

# **BARRIERS TO CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN AGENCIES ADDRESSING CHILD LABOUR IN ZAMBIA: THE CASE OF LUSAKA CITY**

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## **Abstract**

Child labour still remains one of the challenging social problems Zambia is grappling with hitherto. Despite numerous efforts that have been embarked on to address this problem, children’s participation in the fight against child labour is minimal and in some instances, is hardly recognised at all. The present study aims to explore the barriers that hinder children’s participation in agencies addressing child labour in Zambia. In-depth interviews with key informants and focus group discussions with children were conducted, which included 12 agency staff and 30 children from poor families who were engaged in child labour respectively, using semi-structured checklists. Agency staff and children were purposively sampled whilst those not known during the initial sampling process were sampled using snowball during the course of the study. All interviews and focus group discussions were digitally recorded. By using thematic and content analysis to identify patterns and themes from the data, five major barriers were identified: culture, adults’ negative attitudes towards children, poverty, lack of information among children, and generally participation being perceived as a waste of time. Results show that the idea and value of children participation in decision making is not only misunderstood but also unaccepted amongst practitioners in agencies addressing child labour. However, these barriers can be addressed if children are perceived as stakeholders in decision making and by addressing poverty at household level. The author proposes the integration of the human rights-based approach in agency programming to inform practitioners, as it incorporates the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment.

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**Keywords:** Child, Child labour, Children participation, Human rights-based approach, Zambia

## **Introduction**

It is nearly a quarter of a century since Zambia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. The CRC is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights; civil, political, economic, social and cultural, and it is the most comprehensive UN treaty for the protection and support of children in existence today. Built on varied legal systems and cultural traditions, the convention is a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations linking the child and fundamental human rights (Guy 2003). Zambia's ratification of the CRC was a commitment to the rest of the world that it was going to put in place institutional, legal and policy frameworks aimed to improve the welfare of children. According to the 1989 United Nations CRC (Article 1) and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (Article 2), a child is a person under 18 years of age. Article 12 of the CRC endorses the rights of the children to be actively involved in matters affecting their well-being as it states: 'State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (UN Convention on the Right of the Child 1989: Article 12 cited in Stern 2006). Thus article 12 premises the need for children to participate in issues affecting them. Children's participation has been defined as, 'An ongoing process of children's active involvement in decisions that affect their lives. Genuine participation gives children the power to shape both the process and the outcome. Children's participation involves the exercise of one's right for the best interest of one's self' (Karkar and O'Kane 2002, 13 cited in Twam-Danso 2007). Participation of children and young people may include a number of activities. For example: expressing the desire to learn even at a very young age; seeking information; expressing ideas and opinions; taking part in activities and processes; being informed and consulted in decision-making; initiating ideas, proposals or projects; and, respecting others (Guy 2003, p. 6).

In an attempt to promote children participation in addressing child labour, child protection agencies in Zambia have instituted mechanisms aimed at fostering children participation. However, these measures are faced with a lot of impediments that makes it even difficult to impact positively on the welfare of children. In Zambia, children's participation, especially in the fight against child labour has met formidable obstacles despite the ratification of the CRC (article 12), and the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), (article 4 (2) & 7, all of which emphasise the significance of children's participatory rights. The ACRWC, which so far has been ratified by 39 out of Africa's 54 states, is

intended to take into account the economic, social, political, cultural and historical experience of African children, and thereby provide a distinctively African framework for the protection and promotion of children's rights (Kaime 2009).

Child labour constitute any form of work that deprives children from enjoying their childhood and interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and is harmful to their physical, psychological, moral and social well-being. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the rest of the UN consider child labour as exploitative, as article 32 of the CRC explicitly states: 'state parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.' Child labour is defined by the ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age, 1973, and the ILO Convention No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, as work that harms children's well-being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. The Zambian Employment of Young Person and Children Act (2004) define child labour as work that by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The same Act under section 4A, subsection 2 states that a child aged between thirteen and fifteen years may be lawfully engaged in light work- (a) which is not likely to be harmful to the child's health and development and (b) is not prejudicial to the child's – (i) attendance at an institution of learning (ii) participation in vocational orientation or training approved by a competent authority or that child's capacity to benefit from the education received.

The Labour Force Survey conducted in 1986, found out that there were 163,200 working children in Zambia aged between 12 to 14 years of age. In 1999, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) survey found that there were 595,033 child labourers in Zambia. The 2005 Child Labour Survey conducted by ILO shows that 895,246 children between the ages of 5 to 17 years were engaged as child labourers (Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2006). Although in many theoretical approaches to child and childhood studies there is emphasis on the need to consult children and to take their views into account, few studies have in fact paid children the respect they deserve by working directly and consistently with them (Henderson 2003 cited in Kaime 2009). It is against this background that the present study aimed to explore the barriers to child participation in agencies addressing child labour in Zambia. Child participation has a positive impact in addressing child labour as attested in some areas. The 2009 International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) programme evaluation in Ghana found that the vast majority of children in project communities can identify which cocoa

farming activities are hazardous and explain why, in line with the 2008 Hazardous Child Labour Activity Framework for the Cocoa Sector of Ghana. Prior to the ICI programme this concept was virtually unknown to the children. This has led to a significant reduction in the numbers of children involved in child labour (Chastel, Laurent & Nick 2011).

### **Research Design**

The research was conducted in the natural setting hence a non-experimental design was adopted. Kerlinger (1986) asserts that ‘non-experimental research is more important than experimental research. This is, of course, not a methodological observation. It means, rather, that most social scientific and educational research problems do not lend themselves to experimentation, although many of them do lend themselves to controlled inquiry of the non-experimental kind’.

This was a participatory research which involved child protection agencies, children and the communities to explore the barriers to children participation in agencies addressing child labour in Zambia. Participatory methods actively involve the subjects of research, allow people to take part in projects that serve their unique individual aspirations and needs. According to Penzhorn (2006) the basic tenet of the participatory research method can be summarized as: equity and active involvement of the subjects taking part in the research process; resulting in knowledge generation and the development of critical awareness; leading to identification of needs and priorities, empowerment, self-confidence, decision making and problem solving.

### **Data collection**

The study largely generated and used qualitative data from secondary and primary sources. Esterby-Smith et al. (1991) asserts that qualitative data is about understanding the meaning and significance that interviewees attach to issues, information, ideas and statistics. This implies that it is not enough to record what is said but that value is added to qualitative data by relating it to wider issues to establish links, theories and consequences for everyday practice. Secondary data collection involved the review of unpublished and published documents. These included official report, grey literature, thesis, conference papers, books and records from the Zambia government departments and non-governmental organisations. This data was useful in providing a foundation upon which the study was build. It provided leads on how the issue of children participation in the fight of child labour is perceived by various stakeholders. The literature review also helped to identify the gaps on available knowledge and provided a perspective of the study.

Primary data was collected using in-depth interviews (IDIs) with key informants (KI), focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies with children. The data collected was mainly qualitative. Checklists with themes and semi-structured questions were the main research instruments in interviewing the key Informants, these being the project managers. Three (5) FGDs were conducted with the children currently benefitting from ILO/IPEC sponsored programmes and other organisations dealing with child labour. To elicit discussion and interaction, the FGDs were homogeneous in nature with approximately 6-8 participants. Besides key informant interviews and FGDs, three (3) case studies with the boys who have been involved in the labour force were conducted to have a deeper insight as to how they perceive children participation in agencies addressing child labour in Zambia. The children who took part in the FGDs and cases studies were arranged by the project managers whilst others were conveniently sampled from the project sites, based on those that were available at the time of the visit.

### **Sampling procedures**

To identify the KIs, non-probability sampling in the form of purposive and snowball sampling methods were used. Purposive sampling was used in that it is vital when one is looking for organisations dealing with a specific problem, which in this case is child labour. Only organisations that fall in this category were sampled. Snowball sampling was used since some organisations not known prior to the commencement of the study were identified by talking to those already in the sample. This resulted in twelve (12) non-governmental organisations (NGO's) being purposively sampled, all based in Lusaka. Introductory letters requesting interviews and also detailing the research purpose, informed consent and benefits were delivered to the organisations prior to the interview. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour. During the interviews, project managers were asked what services they provide to children, the barriers that hinder children participation and measures on how these barriers can be addressed.

### **Data analysis**

To ensure accuracy on the data collected, all interviews and FGDs were digitally recorded. These were later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Data analysis was conducted manually and followed a thematic framework analysis approach, which is used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories (Ritchie, Spencer, & O'Connor, 2003). Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set

(Braun and Clark 2006). The transcripts and interviews were scrutinised and thoroughly read. The first step in the analysis was to become familiar with the data that was gathered through the interviews and FGDs. The focus was placed on identifying, summarising and retaining the patterns as well as differences in the data. Once this was done, initial codes were generated which was followed by searching for themes. After finding the themes, these were later reviewed and then defined and named (Braun and Clark 2006). The data from the interviews, FGDs and case studies were then triangulated to ensure they fitted well in different themes of the study in relation to the research questions.

### **Ethical consideration**

The researcher ensured that the respondents were not harmed in any way by adhering to the three principles that underpin human research: beneficence, justice and respect for persons (Blustein, 2005). Two general rules have been formulated as complementary acts of beneficence: do not harm and maximise possible benefits and minimise possible harms (Riverra, Borasky, Rice, & Carayon 2001). This principle was important especially that in this research children were involved. Lewis and Lindsay (2000) have also affirmed that, “it is our task as researchers, from both practical and ethical consideration, to ensure that we ask right questions in our studies, those which are important, and that we conduct our research in a manner that optimizes the opportunity for children’s perspective to be listened to and heard.” On the part of the participants, informed consent was sought from both the children and parents. This involved explaining the purpose of the study, risks and benefits. Confidentiality of research participants during and after the study was also emphasised. Those sampled were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and were at liberty to withdraw at any point. By so doing, the principles of justice and respect for persons were also observed.

### **The human rights-based approach to address barrier to children’s participation**

This section discusses the human rights-based approach. It further highlights how this approach is critical in addressing the barriers to children participation. An important aspect in defining the human rights-based approach is an understanding of what human rights are. Human rights are universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that interfere with fundamental freedoms, entitlements and human dignity (UNHCHR 2006). Human rights law obliges Governments (principally) and other duty-bearers to do certain things and prevents them from doing others (UNHCHR 2006). All human rights are equally important

and this is affirmed by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which made it clear that human rights of all kinds-economic, political, civil, cultural and social are of equal validity and importance (UNHCHR 2006). Every child is unique, important, and possesses rights by virtue of being human, regardless of sex, language, religion, ethnicity, race and other attributes. The present study found that the majority of the adults do not respect the right of children to participate in decision making, which actually forms the core basis of the human rights-based approach.

Hitherto, there is no one or correct definition of a human rights-based approach. The most fundamental definition of a human rights-based approach is that development activities aim to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights codified in the international human rights framework (ACFID 2010, p. 1). Just as there is no single definition, there is no one single strategy for implementing human rights-based approach. Different organisations around the world have adopted different approaches to implement their human rights-based approaches (UNDP, 2003). The UNDP issued a 'Statement of Common Understanding' in May 2003, explaining that 'in a human rights-based approach, human rights determine the relationship between individuals and groups with valid claims (rights-holders) and State and non-state actors with correlative obligations (duty bearers). It works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders (*children*) to make their claims, and of duty bearers (*agencies*) to meet their obligations' (UNDP, 2003 cited in Duvvury and Kapur 2006, p.7). Children have the obligation to claim their right for meaningful participation in the fight against child labour and agencies should aim to meet their obligation by involving children in developmental projects. The rights-based approach ensures that agencies are bounded by policies that have been put in place and should be made accountable for non-adherence of these policies.

According, to the United Nations, the human rights-based approach, 'integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development' (UNHCHR, 2005 cited in Kapur, A. and Duvvury, N. 2006, p. 5). Development programmes that use this approach espouse the principles of participation, empowerment, accountability, transparency and nondiscrimination. In the rights-based approach, aspect of perceiving children as 'objects' and agency staff as 'actors' is not encouraged. Thus, children and staff are perceived as equal with each having something to contribute. This approach recognises the need for agencies to create synergies with children, and that children should be seen as 'real' partners and not 'recipients' in addressing child labour. Narayan 2000 (cited in Ife 2001) asserts that for empowerment to be achieved there is need for agency staff and children to share experiences. The idea of empowerment remains

attractive to social workers (*like other development workers*), and for good reason. Agency staff and children should learn from each other in a relationship of shared knowledge and expertise which does not privilege one above the other. As a result of that sharing of expertise and experiences, agency staff and children will then act together towards the goal to achieve human rights which otherwise may be difficult for agency staff to achieve without the partnership with children. Child labourers have the knowledge and lived experiences which workers in the agencies may not possess. Thus by involving children, children will be able to share their perspectives and ideas about child labour and how best it can be addressed. Woodhead (1999) asserts that the participation of children will help in that the intervention designed to eliminate exploitative and hazardous child labour should be context appropriate, locally sustainable and child centered.

Child protection programmes that seek to address the needs and problems affecting children ought to recognise children as stakeholders. Every stakeholder has the right to be accorded an opportunity to be heard. The right to participate is inalienable, thus agencies should not decide when to grant children the right to participate and when not to participate. As duty bearers, agencies are obligated to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights. Boyden and Mann (2000), assert that agency intervention should build upon the knowledge, skills, and experience of children in order to improve the quality of protection mechanisms. This requires devising appropriate ways for young people to be involved in relevant fora and mechanisms related to the design, management and implementation of solutions. Therefore children discrimination works against the realisation of a good development practice which is central in the human right-based approach.

To enhance participation, Chambers proposed the following questions: Whose knowledge counts? Whose values? Whose criteria and preferences? Whose appraisal, analysis and planning? Whose action? Whose monitoring and evaluation? Whose learning? Whose empowerment? Whose reality counts? (Chambers 1997). Agencies addressing child labour should seek to critically look at these questions from the perspective of children. The human rights-based approach requires that children are fully involved and take action in determining their needs and the responses that will be provided to answer them. ANANDI-TISS (2005) affirms that it is important to determine whose rights are being discussed. The question of whose rights actually count often compels development agencies to examine the values and power structures that exclude certain sectors of society (*children*) while granting privileges to others (*adults*). If children's participation is not taken into account, projects and policy formulation are likely to remain uninformed by children's views.

## **Results and discussions**

The present study aimed to explore the barriers to children participation in agencies addressing child labour in Zambia. The barriers that were identified included the following: lack of information, negative attitudes, poverty and culture and children participation being perceived as a waste of time, which are discussed at length below.

### **Lack of information on child labour**

The present study revealed that in as much as services aimed to address child labour are available in Zambia, children still lack access to information on child labour. This poses a great threat to national development since children are the majority in Zambia. The 2010 census indicates that 45.4 percent of the Zambian population of 13.1 million was comprised of young people below the age of 15 years (CSO 2010). Hitherto, an understanding of what constitutes child labour and its negative effects still remains a paradox to many children and adults. Children, like adults, find it difficult to participate in activities aimed to address child labour because they do not have adequate information on the meaning of child labour. Thus, specific measures should be put in place to ensure that children are provided with adequate information on child labour. The study also found that people working in child protection agencies often feel that problems that children face can be addressed by adults without soliciting the views of children in decision making. The tendency to ostracize children in decision making results in coming up with solutions that do not only work very well but also marginalises and devalues the knowledge and lived experiences of children, especially those engaged in child labour. For example, the programme officer from one of the child protection agencies had this to say from his experiences of working with children:

*‘Children lack knowledge on child labour because they are not provided with adequate information on the meaning of child labour. If children are not provided with adequate information on child labour they will not participate in addressing the scourge’.* (Key informant 1)

Of further concern, when children are excluded from participation, it is highly probable that when they grow up, they will not see the need to involve children in the future. Subsequently, this becomes a vicious circle which ultimately becomes deeply entrenched in the culture. The lack of self-determination among children also affects the way they make decisions and choices. Making choices and decisions at an early age helps children to protect themselves from harmful situations, such as child abuse; child labour and sexual abuse. For instance, children lack of involvement has also proliferated in many spheres of lives in Zambia. The majority of adults in Zambia are the ones holding influential positions because children and young

people lack information and self-esteem to address problems affecting them. When decision making is dictated by vested interests and cultural norms especially by adults, children are at risk of not being informed on pertinent and correct information. Children participation in the fight against child labour can only be realised if children are adequately informed on child labour and come up with services that are geared at espousing children's views. There is also need for expanded communication efforts at national and community level which should take a wide array of communication vehicles such as press briefing in both print and broadcast media presented in terms that are easy to understand to the target populace.

With regards to enhancing children participation, the present study proposes the need to organize children to take part in various activities such as sports, debates, anti-AIDS clubs, drama as they are likely to create a viable platform for engaging children in dialogue, expression of ideas, suggesting of what needs to be done or changed thus enhancing children self-esteem. In-depth interviews with key informants suggested the need to target child labourers because such techniques support poor and excluded children and create an atmosphere in which these children are able to discuss and realise who they are, which creates a collective sense of identity among themselves as rights-holders where their input will be meaningful and genuine. This is important because it enables children who have been made to believe that they have no rights to perceive themselves as right holders and be able to contribute positively to address child labour. Therefore, selecting a small group of children as a way of displaying participation in agencies addressing child labour should be avoided as has been a practice for some agencies. There is need to uphold children's *real* participation and not just in the form of *tokenism*. 'Tokenism is the process whereby a dominant group promotes a few members of an oppressed group to high positions and then uses them to claim there are no barriers preventing any member of that group reaching the position of power and status. Tokens can also be used as a buffer between the dominant and oppressed groups. It is harder for the oppressed group to name the oppression and make demands when members of their own group are representing the dominant group' (Bishop 2002, p. 165). Such acts militate against children rights to have access to relevant information that is likely to make them understand child labour and how it can be addressed.

### **Adults negative attitudes towards children**

The present study found that perhaps the most compelling evidence from the discussions with the key participants was the revelation that most adults are imbued with the belief that children cannot make rational and tangible decisions. In the fight against child labour, this attitude seems to be

prominent as most services directed at addressing child labour are orchestrated by adults as can be attested from the views of the key informants:

*‘Adult attitudes towards children discourage children to participate. It is not an easy task to change adult attitudes towards children. Adults always feel that they know what is best for children and should do things for them (children) without according them a chance to participate in decision making’*( Key informant 2).

*‘We involve children in a very limited way because their contribution is less and can go only to a certain level’* (Key informant 3).

In light of the aforementioned statements, it is often portrayed that children know nothing and should let adults to make decisions on problems affecting them. However, contrasting with such beliefs is that providing children with information will enable them to be active stakeholders in addressing child labour. For instance there is a proverb in Nigeria among the Yoruba which states that, *‘you do not have to be old to be wise’*. Why then do adults employed in child protection agencies sideline children from participating in project activities and opt to involve adults only in resolving problems that affect children? It is a known fact that problem solving tasks that engage children at an early age are likely to yield positive results as children grow up. This should also be the case with child labour. Unfortunately, the present study found that such initiatives are perceived as working against what society has established as an ‘accepted standard’. Decision making by children in the presence of adults is perceived as repugnant to society, as can be seen from the following statement:

*‘The issue of children participation has generated a lot of problems. When we tell adults to involve children in decision making, they ask, ‘What do these children know?’*(Key informant 1).

Consistent with the aforementioned statement, Alanen et al. in Ennew (1994) asserts that children are born into an existing adult world that ‘constructs children *out* of society, mutes their voices, denies their personhood, limits their potential’. Negative attitudes towards children are prevalent in Zambia as in many parts of Africa. There is a saying among the Tonga of Southern province in Zambia which states that, *‘an elderly person can only be surpassed in running not in wisdom’*. There is also a proverb in the northern part of Ghana which states that, *‘what an adult can lie down and see, a child can stand on the tree and not see it’*. Such sayings show that elderly people ‘know better’, have the wisdom and are superior in decision making as compared to children. To overcome such attitudes, there is need to work *with* young people rather than *for* them, treating their views as a source of strength and allowing them to express their views on problems and solutions which adults may be unaware of. According children a platform to

make decisions enables them to realise their full potential as human beings, and be able to use the acquired skills in future to achieve their ambitions. To promote the culture of children participation, it will require that agencies providing services to children change the way they perceive children. Chambers (1983) describes this process as 'Putting the last first' and 'Putting the first last'. Thus, children should take an active role in the fight of child labour if the services that are provided to the children will have a lasting impact in their lives.

There is ample evidence that negative attitude emanating from cultural structures fetters children from participating in addressing child labour. Previous studies have found that a child's ability to participate is either constrained or encouraged by the framework of interpersonal relationships linking an individual child to his/her environment. It is necessary to understand the lack of participation as being a result of structures and processes that militate against participation (Wernham 2003; Beck 1997). Adults find it difficult to interact and share views with children on issues that affect children. Structural barriers that compel adults to feel that they can always make decisions on behalf of children in agencies addressing child labour makes it even harder for children to claim their rights to participation. Such structures always inhibit the culture of promoting dialogue which is fundamental for the formation of a healthy participatory society. The study revealed that these structural barriers have superseded the need to promote children rights to participation in Zambia.

A critical analysis of the responses from key informants revealed that realizing children's rights is not something that can happen instantaneously. Essentially, it should begin by recognizing children as participants with something to contribute in issues that affect them. Negative attitude towards children remains a salient and predetermining factor for the persistence of child labour. An assessment of whether children's rights in the fight against child labour have been realised should be predicated on the views of the children in lieu of adults. Ife (2000) asserts that workers should be working to find ways whereby people (*children*) can have a genuine role in the definition of their own needs, in the appreciation of the rights that lie behind them, and in determining what action is required so that those needs can be best met. Thus, ostracising children from taking part in decision making on issues that affect them is likely to have negative knock-on-effects on the children in future as it stultifies their abilities to make decisions, engage in constructive dialogue, express themselves, negotiate differences of opinion, and assume responsibility for self, family, and society. The strengths based principles outlined by Elliot, Mulrony & O'Neil (2000) also provide ways of discovering strengths to challenge oppressive principles. To work sensitively with children and families, it is necessary to seek the voices of children and

include them in the decision-making process. As the youngest and least powerful citizens, children are often overlooked. Children should be regarded as persons not only in need of support, guidance, and opportunity but also in possession of unrealised resources which must be identified and mobilized to resolve the problem of child labour.

In this present study, it was found that children are sidelined on the basis of age. Social exclusion based on age widens the gulf between adults and children in society since children are not accorded opportunities to express their view, which in turn works against the democratic tenets which accords everyone the right to be heard. The right-based approach to delivering development is distinct from other forms to delivering aid and development (such as needs-based and charity based approach) by their emphasis on discrimination and exclusion (ACFID 2010). Children participation challenges the inequalities that exist in society. The present study found Kwasha Mukwenu women group project in Lusaka's Matero township, which is one of the densely populated suburbs, the beneficiaries were requesting sewing machines to use after they were empowered with skills in tailoring to enable them start businesses of their own in order to enhance their economic status which would subsequently prevent them returning to child labour. Such request from children should act as reflection and learning points for displaying inclusion, accountability and transparency among agencies addressing child labour because the children are aware of the long term benefits such assistance can bring in their lives as can be seen from the statement below:

*'We should be given assistance in form of money or sewing machines to enable us utilize our skills by doing business when we finish the course'* (FGD with children beneficiary).

The process of recognizing children and appreciating them in project processes is likely to result in project sustenance and success which form a core basis for project replication and good practices that embrace social inclusion for the marginalised groups, such as children, who are mainly excluded because of the attitude adults have towards children. Furthermore, it enables children to realise their self-worth as individuals who are capable to achieve their goals in life and lead a decent life devoid of exploitation as child labourers.

### **Poverty among children and families**

This current study perceives poverty not only as low income, but from a broader perspective which includes other attributes normally overlooked, especially in children studies. Lack of child participation in agencies addressing child labour militates against children's ability to interact, learn and exercise their right to expression. Poverty is understood as

the deprivation of basic capabilities and not as low income only (Hunt, Nowak & Osmani 2004). Thus poverty should not only be connected with low income, but also with discrimination on various grounds which include age leading to the sense of exclusion, powerlessness, low self-esteem and the feeling of being ashamed when appearing in public; which in sum leads to a perpetuation of poverty within the socially marginalized and disadvantaged groups of a society such as children (Barbara Kühhas et al. 2006).

Poverty is endemic among most households in Zambia. Although statistics indicate that poverty has declined from 58 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2010, most families are still struggling to access the basic needs of life such as food, clothes, water and shelter. In rural parts of Zambia this is actually visible as these are the areas where poverty is rampant with limited social infrastructure such as schools, medical facilities, roads, piped water, electricity which retards development. In fact it is four times higher in rural areas (57.7 percent) as compared to urban areas (13.1 percent). Rural provinces such as Luapula (64.9 percent), Western (64.0 percent), and Eastern (57.7 percent) are the worst affected (UNDP 2013). The present study found that poverty is the compelling push factor for many children engaged in child labour. When the family is poor, it becomes difficult to move out of poverty if interventions that are instituted are not pro-poor and participatory in nature. This perpetuates the vicious circle of poverty which needs to be broken if children engaged in the labour force are to succeed in gainful employment in future and lead a decent life. Educated and rich parents are less likely to involve their children in child labour, because of their awareness of the benefits of educating their children, which poor families may want to do, but find it difficult due to financial constraints.

The present study found that a high poverty level was the main reason that makes children not to participate in the fight against child labour. In terms of cost-benefit analysis, it is difficult for poor parents to think of children participation when they are riddled with personal problems that have not been resolved. It is a daily struggle for these parents to think of where to find money to buy food for their families. For poor families, engaging children in child labour is more beneficial and lucrative than participation aimed at addressing child labour and promoting children's rights. For instance, a key informant in a child protection agency had this to say:

*'If you do not have a job, you wouldn't encourage your children to participate in something that will hinder you from making money. As a parent you wouldn't say no to child labour if you need money for survival'* (Key informant 4).

Analysis of the findings revealed that most parents do not encourage their children to attend child labour meetings and do not go to school, places

where children are likely to be enlightened about child labour, because this is their main source of livelihood and income. Article 28 of the CRC underscores children's right to education by making primary education compulsory and free to all children. Child labour and poverty remains important obstacles to achieve Universal Primary Education and other Millennium Development Goals in Zambia as can be seen from the expressions of the two children:

*'When I was enrolled to grade seven for the second time, I managed to pay K10 (\$US1.64) though for two terms only. I have stopped school because I have no money. When you are poor it is difficult to make decisions and participate in issues that affect you. In this case I can't even make a decision to go to school. I need assistance to go back to school'* (interview with a 17 years old boy).

*'My uncle has a job but has a lot of children to take care. He cannot pay for my education. He told me that I should start a business but I have no money. I just stay at home and go through my old notes in my books with the hope that I will find assistance. I really need assistance to go back to school'* (interview with a 15 years old boy).

The present study found that children participation is mainly placed on duties. Children often participate extensively in the daily work of their families. Like adults, children are seen as having a responsibility to contribute to the subsistence of their families. They are engaged in hazardous form of labour in the agriculture, mining, vending, fishing and scavenging sectors. This work exposes children to myriad risks at the expense of making money, thus being denied their rights to education and play which other children are enjoying at this age. If children can make decisions of raising money in order to supplement the sustenance of their families in terms of food and other household requirements, they are also capable of making good contributions on how to address child labour in child protection agencies. The present study recommends that poverty should be addressed by channeling resources to empower child labourers and their families to make them resilient from economic hardships, thus preventing them from engaging children in hazardous work thus encouraging children participation in the fight of child labour. Poverty violates human rights and this happens because of unequal power relations which start in the family and extend up to the global level (Action Aid 2011). Addressing poverty for children and their families remains central in order to empower them and develop their capacity for them to lead a decent life that is devoid of child right violation mainly caused by poverty at household level.

Data obtained in this present study revealed that poverty works against the realisation of the social, cultural and economic rights aimed at enhancing the welfare of children. Families and children alike, do not see the

need to fight child labour as it is their main source for survival. It is like '*cutting the hands that feeds you*'. Child labour is the major source of income for the families and their children. Unless the family has financial security, children are less likely to go to school thus they are excluded from participating effectively in the social, economic and political spheres due to lack of education. Human rights are used to address poverty including social, political and economic exclusion and to support the struggle for social justice at national and international level (SDC 2006). Defining basic rights, and roles and responsibilities, human rights add an essential dimension to poverty reduction and development strategies (SDC 2006). Thus there is need for agencies to increase resources and the number of children beneficiaries in their projects as compared to the current situation where a lot of families and children are not catered for. Only when this is done, will the families realize the need to encourage children to participate in the fight against child labour because they will have food and money to support their children.

## **Culture**

Culture influences the way people relate and perceive one another, and this is acquired during the process of socialisation. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century anthropologist defined culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (in Duncan Mitchell 1987, p. 232). Ambercrombie et al. (1994) describe it as, 'the symbolic and learned, non-biological aspects of human society, including language, custom and convention, by which human behaviour can be distinguished from that of other primates. Beal (1994) defines socialisation as the process, through which the child becomes an individual respecting his or her environment laws, norms and customs. The socialization process in Zambia normally emphasises the need for children to respect adults and not to argue against what adults say. Article 31 of the ACRWC affirms this as it states, 'a child is expected to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need'. The present study found that in most cases children are not consulted by their parents/guardians if they are to be engaged in any form of work because of the deeply entrenched cultural beliefs that children should obey what adults say. In like manner, if something goes wrong in the kind of work that children have been engaged in by adult, it is the adults that have to make decisions about that issue, by virtue of being parents/guardians. The fear to lose a grip on control and authority over children, and always wanting to maintain the status quo amongst adults has always been strong.

The study also found that cultural values are still a major hindrance for children's participation in issues that affect them. One of the programmes managers acknowledged this in the interview when she stated that:

*'The attitude of adults is what deters children from participating in the decision making process. Adults think that children do not know anything'* (Key informant 3).

Herein lies the problem that militates against promoting the culture of dialogue, upholding children's rights, democracy and participation. This kind of children upbringing buttresses the sense of fear and despair in children and adults who together normally finds it difficult to share ideas. This is echoed by UNICEF (2002, p.5) as it states 'authentic and meaningful participation requires a radical shift in adult thinking and behaviour—from an exclusionary to an inclusionary approach to children and their capabilities - from a world defined solely by adults to one in which children contribute to building the kind of world they want to live in'. The lack of information sharing between adults and children militates against the realisation of children rights because children will not see the need to participate in the fight against child labour. Ultimately, relationships between children and adults are jeopardized. One of the key informants also had this to say:

*'Some parents are hostile towards children's participation in the fight against child labour in agencies and at community level. This makes some children not to attend meetings because their parents do not allow them'* (Key informant 5).

The present study recommends the need to denigrate negative attitudes towards children, if children and adults are to synergise their efforts in the fight against child labour. To realise children participation, certain conditions need to be created which allow children to participate in decision making and influence their personal development. Children should be allowed to address adults, to be able to openly stress what issues affect them, to have their likes and dislikes and other issues openly discussed, assessed, criticised or upheld when need arises. Cultural reticence which is buttressed by cultural beliefs governing children-adult relationship should be addressed to enhance child participation. Child participation ensures that children are given the space to have real access in decision-making through active involvement in problem identification, the planning and design of policies, programmes and services. If policies, programmes and services are informed by the direct experiences of children, they are much more likely to have a positive, beneficial and lasting impact on children's lives. Besides having an impact on children's lives, child protection agencies also stand to benefit as they will be able to document some of the learning experiences and success stories of engaging children in their programming thus resulting in reducing the barrier that preclude children to participate in the fight against child

labour. Bringing adults and children to dialogue and share experiences on how to best address child labour is likely to create an environment where confidence among children will be enhanced. Adults' negative attitudes towards children which seem to be condoned because it is shrouded in culture should be avoided by changing the way projects are run and how children are perceived by adults. This is a complex but surmountable task for workers employed in child oriented agencies and the community at large. For instance, some children interviewed raised pertinent issues that preclude them from active participation in addressing child labour:

*'Participation is a waste of time. Most of our suggestions are not taken into account even if they aim to address serious issues'* (FGD with Children).

The study found that children would rather continue working and making quick money than being kept in meetings where their contribution is not even taken seriously. Most of the boys that were enrolled for a carpentry course supported by Kwasha Mukwenu women group project, with a view of empower them with skills so that they are not engaged in child labour stopped attending lessons and preferred going to working on the streets than learning carpentry skills and attending meetings. The lack of trust can also be seen from one of the responses which one of the children made in a FGD:

*'We are given promises on what they are going to do for us but this does not happen'* (FGD with Children).

If children are promised that their needs and suggestions will be taken into account, they feel valued. If the promises are not kept, participation often slackens. Young people are less likely to participate if they believe that past promises have not been kept. In this respect, agencies working with children should fulfill the promises they make to the children. This will make children feel valued and this will eventuate in reducing the barriers to children participation thus contributing positively towards addressing child labour.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that children participation is not appreciated, and where it exists, it is in its embryonic stages in agencies working with children. In most cases, addressing child labour is being done without the active participation of children. Children's participation which is a right can only be realised if children are involved in decision making. Unfortunately, the present study found that children participation is fettered by salient factors such as culture, poverty, lack of information and negative attitudes towards children.

The present study found that high poverty levels among children and families involved in child labour is pervasive. Thus, the need to synchronise

children and family economic empowerment remains paramount among poverty stricken households. The government and agencies working to enhance the welfare of children need to empower poor families economically if they are to stop sending their children in the labour force. These interventions should take an integrative approach, by ensuring that whilst children are being withdrawn from the labour force, their families should be trained in entrepreneurship activities, thus preventing the children to return into child labour. Once issues of poverty are dealt with at household level, parents will encourage their children to attend school and meetings where they are likely to learn about their rights and participate in decision making at both organizational and community levels in the fight against child labour.

Another important aspect highlighted in the study is that negative attitude towards children a major barrier to children participation. Therefore we can see the need to institute interventions aimed at sensitising community members on the importance of promoting the culture that will accommodate children's participation in decision making in agencies and at community level. The socialisation process which is heavily influenced by cultural values and beliefs dictates the way a child is perceived in society. Generally, children are regarded as incapable of making decisions on issues that affects them. Therefore, awareness rising should also aim at targeting influential people in society such as traditional leaders and other members to make them understand children's rights, especially the right to participation in addressing child labour.

Finally, to achieve children's participation in the fight against child labour, children agencies, children, communities and government need to collaborate and share information on how child labour can be addressed. Although most agencies are aware of the right to children participation, children participation in addressing child labour still remains minimal and non-existent in some agencies. The findings of the study should be used by child protection agencies for intervention by ensuring that policies, programmes and services aimed at promoting children rights espouse the needs and views of children.

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