

**Child Labour in Malawi's Agriculture Sector - the Socio-Economic and HIV/AIDS
Impact nexus**

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

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Abstract

Child labour is a menace that affects many sectors, including the agriculture sector world over. In Malawi child labour has been reported to exist at a large scale especially in tobacco and tea industries. The age group frequently reported to be engaged in child labour activities is from 5 years to 18 years. The child labour issues in Malawi are much related to the general social-economic factors characterised by the larger Malawi population which in turn has created a conducive environment for its continued practice in the agricultural sector. This paper discusses child labour issues in Agriculture especially as influenced by both the socio-economic and HIV/AIDS conditions and argues how the practice defeats the very objective of profit maximisation on the premise of exploiting the children labourers in the long run. The paper also examines the extent to which child labour robs Malawi of its future productive manpower and discusses the issues that are contributory to the general social-economic development of the country. It further examines the impacts of HIV/AIDS and its potency in creating an orphaned population that will continually live in a poverty cycle that negates the general theory of propelling the country up the development ladder. It also proposes recommendations that could be adopted at policy level in order to eliminate the practice in Malawi.

Key words: *Child labour; Agriculture, HIV/AIDS, Malawi, Socio-economic*

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1 Introduction

Child labour is defined as any work, which by its nature or employment conditions is detrimental to a child’s physical, mental, moral, social or emotional development. The “Worst Forms of Child Labour” refers to the types of work for children described in

Article 3 of the ILO Convention 182. Article 3 emphasises any work which is “likely” to harm a child’s health, safety or morals.

According to the ILO, there are around 215 million children workers throughout the world many of whom are employed on full-time basis. Most these children do not attend school and do not have time to socialise through play. Many do not receive proper nutrition or care. They are denied the chance to be children. More than half of them are exposed to the worst forms of child labour such as work in hazardous environments, slavery, or other forms of forced labour, illicit activities including drug trafficking and prostitution, as well as involvement in armed conflict (ILO, 2011).

In many countries child labour is mainly an agricultural issue. Worldwide 60 percent of all child labourers fall in the age group of 5 - 17 years and are working in agriculture sector, i.e. farming, fishing, aquaculture, forestry, and livestock. This amounts to over 129 million girls and boys (ILO, 2010). The majority (67.5%) of child labourers are unpaid family members. In agriculture this percentage is higher, and is combined with very early entry into work, sometimes between 5 and 7 years of age. Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases. About 59 percent (or 70 millions) of all children in hazardous work aged 5–17 are in agriculture (<http://www.fao-ilo.org/fao-ilo-child/>) and (<http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>), accessed on 03/8/2012.

The 2002 Global Report on the Worst Forms of child labour compiled by the Global March against child labour (GM), mostly based on the ILO findings reported that child labour in Malawi is widespread and increasing. Specifically, in 2002 the National Statistical Office (NSO) report on Malawi National Child Labour indicates that 88.9 per cent of working children are employed in the agricultural sector, 10.0 per cent are employed in the industrial sector and 0.9 per cent work in services (NSO, 2002 - Malawi National Child Labour Survey). In 2002, Malawi was considered one of the countries in Africa where child labour was rampant, especially in the tobacco industry, which

constitutes 70 percent of the country's foreign exchange (<http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=1502>) and (Semu-Banda, Corp-Watch ; 2008) . A study commissioned by UNICEF in 2007 found that about 29 percent of children that were aged between 5 and 14 in Malawi were employed as child labourers, out of which the majority were employed by the agriculture sector. The British "Guardian" Newspaper, echoed these sentiments in their 26th September, 2011 Edition, alleging that Malawi has the largest number of child labour in Africa (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2011/sep/14/malawi-child-labour-tobacco-industry>). Most of these children work in the Agriculture sector; the Tobacco industry sub-sector only employing over 80,000 child workers. The tobacco crop is 70 percent of Malawi's foreign exchange earner and constitutes 30 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Child labour in tobacco estates is classified by ILO standards as the "Worst Form of Child Labour.". The health issues aside; children are also suffering from economic exploitation. Some child workers are as young as 5 years old and often work 12 hours a day, (Report VI (1)) - 86th Session, 1998, ISBN 92-2-110328-5. International Labour Office, 1996; ILO, 2007), but earn less than \$1 per day. Even so, they are considered lucky; some children have never seen the money they deserve. There is a milliard of reports that indicate that a lot of children have been lured by high wages working on the farm and end up being paid an old shirt. (Sangya, 2011; Face of Africa, 2011).

2 Causes of child labour

Poverty and over population have been identified as the two main causes of child labour. Poverty is undoubtedly a dominant factor in the use of child labour; families on or below the poverty line force their children into work to supplement their household's meagre income. Parents are forced to send little children into hazardous jobs for reasons of survival, even when they know it is wrong. Monetary constraints and the need for food, shelter and clothing drives their children in the trap of premature labour. Over population in some regions creates paucity of resources. When there are limited means and more mouths to feed, children are driven to commercial activities and not

provided for their development needs. This is the case in most Asian and African countries.

Illiterate and ignorant parents do not understand the need for wholesome proper physical, cognitive and emotional development of their child. They are themselves uneducated and unexposed, so they don't realize the importance of education for their children. Eradicating poverty, however, is only the first step on the road to eliminating child labour.

Adult unemployment and urbanization also cause child labour. Adults often find it difficult to find jobs because factory owners find it more beneficial to employ children at cheap rates. Although this is not very common in Malawi, it is worth noting as the country continues to develop its industries. This exploitation is particularly visible in garment factories of urban areas. Adult exploitation of children is also seen in many places. Elders relax at home and live on the labour of poor helpless children.

The industrial revolution has also had a negative effect by giving rise to circumstances which encourages child labour. In many other developing countries there have been cases of multinationals preferring to employ child workers. This is so because they can be recruited for less pay, more work can be extracted from them and there is no agreement problem with them. This attitude also makes it difficult for adults to find jobs in factories, forcing them to drive their little ones to work to ensure there is income flowing into the homes for their survival.

There are many other general factors that conspire to drive children into employment, none of which is unique to any one country or any one family's circumstances. Only when we fully understand these reasons can we begin to address the problems associated with child labour:

- Cuts in social spending - particularly education and the health services - have a direct impact on poverty. With little or no access to schooling, children are forced into employment at an early age in order to survive.

- Child labour may not even be recognized when children work as part of the family unit. This is particularly common in agriculture, where an entire family may have to work to meet a particular quota or target given by the employer or land lord.
- Children may also be expected to act as unpaid domestic servants in their own home, taking care of the family's needs while both parents work.
- Parents may effectively "sell" their children in order to repay debts or secure a loan – there are cases that are reported in literature that parents agree to have their child, especially the female children accompany another family staying in town in exchange for some economic benefits the town family will provide to the biological parents of the daughter. This is also true with boy children although with fewer cases reported.
- The prevalence of AIDS throughout many developing countries has resulted in an enormous number of orphans who are forced to become their own breadwinners.
- The demand for cheap labour by contractors means that children are often offered work in place of their parents. With such narrow margins, contractors such as produce-growers and owners of weaving machines know that children can be exploited and forced to work for much less than the minimum wage.
- Children may also be sent into hazardous jobs in favor of parents, who can less afford the time or money to become ill or injured.
- Child soldiers are forcibly enlisted into military service and operations.
- Employers often justify the use of children by claiming that a child's small, nimble hands are vital to the production of certain products such as hand-knotted carpets and delicate glassware - although evidence for this is limited.
- The international sex trade places great value on child prostitutes. Girls - and to a lesser extent boys - are kidnapped from their homes (or sold) to networks of child traffickers supplying overseas markets; poverty and sexual and racial discrimination also drive children into the tourist sex trade.

- Young workers are unaware of their rights and less likely to complain or revolt. In many countries, the legislation is simply not effective enough to support these workers.

In Malawi, some of the specific factors identified as encouraging the phenomenon of child labour can be listed as follows:

1. poverty,
2. parental illiteracy,
3. social apathy,
4. ignorance; E.g. parental ignorance regarding the bad effects of child labour,
5. lack of education and exposure,
6. Exploitation of cheap and unorganized labour.
7. The family practice to inculcate traditional skills in children – this also pulls little ones inexorably in the trap of child labour, as they never get the opportunity to learn anything else.
8. Ineffective child labour laws in terms of implementation,
9. Absence of compulsory education at the primary level,
10. Non availability and non accessibility of schools in certain remote parts of the country,
11. Boring and unpractical school curriculum
12. Mere availability of cheap child labour ,
13. Inability of immature minds and undeveloped bodies to understand and organize themselves against exploitation in the absence of adult guidance

A 1998 report commissioned by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) observed that being tender physically; children are susceptible to various work-related injuries and illnesses more than adults doing the same kind of work. Also because they are not yet matured mentally, they are less aware, even completely unaware, of the potential risks involved in their specific occupations or at the workplace. As a result, a large number of working children is affected by various hazards.

Global surveys at the national levels have demonstrated that a very high proportion of the children were physically injured or fell ill while working (ILO, 1998). These included punctures, broken or complete loss of body parts, burns and skin diseases, eye and hearing impairment, respiratory and gastro-intestinal illnesses, fever, and headaches from excessive heat in the fields or in factories. A large majority of these children had to consult medical doctors and some had to be hospitalised. Many affected children had to miss work for a time, with some stopping work for good.

The incidence of child labour would diminish considerably even in the face of poverty, if there are no parties willing to exploits them. Strict implementation of child labour laws and practical and healthy alternatives to replace this evil can go a long way to solve the problem of child labour. Children who are born out of wedlock, orphaned or abandoned are especially vulnerable to exploitation. They are forced to work for survival when there are no adults and relatives to support them. Livelihood considerations can also drive a child into the dirtiest forms of child labour like child prostitution and organized begging.

The fundamental issue that needs to be clarified is perhaps whether working while young influences a household's current economic status through the economic contribution of children. Poverty is the main cause of child labour in agriculture, together with limited access to quality education, inadequate agricultural technology and access to adult labour, high hazards and risks, and traditional attitudes towards children's participation in agricultural activities, the practice is perpetuated.

Participation in some agricultural activities is not always child labour. Age - appropriate tasks that are of lower risk and do not interfere with a child's schooling and leisure time can be a normal part of growing up in a rural environment. Especially in the context of family farming, small-scale fisheries and livestock husbandry, some participation of children in non-hazardous activities can be positive as it contributes to the inter-generational transfer of technical and social skills and children's food security.

Improved self-confidence, self-esteem and work skills are attributes often detected in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work. Therefore it is important to distinguish between light duties that do no harm to the child and child labour, which is work that interferes with compulsory schooling and damages health and personal development, based on hours and conditions of work, child's age, activities performed and hazards involved.

3 Impacts on the children/Consequences for children

Emerson et al. 2007, argues that although Child Labour is generally assumed to be detrimental, the potential effects of child labour on adult earnings are potentially twofold. On one hand, child labour can be detrimental through the hindering of the acquisition of formal education, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and causing irreparable damage to health, reputation or other things that effect adult human capital, which could lead to lower wages in the adult labour market. Spindel (1985) argues that adolescent workers are more likely to end up in dead-end jobs that hamper their human capital development. On the other hand, there may be positive pecuniary benefits to young labour especially in the agriculture sector where most of them end up: vocational training, learning by doing, general workplace experience as well as the potential for making contacts, learning job market strategies, etc.

In other words, there are many reasons to expect that a young labourer can gain some human capital from their workplace experience (Horn, 1994). Furthermore, child labour could be a way to finance education that an individual would not otherwise have access to, which, in turn, could lead to better outcomes for older child or adolescent workers (Akabayashi and Psacharopoulos, 1999; Psacharopoulos, 1997). The net effect of starting to work as a child is an empirical issue. Though virtually all studies of child labour assume it is harmful, there is as yet no reliable measure of the effects of working as a child on adult outcomes.

It should be noted that there are some forms of child labour that are unequivocally bad: those that are detrimental to a child's health and well-being, those that involve indentured servitude or deny children their basic human rights, and those that involve psychological distress, to identify but a few. Some of these activities may not be detrimental to the adult earnings of the individual, but are indefensible nonetheless (Emerson et al. 2007). The following are some arguments against Child labour and the impacts that are perceived from the practice:

Child labour does more than deprive children of their education and mental and physical development - their childhood is stolen. Child labour deprives the child of a proper childhood. Children being exposed to child labour practice are not able to get the nurture and care that is essential for their all round development. In most cases, this leads to many psychological imbalances which are often expressed in the form of increased aggressiveness, low self esteem and eventually reducing the child's potential to contribute to their full potential in the society when they reach adulthood. Most of such children become problematic citizens who engage in illicit behaviour which is detrimental to upward growth of societal development.

Working long hours, child labourers are often denied a basic school education, normal social interaction, personal development and emotional support from their family. Besides these problems, children face many physical dangers - and death - from forced labour: In such circumstances a child labourer remains uneducated; in whatever form the child labourer takes, the child has no time to attend school, if the labourers are school going children, they mostly have no time to concentrate on their studies either because they are carried away by wanting to make more money (forced or not) or they are too tired to concentrate on studies, the eventual consequence is that they are unable to take care of their own families when they grow up. The families they lead in adulthood become disconnected with the essential fabric that makes a community they belong to, a functioning society that can play meaningful role in issues of the community. In most cases, such families will force their children to work and thus the cycle is perpetuated, making it difficult to move out of the vicious cycle.

In child labour system, the children reach mental and emotional maturity at a very early age. This is highly dangerous as such children start displaying pseudo adult behaviour such as smoking and displays of aggression. Children who are already entrenched into a particular behaviour at a young age will not easily stop that behaviour in adulthood. If the behaviour is detrimental to the child's health, like use of dangerous drugs e.g. smoking of marijuana, the children are destined to becoming sickly and destitute; hence useless in their economic life to the society during the adulthood.

A sector that hires children labourers and young people often pays them much less for work done than their adult counterparts while forcing them to work as much as adults. This pushes adults to compete for jobs out of the market. This results in many social discontents; in a society which is manifested in high rates of crime which in many ways is detriment to development.

Many children who work either withdraw from school or find that their educational performance declines because of the work they are doing. Lewis Hine (1908), summed this up best in these words: "There is work that profits children, and there is work that brings profits only to employers. The object of employing children is not to train them, but to get high profits from their work."

Throughout history, children have been working under very unhealthy and hazardous conditions. Physical injuries and mutilations are caused by badly maintained machinery on farms and in factories, machete accidents in plantations, and any number of hazards encountered in industries. Their working environments are usually so unsafe that fatal accidents can be routine.

Pesticide poisoning is one of the biggest killers of child labourers. Although definite figures are not available for Malawi, but it has been noted that in some countries like Sri Lanka it is recorded that pesticides kill more children than diphtheria, malaria, polio and tetanus combined. The global death toll each year from pesticides is approximately 40,000 (ECLT, 2010). Long-term health problems, such as respiratory

disease, asbestosis and a variety of cancers, are common in countries where children are forced to work with dangerous chemicals. The working conditions have not changed; in fact, they have gotten worse. The more children work in these conditions the more the country loses the much needed manpower for its development. An economy driven by a majority of child labourers shoots itself in the foot because it denies itself a continuum of supply of human capital to drive its development.

Growth deficiency is prevalent among working children, who tend to be shorter and lighter than other children; these deficiencies also impact on their adult life both socially and health wise. Exhaustion and malnutrition are a result of underdeveloped children performing heavy manual labour, working long hours in unbearable conditions and not earning enough to feed themselves adequately. Such deficiencies inhibit children in their adult life to exploit their full potential in performing their duties.

4 HIV/AIDS & Child Labour

There is a close association between poverty influencing child labour and HIV/AIDS prevalence as indicated in Figure 1.

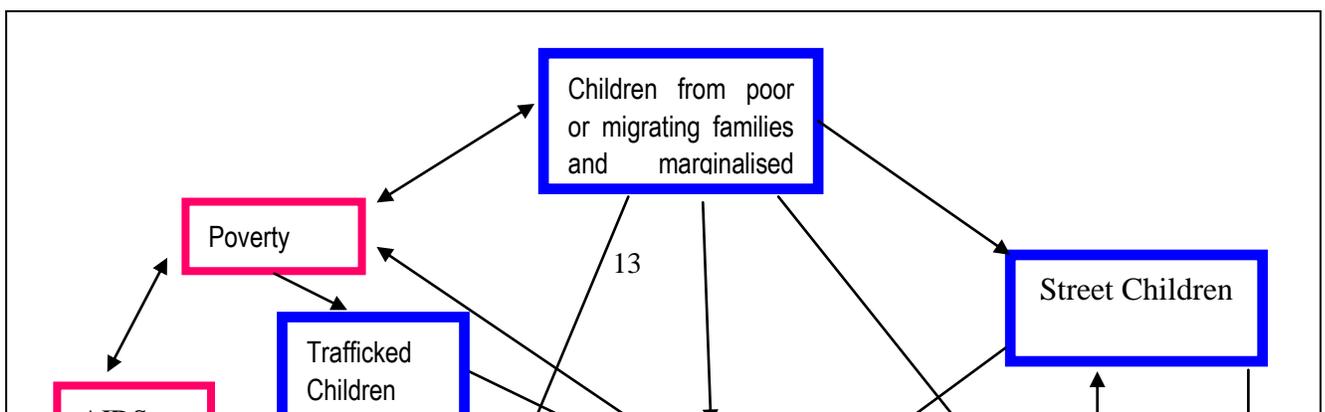


Figure 1: Conceptual web-link between Child Labour and HIV/AIDS
(Adopted from ILO/IPEC, 2010)

The likely occurrence of HIV/AIDS, loss of caregivers and deprivation associated with deepening poverty has been well researched and established by many (Richter, 2010). It is then arguably true that the impact on large numbers of children of the combined effects of poverty and HIV/AIDS - namely school dropout (caused by many factors including those that result from being employed as child labourers), child labour abuses and the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children are likely to cause significant social disruption. HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are rife among the one million children forced into prostitution every year; pregnancy, drug addiction and mental illness are also common among child prostitutes ECLT Foundation (2010).

Work limits a child's opportunities to obtain an education, especially for girls, whose educational attainment is a recognized determinant of child survival and health (ECLT Foundation, 2010). Work exposes children to physical and social environments

conducive to high-risk sexual behavior. Because child labour is significantly correlated with infectious diseases among children, including HIV/AIDS, interventions that reduce child labour rates could have a direct health benefit.

4.1 Some of the hazardous work that child labourers in Malawi may

- 1) Lifting heavy loads that may cause retarded growth in children
- 2) Operating heavy machinery like tobacco bailing
- 3) Walking long distances for deliveries of heavy loads
- 4) Children working overnight causing lack of sleep and exhaustion
- 5) Exposure to use of drugs including marijuana (*chamba*) to enable them do heavy work on the tobacco farms
- 6) Working without boots or other protective equipment exposing children to risk of injury
- 7) Use of chemicals during tobacco growing and processing can affect the respiratory system of the child since the chemicals are dangerous.
- 8) Sexual exploitation by supervisors. Women and girls are exposed to sexual exploitation and the risk of HIV/AIDS.
- 9) Working long hours in adverse weather conditions

5 Implications for further research and policy

In short term, the most obvious economic impact of child labour at the family level is an increase in household income. Long term, the under-accumulation of human capital caused by low school attendance and poor health is a serious negative consequence of child labour, representing a missed opportunity to enhance the productivity and future earnings capacity of the next generation.

Child labourers grow up to be low-wage-earning adults; as a result, their offspring will also be compelled to work to supplement the family's income. In this way, poverty and child labour is passed from generation to generation.

There is an established correlation between child labour and childhood morbidity associated with HIV/AIDS, non – HIV infectious diseases and malaria. As such doing away with the practice would ensure a health future generation with guaranteed human capital necessary to move a generation out of poverty cycle.

Child labour remains one of the most provocative and controversial challenges facing the world at the beginning of the 21st century. Furthermore, child labour's close links to poverty, lack of education, poor health, and gender inequalities highlight the need for broad-based social and economic progress.

Child labour and poverty both were significantly correlated with malnutrition (as measured by the percentage of population that was undernourished).

6 Conclusion

The use of child labour may actually be a fundamental evolutionary stage in the development of a country. Evidence suggests that parents have children based on a cost benefit perspective (Singh and Schuh 1986). Children in developing countries tend to be of economic value and, as a result, become a desirable asset for struggling parents. Children can significantly contribute to family income. Therefore, child labour is an intrinsic component of survival in a developing country. After a certain level of development is reached, children are more of an economic burden and take on less fiscal importance as contributors.

This process is illustrated by Siddiqi, 2002 where it was discovered that during England's "developing stage", children's contributions to family income paralleled those of present day Peru and Paraguay. But as a country develops, children start to consume more than they produce. He further noted that after World War II, the United States experienced pronounced development. An upward drift of adult skills and

wartime demands for female labour pulled a large number of mothers from home (Lindert, 1976). The result was, for the first time in the US an extra child consistently exhausted more household earnings than s/he supplied. Therefore, the role of children differs in developed and developing countries. At certain levels of poverty in developing countries, child labour may play an instrumental role in economic survival which augments national economic development and Malawi may not be excluded from such phenomenon.

7 Recommendations

To better understand how these issues are related, and how best policy could be influenced to better guide the child labour eradication, the following is proposed:

- Collect/study child labour data and devise interventions that allow for the possibility of children being in school and working;
- Improve the quality of schooling by investing in education so as to increase its value to children and parents;
- Provide subsidies to poor families prone to having working children so they can afford their children's schooling (income subsidies, nutritional supplements); and
- Establish/increase partnerships of government, local and international organizations dedicated to improving children's lives to increase the synergies in the efforts to combat child labour.

Mortality rates for different age groups are important indicators of health status in a country. In the absence of incidence and prevalence rates for disease (morbidity data), they serve to identify vulnerable populations. They are also among the indicators most frequently used to compare levels of socioeconomic development across countries. The finding that child labour prevalence is significantly correlated with adolescent mortality, a

population's nutrition level, and the presence of infectious disease among children suggests that countries with high child labour prevalence have low health status.

Work can limit a child's opportunities to obtain education, especially for girls, whose educational attainment is a recognized determinant of child survival and health. Work can expose children to physical and social environments conducive to high-risk sexual behavior. Because child labour is significantly correlated with infectious diseases among children, including HIV/AIDS, interventions that reduce child labour rates could have a direct health benefit.

Although this desk research finding indicate that child labour may be affecting the health of children, more data are needed to develop a better understanding of the short- and long-term health problems associated with child labour. Most important, longitudinal studies are required to understand the short- and long-term health effects of child labour on the individual child.

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