

Child labour magnitude, nature and trends in Malawi

A Paper for the National Conference in Eliminating Child Labour in Agriculture

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Abstract

Studies show that Malawi is amongst the countries in Southern Africa with high incidence of child labour. Various studies have been undertaken to verify this. It has been explained that child labour in Malawi is to a large extent explained by poverty and lack of resources amongst others. It is therefore the aim of this paper to discuss the magnitude, nature and trends in child labour in Malawi and draw some recommendations on the same.

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1.0 Magnitude of child labour

Child labour started in tea plantations of Mulanje and Thyolo Districts when tea was introduced to Malawi by Europeans in early 19th century. This continued when we started growing tobacco on a big scale after independence in 1964. A number of studies have been undertaken in order to establish the magnitude of child labour in Malawi. Chirwa, (1993) research study showed that young people constituted a large section of plantation labour force in Nyasaland from the mid -1920. He also argued that the employment of children, youth and women in casual wage labour stemmed from the wider problem of labour mobilization and was compounded by seasonal variability in the flow of adult male labour and the volatile environment in which the country's agricultural economy operated. From the 1930s right up to the early 1950s, the Nyasaland planters could not afford a large and regular wage-labour force. The tendency was, therefore, to rely on cheap categories of casual labour, predominately that of children, women and immigrants from Mozambique. The majority of children who worked were drawn from the tenant's families that were already resident in the plantations and from surrounding villages. The study shows the majority of regular child labourers were boys (Chirwa, 1993). This study demonstrated that child labour has been a problem in Malawi since colonial times.

According to the Malawi Child Labour Survey undertaken by NSO (2002) there were about 3.8 million children in the 5-17 year age range, representing 34 percent of the estimated total population in Malawi; 1.5 million of these, or 38 percent, were economically active. The majority (45 percent) were engaged in non-economic activities while only 17 percent were inactive and this is the only child labour comprehensive national sample survey that has been undertaken.

In order to determine the prevalence of child labour in Malawi, the Malawi Human Rights Commission, (2002) conducted a study in Nkhoswezi and Dedza Districts

between December 2001 and May 2002. The findings of the survey revealed that there is substantial evidence of child labour in the two districts. The result further show that poverty and high levels of illiteracy contribute significantly to child labour in these districts

ECLT baseline study on child labour in tobacco growing areas in Mchinji, Ntchisi and Rumphi Districts (2010-11) The baseline confirms that the incidence of child labour in the three districts is high in general (Mchinji 87.1%, Ntchisi 91.1% and Rumphi 93.3%) as well as in tobacco growing (Mchinji 54%, Ntchisi 55% and Rumphi 39.8%). It was found that 90.1% of children in the research sample go to school and perform domestic chores for less than four hours per day (though this is likely to be relatively heavy work as firewood is the main energy source in the research areas). Roughly half the children in the sample reported work in tobacco growing. Therefore, relatively high proportions of children work and attend school at the same time. The baseline survey finds no major gender differences in work load or tasks, but older children tend to work more than younger children. Still, a very high proportion of the 5-9 year old children work (approximately 41%). A high work participation rate among young children is consistent with general child labour patterns found elsewhere in the world also where work on family farms is common, children tend to start work at a young age. Most of the interviewed children worked on family or tenant farms. This is not surprising as family farms and estates employing tenants are more common than plantation agriculture in all the three districts included in the baseline (ECLT, 2011).

Matemba and Dzilankhulilani (2002) conducted a base line survey in Kasungu and Dowa and the results indicated that 90% of children engaging in child labour were from poor families, especially from those that are female headed ones. As result, child labour as used as a coping mechanism to supplement the low house hold incomes. It's reported that children were involved in various agriculture related activities. Those children working in the tobacco related activities reported that they work under poor conditions. Most of the children interviewed 14 % work for long hours and given too much work load, 19% were not given enough food and 18% said they had adequate time to rest. In Kasungu, 90 % of children were involved in tobacco related tasks for

example, leaf tying and tobacco harvesting. The working children also reported that they were given too much workload and worked for many hours.

The Malawi Demographic and health survey (2004) undertaken by NSO show that 37 percent of children age 5-14 are currently engaged in some type of work. Eight percent of children age 5-14 are doing work for nonrelatives, about half of these without pay. It's reported that 70 percent of the children did daily household chores for less than four hours per day. One in three children was engaged in family business or working on the family farm. Older children were much more likely to be working than younger children. Although girls were more likely to be involved in longer hours of domestic work per day than boys, there was little difference in the overall proportions of girls and boys who work (35 and 39 percent, respectively). Urban children (17 percent) are much less likely to be working than rural children (40 percent). Children in the Northern Region were more likely than those in the Central Region and Southern Region to be working without pay for nonrelatives (5 percent compared with 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively). Children in the Northern Region are less likely to be employed on the family farm or in the family business than children in the Southern and Central regions (29 percent compared with 33 percent and 34 percent, respectively). While 41 percent of children in the lowest quintile work, the corresponding proportion among children in the highest quintile is only 22 percent. Among the oversampled districts, almost half of children age 5-14 in Kasungu are working, compared to 30 percent in Blantyre

The Malawi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) commissioned by NSO (2006) shows that the total child labour rate in Malawi is nearly 29 per cent, eight per cent points lower than that reported in MDHS 2004 (37 per cent). Children in Northern region are more in labour, though mostly engaged in unpaid work and family business. There is no difference in the total child labour rates between boys and girls but children engaged in work in the rural areas almost double the number of children working in urban areas. Nearly one third of working children are able to attend school. Children belonging to higher wealth quintile are less likely involved in child labour.

2.0 Why are children hired for labour?

There are many explanations for the use of child labor in agriculture. The following will be cited in trying to answer the question.

2.1 Poverty

Poverty is the most often cited reason for the use of child labor in agriculture and fishing. Children most commonly work in poor rural agricultural regions in which families believe the employment of their children will increase total family income

2.2 Educational Factors

A major factor contributing to the use of child labor is the lack of educational opportunities available to children in rural areas. Many plantations do not have schools on the premises. The long distances that must be travelled, often on foot, to attend the nearest school commonly precludes attendance.

2.3 Parents' negative attitudes

Parents' negative attitudes toward the usefulness of schooling also prevent the placement of children in schools. In many rural areas where farm work is the only job available, many parents perceive little utility in sending their children to school when they could be more useful to the family by working.

2.4 Societal Attitudes

Many children work because child labor has become an accepted norm within the social structure. Children growing up on farms are inculcated into a lifestyle centered on work at an early age and simply know no other way of life, particularly if schooling is not a possibility

2.5 Family value system

In some instances the use of child labor supports the reigning social and family value system; child labor is viewed as beneficial to the child, the family, and the society in general. Society in general contributes to child labor through omission, indifference, a lack of awareness, or the acceptance of child labor as a natural and customary way of life for selfish reasons or out of ignorance.

2.6 Government policies

Policies also contribute to the use of child labor in agriculture. In many countries, a lack of surveillance, enforcement, and intervention on the part of governments allows child labor to thrive. Even when violators are caught and prosecuted, penalties are often too small to induce employers to change their practices.

2.7 The influence of family size and structure

The influence of family size and structure also influence child labour by the size and structure of the family (e.g. number, sex, age, spacing and birth order of children, presence of elderly or disabled family members, and number of adults of working age). Changes in family form and function affect children's participation in the labour market. The increased numbers of child- and grandparent-headed households principally linked to HIV/AIDS and, means increased pressure on children to work.

2.8 Other factors

According to ILO, decisions about whether or not a particular child works depend on a mixture of need (whether the family or child actually requires the income), opportunity (whether work is available for children), values (about children, work of boys and girls and their futures, responsibility towards family members, education and consumer goods) and perceptions (whether the child or family has images of a better life that can be secured by the child working).

3.0 Child Labour in Agriculture

Historically, children have been part of the agricultural workforce and this is still the reality in many countries today. Worldwide, agriculture is the sector where by far the largest share of child laborers is found – nearly 60 percent. Over 129 million girls and boys aged 5 to 17 years old work in crop and livestock production, helping supply some

of the food and drink we consume and the fibers and raw materials we use to make other products. This figure includes child laborers in fisheries and forestry. Almost 70 percent of child laborers are unpaid family workers (Global Report 2010).

3.1 The importance of agriculture

The strategic importance of agriculture in the overall economic development of many countries stems from a combination of factors: agriculture is a source of food, export revenue (for many countries, the only source) and capital formation; it has many linkages with other sectors; and, most importantly, it is a significant source of employment, particularly in developing countries, for millions of men, women and children. The agricultural sector is critical to rural Development (ILO, 2008)

4.0 Child labour on tobacco farms

Malawi has the highest incidence of child labour in southern Africa (Otañez, Muggli, Hurt, & Glantz, 2006) and it exists in several sectors, including commercial farms, domestic work and the informal sector. Most children work in the informal sector with 88.9% of the children in the age group 5-14 working in the agricultural sector, where tobacco estates are highly represented. Many children are employed as unpaid family workers, helping their parents during high seasons but these children combine work with school. A significant number of children (4.7%), however, work without attending school. This is more common in boys than girls, and among children in rural areas (ILO/IPEC, 2006).

Malawi is one of the world's biggest tobacco producers and relies on tobacco as its main export product, representing 70% of the nation's export income and the second largest source of total income following foreign aid (Davies, 2003). Most of the tobacco in Malawi is cultivated by farmers on smallholdings, by tobacco tenants and by casual farm workers. Using the tenant population of 39,000, the number of children working on tobacco farms in Malawi has been estimated at 78,000 although the actual number is thought to be much higher because of problems of estimation (Otañez, et al, 2006

4.1 Tasks children do on the farms

Studies done by Plan Malawi (2009) in Kasungu, Lilongwe and Mzimba Districts showed that children do a number of tasks on the tobacco farms throughout the season.

The following is a list of tasks that almost all of the children reported that they do.

- Clearing fields, digging the field before planting, making nursery beds ,• watering plants in the nursery,• transplanting, • cutting trees to make posts for drying sheds, weeding
- Applying fertilizer, irrigating the fields, • applying pesticides, • picking and tying the leaves together for drying, • bundling the tobacco, • sorting and grading, •carrying bales

4.2 Why are they involved in these tasks?

The lack of access to schooling and other social facilities for tenant families increases the extent to which children are used on the tobacco estates. It is not easy for tenant children to go to school and lead a life that draws them away from being exploited for their labour. Given the poverty conditions of the tenant families they are often unable to afford their children the opportunity of attending school. Liwander (2008) reports that the unregulated tenancy system in Malawi tends to promote child labour

5.0 Nature of child labour (Situation in which children are found).

Children working in agriculture are exposed to many hazards that imperil their safety and health. Hygienic conditions on plantations are often substandard. Drinking water is often unsafe, sanitary facilities are frequently unclean, and medical facilities found on plantations, if they exist at all, are often inadequate to treat the illnesses and injuries suffered by children. A particularly dangerous threat to children working on plantations is regular exposure to hazardous substances used in agriculture, such as toxic chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The structure and operation of the tenancy system does in itself promote child labour. By bringing the whole family onto the estates and making the remuneration dependent first and foremost upon production, children are easily brought into work by parents concerned with the survival of their family.

Children are usually not employed directly on the estates but work as part of the tenant family. When a tenant is employed on the estate he or she is employed as the head of the household and responsible for fulfilling the quota required by the estate owner. This quota cannot be grown unless the entire family of the tenant is involved in the growing of tobacco. Children are then directly involved in all aspects of tobacco growing.

Children above nine years of age are heavily involved in light tasks like clearing fields, making nursery beds and watering nurseries during the first phase of tobacco production; uprooting, transporting and transplanting seedlings and weeding during the second phase; picking, transporting, tying/sowing the leaf, picking down the dried tobacco and bundling during the last phase. In fact, these children of nine years and older are excused from very few tasks like curing the leaf and to some extent sorting and grading tobacco (FAFO, 2000).

Even when they are not engaged in full-time farm work, children may also support the economic life of the plantation by taking care of younger children, performing domestic tasks and chores, and taking care of their family's animals and vegetable plots. By doing these jobs, farm and plantation operators are relieved of having to provide child-care facilities, and adult workers are freed up to devote more of their time to farm work (FAFO, 2000).

The work that children perform in agriculture is often invisible and unacknowledged because they assist their parents or relatives on the family farm or they undertake piecework or work under a quota system on larger farms or plantations, often as part of migrant worker families.

Plan report (2009) show that children on the farms did the full range of tasks: there was no differentiation between work done by children and adults. Most of the children worked for 12 hours a day though some worked for much longer. Apart from the break for lunch (usually the only meal of the day) there were few breaks. Children reported

that the work was often too hard for their size and that they often had pay deducted if they did not finish the work given for that day

6.0 Determinants and trends in child labour

The determinants of child labour will focus on the socio economic characteristics of child laborers and the following are the determining factors; household structure, household size, household expenditure pattern, the main activities from which the household derived their main income, and, orphan hood and education

6.1 Percentage distribution of child laborers by household structure

NSO (2002) shows that 43 percent of children between 5-17 years were found in male headed house hold and were not in child labour while 24 percent of children 5-17 years were in male households and were in child labour. Similarly, 12 percent of children were in female - headed household and in child labour and about 19 percent of children were in female - headed household not in child labour. Children in female-headed household and in child labour represent 39 percent of all children female - headed households. This can be compared with 36 percent of the same in male - headed household.

6.2 Household size

Distribution of children according to household size; 24 percent of were living in households with less than 7 members and were in child labour, 13 percent of children were living in households with more than 6 members and were in child labour. The proportion of child laborers in households with less than 7 members on average was greater than the proportion of child laborers in households with more than 6 members at 38 percent and 36 percent respectively. In urban areas households with more than 6 members had low proportion of children in child labour than household with less than 7 members at 23 percent and 31 percent respectively. While in rural areas the proportions were the same at 39 percent (NSO, 2002).

6.3 Household expenditure pattern

Four percent of children were in monthly household expenditure group of less MK1, 000 and were child laborers. Furthermore, 9 percent of children were in monthly household expenditure group of (MK1, 000 and MK1, 999) and were in child labour. About 6 percent of children were in monthly household expenditure group of (MK2, 000-MK2, 999) and were in child labour. Close to 5 percent of children were in monthly household expenditure group of (MK3, 000 - MK3999) and were in child labour. Lastly, 12 percent of children were in monthly household expenditure group of (MK4, 000+) and were in child labour

6.4 Child laborers by industry and seriousness of the most recent Injury

The survey done by NSO (2002) shows that almost half of those that reported injuries, 13 percent and 12 percent of child laborers in agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing; and community, social and personal service industries respectively, reported no serious injuries. Only 5 percent and 2 percent of child laborers in agriculture industry reported serious injuries warranting hospitalization and a break in school attendance. In community, social and personal service industry, 4 percent of child laborers and 2 percent of the same had injuries that warranted hospitalization and a break in school respectively.

6.5 Currently economically active children and their working hours per week

The Child labour Survey (2002) show that a high proportion of children (70 percent reported having spent about 6-14 hrs doing their jobs while approximately 18 percent of them worked more hours (15+) in a week. Of those who reported highest working hours, central and Southern regions had the highest reported proportions in the category of 6-14 hours (about 68 percent and 76 percent, respectively).

6.6 Working children by employment status

Malawi child labour survey also show that for working children of ages 5 –17 years, most of them were working either in family farm or in their own homes, assisting parents or guardians in production of food and housekeeping activities. And as a result most of the working children were referred to as unpaid family worker.

6.7 Children engaged in child labour by education levels and sex

A high proportion of the child labour force, about 800 thousand had attended junior primary school i.e. between standards 1 and 5 (representing about 59 percent), about 180 thousand had attended at least standard 8, representing around 12 percent, while a very small proportion, close to 25 thousand responded having attended post-primary school education (representing around 1 percent) and 29 percent of children engaged in child labour never attended school

6.8 Estimated number of children engaged in child labour by industry and sex

The majority of child laborers belonged to Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing industry which Constituted 54 percent of child laborers and personal and community service that consisted of 43 percent

7.0 Recommendations

1. Lack of accurate data on the incidence of child labour is a major problem and affects efforts to come up with a systematic strategy and plan. It is therefore necessary that the government commission research and surveys on different aspects of child labour in the country. This is important since the last countrywide enumeration of the working children was held in 2002
2. There is need to have statistics on occupational safety and health in relation to children. Information is needed on the short- and long-term effects on children of different working conditions and environment because of now such information is scarce

3. There is need to enrich information on schooling. While information on Sex-, age- and location disaggregated data on drop-out and repetition rates, absenteeism and failure to transfer from primary to secondary education is available there is need to link to data on number of hours, type and intensity of children's work outside school, This would help us build an understanding of the linkages between child labour and school performance
4. A holistic approach to research about children takes into account all dimensions of their lives – work, school, home, service provision, community life, relationships with adults or other children – and how these elements interact. A wide range of disciplines can contribute, including demography, economics and statistics, epidemiology, geography, law, nutrition, psychology, public health and social anthropology. Ideally, research should study children over time, so as to shed light on the changing nature of their work, school and home lives, which cannot be captured in a snap-shot of what children, are doing.
5. Detailed information and statistical data on the nature and extent of child labor should be compiled and kept up to date to be a basis for determining priorities for national action.
6. Child Labour Monitoring Systems at district and community level should be supported and extended to other stakeholders like education, agriculture and social welfare. This will help us to increase the knowledge base on child labour
7. Child labour should be linked to Government development agendas so that this can form the basis of mainstreaming child labour in different policies and programmes
8. We need a comprehensive data on the extent and characteristics of the independent child migration and those who migrate with parents and guardians in the tenancy system of farming

8.0 Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, according to ILO there are many interlinked explanations for child labour. No single factor can fully explain its persistence and, in some cases, its growth. The way in which different causes, at different levels, interact with each other ultimately determines whether or not an individual child becomes a child laborer. Child labour is a stubborn problem that, even if overcome in certain places or sectors, will seek out opportunities to reappear in new and often unanticipated ways. Our responses

to the problem must be similarly versatile and adaptable, based firmly on the reality of child labour in a given national context.

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