Hazardous Child Labour in Agricultural Sector in Uganda

Worldwide 60 percent of all child labourers in the age group 5 - 17 years work in agriculture, including farming, fishing, aquaculture, forestry, and livestock. This amounts to over 129 million girls and boys. 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. In Uganda, agriculture is the main contributor to the national economy contributing over 40% of the GDP and generating 90% of earnings in foreign currency. Out of all households, 86.6% are employed in the agricultural sector. Child labour in commercial agriculture has become a major concern globally, and in Uganda in particular, especially in consequence of economic trans-formation and agricultural modernization, which has brought the utilization of agrochemicals and machinery.

According to the National Child Labour Policy (2006), hazardous work refers to work, which by its nature or circumstances in which it is performed, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Almost 96 percent of total economically-active 7-14 year-olds work in agriculture, against 3 percent in services and just 1.3 percent in manufacturing

1ILO: Accelerating action against child labour – Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2010 (Geneva, 2010).
Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors to work in at any age, in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases. For children, these risks are even further increased because their bodies and minds are still growing. 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.

According to the report on Understanding Children's Work (UCW) in Uganda 2008, children's work is concentrated overwhelmingly in the agriculture sector. Indeed, almost 96 percent of total economically-active 7-14 year-olds work in agriculture, against 3 percent in services and just 1.3 percent in manufacturing. Within the agriculture sector, most working children are involved in the growing of cereals or other crops (89 percent) or in mixed farming (i.e., growing of crops and animal husbandry). According to UWC report, in the agricultural sector, children are involved in activities ranging from digging, planting, growing, harvesting, processing, and marketing in tobacco, tea, rice, sugar cane, maize milling, cotton, horticulture. They are exposed to the following hazards: noise and vibration, carrying heavy loads, exposure to dust, fumes, hazardous chemicals (pesticides), extreme temperatures, dangerous machinery, long hours of work, exposure to smoking and animal attack. The risk and possible consequences include, loss of hearing, poisoning (acute and chronic), cuts and wounds, fatigue, long term health problems, respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal injuries.

A survey, of the state of labour in Uganda, indicated that 3.5 million children are engaged in agricultural activities, while 80% of the employers in this sector have children as part of their labour force.

It should be noted that, not all participation in some agricultural activities is 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 work that do no harm to the child, and child labour, which is work that interferes with schooling and damages health and personal development, based on hours and conditions of work, child’s age, activities performed and hazards involved.

Pro-biodiversity conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU) is implementing a 24 months project aimed at promoting chemical safety for children at work in rural agricultural communities. The project is an effort to put in place a minimal programme to prevent ill health arising from pesticides with particular focus on children at work in agricultural settings. The project covers 20 Districts in Uganda with focus on development of up-to-date information on chemicals in agriculture, their uses, the dangerous processes and end point discharges. The other focus is on development of human resource among the workers, employers and the general public for the dissemination of safety measures in use of toxic chemicals and building a comprehensive public awareness and education on the alternatives to toxic chemicals and careful use when it is necessary to use them.

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3National Centre for farm worker, Health, Inc. NCFH 2009
4Ibid
5Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) in Uganda, 2008
6Occupational Health and Hygiene Department Report
7ANPPCAN Uganda Chapter, Liza Sekaggya, June 2000.
8PROBICOU is a non for Profit Environmental Organization, engaged in environmental conservation, and poverty eradication.
Child Labour and Social Protection in Uganda

Social protection is one of the approaches promoted that has been effective in building safety nets and empowering vulnerable households to meet their basic needs and prevent children from engaging in child labour. Through social protection, families have been supported to start income generating activities and to participate in community savings and credit groups. Community savings and credit groups are community-led initiatives that involve pooling of locally available resources by group members for their mutual benefit which they use to acquire basic needs and also invest in income generating activities.

Social protection interventions are a very vital part in eradicating child labour. Poor and low-income households in Uganda are increasing becoming vulnerable due to chronic poverty, impact of HIV/AIDS, short term shocks and family disruptions. This has aggravated the dependence on children to work with an aim of earning income. Linking vulnerable households to social protection schemes such as Village Savings

Social protection interventions are a very vital part in eradicating child labour.

1African Development Bank, 2000
On the supply-side, community-based social protection schemes can provide a safety net against shocks where households can be able to manage the social risks, such as sickness and famine without necessarily relying on their children to work for income.

and Loan Associations (VSLA), Community Managed Micro Finance (CMMF), Self Help Groups (SHG) can help to improve and sustain household incomes and livelihoods, as a measure to prevent children in such households from engaging in labour, including its worst forms. Community programmes where vulnerable households are organized to meet regularly can assist community groups to share ideas on how to start and successfully manage small household businesses and also confront other social problems such as child labour, child neglect, poverty and domestic violence.

On the supply-side, community-based social protection schemes can provide a safety net against shocks where households can be able to manage the social risks, such as sickness and famine without necessarily relying on their children to work for income. Social protection interventions that effectively support families to manage social risks and poverty among households, can help to reduce vulnerability among households and also empower such families with positive choices and options that will enable them to improve and sustain their incomes, savings, livelihoods and overall well-being without sending their children to work as a coping mechanism.
Child Labour and Youth Unemployment in Uganda

Child labour and youth unemployment exist side by side. The ILO estimates that 62 million adolescents aged 15-17 years were engaged in hazardous occupations during 2008. This figure represents about half of all employment undertaken by this age group.

The overlap between the definitions of childhood (below 18 years) and youth (ages 15-24) points to the difficulties of drawing a distinct line between when childhood ends and when youth begins. Adolescence, generally defines the period that lies between the ages of 10-19 and is seen as the transition phase between childhood and young adulthood.

In Uganda like in many other countries child labour is linked to the problem of growing youth unemployment and underemployment and accounts for the declining trend in labour productivity among the young people in Uganda. Child labour prevents children from acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills thereby limiting their careers, employability and future livelihood opportunities as youths and their ability to transition from school into decent work as adults. Early involvement of children in the labour force prevents the accumulation of the human capital necessary for gainful employment during early adulthood and beyond.

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Youth unemployment and underemployment has important consequences for national growth, stability and development and can contribute to high levels of poverty and lost opportunities for economic growth.

The current labour force (persons aged 14-60) stands at 11.5 million with 57% (6.5 million) categorized as youth. Of the 6.5 million, only 19% (1.2 million) is employed, implying that an estimated 4.9 million youth are unemployed (UNHS 2009/10). Adolescents are increasingly presented with a choice between undertaking hazardous work or no work at all. These disadvantaged youth who are above the minimum working age but below 18 years are vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour. The National Employment Policy shows that if all children aged between 14-19 years were in school, there would be a fall in the new labour market entrants of about 100,000 young people per year. This would reduce on the numbers of the unemployed and underemployed young persons.

Addressing the problems related to child labour and youth unemployment is crucial for achieving decent work for all and in promoting intergenerational solidarity. Ultimately this contributes to a virtuous circle of development and poverty reduction. Noting the linkages between child labour, youth employment and underemployment, the experiences of children in their formative years are critical to ensuring that they transition into decent work opportunities and contribute to economic growth. Government has been implementing a number of measures to address child labour in the country among others:

1. Awareness raising campaigns on the dangers of child labour
2. Establishing child labour free communities
3. Simplification of the National Child Labour Policy and its translation into local languages for use by the local governments, social partners, youths, communities, teachers and civil society organizations and parents
4. Providing alternatives to child labour including skills training and income generating activities to older children
5. Enactment of ordinances and byelaws to discourage and prevent child labour
6. Formation of community mobilization groups to initiate, finance and implement programmes for elimination of child labour
7. Free universal primary education so that children attend school instead of engaging in child labour
8. With 54% of Uganda’s population under 15 years, child labour elimination efforts need to explore sustainable opportunities for addressing child labour to reduce youth unemployment and underemployment. More specific efforts should include, among others:
   1. Building capacity of the education system to ensure that young people complete and do not drop out of school. Remaining in school longer will provide them with the literacy and skills they need to obtain decent employment in the future and shift the young people from social dependency to self-sufficiency
   2. Provision of alternative learning programmes, skills training, life skills and non-formal vocational programmes
   3. Provision of recreational facilities in schools and improvement in adult to child communication through training in SCREAM to make the school environment friendlier to children
   4. Active labour market policies that increase employability of young people, such as, career guidance and counselling and placement
   5. Dissemination of vocational information on occupations, training institutions and self-employment opportunities to interested job seekers and youths, through the public employment services
   6. Collaborate with employers to provide enterprise based training to strengthen apprenticeship

It is important that the safety and health of the young people engaged in skills training and employment continues to be monitored to ensure that they are not exposed to hazardous work.
Child Labour and Education in Uganda

Worldwide, there is a growing consensus that all children need to be educated to become productive adults and that child labour jeopardizes their development. Consensus is also growing that education plays a key role in economic development, and that investment in education, in particular primary education and education for girls, gives a high return. No fewer than 250 million children aged between 5 and 14 are working worldwide. At least 120 million of them are working full time and close to 80 million are in hazardous work. They are the children who either have no education at all or have had very little education. These figures are staggering, but very much supported by UNESCOs statistics on education.

Child labour is work that harms children or work undertaken by children under conditions that are hazardous, illegal, or exploitative. It constitutes a grave violation of children’s rights, yet the majority of child labourers are hidden from eyesight and behind the reach of the law. Though poverty has been advanced as the principal cause of child labour, lack of access to scholastic materials, the high cost of education, and the limited relevance of education to livelihood concerns of vulnerable households are some of the reasons often cited for why children of school-going age engage in child labour.

Child labour affects the education performance, ambitions and attainment of children’s careers. Due to long hours

Education needs to be recognised as the principal occupation of children.

Walakira (2004)

Mukomye okukozesa abaana obupakasi
Stop child labour

Muwereze abana mu somero
Send all children to school

Worlds’ children aged 6-11 are out of school

145 million
(85 million girls, 60 million boys)
dedicated to hazardous and heavy work they are unable to attend school regularly. They are usually tired and absent-minded and therefore perform poorly and eventually drop out of school.

Education is linked to child labour in many different ways. The education system can contribute to the recruitment of children into the labour market by not providing enough school places for the children in school-going age, by not providing schools where the children live, by providing education where the private costs exclude some groups, or by providing education of insufficient quality or relevance.

On the other hand, education can play a key role in prevention of child labour. Provision of free, accessible, universal education of quality for all will always be a very important contribution to a sustainable solution to the child labour problem. In addition, if education is made compulsory, the education system can provide a low cost monitoring system to ensure that children continue to be in school and not at work. Reducing the drop-out rate, creating school environments where children at risk feel welcome, and taking into consideration the factors that keep girls away from school, are all important contributions to ensuring that the education system also caters for the children most at risk.

The most comprehensive International Labour Standard on child labour, ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138) lays down the principle that school age children should not be employed or work, requiring the minimum age for employment or work to be not less than the age for completion of compulsory schooling. Convention 138 allows light work for children 13 - 15 years of age (12 - 14 in developing countries) and it is part of the definition of light work, that it should not in any way jeopardize the child's possibilities to benefit from education (schooling and/or vocational training).

Likewise, the almost universally adopted UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children must be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to interfere with education, or is harmful to a child's health or well-being.

The National Child Labour Policy 2006 acknowledges that education is one of the key strategies for combating child labour and increased access to relevant quality education opportunities would enable children to develop their capacities and sustainably provide for their families when they become adults and break the cycle of poverty, unemployment, indecent work and child labour.

Among some of the efforts on child labour and education linkages by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), in collaboration with the ILO/IPEC, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), social partners and various implementing agencies have focused on:
1. Establishing child labour free communities
2. Involvement of communities in quality education, school feeding and school environment
3. Simplification of the National Child Labour Policy and its translation into local languages for use by the local governments, social partners, communities, teachers, civil society organizations and parents
4. The integration of child labour within the National Curriculum for Primary Education and the Teacher Training institutions and the production of SCREAM materials for use by the teachers and children using music, drama and drawing as a tool for raising awareness
5. Public awareness on the role of education in addressing child labour and profiling child labour elimination as a national priority issue for achieving the Millennium Development Goals on education

In addition to awareness-raising, education infrastructures need to be expanded and improved and the capacity of national education institutions built to deliver appropriate education systems that encourage children engaged in or at-risk of exploitative labour to attend school. In general, schools need to be made more receptive, accommodating, friendlier and safer for children. More importantly, children need to be involved in the decision-making processes of their removal from child labour and enrolment in school. Children need to understand why they need to be disengaged from child labour and made to appreciate why they need to go to school for them to remain in school. To ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts, policies on child labour and education need to be strengthened and enforced and the capacity of relevant national institutions built to conduct research and collect reliable data on child labour.

In the long run, education needs to be recognised as the principal occupation of children.

The MGLSD and the MoES intend to strengthen collaboration in efforts to increase educational opportunities as viable alternatives to combating the worst forms of child labour. This initiative presents a timely opportunity for the Ministries of Education and that responsible for Labour to jointly address common challenges that affect the two sectors in achieving the twin goals of elimination of child labour and education for all.

The public at large needs to know about child labour, particularly its worst forms, and why it is harmful both to the children concerned and to society as a whole. Vulnerable households need to be engaged at their level to enable them understand the benefits of education and how it can help to combat child labour. Parents and children must see education as a meaningful investment of time.
Poverty is undeniably one of the greatest challenges that many countries face in their efforts to sustainably eliminate child labour although poverty should never be an excuse for engaging children in hazardous work. According to the UNHS (2009/2010) 24.5% of the Ugandan population (7.5 million people) is poor. Of the 7.5 million, 7 million (94%) live in rural areas and are categorized as vulnerable and 5.8 million (78%) live in chronic poverty (UNHS 2009/10). With such high proportions of Ugandans living in absolute poverty, many households and communities traditionally depend on children’s work and labour. Thus children out of necessity have been compelled to work to supplement family incomes and in some cases support themselves and their siblings.

Poverty impacts negatively on education attainment of children from poor and vulnerable households and further perpetuates the cycle of child labour. Some households are so poor that they cannot even afford a pen, the most basic of all scholastic materials. For these households, education is seen as an unaffordable long term investment in comparison to their short-term basic survival needs. They are thus compelled to engage their children in hazardous work at an early age to enable children support themselves in school.

Poverty should never be an excuse for engaging children in hazardous work!

1Livelihoods, Empowerment and Protection (LEAP) project: Awareness-Raising Impact Assessment, 2011
Building the capacity of households to improve their incomes and savings is therefore an important element of a comprehensive and sustainable approach to eliminate child labour.

Building the capacity of households to improve their incomes and savings is therefore an important element of a comprehensive and sustainable approach to eliminate child labour. Increasing access to alternative income generating activities and savings schemes improves the earnings of poor households and provides increased opportunities for children to attend school regularly and stay in school. With improved incomes, parents feel a sense of independence and self-reliance as many are able to move out of debt and children no longer have to go to work. Strengthening household livelihoods through improved incomes also enables families meet their basic needs including food, water, and clothing in addition to paying for schooling for their children.

Child labour initiatives, such as, KURET\textsuperscript{2}, LEAP and ILO/IPEC SNAP\textsuperscript{3} project have all used a participatory approach to help poor families to form Village Savings & Loans Associations that have shown considerable potential for improving household income levels and savings. Using this strategy, the costs of paying for children’s education can slowly be shifted back to communities. To address the socio-cultural context of poverty and its linkages with child labour, community dialogues and conversations can be initiated to address the negative traditional norms, misconceptions and attitudes that place a huge value on children’s labour.

Promoting decent work for adults supplemented by social protection measures for the most poor provide a more sustainable strategy for the elimination of child labour.

\textsuperscript{2}Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia Together
\textsuperscript{3}Support for the preparatory phase of the Uganda National Action Plan on the elimination of child labour

Okuvuba kyabulabe eri abaana
Fishing is dangerous to children
Batwale basome
Send them to school
Child Labour and HIV/AIDS in Uganda

Child labour and HIV/AIDS are closely related. HIV/AIDS is both a cause and an effect of child labour and in this sense HIV/AIDS constitutes a real threat to child labour eradication efforts. The economic impact of the AIDS pandemic, due to the loss of parents who provide for homes, care and basic needs, is one of the primary factors pushing children into the labour market in Uganda.

Currently an estimate of 1.2 million people are living with HIV in Uganda (including 150,000 children); and 64,000 died from AIDS in 2009. These trends in HIV/AIDS contribute to the vicious cycle of child labour by exacerbating the poverty levels of households and accelerating the negative coping strategies including dependence on children’s work. It is estimated that 1.76 million Ugandan children aged 5 - 17 are engaged in child labour including its worst forms as defined by ILO Convention 182 and the National List of Hazardous Work. HIV/AIDS-associated illnesses often increase family health care and treatment expenses while inhibiting

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2Understanding Children’s Work in Uganda, March 2008 UBOS.
their ability to earn an income. In families where one or both parents are chronically ill or have died of AIDS related sicknesses, there is often no money left to continue paying for school fees and other related expenses. One of the coping mechanisms that households affected by HIV/AIDS have adopted to ensure survival of their families is, to remove their children from school and send them for casual work in order to generate income for the family. The girl child often takes a harsh burden in the family by providing care to the sick and also other household services for the entire family when a parent becomes ill or dies. The kind of work children engage in are often poorly paid, stressful, physically and emotionally demanding, harmful to their health and jeopardizes their future. Many inevitably miss out on acquiring the knowledge and developmental skills necessary to access decent work in their adult lives.

The most obvious manifestation of HIV/AIDS is the large number of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs) that are left behind due to the death of a parent. Traditionally, communities had family-based care structures for assisting such children, but these have been stretched beyond their capacity by the increasing number of orphaned children. The kind of work children engage in are often poorly paid, stressful, physically and emotionally demanding, harmful to their health and jeopardizes their future. Many inevitably miss out on acquiring the knowledge and developmental skills necessary to access decent work in their adult lives. The most obvious manifestation of HIV/AIDS is the large number of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs) that are left behind due to the death of a parent. Traditionally, communities had family-based care structures for assisting such children, but these have been stretched beyond their capacity by the increasing number of orphaned and needing care. Many orphans are therefore cared for in the households of guardians or relatives. Being under the care of grandparents or other relatives may not provide optimum protection and care to the children. They may have to work in order to contribute to income for the guardians and their siblings. This often exposes some of the orphans, especially girls, to HIV risk factors because they often work in situations where they are vulnerable to sexual abuse. This is particularly the case for children engaged in the worst forms of child labour, which includes commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), child trafficking, informal sector and street vending, and domestic work.

For a successful programme implementation on elimination of child labour, the relationship between child labour and HIV/AIDS need to be recognised and addressed in the design and delivery of child labour prevention and eradication activities. Opportunities for the integration of child labour issues into ongoing programmes on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work and the orphans and other vulnerable children need to be more expanded.