

What are the causes, conditions and consequences of children working in agriculture?

Report on qualitative fieldwork in KwaZulu-Natal



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HSRC Child, Youth Family and Social Development Programme**

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to qualitative field work

This report covers the qualitative aspect of fieldwork carried out in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa as part of a study of the causes, conditions and consequences of children working in agriculture.

The study, commissioned by the TECL (Towards the Elimination of Child Labour) Programme of the Department of Labour (SA), looked at the economic and non-economic activities of children living in farming areas. The purpose was to get a better understanding of the involvement of children in agriculture and of the impact of their activities on their well-being, with a view to informing policy on preventing child labour and protecting working children.

The legislative context for this investigation is:

- the International Labour organisation's Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999), which includes forced or compulsory labour and work that is 'likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children':
- South Africa's Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997): Based on Section 43, it is a criminal offence to employ a child under the age of 15¹. Children aged 15 to 18 may not be employed to do work inappropriate for their age, or work that places them at risk. Child labour is defined as work done by children under the age of 15, which is exploitative, hazardous or otherwise inappropriate for their age, detrimental to their schooling, social, physical or moral development.

The study comprised a survey conducted among children aged 12-16 years in schools in three provinces of South Africa, a series of focus groups and interviews with school-going and out-of-school children who had been engaged in agricultural activities during the past year, and focus groups and interviews with adult stakeholders in the farming areas targeted.

1.2 Terms of reference for the qualitative work

The terms of reference for the qualitative research were defined by the research objectives of the study. The objectives were:

- To enhance understanding of the causes, nature, incidence and impact of child work and labour in commercial and subsistence agriculture, and to explore to what extent their activities harmed or benefited children;
- To shed light on how the pattern of child work and labour in commercial agriculture and its impact has changed in the recent past, in relation to policy and legislation;
- To shed light on age, gender and regional differences in the child work and labour situation in commercial and subsistence agriculture using the data gathered from the four sites studied.

¹ Except with a permit from the Department to employ children in the performing arts.

The qualitative component of the research addressed the following questions:

- What activities do children perform in commercial and subsistence agriculture?
- In what other economic and non-economic work activities do they engage?
- Has there been a reduction in child work in commercial agriculture since the passing of policy and laws prohibiting children under 15 from performing such work?
- What are the conditions under which children are working in agriculture and what are the impacts of this work, both negative and positive, on child well-being?
- What are the principal causes of children being engaged in commercial agriculture?
- How do the causes, conditions and consequences of children's activities in agriculture differ across gender?

1.3 Description of site and overview of agriculture in the area



The study site is on the Msinga/Weenen border, equidistant (about 32km) from the small rural towns of Tugela Ferry and Weenen, in northern central KwaZulu-Natal. It straddles two district municipalities – uThukela and uMzinyathi. It includes parts of the Mchunu and Mthembu traditional authority areas. The site is about three and a half hours' drive from Durban.

Msinga is one of the poorest districts in the province, with one of the highest concentrations of people living in poverty². The area is characterised by high unemployment, high levels of migration for work, single-female (including absent male) headed households and comparatively low levels of school attendance.



Left: Top, isibaya (animal enclosure) at the kraal of a cattle farmer in Msinga; Bottom, irrigated farming in neighbouring Weenen.

² Provincial Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2001. HSRC/StatsSA

Demographic data

- The population is, according to apartheid classifications, 95.29% Black African, 0.67% Coloured, 1.97% Indian and 2.07% White³.
- Less than 15% of the total population of Mzinyathi district is formally employed. In Msinga the situation is worse, with only around 5000 of the 80 000 inhabitants reported as employed in 2001⁴.
- 56% of the population is 18 years or younger⁵
- 44.25% of the population of the district had no formal schooling by 2001 and the levels were highest in Msinga.
- Msinga has the highest rate of illiteracy, at 33%, although literacy levels have improved significantly since the 1996 census.⁶

Living conditions of children

Children are being raised in the context of deep and widespread poverty. There is very limited infrastructure and poor access to basic services. The vast majority of homes are not electrified and do not have running water or sanitation. Households rely on wood fuel and paraffin, river or borehole water, and use pit latrines or the bush. There is no public transport within the area studied. People travel on foot or use taxis on the dirt and gravel roads between villages. Some settlements are completely inaccessible by vehicle.

Medical treatment is available from traditional healers and from the Church of Scotland hospital at Tugela Ferry. The hospital has an HIV/AIDS centre and a network of community health workers but has not been able to operate its mobile clinic service for some time due to lack of drivers.

Means of communication are very limited. Apart from poor access to telephones, most people do not have television or radio and do not regularly have newspapers and magazines.

There has been a concerted effort by government to facilitate the take-up of social benefits (pensions, child support grants, foster care grants, disability grants). This is judged by all respondents to have made a positive difference to children and families, although it cannot compensate for the lack of income and livelihood opportunities. Apart from grants, households rely on remittances from migrant workers, casual work, petty trading, support from relatives employed in the public sector, subsistence agriculture and mutual borrowing.

The situation of children and youth working on and off-farms is very different. Those who live on the black-owned, former labour tenant farms look after cattle, generally unpaid and because they are required to do so by their parents. Many also work after school, at weekends and/or holidays on white-owned farms, picking tomatoes and cotton, planting, weeding and watering cabbages, potatoes and other vegetables. Off the farms, in the former KwaZulu homeland areas, children both in and out-of-school actively seek work on commercial farms and irrigated gardens, to help sustain households that cannot subsist by

³ Census 2001. StatsSA.

⁴ Umzinyathi Economic Regeneration Study (February 2003)

⁵ Census 2001. StatsSA.

⁶ Ibid.

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farming⁷. All these agricultural activities are in addition to a wide range of domestic tasks performed by most boys and girls from an early age.

Children attend a variety of farm and government schools. Children from the different areas have to walk up to 5km to attend primary school and sometimes further to attend senior secondary school. Children from one community have to cross the Tugela River to get to and from school. They can be seen wading across, with their shoes and books on their heads, saving on the fare for the small ferry boat and braving the crocodiles that are reported to bask just upstream.

There are few sporting or recreational opportunities. Schools offer some extra-curricular activities. Boys improvise soccer matches as there are no purpose-made pitches and equipment is hard to come by. Girls also like to play ball games but most social life revolves around spending time with friends and preparing for and attending traditional celebrations and ceremonies, such as engagement and coming of age rituals, and funerals. In fact, farmers, parents and teachers noted that girls were more likely to be absent from school due to such festivities – up to a month for a coming of age ceremony.

Adults complain that the youth are increasingly abusing alcohol, and to a lesser extent dagga, and that teenage boys and girls are more interested in their affairs than in their schooling and responsibilities.

Teachers report a high rate of dropping out of school. There are many children dropping out of school AND also working in agriculture BUT it is not work *per se* that causes children to leave school – and it is not always poverty. There are big issues around the value attached to girls' education, the usefulness of education in equipping children to engage in employment and the lack of opportunities for people of all ages to secure a livelihood. One of the consequences of children dropping out of school is that they miss out on a school meal. All the schools surveyed provided a hot meal (for example maize meal and beans stew), which was the main meal of the day for many children.

School-going boys complained about the local practice of being beaten by male elders or older boys. They said there was a belief that boys must be beaten until they bleed and that will make them grow stronger. They said that mostly uneducated boys 'abuse us for no reason'. When they reported to their parents, families or teachers, nothing was done and they were told that is normal and acceptable.

Farming

There is a mixture of private commercial (irrigated, mainly white-owned) farming, including maize, vegetables, fruit (oranges), and sugar cane, as well as commercial (communal/black-owned) cattle farming, and some smallholder and subsistence farming (mainly gardening and goats). The cultivation of dagga (cannabis) is an important source of income for many households in the area due to the extremely limited livelihood opportunities and the constraints on subsistence farming due to the rocky, mountainous terrain and lack of accessible water sources.

The area was the site of the first pilot land reform programme in KZN and saw the resettlement of a displaced community and the state-supported purchase of (parts of) white-owned farms by former labour tenants.

⁷ Additional information from Rauri Alcock, Church Agricultural Project (CAP) Farm Trust, which runs the farm Mdukatshani, 'place of the lost grasses' on the southern (Weenen) side of the Tugela River.

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Historically, many children, as young as seven, have worked in agriculture to help support their households. They have been employed as day and seasonal workers. The resettlement and the sale of farms have reduced the opportunities for commercial farm work generally. The introduction of labour regulations limiting the employment of children to those aged 15 and over is reported to have further reduced the number of children in paid agricultural work. However, significant numbers of children are still engaged in both commercial and subsistence agriculture.

The fieldwork focused on three farms (Nomoya, Nkaseni and Ncunjane), where returned labour tenants acquired land under the land reform programme, and four neighbouring settlements Mashunka, Mathinta, Ngubo and Mhlangeni (Mbabane). On the farms, there are 40, 50 and 30 families respectively, with up to 100 people in the larger kraals. That is up to twice the number in an average off-farm household⁸. The adjacent settlements cover a huge area on both sides of the Tugela River and include thousands of families.

Three schools were identified for inclusion in the study to represent the areas and types of livelihood in the target area:

- Mandleni Secondary School
- Ngongolo School (up to Grade 9)
- Nkaseni Primary School (up to Grade 8)

2. Fieldwork Method



The areas where the fieldwork was conducted were 3.5 to 4.5 hours' drive from Durban and driving conditions are not favourable after dark. Within the site, there are no tarred roads and the terrain is often rugged. There is no cellphone signal in much of the area and very few fixed phone lines⁹. This meant it was not feasible to make frequent preparatory trips to the study site or to communicate by phone with those in the field. For this reason, it was decided

to work with an organisation based in the community, to facilitate the logistical arrangements.

A meeting was held with the committee of Church Agricultural Projects (CAP), to discuss the purpose and scope of the study, seek their practical support for the fieldwork and identify any critical issues pertaining to the research.

⁸ CAP.

⁹ Msinga local municipality has the fourth highest proportion of households in the country with no access to a telephone – 28.31%. This is according to Khaas, T. Community Telephone Survey 2006. Digital IQ Corporation.

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The research team then worked with a community-based facilitator, seconded from CAP, to assist with access/liaison on an ongoing basis, to co-facilitate focus groups/interviews and to ensure proper support for the children and referral where needed.

CAP arranged for the researchers to introduce the project to Nkosi Ngoza Mthembu, traditional leader of the Mthembu community, and his Ndunankulu and councillors, at his traditional court at Tugela Ferry. Representatives of CAP met on behalf of the research team with Nkosi Simakadi Mchunu, of the Mchunu community, for the same purpose, as the Nkosi was not available when the team first visited the area.

The community-based facilitator approached the principals and teachers of the schools identified to confirm that there would be adequate numbers of learners in the target age group, to assess levels of interest/support among the staff, and to identify any possible time or practical constraints. She also informed the principals that letters, requesting their cooperation and giving permission for their involvement, would be forthcoming.

It was found to be critical to review and test the questionnaire for the quantitative survey before going into the field, due to sensitivities about the purpose of the study, the kinds of questions being asked and the use of the information. This was done at a workshop at the CAP learning centre with local (Black) farmers and parents, and CAP staff. This workshop also explored local understanding of the concepts of childhood, work, labour and responsibilities of children.

The schedules for the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study were tentatively agreed at this workshop and the criteria for the selection of focus group participants were explained. The research team was advised that it would not be practical to try to access out-of-school children through school-going children, since the two groups tended not to mix, with school-going children often looking down on those who have dropped out of school.

Suggested ways to identify and contact out-of-school, children who were working in agriculture were to approach farmers, traditional leaders and possibly teachers (who might know households where children had dropped out in order to work, seasonally or permanently), and to talk to children/youth at the weekly cattle 'dip-days'. All of these approaches were used with the assistance of the community-based facilitator.

The research plan was to conduct

- A focus group with ten school-going children who were engaged in agricultural work or who had worked in agriculture in the past year;
- A focus group with ten out-of-school children who were engaged in agricultural work or who had worked in agriculture in the past year;
- Focus groups and individual interviews with adult stakeholders, including teachers, parents, farmers, health care workers and social/community workers.

Interviews and focus groups were structured in order to generate data about:

- the concept of work, labour and children's responsibilities;
- the causes, conditions and consequences of children's work in agriculture;
- the ways in which children's participation in agriculture has changed over time; and
- respondents' views on necessary steps to prevent children from engaging in harmful agricultural work and to protect working children.

2.1 Description of fieldwork conducted

DATE	FIELD ACTIVITY
Tuesday 27 June	Meeting with CAP staff at Hilton to discuss purpose and logistics of study
Tuesday 27 July	Workshop with CAP staff, committee, and farmers/parents at Msinga, to discuss concepts of childhood and work, and review questionnaire. Interview community worker
Tuesday 1 August	Meeting with Nkosi Mthembu and others at traditional authority court, Tugela Ferry, to seek support for study activities in his area (meeting with Nkosi Mchunu conducted by CAP staff). Meeting with department of agriculture rep at Msinga.
Friday 8 September	Meeting with school governing bodies of Mandleni and Ngongolo schools (re consent forms), Msinga
Monday 11 September	Meetings with school principals at Mandleni and Ngongolo schools to confirm time and arrangements for survey Meeting at Nkaseni school with Deputy Principal – letters written and delivered to SGB members
Tuesday 12 September	Meeting at Nkaseni school with SGB members, to explain project and answer questions Survey Ngongolo CP school – Grades 5, 6, 7 Interview 2 teachers
Wednesday 13 September	Return to Ngongolo CP school to complete survey Survey Nkaseni CP School – Grades 6 and 7 Interview teacher Interview community worker
Thursday 14 September	Return to Nkaseni school to complete survey Focus Group with in-school children
Friday 15 September	Survey Mandleni School – Grades 8 and 9 Focus Group with farmers Ncunjane
Monday 6 November	Focus group with 4 teachers at Mandleni [Visit to Nkaseni to interview teacher/principal and deliver gift purchases failed as school closed early for educators to attend funeral] Interview with community worker
Tuesday 7 November	Focus group with out of school children Interview with community worker

2.2 Research tools used

2.2.1 Focus groups with children

Two focus groups were conducted with children – one with school-going children and the other with 15 out-of-school children.

Child focus group 1 comprised 11 children from Ngongolo School. There were 4 girls and 7 boys. They were selected from among the survey respondents who had stated in the questionnaire that they had experience of working in agriculture in the past year. They were from Grade 6 and Grade 7 and were all aged 12-16. They were all currently engaged in some form of agricultural work (before/after school, during weekends/holidays). Their work included ploughing, watering and herding cattle (boys only). In addition, girls and boys did domestic chores for their own households and those of relatives, neighbours or other community members, including fetching wood and water, and looking after children (this task was mainly done by girls).

Child focus group 2 comprised 15 out-of-school children, from the Ncunjane area. There were 13 girls and 2 boys (the reasons for the gender imbalance were: girls in the target age group are more likely to have left school than boys (the community liaison facilitator attributes this at least in part to the fear of parents in this very traditional area that girls are at risk of getting boyfriends and becoming pregnant if they stay at school); that boys tended to be out with the cattle during the day and that more boys who were not at school would be away from the homestead playing, compared to girls, who were more likely to be at home even if not working. The children were aged 12-16, except for one girl who was 11. They had all been out of school for at least a year. One of the boys had left in 2004, returned for a year and then left again at the end of 2005.

Methods used were:

Body mapping

This was used with both groups. Both groups found it amusing, enjoyable and interesting to do this activity. The concept – a way of sharing lots of important information without having to work hard talking or writing, and without having to be a good artist – seemed easily grasped. It had a positive effect on the group dynamics, of levelling (literally!), giving a sense of common purpose and focusing energy. However, children in the out-of-school group found it more difficult to express themselves through drawing.

Discussion and debate

Both groups engaged in a group discussion after the body mapping and most of the children participated actively (though more so in the school-going group, where the children were more confident and articulate).

The school-going group had an additional debate on gender and work as this issue came up in discussion.



School-going children drawing their outlines for the body-mapping

The photo-analysis activity was not done partly because of time and partly because the children were comfortable talking about their own experiences without too many prompts.

2.2.2 Focus groups with adults

Two focus groups were conducted with adults – one with teachers from and one with farmers/parents. The focus groups took the form of structured groups discussions. Although the questions to each group were similar, they were open questions that gave the opportunity for participants to speak from their own experience and to share opinions as well as to give general factual information. The questions focused on concepts of childhood and appropriate tasks/work for children of different ages, the causes conditions and consequences of children working, and what would be needed to prevented children from performing tasks that were in any way harmful to them.

Adult focus group 1 comprised 4 teachers from one of the participating schools. Only one of the teachers was originally from the study area but all had more than a year's experience there. They all personally knew many children who worked in agriculture.

Adult focus group 2 comprised 12 cattle farmers (Black males) who were also parents. They all lived and farmed in the study area. They had all worked with livestock as children. All of those with sons expected their children to work with the cattle.

2.2.3 Interviews with adults

Individual interviews were conducted with 2 teachers and with 3 community development workers (staff of CAP) who work with the cattle farmers and vegetable growers in the area. These interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit background information about the area, farming patterns, employment opportunities, attitudes to children and work and changes over time.

2.2.4 Workshop with adults

A workshop was conducted with 12 staff and committee members and farmers from CAP before the first formal period of fieldwork. The purpose of this was initially to inform the design of the survey questionnaire and explore any conceptual or linguistic issues with the translation into Zulu. However, this workshop yielded important information for the qualitative study. Participants shed light of the complex issues of age, work, duty and relationships. They talked about the kind of tasks that children do, the reasons why and the gendered nature of much of the work.

2.2.4 Observation

The researchers observed children taking part in activities at school, playing and having lunch, taking part in the survey and in the focus groups. They also observed children travelling to and from school, tending cattle, working at the dip, fetching water, playing and working in the gardens. They also observed the interaction between adults and children in the area – mainly educators.

2.3 Ethical issues

In line with the HSRC Ethics Committee requirements, consent/assent forms in Zulu, the home language of the respondents, were distributed for signature to parents of all children in the target group for the survey and the focus group with in-school children, as well as to the children participating in the survey and in the focus groups. The forms explained the purpose of the study and the nature of the activities, assured parents and children of the voluntary nature of their involvement and the anonymity of their responses.

The timing of the survey was agreed with the school principals and class teachers

The timing and duration of the child focus groups was agreed with participants at the time of selection. Arrangements were made to transport the children from school to the meeting venue and then to their homes. Refreshments were served to all participants in the focus groups. The community liaison facilitator was present during all the sessions, not only to assist with the activities but to identify and address any concerns the children might have. Opportunities were given to all informants to ask the research team questions about the study.

For the focus groups, beside the study criteria, the researchers added the following criteria: the children are interested in participating; taking part in the focus group will not interfere with any other important activity; the children live close enough to travel home safely and quickly when they are returned by vehicle to the closest accessible point on the road.

A protocol for addressing issues of concern that might arise during the survey/interviews was agreed. This was to speak to the child concerned and initially to raise the problem with the community worker or educator, or other concerned adult, with the child's agreement.

2.4 Constraints and challenges

From the outset, the dates for the fieldwork needed to be scheduled not just according to the timeframes for the project but to take account of various practical considerations – public holidays, pension days, exam schedules and school holidays (half-term).

The fieldwork was provisionally scheduled to take place between 10 and 21 August but had to be postponed three times, once because the HSRC Ethics Committee approval was not received before logistical arrangements had to be made and then twice because approval for the quantitative part of the study to be conducted in schools was not forthcoming from the provincial education department in time.

The late addition of the quantitative survey to the terms of reference for the project impacted negatively on the qualitative component of the study, in terms of the amount of time required to plan, administer and process the survey instrument. Concerns in the community about the practicality and acceptability of parental consent letters (principals said they rarely communicate with parents in writing and there was widespread suspicion about being asked to sign anything, particularly as literacy levels were so low) meant additional meetings had to be arranged.

Explaining the questionnaire and the child consent forms, and assisting learners to go through the questionnaire took much more time than anticipated. Literacy levels and exposure to such materials were low. In addition, the conditions were hot and

overcrowded. No matter how the researchers stressed to children that it was not an exam and they were not obliged to continue if they were uncomfortable, learners clearly felt under pressure to complete the questionnaire. Not surprisingly, the children who were engaged in the most work activities and, therefore, had to answer the greatest numbers of sub-sets of questions, were also those who had the least time for study or who came from the most impoverished homes and had enrolled in school late. These children generally found it the most difficult to understand and answer the questions. Most of the children could understand if the questions were read out in Zulu but many struggled with written Zulu.

It was necessary to return to two of the schools, as the survey could not be completed in one session. The educators and learners were very accommodating and helpful about this but the schools were far apart and this also reduced the amount of time that could be spent doing qualitative work. In the opinion of the author, there was also an ethical dimension to this: it was not ideal to keep the children in cramped classrooms for so long filling in the questionnaire; children decided to forego scheduled breaks in order to finish; the children who took the most time generally gave the most information, and we thanked them for this, but they were made to feel that they were holding everyone up. The author's opinion is that there was not a problem with the questionnaire design or content per se but that in this context it would have been better to spend more time in the field, with perhaps a dedicated session to introduce the survey to the children and explain the concepts and categories in the questionnaire, and then 2 separate sessions to administer the survey. The children would then have felt more like they were participating in research than in a race.

The time available for the focus groups was reduced because of the extra time needed for the survey. This also made it impossible to conduct the range of adult interviews planned or to follow up on information given by children in the focus groups.

The research team had made inquiries with the Church of Scotland Hospital, which serves the area (there are no local clinics operating at present) about interviewing community health workers and social workers based there. Some contact details were provided but it proved impossible to schedule interviews during the field visits, which had to be confirmed at very short notice due to the late receipt of the letter of permission from the Department of Education. The first period in the field also coincided with the hospital facing the epidemic of XDR TB and because of this the research team did not try to pursue interviews at the hospital.

It had been anticipated that it would require considerable time and effort to recruit out-of-school children for a focus group. The community liaison facilitator successfully undertook this task for the second period in the field. However, the children identified stayed in a remote area and the travelling time also reduced the period available for the focus group.

2.5 Differences between the fieldwork planned and the fieldwork conducted

- The qualitative work took place later than scheduled and required two periods in the field, for the reasons outlined in 2.2 above.
- The range of informants interviewed was limited, also for the reasons described above.

- A focus group of a range of adult stakeholders could not be arranged in the time available. Instead, a focus group with teachers was conducted and a focus group of farmers/fathers was conducted. The opportunity to conduct the latter arose because a group of cattle farmers from one of the communal farming areas was holding a meeting about herding during our visit and agreed to remain for a focus group on child work in agriculture in the afternoon.
- The number of children participating in the out-of-school focus group was larger than planned. This was because 15 children arrived at the meeting place. Although one was below the target age group, all the children participated.

3. Concepts of childhood, work and labour in the study site

3.1 Childhood

For the purposes of the study, it was important to clarify understanding of both the nature and duration of childhood. Childhood, as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), international labour legislation and the South African Constitution, extends from birth to a child's 18th birthday.

In practice, the nature and duration of childhood are determined as much by roles, relationships, physical developments, needs and expectations as by age limits. In different cultures and contexts, different activities are seen as the preserve of infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. The lines are blurred by custom, socio-economic conditions, change and crisis.

Both the international and national legislation recognise the period of childhood as a time in which a person should enjoy all basic human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural) but must also be afforded special care, protection and support in order to realise those rights. Childhood is widely characterised as a period of dependence upon parents, teachers and other significant adults, for both material needs and for guidance. At the same time, the UNCRC recognises the 'evolving capacities' of children to participate in decision-making and to make choices about their lives. The balance between a child's right to exercise agency and her or his right to protection is obviously a subjective and sensitive issue that cannot be fixed merely by legislation.

The research team explored with adults and children the concept of childhood.

There was recognition among all respondents that childhood legally ended at 18. There was also consensus that age alone did not define childhood. Comments from the school-going children in the focus group included:

'It's about what you do – not your age. 'Children start by doing adult things but they are still children. For example some girls get pregnant.'

'It's not just when you turn 18 but there is something wrong with you if you are still dependent on your parents at 18.'

'Adults are independent.'

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Among the older generation, farmers and parents said that childhood was a stage of life that only ended when a person became fully independent. Adulthood was marked by the establishment of your own home, a livelihood and the acquisition of dependents through marriage. There was some consensus that a person over 18 who did not have their own place and their own children was still a child. One of the community workers commented that a male even in his late 20s who had not established his own household and had children would not be allowed to sit with the men in community gatherings.

Some of the out-of-school children agreed that:

‘You become an adult when you have your own home and you can look after yourself.’

But they expressed the view, that while, as the school-going group had noted, doing an ‘adult’ thing like having a baby did not make you an adult:

‘You can still be an adult if you don’t have children.’

3.2 When should children work and what should they do?

In terms of the age at which children start working and the age at which they should start working, adults gave a range of responses. The cattle farmers said children start taking care of the cattle at about age 6-8 years. They said it depended on the child - one child of six might be ready and able to help take out the cattle, while another child aged 8 might not cope physically or emotionally. These farmers had heard of the legislation against children under 15 working but simply did not classify the tasks performed by children in homes, gardens or communal commercial farms as work.

The reasons given by adults for children doing domestic work, gardening or herding from the age of 7 were: so that children can learn their responsibilities and because their assistance was essential to the running of the household. This aspect is dealt with in more detail under section 4. Causes of child work in agriculture, below.



Teachers from one of the target schools said children should not be undertaking chores or subsistence work out of school hours until they were at least 12 years old. However, they

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said it was common for many children to start such work as soon as they started school, from the age of 7.

A teacher from another school said many boys from age 11 up were regularly absent because they went to work at the weekly cattle dip (see photo, above right).

3.3 Work and labour

Most people did not make a distinction between work and labour, in the sense that they would refer to work and hard work or hard working conditions. However, they would talk about being exploited at work (ukugqilazwa) or being treated like a slave (isigqila).

‘They are still not paid well – they are exploited. They come back from the farms and they know nothing.’

Cattle farmer, Ncunjane

Adults spoke about kinds of work that were appropriate for children of different ages and about tasks that were the responsibility specifically of girls or of boys. They spoke about the physical impact of work that was not appropriate – for example, the tiredness experienced by children who worked long hours, or the injuries that a child might sustain doing work they were not strong enough for. The children, however, focused on the conditions under which they did the work rather than the nature of the work. They reported problems such as injuries, thirst and heat exhaustion but they stressed how they felt emotionally when they were forced to do something, when they were shouted at or beaten.

The in-school children defined work as:

‘What one does and gets paid for doing it.’

‘Also what one does when requested by an elderly person e.g. a neighbour, parents, or teachers’.

The second point is significant because adults generally made a distinction between duties or responsibilities and work. In their view, carrying out tasks when asked by an adult, for example, fetching wood, looking after a child, herding cattle, or cleaning a classroom, is not work at all, even if it is a task for which an adult would expect to be paid.

Teachers listed some of the tasks that children routinely do – such as selling garden produce, fetching wood, herding cattle and raising and selling chickens. They agreed:

‘These are tasks they have to do and it helps them to grow up right.’

The teachers strongly emphasised that such work should not be done by young children and should not interfere with school:

‘It is fine if they are doing these things after school and in the holidays.’

Having said this, they noted several negative impacts on children, which are dealt with in Section 6, below.

The children, meanwhile, were clear that when they carried out tasks for an older person, they were doing it because it was a duty (cause) but by its nature it was work (definition).

‘It’s work even though you don’t get paid because you can’t say no.’

School-going child

They did not say this was very hard work (labour) but some did consider it exploitation. This was because they had no choice and because their efforts were accorded no value/virtue – even though the tasks they performed were considered essential by adults (see focus group discussion with farmers, below).

When it came to exploitative treatment of children by those giving them work, there was not a straightforward distinction between (White) commercial farmers and family or community members. All the children complained about the conditions under which they carried out farming (and other) tasks regardless of who was the employer/supervisor. Those who were paid all complained about the low wage levels. Several children said that community members/neighbours would sometimes promise to give them something for their efforts and then fail to do so, which the children found hurtful. Those working on vegetable farms or in subsistence/market gardens generally complained of the heat/sun, thirst and tiredness. They all complained of having to work when they were tired. One boy who looked after his father's cattle said his father often beat him if he was not satisfied with his work and that he was frightened of his father.

The literature distinguishes between work (age appropriate, properly remunerated tasks that do not have a negative impact on well-being) and labour (unsuitable work, that is exploitative because it is not properly remunerated but generates income for the supervisor and which is performed under difficult conditions that undermine or jeopardise well-being). As noted, neither the children nor adults made this distinction although they recognised exploitation and negative impacts on well-being.

3.2.1 Policy implications of perceptions of 'work', 'labour' and exploitation

The main concern of adults and children with regard to children's work in agriculture was that it should not exploit children but there was not agreement about what was harmful. Certainly many adults are of the view that even time-consuming and tiring tasks that children do not want to do are both 'good for them' (educational, securing the future) and are not work. Children on the other hand feel exploited and complain of negative effects on their physical and emotional well-being because of the work they do.

Work may also be exploitative, even if it is done for family

It may not be necessary to suggest changing the definitions of work and labour but rather to acknowledge that *work may also be exploitative, even if it is done for family*.

Children are consciously trading off one right to secure another

A critical issue is that of 'trading off' rights. While children say they have to do certain tasks because they cannot say no, very few say they have been forced into paid work by parents or employers (farmers). Rather they have been forced by circumstances (poverty) and have made their own decision to seek work in order to meet their own basic needs and/or those of their family. *Children are consciously trading off one right to secure another*. They may give up the right to rest and recreation for the rights to food and access to education. They may trade the right to physical, emotional, spiritual and social well-being and development, for the right to stay with their family.

4. Causes of child work in agriculture

Why do children in the study area do work in agriculture?

4.1 Adult views

'It is very important. They are learning but they are also helping us. But they are taught respect.'

Ncunjane farmer

The main reasons given by adults were:

- It is the duty of a child to help the family/household/community.
- The child learns essential skills – and required behaviours such as discipline and respect – by recognising this duty and performing certain tasks.
- The child learns and fulfils his/her role in the family, in relation to younger and older people, in relation to the status of other family members and in relation to gender.
- It is for the good of the child – it equips them for their future as adults.
- *It is essential to the survival and upkeep of the household.*

4.2 Child worker views

'To get money...money to buy our own things.'

Out of school girl, 14

'To get money to buy food and clothes.'

'To support my family, my brothers and sisters.'

School-going children

The main reasons given by children were:

- It is because they are instructed/forced to work.
- It is the only way to meet their basic needs – such as food, clothing and the right to health care.
- It is to learn skills for the future.
- *It is essential to the survival and upkeep of the household.*

4.3 Underlying causes

There are two underlying reasons for children working in agriculture in this area:

1. The customary duty of children in the area to learn and assist with essential tasks, such as caring for livestock and crops (whether subsistence or commercial), regardless of the socio-economic status of the household:

'There is a deliberate effort to teach children, to pass on to the next generation; it is what boys have to do.'

Cattle farmer, Ncunjane

'It's about children's needs to learn so that they can have a future.'

Cattle farmer, Ncunjane

2. The necessity of children in the area to bring home food and/or money (from work on subsistence but particularly on commercial farms), due to deep and widespread poverty.

Asked 'Why do you work?', the school-going children answered that it was due to 'unemployment' and 'poverty'. They explained that they needed money:

'To help ourselves'

'To look after our sisters'

'Because my parents have been retrenched'

'Because I am staying with relatives'

'Because I am staying with neighbours'

The focus group participants said that most children they knew worked for food or money if they could, adding that 'a lot of kids come from broken families'. Teachers from the local schools also said that the majority of school-going children worked, before or after school, on weekends and holidays and sometimes during school, both because of poverty and duty:

'Most of the children do some kind of work... They are helping their families and gaining skills... It's a way to help the family survive.'

Teachers from Mandleni

One of the tasks many boys in the area perform (generally unpaid) is taking cattle to the dip, to prevent disease.

'Their parents believe these animals will keep their livelihood for some time and if you don't dip, they will die and everyone will suffer.'

'It is both about helping the family and training the child.'

Teacher from Ngongolo

4.4 Poverty and duty

In summary, both adult and child respondents identified poverty as one of the main causes of child work. However, they also made clear that children would be expected to work, from an early age, even if it were not necessary for the survival of the household.

4.4.1 Policy implications

Anti-poverty measures: legislation/policy can reduce the opportunities for and hence the incidence of children working in commercial agriculture (see Section 7 below) but it neither reduces the perceived need for children to work nor improves child well-being overall in the absence of adequate household income and adult livelihood support.

Commitment to the best interests of the child: Children are expected to work for non-economic reasons, such as learning essential skills, meeting a responsibility to the family

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and assuming a traditional role in the household. Therefore, while anti-poverty measures might remove the economic necessity for child work, they will not bring an end to child work. Neither is the author arguing that all child work should stop. The critical criterion for whether a child should work is 'the best interests of the child'. This raises the question whether it is in the best interests of a child to be made to work in order to learn skills, behaviour and attitudes that will aid his/her development and equip him/her for a productive and fulfilling adult life. Here, there is a clear and unsurprising difference of opinion between some adults and children but also a difference between different groups of adults. Adults readily admit that they depend on the tasks performed by children but then argue that the tasks are performed for the good of the child and distinguish between 'work' and 'duty':

'It is not about a task as work; it is the relationship and the position in the household that determines whether it is work or duty.'

Farmers at Ncunjane

Teachers acknowledge the learning/training aspect of child work but argue that it is not in the best interests of the child to start work as young as they do or to work in the conditions they do (see Section 7 below).

Children work because they have to. They may see work as in their best interests because the alternatives would be worse – lack of food, punishment. However, they do not see it in their best interests to work in the conditions that they do (see Section 5 below).

There is not a common understanding of the concept of 'best interests of the child' and this leaves much room for abuse, with adults acting in their own best interests under the guise of the child's own good.

The challenge here is for everyone associated with the child to understand the working child's experience, to recognise negative impacts upon the child of some of the work they do and to take steps to protect the child from such harm.

5. Conditions of child work in agriculture

5.1 Types of work children do in the study area

Children are involved in a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural work in the study area. The main tasks they perform are listed in the table below. The information on the gender division of tasks is summarised from the focus group debate with school-going children, information given in the other interviews and confirmed by research team observation:



Right: self-portrait of 14-year-old out-of-school girl hoeing.

Tasks performed by children, by gender

Boys	Task	Girls
Yes	Ploughing, with cattle	No
Yes	Hoeing	Yes
Yes	Planting	Yes
Yes	Watering crops	Yes
Yes	Weeding	Yes
Yes	Harvesting on commercial and subsistence farms (cabbages; potatoes, tomatoes; other vegetables)	Yes
Yes	Selling produce (from communal/market gardens)	Yes
Yes	Tending/feeding fowls (chicken)	Yes
Yes	Buying/selling fowls at market	Yes
Yes	Herding cattle	Only if there are no boys to do it
Yes	Minding cattle at the dip	No
No – it is taboo for boys to do this and they are not taught how. They would be physically capable of doing it but ‘They cannot do it because they would be cursed... Something bad will happen to them.’ Such as? ‘They will not be able to get a girlfriend!’ The director of a local craft project noted that, irrespective of belief in curses, it was indeed likely that a boy who did this task would not get a girlfriend because people would laugh at him.	Cleaning floor with cow dung (ukusinda)	Yes
Yes	Grave-digging	No - not because they are not allowed by custom but because ‘it is difficult for them’. The boys explained that ‘Girls have all their

		strength in their shoulders and necks while boys have strength in their arms and legs'. Asked where their ideas about who could do what came from, they said, from their parents, from the chief and from god.
Yes	Building wooden frames for round huts (rondavels).	No – for the same reason girls cannot dig graves. One boy pointed out that there was a woman in his village who did build these frames. The other boys laughed and said 'That one is not a woman. She is a man!'
Yes	Cutting/fetching firewood	Yes
Yes	Selling firewood	Yes, but boys are more likely to do this
Yes	Fetching water	Yes
Yes	Sweeping	Yes
Yes	Cooking	Yes
Yes	Running errands	Yes
Yes – but girls are more commonly expected to do this and more likely to be taken out of school to do so.	Looking after children	Yes

5.2 Timing and duration of children's work in agriculture

School-going children work in subsistence farming – mainly vegetables and maize – generally before and after school, at weekends and during the day in school vacations. The boys (and rarely girls) work in communal commercial cattle farming at the same times. However, boys also go to the dip once a week during school hours and sometimes come to school late from taking out the cattle to graze. Boys and girls also travel long distances (to Newcastle, Greytown and Pietermaritzburg) to sell wood or trade chickens. Some travel to Tugela Ferry to sell cabbages. They work in commercial agriculture (vegetable farming) in the neighbouring district of Weenen, or further afield, at harvest times, usually during the school summer holidays.

Out of school children who work in subsistence agriculture generally do so whenever they are needed, between their domestic chores. The boys tend to work longer hours tending cattle and also go to the dip. They also work during the harvest times.

On school days, children do not generally work long hours in agriculture. However, when added to the hours they spend doing domestic chores and the hours at school and doing school homework, the working day of many children extends from dawn to dusk.

Adults acknowledge the number of tasks children do. According to the farmers:

‘In the mornings when they get up, girls fetch water and boys get the cattle. Children go to school; then in the afternoons, they go and look for the cattle. They also feed the livestock. Boys also plough using cattle.’

Children work long hours at harvest time, starting at sunrise, and having to leave home in the dark, to walk to pick up a truck if they are working on a commercial farm, or to catch a taxi if they are going to market to buy or sell.

‘Children are cutting wood and having to transport it far to sell – in Greytown and Pietermaritzburg.’

Teacher, Mandleni

5.3 Conditions of work and remuneration

Nearly all the work in agriculture performed by children is carried out in the open, with continual exposure to the elements. Work in the gardens, looking after cattle and going to the dip is year-round. This means extremes of heat and cold, with dry and often windy conditions in the winter, and blistering sun and sometimes dramatic electric storms and rains in the summer. Working in the sun and getting headaches as a result was the most common complaint of children doing harvesting work in the summer. The children did not complain about the type of work or the hours but they all said that they would like to work in better conditions. They suffered from heat, thirst, tiredness and occasionally injuries (see Section 6, on impact of child work, below). They did not complain about their treatment by supervisors. Travelling is hazardous – children have to walk through thick bush to reach local roads, and the roads to the nearest towns are not tarred or lit. Snakes are a common hazard but greater is the threat of assault in remote areas. Boys complain of violent attack by groups of older youths when they are on the road, travelling to or from school or work.

Work in the gardens and commercial vegetable farms tends to be done under adult supervision while work with cattle, domestic chores, childcare and fetching water and wood are done under adult instruction but out of view of adults, who are engaged in other activities.

Children do not have any negotiating power when it comes to hours and rates of work. They are told what they will be paid and are expected to complete a task to the satisfaction of the employer/supervisor, who then decides whether and how much s/he will pay. Being unable to refuse a task regardless of remuneration or working conditions was particularly distressing to the children. Children felt compelled both by their circumstances and by their subordinate position to parents and all older people to undertake work even if they were tired or wanted to do something else. However, the reaction to these two kinds of compulsion differed. Children generally accepted with some stoicism the need to work for food or money because of the difficult circumstances of their household; they also expressed pride at being able to assist. However, there was some resentment about the duty to do work for no remuneration because an older person required it. The resentment was not about helping but because adults did not seem to value the work or recognise the needs of children to rest or to be rewarded.

5.3.1 Views of in-school children on working conditions and pay

The school-going children interviewed in the focus group said they were paid R8 per day for doing work in gardens. Some said that they were paid with food (one meal a day)

One boy said he was paid R30 for working every afternoon after school for a month.

One of the girls said that they were paid between R30 and R50 for the entire June/July or December holidays.

A girl who looked after a neighbour's child/children was paid R20 for a weekend.

They all said it was 'OK' to work if you get something for it but they would like to be paid more. Some children complained that sometimes they were not paid anything at all. It made them feel bad when some adults did not pay them after they had performed certain tasks that they were told they would be paid for.

Asked what was the worst thing about the conditions they worked in, the children said:

- Injury
- Extreme heat
- Thirst
- Blowing dry wind
- Work in extreme cold conditions
- Being forced to work even when they were tired.

5.3.2 Views of out-of-school children on working conditions and pay

All the children said they were paid for harvesting potatoes or doing other tasks on the commercial farms, apart from cattle farming for parents or community members. Wages paid ranged from R10 a day to R100 for the holiday period (around 2 weeks); one girl got R50 for a week. Several children said they got food instead of or as well as money.

One girl was paid R10 for looking after children for the weekend. She was angry because she was told she would get R20.

'Sometimes they don't pay me anything and just give me a meal a day.'

Girl (14) caring for neighbour's child at weekends

One of the boys was looking after his father's cattle. He was also looking after relatives' cattle but didn't get paid. This boy sometimes did ploughing, watering and planting at a farm as well as looking after cattle. He got paid R20 and/or food for a day working in the gardens. He had left school because his father wanted him to look after the cattle, although he said his mother wanted him to go back to his studies. He did not mind not being paid for this because he saw some future benefit. However, he complained of severe beatings from his father when he did not work to his satisfaction.

'I am learning something useful because when I grow up I will also have my own cattle.'

Out-of-school boy (16)

The children only worked on commercial vegetable farms in the planting and harvesting seasons. Although they had left school, they were not working full-time because there was not enough work. The girls had not left school in order to work but because of the distance

to school and their parents' view that there was no point in them staying on. They were not keen to do more work but wanted better pay.

5.3.3 Views of adults on conditions and pay of working children

As noted above, children do not generally get paid for working with cattle, even though they do some of the same tasks for which adults get paid, or by which adults benefit as cattle owners. The farmers recognise the value of the work:

'We could manage without the children but not very well...Children play a central role.'

At the same time, they say: 'That is their duty. It is their responsibility.'

Asked when does duty become work that requires remuneration, one farmer replied:

'Once the boys start recognising that there are thorns in the bush, they want to work to get money to buy shoes!'

Cattle farmer, Ncunjane

The farmers said that payment related to need, not to the task and not to age.

'It's about having a relationship and beginning to have personal needs, and preparing to meet those needs. A child should see that he is not ready to go away to the urban areas to work and must help here.'

Cattle farmer/parent, Ncunjane

One farmer gave an example of how a child might be rewarded for his work according to need:

Sometimes, a boy buys or sells goats or cattle for the owners. He grooms them first and we may put up a goat as a reward, saying "If you do this well, I will give it to you to sell, to buy your school uniform or books".'

Another farmer said that in his opinion, working with cattle as a boy was all about *ilobolo* – cows given by a bridegroom's family to his in-laws, which the man must raise or buy.

'It is about a boy's future – building a kraal, taking responsibilities as an adult man.'

One of the farmers expressed the view that children were exploited by commercial farmers outside the area because they were not paid enough but the cattle farmers did not view the work that children did for them for nothing in the same light – they saw it as having a long-term benefit to the child, aside from the short-term benefit to themselves.

Teachers felt the working conditions of children were often unacceptable, especially because the children were tired and because they had to work when they needed to do other things that would benefit them.

5.3.4 policy implications of conditions of children working in agriculture

Employment of children below the minimum legal age: Children are doing unpaid work in subsistence farming, unpaid work in livestock farming and paid work in commercial farming below the minimum age. Of the 26 children interviewed for the qualitative study, all were doing such work and all were either 14 or younger or had performed such work since

they were 14 or younger. Although legislation does seem to have had an impact on the numbers and ages of children employed, the compulsion for children in this area to work (due to poverty and parental requirements) remains stronger than the legal disincentive.

Breach of basic conditions of employment (minimum wage): Children are being paid far below the minimum wage, which was set at R650 per month and is due to be increased. The children interviewed for this study were receiving a maximum of R50 per week and on average R10 a day. Many children complained of not being paid when they had been told they would receive money. They said they had to work and could not negotiate rates. This is a policy dilemma because in terms of the legislation, many of the children should not be working: to argue for better pay and conditions legitimises their unlawful employment but simply to further enforce the ban on children working in agriculture does not address the dire economic conditions of the children and their families.

Adverse working conditions: Children are working in difficult conditions, according to their own testimony and the views of teachers and some parents/cattle farmers. School-going children may not be working long hours in agriculture but when added to the domestic chores and the school work they have to do, the burden becomes very heavy. The children complained that they were often too hot, thirsty and tired. The same policy dilemma applies as with the issue of remuneration: in terms of the law, children should not be doing much of the work they do, let alone in the conditions they do it; on the other hand, the ban does not feed and clothe them.

6. Impact of child work and labour on the well-being and rights of the child

The best interest of the child is supposed to be paramount when an adult makes a decision about what a child should or should not do¹⁰. The question then is whether the perceived and experienced benefits to the child, of learning certain skills for the future and of contributing to the well-being of the household, by working in agriculture, outweigh any harm to the child's health, development or emotional well-being.



Playing soccer in Msinga. Working boys don't complain about the lack of a proper pitch, equipment or kit but about having no time to play.

¹⁰ 'A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.' Bill of Rights, Constitution of South Africa (Section 28 (2)).

6.1 Respondents views on benefit and harm of children working

Adults and children identified a range of impacts of working. While the list of harmful impacts, in terms of time, emotional and physical well-being, and development, was much longer than the list of benefits, the impact of not being able to work was often seen as the most negative.

6.1.1 Views of school-going children from focus group:

The most important positive impacts the children mentioned were:

‘We get money to buy food and clothes.’

‘We are able to support our families, mainly brothers and sisters.’

When asked what was the worst thing about working in agriculture, they responded:

- Injury – two boys and one girl said they that they had been injured severely enough to say in bed for at least a week.
- Extreme heat
- Thirst
- Dry wind
- Extreme cold conditions
- Being forced to work when tired

In terms of impact on schooling, the children mentioned lateness and absenteeism but did not talk about any impact on their school performance. They said they and some other children missed school during harvesting. Some boys arrived at school late (during first or second period) because of taking out cattle and all the boys took cattle to the weekly dip and came late to school.

The injuries they had suffered because of work included cuts, bruises and sprains to fingers, the head, legs, feet and arms. They also suffered headaches because of the heat/sun. One of the boys had a scar on his leg and said he was injured by a plough when he was pulled by cattle pulling the plough. He said he went to a clinic because it was so sore that he couldn’t put it down. One other child had been to the clinic with her injuries but others did not because, they said, they were afraid they would be admitted to hospital.

6.1.2 Views of out-of-school children from focus group:

These children said the best thing about working was getting money. The worst thing was the extreme heat – working in the sun.

They also drew on their body maps the things they wanted to do but could not because of working (this referred to their domestic chores as well as agricultural work).



Seven of the girls wanted time to play. They all said they didn't have time to go to school but none of them wanted to return to school.

One boy wished he had time to play soccer and to swim. The other boy in this group wanted to go back to school.

Among the injuries this group had sustained were cuts to the head, the feet, legs, fingers and hands. One girl reported that she had suffered an injury to her head and foot after being pushed by a goat while working

6.1.3 Views of adults:

The teachers interviewed were very concerned about the impacts on children of working, in terms of their participation and performance at school. They said most of the children in their schools were doing both domestic and agriculture-related work (ie gardening, tending livestock or selling produce).

The teachers from one school noted:

'It makes them tired.'

'They don't have enough time.'

'It can interfere with school.'

One of the Mandleni teachers was concerned not just about late-coming or lack of time to study but the overall development of the children:

'Children who have to work are very affected – they can't take part in extra murals – soccer, music. They can't study at home.'

Significantly, work in agriculture was not seen as the only, or even the main reason why children were absent from school or experiencing difficulties. Some teachers said they didn't see greater problems with children who worked in agriculture in terms of tiredness or lack of concentration, because they were mainly working after school. They said some of the boys came late because they were taking cattle out and were missing school because of the dip every week.

'When it is time for cattle to be disinfected, a lot of children are absent. It is the older ones and around 30-50 are away for dip day on a Monday or Tuesday. It happens all year round.'

Ngongolo teacher

However, in terms of prolonged absenteeism, this was mainly because of death in the family – maybe five days before the burial plus one or two days after. There was also prolonged absence, as noted earlier (see page 5) due to engagement ceremonies (ukuqomela), which the teachers said affects not just the girls who are engaged but also their peers, who absent themselves for these functions. Children were also absent from school due to being sent away somewhere by parents (the reasons for this were not clarified) and due to other traditional ceremonies. They said it was very rare for children to be off due to work related injuries or sickness¹¹.

¹¹ The research team did not conduct a formal interview with health workers. However, we had preliminary discussions with the hospital chief medical officer. He said that while their records of

The teachers said it was not common for children to drop out of school to work but that some did leave school without matric to go and work on timber plantations or as domestic workers.

Development workers stressed the impact on children of the combination of poor educational outcomes, absence of livelihood opportunities and poverty in terms of HIV/AIDS. They noted that some of the children in the study site who were quitting school around age 15 with no qualifications for further study or for work, and who could not find work on farms locally, moved away to get work on the plantations and then became extremely vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

'The increased rate of early pregnancy we see among girls who have gone away to work shows young people are practising unsafe sex. They have been uprooted from a conservative cultural context in which boys and girls are fairly segregated, and go and stay in compounds where they can mix freely without adult supervision at a time when the urge to engage in sexual relationships is very strong.'

Development worker, Msinga

While children are being compelled to seek work away from home and to work in an adult environment, the situation reflects concerns by cattle farmers complained that young people who went away to work became more interested in affairs and got into 'trouble'.

The cattle farmers interviewed were not asked in detail about the impacts of work upon children but spontaneously mentioned what they perceived as the benefits – gaining skills, learning responsibility and respect, and investing time and energy for their future needs. In terms of negative impacts, one farmer said that children did get injured because cattle sometimes kicked them.

7. Changes over time in relation to child work in agriculture

Overall, the views of adults and children alike were that children did less work on commercial (White-owned) farms than in the past. There was consensus about the reasons for this:

- that there is less work available in general on farms, due to farmers selling up, moving out or changing land use;
- that there is less work available to children, due to the introduction of labour legislation prohibiting children working below the age of 15;
- that since the introduction in 2003 of the minimum wage for farmworkers, farmers preferred to employ adults (men) who are generally stronger and more productive;

Children, teachers, parents, cattle farmers and community workers all agreed, however, that there are still large numbers of children working in agriculture (as borne out by the

childhood injuries are not categorised to show if children were working, he could not recall any incidents of children being treated for serious work-related injuries or significant numbers of children injured at work. He also said we was not aware of any children suffering illness due to using pesticides or other chemicals.

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survey data), and more significantly, high numbers of children actively seeking work before the minimum age, because of the need for food and money to meet other basic needs.

In fact, one of the consequences of the changes noted above is that children have to travel much further afield to look for work on farms. Instead of doing 'togt' – day labour on farms they can walk to, they are travelling to look for work on the commercial timber, fruit and vegetable farms in other districts. It was reported by adults and children that farmers are now requiring identity documents to check the age of work-seekers, which means children of 14 and under are routinely turned away. However, it also means that children (15-18) are working away from home, staying in hostels with peers and older workers and without parental supervision.

Adults commented on changes in the attitudes of children to working in agriculture, particularly livestock farming, and felt that children were less interested in such work than the previous generation. Teachers observed this in a more objective way than the cattle farmers/parents, who saw the perceived resistance to cattle farming and rural life in general as problematic.

'I think children are no longer interested in cattle because coming to school modernises them. They want to go and work elsewhere.'

Teacher, Ngongolo

'What has changed is the number of children going to school and wanting to do other things instead of cattle farming. We are not happy about it. They don't want their children to go to town. Once they leave to town, they don't respect their parents.'

Cattle farmer/father, Ncunjane.

Certainly more children are enrolling in school than 10 years ago. However, the obstacles to them completing their education and achieving qualifications that will enable them to qualify for places in tertiary education, or gain skills that will enable them to secure a livelihood, are many. Given the poverty, levels of unemployment and dependency ratios, even children who do perform well at Matric struggle to find the resources to access college or university.

Children are more exposed to different lifestyles than they were in the previous generation. Even those who cannot afford to travel to 'town' – the small but growing town of Tugela Ferry – regularly, or at all, mix with people who have visited or worked in larger towns and cities. A handful of residents of the outskirts of Msinga have satellite television and western fashion has found its way to the area, so that the sight of girls with towels pinned round their hips, young women with bright capes billowing in the wind and women striding slowly along wearing the broad orange headdress (isicholo) and leather skirt (isidwaba) is gradually replaced by the sight of T-shirts, jeans and chain store dresses. As in every society, parents and grandparents feel alienated by some of the changes they see. The cattle farmers associate some of the changes with the decline they perceive in interest and commitment among young people to continuing with their traditional livelihoods. They spoke heatedly about their worry that children start taking drugs and drinking when they get exposed to urban life, and that they are more interested in socialising than carrying out their duties:

'Once they are involved in affairs with girls they start ignoring cattle!'

Cattle farmer, Ncunjane

Children, teachers, parents and community workers all report growing take-up of social benefits. This is particularly with regard to child support grants, as the government has extended the eligibility criteria and local government and service delivery departments have improved public awareness of the grants and facilitated access. In theory, this should have reduced the need for children to be working (including in subsistence or commercial agriculture) for family survival. However, from the views of those interviewed and observation over time, it does not seem to have had the scale of impact one might expect.

It is not possible to assess whether it represents a 'change over time' or simply two parallel developments but on one hand, children generally do not express enthusiasm for the work they do and on the other hand, they feel under sustained pressure to work – pressure both from family and circumstances.

The cattle farmers expressed particularly negative attitudes towards girl children, as sources of distraction to boys, a drain on resources and as undisciplined and unreliable workers. The research team did not engage the girls interviewed on how they felt about the gendered division of labour or the strict gender roles in the community. However, in the context of this study it is worth further investigation how the expectations of girls to become wives, mothers and producers in a climate of chronic poverty and marginal chances of being married and supported by a husband, have impacted upon attitudes to work, school and the traditional rural lifestyle.

8. Conclusion: challenges and policy implications

This section deals with challenges and policy implications relating to two aspects of child work – the forces that compel children to work in agriculture below the minimum age; and the impacts upon children of working, whether outside or within the legislation.

8.1 Addressing the causes of children working in agriculture

The researchers asked adults and children what would have to change for children not to need to work until they are at least 15 and not to perform tasks or work in conditions that undermine any aspect of their well-being?

8.1.1 Teachers' views

The teachers were clear that it was not better law enforcement or more legislation, but interventions to address poverty and unemployment:

Mandleni teachers' responses included:

'At least we need local projects to support livelihoods.'

'There is no work here – people are going to Durban, to Joburg to try to get work.'

The teacher interviewed at Ngongolo agreed that poverty was the main cause of children working, and particularly of children doing work that had a negative effect on their well-being. One of the historical responses to poverty in the area has been the commercial cultivation of dagga (there is, unsurprisingly, no indication from any source that children are in any way engaged in farming this illegal crop). The police routinely spray the crops

along the river to kill the dagga and the farmers routinely plant it again since the benefit of harvesting a highly marketable crop outweighs the risk of being hit by the next round of spraying. The profit from dagga buys food and clothes, pays medical bills, taxi fare and even school fees. The production and destruction has become an inevitable cycle. One of the teachers commented:

‘People cannot do any living without dagga. To get rid of it, there would have to be an alternative – crop substitution.’

Teachers also felt that more must be done to keep children in school and to equip them with vocational skills so that they can earn a living, since the reality is that most school-leavers do not get a job:

‘If children want to stay here when they leave school, I think there should be an agricultural learning area so that they can form coops or engage in agriculture as a way of earning a living. It would be wise for us to help give them a love of agriculture.’

Even if children do develop a love of agriculture, imparted by parents or teachers, it does not seem to represent a viable career choice for most. The community liaison facilitator who was seconded to the research team did inherit a love of agriculture from her family and is pursuing a career in organic farming but training and job options are limited. She is a volunteer with the agricultural development project run in the area by CAP and the organisation is paying for her studies but she has to commute weekly to a college nearly 3 hours away from her home.

The teacher from Ngongolo said:

‘We engage children in choosing careers and I think the government should at least have a technical school here so that from Grade 9 children can go there and get skilled to earn a living.’

The teachers at all the schools felt that grants were important to mitigate poverty. Some shared the concern that some caregivers did not prioritise children’s needs but were more worried that people who were eligible for support were not receiving it:

‘Some people in the area are not aware that they can get a grant for their grandchildren [foster care grant or child support grant as primary caregiver]. Some grannies look after many children – I know one who is supporting grandchildren from 3 families from her own pension.’

Mandleni teacher

8.1.2 Children’s views

School-going children disagreed about whether there should not be a law to say when a child can work – they said circumstances vary and some children have to work to survive. The school-going children wanted to carry on working but to work in better conditions and to be paid more. The out-of-school children were not clear about the value of legislation. They also generally thought it was fine to work if they were treated properly and paid better.

They were asked since the law says you can’t work until you are 15, what needs to change so that children are not forced to work?

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They replied that if children had all their basic needs met, there wouldn't need to be a law but because children live in poverty affected homes, some are forced to work.

Out of school children said the best way to stop children working was to create jobs for their parents. Nine out of the 15 in the focus group were living with both parents but most said their parents were not employed.

One child said the only way to ensure that children were not forced to work was adequate grants for all who needed them:

'There would have to be better access to grants and the amount should be increased. R1000 [a month] would be enough.'

While all the children agreed grants were helpful, several expressed concern that they need to be monitored to ensure enough money is spent on children. One girl said:

'Even if the money was increased, people don't always use the money for the needs of the child. We get bluffed that the money has been spent on us but very few things have been bought that benefit us. They get it [the grant] for us but we don't see it; we just hear that it is finished. Sometimes they drink it.'

All the children emphasised that: 'It is not all people who don't spend the grant money on the children.' But they felt that many parents saw the grant as intended for their benefit and not to help their children:

'Parents do their own things: do their hair, share the money with other adults.'

One girl was heading a household and was not eligible to get money for her siblings but she said a relative was collecting the money on their behalf and spending it on her own needs.

Children suggested that the government should make sure the money was properly spent but it was pointed out that there could not be a social worker in every house to see what people are doing with the money and children were asked whether families and neighbours did not monitor what was happening to children in households that were receiving a grant. The children laughed and said:

'Abanendaba' [they mind their own business]

They said people would be considered nosy if they tried to check up on another household.

Those out-of-school children who were under 14 were getting grants and those with siblings under 14 said they were also getting grants but they did not express opinions about the amount or how it was spent.

8.2 Addressing the conditions of working children

The challenge here is that many children are engaged in work that, by law, they should not be doing but in circumstances where poverty and deeply-rooted ideas about children's role in the family and society carry greater weight than the law. Stricter enforcement of the law on the minimum age and restrictions on type of work, in the absence of effective poverty reduction measures, could have a largely negative effect. It could impose a trade-off of children's rights – ensuring the right to protection at the cost of the rights to food, clothing and education. This is addressed in the policy implications section below.

However, the fact of children working cannot be delinked from the conditions under which they work – both need to be addressed. None of the children interviewed was doing enough work to earn enough money to meet all their basic needs, or to supplement household income sufficiently for their parents to meet all their needs. None of the out of school children interviewed worked full-time because there was not enough work and because they were under 15 and said most farmers would not take them. Poverty, competition for work and the idea that farmers were not exploiting children but helping them all perpetuate the notion of child work being acceptable but also keep wages very low.

Most of the respondents commented in fairly general terms about the conditions under which children work. The children, as reported earlier, generally wanted to be allowed to work but the school-going children especially felt they should work fewer hours. All the children felt they should be paid more and should not have to work unprotected in the sun or without rest. They felt they should have some say in whether they were paid, how much they were paid and whether they received food in lieu of payment.

Cattle farmers/parents interviewed did not see the tasks they required children to do as work and did not regard non-payment as exploitative but rather as part of the normal course of childhood prefacing a sort of apprenticeship to adulthood. They did not object to children working on private commercial farms but felt they were exploited there because of the low rates of pay.

8.3 Policy implications

8.3.1 Policy and legislation

Policy and legislation has by all accounts reduced the number of children working in agriculture and the types of work they do in the study area. However, it has not stopped children from working to the detriment of their physical, developmental and emotional well-being. In fact, the children who are still engaged in agricultural work and who need to be protected from adverse working conditions and exploitation are the most vulnerable because they have fewer options: if they don't work there will be immediate negative consequences, either in the form of censure from parents or lack of food, or inability to buy a school uniform or shoes.

'...poverty is the major obstacle [to] the realisation of children's rights'.

Secretary General of the UN¹²

There needs to be a rights-based approach to meeting children's needs that both supports parents/caregivers, teachers and other significant adults to protect and nurture the child *and* improves the conditions of working children. This means a combination of social protection measures and livelihood support. Such measures are in line with, and in some instances, part of existing policy but it is critical they are implemented in tandem with efforts to enforce labour policy on both minimum age and minimum wage, so that children are not banned from working and denied the means of survival and development.

8.3.2 Social protection¹³

¹² UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, UN General Assembly. 2002.

Parents do not generally force children to work because they don't care about their needs or well-being but because on one hand they see no alternative and on the other, many are convinced that it is in the child's best interests to grow up shouldering the responsibilities that they did. There may of course be some self-interest at play because if the children didn't do the work, who would? Cattle farmers acknowledge the 'central role' of children, as noted in section 5, above, even if they do not give the children direct recognition. But in the context of such limited livelihood choices, school is more often seen as an interference with the child's duties than vice versa. If a child completes school, it does not guarantee a livelihood; and a child who is not skilled and experienced enough in the traditional way of life will not be tough and disciplined enough to eke out a living in the area.

Protecting rights

Protection of rights is a critical element of social protection. Children have the right to have all their basic needs met and to be brought up in a loving family environment. Parents have the right to state support if they cannot provide for all a child's needs. Legislation and grants are two measures that help to protect workers of all ages from exploitation and abuse and to meet a person's basic needs. Greater awareness of children's developmental needs and the impact of certain tasks, whether defined as duties, work or labour, upon different aspects of their well-being, is also an important step to protecting rights. Teachers, for example, see the negative effects on children of having to perform domestic, agricultural and school work. Commercial farmers, other employers and parents need to support the spirit as well as the letter of the law. For example, children are being paid less than a third of the minimum wage in private commercial agriculture and for doing domestic work. If they were paid the minimum wage, they could work less than a third of the hours they do to generate the same income. Children also bear a heavy burden of unpaid subsistence and livestock farming work. The argument that this is in their best interests as potentially capable, disciplined and skilled adult members of the community can only be supported if such work does not deny them such basic rights as education, a healthy environment, rest and recreation – and dignity. Working without appreciation or any tangible reward also has a negative effect on morale and socialisation. There needs to be more engagement with those who employ or supervise children about the conditions, harm and benefits. Children's views need to be the starting point for that engagement.

Springboards

Education needs to be a springboard to further education and/or opportunities for training and employment. The curriculum and career guidance need to be of a universal standard but must take account of local realities. Temporary work as part of the EPWP or short courses/learnerships are not going to have much impact if they are merely a short interlude between schooling terminated at Grade 9 and years of unemployment or underemployment. Schooling does not set children on a path to cattle farming, market gardening or other forms of agriculture as a viable means of subsistence; it is seen by many as a last resort. Children aspire to be doctors, engineers, soccer stars but the chances of realising such dreams are more of a lucky draw than a strategic plan for the country's greatest asset. Investment in ECD and ABET, to ensure that children in Msinga enter primary education with the best chance of success and leave secondary school having realised their potential and recognised their options, would help to establish routes

¹³ These categories of social protection are emphasised in the literature on poverty elimination. See for example Our Common Interest, the report of the Commission for Africa. London. 2005. Page 202

out of poverty. The lack of interest in schooling among the girl children interviewed may have multiple causes. The community liaison facilitator observed that the established pattern in the area of girls being taken out of school at adolescence was not necessarily a reflection on the quality of education. However, if education is not considered valuable enough to fight for, there must certainly be questions about its relevance.

Cash transfers

The role of pensions, the child support grant, the foster care grant and other social benefits in mitigating the impacts of poverty has been well-established in other studies¹⁴. However, given actual living costs, user fees for essential services and the high cost of transport and communications, such benefits do not have sufficient impact. The question of misuse of grants raised by some respondents speaks to a wider problem of parental responsibility, family support and social cohesion rather than to the question of the necessity for cash transfers. In the context of such profound, widespread and chronic poverty as prevails in Msinga and other rural areas, social benefits need to be extended. A universal child support grant up to age 18 would go some way to removing the necessity for children to work.

Consumption transfers

Cash transfers need to be extended in conjunction with consumption transfer - subsidies, feeding schemes, an end to user fees. The ability of grants to meet basic household needs is greatly diminished by the need to pay for essential services that should be free, such as education and health. In Msinga, transport costs also obstruct access to services. Lack of transport was cited by children and teachers as a major reason why children drop out of school after Grade 9 or arrive at school tired and late.

Community support

The study did not fully investigate the structures and mechanisms of community support in the area. However, this is an aspect of social protection that deserves further attention. This is suggested in light of the scale and conditions of child work in the area, the differing views of adults and children about the impact of work on children, the numbers of single parent, grandparent and sibling headed households, and the complaints of children about the failure of some parents/adults to recognise and meet their needs.

¹⁴ See for example Barrientos, A and De Jong J (2004) Child Poverty and Cash Transfers, CHIP report no 4.

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Children walk long distances to and from school in Msinga. They often arrive tired and hungry, having been up since before dawn performing household chores without eating. They arrive home to more chores, work in the vegetable gardens and bringing home the cattle. If they manage to complete their schooling, their chances of being able to go on to higher education are 1 in 100 and their chances of earning a living in the area are about 1 in 7. (Source: Umzinyathi Economic Regeneration Study. February 2003).