estate management, students are now provided with a covered location with benches and a table in an area with good network connectivity. The students can now take their final exams in late June 2020 more comfortably.



SK Suai, SK Suai Satu and SK Subis, which are government schools near our estates in Sarawak, have created Whatsapp groups between teachers and parents to distribute schoolwork and worksheets on a daily basis as there are no online classes or programmes by the schools. Parents are therefore provided with guidance on their children's schoolwork that needs to be completed while using school books that are already available to the students.

For the Humana primary schools, for the most part there has been no formal programme since schools shut. However since meeting with some teachers, Wilmar is now assisting with the printing of school materials and worksheets. Where the teachers are not on-site, and cannot pass the worksheets to the children directly, we have designed an "internal homework postal system" where the estate office, or members of the Women Committees will deliver worksheets to the children in turns. The worksheets are then collected and handed over to the teachers for checking.







Ms Liana, a teacher at the Humana School at Wilmar's Ribubonus Estate, focuses her efforts on sending workbooks to students while spending time with each of them outside their homes due to unstable network connectivity.

To help maintain education in our plantation estates, we have adopted the following guidelines during school closures in the Covid-19 pandemic period:

- Schools will remain shut and no classroom learning shall resume until government ruling or order is received.
- We will work with schools and teachers on developing new SOPs for when school lessons resume. Wilmar will assist with the provision of disinfectants, hand sanitizers, and other PPE.
- We are assisting teachers to facilitate access to homework, worksheets, and reading materials by either having printing it out at our office or providing readily available activity books.
- Learning materials will be distributed to children in our estates through cooperation with teachers, members of our women committees / women working groups, and our estate staff.
- We will maintain open communications with teachers to help monitor the situation and providing assistance where we can, such as with homework checks and evaluations, as well as providing supplies and other help needed.
- Where online programmes are in place, we will work with the teacher to help ensure maximum usage.

To ensure that education continues to be accessible to children living in our estates during this period of school closures in the Covid-19 pandemic, coordination between the teacher and management is important. We are organizing regular meetings with our CLC and Humana teachers to find out what kind of suitable material can be provided for the children, and how best we can monitor progress of the children. These meetings are led by the General Manager or Assistant General Manager in the regions with the estate group managers, as this is an issue important to Wilmar management, and helps to show to the teachers how seriously we view education for the children living in our estates.

JURNAL KEGIATAN HARIAN GURU TAHUN PELAJARAN 2019/2020					
NAMA : NIASARI RACHMAWATI					
TAHAP : 7 (TUJUH)					
ASAL CLC/GUGUS : RIBU BONUS/TELUPID-SANDAKAN					
BULAN : APRIL					
NO	HARI, TGL	URAIAN KEGIATAN*	KELAS / PESERTA	KETERANGAN	DOKUMENTASI KEGIATAN
1	Senin-Rabu, 13-15 April 2020	home learning	Kelas 7, 3 siswa	IPS KD 3.3, Hubungan kelangkaan dengan permintaan-penawaran Praktik KD 3.2 Kerajinan, Pengolahan limbah organik	
2	Senin-Rabu, 13-15 April 2020	home learning	Kelas 8, 3 siswa	IPS KD 3.1, Proses pemenuhan kebutuhan Praktik KD 3.3 Kerajinan, Pengolahan botol plastik	
3	Senin-Rabu, 13-15 April 2020	home learning	Kelas 9, 3 siswa	Praktik KD 3.1 Kerajinan, Pengolahan bahan kayu/bambu	
4	Kamis-Jumat, 16-17 April 2020	home learning	Kelas 7, 3 siswa	IPA KD 3.10, Lapisan bumi Bahasa Inggris KD 3.7, Menyusun teks deskriptif terkait orang/keluarga	

Ms Niasari Rachmawati, a CLC teacher in Wilmar's Ribubonus estate, maintains weekly teaching journals. These journals are shared with the estate management to report progress of educational activities happening on the ground.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that it is necessary to seek out-of-the-box solutions to help us deliver every child's right to education in these circumstances, especially considering our rural locations and challenges to mobile and internet connectivity.