



MIGRATION OF CHILDREN FROM 7 TO 17 YEARS TO WORK IN AGRICULTURAL PLANTATIONS IN THE DIVISIONS OF MENOUA AND BAMBOUTOUS (WEST REGION OF CAMEROON): MINORS IN SEARCH OF THEIR WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The advent of crisis in the 1990s, marked the fall in the prices of cash crops and the disengagement of the State from major rural projects. This led to an increase in paid agricultural work in divisions of the West Region of Cameroon. Based on the dependence on food crops and market gardening cultivations, children were recruited from densely populated villages to act as the main labour force in this sector. This work is based on a study of five markets in the divisions of Menoua and Bamboutous. The methods of data collection for this write up includes; direct observations, interviews with key actors, and questionnaire administration and surveys of 456 children within the study area. This enabled us to explain the basis of this growing phenomenon of paid agricultural labour in rural areas. Underlying issues points to the pathways and risks these children are exposed to. The study shows that children aged between 7 and 17 years occupy 70% of the paid agricultural workforce. About 87% of the majority of the farmers are medium-sized producers from different Sub-Divisions with cultivable lands ranging from 500 square metres to 1 hectare. Their main activity is farming and they do not have enough physical strength to devote to it, hence the inescapability of paid agricultural labour, which covers 80% of the work on their farms. Working conditions depend on the type of negotiation between the farmer and the farm worker and the arrangements are verbal and based on mutual trust. Finally, paid agricultural work contributes to the development of arable land, the improvement of workers' living conditions and food security. However, without any form of social protection, it compromises the education of the children who engage in it and exposes them to all forms of abuse, the consequences of which are sometimes irreversible, hence the need for regulation from the family unit to public development policies.

Keywords: Migration, Paid Agricultural Work, West Cameroon, Minors, Exposed, Welfare

INTRODUCTION

The world's agricultural labour force is estimated at more than 1.1 billion people today. This figure represents half of the total economically active population and corresponds to 9% of workers in industrialized countries and almost 60% of workers in Developing Countries (Manning *et al.*). Within the agricultural sector in order to carry out certain tasks and also to meet up the deficits, farm managers resort to external labour in several forms: invitation, mutual

aid and remuneration for those who sell their labour power in exchange for payment (Mbetid-Bessane and Gafsis, 2002). Agricultural labour is ultimately a socio-economic phenomenon that takes different forms throughout the world: agricultural wage labour, temporary workers in the case of employees of family farms or agricultural enterprises, and temporary workers in the case of paid work.

In Cameroon, agriculture employs more than 60% of the total active population and is the main source of income for rural people (Amougou, 2006). Agricultural work in Africa is largely carried out by family labour. In the West Region of Cameroon, paid work in agriculture is becoming more and more widespread. This is remarkable in the different women and men's associations. This is visible along certain major roads in search of agricultural work to be done. In some divisions of the study region, spontaneous labour markets are being created, whereas one would have expected that the rural people concerned would invest in their own farms in order to improve their living conditions. The place of children is also remarkable in these agricultural labour markets. The increase demands for labour, makes the issue of child labour to be in the spotlight. While Law N°92/007 on the labour code, in its article 2 on the prohibition of child labour, sets the minimum working age at 14 years, 41% of children aged between 5 and 17 years work and nearly 8 out of 10 children aged between 5 and 17 years who are obliged to work are in this situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An analysis of paid child labour in agriculture is carried out and has at least a double interest. Firstly, as a social phenomenon, it is necessary to analyse the reasons why children are involved in this phenomenon, to highlight the recruitment criteria and the issues at stake for their social well-being. Secondly, it is a question of analysing the working conditions as well as the implication of such an activity in a rural welfare perspective. The paid agricultural work of children of interest to this study is marked by roadside gatherings of people offering their services. This phenomenon is very much in evidence in the Menoua and Bamboutous divisions, which were chosen as our study area. The first step was to list the main assembly points (agricultural labour markets). Indeed, five markets. The resource persons were selected from the location of the five agricultural labour markets, three (03) persons per market, based on their seniority in the area and the knowledge they had of the area.

Markets were identified throughout the study area. Surveys were carried out in four of these markets, namely: the market at the Balessing crossroads, the market at the Boulangerie Bafounda crossroads, the market at the Femock crossroads and the market at the Bagang Protestant mission crossroads. In these markets, 456 working children and 100 employers (farmers) were surveyed randomly and by means of a questionnaire. In addition, interviews with resource persons and direct observations were carried out to obtain first-hand information for the study.

Obtained results were subject to analysis and represented using different techniques such as bar charts, pie charts, histograms etc. The content analysis preceded the synthesis and triangulation of all the qualitative information collected. Documentary analysis was also carried out to boost the quality of the results obtained. After data collection, the Statistical Packaged Software for Social Science (SPSS) was used for data analysis. In addition, Microsoft Excel was used for data

analysis and graphing. Adopted methodology was tailored to suit the content and context of the research.

Obtained results from figure 1 revealed that, the monthly income of household head varies between 30,000 and 50,000 FCFA. That is, 34% of children of these households have this monthly amount in the Bamboutos and 46% of children in Menoua.

RESULTS

Results 1. Conditions for the emergence of paid agricultural work by children in the divisions of Menoua and Bamboutos

1.1 Reasons for children to migrate for paid agricultural work

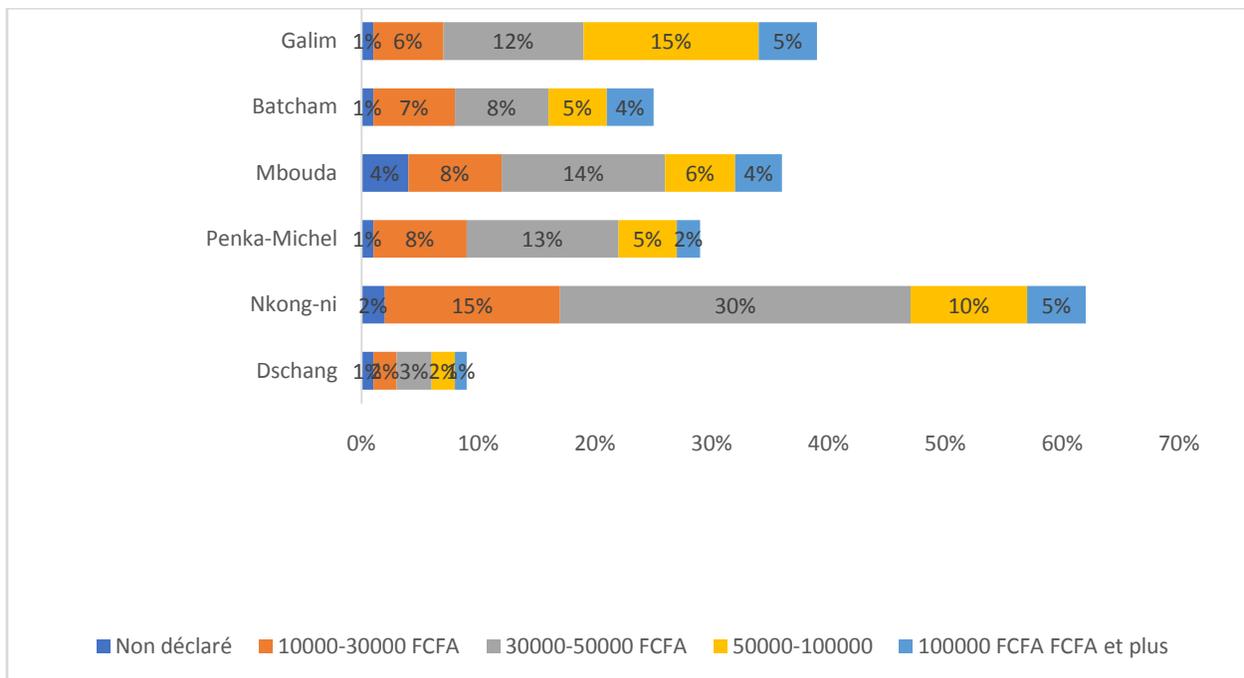


Figure 1: Monthly income of household heads and its influence on child migration for agricultural work

The income of household heads is one of the main reasons why children migrate for paid agricultural work (Figure 1). This suggests that a head of household with a daily income of this amount may only have 1650 FCFA at his disposal. This amount is low and does not allow him to take care of his whole family. It follows that there are advantages to having children work. Households in financial difficulties cannot do without the economic contribution of their children. So many children are encouraged to work in agriculture to help their families. To meet the daily needs of the household, they are therefore found in various agricultural labour markets to remedy their living conditions (BOUTIN, 2012).

1.2 Mapping of agricultural labour markets

We were able to identify five agricultural labour markets in Menoua and Bamboutos (Table 1)

Tableau 1: Labour markets in the Menoua and Bamboutos divisions

Divisions	Sub-Divisions	Labour markets
Bamboutos	Mbouda	plantain market Bafounda
		Carrefour bakery Bafounda
		Bandjuinsi (Bamendjo)
		Bakatou (Bamendjo)
	Batcham	Catholic Mission Bangang
		Mission protestante Bangang
Menoua	Penka-Michel	Carrefour Balessing
		Pougong
	Nkong-Ni	Femock
		Bafou pastoral

Although farmers may ask children to work in distant areas, children prefer to work in nearby areas (Table 2)

Tableau 2 : Preferred destinations of workers by surveyed markets

Agricultural Labour Markets	Worker Preference Zone
Carrefour Balessing	Bansoa, Balessing, Baleveng, Bamendou, Bamegong, Baloum, ...
Carrefour Bafounda	Bafounda, Bamengoum, Bamendjo, Ngouaya, Sacdah, Bamendjinda, ...
Femock	Femock, Bafou Pastoral
Carrefour Mission Protestante Bangang	Bangang, Nzindong, Djuititsa

This is common in the plots on the northern fringes of the western region, particularly in Galim and Foubot. It is therefore difficult for these young people to return the same day. They are employed on weekends and sometimes they even work beyond this period.

1.3. Some characteristics of agricultural labor markets

Agricultural labour markets in the study area are a function of the actors involved and the operating systems in place. There are two types of actors: people who sell their labour and farmers. However, the two types of actors are not the same, labour markets for their safety and also to reduce the distances they have to walk. Some workers can walk up to 30 kilometres to reach the plots (Balessing- Baloum, Bafounda- Sacdah). Some young people recruited in the central Bamileke region find themselves. However, child labourers are daily migrants who travel several kilometres (sometimes 5 to 7 km) before ending up in the labour markets. In addition, 68% of the young people surveyed revealed this.

While the majority of people using paid labour work small areas of land, ranging from 0.3 to 1 hectare on average, fallow land has virtually disappeared and only a few farmers adopt improved fallow, which consists of introducing leguminous plants into the plot to rest. On average, they

work 3 days a week on paid agricultural work. The frequency of work depends on several parameters, including school breaks, periods of intense agricultural activity and, above all, personal difficulties in daily life.

The majority of farmers (70%) improve their soils. Despite the fact that the use of fertilisers has become a key approach for them, some have opted in recent years to diversify their use of fertilisers, with a penchant for combining the two types (chemical and organic), to combine paid labour is used for almost all field activities, including clearing, ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, fertilising, spraying, harvesting and evacuating produce from the fields to the road. This workforce performs 70% of the agricultural tasks.

1.4. Negotiation in labor markets

Transactions in the agricultural labour markets start at 5.30 a.m. and end at 9 a.m. at the latest. The young people present their services using convincing arguments to be the first to be selected, but supply is often greater than demand, especially at weekends and during school breaks. This is done every time a stranger approach on foot or by car. These young people do not even wait for the vehicle to come to a complete stop before jumping in, and their services are only sold once inside. For the smaller ones, their older brothers testify to their work performance to convince the farmer present *“don't see him as small, he is used to working in the field, and is sometimes faster than us, you won't be disappointed if you choose him”*, these children crowd around him to boast about their services. You can often hear them shouting: *“We will work until 5pm... We are not lazy...we have our equipment...we will rest just for a few minutes during the day...we have our lunch...we are very fast...»*. Sometimes, old workers argue in defence of the younger ones. In cases where the physical strength of the smallest worker is limited, the argument of the cost of labour is raised by one of the parties: *“I'll go with him, but he'll be paid half price. If you agree, come with him”*, says a farmer with an air of leniency to show his good faith in wanting to help the smallest.

In some cases, the farmer is accosted by children on arrival who ask him what kind of operation or services he is need of. The farmer cannot talk to everyone at once, so he chooses two workers and gives them information about the location of his farm. They agree on the prices and the latter go and propose them to their colleagues who give their point of view. If it is favorable, the number of people desired by the farmer withdraws with him. During remuneration negotiations, two types of proposals are made in the agricultural labour markets, namely remuneration per working day and remuneration per task. It should be noted that negotiations for payment by task must take place on the plot in order to allow the worker to study all the relevant parameters (surface area and condition of the plot). Daily payment is popular with child workers and field findings revealed about 80%. There is a variation in preferences according to gender and age. Surveys show that boys aged between 14 and 17 years prefer piecework, believing that their labour power can earn them more time. The majority (90%) of young female workers prefer day labour arrangements. At most, the arrangements are verbal (Plate 1) and based on mutual trust, and do not take into account the weather conditions when it comes to remuneration per working day. Therefore, work should continue on a rainy day.

Plate 1 : Enlistment of children in labour markets



Source: Ngueking, March 2021



Source: Ngueking, March 2021

Photo A: Enlistment of child labourers

Photo B: Children ready for work

The cost of the working day varies according to several parameters

Table 3: Periodic variation in labor costs

	Periods of intense agricultural activity	Periods of low activity
School period	Rising labour costs	Stable labour costs
School holiday period	Stable labour costs	Lower labour costs

Source: Field survey, 2021

From table 3, periods of intense agricultural activity are considered to be those that require an abundance of labour. These are the periods at the beginning of the agricultural season with the preparation of plots and sowing, weeding and harvesting periods. These periods do not always coincide with the periods of availability. As a result, there is instability in labour costs, which follow the law of the market. This is why the daily cost of labour varies from 1500 FCFA to 2500 FCFA (Table 4).

Table 4: Labor costs per period and per farm task

	Average cost (FCFA)/ period	
	Period of labour scarcity	Period of labour abundance
Clearing, ploughing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting	2500	2000
sowing	2000	1500
Plant protection	150/sprayer	100/sprayer

Source: Fields survey, 2021

Some school-going youths are therefore seduced by the labour market offer and end up deserting schools for paid agricultural work.

Result 2. Conditions of children engaged in paid agricultural work

Paid agricultural work by children exposes them to many risks at all stages of their journey.

2.1. From home to market

In order to be in the labor markets at 5.30 am, the young people furthest away leave their homes at 4 am and sometimes earlier. Some of them travel more than 7 kilometers to reach the markets. The risk of aggression is high during the journey. The strategy adopted to avoid this risk is to travel in groups. In addition, the physical effort required for walking is quite considerable and they are exposed to cold, dust in the dry season, and hoe and/or rain in the rainy season. The risk of respiratory diseases including pneumonia, colds, coughs and injuries is high.

2.2. From markets to plots

Once in the labour market and after negotiation with the client, the young laborer have to follow the farmer to an unknown destination. The movement of the workers from the market to the farm and back is at the farmer's expense. When the plots are not far from the markets, the workers go there on foot. Otherwise, they are transported in various vehicles and under rather difficult conditions. Goods vehicles (cargo, pick-up trucks, dynas and trucks) are the most used because they are less expensive. Even though vehicles for transporting people are used, there is an overloading. These vehicles are in an excessive state of disrepair and the young people are crammed on top of them, seeing the trunks. These vehicles, most of which are in a dilapidated state, are sometimes converted to hold more luggage and people. The occupants are exposed to bad weather (wind, rain, dust, etc.) and to accidents, of which 10% of respondents were victims. With the poor state of the roads in the rainy season, the journeys are sometimes an obstacle course and when travellers do not simply dismount to cross the quagmires on foot, they are called upon to contribute by human traction for the vehicles to cross the quagmires. The transport conditions are therefore generally exhausting and affects the physical condition of the young people before they actually work in the plots (Plate 2).

Plate2: Transportation of young people enrolled for paid agricultural work



Source: Ngueking, Juillet 2021

Photo 2A: Transportation of young labourers



Source: Ngueking, Juillet 202

Photo 2B: Young labourers taking their work tools

2.3: Plot conditions

Work duration in the plots can last from one to several days. Longer stays are generally during harvest periods. Accommodation is either with the local inhabitants of the plots, with the facilities that this entails, or in the field huts where they are exposed to poor hygiene conditions, aggression and theft. To protect themselves from insecurity, they stay in groups, hence the promiscuity observed in the already dilapidated field huts (without doors, collapsed walls, stripped roofs), which are not maintained and are sometimes built of temporary materials. These huts are Animal hideouts in the absence of workers. When work is daily, the child is responsible for his or her own nutrition. Only 35% of children said that they received a meal from the farmer during the day.

It is when the workers stay more than one day in the plot that the farmer takes care of the nutrition. However, most of these children leave home without a meal. As a result, some farmers prefer to provide a meal to strengthen the physical condition of the workers in the afternoon. The main working materials are: the hoe, the machete and the sprayer. The hoe and machete are the responsibility of the worker and the sprayer is the responsibility of the farmer.

As regards working conditions, the work is difficult because of the rudimentary tools and the lack of adequate protective equipment for certain tasks such as plant protection treatments (Plate 3).

Plate 3: Children's poor equipment in crop



Ngueking, March 2021

Photo 3 A: Back view a child ready to start spraying without equipment



Ngueking, March 2021

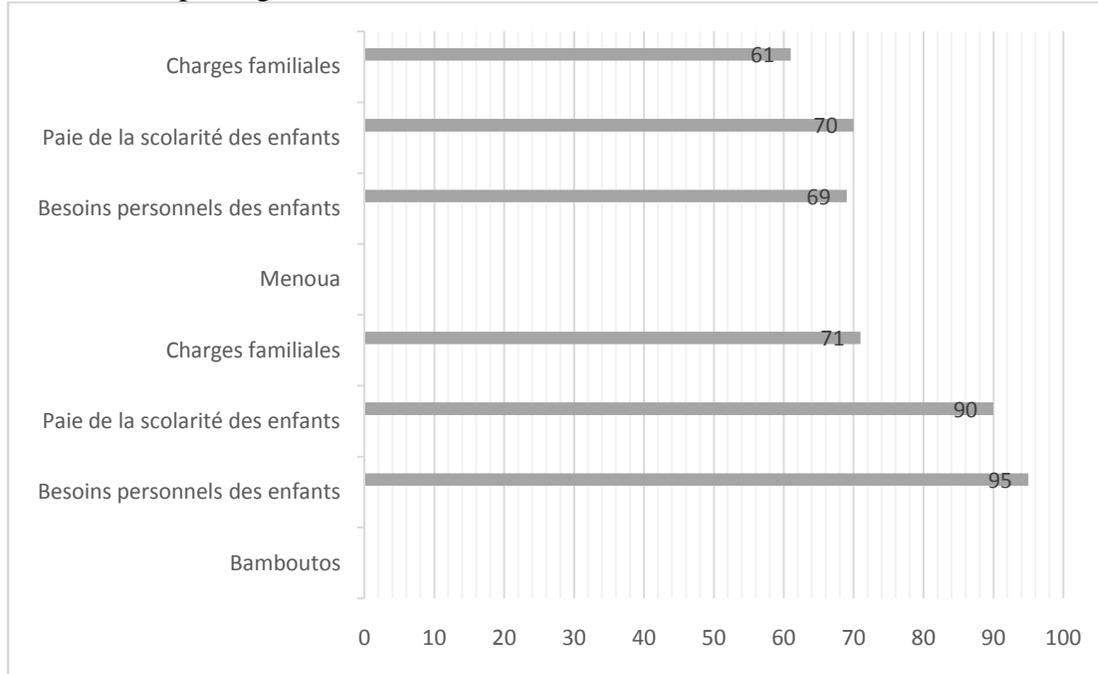
Photo 3B: Front view of a child spraying plants without equipment

Result 3. Impacts of agricultural work on children's welfare

3.1 Impact of paid agricultural work on children's lives

Paid agricultural work is a source of income for the children engaged in it. It produces a monthly income of 216,000 CFA francs for those who spend 2 days a week on it, they do this according

to the one-off worries they want to avoid. This figure (1) shows the main expenditure items of income from paid agricultural work.



Source: Fields survey, 2021

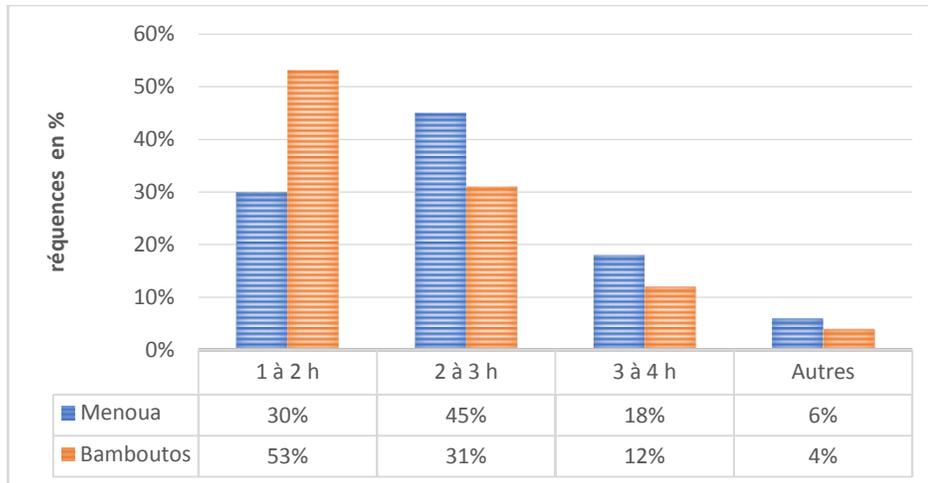
Figure 1: Destination of income from paid agricultural work

The figure 1 shows that the income earned by young children from paid agricultural work provides them with, in order of importance, school supplies, pocket money, payment of school fees, money for parties, clothing and, to a certain extent, a contribution to family expenses. One young person says that paid agricultural work is a way for him to afford what he needs to improve his living conditions, as his parents are always responsible for his school fees: "*I do the work for pocket money or to prepare for the holidays when the festive season comes*". Before returning to school, a young student is approached. Unfortunately, this period of work takes him away from school and compromises his academic performance.

3.2 Impact of paid agricultural work on children's school performance

Most of these young children are concerned about their education and work to obtain school supplies, back-to-school supplies and supplies needed during the school year. "When I am chased for board or books, I commit myself to work every day until I have the amount I need.

Paid agricultural work significantly affects school performance because of the organization of the work, the timetable plays an undeniable role in this organization and there is a mismatch between school work and agricultural work. The student's weekly timetable provides to spend 36 hours at school. If we add two days of paid work, he ends up working 54 hours per week, which is far above the hours assigned to different services in Cameroon, which average 40 hours per week per adult (TCHAKOUA, 2013). Children are overwhelmed with work because study and/or revision periods are almost non-existent, let alone the necessary rehearsal periods for some pupils, and it becomes impossible to perform academically (Figure 2)



Source: Fields surveys, 2021

Figure 2: the timetable for children's education after farming practice

From figure 2, 30% of children in Menoua and 53 % in Bamboutos allow 1 to 2 hours for study after school. And they do so regularly, especially during festive events. These absences from lessons, in addition to holding the pupil's school discipline in check by exposing him or her to exclusion, are detrimental to their performance because they are deprived of lessons. In addition, paid agricultural work leads many young people to drop out of school. Dropping out of school "refers to anyone who has left school for various reasons before graduating" (BETSOGO, 2012). Indeed, the majority of the pupils surveyed had already been permanently excluded because of the high number of hours of absence. In addition, they often receive temporary exclusions for the same reasons. Sometimes, having developed a taste for the pursuit of gain, some children begin to see no point in school. This leads to a lack of interest in school, which in turn leads them to desert schools. When children leave school, they lose their freedom to choose their future

3.3. Paid agricultural work and the risk of diversion children

Working children are characterised by a vulnerability sustained by the vital needs they face. They are therefore exposed to multiple forms of violence, including sexual exploitation defined as "any sexual act, attempt young girls are the most affected by this phenomenon. They very often give in willingly or forcibly to the sometimes very tempting offers of their employees in return for sexual activity. Young girls confide that once on the plots, some farmers abuse them by trying to rape them. To obtain a sexual act, comment or advance of a sexual nature, any act aimed at trafficking in a person's sexuality regardless of the relationship with the victim, in any context; including, but not limited to, home and work" (ILO, 2013). Granted, it is more painful to work all day than to offer yourself to the boss. This sexual abuse leads to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

DISCUSSIONS

Some of the girls claim to be opposed to this, while others are willing and have regular relationships with the operators. According to the latter, in addition to the financial favours that the employer. Several stakeholders, namely parents, farmers and public/private institutions, are concerned by this regulation and must intervene so that paid agricultural activity is less harmful

to the children involved. Parents must play a leading role. It is well known that working children are mostly from poor families where the responsibilities are left to the woman. From the age of 7, children assist their mothers on weekends and holidays in its 'pambe' activity at the expense of its revisions. However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2013) sets 18 years as the age of admission to any type of employment which, by its nature or the conditions in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardise their company or that of adult acquaintances. These adults therefore monitor and supervise the children throughout the course, and are ready to defend them against any form of abuse. These parents control the children's activity periods, ensuring that there is no (or minimal) interference with their studies. The health, safety or morality of adolescents. These children end up dropping out of school early, hence the under-schooling in this social segment. On the other hand, some parents are more conscientious and supervise their children's activities, rarely letting their offspring do paid agricultural work. Other parents, on the other hand, are irresponsible and do not exercise any parental control. The children are left to themselves. The worst of them exploit their children themselves by forcing them to go to work and then giving them the income. Parents must therefore assume their responsibility for the care of their children by providing them with the necessities for their development. In addition to, Farmers are also responsible for the harms of paid agricultural work done by children while they take proper care of their own children and provide for their schooling, they abuse other children whom they solicit for labour. They are responsible for not respecting working hours, sexual abuse of children, overexploitation of children's physical strength through the use of force, and other forms of violence. They must therefore become aware by humanising this work of which they are ultimately the main beneficiaries. Social services need to pay more attention to this social phenomenon in order to develop control strategies (ILO, 2015). They should also popularize the texts. Nevertheless, the public authorities must take action on this phenomenon, which has alarming consequences for the future of children. This already involves taking into account the contribution of paid agricultural work in the fight against poverty. Children's work with different stakeholders (parents, operators and children) to ensure that they are fully informed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Paid work in agriculture emanates from economic crisis and has negatively led to decline in the purchasing power households and the opening of small farms by workers from other sectors of activity. People who seek paid agricultural labour are mostly civil servants, traders, and farmers with farmlands from 500 square metres to 1 hectare.

Paid agricultural work is an activity carried out by poor children with no agricultural qualifications. Children aged between 7 and 17 make up 40% of agricultural workers. Paid agricultural work contributes to the development of arable land, to the improvement of workers' living conditions and to food security. It also contributes to covering the basic needs of the practitioners. However, under the current conditions, it is painful, dangerous and compromises the future of the children who practice it. They do not benefit from social protection and are not taken into account in the development policies of this sector of activity. Thus, in order to make this activity suitable for children, it would be wise for it to be structured and regulated so that they should be provided with better working conditions and social protection.

The following recommendations should be taken into account for a better supervision of children offering their services in agricultural work

- Raising awareness among parents, farmers and children themselves of the harmful consequences of agricultural work under current conditions for children
- Support for poor families in the development of income-generating activities (IGA) to increase their income to meet the needs of the children;
- Extension existing labour laws and the revision of national policies and legislation related to child labour;
- Reintegration of child labourers into the education system by providing them with psychological support;

It would be important to that paid work in agriculture, which contributes to the fight against poverty and unemployment, be structured and regulated.

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