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A Psychosocial Inquiry into the Impact of the Termination of the 'earn and learn' Programme in Zimbabwe

By Ellen Mapiko and Emily Ganga
Robert Mugabe School of Education and Culture
Great Zimbabwe University
E-mail: emilyganga@gmail.com

Abstract

The phenomenological case study was carried out in Chipinge District of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The population comprised of learners formally engaged in the Earn and Learn programme (ELP) under Tanganda Tea Estate before its termination in year 2013. The ELP allowed children aged 10-18 years to be contracted to provide labour to work in tea growing estates in exchange for education. Under the programme, the tea estate management paid each child a token fee, accommodation and food. Whilst this created a form of child labour, it was also found to deprive the youngsters of their childhood and interfered with their ability to attend regular school. The study sought to make an inquiry into the impact that the termination had on the learners and their communities, their lived experiences as well as their observations and insights. A phenomenological approach was employed involving the use of interviews, focus group discussions, essays and observations. A total purposive sample of 36 former ELP learners aged between 17 and 24 years was involved. Issues of inequalities and vulnerabilities, prostitution, early marriages, increased criminal activity and disillusionment were amongst the findings we received.

Key words: Zimbabwe, Education, Earn and Learn, Child labour, Ecological model, Phenomenology, Disillusionment

Background of the Study

Earn and learn programmes across the developing world have been instrumental in educating children from under privileged backgrounds. Under these programmes, children are contracted to provide labour in exchange for education where they pay a token fee for accommodation and food. However, these programmes have often been likened to a form of child labour by human rights activists as well as the developed world. They state that these programmes are both exploitative and manipulative while in keeping with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definition of child labour.

According to the ILO, Child labour refers to the "employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood interferes with their ability to attend regular school and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful," (ILO report, 2014). It is also defined by Bourdillon (2010) as the "full-time employment of children who are under a minimum legal age." It is worth noting that under Zimbabwean law, a child is anyone under the age of 16 whereas child protection policies and the majority of international countries have pegged the legal age of majority at 18. The Earn and Learn practice is considered exploitative and illegal by many countries and international organisations. However, it is only in the early 1900s that legislation regarding child labour came to be passed. Though this legislation across the world prohibited child labour, it was employed to varying extents throughout most of history and is still practised openly mostly in Africa and Asia.

Before the 1940s, numerous children aged between 5 and 14 worked in Europe, the United States and various colonies of European powers (Bradley & Cronwyn, 2014). These

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children worked in agriculture, home-based assembly operations, factories, and mining. During the Industrial Revolution, children as young as 4 were employed in production factories with dangerous, and often fatal, working conditions (Evans, 2009). In developing countries with high poverty and poor schooling opportunities, child labour is still prevalent. In 2014, Sub-Sahara Africa had the highest incidence rates of child labour; with several African nations witnessing over 50% of children aged 5 and 14 working, (ILO, 2014). The report also reveals that worldwide, agriculture is the largest employer of child labour and vast majority of child labour is found in rural settings and the informal urban economy. Poverty and lack of schools are considered as the primary cause of child labour and the world bank reports that the incidence of child labour in the world decreased from 25% to 10% between 1960 and 2003 due to various legislation and protests by activists (ILO, 2012, World Bank, 2010).

In Zimbabwe, tea and coffee estates constitute 45% of the country's exports and have thrived on the sweat and labour of children for the past seventy three years under the Earn and Learn programme until its termination in December 2013. Under the Earn and Learn system, children were contracted to work for Tanganda Tea Company as a condition of attendance at the estate's boarding schools. According to Bourdillon (2010), the main reason for the establishment of this programme was to assist children from difficult situations to attain education, children who would not be able to attend school due to lack of funds. It was also established as way of ascertaining a stable and reliable source of labour for the tea company. At the end of the academic year in 2013 when the programme was terminated, there were four primary schools with a total of 2195 pupils, as well as four secondary schools offering Earn and Learn up to "A" Level in the curriculum with a total of 2286 pupils, (Unpublished school records, 2013).

The children who were engaged in the programme came from all over the country with Bikita, Gutu, Buhera and Chipinge districts being the biggest feeders. Some of the pupils came from as far as Mozambique in search of education under the Earn and Learn programme. However, the majority of the children under the programme were out growers and their tenants' children as well as Tanganda tea estates labourers' own children who were not able to pay school fees for them hence they became contracted in the programme . Since it started in 1943 to its termination in 2013, more than 20 000 school children have passed through its doors, (Unpublished Tanganda Tea Company records, 2014).

The programme demanded that in summer, children start work in the field at 05.00 hrs until 13.00 hrs when they broke for lunch and resumed lessons at 14.00 hrs to break at 21.00 hrs. In winter, lessons started at 05.00 hrs till noon when they stopped for lunch and then went to the fields at 13.00 hrs till 21.00 hrs (Grier, 2007). Children were paid a wage of 20 cents per kilogram of tea that they plucked, a rate above that of adult pluckers who received 5 cents per kilogram. The fact that adults received a lesser rate to that of children ensured that parents could not afford to pay school fees for their children and the only option was for the children to become labourers. In return, the pupils paid school fees and a token payment for board. Besides paying the pupils their wages, the company also spent appreciable amounts in subsidizing the schools and providing medical care (Bourdillon, 2010; Grier, 2014). Initially the scheme involved older children and young adults, but high rates of poverty drove young school going children to join the programme. Attendance at the schools was by choice and the schools offered opportunities for many who would not otherwise get to school and it is worth noting that the programme has produced many successful and influential people in Zimbabwe's government and economy.

One of the key themes in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is that in all matters concerning children, the best interests of the children shall be paramount

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(Articles 3, 9, 10, 20, 21, 37 and 40), and it is clear that, in working out these best interests, the children should be heard and have a say in decisions that affect them (Article 12), (www.unconventionforchildren.com). There is a problem when children claim the right to work to relieve their situation. When work comes into conflict with other rights, such as the right to education and the right to relaxation and time for creative activities, there comes a problem. Ravallon & Woodon (2010) observe that people under economic stress pay more attention to immediate needs than to long-term development and children in particular are liable to sacrifice development for immediate satisfaction. This is the scenario that pertained in the tea estates of Zimbabwe for more than half a decade.

It is against this background that child protection organisations like the Child Line agency in Zimbabwe began to look into the programme with a view to enforce child protection laws and found the tea companies at fault. The Daily News of October 23, 2012 describes the children as having scarred legs as cutback tea stumps slashed their naked legs. The newspaper goes on to explain that these children’s destitute labour helped this agricultural sector remain profitable while they received an education. It is also exposed in an interview by the president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) documented in Kanyango (2011), that the young labourers risked snake and insect bites, early arthritis, poor bone development and may have to pay for it over their lifetime through loss of health, education and other opportunities because of poverty which has over the years been also worsened by a debilitating HIV epidemic. The Earn and Learn programme was abolished at primary school level in Zimbabwe in December 2012 and the schools recorded a 65% dropout rate in January 2013 as pupils failed to come back to school due to financial constraints (unpublished school records).

The year 2013 also saw humanitarian agencies looking into the programme at secondary school level and this inquiry coincided with the International humanitarian agency, Rainforest Alliance, also inquiring into the conditions of the programme as Zimbabwean tea was being marketed in the more lucrative European markets. The agency found the conditions wanting and advised the tea companies to improve the children’s conditions before the tea could be admitted on the market, (Unpublished Rainforest Alliance Report, 2013). Because of this pressure, the tea companies felt that it was more expensive to improve the children’s conditions so they removed the programme and introduced machinery in the plucking, sorting and grading of tea which requires minimum, if not none, supervision, doing away with the human aspect. Earn and learn officially ended at secondary school level in December 2013. The four schools combined recorded that 624 pupils dropped out of school in January 2014 while a further 234 had dropped out by January 2015. Students were then required to pay school fees between \$30 and \$50. \$50 was paid at the biggest school; school D, which ended up having two secondary schools at the end of 2013 because of the high enrolment figures, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Pupils enrolled in the ‘Earn and Learn’ programme in 2013 and those remaining in 2014 and 2015 after termination of the programme

	SCHOOL A			SCHOOL B			SCHOOL C			SCHOOL D			TOTAL
	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	
2013	150	110	467	139	94	768	174	155	432	592	567	1159	2826
2014	251	125	376	252	312	564	252	134	386	552	324	876	2202
2015	225	87	312	236	287	523	236	107	343	498	287	785	1963

Key

B – Boys, G- Girls, T- Total

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Table 1: shows that a total number of 2826 students were enrolled in the "earn and learn" programme in 2013 before it was terminated. In January 2014 when schools opened, there was a marked decrease in enrolment as 22% (624) of the students who were part of the programme dropped out and 78% (2202) returned to register on a normal school basis, and that girls suffered the most. In January 2015, the trend remained the same as there were more casualties amongst the pupils formally engaged in the programme. Of the remaining 2202 in 2014, only 1963 students returned to school in 2015, a further 10% decrease. The returned students are of various ages and are at different stages of the curriculum. It is also worth noting the girls suffered the most.

The aim of this research is to look into the plight of these children and assess how they have been impacted on by the termination of this programme. The research will also explore how the communities have been affected due the termination of the programme. It is also pertinent to investigate how the children have fared since the closure of the programme without any other form of psycho social support. It would also be in order to enquire into the long term impact this form of lifestyle has had on the psycho social development of the child given the fact these children have been turned into adults before they are old enough. This is so in the sense that they are earning an income as well as taking responsibility for their welfare in terms of education, food and sustenance at an early age.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2008) Ecological theory which explains a child's development by looking at the environment in terms of its quality and context. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) explain that the Ecological model states that child development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. His ecological environment consists of the following five nested structures: microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Rathus 2006, Berk 2007, Berk 2006, Donald et al 2010; Ganga, 2013). This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his/her environment. Donald et al (2010) posit that microsystems are systems in which children are closely involved in proximal interactions with other familiar people (such as the family). They involve roles, relationships and patterns of daily activities that shape many aspects of cognitive, social, emotional, moral and spiritual development.

Structures in the microsystem include the family, school, neighbourhood or childcare environments (Boyd and Bee, 2006; Cole et al 2009; Engler, 2007). Children in the Earn and Learn programme have an irregular daily pattern in which labour takes precedence over all other activities. Berk (2007) maintains that all relationships must be kept in mind as bidirectional for example, the child from a poverty stricken household who is engaged in the earn and learn programme may be affected by the fact that some of the pupils do not work in the fields as they are not part of the programme, thus affecting her cognitive performance. This is in keeping with Ganga and Chinyoka (2010)'s assertions that poverty has a debilitating effect on the cognitive development of a child and thereby negatively affecting academic performance.

Exosystems refer to one or more settings that do not involve the child as an active participant, but can affect the child's immediate setting, (Cole, Cole & Lightfoot 2009, and Donald et al 2010). These settings have an effect on the child's life but the child does not participate. They include school boards, parent's workplaces and community agencies. In this study, the child's mesosystem would be the company administrators who make the rules and

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laws that affect the child's well being according to their budget without necessarily meeting the children in person to discuss the issues affecting them. Gooskens, Khan, Moses and Seekings (2010) describe the macrosystem as the one that involves dominant social and economic structures as well as values, beliefs and practices that influence all other social system For example a cultural value will then influence the proximal interactions in the child's microsystems and probably, her whole mesosystem too. Equally, how the tea company distributes resources like food, protective wear and books at the estate affects every level of the system which would then have positive or negative implications for all interested parties as a whole and they form the basis on which individuals and families structure their lives.

The chronosystem involves development over time that affects the interactions between these systems as well as their influences on the academic and intellectual development of learners. Changes such as parental divorce, historical events, or social conditions occur within the environment, and changes such as life transitions, within the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, and 2008). Rathus (2006) describes the chronosystem as the changes in the environment that occurs over time and has an effect on the child. In this case, the change being in the abrupt ending of the programme without any safety measures with which to catch the students who fall through. An ecological systems model provides an appropriate framework to guide research and selection of appropriate interventions for poor families and children experiencing psychosocial problems. Understanding the interactions of these systems is the key in understanding how a child develops and what factors may lead to failure. The ecological model incorporates all areas of influence on the development of the child to assess the cause and also the solution to some increasing behavioural, academic and emotional problems seen today.

Donald et al (2010) purport that things that happen in one part of the system can affect other parts and ultimately the ecological system as a whole, as explained in the work of Bronfenbrenner. However, although it is important to understand the underlying issues that worsen the plight of the child, it is equally important to look at why and how many children exposed to such risks may rise above them (the resilience perspective). This is seen in the large numbers of students who have successfully passed through the programme and are holding important positions in society, contributing to the development of their country. Despite the issues within and between all the levels of system presented above, it is also true that there are proximal systems that may foster resilience in any social context (Ungar, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. Explore the psycho social impact of child labour on the academic performance of learners at the tea estates of Zimbabwe with the view to generalise the findings to all learners in Earn and Learn programmes.
2. Assess the impact of the termination of 'earn and learn' on children and their communities.
3. Suggest solutions, thus minimising consequences caused by child labour on the
4. Encourage the government, estate companies and various stakeholders to come up with an alternative programme that is sensitive to the needs of the children so that children from disadvantaged and difficult backgrounds can continue to access education.

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Methodology

The Research Approach and Design

The research was carried out using a qualitative phenomenological approach which, according to Groenwald (2007), highlights the specific and identifies phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in the situation. The phenomena in this context being the psychosocial impact of child labour as well as its termination on the mental wellbeing of the child in academic performance. The researchers were therefore concerned with the lived experiences of the children who were under the Earn and Learn programme as Leedy (2007) emphasises that phenomenology demands that one gets information from those involved or who were involved with the issue that is being researched. This therefore implies that qualitative phenomenological research is holistic, in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences of child labour and its termination on the academic performance of children, thus affecting human behaviour and development. In doing so, it seeks to avoid both the deliberate manipulation of variables and the study of attitudes or indicators as variables isolated from the wider totality. It is therefore advantageous that one of the researchers is currently teaching in the district and was able to gain the children's trust so that they were more open and trusting while the other researcher has firsthand experience of the earn and learn programme as she has taught in the programme for more than five years. The main aim of the study was descriptive and exploratory.

Study Population

The study was carried out in Chipinge District of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe where the Earn and Learn programme was carried out. The research was targeted at pupils who were formally engaged in the programme. Of the 2826 formally enrolled in 2013, 1963 remain in the schools as of January 2015 while 863 have dropped out. 85 remain in the villages surrounding the estates, 52 have been employed on a contract basis by the tea estates, 22 girls have been recorded as married while at least 42 girls have been identified to be living in Chipinge town and around the shopping centres trying to eke out a living. The rest of the children's whereabouts are unknown with different explanations being offered. There are four (4) estate schools, four (4) headmasters, four (4) estate managers and four (4) local headmen for the areas in which the estates are situated. The combined schools have a total of 104 teachers with the District Education Officer being made a part of the population under study as she is the highest ranking authority in the Ministry of Education in the District, making a total population of 2280.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

From this population, two secondary schools from the four schools which were operating under the Earn and Learn programme were purposively selected because of their proximity to the researchers for easy access. Students aged between 16 and 17 were purposively selected to participate mainly because they were considered mature and able to participate fully. Therefore, twenty learners (ten from each school) were conveniently selected from this population. Two teachers were also selected for their length of stay in the school implementing the programme, ensuring that they have much to contribute while one headmaster, one estate manager and one local headman were also purposively selected for reasons of proximity to the researchers as well as availability due to their busy schedules. Of the children who have dropped out of school, ten were conveniently selected for reasons of availability as they were no longer part of the system and were difficult to locate. Snowballing

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was also employed in identifying the children who had dropped out of school. The District Education Officer was also included in the sample for she is the highest representative of the ministry of education in the district, making a total sample of thirty six (36) participants.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, essays and observations, in an attempt at triangulation. The researchers made use of structured in-depth phenomenological interviews described by Bryman (2010) as a way of getting data about people by asking them rather than observing and sampling their behaviour. The researchers also made use of focus group discussions as according to Boyd (2007), they are a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously. This method is intended to bring out, clarify and validate ideas brought out in the one on one interviews as well as add on new ideas. As a means to triangulation, the researchers made use of assistant researchers in observation because the method produces a true social reality and first hand information is recorded, according to Dooley (2010). This method was also valuable in this research in counter checking and verifying information collected through interviews and FGDs (Marshall & Rossman, 2009).

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the study was secured from Chipinge District Education Office, Zimbabwe, as well as from the selected school headmasters/principals. Permission was also sought from the company managers of the respective tea estate. Further permission was sought from the parents of the selected learners. The participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research if they were not comfortable. Participants were also assured of anonymity in the research report.

Research findings

The following themes emerged from the findings:

Disillusionment

Some of the children who live in the areas surrounding their former Earn and Learn schools are still in the area, two years after the termination of the programme without an idea of where to go or what to do. They are still in limbo, unbelieving that this could happen to them given the fact that the programme had existed for as long as they have been alive, assisting their parents, brothers and sisters. It is still a shock to them that a programme that had run for over fifty years could be terminated just like that, leaving hundreds of students without hope for an education and without an idea of where to start from. A total number of former earn and learn students have been identified to be still living in the area, with others reported to be coming and going aimlessly.

One of the former Earn and Learn students interviewed said:

Zvirikutonetsa kuti totangira papi. Takanga tichingoziva kotanha tea tichifunda saka zvazvakapera handichazivi kuti ndodii. Takambotanga tichifunga kuti vachazvidzosa nokuti zviro zvanga zvagara zviripo kubvira makarekare asi tavakutoona kuti hapana chirikuitika.

(Translation: It is difficult for us for we don't know where to start from. We only knew to pluck tea and attend school but now that the programme is over I

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don't know what to do. For a while we thought they would bring it back seeing as it had been there for years but I see nothing is happening.)

Another student lamented the lack of a safety net with which to catch the students and assist them rebuild their lives or continue with their education. She said:

Havana kana kumbotipa notice kana kutibatsira kuramba tichienda kuchikoro. Vakangotijata ende hazvisikumboita nebasa rataivaitira taizofunga kuti vaizoonawo zvekuita kuti tibatsirike.

(They did not give us notice of termination neither did they assist us to continue with our education. We thought they would assist us in some way but we just feel that they dumped us).

It is the children's feeling that should they have been involved in the decision making they would have advocated for the continuation of the programme with some changes in order to address the issues that were lacking. It is these changes in the child's exosystem as put forward by the Ecological model that the child is not an active participant in issues that have affected her as a whole. Some of the children commented that the work they did under Earn and Learn was not as bad as the work they did at home. They stated that at home they never had time to read but at the tea estates they were free to do so at the weekends. Others remarked that at home they spent several hours walking to and from school every day and the work at the estates simply replaced that.

Humphries (2010) believes that these Human Rights groups and Western powers agitating for change in Earn and Learn programmes need to realize that their only responsibility as major powers should be to support other countries' traditions by looking past the misrepresented face of child labour and promoting its rewards to societies while making the workplace safer for children. The researchers put it that by taking action against the practices of child labour in foreign countries, the United States, European Union, and the U.N. will be undermining the independence of foreign nations, thereby negatively affecting the cultures and social structures that these societies have been based on for centuries. In this case, Earn and Learn in the tea estates has been in existence since 1943 and since then, over 20 000 students have passed through its doors and many of these children have been successful to hold managerial positions in the tea company as well as top positions in government. It is therefore worth noting that the programme has done more good than harm and afforded children a chance at educating themselves and making a better life for themselves and their families.

Early marriages

Some of the girls who found themselves unable to continue with their education resorted to marriage. Some have joined polygamous marriages to men old enough to be their fathers while some have been married by boys based in South Africa who only return home once a year at Christmas, exposing themselves to HIV and other diseases. This has perpetuated the vicious cycle of poverty as there is no hope for them or their offspring to have a formal education or go beyond the basic primary education as the parents have no means to send them to school or pull themselves out of the villages and live in better areas with better facilities. One girl narrated the story of one of her classmates who had already died during childbirth. She said:

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Hapana zvekuzviita takatoroorwa tatoona kuti hakuchina kwekuenda. Murume wangu anoseenza kutea ndivo varume vacho varipo. Prisca akaroorwa akashaika pakubara. Vana mbuya vakamutaurira kuti uchiri mwana mudiki kuti ubare saka wonogarira kuchipatara kuChipinge asi akashaya mari yekogarira kwakurwadziwa chiuno ndokutoshaya mwana akaramba kubuda anga akakurisa.

(There is nothing we can do about it, we got married as soon as we realised that we had nowhere to go. Prisca got married and died while she was giving birth. The nurses told her that she had to go to the referral district hospital to wait for her time there and get access to doctors there as she was still too young to give birth and her body had not yet matured. She didn't have the money to go to Chipinge and as a result delivery time became due while she was still here and she went into labour. Both mother and baby died.)

Another girl who is fourth wife to a man old enough to be her father was actually happy to be a favourite wife at the moment. She also said that she had the advantage of having gone to school over the other wives, going as far as form 3 and therefore could read and write. She said that her husband had started a kiosk for her where she could sell sweets, chips and other small things as she could calculate change and profit and loss. This girl did not foresee the numerous problems associated with polygamy.

WHO (2012) report explains the dangers of early marriage for young girls and going as far as labelling it child abuse. They enumerate the risks of HIV infection, death or injury to the body during pregnancy or childbirth as the body is not yet mature enough to carry a child, different forms of abuse being inflicted on the child bride as she is much younger than the husband and is not as informed as an adult. It is also pertinent to note that once a child is married off in the villages to an older man, chances of her continuing with her education or ever realising her full potential are next to zero and she has been robbed of her childhood as she has become a mother and a wife before her time. It is these issues, argue the researchers that Human Rights groups ought to be focusing on rather than the issue of "child labour" in the Earn and Learn programme which has been seen to have been giving disadvantaged children a lifeline.

Mass emigration and displacement

A lot of the children have since disappeared from the Chipinge area and are reported to have illegally crossed the borders into Mozambique or South Africa in search of work. A number have since returned after the xenophobic attacks to stay while some went back to South Africa when the situation had quietened down. An interview with one of the returnees revealed that they were still in the country for lack of money to go back to South Africa and that they were looking for piece jobs which would just cover their bus fare and then they would go back. One boy said:

Maam, kuJoni kuri nani. Hakuna zvikuru zvinoshamisira hazvo asi mabasa anowanikwa kumapurazi. Ini ndinoziva basa remumunda uye handirityi saka ndiro randirikuuta kuti vanin'ina vawone kuenda kuchikoro. Taiva vaviri kutea asi ini ndakasiya chikoro muninina wangu akasarako. Ndini ndiri kumubhadharira ndiri kujoni ikoko asi zvakaoma. Izvevzi ndakadzoka pakwakaita noise kujoni asi handichina mari yekuti ndidzokere. Zvakaoma.

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(Madam, South Africa is better. There is nothing big there but you can get a job in the fields. Field work is all I know and that is what I am doing there to enable my siblings to go to school. It was the two of us in Earn and Learn, I had to leave so that I could work and pay for my brother's education. I came back during the xenophobic attacks but now I don't have the money to go back. It is difficult.)

One lamented the fact that he had never been to South Africa or Mozambique not for lack of trying but sheer lack of resources. He has no money for the journey, does not have relatives or friends already settled there who can assist him to find a job and settle. This is not a situation peculiar to this boy alone but to many of them as the same sentiments were expressed by many of the parents and the small scale farmers' chairperson as well. The Chairperson said:

We don't want to see our children roaming around doing nothing because the next thing is that they will impregnate each other or commit crimes that will see them end up in jail but we cannot have all our young boys going across the border for manual labour. There is nothing we can do as there is no life for them here but then we also do not have the resources to send them with proper papers hence you hear that some of them perish while they are trying to cross the Limpopo River at illegal crossing points because they do not have passports or the money that will enable them to cross clandestinely.

The villages are left poorer without the young men. It is only the old men and women remaining in the villages as the young men have moved en masse to other countries in search of jobs and this upsets the balance of power in the society and community.

This situation begs an answer to the question whether termination of the programme has done away with 'child labour' or that it has simply moved the problem away from the tea estates as the children are still working elsewhere though in different capacities, in foreign lands without permits or identification documents or the assurance that they will receive their wages or even health insurance. It seems the termination of the programme has created even bigger problems as it has pushed the children from their homes into foreign lands without adequate resources.

The researchers argue that what Western society must realize is that the act of children working full days in other countries is comparable to sending children to school in America and European countries. The benefit to sending children to work as opposed to paying for schooling, in what usually are poor countries, is the fact that they are receiving a salary for a service which is crucial to their survival in both the present and the future. The notion that it is wrong for children to work is the type of one-sided thinking which prohibits people from seeing the good that can come from it. In other cultures, African culture to be specific, children are given a higher level of respect once they have proven themselves to be old enough to help provide for their family (Mwamwenda, 2009).

Once they reach this level, no matter the age, they are considered young adults and are officially productive members of society. In the end, "International pressure to reduce child labour does some good but ultimately, 'a cultural change has to come from within the developing countries themselves,' (Grier, 2014). Without an effort for change within these countries in need of help, outside forces will be unable to lend the maximum amount of aid. In the event that the United Nations attempts to implement culture changes within other

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countries, they will most likely end up hurting the country in the long run as has been seen in this study where a total number of children has dropped out of school between January 2014 and January 2015 and have no prospects of continuing with their education. The question, "What is to become of these children?" still begs an answer.

Disturbances in the schools system

A number of teachers were affected by the decrease in enrolment and had to be moved elsewhere in the district due to over staffing, thereby uprooting families. They were redeployed to other schools in the district, at times schools more remote and less resourced than the ones they were at. Some had to leave their families behind for fear of disrupting their children's schooling while others had to be separated from their spouses as the spouses had not been affected at their work places.

A lot of changes had to be made in the schools. Because of the decrease in enrolment, some subjects had to be dropped as there were no teachers to continue teaching them because the student enrolment did not complement the number of teachers. Students who were previously doing two practical subjects at ZJC level had to drop one and be content with one, subjects like Accounts, Physics and Biology had to be dropped as the curriculum was changed to suit the current enrolment figures.

Headmasters found themselves working with smaller budgets as enrolment decreased and this disturbed long term projects which were already in progress like at school A where they were in the process of building a new school block using building funds from a bigger enrolment. Building of the hall was stopped in 2014 and has not progressed ever since because of a lack of funds.

The headmasters also stated that the tea company previously ran the financial administration of the schools. Heads did not handle any school funds as all the moneys were handled by the company's Administration managers and school Heads simply sent requisitions for the schools' needs to the clerks who facilitated the purchase. This provided transparency and the smooth running of schools in the estates as there were strict company audits and both teachers and students received better services and resources. However with the termination of Earn and Learn, Tanganda Tea Company released the finances of the schools into the hands of the schools and schools were required to form School Development Committees and receipt their own school fees from their students, draw up budgets and use the monies as they see fit. This has led to problems of embezzlement, non paying of fees, lack of progress and development bedevilling all the other schools in the district because of a lack of strict accounting system. The company retains ownership of the buildings and is in charge of maintenance but that is as far as they are willing to go.

One of the headmasters said:

We are facing problems in running the school as we are now operating on a smaller budget. We don't have a guarantee that the school fees will be paid or when they will be paid as they are no longer coming from the tea estates children's wages. Children are now paying their own school fees as and when they can afford. Subsidies previously coming from the tea estates have been stopped because of the termination of earn and learn. Admin managers previously running the financial affairs of the schools do not do so anymore.

The District Education Officer Representative for Chipinge District lamented the closure of this programme as it was a means for the under privileged children to get an education. He

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stated that there was need for the government to find a way for these children to be absorbed in the school system. He alluded to assistance funding structures like the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) but there are challenges in attaining this assistance as not all the students can be covered by BEAM and it is not certain that one will be under the fund throughout their academic career as it is applied for every year. Schools are also wary of these government assistance modules as there are delays in paying out the moneys with some terms going unpaid for long periods of time, at times years.

One of the estate managers said:

We are aware of the problems going on in the schools but for us to continue engaging children in the earn and learn programme, is counterproductive as we have to comply with international laws as well as do what is best for the company. We feel for the children as they have no other means for them to carry on with their education.

Buildings previously housing students are lying empty and are prone to vandalism as the schools no longer run the boarding system. The tea company has proposed to partition the boarding facilities into living quarters for their workers though it has still not been done, two years later.

Company officials argue the children's labour is not cheap when compared with adult labour. But from the management point of view, it had the advantage of being regular and reliable. They agree that in an ideal world there would be no need for such schools but, since government does not provide free education, they have been able to fulfil a need in return for reliable labour. However, both teachers and pupils complained of the problem of dozing when they are at school after a hard morning of plucking tea in the fields. Teachers stated that it is hard enough to keep awake during the heat of summer afternoons even when children are fresh but it is virtually impossible after less than six hours of sleep and many hours in the fields, as they raised the dark side of Earn and Learn.

Research findings revealed that nobody in the Earn and Learn equation appeared to consider the issue of sleep, which according to psychologist, is an important component to human development. The company management demanded hours of plucking that made the scheme worth their while. The teachers wanted the children do well at school and set hours similar to those of normal schools. So the children had to get up early as is common for agricultural workers. Study cut late into the night and some of the children complained of waking up tired. Despite all these negative reports, teachers explained that they would find the children in the fields by following the sound of happy chatter and singing every morning. O level examination pass rates at the schools compared favourably with other schools in the district who were not offering earn and learn.

Another negative aspect of the Earn and Learn programme raised by the teachers is the high drop-out rates. Some of the children did not last more than a week and their names never got entered into the registers. This was revealed in the essays the children wrote for the researchers. Some told of their wish to leave but were only deterred by the poverty waiting for them at home. The teachers interviewed corroborated the high drop-out incidences as some of the children lacked the stamina to withstand the conditions at the estates. Some of the children blasted the tea company as having put in place a programme with harsh conditions as they had little time for recreation and sport; while they spent little time with their families as they were required to work during the holidays as well. One of the headmasters recounted a history of strikes in the programme though they never went as far as

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the newspapers. However, it is these conditions that needed to be addressed in order to make the programme more child friendly instead of terminating it parse.

The researchers put it that if the Western world knew that child labour was not as bad as it tends to be portrayed, as well as the fact that it is a cultural tradition in many countries, they would be able to recognize its benefits thereby relieving organizations such as the U.N. from having to wrongfully deal with that issue. This misconception that Western society has is due to the fact that the media chooses to report the worst forms of child labour in order to make compelling human interest stories as is the case in *The Daily News* of 3 June 2013 and *The Herald* of 5 October 2014. As a result of portrayals such as these, there is a large movement in society to fight against the practice of child labour.

Increased criminal activity

Areas surrounding the tea estates are inhabited by small scale farmers who are affiliated to the tea estates as out growers living and working on purchase land. These small scale out growers have workers who have children who were engaged in the Earn and Learn programme. These are some of the children who are still in the area and are causing the increase in criminal activity. Cases of break ins, petty thefts, cattle and goat rustling have increased since December 2013 at the termination of the programme. There were a lot of cases involving violence in which simple disputes led to murders because of the stresses caused by these job losses. The Chairman for these small scale farmers committees stressed that parents found themselves with children who were not going to school and who were not meaningfully occupied. Tempers were running high as well as violent clashes. One Chairman said:

Tirikunetseka maningi ngendaa yevafana ava vasikachaendi kofunda. Vanoswerohamba maraini vachipinda mumhatso dzaanhu achiba nekuchayana pachavo. Havana chekuita. Hapana chinorwadza mubereki sekuonamwana akagara pamba asikaendi kuchikoro pasina zvaunokwanisa kuita ngekuti hauna chekubetseera nacho. Takatombotaura na MP kuti vatibetsere vana ava vawane zvekuita kana kuita macourse emaoko zvawo.

(We are facing big problems because of these children who are no longer going to school. They just loiter about breaking and entering. There is nothing as disappointing to a parent as seeing your child not going to school and you can't do anything about it because of lack of resources. We have since engaged the local Member of Parliament (MP) for assistance.)

The local special constabulary police force confirmed these views and reiterated the fact there was an increase in criminal activities in the area though evidence showed that they were being committed by petty and amateurish people. They explained that they had caught some former Earn and Learn pupils engaging in these activities and had engaged them in counselling sessions with their parents though they could not ascertain whether this had been effective.

The researchers put it that throughout history, children have been a crucial part of a developing society's workforce. But now the Western world has moved past this stage in its development and decided that through the power of the United States and such organizations as the U.N. and the European Union, they will change all other societies. They are determining whether or not it is right to have a child labour force much to the detriment of the existing status quo, explain Jensen & Nielsen (2007). What must be realised to have been one

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of the major attractions of the Earn and Learn programme, explain the researchers, is the independence it gave the children. The children interviewed expressed pride in supporting themselves.

4. Prostitution, drugs and substance abuse

Some of the girls have resorted to prostitution at the nearby shopping centres like Mundanda, Chako and Tamandai. There has been an increase in sexual activity in these areas and they have come to be regarded as "hot night spots" because of the presence of these young girls who dropped out of school. These children have been exposed to many disease and ills in their newly chosen profession. Some have confided to the researchers that they have contracted HIV since they started on this journey. Most of the girls were not willing to open up about their new activities however, the assistant researchers engaged as observers noted that these girls were renting one room in fours or fives and taking turns to bring clients to the room and charged a fee ranging from US\$2- US\$5 due to the hardships they are facing.

There is also a thriving trade in Mbanje (dagga) as it is grown in the areas around the tea estates as well as coming from neighbouring Mozambique through the numerous unofficial crossing points connecting the two countries. A small joint of mbanje sells for 5 rand and the boys confessed that they sell at least US\$5 worth of mbanje on a bad day and as much as US\$15 on a good day and their market has always been the tea labourers but now extends to the former students located in the area who in turn, resort to petty thefts in order to buy the drugs.

5. Continued labour

Some of the children dropped out of school to be formally employed by the tea estates as labourers and work a normal 8-4 day. However, this option is only limited to those above 16 years of age and it is not all of them who can be accommodated as the companies have introduced machinery to be operated by two people only in the plucking of tea. This has also resulted in massive job cuts for the elderly labourers therefore leaving no room for the young labourers who are mostly hired as casual labourers working a few hours per week which can hardly sustain them. Some of the pupils stated that their former teachers are offering them evening classes at US\$10 per month which they cannot afford as they are only being hired occasionally. This is a true representation of the corruption and rot pervading the Zimbabwean education system where monetary gain precedes the main aim of education, that of imparting knowledge and capacitating individuals and communities.

Even though child labour has been given such a bad image, the true form can still be seen in the fact that "three-quarters of all children in African communities work in agriculture with their families to cultivate the family plots," (Humbert, 2009), while only a few percent are actually in rough working conditions such as mining or construction, (Emmerson & Souza, 2011). It is information such as this that must be relayed to the masses in order to help influence the powerful groups in control of the rest of the world. It is this information that the ILO needs to take into account as it moves ahead with its drive to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2016 (ILO, 2012).

The Labour Relations Act (Employment of Children and Young Persons) Regulations Statutory Instrument 72 of 1997 of Zimbabwe prohibits the employment of children during school terms but includes the clause, "unless the contract of employment concerned has been approved by the minister," (Education Act Chapter 25:04). The Earn and Learn programme had the blessings of the government represented by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare as well as presidential support with the president having donated computers to two of the

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secondary schools in 2010. Acting Manicaland Provincial Education Director, Mr Andrew Chigumira, claimed he was yet to get any complaints from the children about any injuries or reports of unrest and discontent at the schools. He added the view that work is good for the character-building and skill development of children explaining that in many cultures, particular where informal economy and small household businesses thrive, the cultural tradition is that children follow in their parents' footsteps; child labour then is a means to learn and practice that trade from a very early age.

Findings from the research concur with the Provincial Education director's views and recognize that some work is an important part of children's education and socialization. Children, and specially girls, are expected to help with chores around the home from an early age and so learn household skills. Girls under ten years of age are often charged with caring for infants while their mothers work and boys are expected to help in farm work and particularly in caring for domestic livestock (Mwamwenda, 2009). In the current economy, children in urban areas help in their parents' commercial ventures, particularly in various kinds of small-scale trading. Children are expected to work at school in a variety of tasks, few of which are directly productive.

However, this is not to support intolerable forms of child labour which may not always be distinct from the generalised chores because there are some dangerous back breaking tasks within that same African culture endured by children like fetching heavy pails water for the household over long distances which can have adverse effects on the physical development of a girl's spine. Bass (2004) points to the significant contribution Tonga children in Zimbabwe make towards the household economy, with girls in particular spending much of their time in work-related activities even before they are ten years old and boys being away from home weeks at a time herding animals and living under very harsh conditions.

The fact that these activities seem to be socially acceptable in traditional African societies does not make it alright. The researchers feel that the society has an obligation to protect disadvantaged groups and should not let market forces dictate the treatment of children. However, much of the discussion on child labour is heavily influenced by Western and middle class ideas on childhood and education and hence there is need to move away from these euro-centric viewpoints and formulate laws and ideas that are more afro-centric, taking into consideration cultures and socio-economic states of the issues pertaining.

Conclusion and recommendations

There are special circumstances which arise throughout people's lives that force them to make decisions that can affect their lives and the lives of their children. Bequale & Boyden (2009) point to the time when the Taliban was in control of Afghanistan, much of the male population had been killed in war and women were not allowed to work. At this time, it became necessary for the male child to work in order to provide for his family.

The research project makes the following recommendations in an attempt to strike a balance between the two views; pro and anti earn and learn programmes, for the mutual benefit of both the child and the employer: One of the greatest contributions that these organizations can make to the child labour market is to better the working conditions, thereby providing an appropriate environment for these children to spend their days and possibly improving upon the level of poverty that their families live in. This plan, which still permits child labour, allows children and society to remain where they are in regards to cultural backgrounds while improving their working standards in terms of a higher level of cleanliness, shorter work days, and an overall higher level of safety.

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The study recommends that companies engaging in such programmes should be encouraged to provide fair treatment for the children through different legislations. Governments and companies be in consultation in matters pertaining to such programmes so that the children's interests are represented and they do not find themselves stranded when the companies pull out without notice. Governments seriously commit themselves to eradicating poverty in their communities and work towards the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals as all the findings documented in this research paper seriously hinder the achievement of all the goals outlined.

The study further recommends that the companies engaging in earn and learn programmes, through legislation, be forced to be responsible for the welfare of their students in the event that the programme has been terminated much in the same way that they would pay a pension for retrenched employees. Human Rights organisations fighting such causes be in consultation with the people on the ground, engage in surveys before making conclusions and take into account the cultures and economic backgrounds of these communities. The company should have a pension fund or insurance policy much in the same vein as NSSA so that the children are covered in times of injury and retrenchments. Children should have adult representation in the formulation of the contract. Children and their parents engaging in such programmes should be well informed and capacitated in order that they make well informed decisions.

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