

## Chapter 2 The Impact of the 2001/2002 Hunger Crisis on Child Labour and Education: A Case Study of Kasungu and Mchinji Districts in Central Malawi

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## **Chapter 2**

# **The Impact of the 2001/2002 Hunger Crisis on Child Labour and Education: A Case Study of Kasungu and Mchinji Districts in Central Malawi<sup>a</sup>**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

Child labour is generally recognised as a growing social disease worldwide and under the leadership of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are programmes being implemented in different parts of the world to combat child labour. Kooijmans has defined child labour as work performed by children which is considered detrimental to their physical and mental development (Kooijmans, 1998). Such work disrupts the child's prospects of getting a better education and it also negatively affects their health and wellbeing as they usually have to work long hours. In addition to defining child labour in terms of the effects of work on their education, health and other aspects of their lives, in other contexts child labour has been defined in terms of age. The ILO Convention No. 138 on minimum age for employment prohibits the

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<sup>a</sup> Tsutomu Takane, ed., *Current Issues of Rural Development in Malawi* (Chiba, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies, 2006)

employment of children aged less than 15 years. Some member states of the International Labour Organisation have adopted policies and other legislative frameworks which are consistent with the ILO Convention No. 138<sup>1</sup>. Child labour should, however, be differentiated from child work which is generally perceived as an important component of the socialisation and acculturation processes through which every child undergoes as a preparatory stage for the assumption of adult life (Kaponda, 2000). Unlike child labour, child work does not affect the health and personal development of the child nor does it interfere with the child's education.

According to the International Labour Organisation, there are approximately 211 million children aged between 5 and 14 years working in economic activities throughout the world and 73 million of these are under the age of 10 (International Labour Organisation 2005). The prevalence of child labour is the highest in Africa which is home to approximately 40% of children engaged in economic activities. Approximately 1 million new child labourers are expected each year (Eldring, Nakanyane and Tshoedi 2000). The majority of these child workers are engaged in agricultural and related activities such as fishing, hunting and forestry. Malawi is one of the countries in the world where child labour is most prevalent especially in the agricultural estate sector. Since Malawi is dependent on agriculture, the occurrence of shocks such as drought and flooding negatively affect peoples' livelihoods as well as the country's economy. Between 2000 and 2002 Malawi experienced a hunger crisis mostly because of drought among other reasons.

The general objective of this paper is to examine the impact of the 2002 hunger crisis on child labour and school attendance. The paper further explores how the liberalisation of tobacco growing may have impacted on child labour and food security in Malawi. The data upon which this paper is based was collected in December 2002 and was funded by the International Labour Organisation. Fieldwork was done in Traditional Authorities (TAs) Kaomba and Chulu in Kasungu District while in Mchinji District, the study was done in TAs Mlonyeni and Mkanda. The two districts were chosen because they have many estates where child labour is reportedly rampant. While the study was both quantitative as well as qualitative in nature, this paper mainly draws on the qualitative data collected through Focus Group

Discussions (FGDs) with men, women and children (aged 5-17 years) and key informant interviews with village headmen and their counsellors, field assistants and teachers were also interviewed. Head teachers were particularly useful in giving information on school attendance during the hunger period. A total of 84 key informant interviews and 112 FGDs were carried out in Mchinji and Kasungu Districts. In addition to fieldwork, a review of studies done on child labour and other related issues was done including the 2002 child labour survey report published in 2004.

## **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

According to the Population and Housing Census conducted in Malawi in 1998, Malawi's population is approximately 10 million and this represents an estimated 79% increase from the 1977 census when the population was 5.5 million. The proportion of people living in urban areas has almost doubled over the same period. In 1998 approximately 86% of Malawi's population lived in rural areas with 14% living in urban areas. This shows that there has been a significant increase in urban population in Malawi as in 1977 and 1987, 8.5% and 11.0% respectively lived in urban areas (National Statistical Office 2001b). While the proportion of people living in urban areas in Malawi is generally low compared to other countries in Africa, the rate of urbanization is one of the highest. The transformation of rural settlements and the rural-urban migration in less developed countries are the major determinants of the increase in urban population (United Nations 2001).

With approximately 65.0% of the population of Malawi living below the poverty line and a per capita gross national product of US\$190, Malawi is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world. The country is also characterised by some of the worst social indicators such as infant mortality rate and literacy rates. Malawi's economy registered rapid economic growth between 1964 and 1979 growing at 6% annually compared to only 2% population growth. The economy however started declining in the late 1970s until for the first time since independence the GDP was negative in 1981. A number of factors were responsible for the decline and these included the 1978-79 oil shocks, disruption of the trade route through Mozambique, the serious drought that hit Malawi in 1980/81,

the rise in interest rates on international financial markets, and the influx of refugees from war-torn Mozambique among other factors (Chinsinga 2004). Despite implementing structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s, Malawi's economy has not achieved economic growth characteristic of the pre-1979 period (Chilowa and Chirwa 1997).

The occurrence of natural disasters such as drought at a national level negatively affects the economic performance of Malawi as its economy largely depends on agriculture as can be demonstrated by the negative growth of Malawi's GDP in the early 1990s and between 2000 and 2002. Agriculture is important in Malawi's economy as approximately 80% of the people live in rural areas and they subsist on subsistence farming. In addition to this, agriculture contributes approximately 40% of the GDP. Between 1995 and 2001, the share of the agricultural sector in formal employment was estimated at 51.2% (Chirwa and Zakeyo. 2003). Agriculture accounts for 63.7% of the total income for the poor and it has been identified in the Malawi Poverty Strategy Paper as a key source of pro-poor growth in the medium term. Hence, increasing agricultural incomes is perceived to be a key source of reducing poverty. While the contribution of the agricultural sector to Malawi's economy is indispensable in the foreseeable future, the involvement of children aged under 14 years in agricultural production needs to be discouraged and discontinued.

## **2.1 Children in Malawi**

According to the 1998 Population and Housing Census, there are approximately 1.7 million under-five children in Malawi and about 4.9 million are aged 18 years or above. Of Malawi's total population, more than 50% are those aged 18 years of age or above. Approximately 44% of the population are aged less than 15 years of age (National Statistical Office 2002) and this represents a 3% drop from the 1987 proportions. Approximately 4.0% of the population are aged above 65 years and 52% between 15 and 64 years. The dependency ratio for Malawi is therefore 0.906 (National Statistical Office and International Food Policy Research Institute 2002). In economics, the dependency ratio is the ratio of the economically dependent part of the population to the productive part. The economically dependent part is recognised to be children who are too

young to work, and individuals that are too old, that is, generally, individuals under the age of 15 and over the age of 65. This ratio is important because as it increases, there is increased strain on the productive part of the population to support the economically dependent. As Torres has argued, the high dependency ratio may lead Malawian children to work before the age of 15 and drop out of school (Torres 2000).

Malawi is re-known for having some of the worst child health indicators in the world. However there have been some improvements in some basic health statistics. For example, the total fertility rate has dropped from 6.7 in 1992 to 6.3 children born per woman in 2000 (National Statistical Office 1992; 2001a). According to the 2004 Demographic and Health Survey, total fertility now is estimated at 6.0 children per woman (National Statistical Office 2005). The 2004 DHS has further shown that the total fertility rate is higher in the rural areas at 6.4 than in the urban areas at 4.2. Infant and under-five mortality rates have been decreasing even though they are still very high. In 1960 the infant mortality rate was estimated at 205 deaths per 1000 live births but by the year 2000 this figure had gone down to 117. The under-five mortality rate, which is currently at 188 per 1000 live births, puts Malawi at number 15 from the bottom in the world, where the bottom refers to the country with the highest mortality rate. In 1960, the under-five mortality rate was at 361 and, by 1990, it had dropped to 241 deaths per 1000 live births (UNICEF 2002). One of the major reasons for the decrease in the under-five mortality rate is the great increase in vaccination coverage, which has considerably reduced deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, tuberculosis, tetanus, etc. Though the vaccination coverage was generally low in the early years of the EPI, as of now, Malawi is one of the African countries boasting high coverage rates, ranging from 74 percent for the oral polio vaccine (OPV) to over 83 percent for the other antigens (UNICEF 2002). Due to the success of the immunization programme, neonatal tetanus has been declared eliminated and that there have been no reported cases of poliomyelitis since the end of the 1990s. While the fight against vaccine preventable diseases is being won, malnutrition in under-five children constitutes one of the major child health problems in Malawi. UNICEF estimates that approximately half of the children under five years of age are stunted and

one third of the children are failing to thrive, hence the need for urgent actions to address these issues (UNICEF 2004).

It can be noted from this discussion that there has been some improvements in some indicators even though they are still considered to be one of the worst in the world. However life expectancy, unlike other indicators, has been on the decrease since the early 1990s. The life expectancy rate in 2000 was estimated at 40 years (UNICEF 2002), a drop from 48 in 1992 (United Nations and Government of Malawi 1993). As is the case with other Sub-Saharan countries, the precipitous drop in overall life expectancy in the region is mostly due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic which is mostly claiming the lives of the economically productive age group of 15-49 years (World Health Organization 2002).

With regard to education, one had to pay school fees in order to access primary school education in the period before 1994. The payment of school fees was considered to be one of the major barriers to accessing primary school education. Free primary education (FPE) was introduced in Malawi in 1994 by the UDF government with the aim of increasing primary school enrolment. Total enrolment in primary school jumped from 1.9 million in 1994 to 2.9 million in 1995 and this was mainly due to the introduction of free primary school education. While politicians have been boasting about this increase in primary school enrolment, it has also been argued that the increase has been at the expense of educational quality and that while many pupils start standard one, only 30% complete primary school (Kadzamira, Nthara and Kholowa 2004). Child labour has been cited in a number of studies as one of the major reasons why children aged 6-17 years old withdraw from school. How prevalent is child labour?

### **3. CHILD LABOUR: PREVALENCE AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS**

#### **3.1 General employment and child labour issues**

In the absence of specialised labour surveys, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training uses the Housing and Population Censuses to determine the employment situation in Malawi. According to the 1987 Population and Housing Census conducted by the National Statistical Office the labour force in 1987 was estimated at 43% of the population,

which translates into 3.5 million people and this increased to between 4.2 and 5.1 million by 1997. Bose and Livingstone further analysed the results of the 1987 Population and Housing Census and found that 11% of the children aged 10-14 years were in paid employment while for the age group 15-19 years the labour force participation was much higher at 42%. Census results further showed that labour force participation rate for males was at 34%, much lower than the female rate which was at 50% (Bose and Livingstone 1993).

During the 1998 Population and Housing Census, individuals aged 10 years and above were asked what their economic activity was over the seven days prior to the survey. Out of the 9.9 million people enumerated in Malawi in the 1998 Population and Housing Census, about 6.8 million were persons aged 10 years and above. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the persons aged 10 years and above were economically productive with 78% being subsistence farmers (*alimi*) and 13% were employees. The study also revealed that at national level agriculture, hunting and forestry constitute a major economic activity for persons aged 10 years and above. There were, however, regional as well as rural/urban variations with regard to proportions of the population of persons aged 10 years and above who were economically active. The proportion of the economically active persons in the urban areas was 46.5% compared to rural areas at 69.9%. The Central Region had the highest proportion of economically active persons at 67.6% followed by the Southern Region and Northern Region at 66.9% and 57.4% respectively (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training 2002). Earlier in 1995 approximately 35.2% of the children aged between 10 and 14 years were estimated to be in paid employment (UNICEF 2001).

The Demographic and Health Survey of 2000 also collected data on work activities of children aged 5-14 years of age. Overall the survey found that 27% of the children were either engaged in paid or unpaid work for a non-relative or spending four or more hours a day doing household chores, with older children being more likely working than younger children. Most of these children were found to be involved in family business or family farm. The survey also revealed that 13.8% of the children aged 5-9 were working at the time of the survey (National Statistical Office 2001b). Unlike the 1998 Population and Housing Census which looked at the work activities for those aged 10 years and above, a

child labour survey conducted by the National Statistical Office and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training with funding from the International Labour Organisation in 2002 even looked at children aged 5-9 years old in addition to those aged 10+. According to this survey, 60% of the population aged 5 years and above were engaged in economic activities 7 days prior to the survey. The rural population was also found to be more economically active at 62% than the urban population at 48%. The 2002 Child Labour Survey also found that 24% and 47.6% of the children aged 5-9 years and 10-14 years, respectively were economically active 7 days prior to the survey (National Statistical Office and Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training 2004).

The 2002 Child Labour Survey defined working children as the ones aged 5-17 years who are involved either in economic or non-economic activities. The period of engagement in these activities varies in either the previous seven days or the previous 12 months. This study has shown that 38.6% of the children aged 5-17 years were involved in usual economic activities while the rest were either idle or involved in usual non-economic activities. This study further showed that most of the children who were economically active were engaged in agriculture as the main activity and these were mainly working on the family's farm. Almost at the same time the child labour survey was being conducted, another study found that around the Dwangwa area of Nkhota Kota, there were 37 smallholder estates and over 60% of these estates employed children either as tenants or as labourers. According to this study, 90% of the children engaged in child labour were from the poorer families, particularly those which were female headed (Matemba and Dzilankhulani 2002). Children aged 5-17 years old are supposed to be in school but they withdraw from school in order to take up employment and earn a bit of money to satisfy the basic needs. In Malawi there are some legislative frameworks that are supposed to regulate child labour but it is difficult to implement these provisions as shall be discussed in the following section.

### **3.2 Existing legislative frameworks on child labour**

There are a number of international conventions on child labour which have been ratified by member states in order to curb the problem of child labour. One of the first conventions to be passed by the International

Labour Organisation was the 1973 Minimum Age Convention No. 138. This convention requires countries to specify a minimum age for admission to employment which, in any case, is not supposed to be less than the age for completion of compulsory schooling. Malawi has since ratified this convention. The 2000 Employment Act, enacted after Malawi ratified the ILO Convention No. 138, is in line with this convention as it prohibits the employment of children aged less than 14 years. Later in 1999 the ILO also passed Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The convention calls for the protection of children against worst forms of child labour which include slavery, prostitution, child trafficking, bonded labour and the use of children in armed conflict. Malawi has also ratified this convention. Even though Malawi has ratified these two ILO conventions relating to child labour, the major problem is implementation.

The most universally accepted human rights instrument in history which has been ratified by almost every country in the world is the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted by the United Nations in 1989. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education and legal, civil and social services. These standards are benchmarks against which progress can be assessed. In 1989, the United Nations passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) article 32 which stresses that a child has the right to be protected from work that jeopardises his or her health, education or development. It, just like Convention No. 138, also calls for States to set the minimum age for employment and the need to regulate working conditions. Malawi has thus far only sent the initial report on the progress made in implementing the CRC. This initial CRC report acknowledges the existence of child labour especially among the tenant farmers (Government of Malawi 2002).

In addition to the Employment Act of 2000, at national level there is also the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Malawi which provides for the protection of children. Section 23 (4) of the Constitution deals with the rights of children. It says that “Children are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation or any treatment, work or punishment that is, or is likely to be hazardous; interfere with their education; or be harmful to their health or to their physical, mental or spiritual or social development”.

While these international and national legislative frameworks exist, the major problem is the lack of enforcement. Malawi's initial CRC report

says that labour inspectors are in short supply and are often without resources to undertake inspections of child labour. Likewise Kooijmans (1998) has attributed the problem of legislation enforcement to weaknesses in the inspection system, especially the fact that they are understaffed, inadequately trained, the general lack of transportation and the lack of access to workplaces

#### **4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

Having looked at the situation of children in Malawi, the prevalence of child labour and available legislative frameworks protecting children, it is necessary at this juncture to present the results of this study which was aimed at exploring the impact of the hunger crisis on child labour. What are the major crops grown in Kasungu and Mchinji? Are there any differences in the type of inputs used in the production of food and cash crops? How does low food production relate to child labour?

##### **4.1 The cultivation of crops and utilization of farm inputs**

The major crops that are grown in Kasungu and Mchinji are maize, tobacco, groundnuts and sweet potatoes. Other crops grown include Soya beans, *bambara* or ground beans (*nzama*) and cassava. Cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, *nzama* and maize are mainly grown for household consumption and they are only sold when harvested in excess. Maize is the staple food crop and it is not normally sold because the yields are often very poor. Tobacco is a major source of income for households in the two districts hence it is mainly grown for sale. From the household questionnaire it was found that about 40% of the households are involved in the cultivation of tobacco and that almost all households grow maize which is the staple food crop.

Participants in FGDs in both Mchinji and Kasungu said that farm inputs such as local and improved seeds and compost and *khola* manure are used in the cultivation of crops. As much as people would want to use hybrid seeds, unfortunately they usually do not have money to buy improved or hybrid seeds, hence the use of local seeds. With erratic rains that have characterised Malawi over the last few years, it is better to use hybrid maize which is fast maturing. The cultivation of hybrid maize

however requires fertilizer which the majority of the people cannot afford, hence the use of local varieties of maize. On the other hand, participants in FGDs pointed out that local maize is preferred and very popular because of its resistance to weevils.

Other farm inputs that are used include hired labour and fertiliser. Hired labour is mostly used in the cultivation of tobacco because the crop requires intensive labour. A lot more fertiliser is used in the cultivation of tobacco than in maize. Key informants and participants in FGDs said that the use of more fertiliser in the cultivation of tobacco is done in order to ensure that they have good quality tobacco which should fetch good prices at the Auction Floors. With more resources, including time and fertiliser, dedicated to the cultivation of tobacco, it is very unlikely that people would harvest high maize yields. This is also compounded by the fact that it seems some people dedicate more land to the growing of tobacco than maize. According to FGDs and key informant interviews this is done in the hope that after tobacco sales, the money realised can be used to purchase maize. This is often not the case as maize is not a priority during the season when tobacco is being sold as people still have some maize in their granaries.

#### **4.2 The 2001/2002 food shortages and community's coping strategies**

While Malawi produced nearly adequate maize yields in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s generally saw a significant fall in maize production. In this study heads of households were asked if they produced enough maize in the 2000/2001 growing seasons to last them to the 2001/2002 harvest. Over 90% of the households who participated in this survey did not produce enough maize in the 2000/2001 growing season and this explains why there was widespread hunger around this time, not only in Kasungu and Mchinji but all over Malawi. A number of reasons were given for the low production of maize and these included the lack of fertiliser because it is expensive; erratic and inadequate rains; the carry-over effects of the 1999/2000 poor maize yields; inadequate landholding sizes and the non-use of hybrid seeds. As most people reported that they did not harvest adequate maize yields in 1999/2000, instead of spending most of the time working in their gardens, they instead spent a lot of time doing *ganyu* in other people's gardens. Around the same time maize production was

greatly compromised because of the drought that Malawi experienced at the time.

The above discussion shows that hunger was a major crisis in 2001 and 2002 as has also been documented in a number of studies. Participants in FGDs mentioned a number of strategies that people used in order to “cope” with hunger after they run out of the maize they grew on their own. These coping strategies included people engaging in *ganyu* (piece work) labour; purchase of food from local markets and Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), bartering; food transfers from relatives, NGOs and employers; selling of assets and begging. The *ganyu* work that people, including children, did in order to get some money and purchase food included sewing tobacco leaves, weeding, making ridges and banking. Non-agricultural work included moulding bricks, building houses, being involved in small-scale businesses such as selling freezits, milk, charcoal, firewood, and cleaning the general surroundings. While these non-agricultural *ganyus* existed, most of the *ganyu* work that people were engaged in was agricultural in nature. One concern however was that there was a lot of exploitation as payment was too meagre for the work done. In bartering household goods with maize or flour, the major concern was that the value of the goods was not equivalent to the amount of maize/flour given, for example, a goat could be exchanged with 5 kilogrammes of maize.

The major perception in Malawian communities is that one considers to have eaten a meal if he or she eats *nsima* prepared from maize flour. During the hunger period, because maize and therefore maize flour was not available, people instead ate mangoes, potatoes, vegetables such as pumpkin and cassava leaves, etc as main meals; but this is not considered as “food”. Most people also mentioned during the FGDs that they also ate banana tubers. The tubers were pounded, sun-dried and ground and the ‘flour’ from such a process was used to cook something similar to *nsima*. In some areas, such as in TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji, bananas were cooked and eaten without even peeling them. People in both Kasungu and Mchinji also resorted to eating green maize stalks whilst the maize was still in the garden. The hunger period in fact coincided with the mango season hence people ate mangoes. Unripe (green) mangoes were even cooked and eaten (Devereux 1999).

Lastly due to food shortages, participants in FGDs in both Kasungu and Mchinji said that in most cases households reduced the number of meals they were having per day, for example they ate once a day, either lunch or supper, and in the worst scenario, households went without food which was not uncommon. These coping strategies have also been discussed in a number of studies for example by Devereux (1999).

#### **4.3 What needs to be done for people to have adequate harvests**

During focus group discussions, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews, participants were also asked what needs to be done in order for community members to harvest adequate maize. In response to this question, participants in FGDs in Mchinji and Kasungu mentioned that there is need for an adequate supply of hybrid seeds and fertilizer. They said that for this to be achieved children (during school holidays) and their parents should be involved in a lot of *ganyus* so that the money realized from this initiative can be used to purchase fertilizer. This can be supplemented by involvement in small-scale businesses such as selling firewood and money realized from this should be saved in order to be used for the purchase of food during the hunger period.

Realizing that people did not harvest adequate maize and hence did not have seeds for planting, the Government of Malawi started the Starter Pack Programme and later the Targeted Inputs (Farm) Programme which were aimed at giving farm inputs to vulnerable groups of people. Women and children in TA Mlonyeni and TA Mkanda respectively said that adequate maize can be harvested if the Government increased the quantity of fertilizer and seeds which are given to vulnerable groups of people in the starter pack programme from 10 kg of fertilizer to 50 kg and 2 kg of seed to 10 kg. Some children during a focus group discussion suggested that, since fertilizer is a requisite for people to produce adequate food, there is need for government to bring down the price of fertilizer so that most people in the village should be able to afford. In this context, children in TA Mlonyeni also suggested that ADMARC and Farmers' World and other non-governmental organizations should take particular interest in providing credit input loans to all community members who cultivate maize. There were also some suggestions that the 20 percent deposit that is required before one gets a fertilizer loan should be scrapped

off as it hinders access to these loans by so many poor people. In some places in TA Mlonyeni participants said that institutions which give out loans are not available hence there was a suggestion that these institutions should open an office in such areas. This would enable people to have access to agricultural input loans. Some Field Assistants in Kasungu further suggested that people should be planting fast maturing hybrid maize seeds so that maize should not be affected when there is a dry spell or inadequate rains. While this is what most members of the community would want to do, they however pointed out the major problem was the lack of funds to purchase hybrid maize seeds.

Some even suggested that since this is currently a big problem there was need for government to provide free fertilizer for at least one growing season and this would consequently ensure that they have adequate maize some of which can be sold and the money realized used to purchase fertilizer. One of the major reasons for not producing enough food in 2000/2001 growing season, as has been discussed, is that most people worked in other people's gardens in order to get food. There were therefore also suggestions that government should give out food to people during the hunger period as this would ensure that they have enough food to eat and would therefore concentrate on working in their own gardens.

Some women and children in TA Kaomba in Kasungu and TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji respectively argued that even if people work very hard and purchase fertilizer, this on its own will not be adequate. There will be need for these people to work very hard and take maximum care of their maize gardens. There were also some suggestions from children and women in TA Kaomba and men in TA Mkanda that in order to fight the problem of hunger in Malawi, there is need for the introduction of irrigation farming and that they need expert advice on the type of seed and fertilizer that should be used in order to get maximum yield. Women in TA Chulu and children in TA Kaomba further argued that farmers should plant with the first rains and that money realised from the sale of tobacco should be reserved to buy adequate fertilizer. From the FGDs, it was also noted that many people who got fertilizer on loan ended up selling that fertilizer to buy food hence they did not harvest enough maize. Such people should therefore be advised that they should not sell the fertilizer if they want to realize better maize yields. Lastly, some women in TA Mkanda suggested

that, for them to harvest enough maize, there is also need for adequate rains. In addition to the above initiatives, there was also a suggestion that the production of *dimba* crops should be encouraged.

While community members said that they did not have enough fertilizer, some Field Assistants argued that communities take a long time to adapt. They said that they trained the community members to make compost manure and also told them the need to plant *nsangu* (*Acacia albida*) trees in their gardens but the members of the community had not adopted this cheap technology. If they had adopted such approaches they would not be perceiving the lack of fertilizer as a problem. It is apparent that people know what is generally required for them to produce adequate food, but factors such as widespread poverty, poor rains and small landholding sizes seem to be the major constraining factors.

#### **4.4 How did the 2001/2002 hunger impact on children**

This study also explored people's views on how the 2001/2002 hunger crisis impacted on the health and well being of children especially those aged 5-17 years old. According to participants in FGDs conducted in Kasungu and Mchinji, the hunger crisis was at its peak in December 2001, January 2002, February 2002 and March 2002. Because of the widespread hunger crisis, most boys and girls in TA Mkanda said that they suffered from malnutrition-related illnesses and reports of hunger-related deaths were not uncommon in the areas where this study was conducted. There were also a number of children who withdrew from school because of hunger as will be discussed later.

During this period while there were some children who did not work, there were others who worked in order to contribute towards their household's search for food. Approximately 39% of the children aged 5-17 years said that they participated in the search for food. Those involved in the search for food were mainly those aged 9-17 years old and some of the *ganyus* they were involved in included the herding of livestock, weeding in other people's gardens; making ridges for sweet potatoes; fetching water for restaurants; and ferrying sand from the dambos. During the tobacco harvest period, they were involved in plucking and sewing of tobacco leaves. It was also learnt during the FGDs and key informant interviews that in addition to activities cited above children were also involved in

selling their employers' merchandise such as doughnuts and freezits, carrying luggage for travellers and looking after children. One village headman in Mchinji said that in rural areas children are also largely employed by teachers to do domestic work such as childcare and washing baby napkins. This is however worrisome as teachers know and understand the need for children to get educated, and yet, they are in some cases the ones who are in forefront of practicing child labour. Even though children were involved in a variety of work activities, the majority were involved in agricultural related work activities. These working children during the hunger crisis were paid in kind (maize bran, pumpkin leaves and cooked food), but the problem was that they were being underpaid.

During FGDs, children who worked during this period said that they worked in order to supplement their households' income and food requirements as their parents were unable to provide the household with all the food requirements. Other reasons why children worked during this period as narrated by children themselves included easing parents' workload and being told by parents to work. Instead of working, some children were withdrawn from school in order to baby-sit or guard their houses when their parents were away working.

While some children would have wanted to work in order to contribute towards their households' search for food, they could not do so because of the scarcity of *ganyus*; otherwise they intimated that if *ganyus* were available, they would have been working so as to earn money to purchase their needs such as notebooks, writing materials, clothes and shoes as well as food. What is apparent from this discussion is that children worked during the hunger period. In their study, Tsoka and Konyani have also cited reasons such as supplementation of household income, assisting their households in acquiring food, failure by parents to pay school fees and as part of the learning process as reasons why children work. (Tsoka and Konyani 2003). It can be observed therefore that children work because of the prevailing poverty in their respective communities which leads to food insecurity and the lack of other basic necessities in the household. During the FGDs and key informant interviews it was learnt that if some of the children did not work the hunger situation in their households would have been worse as they contributed significantly towards the households'

search for food. The elimination of child labour would therefore require that the issue of poverty be properly addressed.

The other impact of the 2001/2002 hunger crisis on children was that they were withdrawn from school mainly because of hunger related reasons: they were too weak to walk to school. Appendix 1 shows the number of pupils who attended school from January to December 2002 at two primary schools in Mchinji. What is observed from Appendix 1 is that, although attendance is a generally occurring problem, this is especially noticeable between January and March 2002. During this period, attendance was very poor. As has been mentioned before, some schools were closed while others such as Msupadzi F.P. School in Mchinji run at less than 20% attendance rates (see Appendix 1). It is evident from Appendix 1 that the hunger crisis negatively affected school attendance as most pupils could not attend school because either they were very weak or they had to go and help their parents look for food. Both boys and girls were withdrawn from school as it was difficult for them to learn on an empty stomach.

Some teachers were not spared either by the hunger crisis. They too in some cases did not eat and could not teach while hungry. Some schools were closed. During fieldwork it was learnt that Kamalira F.P. School in TA Kaomba in Kasungu was temporarily closed during the hunger period. For those children who were at secondary school, they were only withdrawn after they run out of food. The survey component of this study revealed that approximately 70% of the children had been absent from school over the one year period preceding the study. These children were mostly absent between November 2001 and March 2002 when hunger was very critical. Two major reasons were given for being absent from school and these were lack of food and being ill and according to participants in FGDs, the illnesses were mostly due to hunger.

While children may be absent or withdraw from school, key informants however added that orphans are the ones who are in most cases absent from school. Some orphans are ill treated by their guardians “*popeza kuti siwawo mwana, poona kuti chakudya alibe amangoona ngati awatangwanitsa*” (seeing that the child is not theirs, they just think that he or she will give them tough time). As far as dropping out of school is concerned, teachers said that in most cases girls, unlike boys, drop out of

school the most and this is applicable to those from Standard 5 to Standard 8. These girls go for early marriages. For instance, at one of the schools in Mchinji, there were 8 girls in Standard 8 and out of these four dropped out due to pregnancy. Apart from pregnancy and related factors, some key informants said that one other contributing factor for girls being absent from school is that parents tend to assign many household chores such as pounding, going to maize mills etc to girls. These problems, according to informants, can be minimized if the girls and their parents are told the importance of education and why early marriages are disadvantageous.

During the hunger crisis, priority for spending money is given to purchasing food for households. Hence in some FGDs it was learnt that some parents refused to buy notebooks and clothes for their children hence some children chose to withdraw from school than to go to school in their old clothes and without notebooks. Those in secondary school were also withdrawn because their parents spent the little money they found on purchasing food for the household instead of paying school fees. Some of the children, for example in TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji, were withdrawn not really to work in other people's gardens, but in their gardens while their parents worked in other people's gardens in search for food. It is not only during the hunger period that children work. During the FGDs in Mchinji and Kasungu, boys and girls said that they usually work because they would like to get money to buy their needs such as Vaseline, soap, writing materials, notebooks and clothes. They argued that they do this because they would like to show a bit of independence and not only rely on their parents to support them on everything. In a way, by working and realizing some income, they are able to alleviate some of the problems being faced by their parents.

It can be seen from the above discussion that child labour impacts negatively on the health and general well-being of children. While child labour exists, the occurrence of social shocks such as severe famine exacerbates the situation of child labour. The situation could have been worse if there was abundant work as this study has shown that some children wanted to work but there was no work.

#### **4.5 Why are children employed?**

Participants in FGDs were also asked why people employ children instead of adults. During FGDs in Mchinji and Kasungu Districts, men, women and children explained that this is done because employers just want to take advantage of the vulnerability of children by offering them a small pay i.e. that children are a source of cheap labour and are easily persuaded to take up the job at lower pay. They further explained that children are more resilient than adults, saying that adults usually take offence after being reprimanded by their employers while a child does not take offence easily and he or she will always do what his or her employer says. Sometimes these children are not even paid but employers can hardly do this to adults:

*“Zimenezi sangachite kwa wandevu amaopa kuti angamumenye chifukwa cha ndalama” (They cannot do this to someone who has a beard (an adult) because they fear that he can beat them) [FGD with children in TA Kaomba, Kasungu].*

Some FGDs with children in TA Mkanda and TA Mlonyeni revealed that children are in most cases recruited because the prospective employers expect a lot of obedience from these children and hence they can assign even difficult tasks to these children. Children will not question because of fear of the adult employer:

*“Ana amakhala amantha, savuta kutumika, wamkulu akhoza kukana” (Children are afraid, therefore they can easily be sent while an adult can refuse) [FGD with men, TA Mkanda].*

In FGDs with children in TA Mlonyeni and TA Kaomba, some children felt that employers in most cases recruit children because they feel sorry for them and, after all, it is children themselves who seek employment. In some cases, children are preferred because some of the activities are deemed not fit for adults, for example the herding of cattle. In addition to this, there were also feelings that there are certain types of jobs that are better done by children than adults. One village headman gave an example of plucking of tobacco in the field and sewing of tobacco in the tobacco sheds as tasks that children generally perform better and faster than

adults. In addition to working on the farm, children are also employed in the home. In TA Chulu in Kasungu some children in the FGDs argued that it is easier for a child to work in someone's house or farm unlike an adult who would want to be in control. One village headman in TA Kaomba said that households employ children because they fear that if they employ adults, they would start sexual relationships with their children, husbands or wives. One head teacher however argued that some people employ children out of malice i.e. they do not want children of other people to go to school. Another point that was raised during an FGD with men in TA Mkanda in Mchinji was that orphaned children especially may face problems originating from their guardians hence they may just leave and get employed elsewhere without really minding the working conditions.

It can therefore be seen that children are employed because they are a source of cheap labour, they are easy to control, they are obedient and the view that they can perform some jobs better than adults. In addition to the reasons discussed above, Tsoka and Konyani have also argued that children are employed because they are trustworthy, are trainable and the view that it is a component of training them for adulthood.

#### **4.6 How work affects the lives of children**

During interviews with key informants and FGDs with men, women and children, the study also explored what participants felt were the impacts of working on children. During FGDs, children and women in Mchinji and Kasungu Districts said that working children face a lot of problems, which in most cases have to do with ill treatment, including being physically beaten. For example, in some cases employers assign them a lot of work even though that type of work is hazardous or not really appropriate for their age. Child workers are sometimes subjected to very long working hours. As a result of being assigned work which is not appropriate for their age as well as working for very long hours, working children are not all that healthy. One village headman pointed out that it is not uncommon to see children working on the agricultural estates from 6.00 am to 6.00 pm with very little pay and in most cases they do not have enough food to eat. Children argued during focus group discussions conducted in TA Mkanda, Mchinji that such children may develop illness which may, as a result, lead to early death. These children further argued

that the country loses a child who could have been an asset in future while the adult employer lives on as the following quotation shows:

*“Mmalo moti akhale moyo nthawi yayitali adzathandize chitukuko amatsogola kufa kusiya a bwanawo a moyo waufupi osathandiza ayi”* (Instead of the child living long so that he contributes to (national) development, he dies earlier because of working leaving behind his boss who is much older and hence has a short life) [FGD with boys and girls in TA Mkanda, Mchinji].

In TAs Mkanda and Mlonyeni, children said that in some cases working children may even be denied food or given very little food by their employers just to show that he is the boss or in some cases, because employers argue that child workers do not eat much:

*“Ana a ntchito sadya kwambiri”* (Working children do not eat much) [FGD with boys and girls in TA Mkanda, Mchinji].

Denying children food is not only to show that the employer is the boss but, according to FGDs with women in TA Mkanda, to ensure that the work assigned to the child is completed. Children are told statements such as:

*“Munathawa njala kwa makolo anu. Kagwireni ntchito kuti mupatsidwe chakudya”* (You ran away from your parents because of hunger. Go and work in order for you to get some food) [FGD with women in TA Mkanda].

In some cases, child workers are shouted at any time and without any proper reason. Because children have little or no bargaining power, they are even assigned other jobs for which they were not recruited for. For example, children in TA Kaomba said that it is not uncommon for a child to be employed to herd livestock, but at the same time he will be asked to do farming. Child cattle herders are especially vulnerable as in most cases they spend the whole day herding cattle without eating. These children have at

many times been attacked by cattle thieves and they are also beaten if cattle trespass into other peoples' gardens [FGD with women, TA Mkanda]. Some children in TA Mlonyeni pointed out that working children who are orphans are the ones who in most cases are mistreated by their workers. They do this because they know that the orphan has nowhere to go and he would do anything that the employer says. These children and women in FGDs in TA Mlonyeni and men in TA Mkanda further said that girl child workers are in some cases impregnated by their male employers only to deny responsibility. Being a child worker, she could not refuse because of fear that her boss can dismiss her. These children and women added that in some cases the girl child can contract sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS and hence suffer for the rest of their lives for something they did not consent to. In addition to this, some children in Kasungu reported that a girl child can sometimes bring conflicts and tension to her employers i.e. the employer and his wife especially when the man starts showing interest in the girl child. On the other hand, during the hunger period participants said that girls who were having sex with the "supervisors" had an "advantage" as the supervisor could give the child a smaller portion of work to accomplish. Apart from these intricate problems that working children face, work as such also impacts on education.

#### **4.7 Effects of child labour on school performance**

As far as school performance is concerned, men, children and women in Kasungu and Mchinji said that it is problematic for children to work while at the same time studying. According to FGDs and key informant interviews (KIIs), working children do not do well in school because they do not have enough time to study and indeed do their homework as most of the time they are working and have very little rest. As a result of this, the only free time they have is used for resting. This often results in children dropping out of school. During an FGD with women in TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji, participants said that working children do not do well in school as they always think about how much money they will be paid and how they are to use such money. Hence, they usually fail examinations and consequently withdraw from school to concentrate on work. This was further echoed by some head teachers of primary schools who said that a working child is only interested in money and hence he does not concentrate in class. He or she thinks of the work left to do at his

workplace. As a result, he fails exercises and examinations. This can be seen from the following statement:

*“Mwana akazolowera kugwira ndalama ndi mabvuto, sizimamuyendera bwino, mapeto ake sapitiriza sukulu”* (It is not good for a child to get used to having money. It causes a lot of problems and in the end he does not continue with school) [Counsellor to Village headman in TA Kaomba].

While some children work and at the same time study, some women in TA Mkanda observed that employers do not allow children to work as well as attend school. These children have to make a decision between school and working. Unfortunately, according to mothers, children sometimes choose to work because they see immediate gains. It is apparent that child labour impacts negatively on pupils' performance in school. It is also a major cause of absenteeism from school, dropping out of school, poor performance and consequently failing of examinations. Tsoka and Konyani in their study found that 86.5% of the children were absent from school because of working and other related factors (Tsoka and Konyani 2003).

In addition to the above problems, children in TA Mkanda in Mchinji District argued that there are some children who have not experienced any problems since they started working; hence they could lose interest in school and always think about work even in class. As a result of this, he or she does not concentrate in school hence he or she can drop out of school completely. It can therefore be concluded that while people are knowledgeable about the effects of child labour on school performance, the practice of child labour continues largely because of poverty which is widespread in Malawi.

#### **4.8 Factors that would hinder children from schooling or working**

Women and children (both those at school and out of school) participating in focus group discussions were also asked what they would prefer children to be doing at present. Children in general preferred pursuing education because they felt that education is important as one learns how to read and write and they would not get lost when they are on a journey as they would be able to read before boarding a bus. More

importantly, they said that education is a key to success and even to agriculture. They explained that a person who has been to school would be able to interpret and adopt modern agricultural practices with ease hence will earn a lot of money through successful farming. During FGDs in Mchinji and Kasungu Districts, children further said that they would prefer schooling to working because, after attaining a good education, they would get a good job from which they would be earning money which can then be used to help their parents to meet their needs.

Some children in TA Chulu in Kasungu said that the provision of unskilled labour as is the case with child labour is not all that good because, once one is fired, it becomes increasingly difficult to find another job whereas if one is well educated, it is much easier for him or her to find work after losing one job. Some employers would even not be interested to employ uneducated people. During the FGDs with women in TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji and TA Kaomba and TA Chulu in Kasungu, it was echoed that they would rather have their children aged 5 to 17 years old to be at school so that they could get a good education. The good education would lead to securing a good job and they would thus be able to support their parents. These women were of the view that once the children were educated and started working, hunger will be alleviated because when their parents run out of food, these children (since they will have good jobs) will support them. One major issue raised by most women and men in FGDs was that children are future leaders and denying them a decent education would mean denying them to be doctors or presidents of tomorrow. Apart from these advantages of going to school, children in TA Mlonyeni also said that in school they can also learn skills such as art, knitting and how they can run a business. Attending school and later getting a good job was also seen as beneficial to the community as this would greatly reduce the number of thieves as many of those who steal never completed their education hence they steal in order to earn a living.

Only two child respondents said that they would choose to work other than schooling. These children pointed out that their immediate need is money to help their parents to purchase clothes, soap and other necessities for the family including the purchase of food. Therefore, they chose work over school because it is work which can solve their immediate problem of food and not school. One girl from Kasungu said that she would

willingly go back to school if someone else provided her parents with food and clothes. While these children indeed wanted to work, they were quick to point out that their wishes could not be achieved because of lack of employment opportunities in their communities.

While some children preferred to be at school, they were also asked what factors would hinder them from working or pursuing education. It was learnt during the focus group discussions with children, men and women conducted in Mchinji and Kasungu that poverty is one of the major factors that may hinder these children from pursuing further education as their parents may fail to pay school fees and purchase school uniform and other necessities such as clothes, Vaseline, soap and note books. Children in TA Mlonyeni added that secondary school fees is now very expensive and, because of this, a household can put priority in purchasing food other than paying school fees for the child. In addition to this, men and children in Kasungu said that lack of school materials and good clothes can also make children not to want to go to school. They said that a child who does not have good clothes would not want to go to school because he or she would be comparing the type of clothes he or she is putting on with those that his or her friends are wearing. As a result they said that he or she would lose interest and drop out of school completely.

Due to poverty, parents would also not be able to purchase fertilizer hence households will have poor harvests which will consequently lead to hunger. Children will then be required to assist in the household's search for food instead of attending school which may subsequently lead to children losing interest in school. Due to the prevailing and recurring hunger situation children may not be in a position to continue with school because they will be withdrawn to help in the search for food as has been demonstrated in this study. This was also echoed by women in Kasungu in TAs Kaomba and Chulu who said that hunger may indeed hinder their children from schooling as they may lose interest and concentrate on work to get money and buy food. Women in TA Chulu also said that because of the lack of food, children become malnourished and hence suffer from hunger or malnutrition related illnesses. These would prevent a child from going to school and eventually withdraw from school since the hunger problem is a recurring one.

The other problem expressed by some children during FGDs in TA Mkanda and TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji District was that schools are located very far from the village hence, with the prevailing poverty, most children fail to get to school. In TA Mlonyeni, children added that in order to get to their school, they have to travel through the forest and that, in the recent past, people have been killed in the forest and had their private parts removed. They therefore argued that a child cannot deliberately go to that school for fear of being killed. Hence, he or she would rather start working instead of going to school. Some of the schools in TA Mlonyeni are very far and are also not accessible during the rainy season.

The other reason that children in TA Mlonyeni said would hinder them from pursuing education is the desire to take foods such as tea and bread to school and eat such foods during break time. They said that many children bring tea and bread as the school is very close to the Boma.

*“Timakhumbira ana anzathu akamamwa tiyi pa buleki nkumwera buledi”* (We envy our friends who take with them tea and bread when going to school) [FGD with boys and girls, TA Mlonyeni, Mchinji].

Peer pressure is one of the factors that may hinder their children’s desire to further their education. What may happen is that a child’s friends may not be going to school and they might be working. Hence, such children may influence their school going friends to change their mind to start working instead just like them [FGD with women, TA Mlonyeni in Mchinji]. In some circumstances, some children may withdraw from school because of shyness, for example when a child is older than most of his or her classmates, he or she may then decide to withdraw. In addition to this, girls may be married off at an early age so that her parents may get financial assistance from them [FGD with women in TA Kaomba]. Women in one FGD held in TA Chulu said that orphanhood is one of the factors which may hinder some children from pursuing further education. They argued that care for orphaned children is generally minimal/limited to the extent of actually withdrawing them from school to utilize them in more productive ways such as farming and doing *ganyu*.

During one FGD conducted with children in TA Chulu in Kasungu it was pointed out that some schools were closed during the hunger period and if the schools are intermittently closed some children would be discouraged and would therefore drop out of school. In the case of girls, prostitution and early pregnancies would also hinder a girl child from pursuing her education because she may never return to school even after delivery.

In addition to the above factors, men during a focus group discussion in TA Mlonyeni and TA Kaomba added that in some cases parents' perceptions about school may hinder a child from getting a good education. Some of the parents do not appreciate the importance of school, hence they send their children to work during school time. From the above discussion, it is seen that many parents would want their children to pursue education and not working. But, in order for this to be achieved, there is a need for all the constraining factors as discussed above to be addressed.

#### **4.9 Keeping children in school during hunger crises**

As has been discussed above, hunger constitutes one of the most important shocks that can disrupt school attendance. Hence, it is important that strategies be developed which would ensure that children stay in school even in the face of shocks such as widespread famine. On what would keep children in school during the hunger periods, children, during the focus group discussions held in Mchinji District said that parents should make an extra effort to find food for the family by engaging in *ganyu* so that the household has adequate food. In TA Mlonyeni, children added that they should also be involved in *ganyus* especially over the weekend and holidays. The money realized from doing *ganyus* would be used to purchase fertilizer which they can apply to the maize gardens and consequently improve their yield. Since people will have adequate maize, children then will not be withdrawn from school since their households have enough food. One Field Assistant in Kasungu also felt that fertilizer is too expensive, hence there is need for government to subsidize it so that it is accessible to everyone.

In addition to this, some children in TA Mkanda added that it is important that parents should encourage their children to go to school by telling them the importance of having a good education and the disadvantages of working especially when they are still young. Parents should in fact force

their children to go to school even to the extent of threatening them that they will be denied food if they do not go to school. In this context, some civic education need to be conducted so that parents should realize the importance of sending children to school and, at the same time, prospective employers need to be told or enlightened that employing a school going child is unlawful. Civic education should however not only be for parents and employers. Children should also be told the disadvantages of working, and these should be linked to advantages of going to school.

The children in TA Mkanda in Mchinji and TA Chulu in Kasungu also said that there is need for government to take care of children especially during hunger periods. They proposed that government should keep children in one place and feed them during the entire hunger period. One head teacher even suggested that the school, once the government donates the food for the school-going children, can be responsible for preparing food for these children. This would ensure that every child goes to school. In addition, the government should pay secondary school fees for those who discontinue because their parents do not have money.

One Field Assistant further suggested that in order to keep children in school, there was need to improve the food situation in all households by ensuring that everyone harvests enough food. This can be achieved through practicing crop diversification especially by planting crops which do not require fertilizer such as cassava and sweet potatoes. While the availability of food in the home would, indeed, help to keep children in school, there were also some concerns that children should not always complain of clothes and other needs. Children who do not have good clothes, tend to compare with others who have good clothes and this may discourage children from going to school. This would then force them to search for *ganyu* in order for them to realize some money to purchase their needs. One village counsellor added that some teachers should be positive motivators by being nice to school children instead of being cruel. These factors would indeed keep children in school. As we have discussed, the lack of food, as was shown by the 2001/2002 famine crisis, significantly affects children's attendance rates in schools. If household's food security is assured then child labour would be minimized and children would therefore not be interrupted from schooling. Earlier on the growing of

tobacco was somehow restricted. Did the liberalisation of tobacco contribute to increased prevalence of child labour?

## **5. THE IMPACT OF THE LIBERALIZATION OF TOBACCO ON FOOD SECURITY AND CHILD LABOUR**

Initially, the growing of tobacco was controlled and this crop was mainly grown by the estate sub-sector. However, as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes, among other reforms, tobacco growing was liberalized and smallholder farmers were allowed to cultivate tobacco. The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) identifies agriculture as the key specific sectoral source of pro-poor growth in the medium term. Hence, increasing agricultural incomes is perceived to be a key source of reducing poverty. However, this study shows that there are a lot of problems or constraints to poverty reduction and growth through the agricultural sector.

One of the major constraints is the access to farm input credit. Many key informants and participants in focus group discussions pointed out the difficulties that small farmers face in accessing farm input credit (i.e., credit to buy fertilizer and improved seeds) They also pointed out the difficulties faced by those who have had access to loans, their inability to repay these loans because of poor harvests and the low prices that tobacco fetches on the market *vis a vis* the high cost of farm inputs, including labour. Further, the imposition of a 20% deposit that should be paid before one gets fertilizer on loan limits the small farmers' access to these farm inputs. The non-use of fertilizer and the use of local seeds because of the inability to purchase fertilizer and improved seeds is therefore not uncommon and generally results into poor yields as has been demonstrated in this study.

From the results presented above, it can also be seen that not many people apply fertilizer to their maize fields. The little fertilizer that they get is mainly used in the cultivation of tobacco. In some cases, the amount of land dedicated to the growing of tobacco is much bigger than that dedicated to the cultivation of maize. Though maize is the Malawi's staple food crop, it can be seen that a lot of time and resources are dedicated to the growing of tobacco and not maize. Though it has been argued that the money

realized from the sale of tobacco can at a later stage be used to buy maize/food, this is never realised because at the time tobacco is being sold, people generally also have maize as this happens soon after harvest. Hence, maize is not a priority during the time tobacco is being sold and as a result money from tobacco sales is used to purchase other household requirements. By the time maize runs out, most of the smallholder farmers have also run out of money from tobacco sales.

Before the 1990s, there were a lot of restrictions on the growing of tobacco. The existence of the Special Crops Act prohibited smallholder farmers from growing high value cash crops such as tobacco and it was only the estate sector which was allowed to grow tobacco. Even for estates, the volume of burley tobacco production was very much restricted and controlled through the issuing of licences and quotas. This strategy was introduced as an attempt to stabilize widely fluctuating tobacco prices. It has been argued that the restriction was somehow beneficial because at the time, what Tsoka and Konyani term *formal* employment of children, was non-existent as adult labour was in abundance (Tsoka and Konyani 2003). However, as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes introduced in Malawi in 1981, a number of reforms in the agricultural sector were introduced. The key reforms have included the phased removal of fertilizer and other farm input subsidies and the easing of restrictions on the production of certain export crops, most notably tobacco. This, in general, gave opportunities to the smallholder farmers to participate in tobacco production. These reforms led to a substantial increase in the production of tobacco as well as private sector participation in the marketing of agricultural produce. The liberalization of burley tobacco growing generated around US\$ 185 million of revenues for the rural sector (Government of Malawi, 2002). It can therefore be envisaged that these reforms led to the alleviation of rural poverty by increasing the revenues of the rural poor. While this was indeed useful, it can also be argued that the liberalization of tobacco somehow freed adult labour who opted to grow their own tobacco other than being tenants. This put a lot of pressure on estates such that the “*opportunity*” arose to employ children (Tsoka and Konyani 2003).

In fact, it has been argued in certain circles that the Special Crops Act which prohibited the smallholder farmers from growing cash crops

such as tobacco was not all that good as the legislation restricted them from growing what was one of the most lucrative crops. Johnson argues further that as a result of that policy more land was transferred from customary tenancy to freehold tenancy thereby reducing the size of land holding for the smallholder farmers. Since tobacco growing was lucrative, the legislation also denied them the ability to provide gainful employment thus forcing many to work on tobacco estates for very low wages instead of growing tobacco on their own and getting higher returns. From these arguments, as put forward by the Johnson, it can be discerned that allowing farmers to participate in the growing of tobacco would have increased their incomes with which they could have been able to purchase food (see Johnson, 1996). However, from the results of this study, it can be seen that while there might be adequate incomes from tobacco growing, at the end of the day, the money is used to purchase other items and not maize and the fact that the liberalisation of tobacco has not necessarily resulted into food self-sufficiency in Malawian communities. This, as we have argued earlier and as Evans also argues, is because the majority of households that grow barley tobacco do not retain their sales income until later in the year when maize supplies have run out (Evans 1997).

It can be argued that initially, before the liberalization of tobacco, smallholder farmers concentrated on the production of food crops, especially maize. The meagre resources that they had at their disposal, for example land, fertilizer, money, labour etc was dedicated to the growing of maize. At the time, smallholder farmers sold their excess maize to the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC), which could in turn sell the maize to these farmers in times of hunger at *affordable* prices. This study has shown however that while indeed the liberalization of tobacco led to increased incomes for the rural poor, on the other hand it has also drawn the smallholder farmers' attention away from concentrating on maize/food production, consequently leading to lower maize yields as a lot of resources are used in the production of tobacco, thereby compromising issues of food security. In the same vein, Jaffee argues that on smallholder farms, the planting of tobacco results in reduced plantings of maize and that among the farmers in the lowest tercile of landholdings, tobacco plantings appear to have come at the expense of hybrid maize (Jaffee 1997).

At the national level, government policy recognizes the vulnerability of the national food security due to the fact that maize production is dependent on good rains and other climatic conditions. In this context, government's food security policy therefore promotes the production of alternative food crops and the participation of the private sector in the movement of food crops to deficit areas. It seems that the promotion of alternative food crops has not really been successful as exemplified by the fact that up to now there is still very high dependent on maize as a major food crop.

As it has been argued above, the liberalization of tobacco led to increased incomes for the rural poor but at the same time, it has drawn farmers away from concentrating on food production. According to head teachers of the schools visited during the study, a lot of school pupils do not go to school between January and February of each year. This is because each year substantial numbers of smallholder farmers experience hunger at this time of the year because their maize stocks have been used up. Children do not therefore go to school because they assist their parents doing *ganyus* so that they can get food for the household. Teachers pointed out that while this happens year after year, sometimes it goes unnoticed because some families have food, school enrolment does not drop much and schools remain open. The 2001/2002 hunger was, however, widespread and school enrolment plummeted to very low levels because most school pupils went in search for *ganyus* or they helped their parents do *ganyus* to get food for their households. A lot of children therefore spent their time working and because of low or non-attendance, some schools were even closed during the critical hunger months (See also Munthali, 2003 for similar results).

While indeed the occurrence of hunger, the lack of clothes and school materials etc may force children to engage in child labour, one other thing that should be considered is that tobacco growing needs very intensive labour. The liberalization of tobacco, therefore, led to a substantial increase in the demand for casual agricultural labour (Evans 1997), including child labour.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The major objective of this study was to determine the impact of the hunger crisis on child labour and education and analyse the implications of liberalisation of tobacco growing for food security and child labour. This study has shown that a variety of crops are grown in Kasungu and Mchinji and these include maize, tobacco, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and Soya beans. Agricultural inputs, fertilizer and improved seeds are very expensive and beyond the reach of many ordinary Malawians. While there are some who use improved seeds and fertilizer, the majority of the people interviewed do not use these inputs in maize production and, if they have these inputs, they would rather use them in the production of tobacco. The reasoning is that once people produce a lot of tobacco, then they will have money which they can use to buy food. This does not usually happen as food is not a problem really during the sale of tobacco. In addition to this, most of the inputs that are used in tobacco production by the majority of smallholders are obtained on loan, hence they have to ensure that tobacco is cared for properly so that they can be able to pay the loan after tobacco sales. As has been demonstrated in the study, it seems that people pay a lot of attention to the growing of tobacco at the expense of maize production. This, as has been argued, is one of the factors that contributes to low maize yields, hence food shortages.

While the lack of fertilizer and improved seeds constituted one of the factors that contributed to the 2002 hunger crisis, informants in this study also said that the poor harvests of the 1999/2000 growing season, inadequate or too much rains, theft of maize from the maize fields and small landholding sizes also contributed as much. According to informants, the low yields of 2000 that some farmers realized meant that maize could not last to the 2001 harvest, hence such people had to spend most of their time doing *ganyus* in order to find food for their families. They did not have the time to work in their own gardens. As has been discussed in this report, the same reasons were also responsible for the poor harvests of the 2000/2001 growing season. Households used a number of coping strategies to deal with the hunger crisis including doing *ganyus* during which they were paid in cash or kind (mainly food), begging for money or food stuffs, eating non-traditional foods such as banana tubers, eating less or not eating

at all, food transfers from friends and relatives and bartering items for food or selling household goods, among other strategies. One concern by respondents in this study was that even though they were involved in doing *ganyus*, the pay was not all that adequate. The same thing applied to the bartering of household items where the sellers did not get as much money for their goods.

As has been discussed in this report, the 2002 hunger crisis impacted negatively on the lives of many Malawians especially on children. Because of the lack of food and not eating for many days, children became very weak, hence they could not attend school some of the older children absented themselves or were withdrawn from school because they had to help their parents to do *ganyus* so that they could find food. This has been demonstrated by the low school attendance rates during the hunger crisis. Most of the children interviewed said that working was not really their priority at the present time. They preferred to go to school so that they can get a good job in future and be in a position to care and support their parents. However, children may fail to pursue schooling because of poverty prevailing in their households. The failure by their parents to pay school fees, buy writing materials and good clothes are some of the factors that make children not to continue with school. More importantly and as has been demonstrated in this report, the occurrence of shocks such as hunger crises disrupts children's attendance in school and hence their performance. These children need to be kept in school despite the occurrence of crises such as famine.

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are therefore made in order to address the problem of child labour in Malawi even in the face of major shocks such as the hunger crisis that Malawi experienced in 2001/2002.

### **6.1 Creating awareness about the effects of child labour on child development**

In this report, a number of issues have been discussed, including the impact of child labour on the children's health and wellbeing as well as education. The exposure of children to long working hours and hazardous working environments has a very negative impact on the children's health, which as we have discussed, also impacts negatively on their education. Education is one of the key factors that can uplift people out of poverty, a

major cause of child labour. The health of the children, who are future leaders of Malawi, needs to be safeguarded and their education assured.

We also have to take cognizance of the Laws of Malawi, for example the Employment Act which among other things prohibits the employment or working of children under the age of 14 in any public or private agricultural, industrial or non-industrial undertaking or any branch of such undertaking. The Act also prohibits the employment of young persons between the ages of 14 and 18 in hazardous work situations considered to be harmful to the health, safety, education or development of such a person (See Kambuto, 2001).

While the above are the impacts of child labour and some of the legal provisions against the practice of child labour, it should not be taken for granted that parents, employers and the children themselves are aware of these issues. One of the challenges for the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and its stakeholders is to raise people's awareness about child labour and related issues. Since the worst forms of child labour are very prevalent in tobacco, tea and other estates, child labour awareness programmes can start in districts where these crops are predominantly grown, for example Kasungu and Mchinji. Awareness programmes should involve visiting owners of estates and other employers, primary schools and communities and explaining to them the dangers of child labour, the existing legislation against child labour and the punishment that is supposed to be meted out to those employers who breach this legislation. In addition to these visits, workshops and seminars can be conducted for employers, teachers and community leaders (e.g. traditional, political and religious leaders) during which issues of child labour could be discussed. Such workshops should be participatory in nature and participants should be encouraged to give their opinions on how best child labour could be addressed. Compulsory education should also be introduced as it is key to poverty alleviation.

## **6.2 Monitoring and enforcement of legislation against child labour**

Kooijmans has argued that legislative commitments require monitoring and enforcement measures in order to ensure that child labour, particularly in its extreme forms, is abolished (Kooijmans 1998). At national level there has been considerable action to legislate against child

labour (James 2002). For example the enactment of the new Employment Act, the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 138 on minimum wage and Convention No. 182 on worst forms of child labour and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While these legal instruments exist, concern has also been raised about the lack of implementation. The Malawi Human Rights Commission says that labour inspections are generally not carried out in places of employment as stipulated in the Employment Act due to reasons such as lack of transport, inadequate funding and the limited laws set up by the Labour Act (Malawi Human Rights Commission 2002).

For child labour to be eliminated there is need for effective monitoring and enforcement of the legislation against child labour. This can only be done if there is adequate and properly trained personnel in the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training on child labour and related issues and the availability of transport needed to inspect workplaces outside the major cities. One of the biggest challenges for the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and its stakeholders would therefore be to assess the existing human resource and infrastructure capacities and improve on them accordingly.

### **6.3 Introduction of stiffer penalties for perpetrators of child labour**

The major problem with the current legislation against child labour is that the penalties/punishment for the breach of this legislation are not all that serious. Because of lack of effective monitoring, though there are many cases of child labour, and in some cases in its worst forms, there have not been many cases (if at all there have been any such cases) in which employers have been brought to the court to answer charges of practicing child labour. The establishment of an effective monitoring system would in a way ensure that perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice. The metting out of serious penalties to these perpetrators and the publication of such cases in both the print and electronic media would serve as a lesson to other such perpetrators and with time because of the heavy punishments given, child labour would be eliminated. Though it is a long process, there is however a need to revise the legislation, particularly the penalties involved in order to deter people who would otherwise have employed children. The Ministry of Labour and its stakeholders should therefore

initiate the process of revising the legislation so that the practice of child labour should attract higher fines than is currently the case.

#### **6.4 Addressing the factors that contribute to children withdrawing from school**

A number of reasons have been given in this report as to why children work instead of going to school. These factors include the lack of good clothes, lack of writing materials such as notebooks and pens etc. As was shown by the 2001/2002 famine, the lack of food in the household forces children to withdraw from school as they cannot be able to learn without eating. The promotion of the abolishment of child labour cannot therefore be successfully implemented if these issues are not properly addressed. Poverty seems to be the overall cause for child labour. Agriculture is key to poverty alleviation. In this sector emphasis should be on implementing interventions such as availability of inputs, the use of improved farming technologies, access to credit etc. In this paper, participants in FGDs and key informants stated that some of the most important barriers to cultivating enough maize were lack of fertilizer and improved maize seeds. They said that these are expensive hence they cannot afford to purchase them. If they had access to credit, they would be in a position to harvest adequate maize as well as tobacco since they would use improved seeds and fertilizer. The problem of hunger and consequently poverty would be addressed and since there are alternatives, working children would easily be withdrawn and put in school.

We should realize that, as James (2002) argues, the actions against child labour as outlined above should also ensure that household incomes are safeguarded and that children should have access to quality education. This could be done through the establishment of credit schemes and making these accessible and providing or funding education initiatives.

#### **6.5 School feeding**

It has been argued in this study that the major reason for the withdrawal of children from school was the occurrence of hunger. In Mchinji, there was one school which provided food for the school pupils during the hunger period. One of the Primary Education Advisers in Mchinji mentioned that most of the pupils run away from their respective

schools and started attending the school where food was being given to the school pupils. Other schools around this school experienced low school pupil turn-out as most pupils decided to go to the school which was providing food. As we have seen earlier, in Kasungu, the Catholic Church also fed children who then attended school. In schools, where food was being provided to school pupils, attendance rates were quite high. It is therefore important that the international donor community, NGOs and Government should provide food to school children during food crises such as the one experienced in 2001/2002 as this would help retain children during such crises.

### **6.6 Provision of school materials**

The lack of school materials such as notebooks, pencils and pens etc was cited as one of the major reasons for absenteeism in schools. The lack of these school materials forces children to absent themselves from school. When this happens they have to go and work in order to get some money to buy whatever is required at school. It may therefore be a good idea if development programs can be providing writing materials for school pupils as this would motivate them to attend school. Some of these initiatives are currently being done in certain circles. For example, the Chisomo Children Club in Blantyre promotes children's access to education by supporting children through making visits to families and schools, providing uniforms and school materials and supplementing their formal education with literacy and life skills (James 2002). Such good initiatives can be emulated by other programmes.

### **6.7 Introduction of irrigation farming**

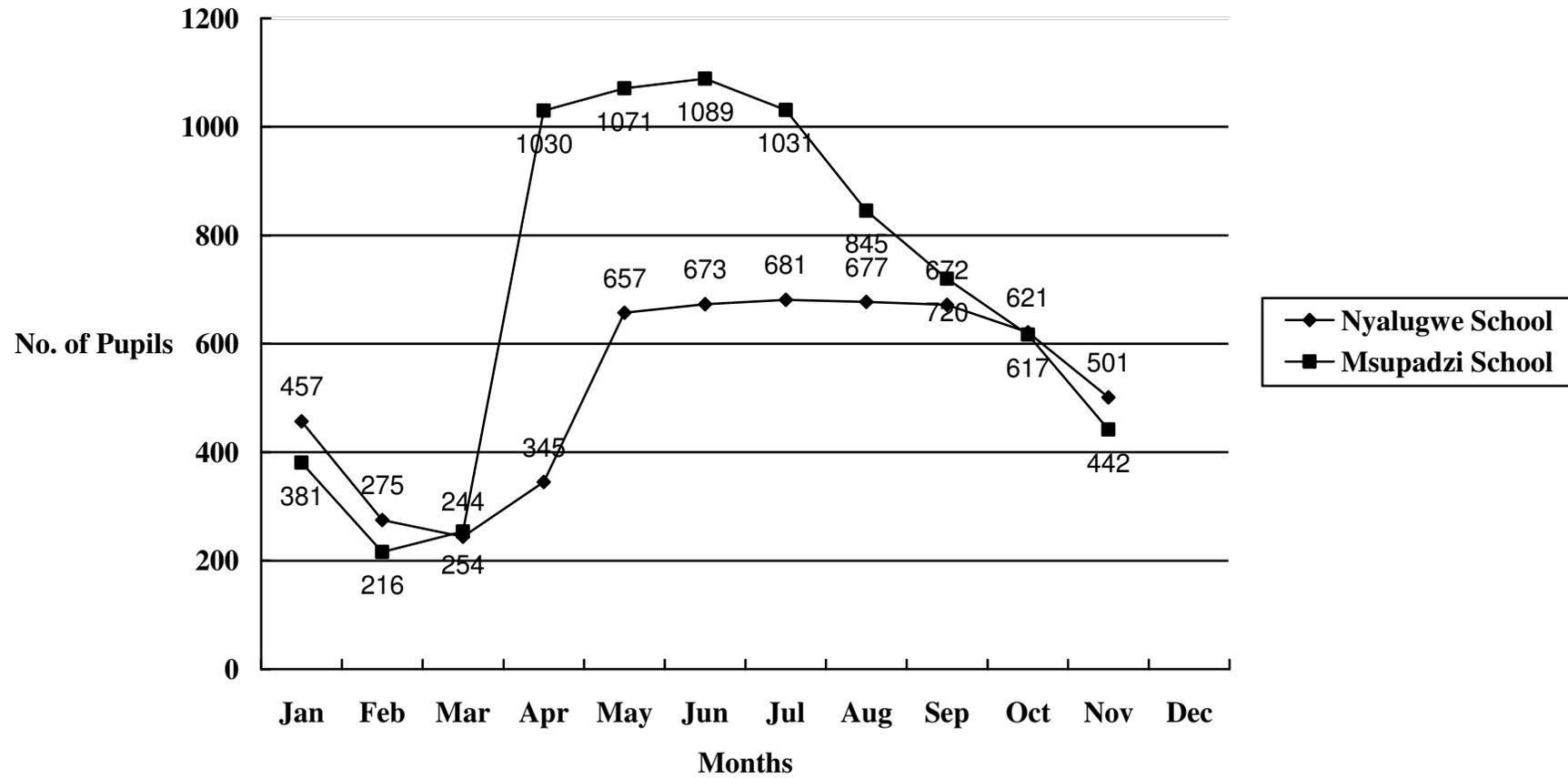
Malawi has huge water resources which as of now are not being utilised effectively. Some informants during the field survey suggested that it would be useful to introduce irrigation farming in the respective communities so that they should not only depend on availability of rains. This suggestion can be followed up so that indeed irrigation farming is introduced. Government has been trying to encourage people to start irrigation farming, but up to now, there isn't much that has been done. The IPEC program can therefore enter into dialogue with the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation so as to find ways of how best irrigation farming

can be introduced in Malawi. It may be assumed that the introduction of irrigation farming would ensure the availability of food and children would therefore attend school since food is available. One way of approaching this would be to provide irrigation pumps to selected farming families.

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**Appendix 1: School attendance January - December 2002**



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## ENDNOTE

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<sup>1</sup> For example in Malawi the Employment Act of 2000 has set the minimum age for employment at 14 years, hence the employment of children under the age of 14 years is an offence in the Laws of Malawi.