The provision and financing of care work, policies and interventions to reduce and redistribute it, and implications for children’s wellbeing: country examples from Sub-Saharan Africa
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The case of Malawi

At national level, the country has several policies and legal instruments and frameworks related to the welfare of children. These include the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act 2010, the Employment Act 2000, the National Code of Conduct on Child Labour 2004, and the National Policy on Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children.

However, good policy instruments are rarely translated into good practice on the ground. Even enforcers such as police, child protection officers and social welfare officers are hampered by lack of resources, lack of capacity, widespread corruption,

The regional case: Sub-Saharan Africa
Challenges, including poverty and impacts of HIV/AIDS, poor health and social care, lack of alternative care provision beyond immediate family members, mean there are no or few alternatives for caregiving children.

- Possible interventions are to improve access to or support school enrolment and attendance for caregiving children, for instance through bursaries; to improve the targeting of social cash transfers to households with caregiving children, including child-, adolescent- and grandparent-headed households;
- Children living with grandparents are often co-dependent, with reciprocal care-giving relations in different ways, for instance the child washes dishes and fetches water while the grandparent knows which plants are good to forage, and provides moral guidance;
- Cultural norms and economic imperatives mean caregiving work by children is invisible in plain sight, largely unrecognised, unacknowledged, unmeasured but it is NOT uncommon.

Example of a Country Intervention from South Africa: booklet (2014?) ‘Guidelines for Acceptable Household Chores’ published by Department of Labour and the ILO Child Labour Programme of Action

Key area for research
- What are children’s views?

See for instance the international campaign “It’s time to talk – Children’s Views on Children’s Work”

Challenges for research, policy & intervention
- How to be accountable to children?
- How to ensure children’s participation?
- How to uphold children’s rights?

Challenges for Policy/Intervention
How to protect children from exploitative and harmful work at the same time ensuring that positive/beneficial opportunities for work is not removed?

How to ensure policies (e.g. national laws and regulations) address root causes of harmful child work?

How to ensure policies (e.g. national laws and regulations) are not inherently punitive, and thus inadvertently harm the children (and their families) they intend to protect?

Some key academic researchers on children’s unpaid care work in sub-Saharan Africa:

- Dr Ruth Evans (University of Reading)
- Dr Morten Skovdal (London School of Economics?)
- Prof Lucie Cluver (University of Oxford)
- Prof Michael Bourdillon (University of Zimbabwe) e.g. Bourdillon, M et al (2010) Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work Rutgers University Press.


My own published research on unpaid work by children in sub-Saharan Africa:

Hajdu, F; Ansell, N; van Blerk, L; Robson, E 2013 ‘Rural young people’s opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in globalised southern Africa: The limitations of targeting policies’ International Development Planning Review 35(2) 155-174. DOI:10.3828/idpr.2013.11


Porter, G; Hampshire, K; Abane, A; Munthali, A; Robson, E; Mashiri, M; Tanle, A; Maponya, G; Dube, S 2012 Child porterage and Africa’s transport gap: evidence from Ghana, Malawi and South Africa’ World Development 40(10) 2136-2154. DOI 10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.004


Hajdu, F; Ansell, N; van Blerk, L; Chipeta, L 2011 ‘Income generating activities for young people in southern Africa: Exploring AIDS and other constraints’ Geographical Journal 177(3) 251-263. DOI 10.1111/j.1475-4959.2010.00381.x


