

RECONCILING WORK AND SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF WORKING CHILDREN IN MUCHEKE SUBURBS IN MASVINGO, ZIMBABWE

Gukurume Simbarashe and Nyanga Takupiwa

Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

The increasing prevalence of working children is symptomatic of the rampant poverty in most African countries, Zimbabwe included. There has been an emerging trend of children reconciling work and school simultaneously. Notwithstanding the fact that many people have viewed child work as a synonym for child labour; the researcher contends that there is a distinction between the two although there is an intricate relationship between the two. Traditionally the concept of child labour was used as euphemism for the work that children do both at home and in industries for survival. Child work has always been pervasive in most societies since the dawn of history. It is thus difficult to envisage any society devoid of any incidences of working children. To this end child work can be said to be as old as humanity. These working children have been confronted by a plethora of challenges; hence this study examined the challenges faced by working children at school as well as at work. This study further assessed children's perceptions on juxtaposing work and school. Likewise, the study also investigated the strategies that are employed by children in transcending the problems they face. It has emerged from the research findings that most working children are vulnerable to abuse by their employers, teachers, parents and relatives. It has also been noted that working, tends to destruct the attention of children at school and hence impacting on their performance, although there is no direct relationship between the two. Evidence from the study findings pointed to the fact that working for these children is a manifestation of a coping strategy employed by children muddled in abject poverty; hence working to them is necessary and functional. This study is grounded in qualitative methodology, with a triangulation of data collection techniques being used that range from unstructured in depth interviews, transect walks, direct observations, secondary sources of data and focus group discussions. Giddens structuration thesis was adopted as the fundamental analytical foundation. This study is based on an anthropological fieldwork conducted in Muccheke at various marketplaces.

Keywords: Child work, Child labour, Poverty, Child Schooling, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Livelihoods

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The problem of working children and child labour exists in almost all third world countries. With the adoption of the Convention on children's rights in 1919, the minimum age for industrial employment was set at fourteen, this age was later revised to eighteen years, Loewenson (1991). Despite ratification of such conventions by the Zimbabwean government, cases of working children under these age limits are skyrocketing in both the formal and informal sectors. This largely has been a consequence of the economic meltdown which had been bedeviling the country. According to the Central Statistics Office, many children under these age limits are participating actively in working life and tend to reconcile this with their school work. Loewenson (1991) noted that child labour today is normally viewed as a mere natural extension of what children have

always done in Zimbabwean society. It should be noted that in the pre – colonial, colonial and post – colonial eras, children from poor peasant families have almost always been involved in family production and domestic work from an early age. This has been done to some extent as a survival strategy, when children work to compliment family income. There should however, be a clear distinction between child work (working children) and child labour, since the latter is more positive to the children involved while the former is rather destructive to the children involved. Although some scholars argue that the difference between the two tends to be blurred, the researcher felt that there should be a disjuncture between the two. Thus the working children philosophy of ‘*education with production*’ has been hailed as an honourable form of child labour, if it is at all. This is so because the rationale has been that children are learning through working in some form of apprenticeship, thereby locating production firmly in educational context, Loewenson (1991). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics 41 percent of children under the age of fourteen, approximately 80 million are working. Basu (2007) notes that poverty appears to be the major reason for working children and child labour. As the poorest continent, Africa has a higher incidence of working children and child labour, which is further differentiated within the continent itself. As Basu (2007) states it, sending their children into the labour force is the family’s last income earning resort.

Some critics of the working children philosophy have argued that this philosophy has been manipulated as a ‘*buzzword*’ to explain child labour in commercial farms. These critics questioned if there is anything educational about such work, except exploitative education or education in exploitation. Child labour has been variously defined but for the purposes of this paper child labour refers to the premature involvement of children in adult forms of labour, working for long hours and usually under very harsh conditions, with this work interrupting with their educational endeavours. These children are thus deprived of meaningful educational and training opportunities. This study however focuses on children who are working and at the same time going to school. The author felt that little if any study has been done concerning child work, rather there is voluminous literature on child labour which in most cases is negatively portrayed. Thus the researcher felt that there is need to explore the experiences of children who are juggling with school and some work at the same time. It has been noted that children in poor families are inevitably vulnerable and victims of their parent’s poverty and economic insecurity. Thus children in such families are simultaneously compelled to juxtapose some work together with education so as to subsidize the family income. Sachikonye (1989) argued that in most poor households children are either out doing piece work or taking on some trading activities like street vending. Earnings from child work are often thought to be used to pay for the children’s school fees, books, food, uniforms as well as supplementing below poverty household incomes. It has also been noted that most of these children operate in makeshift stalls, temporary roadside markets and sometimes in open air markets. Through engaging in trading activities children are taking on responsibilities that their parents may not be able to meet. The ILO (2002b) noted that the incidence of working children is higher in Sub – Saharan Africa than in any other region in the world. They have also estimated that the number of child labourers in Sub – Saharan Africa is likely to surge to over 20 million as a result of a demographic explosion of impoverished people, deterioration of living standards and poor levels of economic growth across the region.

It is paradoxical that while there has been a plethora of literature pertaining to child labour, certainly not enough has been reported on the experiences of children who are working and schooling simultaneously, the challenges they face, their

perceptions on their work, benefits that come from such work if any and the strategies they employ to transcend the challenges confronting them in their daily routines. Notwithstanding the fact that these working children will have to spend some time at school, they are also expected to engage in some trading activities. While Sachikonye (1989), Loewenson (1991), Bourdillon (2001) focused on child labour and its related manifestations in several sectors that include commercial farms, mining sectors etc., this study departs from this. It has also been noted that most authors and researchers in this subject tended to portray working children and or child labour as the same as well as being largely negative and destructive to children's lives. This study however embraces a holistic approach of exploring both sides of the phenomenon. It is also of paramount significance to note that working children in large cities have been over studied (Loewenson 1994, McLoyd 1998, Sachikonye 1989;ILO 2005b), while working children in small cities have been largely ignored as if this phenomenon is only particular to mega cities. It is thus the major objective of this study to explore the experiences of working children in small cities like Masvingo. Other scholars like (McLoyd, 1998; Mitullah, 2003; Fields, 1990; Basu, 2007) have focused on policies pertaining to the arresting of child work in Africa. This study explores the lived experiences of working children from the point of view of those children in question, thus employing a phenomenological perspective in understanding children's lifeworlds. Most street working children have been stereotyped as juveniles, thieves, prostitutes and deviant vagrants. To this end it should be noted that several studies on working children are embroiled in gross misconceptions about, and against either child work or working children. Loewenson (1991) noted that the conditions under which children work, are at odds with the rights of children outlined in the Draft UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and will persist while society and the economy continue to generate extremes of poverty and wealth. Many children work not for their own family but for the wealth of a private employer with squalid working conditions. The International Labour Organization (ILO – 2002b: 11) estimates that there are 48 million children in sub-Saharan Africa who are economically active in the 10-14 age group, representing 20-30% of children – a higher percentage than anywhere else in the world (Admassie 2002: 255). While the practice of child work has always existed in the Zimbabwean history the current situation in the country has seen a considerable increase in this phenomenon due to the economic malaise that confronted the country in the last decade. Many people justify employing children as a way of providing income for poor children and their families, or as a way of providing them with a decent life and shelter. Bourdillon (2000) argued in the Zimbabwean context employing children “is sometimes a route to providing poor children with a means of livelihood. Some children use their labour to fund the expenses necessary to complete their schooling” (Ngwenya, 2009). According to Bourdillon (2001) the ILO policy on the minimum age for employment has always been explicitly linked to education, and the Minimum Age Convention stated that the minimum age for entry into employment should not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION

The researcher noted that while there is a myriad of literature and research on child labour, there is however, paucity on research focusing on working children who are juggling with both work and school with particular emphasis being placed on the challenges they are facing, the strategies they employ to transcend such challenges as well as the advantages and/or disadvantages of engaging in work on their education. Little research has been done to unearth the routine experiences of children in this situation. In most literature the researcher noted that child work has been largely viewed as the direct inverse of school attendance, reality however points to the fact that many children combine work and school more especially when

the work they do is family run enterprise. This thus forms the major crux of this research. It has been observed with great concern by the researcher that most studies on working children portrayed such scenario negatively, focusing only on the bad side of the practice basing on their obscure preconceptions and biases. In this research, therefore the working children give accounts and narratives on their situation highlighting their challenges and how they overcome them. Thus, rather than imposing reality on these children, this study seeks to understand this phenomenon from the people concerned. While it may be a brutal fact that working children may be disadvantaged academically by simultaneously engaging in productive roles, it can also be true that some children are benefiting greatly from their participating in productive activities. This study thus seeks to understand the phenomenon of working children from their personal point of view. It should also be underscored that this scenario also impacts on the sustainable development of the communities in question. This is so because to the children working may have ambivalent outcomes to the children involved. To some children working may enhance their livelihoods as well as academic attainment as children are able to finance their education by working. This will inevitably enhance the attainment of sustainable development since education is regarded as the pillar for sustainable development. Education is considered the most fundamental resource to the poor and is essential to enabling them to lift themselves out of poverty. It is thus against this background that education can be regarded as a precondition for sustainable development, hence the more educated the children the higher the chances of attaining sustainability. It has been noted that lack of education and illiteracy in most African countries has been portrayed as a long-standing source of underdevelopment. To this end, most poor families rarely afford to send their children to school. Consequently, such children will then resort to wage employment so as to finance their education; hence working for these children should be viewed as the sine qua non for sustainable development. Without working most of these children would not be able to educate themselves and would plunge in abject poverty with negative ramifications for sustainable development. It should be underscored that when children work and learn simultaneously, they can have enormous potential to contribute not only to the sustainable development of their own communities but to the national and global society. Needless to stress that education is seen as fundamental to improving the quality of life in developing countries, by lifting the children who are educated out of poverty and by improving the quality of human resources that are available for sustainable national economic development.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research study are:

- 1) To assess children perceptions about juxtaposing work and school simultaneously.
- 2) To examine the challenges faced by working children in juggling with school and work.
- 3) To investigate the various strategies they employ to overcome such challenges.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is highly embedded within the Structuration thesis by Giddens (1979). For Giddens (1979) structure refers to the visible patterning of social relations, it entails the rules and resources that actors draw upon as they produce and reproduce social activity. Likewise, agency entails the capacity of individual actors to act independently and make their own rational choices in dealing with challenges confronting them. Seale (1992), notes that structure is however not external to action (agency), rather it is internal to the flow of action which constitutes social practices. This structuration thesis provides

important analytical insights into the dialectical relationship between the 'structure', in this case poverty and the challenges of having to work while going to school at the same time, and agents/actors henceforth working children and the strategies that they devise to overcome the many problems that confront them in their daily routines. In as much as actors in this case working children are constrained by the structure in this poverty and schoolwork, these actors employ multiple livelihood strategies which vary with the nature of the endowments of livelihood capital that they possess (Ellis, 1998 &, 2002). The concept of structuration allows working children to be viewed as capable actors who act rationally and respond swiftly to the dictates of structures that surrounds them. Thus, actors become both '*structured structures*' as well as '*structuring structures*' as they engage themselves in a number of strategies in response to structural constraints posed by the many challenges imbued in their daily routines. . Structuration thesis thus becomes important in this research since it places emphasis on the fact that individual actors are not passive and helpless dupes or pawns, but are competent agents. The assumption that many people have is that most if not all children who are working are forced to do so by some people, especially their parents and relatives. True as it may sound but not all are forced .Infact, some children willingly engage in productive activities as a survival strategy and without that their education may be thrown in turmoil. To this end, this research becomes holistic in nature by focusing on children trapped in both situations and tries to understand it from the children concerned.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

This research is purely qualitative in nature. Unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and transect walks were employed as the major data collection techniques. Qualitative methodology enabled the generation of rich descriptive data that helped in understanding the experiences of working children. This research made extensive use of secondary sources of data, appreciating what other researchers have documented pertaining to working children. Transect walks will offer an opportunity for direct observation by the researcher on the actual activities done by the children in their daily routines especially at their market places. The qualitative methodology is the most appropriate in this study since it is highly interactive and flexible, since it allows triangulation of techniques whereby the researcher will employ focus group discussions, unstructured interviews and secondary sources of data. Through this methodology life experiences, feelings, perceptions, opinions and aspirations will be revealed by the participants as they give detailed accounts of their daily routines in engaging in their activities. The ages of children studied ranged from 9 to 17 years, although some isolated cases of children under 9 years were salient and consequently incorporated in this study. The social construction of childhood has however been problematic. This is because some scholars have argued that the definition of childhood is elastically relative since some of those categorized as children on the basis of age are actually heads of households and thus becomes adults by default, while others argue that for example 17 year olds are scarcely "*children*".

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Unstructured interviews were the main data gathering technique in this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) assert that an interview is a face to face interpersonal role situation in which an interviewer asks respondents questions to elicit answers pertaining to the research problem from the concerned people themselves. In this study unstructured interviews are important as the main data soliciting technique. Unstructured interviews created rapport between the researcher and the participating children. The researcher felt that interviews are more appropriate because of their high response rate and the room for the researcher to

probe for clarification from the participants. Interviews offered the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and self administered questionnaires cannot, therefore enhancing reliability of the data.

Moreso, to complement unstructured interviews, transect walks were carried out in the research area. The researchers used this method to find out and directly observe the work activities that children are engaged in and how the children coping strategies work. The researcher walked around the market places in Mucheke observing the children conducting their businesses in their natural setting. Transect walks allowed the researcher to watch life as it happened naturally so as to add weight to the narratives got from interviews. Thus, transect walks offered observational insights in corroborating the information gathered from other data collection techniques.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with the working children in Mucheke. The focus group interview is essentially a data gathering technique that relies upon the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting (Patton, 2002). Three FGDs were conducted, one with male children, another with female children and the last one with a combined group of both male and female children. FGDs allows for multivocality with various perspectives coming from many individuals. These assisted the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding into the lived experiences of the working children. FGDs had been conceptualised as a fundamental way of listening to people and learning from them. It allows access to research participants who may be intimidated with face to face interaction to participate and they may find the experience more gratifying and stimulating. Patton (2002) argued that FGDs can be an important element in discussing openly the challenges that children are facing as a collectivity. Moreover, this collective nature of the group interview empowers the participants and validates their voices and experiences about working and schooling.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

In the selection of research participants convenient sampling was employed. This technique entails that the researcher subjectively selects respondents who are simply available in a convenient way based on the purpose of the study. In this study the willingness of children to participate was also very important in selecting respondents. The participatory consultations with children were conducted with an ethical understanding of their vulnerability and respect for their capacities. Consent was sought from the guardians of the children interviewed or their respective employers.

STUDY AREA

The city of Masvingo is situated on the southern part of the country along Harare – Beitbridge main road. Masvingo was the first modern settlement to be established in the country in 1890. Mucheke, likewise thus becomes the first and oldest low income residential area in the country to be established by the colonialists. Mucheke was established to house blacks who were working for the white colonial masters. This possibly explains the proximity of especially Mucheke A to the industrial site as well as the city centre. During the colonial era to date Mucheke is inundated and domiciled by the low – income earners. Livelihood activities for most households in Mucheke are centered on vending and petty trading. Vending is normally done along busy streets such as Chesvingo Street and at bus terminuses like Mucheke bus terminus. Petty trading

and vending increases in volume at these confluences and during the festive season as many people pass through long distance bus terminuses where most vending sites and markets are located. Masvingo has a small industry despite being the oldest city and most people who work in these industries stay in Muccheke and other low income suburbs like Rujeko and Runyararo. Although the city has a weak industrial base, the city and by extension Muccheke has experienced phenomenal spatial and demographic growth over the years. By virtue of being the oldest suburb in Masvingo, Muccheke is also the largest in spatial and demographic terms. The prominent trading areas include Yeukai market, Muccheke bus terminus, Chitima market, Tanaiwa market and Chesvingo Street. Muccheke suburb is separated from the city centre by Muccheke River which is one of the major rivers in the city.

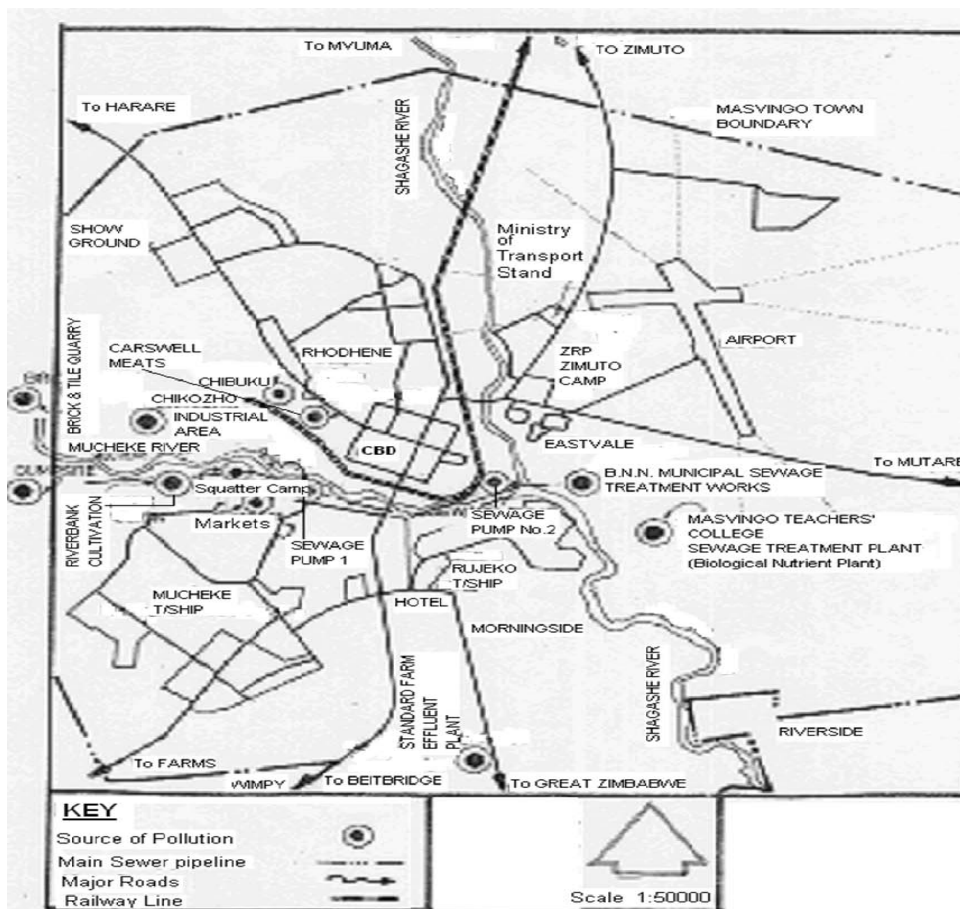


Figure: 1 Map showing the study area of Muccheke Township where children work

(Source: Mapira 2011)

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section of the paper the researcher presents the major findings of the study based on the narratives provided and interviews with the working children. Presentation and discussion in this section is done concurrently. In presenting and discussing the findings the researcher utilized critical issues that emerged from the ethnographic fieldwork with the working children.

The Hot – Seating System and Working Children.

It has been observed in this study that children have been imbibed into working due to a multiplicity of reasons. One respondent interviewed said;

“I had to come to the market because my mother was sick, I had stopped going to school but my mother’s friend assisted me with capital to start this business”

He noted that the hot – seating system to him is actually a blessing in disguise because if he goes to school in the morning, he can then come back and trade in the afternoon and evening. Likewise if he goes to school in the afternoon then he has to go to the market in the morning. The hot – seating practice is a system whereby certain classes alternate going to school in the morning for a week and then in the afternoon in the coming week. This practice emerged due to the skyrocketing number of students in urban areas. Due to limited classroom blocks or class space; it meant that other students have to come to school at a later time than others for them to be accommodated. It has been observed from a number of conversational interviews by the researcher that poverty is one of the fundamental vehicles behind the prevalence of this practice of working children. These children work in a number of sectors of the economy, while a majority was observed to be working in the informal sector. Most children are engaged in street vending. One respondent argued that after his parents passed on he had no choice but to look for employment. Being the oldest in his family he had become a *de –facto* household head and thus had to fend for his two brothers and sisters. He was forced to suspend his studies for a year and returned later after his finances had stabilized. He said;

“If I had not started selling a range of products in Chesvingo Street, my brothers and sister would have died and I could not have aborted my studies for good”.

Most of the children interviewed in this study indicated that working and going to school is a toll order but there have no option. A greater number of children interviewed highlighted that they have lost one or all of their parents; hence more than half of the working children interviewed were orphaned. This was one of the reasons given pertaining to their working. One old lady who had employed one of my informants noted that if these children do not come and work then their families will not have money to send them to school or even to buy food for the family. In this case working children are seen to be playing a fundamental role in complementing the family income. A number of schools in Masvingo have adopted the hot – seating system and this system enables those working children to have some time to go to the market to trade. One respondent argued that he had to transfer from one school to another school which had hot – seating since he was having limited time of trading because his former school did not have hot – seating. It was observed from the interviews conducted that most of the working children who were going to school were benefiting from their involvement in trading, this was so

because the money that accrued to them was used for school fees, uniforms and other things as well as for survival. Thus, it can be argued that while working and schooling was a major challenge it was a necessary evil to the children involved. Most of the working children interviewed confirmed that they were working in a household – run enterprise and a few were working for other people not related to them noted that poverty and orphanhood are the fundamental forces that compelled them into working. It was observed however that those who were working in family – run businesses had relatively flexible work schedules that allowed them relatively adequate time to combine both work and school attendance. Some children noted that their families could have barely survived the economic quagmire that the country faced without some income from their work. One child interviewed argued that their working is more of a survival strategy and thus it becomes a necessary evil, less terrible than illness or even death due to inadequate income (poverty).

During fieldwork, it became apparent that most of the working children in Muccheke have either lost a single parent or all of them and such a situation pushed them into wage employment or self – employment so as to fend for the other family members. One respondent said;

“I was supposed to be doing form three but I stopped school for about two years when my parents died, I then worked for those two years to raise money for my school fees and I have since resumed school”.

He noted that this was the only way he could look after his two young brothers and raise his own school fees. Some children were working for their parents on a part time basis especially after school, during weekends and on holidays as mobile vendors in Chesvingo Street and at the Muccheke bus terminus. The researcher thus contends that such kind of work does not totally interfere with the children’s education since these children work on their spare time to compliment family income and assist their parents thereby increasing household income which by extension also helps the wellbeing of the children concerned. One child interviewed argued that he only works after school since the business he is into thrives on the later hours of the day.

He said;

“Ini ndinogocha chibage chokutengesa saka ndinoenda kuchokoro ndozodzoka ndichigocha chibage” (I sell smoke maize cobs and this business thrives in the evening so this enables me to go to school first).

Child work in this case should be understood from within a cultural setting where children work to grow in competence and confidence. Poverty is a challenge for many people living in sub-Saharan Africa. Curtin, Hossain & Choudhury (1997) regarded poverty eradication as the central key for reducing the number of working children and pursue development efforts and subsequently attaining sustainable development. Results revealed that in most instances school children engage in income generating activities because of their poor socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents or guardians fail to provide them with adequate food, clothes and money for school fees which usually culminate into low educational attainment. The findings are in line with Brudely, Burchinal & Carwyn (2001) who observed that in most cases children who live in abject poverty engage in some gainful employment activities as a strategy to pursue their studies and also provide basic necessities for themselves and their siblings. Working children who are usually from economically disadvantaged families try to generate income to acquire basic commodities. It is clear that there is a lack of extra resources for other educational activities

such as school trips. In line with these findings Shumba (2010) observed that most often poor homes have no place and resources for the child to do homework and study because poverty often comes with crippled living conditions. Educational resources such as books and pens are not likely to be available; hence the child views the engagement into income generating activities as a major if not the only source for his/her survival. Children sell tomatoes, vegetables, and airtime in most instances to travellers. To further clarify the activities they engage in, one of the participants said;

“After school I sell tomatoes and fruits at Mucheke Bus terminus so as to subsidize my parents’ income which also enables them to pay my school fees and other basics”

The findings show that children do not engage in buying and selling activities out of will but out of need and necessity. The main reason why school going age children engage in buying and selling activities is mainly to support their parents’ income. The researcher observed that the socio – economic and political quandary and its subsequent deepening poverty has collapsed and eroded traditional family “*safety nets*” which used to be shock absorbers in times of adversities. To this end, without any safety nets to fall back on, children have no choice but to seek employment for them to survive and support their minor siblings. Such has been the case with a number of the children interviewed in this study. The buying and selling activities deprive children enough time to embark on their school work. It has also emerged that students are given school work to do at home so engaging in buying and selling activities leave them with little or no space to do their homework.

Exploring the Challenges faced by working Children in their daily business routines

Life stories and narratives of children’s experiences in their daily routines at the market highlighted that most of the children working in the streets and at bus terminus markets have had a long and protracted exposure to violence and abuse either from the general public, employers, police and the municipal police. This is because street vending is regarded by the police and by extension local authorities as illegal hence child vendors always fought running battles with these law enforcing agents and repressive state apparatus. It was also observed that children from poor households preferred to endure bouts of exploitation and abuse rather than standing up to their rights. This was mainly because most of them could not afford to risk their necessary and only source of income for just rights. Since some if not most of the children came from deprived families, they had no choice but to be ill – treated as long as they would get some money to buy something to eat for their families as well as money to go to school. This concurs with Muzvidziwa (1994) who argued that households that are struggling to survive tend to use the services of their children in order for them to boost their sales and enabling them to survive. One child noted that he was beaten by his employer after he had lost some of the merchandises he was selling to the police. He said;

“It was very painful that after spending almost two days in prison, my madam had to beat me up and threatened not to give me my salary after losing some goods to the police”.

In this case because the police occasionally invaded their vending points, these children had resorted to keeping a few commodities with them. This was a strategy of minimizing excessive loses in the event that they are caught by the police and risk losing all their wares to the police. One of the respondent noted that he has been ill – treated on several occasions by his employers and he argued that sometimes he is forced to go to the market when it is raining. Some of the children argued that

they sometimes go for some months without being paid by their employers while some claimed that sometimes they are paid in kind with clothes albeit their consent to such form of payment. Ngwenya (2009) noted that children are vulnerable to exploitation because in most cases they do not have a voice in their families, communities and society. In the same vein, Loewenson (1991) observes that while the victim is always the child, the oppressor is not only the employer but also relatives.

In most African countries, Zimbabwe included street vending has been regarded as an eyesore that undermines the smooth functioning of the formal economy and consequently such attitude has resulted in perpetual conflicts between vendors and urban authorities over licensing, site of operation and taxation. Thus, the researcher observed that most child vendors carve out a living in an environment fraught with harassment by urban authorities like the police and municipal authorities. This is because vendors settle in streets spontaneously without any official allocation; hence this resulted in incidences of brutal confrontation between the vendors and law enforcing agents. Children engaging in street vending have also been caught up in such violent confrontations that have dominated the relationship between the vendors and the urban authorities. Some of the children noted that they are always late at school due to the distance that they travel from the market to school. They also arrive at school exhausted and may actually sleep in class. This tends to consequently impact on their performance in class.

One respondent argued that;

“I walk from Runyararo West to the “Chitima market” before going back to Masvingo Christian secondary for my lessons, sometimes I will arrive at school exhausted and thus affecting my concentration levels”.

He noted that to avoid going to school late he takes his uniforms to the market so that he will not have to go back home again before going to school. He further noted that for coming to school late, he has been forced to do a number of punishments, which also affects his schoolwork and class time. Some respondents did not regard the buying and selling activities they do after or before school as part of work but regarded it as part of socialization towards playing a productive role in society. They argued that traditionally children looked after cattle, foraged for food, looked after young children and worked in family fields hence children always manage to satisfy both home and school needs. In support of these findings the International Labour Organisation’s International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour 1992 report revealed that child work is a natural extension of what children have always done in Zimbabwean society. The following verbal quote illustrates the feelings of one of the respondents;

“I used to work at home when my parents were still alive so I feel I have just changed my work place from home to the streets”

It means that even if a child embarks on formal employment he remains at the same position with those who will be home after school since their parents will assign them to some family chores to do. Whilst it is appreciated that the effects child work on children’s education needs to be curtailed, it has always been very difficult to differentiate it from other family chores and it has been observed that it helps to stabilize families’ socio economic positions. Eradicating child work may yield

adverse effects such school dropouts because of lack of school fees. It has also been noted that much of their activities are not so exploitative or hazardous, but rather are performed under conditions which are friendly to children.

Migration of Parents and Child Work

The findings revealed that at the height of the economic turmoil and political upheavals, over two million Zimbabweans have found themselves in all parts of the world where their labour was most required and where the political environment was stable. The rampant brain circulation that characterized the country has had both positive and negative ramifications for the children of the diaspora. While the other diaspora kept their families going during the toll of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe when they remitted home part of their earnings, some failed to provide basic needs for their children. Some parents who relocated abroad failed to transform their economic fortunes hence could not afford to provide their families with basic necessities such as food, clothing and school fees. The above said conditions forced children to seek for employment or self-employment so as to acquire financial resources to meet their basic needs. One of the respondent indicated that his parents went to South Africa in 2007 and never came back nor remitted anything home for their welfare. The migration of people abroad has placed a greater burden on children who have been forced to take unfamiliar roles in the family set up. What further motivated children to do both school work and employment is that the diaspora concept in Zimbabwe led to the breakup of families, as both the remaining spouse and the one in the diaspora may engage in extra marital activities. Wives and husbands left behind are either cohabiting with other men or women, increasing the channels of the HIV and AIDS transmission. Family break ups and death of parents left children to live as destitute as some were left in the custody of other relatives who also failed to provide all the necessities to them. For these children to proceed with their studies they had to attempt to balance both work and education. The use of child-labour is a common coping strategy employed to make up for the lost labour due to migration. Children are compelled to reconcile school and work to supplement household incomes. Muchini & Nyandiya (1991) noted that children have assumed decision making roles and responsibilities that transform roles within the family. It is however paramount to argue that work has benefited many children in this situation to complete their education. This confirms arguments made by Ngwenya (2009) who noted that work in child headed households has benefited working children to help their siblings in completing schooling. It is against this background that Heady (2000) argued that work ensures survival for these working children and hence *“to cease to work is to cease to live”*. Consequently, the researcher thus contends that working for these children becomes a matter of life and death given the global transformations taking place where one’s survival is informed by income levels. This gives credence to Bourdillon’s (2001) arguments that many people who denigrate child work as child labour simply do not understand the cultural values and economic situations of families in Africa. It is thus prudent to argue that child work has not only enabled children to acquire education vital for their future and for the development of the country, it has also prepared these children for their future roles which is a precondition for sustainable development. It also emerged from the interviews that working children tended to be much better off than their non – working counterparts, especially those from poor households. While most studies on working children have tended to portray them as vulnerable to any threat in the work environment as well as being viewed as by and large voiceless and defenseless, this study in contrast unearthed the ingenuity and rational competence of working children in transcending their challenges and standing for themselves. Through working many children have been able to support themselves and their families which could not have been possible if they were not working. Empirical findings in this study

showed working children's ingenuity to mobilise resources which enabled them to finance their education and rise through the social ladder.

Of Working – School Performance Interface

It has been observed that while some scholars have noted that there is a positive and direct correlation between the children's performance at school and their nature of work, it has however emerged in this study that the relationship is not as direct as these scholars want us to believe. The traditional norm to this nexus has been that working children are the worst performing at school because they tend to have very limited if any time to study. This is supported by scholars like Heady (2000) who argued that children that work as well as going to school may find themselves less able to learn, as a result of exhaustion or insufficient time to complete homework. In sharp contrast, basing on the school reports shown to the researcher and narratives given by respondents it was confirmed that some of the working children have been consistently performing extremely well. Some of them have been in the top five grades ever since they started working. While it is a brutal fact that work tends to distract children's time for studying, it does not always follow however that such working children would inevitably perform dismally in class. This concurs with the narratives given by most children that the problems they face actually motivate them to work extremely hard so as to enhance their chances of coming out of their abject poverty. However, findings from some children interviewed revealed that the idea of trying to reconcile work and school has devastating effects to their educational performance. Working children experience stressful situations as a result of the activities they carry out during the day. These children work in violent environments such as the Mucheke bus terminus which is characterized by abusive language and bullying. It is thus apparent that it is difficult if not impossible to reconcile work and school effectively. The antecedents raised by the some of the respondents show that children's performance at school is sometimes greatly affected and it is only through hard work that some of them are still performing well. Respondents confessed that they are sometimes forced to engage in illicit activities, like taking drugs to remove shyness. Some of the children also noted that they are mocked by their teachers and schoolmates and also ill-treated by the police while they are trading at various marketplaces. All these unfriendly experiences work against children's school performance. The experiences they have raised make them feel helpless, inferior and having nagging thoughts culminating to serious psychological disorders such as difficulties to sleep, disrespectful and bullying which are all antecedents that negatively impact on their performance at school. Chireshe & Plattner (2010) observed that vending makes children vulnerable to a number of development complications. For example a child's cognitive development may be impeded, and that in turn negatively affect the child's academic success. Lieten (2005) in his study also revealed that poverty leads to a decline in self-esteem and an increase in mental and physical health problems for children. The findings of this study concur with earlier findings that the child's cognitive development is impeded because of the traumatic conditions they are exposed to. Since poverty and vending are highly correlated, it therefore follows that those children who do both gainful work and attend school face devastating challenges that inturn affect their growth, socialization and schoolwork. For a student to perform well he/she has to be physically fit and psychologically stable, which is a different case with working children. They spend the better part of the day toiling for customers hence by the time they go back to school they will be tired; as a result their performance at school is deterred and sometimes they may sleep in class and fail to concentrate and understand what the teachers will be saying.

Results from this study also revealed that children who try to balance both work and school have very low educational motivation. Mwamwenda (1995) argued that motivation facilitates learning hence if it is low children's performance is retarded. How hard children work on a given task at school is determined by their level of interest. The greater their interest, the harder they will work, and the lower their interests the less hard they will work. The findings show that it is difficult to reconcile work and school since work breeds low motivation which works against the child's performance at school. These findings concur with Dearing's (2008) observation that children who fend for themselves develop feelings of fatalism, defenselessness, depending inferiority, and lower levels of motivation. Working children are likely to experience socio-emotional problems such as impaired peer and teacher relationship, low self-esteem, which translate into low motivation to achieve academically.

Some of the children interviewed argued that they are ill – treated and abused at school by teachers and fellow students who occasionally label them as thieves or street kids and this treatment tend to take its toll on the actual performance of these children.

One child interviewed in this study had this to say;

“I don't enjoy working after school because it makes us mocked by our teachers and school mates especially when we fail our homework, class tests and end of term examinations”

One 12-year-old boy interviewed explained:

“But my uncle is literate, and he always encourages me to go to school. I want to continue the tradition of being literate in the family. I want to continue studying in the future and go outside the village to be a doctor”.

Thus, it should be noted that likewise, if a child is not blessed with a learning environment at home, he or she is prone to fail and eventually to drop out of school. However, despite all these challenges many working children still perform extremely well, sometimes even surpassing those who mocks and look down upon them. It can thus be concluded that it is not working that harms children's educational achievement or enrolment, but rather a lack of motivation that affects both work and learning. Some of the children interviewed argued that their wish is to pass well and proceed to University. In this study a sizeable number of children interviewed were working for their families, with their work being perceived as merely a necessary extension of the kind of contribution that children routinely make to their households. In times of diversity it can be noted that children become a priceless resource for complementing family income. It was noted that this phenomenon is not an aberrant new development but has always been salient in traditional agrarian societies when children were viewed as family assets providing a pool of labour in the fields as well as herding cattle and domestic chores. Children in this case are thus seen to be creating value within the family economy through their engagement in work related activities like vending. Despite the fact that the contribution of children working for their families is unpaid, it emerged in this study that most of them were actually taking pride that they are contributing to the sustenance of the family. This motivates them to work even harder in an attempt to uplift the family out of abject poverty. Through working it is of paramount importance to note that some children acknowledged that they are able to secure some of their earnings towards their own educational costs. In this case families of the children in question are thus benefiting from their children's working. Findings in this study highlight

that poverty and related economic hardships have been compelling many children to work. In this case working at such a tender age becomes a coping strategy that is not only employed by the orphaned children but also by families finding it difficult to sustain their livelihoods without the children's contribution.

Kickbacks and Social Networks of Child Vendors

It has also emerged that to avoid being arrested or having their merchandise confiscated; child vendors offer the law enforcing agents some gifts in cash or kind. This was one of the strategies employed to deal with challenges posed by the police. One respondent noted that if you give them (law enforcement agents) some money then you will be allowed to trade and they will not arrest you for some time. It was thus imperative for most child vendors to establish some social networks with the police and local authorities operating in their area. It is against this background that child vendors should be viewed as rational and calculative subjects rather than being seen as passive objects who are merely victims of their situations. Some of the children argued that they are sometimes rounded up by municipal police officers, beaten up and all their goods taken. Sometimes they resort to paying police officers bribes so that they do not lose all their goods. This gives credence to Loewenson's (1991) arguments that these working children have not been protected by the state, but have instead been victims of police harassment. Their activities are illegal under the Children's Protection and Adoption Act (1972). One third had been fined and had their wares confiscated by the police, despite the importance of their activities to household earnings. The current practice of child vendors' harassment, which defines the children as criminals and breeds hostility towards the police and these children are playing cat and mouse relationships whilst engaging their activities. However, it should be noted that these children have not simply been passive victims of police crackdowns and arrests but have also tries to negotiate a truce with these children. These children pay the police and local authorities some bribe as a pre – requisite for making themselves immune to arbitrary arrests and confiscation of the goods. Findings in this study jettison the archaic perception that portrays children as passive victims of the societal whims, poverty and societal structures; instead children in this study should be portrayed as active agents who can manipulate some of the constraining structures like the police. This is evidenced by how child vendors bribe the police to avoid being disturbed while conducting their activities and also avoiding arrests. These children have thus rationally dealt with their poverty by working and engaging in vending activities. This working for children became an essential activity for the children's survival and education. This is so because it emerged from the study that most of the children's work earnings are often used to pay for school fees, purchasing school uniforms and other basic household food items. It is against this background that the researchers contend that unlike child labour, it should be noted that child work does not necessarily deprive the children of their meaningful educational and training opportunities. Children in this case are able to go to work because of the proceeds from their work and thus they juggle both work and school simultaneously as a survival strategy. This gives credence to Bourdillion (2000) who argued that there is need for more careful definition and prioritization of what is to be eliminated. Abolishing child work in this case may actually create more and worse problems than it can solve. Mupedziswa & Gumbo (2001) argued that to these children, employment was not a problem; it was a solution to greater problems. This is because most children partaking in work are benefiting from their involvement in work hence their survival and sustenance directly depends on such activities. Child work can thus be viewed as a manifestation of a coping strategy and the creativity of children confronted by adversity like orphanhood. This concurs with Bourdillion's (2000) conclusion that many children have to be economically active for

themselves and their siblings to survive due to orphanhood from the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Thus, instead of viewing employment of children as a problem, it should instead be viewed as a solution to many problems confronting the children in question. Of note here is the fact that work made schooling possible for many of the children. Bourdillion (2000) argued that the concern about child labour is an imposition by people who do not understand the cultures and economic situations of families in Africa. Instead child work should be tolerated since it is work that is not exploitative and can accommodate education. To this end, Bass (2004) noted that child work “plays a positive role in a child’s development if consistent with the child’s evolving mental and physical capabilities”. These children should not be stopped from working, but rather their rights should be protected to ensure that they received schooling, a minimum wage, contracts binding on the employer, and freedom to leave. This concurs with Mupedziswa & Gumbo (2001) who argued that eliminating child work has sometimes proved harmful for the children concerned. Bourdillion (2000) noted that Zilama’s study in Morocco pointed to positive reasons for working, including access to skills, financial independence, and respect within their families. It is thus against this background that Loewenson (1991) also noted that we need to be careful not to allow our perceptions of the interests of children to be coloured by our own interests when it comes to child work. Heady (2000: 18, 33) showed that children were able to combine school and economic work, and work did not seriously affect attendance of children.

The Gendered Nature of Child Work

The researcher observed that child work is inherently a gendered phenomenon fraught with some kind of gender division. This is so because girls tended to dominate food vending activities. This concurs with Muzvidziwa’s (1994) conclusion that there is a gender division in vending which is more pronounced in the hawking of non – food items such as toys, watches and belts which even in this study was almost exclusively the preserve of young boys. Food item vending has had a special appeal for women because it is largely an extension of their domestic roles. Young girls are usually employed as domestic workers, and since it is possible for very young children to undertake light household tasks, the age of entry is very low in comparison to other sectors in which children work. However, Mupedziswa & Gumbo (2001) notes that children’s powerlessness within the household renders them especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. Bourdillion (2000) also notes that children as domestic workers are under the exclusive round-the-clock control of the employer thus have little freedom. Work for these children has become a necessity for survival. One of the girl interviewed said;

“I only sell chicken cuts, vegetables and tomatoes in Chesvingo Street after school while my brother sells airtime and pirated CDs at Yeukai and Sisk shopping centres”.

However, while selling pirated CDs is an extremely profitable business it is risky since pirating is a crime. It has also been observed from the children’s narratives that they are sometimes rounded up and arrested by the police while selling CDs. It goes without saying, that there is a clear cut differentiation between the activities that are done by male children and female children. It emerged from the interviews that selling pirated CDs is one of the most profitable businesses despite the fact that children in this industry have to bear the gruesome brunt of having to face successive arrests by the police. Henderson (2004) argued that

CONCLUSION

It has been observed that working children do not have the same kind of experiences that children of other social classes have. They experience both psychological and emotional challenges which put them at a position that compromises their academic achievement. It has also emerged that the children who spend part of their day in stressful work environments experience high degrees of behavioral problems which make them unsuccessful in their academic work. Children who do both gainful employment and academic studies are likely to put more effort on pressing psychological needs than in educational activities. This category of school children cum employees are at the highest risk of being truant and ultimately failing to perform academically as expected. Thus, working children contend with a multiplicity of challenges both at work and at school. Working children are embroiled in long and protracted running battles with the police and municipal authorities. These children have not however been passive victims of these challenges like poverty and harassment by these law enforcing agents. Some of these children devised effective coping strategies in response to such challenges. It has emerged from the study that poverty is the fundamental factor which compels children to work as well as forcing parents to hire out their children for them to survive. To this end child work is cherished as necessary for the sustainable economic wellbeing of the children in question and their respective families. In this study children noted that the hot seating system was a blessing in disguise to them since it gives them the opportunity to reconcile their academic endeavors and work simultaneously. Work is normally done after school, on weekends and holidays hence their working does not directly militate against their education endeavors. Infact, it emerged that it is this work which makes their education possible since the income accruing from their work is normally used to pay their tuition fees, uniforms and other educational expenses. Child work has also been seen to be very much gendered, with boys specialising in certain types of work like selling airtime recharge cards and pirated CDs, while girls were more into selling vegetables, tomatoes and chicken cuts. Migration of parents to neighbouring countries in search of greener pastures has been one of the reasons why children end up working to fend for their siblings and finance their education. It is thus against this background that child work is of paramount importance in sustainable development of the areas concerned. This is so because due to the rampant HIV and AIDS related deaths in Zimbabwe, many children have been orphaned and thus working to them becomes the only way out of the vicious cycle of poverty. It has also been noted that while working tends to distract and limit children's time and commitment to their education, working does not necessarily or directly affect their performance in class since some of the working children were performing extremely well in class. Ultimately child work can thus be viewed as work that can be rendered benign to the interests of the children in question and their families. Light economic work was not necessarily detrimental to schooling but rather a '*sine qua non*' for sustainable development of the children and their communities. This is so because education of the children is of fundamental significance to the attainment of sustainable development in many areas, hence the fact that employment makes schooling possible justifies the support being given to child work.

REFERENCE

- Admassie, A. (2002). 'Explaining the high incidence of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa'. *African Development Review*, 14, 2, pp 251-275.
- Basu, I. (2007). *The Human Rights of Street and Working Children*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Bass, L. E. (2004). *Child labor in Sub-Saharan Africa*. New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Bellamy, C. (2004). *The State of the World's Children 2005. Childhood under Threat*. New York: UNICEF.
- Bourdillion, M.F.C. (1991). *Poor, Harassed but Very Much Alive*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Bourdillion, M.F.C. (2001). *Earning a Life: Working Children in Zimbabwe*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Bourdillion, M. (2006). "Children and Work: A Review of Current Literature and Debates" *Development and Change* Vol 37 (6) (2006) pp 1201-1226.
- Bourdillion, Michael (2000) 'Child labour and education: a case study from south-eastern Zimbabwe.' *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 15, 2, pp 5-32.
- Brudley, R. H, Carwyn, R. F. & Burchinal, M (2001). The Home Environments of Children in United States Part II: Relations with Behavioural Development through age thirteen, *Children Development*, 7 (6), 1868 – 1886.
- Curtin, M., Hossain, T. & Choudhury, P. (1997). *Children Living, Learning and Working in the City*. London: Zed Books.
- Chireshe, R. & Plattner, I.E. (2010) Poverty in Developing Africa: Overarching Themes, *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 20 (2) 169 – 171.
- Dearing, T. (2008). *Urban Children: A Challenge and an Opportunity*. Childhood,
- Ellis, F (2002). *Rural Livelihoods in Developing Countries: Evidence and Policy Implications*. Number 40, April 1999. ODI.
- Ellis, F. (1998). *Rural Livelihood Diversity in Developing Countries: Evidence and Policy Implications*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan.
- Heady, C. (2000). *What is the Effect of Child Labour on Learning Achievement? Evidence from Ghana*, Innocenti Research Centre, Innocenti working papers, 79. Florence: UNICEF
- Henderson, M (2004). *Sanitation and Child Rights in Poor Urban Areas of Harare*, Waterfront: Harare.
- Fields, G.S. (1990). 'Labour Market Modelling and the Urban Informal Sector: Theory and Evidence', in: D. Turnham et al. (Eds.). *The Informal Sector Revisited* (Paris, OECD), pp. 49-69.
- George, I. (1990). *Child Labour and Child Work*. New Delhi: Ashing Publishing House.
- ILO. (2005b). *Youth Employment Conference Southern African Sub-Region*, Harare 17-19 October 2005, Background Paper (Harare, ILO Sub-Regional Office for Southern Africa) (processed).
- ILO. (2002b). *Youth: Pathways to Decent Work*, Report VI, submitted to the International Labour Conference, 93rd Session, 2005 (Geneva).
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mitullah, W.V. (2003). *Street vending in African Cities: A Synthesis of Empirical Findings in Africa*, University of Nairobi.
- Muzvidziwa, V.N. (1994). Child Vendors in the Streets of Masvingo, In Bourdillion, M.F.C. (1996). *Earning a Life: Urban Children in Zimbabwe*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Mupedziswa, R. & Gumbo, P. (2001). *Women Informal Traders in Harare and the Struggle for Survival in an Environment of Economic Reforms*. Research Report 117. (Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet).
- McLoyd, N. (1998), Socio – economic Disadvantage and Children Development, *American Psychologist*, 53 (2), 185 – 204.

- Mwamwenda, T.S. (1993). *Educational Psychology: An African Perspective*, Butterworths: Durban.
- Muchini, B. & Nyandiyi, S. (1991) *Struggling to Survive: A study of Street Children in Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe.
- Ngwenya, S.S. (2009) *From Womb to Work: A theological reflection of "Child Labour" in Zimbabwe*. University of Kwazulu Natal: Pietermaritzburg.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research ,Methods* (3rd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sachikonye, L. (1989) *Children in Hazardous Employment in Zimbabwe*, ZIDS mimeo, Harare.
- Seale, T. (1992) *Understanding Structure and Agency*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Shumba, A. (2010) Resilience in Children of Poverty, *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. 20 (2), 211 – 214.
- Lieten, G.K. (2005) *Children, School and Work: Glimpses from India*. New Delhi: Institute for Human Development.
- Loewenson, R. (1991). Child Labour in Zimbabwe and the Rights of the Child. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*. 1991, 6, 1. pp 19 – 31.
- Loewenson, R.H. (1998). 'Health impact of occupational risks in the informal sector in Zimbabwe', *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 264-74.
- Loewenson, R. (1994). "Health and healthcare in post independence rural Zimbabwe", in Mangoma, J.; & Bourdillon, M., (eds.): *The work of children in impoverished families* .Harare: Weaver Press.

ABOUT AUTHORS:

Gukurume Simbarashe is a Lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. He teaches courses in Social Anthropology such as Anthropology of Gender and Development, Rural Development, Cultural Anthropology and Anthropology of Tourism and Heritage.

Nyanga Takupiwa is a Lecturer and Dean at Great Zimbabwe University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Human Resources Management, Teaching Human Resources Management, labour law and Industrial relations.