

The Impact of Child Labour on Primary School Children's Access to and Participation in Basic Education in Tanzania

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Abstract. Education for all individuals plays a major role in their development and of society at large; thus, it is both a basic social need to strive for and a factor for rapid and sustainable economic development. An increasing level of education for the population at large plays an important role in helping society break out of poverty, yet, how far do working children benefit from the right to basic education? This paper discusses the impact of child labour on children's access to basic education in Tanzania. It examines how education delivery impacts the roles and conditions of school-going children. The study's population consisted of primary school children in two districts in the Iringa Region (one urban and one rural), who were randomly selected, following an examination of their school attendance registers who showed a 50 percent of absenteeism. This mixed-methods study used interviews and focus group discussions to collect information. The main reasons that force children to work to meet their basic needs such as food and health care were found to be poverty and orphanhood. Bread-earning activities compel children to regularly miss attendance at school, and they eventually drop out, so their right to educational opportunities and future development is denied.

Keywords: Child labour, basic education, access to education, participation in education, Tanzania.

Introduction

In Tanzania, basic education includes pre-primary and primary education. Children are enrolled for pre-primary at the age of 4-6; for primary school education, the required enrolment age is 7 years (URT, 1995). The importance of education is cited as a crucial factor in the development of individuals as it allows them to learn skills they need to negotiate an increasingly technical world (Hubbard, 2009).

Generally, access to education and equity are areas of great concern in all aspects of basic education. Malekela and Ndeki (2001) define access to education as opportunities available to the target child population to participate in education, and equity refers to fairness in the distribution and allocation of educational resources to various segments in society. Important in this definition is that, access to education is not just physical attendance in class, but the proper acquisition of what is being taught. Working primary school children indeed miss out real educational opportunity.

There have been a number of studies on child labour (DFID, 2000, ILO/IPEC, 2001, Madihi, 2004, Machibya, 2009, Akarro and Mtwewe, 2011) from different perspectives, ranging from discussing the abrogation of children's basic rights to children's engagement in the worst forms of labour in areas such as mines, plantations, and sexual exploitation. However, Garret and Dachi (2003) note that, in the process of eliminating the worst child labour conditions, a group of working children who are still at school has apparently been overlooked. This study scrutinises this latter group.

Statement of the Problem

Basically, the ILO convention 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour provides fundamental principles concerning the rights of the child in a way that concurs with the general objective of offering basic education to all children in Tanzania because increasing levels of education play an important role in helping society breaking out of poverty.

This goal is a result of the UN formulation of basic rights (UN, 1949) and the Jomtien Declaration (UN, 1990) of achieving education for all. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26 asserts that all persons shall have the right to education. This provision is stated in very general terms. There is a need to consider what the right to education means in terms of learners' access to and participation in basic education in Tanzania. Education is both a basic social need and a factor in sustainable economic development. How do working schoolchildren benefit from this right of basic education?

The major research question that guided the study was what the impact of child labour on children's access to basic education is. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- What conditions compel schoolchildren to engage in working while learning?
- What is the impact of child labour on children's access to and participation in education?

Defining Work, Labour and Working Children

In Tanzania, defining legally who is a child or young person forms a central problem in the development of an effective system for the protection and promotion of the rights of a child or young person (Makaramba, 1998).

However, several International agreements define a child as an individual up to the age of 18 and below (UN, 1990; UNICEF, 2009 and ILO, 2009). In Tanzania, the Child Development Policy (URT, 1996b) also sets the age of a child 18 and below, as this age limitation is in keeping with International laws. Again, a number of International Human Rights Conventions address specifically the human rights of vulnerable groups, children included. This has led to the establishment of standards for child protection globally, resulting in the universalisation of childhood and youth, despite the varying needs and problems of children those considered in various communities and cultures. The Law of the Child Act (2002) defines a child as a person the age of 18 years and below. This definition is in accord with the definition provided by the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the child (Mapaure, 2009).

Garret and Dachi (2003) argue that it is always difficult to define the concept of working children and what constitutes work, but they note that the measurement of child work is linked to economic and social significance. The ILO Convention (ILO, 2009) defines child labour as all children's work undertaken in the labour market or household that interferes with children's education. Child labour is defined, not by the activity *per se*, but by the effects, such activities have on a child. In most cases, the definition of what constitutes child labour is culturally bound, meaning that the social and economic development of a particular society determines the definition of child labour, so that one can trace changes in the degree of acceptance of working children.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2001) makes a distinction between what is called acceptable child labour and what is unacceptable. Children in Tanzania typically engage in domestic and agricultural labour, since many children are involved with their families or shop keeping. Nevertheless, such children still manage to go to school on a fairly regular basis (Dachi, 2000).

Human Rights and Child Rights

The recognition of basic human rights and, more particularly the rights of a child, are 20th century concepts (Garret and Dachi, 2003). The first International instrument to recognise the rights of the child was the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924, which was embraced in 1959 by the UN General Assembly of the Rights of the Child through Resolution 1386 (xiv) (Makaramba,

1998). This intended to ensure that each individual child enjoys the benefits of a good life for the good of society.

Education forms a pivotal role in defining the rights of the child. This right is recognised under Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child of 1989 (UN, 1990), which obliges States to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children. Moreover, States are obliged by the same Convention to direct education towards the development of the personality and talents of the child for an active adult life. Indeed, this convention is the most universally embraced human rights instrument in history as it establishes for the first time in an international convention that children are citizens with certain definable rights. In addition, the Millennium Development Goals, particularly goal number two, focus on achievement of universal primary education among States in the world.

The 1989 UN Convention stresses that the best interests of the child must form the basis of judgement when considering a child's rights to the full development of his or her academic potential. Among children's rights agreed by member States are the right to both primary and secondary education and the right to be protected from work that threatens the child's health, education or development. It emphasises that children should not be permitted to leave primary school until when they have completed schooling. It further prohibits children's employment or any kind of work that is likely to interfere with their education (ILO, 2001).

In Tanzania, the legal basis of the right to education by children is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights mentioned above especially article 26. At the local level, the child's right to education is provided in the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution of 1977, article 11 (2), which provides for the compulsory enrolment and attendance of pupils in primary schools. The Education Act No 25 of 1978 cap 353 R. E (2002) provides for the right to education, envisaging the provision of education as compulsory and affirming the right of every individual to get education up to his or her ability. Thus, every child who is aged 7 to 15 years is obliged to be enrolled for basic education.

The Education and Training Policy (URT, 1995) insists on the adherence to both International conventions and the national policy that strive for basic education provision to school-age children. The goal of basic education being made available for all was enshrined in the 1990 Jomtien Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Education for All and was reasserted in the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum (Mmbaga, 2002).

Quality and relevant education prepares young people to participate meaningfully in their own development, both in their immediate communities and in the world at large. In this way, education is a fundamental human right and it plays a dual role in any society's development. Indeed, without education, life cannot be lived with dignity (Mmbaga, 2002). The values of education include increased education that

improves learners' social benefits gained from schooling, improved agricultural productivity, improved health, and reductions in both fertility and child mortality rates (UNICEF, 2009).

Dachi (2000) argues that for a household, education is one of the main factors for overcoming prevailing poverty. Ironically, however, increased poverty in the household means that parents cannot afford school expenses. Parents are required to cover the costs of uniforms, books, stationery and other supplies but increased poverty makes parents and guardians unable to meet these costs (Machibya, 2009) especially if their incomes decline. As a result, most poor parents and guardians prefer to withdraw their children from school in order to involve them in diverse forms of economic activities (Garret and Dachi, 2003).

Although law prohibits child labour in Tanzania, it manifests itself in terms of children found doing work, hard and light, in various places, such as garages, hotels, people's residences, roadsides or selling small items in the streets. In whatever category, children are always exposed to physical, psychological and intellectual hazards as regards their development (Machibya, 2009). In most cases, their educational progress and general learning at school are interrupted.

Despite the efforts to provide universal free education in Tanzania, children living in hash conditions are hampered by economic factors and either collusion of parents on lack of parental control and supervision culminates in first truancy and finally in their dropping out (URT, 1996). Thus, efforts to educate all children at least at the basic educational level are impeded, especially among vulnerable groups in society. This study is an attempt to add knowledge to an understanding of how child labour is manifested among working children who are still enrolled in primary schools.

Methodology

Area of Study: The study was conducted in the Iringa Region; an area selected because of is one where the problem of child labour is rampant (Madihi, 2004). Moreover, the region is highly plagued by both poverty in households and HIV/AIDS, which has resulted in children's missing either parental guidance or parents altogether (Akarro and Mtweve, 2011). The study was carried out in two districts within the region: Iringa Municipality and Iringa Rural. This study employed a mixed method research approach under the case study research design.

The target population: The target population consisted of primary school children who were working while normally still attending school, "nominal" defined as absenteeism of more than 50 percent of learning days in the term.

Sample and sampling techniques: As it was not possible to collect data from all individuals in the target population, the respondent sample was drawn from the

population as follows: students were selected from eight schools, four from each district. In each school, class attendance registers were used to select students who had missed many classes in the first term of the 2014 academic year (February to June). These students were traced in their homes, where interviews were conducted. A total of 88 primary school children, 42 girls (48 percent) and 46 boys (52 percent), were identified.

Data collection: The author collected the data through a questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions with respondents. The instruments used had previously been developed and piloted in two primary schools, one in each of the sampled districts.

As regards validity and reliability of the instruments, the questionnaire, focus group and interview question guides were written in Kiswahili, the language of instruction in Tanzania primary schools. The collected data were later translated into English with assistance of a person fluent in both English and Kiswahili. This ensured consistency in the content and meaning.

Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted prior administering the questionnaire and interview questions. This was done to find out whether any of the items were ambiguous to ascertain applicability, relevance and usefulness of research tools. The pilot study also served as a means to find out the internal consistency or validity as well as the reliability of the questionnaire. This was found to be of good quality, with a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

Data analysis and statistical procedures: Data were entered and analysed using SPSS for windows (Version 21) following IBM guidelines. Cross tabulation was performed to obtain frequencies, means and percentages of students' responses on their access and participation in primary education. Qualitative data was thematically analysed. Ethical issues such as privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were given due attention during data collection and in reporting the findings of the study.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings in accordance with the research questions.

Demographic information of schoolchildren respondents

Of respondents, 42 respondents (47.8 percent) indicated that they were attending school regularly, missing some days of the week or working after school hours; 39.7 percent (n= 35) rarely attended school while the remaining 12.5 percent (n = 11) confirmed that they had dropped out of school. However, in the last category of children who had abandoned school, 64 percent (n =7) asserted that they would like to go back to school if their basic school and family needs could be met, while the

other portion (n = 4) or 36 percent showed reluctance to do so, implying that they did not like school any more.

Most respondents, (n= 36), or 41 percent explained that they were from child-headed households and were working to earn an income for their families. Other 24 respondents (27 percent) disclosed that they were living with older persons who were caring for them but these adults were not economically productive in their households. Some 20 respondents (23 percent) indicated that they were from households headed by a disabled person; the remaining 9 percent (n = 8) were from poor families; both parents were alive, but they could not afford to pay for basic needs.

On the nature of work these schoolchildren were engaged in, most of them emphasised that they were working in the informal sector, effectively self-employed in petty trade. Their activities included selling fruit, food, and milk, housework, farming, casual labour, and fetching water. Inadequate pay and harsh working conditions forced them to change jobs on a regular basis.

Conditions Compelling School Children to Engage in Working while Learning

Household economic status was found to be a major factor that compelled children to engage in bread-earning activities. Thus, children from families whose parents had died or were very poor were forced to become the breadwinners in their families regardless of their age. They did not work, their food and health care would not be met. This level of poverty forced children to leave school or miss a lot of class, which resulted in an increased primary school dropout rate.

There were also schooling expenses that could not be met if they did not work. More boys (56 percent) than girls (44 percent) were contributing to schooling costs. Ironically, to meet school costs, they sacrificed most of their school time and thus missed the opportunity of further education. This is in line with Machibya's (2009) observation that poverty in households meant that parents failed to meet pupils' basic school needs, such as uniforms, shoes and stationery items.

Regarding their parents or guardians' responsibilities to help them attend school regularly, most respondents reported that parents were too poor and, if uneducated, did not regard education as important. The parents preferred their children to be engaged in economic activities to assist in the family's survival. One respondent remarked:

I am in the street selling groundnuts, sweets, banana, mangoes, and oranges because my parents cannot afford to take care of household needs and my school requirements.

It was also found that children from poor families also did essential household chores while at the same time engaging in income or resource-generating activities.

Although school fees have been abolished in the Tanzanian public primary school system, most children, particularly those from poor families, are not able to meet the other financial requirements at school such as uniforms, books or stationery. These findings complement what Mapaire (2009) found in Namibia: that children work because their survival and that of their families depend on the work children do. Child labour thus persists even when it has been declared illegal. The vicious cycle: poorly educated adults being too poor to educate their children thus develops. The World Bank (1998) links poverty and child labour with the level of development in the community, in that children work less as per capita income increases.

A complicating factor is the poor education of adults in the household who cannot get adequate income to take care of the young, particularly school going children. This impels children to provide for some of their needs themselves, particularly to both support the household and get money to meet the expenses of attending school. In this way, schoolchildren are forced to enter the labour market at a relatively early age.

It was found that the labour of primary school children, particularly girls who were needed at home was unpaid. If they worked for others, they might be paid, but indeed, they were also likely to miss school. Commenting on this, one respondent remarked:

I work as a domestic assistant after school hours and at weekends and sometimes I miss school most of the week, because of financial constraints at home. The money I earn helps supplement my family's income and meets my school needs.

As noted above, engaging children below the age of 18 in employment that hinders their schooling is illegal in Tanzania. In an attempt to help children enrol in and attend school, the National Education Act of 1978, as amended in 2002, states categorically that the school-going child cannot legally be employed. However, this good intention meets hurdles in implementation as the children themselves are seeking the said jobs (Machibya, 2009). Respondents admitted that they were compelled to engage in work by the socio-economic constraints of their families rather than their reluctance to continue with education.

Asked whether they were ready to return to school and concentrate on their studies, the majority of schoolchildren expressed an interest in doing so if they could be helped with meeting both the costs of education basic needs at home. Thus, if children from poor families were given school requirement like uniforms, books, exercise books, as well as material support such as lunch at school, they could stay at school.

The Impact of Child Labour on Children's Access to and Participation in Education

Working schoolchildren were compelled to miss school on a regular basis, and eventually to abandon school completely before finishing standard seven. Thus, children's participation in education was hampered. This denied their right and access to education for their full potential development. One respondent remarked that

I occasionally go to school but I miss class because of various causal jobs I do in the farm to earn money for a living to support my young sisters and brothers at home.

The UN has noted that youth development in the learning process provides children with experiences that prepare them for a responsible life, which helps transform learners and unlock their potential (UN, 1990). In general, education sets its achievers free as it makes it possible to develop their talents, skills and callings so that the full potential of an individual is realised.

The lack of children's access to and participation in education hampers the efforts to liberate them from socio-economic problems, as it deprives them of educational opportunities, leading to inter-generational poverty. In addition, girls (particularly those working as domestic servants in households other than their own), are put at a risk of sexual abuse and exploitation (Madihi, 2004). This leads to the deprivation of their basic health needs. Long work hours hamper their health as well.

Working school-going children have the same needs as others, including the need for food, a sense of belonging, skills in problem solving, life planning and access to appropriate services. Thus, the lack of the assurance of getting these needs means that the community suffers in terms of continuing cycles: extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS infections, robbery, abusive sexual relationships, and unintended pregnancies (Madihi, 2004).

Working children suffer greatly in their struggle for their individual lives in society, due to their lack of knowledge and skills in the world, where survival is greatly determined by one's education (Miteshi and Badiwala, 2009). The marginalisation of working children as regards their access to education condemns them to a future of poor living standards, which has a direct impact on the economy of society.

Conclusions

Poverty within households was found to be the principal factor that forced schoolchildren to work in order to earn money to help meet their families' basic needs and to pay for school essentials such as uniforms and books. These income-generation activities compelled them to miss most of the learning time and eventually to drop out of school, so they entered the labour arena at quite an early age, in defiance of the Education Act of 1978, as amended in 2002.

Schoolchildren who miss access to and participation in studies because of work are denied their right to maximise their future potential, to experience a transformed

responsible adult life, and to be liberated from all sorts of social and economic constraints, creating problems for individual children, and the community in general.

Recommendations

In the light of the research findings, the following recommendations are made. In general, communities should be encouraged to provide for those less fortunate in their midst.

- Since very poor children must prioritise being fed above education, their school attendance would improve if they could be fed a nutritious meal at school each day school is in session. School administrators might seek donations from the community or NGO's to fund a school-lunch programme.
- Similarly, though the government funds compulsory primary education, other school costs keep very poor children from attending school. The government or community should subsidise the provision of uniforms and school supplies for the poorest students so they can stay in school.
- Where donations for food, school uniform and supplies are not forthcoming or not available at the school itself, school administrators should keep abreast of what NGO's, religious organisations, or other philanthropies in the area might be willing to meet poor children's needs and connect poor families to these outside-the-school services.
- Practical child labour laws addressing the real needs of children to access basic education need to be passed and enforced.

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