

Surviving on the Margins: Experiences of cane cutters working at Triangle Sugar Estate in Chiredzi, Masvingo

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Abstract

Research on farm labour in post independent Zimbabwe has more often than not neglected the plight of the most vulnerable sections of this workforce. Such has been the case with sugarcane cutters in the Zimbabwean sugar industry. Thus, the fulcrum of this paper is to fill this knowledge gap by focussing in the lived experiences of cane cutters working for Triangle Sugar Estate in Chiredzi. Specific attention is given to the challenges facing these cane cutters and how they are responding to such challenges. The reasons behind engaging in cane cutting are also explored in this paper. Empirical findings in this paper highlights that cane cutters are facing a myriad of problems such as poor working and living conditions, misery wages as well as vulnerability to diseases. This paper argues that despite their vulnerable position cane cutters have not been passive victims of their challenges, but instead have devised a plethora of coping strategies to transcend these challenges. Of note is the fact that cane cutting in itself can be seen as a manifestation of coping strategy. Giddens' Structuration thesis is of paramount significance in understanding the coping strategies devised by cane cutters in dealing with a myriad of challenges they face. This ethnographic study is grounded in qualitative methodological orientation and employed a triangulation of data soliciting techniques.

Keywords: Cane Cutters, Farm Workers, Coping Strategies, Livelihood Diversity.

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Girls on the frontline: Gender differences in mathematics achievement in Manicaland province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Mathematics achievement has for some time been predominantly a male domain, with boys known to be superior to girls. This study sought to assess the magnitude of difference (if any) between boys and girls on mathematics achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests. A closer look was also paid at analyzing whether differences in mathematics are affected by location or level of education.

A quasi-experimental design was employed to gather data, with a sample of 18 706 participants. Participants were randomly selected resulting in 52% and 48% participants as males and females respectively. The results show a significant difference in the performance of boys and girls on standardized achievement tests with girls performing better than boys in mathematics ($t=-9.697$ significant at 1% confidence level and $t=-3.106$ significant at 5% confidence level at Primary and Secondary levels respectively). Analysis by grade levels indicates narrowing performance gaps between girls and boys from grades 4 to form 3. Results are almost similar across different levels of education and locations. Better scores were observed in urban areas than in rural areas. The better performance of girls when compared to boys is attributed to a shift in attitudes, with current views suggesting that girls can perform equally to boys in mathematics.

Keywords: Achievement, differences, gender, mathematics.

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Contestations surrounding contract farming in Rural Zimbabwe: A case of Mukosi Cotton Growers in Masvingo South

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Abstract

This study is based on the fieldwork conducted in the Mukosi Range, among the Mukosi cotton growers in Masvingo South. It argues against the orthodox conceptualization of contract farming as the panacea to the incessant production challenges bedevilling rural communities. Thus it seeks to unravel the micro-politics and contestations in the contract farming venture. In this regard the perceptions of villagers towards contract farming are juxtaposed with those of the contracting companies operating in this area. The enigma is that in spite of the much heralded virtues of contract farming as a catalyst for improving the strained rural livelihoods, the Mukosi cotton farmers' experiences reveals that the said farming practice far from being an antidote to the problems bedevilling such rural communities has actually degenerated into a battlefield where the local farmers and the private companies compete to position themselves in relation to the pricing system, culminating in a serious impasse that is relentlessly threatening to render contract farming enterprise obsolete. To salvage contract farming from the current doldrums, the concoction is to adopt an interface analysis that will help to reconcile the conflicting interests of the actors in question, simultaneously ensuring the sustainability of this farming programme. To meet the outlined objectives of this study the research was grounded in qualitative methodology and adopted unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and secondary sources of data as the main data soliciting techniques. Long's Actor Oriented Approach was used as the theoretical approach to understand and reconcile the different and conflicting Life-worlds of the social actors involved in contract farming.

Keywords: Contract farming, micro-politics, Contestations, conflict Life-worlds.

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Civil Society, New Farming Technologies and Acceptability by Local Communities in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Conservation Farming Project in Gokwe South District in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The ensuing study dwells on the micro politics embedded in the implementation of conservation farming as a new farming technology to ameliorate the catastrophic effects of incessant droughts as well as the threats posed by climate change in rural Zimbabwe, with particular focus on Gokwe South District. In addition to that it also seeks to elicit the local farmer's perceptions on conservation farming vis-a-vis those espoused by the exponents of the said farming enterprise. It reveals that instead of improving rural livelihoods, conservation farming has been plunged into a battlefield resulting in an ambivalent relationship between the actors involved. Such a ambivalent relationship is relentlessly impinging on the overall acceptability and sustainability of the programme in question despite the much projected merits associated with it in contemporary rural development circles. The paper goes on to argue that unless and until the Civil Society considers conservation farming as a political arena and the subsequent micro politics that emanate from such a political field, the goal of sustainable development will remain a pipeline dream. The panacea to this dilemma therefore rests in the desire to genuinely embrace the principle4s of "Development from below" or adopting a people centred developmental approach which considers beneficiaries of conservation farming as the real owners of the programme for Sustainable Agriculture. The study was grounded in purely qualitative research and adopted unstructured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and the use of secondary sources of data as the main data soliciting techniques for this study. Norman Long's Actor Oriented Approach was utilised as the analytical, framework for the findings made in this study.

Keywords: Conservation farming, micro-politics, acceptability, Sustainable Development and Sustainable Agriculture.

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Globalisation and Development Inequalities: Challenges and Prospects for “A just Development”

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Abstract

The paper explores the ramifications of globalisation as a process, ideology and a theory on the embryonic and apparent discrepancies in development status between and within nations. It illuminated on the socio-economic and political forces behind globalisation and the implications of that process on access to resources, exercise of political and economic power in international governance and the resultant asymmetrical relations between nations in the global village. This endeavour was enabled through a multi-perspective approach in which various macro and micro sociological theories defined the lens for analysis some which entails the New International Division of Labour theory and the World Systems’ theory as they were intrinsically a function and agent for the materialisation of the process of globalisation. Methodologically, the paper adopted the qualitative comparative case study approach which perfectly ushered the opportunity to juxtapose intricacies of different events and outcomes of the lopsided international relations on development between nations in the global village. The paper maintained the notion that, globalisation was an ideological apparatus meant to mystify and veil the realities of exploitation dictated by the new world system yet positively skewed to the Industrialised World at the peril of the Developing Countries.

Keywords: Globalisation, Ideology, Development, Exploitation, Inequalities

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Double Jeopardy: The Psycho-Educational Effects of Absent Parenting on Children with Specific Learning Disabilities: A Case of Masvingo Urban, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The economic hardships which have plagued Zimbabwe have led to the movement of the adult population who are largely parents to the Diaspora. This trend has created 'absent parents'. This study sought to explore the psychological and educational effects of this absent parenting on children with specific learning disabilities left behind. The researcher used a quasi-experimental design to collect data, specifically; the researcher administered a standardized achievement test, the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT LEVEL 1) to twenty four children with learning disabilities under controlled conditions. Twelve (12) of the learners had absent parents and twelve (12) were staying with both parents. Questionnaires and School based tests were used to complement the data from the standardized test results. The questionnaires were administered to professionals dealing with the children who include educational psychologists and specialist teachers. SPSS version 11.5 was used to analyse data. School based test results were analysed over a period of one year, from April 2011, when most children with absent parents were still living with their parents and March 2012 when the parents had since left for the Diaspora. Results revealed that children physically staying with both parents performed significantly better on the standardized test than those staying with one or no parents, ($t=3.448$, significance value of .005). All children with absent parents witnessed an average 27.53% decline in performance after the departure of their biological parents. This study also revealed that learning disabled children with absent parents exhibited a decline in self esteem which could also explain their poor academic performance. This study recommends that, where possible, parents should move with their children especially those with learning disabilities when they decide to migrate. Future researchers should consider exploring the effects of absent parenting on older children.

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The cost of Immobility: Brain drain and educational outcomes of children in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The break neck speed at which brain drain is going in Zimbabwe requires to be monitored so as to establish the ripple effects it poses on the socio-economic and political circles. The aim of the present study was to unearth the ramifications of brain drain on the educational performance of children. To carry out the study, a quantitative research methodology was adopted. The researchers used a QuasiExperimental design which involved selecting groups upon which a variable is tested. A standardized test, Wide Range Achievement Test was used as the main data collection tool. The study noted that emigration by one or both parents has adverse effects on the educational outcome of children left behind. Children left behind by Diaspora parents are confronted with a plethora of educational challenges and that absence of parents makes their educational performance to deteriorate. The study further noted that the degree, density and magnitude of the effects are highly positively correlated to the sex of the absent parent. The absence of both parents causes more adverse effects than the absence of one parent. Among the recommendations proffered was the need for parents to emigrate together with their children since the educational curriculum in the world is fast becoming harmonized because of globalization. The government also needs to craft laws and regulations that hinder parents from emigrating leaving their children in the custody of their relatives.

Keywords: Brain drain, educational outcomes, children and Diaspora parents.

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