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Assessing the Impact of Child labour on Children's Welfare in Tobacco Growing Areas in Uganda: A Case Study of Masindi District.

This study focused on the impact of child labour on children's welfare in tobacco growing areas in Uganda. The study was based on a review of existing literature and actual fieldwork carried out in Masindi district of Uganda. It sought to: (a) explore the factors that are responsible for children engaging into tobacco growing; (b) assess the impact of child labour on children's welfare or socio-economic development in tobacco growing areas; (c) establish the policies and laws that protect children against child labour; and (d) make suggestions that will reduce child labour in Masindi district. The study was carried out in Masindi district, one of the districts with the highest proportion of child labourers working in agricultural plantations. In this study, in-depth interviews and focus group methods were used to collect qualitative data.

Evidence from the study confirmed that many children were engaged in child labour in tobacco growing areas in Masindi district. Various factors contribute to children working as child labourers on tobacco farms and central to these factors given were: the irresponsibility of their parents and/or guardians who were hardly bothered about school and instead preferred their children to make money out of child labour; and weak implementation of policy and legal framework of child labour related legal instruments at grassroot level. It was established that there was limited logistical support to enable the responsible parties to implement these laws and policies leading to the increase in child labour. With regard to the various factors that are responsible for child labour, the study showed that various negative impacts on child labourers' health, education and social development have been witnessed. These impacts have tremendously affected the optimal developmental background of child labourers and thus denying them the opportunity to prepare and equip themselves academically, socially, and emotionally for the future. The study also showed that even the existing policies and laws that protect child labour in Uganda have not been applied in reality in that they inadequately address child rights issues which deny them the opportunity to live as children and have not afforded them equal access to opportunities as compared to other sectors in Uganda. The cost implication of this has been many children engaging in child labour which has got terrible negative impacts on the child's social development. If government sensitised society about the laws and policies related to child labour and set up rules and regulations to guide the implementation of these laws and policies, it is certain that children would not fall victims of child labour. Various suggestions were made in the study to curb child labour in tobacco growing areas and central to this was the elimination of child labour in tobacco farms. In order to achieve this, child labourers proposed that government should: establish strict laws on child labour; put a mechanism in place to limit the size of tobacco farms to manageable levels in order to reduce the pressure on children to manage them; and sensitise and carry out advocacy campaigns against child labour on tobacco farms and that parents and guardians should seek alternative sources of labour. From the study, it is evident that the prevalence of child labour in tobacco growing areas undermines decent work, food security and child education which make child labour in tobacco growing farms very difficult to tackle and eliminate. This has led to the elimination of child labour in tobacco growing areas to remain a challenge. Unless a concerted effort is made by stakeholders to address this problem, especially, its root causes such as poverty and food insecurity, the goal to eliminate child labour will be impossible to achieve.

Key Words: Assessing, Child Labour, Tobacco growing, Masindi District.