

**CHILD LABOUR IN TOBACCO PRODUCTION:
CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND TOBACCO
COMPANIES' CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
INITIATIVES**

by

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ABSTRACT

An estimated 78,000 children are working under hazardous conditions in tobacco production in Malawi. Without access to protective clothing or cleaning facilities, these children are suffering from the effects of pesticides, fertilizers and nicotine whilst working on tobacco farms for 12 hours a day. Two of the main multinational tobacco companies with production interests in Malawi, British American Tobacco and Philip Morris International, have responded to the public demand for ethical operating standards by developing business codes and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. This project, comparing the two tobacco companies' CSR initiatives with the lived experience of former child labourers in Malawi, shows that tobacco companies' statements of compliance with universal standards on health and safety and statements addressing the child labour issue have not translated into better child health outcomes.

Keywords: Child labour; tobacco production; Malawi; corporate social responsibility; British American Tobacco; Philip Morris International

To the children in Malawi. You are my motivation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I am a child and I thought by myself alone that there is a lot of poverty in this home and so I made a decision to look for work”
(Plan Malawi, 2009, p 26).

Every day, thousands of children in Malawi are risking their health to provide consumers with a product that represents the most common preventable cause of death in the world when consumed by smoking; tobacco. Children working on tobacco farms for 12 hours a day without any protective clothing are exposed to the hazardous effects of pesticides, fertilizers and nicotine (Otañez, Muggli, Hurt & Glantz, 2006). This work is often their only way to pay for food and, for a few lucky ones, the salary might be enough to cover school fees. Tobacco companies have responded to the public outrage about child labour and hazardous working conditions by developing corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These initiatives are being promoted as “the solution” for companies to mitigate the profit expectations of their stakeholders and improve their social standing as responsible businesses and thereby regain public trust. Tobacco companies operating in Malawi, however, have been accused of primarily using CSR and child labour projects to “distract public attention from how they profit from low wages and cheap tobacco” (Otañez et al, 2006, p 224).

Malawi’s access to a seemingly limitless supply of cheap labour has resulted in savings of approximately US\$10 million every year for tobacco companies, making Malawi an important supplier of the world’s tobacco (Otañez et al, 2006). The children are at the bottom of the supply chain, making less than 17 US cents for a day of work (Plan Malawi, 2009). In Malawi alone, there are approximately 78,000 children working in tobacco production and the number of child labourers is likely to increase as companies in the country continue to grow and additional companies move their businesses overseas (ILO, 2004). Most child labourers are coming from orphan households with severely limited options for daily survival and, in the view of the alternatives, child labour is sometimes desirable.

The low wages leading to higher profits create an attractive recipe for exploitation whereby tobacco companies benefit disproportionately from the process. The child labour situation in the tobacco industry, however, represents only one of many examples where children are being exploited in the export economy. For countries that rely on the export of commodities, the use of a cheap and malleable workforce is often a response to global price fluctuations. In the production of tobacco as well as cocoa, coffee, tea and other agricultural or manufactured products for export, the vulnerable situation of children is used for other people's economic gains which further expand already existing inequities.

The purpose of this capstone project is to analyse how tobacco companies' CSR initiatives and business codes¹ are communicated as successfully addressing the issue of child labour² and hazardous working conditions, and contrasting those messages with the reality of children's experiences working in tobacco production. The results of focus groups with withdrawn child labourers and interviews with stakeholders in Malawi are analysed in relation to the CSR documents and business codes of two of the largest multinational tobacco companies with production interests in Malawi, British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI). Where possible, the lived experiences and realities of Malawians involved in tobacco production are provided to generate a better understanding of the forces creating the labour environment. The first section of the paper provides a background to the child labour issue and CSR. This section is followed by the comparison of CSR initiatives, business codes and the results of focus groups and interviews in Malawi. The paper provides an insight into the lived experience of child labourers in tobacco production in Malawi, whose views and plight are often overlooked in public health discussions on tobacco.

¹ For the purpose of this paper, the term "business codes" is used as a wide definition incorporating mission statements, code of conduct, code of ethics and other documents that include elements of a corporation's responsibilities for child labour and working conditions. Whilst business codes identifies and communicates responsibilities, CSR documents often outline what activities a corporation has taken to meet their business codes.

² Child labour is defined by the ILO (2009) as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development".

1.1. The Public Health Problem

Child labour increases household income and is sometimes seen as a way for children to learn important tasks and life skills. Although these are often short term outcomes, in the longer term child labour leads to an “underaccumulation of human capital” (Roggero, Mangiaterra, Bustreo & Rosati, 2007, p 271). Working children do not attend school and their work often causes poor health. Working children often end up as low-wage adults and eventually have to put their own children to work. Subsequently “poverty and child labour is passed from generation to generation” (Roggero et al, 2007, p 271). The chronic poverty experienced in many Malawian households has been at the centre of debate for many years and is partially attributed to the high prevalence of child labour (Davies, 2003). Poverty does not only lead to more children looking for employment but also puts pressure on families to make use of child labour to assist in family survival (Plan Malawi, 2009).

Malawian children involved in tobacco production work to supplement their parents’ income or to survive without parents at all, as most working children are living in orphan households or elderly-headed households. According to the Malawi Child Labour Baseline Survey from 2002, the main reasons why children in Malawi are working are to supplement household income (31%); to do something after dropping out of school due to lack of school fees (17%); to acquire food in times of household food shortages (13%); and to learn life skills (13%) (Tsoka & Konyani, 2003). Child labour is more prevalent in large families and families with low parental levels of education. It has also been noted that the prevalence of child labour is related to migration, HIV infection, place of residence and socio-cultural factors as identified in a study from Cameroon (Kongnyuy, Kongnyuy & Richter, 2008). Child labour has been correlated with higher rates of adolescent mortality, infectious diseases and low nutrition levels (Roggero et al, 2007). Many children are also struggling with psychosocial impacts of the loss of their parents or strong feelings of responsibility toward the remaining members of their families. At work, they often suffer physical and sexual abuse from their supervisors for not performing tasks to satisfactory standards. In the community, many of the working children are discriminated against because they are orphans and often considered dirty and less intelligent as a result of not attending school (Plan Malawi, 2009).

Children working in tobacco production are exposed to unique hazards as a result of their tobacco exposure (Rimmer, 2004). Green tobacco sickness (GTS), one of the most severe conditions, occurs when workers absorb nicotine through the skin as they come into contact with leaves of the tobacco plant (McBride, Altman, Klein & White, 1998; Quandt, Arcury, Preisser, Norton & Austin, 2000; McKnight & Spiller, 2005). Wet tobacco leaves are of particular concern since moisture on tobacco leaves may contain as much as nine mg of dissolved nicotine per 100 ml of dew, which is equivalent to the nicotine content of six average cigarettes. On a rainy day during harvesting, the average field worker may be exposed to as much dissolved nicotine as that found in 50 average cigarettes. The symptoms of GTS include nausea, vomiting, weakness, headache, dizziness, abdominal cramps, diarrhoea and difficulty breathing, as well as fluctuations in blood pressure and heart rate (McKnight & Spiller, 2005).

Because most public health research has overlooked the dangers of tobacco at the production stages, focusing more extensively on tobacco use, evidence of health impacts from tobacco production is limited. The extant literature suggests that children are especially vulnerable to GTS due to their small body size in relation to the dose of nicotine they absorb (Baris, Waverley, Prindiville, da Costa e Silva, Chitanondh & Chandiwana, 2000; Davies, 2003). Children also lack tolerance to the effects of nicotine and knowledge about the risks (Baris et al, 2000; Save the Children, 2006).

Tobacco is a heavily pesticide-dependent crop and pesticides are often applied by tobacco workers with their bare hands due to the lack of protective clothing (Baris et al, 2000; Save the Children, 2006). As a result, allergic and irritant skin disorders are common among tobacco farmers. Pesticide workers also have an increased risk of suffering from transient neurological and psychological conditions due to the toxic effects of pesticides on the peripheral and central nervous system (Schmitt, Schmitt, Kouimintzis & Kirch, 2007). Children are thought to be more vulnerable to pesticide exposure due to their small body size, physiological makeup, rapid growth and behaviour (Health Canada, 2003; WHO, 2005). Children also have more years of life ahead of them compared to adults which translates to a greater opportunity for additional exposures to occur, more time for substances to accumulate in a child's body, a longer time living with adverse health outcomes, and greater likelihood of experiencing adverse effects for diseases with a long latency period (Frumkin, 2005).

Although pesticide use is regulated in Malawi as well as internationally, studies have shown that the tobacco industry exerts considerable influence over regulatory processes. Otañez et al (2006) have found that tobacco companies actively lobby to raise acceptable rates of pesticide use in tobacco production, ignoring the adverse health effects. In Malaysia for example, Philip Morris managed to raise the maximum residue limit for methoprene on tobacco from 1.0 ppm, as set by the Malaysian pesticide board, to as much as 15 ppm as a result of strategic efforts to take advantage of the lack of data on pesticides on non-food crops and its potential effect on human health (McDaniel, Solomon & Malone, 2005).

The conditions forcing children to work in the first place as well as the risks associated with their work have long term effects on the “underaccumulation of human capital” (Roggero et al, 2007, p 271), making child labour a significant global health problem (Pollack, Landrigan & Mallino, 1990; Roggero et al, 2007).

1.2. Child Labour and the Dependence on Tobacco in Malawi

In the last few decades, Malawi has become one of the key tobacco producing countries in the world. As a result, multinational tobacco companies from other countries have migrated to Malawi. The tobacco industry in the country is currently dominated by seven major tobacco exporting companies, the majority of them being multinational companies based in the US or Europe. Tobacco is the main export product in Malawi, representing 70 percent of the nation’s export income. It is Malawi's second largest source of total income following foreign aid (Davies, 2003).

Despite the substantial profits generated by the tobacco industry, there has been a very limited financial impact on local communities. In 2008, two of the largest multinational tobacco companies, British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI), enjoyed combined annual revenues of over US\$80 billion (BAT, 2008; PMI, 2008). That same year, Malawi as a country had a GDP of US\$3.5 billion and an average income per capita of US\$250 (World Bank, 2009). Almost 74 percent of the population are estimated to live on less than \$1.25 a day and over 90 percent live below

the UN poverty threshold of \$2 a day. On the Human Development Index, measuring life expectancy, literacy, educational attainment and GDP per capita for countries worldwide, Malawi is ranked among the least developed countries in the world, ranking 160th out of 182 countries (UNDP, 2009).

The smoking prevalence in Malawi is low, making tobacco production and child labour the main problems related to tobacco in that country (FAO, 2003). According to Otañez et al (2006), Malawi has the highest incidence of child labour in southern Africa. Results from the Malawi Child Labour Survey from 2002 showed that 23.3 percent (0.73 million) of all children aged 5-14 worked in Malawi; 25.4 percent of boys and 21.3 percent of girls (Tsoka & Konyani, 2003). Almost 90 percent of them worked in the informal sector where tobacco farms are represented. Although many children were thought to be employed as unpaid family workers, helping their parents during high seasons but also attending school, a proportion of children (4.7%) worked without attending school (ILO-IPEC, 2006).

The large number of child labourers in tobacco production in Malawi has primarily been attributed to the lack of income opportunities for families in one of the world's least developed and under-resourced countries in the world. This issue is compounded by the government's lack of regulations and enforcement of child labour laws, increased competition in the raw tobacco market and the unregulated tenancy system. Under this system, a tenant farmer agrees to grow tobacco on land provided by a landlord and to sell the tobacco to the landlord at the end of the season. A tenant farmer receives seeds, tools and food supplies from the landlord, who deducts the expenses from the sale price of the tobacco. By bringing the whole family onto the estates and making remuneration dependent primarily on production, children are easily brought into work by parents concerned with the survival of their family. Interviews with tenants in Malawi have revealed that some landlords even prohibit tenants living on estates from sending their children to school during harvesting to assure their labour availability (Otañez et al, 2006). Attempts to regulate labour issues in the tobacco sector in Malawi include a draft tenancy bill prepared in 2005. The bill, however, failed to attract political will and get legislative approval.

1.3. Child Labour Legislation

In the regulation of child labour, the Constitution of Malawi accords children the right of protection from any work that is of hazardous nature or any work that may prejudice their attendance to school or inflict any harm on their health and development. There is also a National Code of Conduct in the country that relates to child labour (Tsoka & Konyani, 2003). However, there is no written labour policy or child labour policy in Malawi and no meaningful enforcement of any of the existing provisions (Otañez et al, 2006). The district labour offices, which are responsible for administering most of the labour legislation and regulations, are poorly funded and labour inspections are rarely conducted (Tsoka & Konyani, 2003).

In addition to national legislation, Malawi is also a signatory to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) convention on the worst forms of child labour (No. 182), which includes "slavery, forced labour, sale and trafficking of children; forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; use of children in prostitution, pornography, illicit activities; and hazardous work" (ILO, 2004, p 45). Abuse, dangerous equipment, hazardous substances and excessive working hours are all components of hazardous work. Children working in the agricultural sector are thought to be more involved in hazardous work and have a higher accident rate than children working in other sectors (ILO, 2004).

The minimum age for what should be considered child labour varies in different countries. In Malawi, this age limit also varies within different documents. The Constitution of Malawi bars employment of children below the age of 16 years whilst the Malawi Employment Act of 2000 lowers the bar by condemning the employment of children below the age of 14 years (Otañez et al, 2006). Malawi has also ratified the ILO convention on the minimum age for admission to employment (No. 138), which defines 15 years as the minimum age for work and 14 years for vocational training. The convention on the worst forms of child labour defines 18 years as the minimum age (ILO, 2004).

The Employment Act in Malawi states that first offenders should be charged 10,000 Malawian Kwacha (equivalent to US\$70) for employing children and that repeat

offenders would be charged double. More serious offences and offenders unable to pay this amount would be sent to prison. As of July 2008, no one had been sentenced to prison and the number of offenders that had been charged was insignificant (interview with the Ministry of Labour, Malawi).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Trends in Corporate Social Responsibility

In countries like Malawi with weak legal frameworks, greater attention is sometimes given to multinational corporations with the hope that their CSR initiatives could potentially replace absent or failing governmental action. This shift of responsibility exists despite the fact that a corporation's main responsibility has primarily been to maximize profit and increase shareholder value. Unethical practices in the 1980s and several environmental disasters caused by multinational corporations led to a distrust of the corporate sector and a demand for greater social responsibilities throughout a corporation's supply chain (Sheldon Chumir Foundation, 2007). A broader conception of the responsibilities of corporations has therefore evolved and become increasingly popular. This conception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) includes a corporation's responsibility for the environment, society and the workforce. CSR was described by John Elkington (1998) as the corporate *triple bottom line*; the value that corporations add or destroy through their operation measured in economic, environmental and social terms. A few years later, Elkington introduced a new version of the triple bottom line called the 3Ps; *people, planet and profit* (Elkington, 2004). With these concepts, Elkington placed the triple bottom line on the global agenda and also introduced the idea of corporate responsibilities towards stakeholders as compared to just shareholders (1998). Elkington was part of a larger shift focused on corporations' responsibility for civil society and with greater expectations of corporations to provide communities with more than philanthropic financial donations that had been the main activities in the past. Corporations were expected to build long term relationships with communities and develop CSR initiatives that responded to the community's values (Muthuri, Chapple & Moon, 2009). For some corporations, this community engagement expanded beyond creating relationships to the development of more strategic community investments that correlated with the corporation's values, core competencies and overall strategy as a way of better achieving their business goals (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003; Crane, Matten & Spence, 2008).

2.2. Global Supply Chains and Moral Obligations

Several multinational tobacco companies have moved their supply chains from countries with more expensive labour practices to Malawi in attempts to cut costs. These strategies have led to discussions around the breadth of corporations' social responsibilities. The disaggregation of supply chains creates geographic distances that make the relationship between corporations and their stakeholders more socially distant and also "dilutes the ethical base on which actions are taken" (Goddard, 2005, p 274f). The structure of large organisations and their methods for contracts, such as subcontracts and self-employment, are also thought to contribute to this dilution. In the tobacco industry, these practices are exacerbated by the tenancy system in Malawi. As a result of not dealing directly with the farmers, tobacco companies can claim that they have no responsibility for the individual farmers and their working conditions as they do not "own" the tobacco farms (Otañez et al, 2006). Responsibilities become even more blurred as children are often brought onto the farms by their parents or as part of hired family labour. Children are generally not formally hired and corporate managers can therefore plead that they have no responsibility for them (ILO, 2004).

In response to the diffusion of responsibilities, it has been argued that large multinationals have moral obligations toward their suppliers' working conditions in all countries where they operate. In the tobacco industry, these obligations arise as a result of the purchasing processes connecting multinational tobacco companies with farmers in Malawi. Young (2006) points out that relationships between various participants in the supply chains are often unequal in power. This is seen in the tobacco industry where children and farmers are working under severely restricted conditions for minimal salaries whilst leaders of the tobacco companies are benefiting financially from the relationship (Young, 2006). According to Young (2006) all people that are connected to the unjust structures have a responsibility for changing the conditions leading to those structures. Individuals in positions of power, however, bear greater responsibility. As such, CEOs and management in the tobacco industry bear the greatest responsibility for child labour violations. They also have greater influence to initiate change than most other stakeholders in Malawi. Young (2006) states that those who benefit from the injustice have a forward-looking responsibility to change the conditions creating injustice as they are in positions of privilege. Although multinational tobacco companies bear the

greatest responsibility and are the ones connecting farmers and child labourers to the global market, Young argues that their responsibility is often shared with local owners and the local state as they also contribute to the processes creating injustice. Collective ability is a key concept in Young's analysis, highlighting the significance of stakeholder collaboration (Young, 2006). Given the historical lack of interest in changing the structures in Malawi amongst multinational tobacco companies and the government, this is particularly significant. Other stakeholders also bear an obligation and possess the agency to provide the pressure needed to initiate change.

Multinational corporations' involvement in several countries with a range of different stakeholders has resulted in different, sometimes conflicting, expectations from shareholders, local communities, governments and international organisations. In some areas, corporations are expected to provide educational support and set standards for human rights to counteract the absence or failing of governmental action (Goddard, 2005; Crane, Matten & Spence, 2008). In other areas, corporations are expected to adapt to local norms, which can be problematic in countries that do not have expressed ethical standards to protect their citizens or certain population groups, such as children (Carroll, 2004).

Concerned about the floor to which corporations adhere, pressure from society has led many corporations to develop global, general strategies for CSR with universal standards (Kapelus, 2002; Crane, Matten & Spence, 2008). Often, however, a corporation's responsibilities arise as a result of compromises between the ethical standards of a multinational's home- and host country (Carroll, 2004) or are developed by "outsiders" without sufficient involvement of local communities (Frynas, 2005). Schumacher has expressed his concerns with the lack of community involvement in development projects;

"[Genuine development] cannot be "produced" by skilful grafting operations carried out by foreign technicians or an indigenous elite that has lost contact with the ordinary people" (Schumacher in Frynas, 2005, p 589).

Corporations' general lack of expertise in development issues, public health and environmental issues are also obstacles in the development and implementation of CSR projects and often leads to projects that serve the corporations objectives as opposed to the local community's needs (Frynas, 2005).

For some corporations, CSR has evolved primarily as a business case and public relations strategy in hope that it would minimize the risk of negative publicity and increase the corporation's profits. For others, CSR is about ethics and obligations that go beyond profit. Applying Young's analysis, tobacco companies have the power to influence the injustices in the supply chain, they benefit financially from these unjust structures and are directly connected to tobacco producers. A truly ethical approach to CSR would therefore have to go beyond the business case. According to several researchers (Palazzo & Richter, 2005; Otañez et al, 2006; Barraclough & Morrow, 2008; Hastings & Liberman, 2009), tobacco companies have taken the first approach, arguing that their CSR initiatives are primarily marketing and strict corporate strategies as opposed to an honest will to contribute to good causes. Otañez et al (2006) state that tobacco companies in Malawi could take more sincere measures if they had enforced policies boycotting tobacco grown using child labour.

2.3. Voluntary Compliance with CSR and Business Codes

In an attempt to better communicate their responsibilities, many corporations have defined what ought to be done and what they can be held accountable for in a growing number of documents such as code of conduct (Wood & Rimmer, 2003; Kaptein, 2004; Waddock, 2004; Bratianu & Balanescu, 2008). Corporations are often using these business codes to communicate their identity to shareholders and possibly increase confidence in their operations (Kaptein, 2004; Bartkus & Glassman, 2008). Waddock (2004) argues that the rising number of business codes is an indication of potential gaps between corporations' performance and their stakeholder expectations, or else there would not be such strong demand for these documents. Waddock also expressed concerns with business codes tendency to provide a floor but not a ceiling of what a corporations' social responsibilities are, and as such, only make sense "if there is sufficient global agreement about the standards that they create a level playing field for

companies adhering to them” (Waddock, 2004, p 315). The voluntary nature of business codes and CSR initiatives has obviously caused some significant mistrust. As a way of strengthening these initiatives, some companies have conducted external audits of their performance and engaged with the Global Reporting Initiative which provides guidelines on how to measure and report economic, environmental and social performance (Global Reporting Initiative, 2009).

3. METHODS

I spent two months in Malawi at Plan International's country office, Plan Malawi, in June and July 2008 to learn more about child labour in tobacco production. The majority of my time was spent in the capital city, Lilongwe, where I conducted interviews with key informants from nine organisations including NGOs, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Ministry of Labour³. In Kasungu, one of the main tobacco producing districts, I also participated in a meeting with the district child labour committee⁴ and conducted two focus groups with children that had been withdrawn from labour situations by local organisations. In total, eleven children participated in my focus groups, six girls and five boys. Staff from Plan Malawi identified the participants using convenience sampling. They also helped in the arrangement of the focus groups and acted as translators from Chichewa to English. Focus groups were used to collect data as it is a useful method in promoting discussions on attitudes and perceptions as well as in identifying problems and capturing diverse and new ideas. Focus groups are also successful in providing rich qualitative data under limited time constraints. All the interviews that I conducted with key informants in Lilongwe as well as the meeting with the child labour committee were held in English.

The interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide and a focus group protocol that I developed under the supervision of Plan Malawi staff. A small proportion of the interviews were recorded but none of the focus groups were recorded. I took notes throughout the focus groups, interviews and the meeting with some assistance from Plan Malawi staff. The results were complemented with personal communication with Plan Malawi staff, community members and school personnel as well as results from a two-day conference on child protection that I participated in.

³ Interviews were held with the Centre for Youth and Children Affairs (CEYCA), ILO-IPEC, the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the Malawi Human Rights Youth Network (MHRYN), the Child Labour Control unit at the Ministry of Labour, the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM), Oxfam, Save the Children, and Together Ensuring Child Security (TECS).

⁴ The district child labour committee in Kasungu was represented by Plan's Programme Unit in Kasungu, the Target National Relief and Development (TANARD), the District Labour Office at the Ministry of Labour in Kasungu, and the Create Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM).

Throughout my stay in Malawi, I also took daily field notes to better capture day to day experiences and observations.

The results of my research were used by Plan Malawi as background material for a larger research study with children in tobacco production. This larger study included participatory workshops with an additional 44 children⁵. As my study included a limited number of children with experience from tobacco production, the findings in this capstone project were complemented with data from the larger study by Plan Malawi as the joint results provide a more comprehensive view of children's experiences.

In order to better understand the CSR initiatives and business codes of British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI), I analysed their corporate websites for content related to CSR, child labour and working conditions. My efforts to engage in interviews with representatives from the Tobacco Association of Malawi (TAMA) and conduct a study visit to the tobacco auction halls in Lilongwe were unsuccessful.

3.1. Limitations

One of the main limitations in the project was related to the reliance on a translator in the focus groups with children. Although the translator had a good level of English, he was not a professional translator and I often felt as if I only got a summary of what the children had said. Using a translator also limited my capacity to grasp nuances in the children's stories. Time constraints were an additional limitation. Although several different data collection methods were used in order to get a comprehensive picture of the situation, more time in the field and in-depth interaction with the children would likely have benefited the project. The small sample sizes in the focus groups were primarily a result of the difficulties in finding children that had been withdrawn from labour and challenges related to the coordination of meetings with the children. The use of focus groups and the mix of boys and girls could potentially have prevented children from discussing sensitive topics such as physical and sexual abuse, which were reported to researchers in Plan Malawi's participatory workshops. Data from the additional

⁵ The joint results were published in the report "Hard work, long hours and little pay" by Plan Malawi (see reference list).

participatory workshops conducted by Plan Malawi after my departure are used in this capstone project to complement my own data.

Regarding the analysis of BAT and PMI's CSR reports and business codes, some of the limitations relate to the use of online data and the variety of documents and web pages where BAT and PMI published their CSR information. As these documents are also acting as marketing materials bias can be assumed. Although BAT referred to a specific sustainability report on their website, both companies presented their CSR initiatives on various web pages and documents. The use of online material also overlooked any printed documents that the two tobacco companies might have published on CSR.

Finally, it should be noted that although the children that participated in the project had worked on tobacco farms in Lilongwe and Kasungu, it is impossible to know whether the tobacco purchased by BAT and PMI came from these specific farms. BAT and PMI were chosen for the study as they represent two of the largest multinational companies with production interests in Malawi.

4. RESULTS

“I congratulate British American Tobacco. At a time when trust and confidence in businesses is at an all time low, it is examples like this that will help to demonstrate that some businesses are taking their responsibilities seriously and that it makes business sense” (Stephen Howard, Chief Executive, Business in the Community, BAT, 2009a).

British American Tobacco (BAT) published their first social report in 2002. Since then, they have received numerous awards for their social practices, including occupational health and safety performance, best corporate social responsibility practice in tobacco production programmes, and recognition for their investments in the lives of people and local communities (BAT, 2009b; BAT 2009c). Most recently, BAT became the first tobacco company to receive a platinum rating by the 2009 UK Business in the Community Corporate Social Responsibility Index for environmental performance and efforts related to community management, workplace management and health, safety and wellbeing (BAT, 2009a). In addition, BAT scored highest in their industry in categories related to labour practice and human capital development on the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes, which measures economic, environmental and social performance of companies worldwide (BAT, 2009d). Philip Morris International (PMI) has also made efforts to reposition itself as a responsible company by publishing information about their CSR initiatives on their corporate website. Last year, PMI received three corporate social responsibility awards in the areas of disaster relief, economic community support and environmentalism (PMI, 2009a).

As the two tobacco companies promote these awards on their websites and highlight their positions as leaders in socially responsible businesses, the children working in the fields providing BAT, PMI and other companies with their tobacco supply tell a different story. Their stories inform the following sections.

4.1. Corporate Statements versus Health Outcomes

As stated earlier, several of BAT and PMI's CSR statements on occupational health and safety practices refer to world class standards. They aim to communicate their good-faith efforts and high goals to shareholders as reflected in this quote from BAT;

“We believe that multinational companies can lead by example and use their influence where they can, such as in employment standards, business practice, environmental management and community support” (BAT, 2009e).

Both BAT and PMI report that they hold all aspects of their supply chain to high standards and expect these standards to be reinforced by all employees. In addition to global regulations, the two tobacco companies also refer to their compliance with national health and safety legislation in the countries where they operate. PMI claims that they have their “own health and safety policies, which often go beyond what the law requires” (PMI, 2008a, p 9).

In countries where national legislation is lacking, however, BAT's role as an influential multinational corporation is made clear;

“If a government is thought to be failing in its duties to its citizens, we do not believe that business can, or should, take on the role of international diplomacy” (BAT, 2009e).

Instead of leading by example, BAT chooses not to follow global standards or place their own policies over national legislation. Despite knowing that a government is failing in its duties, the tobacco company places the responsibility of health and safety for its suppliers on national governments and citizens;

“In business and in issues of development, the environment, labour standards or appropriate regulation, we believe that local self-determination is vital. National governments and citizens are best placed to define local priorities and the actions that will work in their societies” (BAT, 2009e).

The main reason why global standards would not supersede national legislation in cases where it is lacking or is under critique is explained by BAT:

“Global regulations and standards that seem reasonable on more advanced economies may risk alienating emerging nations and undermining their competitiveness” (BAT, 2009e).

The impact that a growing number of unhealthy children and low education levels, as a result of work, have on Malawi’s future competitiveness was not considered.

In Malawi, where the government do not have a child labour policy, and health and safety regulations are under-enforced, children are paying the highest price of BAT and PMI’s failure to take action. The focus groups conducted with former child labourers in Malawi revealed stories of some of the worst working conditions possible. The children are conducting the same tasks as adults in tobacco production, including application of pesticides, carrying of heavy loads and working from the early morning hours to late evenings. Grace⁶, a 13 year old girl who used to work on a tobacco farm outside Lilongwe explained her concerns with poor health and safety standards:

“They give us a jerry can, a five litre jerry can containing chemicals with a small cup the size of a jerry can lid and we use that for sprinkling onto the tobacco field. But we are worried because we use bare hands and no protection”.

As a result of the unregulated working conditions, children in this study indicated that they suffered several health effects including back pain, headache, bruises and scars as well as general feelings of fatigue and dizziness. In regards to green tobacco sickness (GTS), one of the health conditions that affect tobacco workers, PMI recognized that GTS is a problem in tobacco farms and clarified their responsibility on their corporate website:

⁶ All names are pseudonyms.

“We are committed to doing our part to raise awareness among tobacco growers, providing them with the information they need to prevent exposure to this illness. We will also work with governments where appropriate to raise their awareness to this issue and what can be done to address it” (PMI, 2009b).

When specifying more concrete steps in the prevention of GTS, PMI was very clear in communicating that the preventive measures they are taking are not because they have to, or because they are responsible, but rather because they care.

“Although PMI does not employ tobacco growers, we are taking a number of steps – as part of our Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) program – to address this issue” (PMI, 2009b).

Their GAP program includes steps to incorporate agreement to mandatory compliance when signing new supplier contracts and implementing supplier protocols on GTS (PMI, 2009b). PMI also states that they have documenting and monitoring practices in place which include random checks of tobacco farms and assessments of farmers’ knowledge of GTS (PMI, 2009b). A key strategy in PMI’s efforts to prevent GTS is the development of safety awareness materials which are also available on their website. The main recommendations on these posters and factsheets are preventive measures that farmers should take, such as using protective clothing and hand washing with warm soapy water after being in the field.

BAT also recognizes the importance of prevention but highlights that protective clothing is not provided free of charge to their farmers. Instead, BAT (2009f) states that clothing can be purchased at the lowest possible cost and that a farmer could take loans to pay for protective clothing and then pay off the loans at the end of the season. In the end, however, BAT takes no responsibility for farmers using protection;

“We see protective clothing as very important, but farmers who supply us are not employees of our Group companies, so ultimately it is their decision to wear protective clothing” (BAT, 2009f).

Preventive measures highlighted by BAT and PMI do not seem to have been implemented in Malawi. The participatory study conducted by Plan Malawi indicated that most children experienced symptoms related to GTS. Almost all children in the study had suffered from headaches and about 75 percent had experienced difficulties breathing and abdominal cramps. More than half of the participants had experienced nausea and vomiting whilst one third reported coughing blood and dizziness. Although the symptoms are similar to those of other conditions, including tuberculosis, it is believed that they are linked to children's long term exposure to nicotine without wearing any protective clothing (Plan Malawi, 2009). Kondwani described his symptoms as follows:

“It starts as a little cough but it goes on for a long time. Sometimes it feels like you don't have enough breath, you don't have enough oxygen. Yes, you reach a point where you cannot breathe in because of the pain in your chest. Then the blood comes when you vomit, you vomit blood. At the end most of this dies and then you remain with a headache” (Plan Malawi, 2009, p 39).

Cuts and abrasions are thought to be risk factors for GTS as nicotine can directly enter the bloodstream (PMI, 2009c). One of the children participating in the focus groups explained that his tasks on the tobacco farms included preparing ridges, planting and processing tobacco; tasks that often resulted in scars and cuts with the knife used to harvest tobacco leaves.

BAT and PMI's key prevention strategies, which included the use of protective clothing and hand washing with warm, soapy water after being in the field, clearly fail to consider the true reasons why farmers are not taking these precautionary measures, namely the lack of availability and affordability of protective clothing, cleaning facilities and soap. Here explained by Rafiq:

“When picking the tobacco, the tobacco produces a juice so it's difficult to clean it out of the hands.....it comes off only when you use soap but now the challenge is we don't have soap”.

One of the reasons why there was no soap was explained by one of the children who noticed that money had been deducted from his salary at the end of the season.

“The supervisor is the one if you don’t have soap you report to him so that you may be given. At the end of the season they will deduct the cost of those necessities and give you MK500. You feel very sad”.

In addition to the lack of protective clothing and cleaning facilities, the children also expressed another important and concerning reason why they could not clean themselves;

“We are busy working and we don’t have time to go for bathing so we develop those sores that come when a person doesn’t bath”.

To further emphasize the disconnect between the two tobacco companies’ recommended strategies on GTS prevention and the realities facing the majority of tobacco workers in Malawi, PMI also recommend workers wear gloves and raingear to minimize skin exposure to tobacco leaves; to change wet or tobacco-soaked clothes; to avoid overheating; to harvest for less than seven hours a day; to take breaks; and to work in cooler, drier conditions when possible. For those needing treatment, PMI states that medication is available but recommends consulting a doctor or pharmacist before taking any medication (PMI, 2009c). The likelihood that the children would have access to medicine, however, appeared minimal. Access to doctors, was even less so, as explained by one of the children:

“Sometimes we request to go to the hospital because we have been spitting blood and they say that they can’t send us to hospital as we are not their relatives”.

Despite these realities facing child labourers in Malawi, BAT and PMI are arguing that they are doing more than they have to in terms of health and safety for their employees (BAT, 2008a; PMI, 2008a).

PMI also presents their policies related to harassment;

“We do not tolerate any form of harassment. Harassment can be verbal, physical or visual behavior where the purpose or effect is to create an offensive, hostile or intimidating environment. Sexual harassment, in particular, can include sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, unwanted physical contact or repeated and unwelcome sexual suggestions” (...) “This kind of behavior has no place at PMI” (PMI, 2008a, p 8).

In the interview with a representative from Save the Children, who had conducted a child labour study on tobacco estates a few years earlier, it became clear that sexual exploitation of girls by supervisors and fellow labourers was common on tobacco estates. In their study, Save the Children draw linkages between sexual exploitation and the wage system in Malawi, which meant that every child was given a specific task to do per day and their daily wage was recorded when their assigned tasks had been finished. According to the representative from Save the Children, girls are particularly vulnerable under this system;

“As most girls do not manage to finish their assigned tasks on time, they are, as such, circumstantially forced to have sex with estate captains in a bid to avoid forfeiture of the daily wage”.

Save the Children also discovered that fellow male labourers sometimes helped the girls to finish their tasks on the understanding that they would benefit by having sex with them. Although this issue did not come up in my focus groups, the participatory workshops conducted by Plan Malawi revealed that at least three of the 44 children had been raped by supervisors and were taken for counselling and HIV testing.

In their core belief and supply chain philosophy, BAT states that they “believe that suppliers and other business partners should have the opportunity to benefit from their relationship with us” (BAT, 2008a). In Malawi, very few children and tobacco farmers would likely agree with this statement as tobacco farming has not translated to better living conditions or health outcomes for the majority of the people. In addition to

developing several health problems, the farmers have also noticed that their land is often not suitable for growing food crops at the end of the tobacco season due to the huge toll tobacco takes on the nutrients in the soil.

4.2. Corporate Statements and the Child Labour Issue

In addition to the tobacco companies' CSR initiatives and business codes related to health and working conditions, BAT and PMI are also highlighting their opposition to the use of children in their operations;

“We are committed to the principles of protecting children from child labour exploitation, believing that their development – as well as that of their communities and countries – is best served through education, not child labour. We do not employ children in our operations” (BAT, 2009g).

For PMI, this commitment goes beyond employees to include contract labourers and suppliers as well;

“PMI will not engage in or condone the unlawful employment or exploitation of children in the workplace or engage in or condone the use of forced labor (...) Beyond that, we want contract laborers who work in our facilities to meet these standards. PMI is committed to work with direct suppliers and with licensees and joint ventures that produce our products to implement appropriate minimum age/forced labor standards” (PMI, 2008a, p 43).

The tobacco companies are making these statements on child labour based on the claim that they do not “own” tobacco farms but are purchasing tobacco leaves from independent suppliers. According to the representative from Save the Children, this strategy of deferring responsibility is not only used by multinational tobacco companies but is a sector wide problem. Rather than dealing with the child labour issue and occupational health, tobacco companies sell their estates and farms. BAT, however,

claims in their sustainability report that their responsibilities cover a wider spectrum as they are “working to protect the human rights of our employees and those within our sphere of influence” (BAT, 2008a, p 37).

BAT and PMI’s claimed responsibilities and actual practices to ensure that no children work on the tobacco farms, or that they are not purchasing tobacco grown by children, are less clear. Most of their efforts to address the child labour issue are centered on their membership in the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation (BAT 2008; BAT, 2008a; PMI, 2009d). Based in Geneva, Switzerland, ECLT works to reduce child labour in tobacco production by:

- Developing independent research to produce an objective picture of the conditions and level of child labour in tobacco growing;
- Supporting and funding local and community-based projects;
- Establishing and sharing best practices and lessons learnt (ECLT, 2009).

The foundation is supported by the ILO and includes representatives from the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations (IUF), the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), and major tobacco companies such as BAT, PMI, Alliance One, Japan Tobacco Inc., and Scandinavian Tobacco Company (ECLT, 2009).

Some of the main activities conducted in Malawi by ECLT and its network include awareness raising, development of schools, teacher’s houses, pit latrines, skills training in carpentry, tinsmith and tailoring, provision of school bursaries and text books, as well as training sessions on child labour and food crop diversification (ECLT, 2009; BAT, 2008a). With ECLT being based in Switzerland, far from the realities facing tobacco farmers in Malawi, they have a partner organisation in Malawi coordinating the integrated child labour elimination program. At the time of the interviews, this partner organisation changed from Together Ensuring Child Security (TECS) to another NGO, Create Centre for Community Mobilisation (CRECCOM), as it was argued by ECLT that TECS results did not match their expectations (ECLT, 2009). Interestingly, the former TECS representative in Kasungu participated in the meeting with the district child labour

committee and explained that he had just moved from TECS to CRECCOM, doing the same kind of work as before.

In an earlier interview with the former director of TECS in Lilongwe it was stated that the main problem with ECLT's child labour elimination program was related to the tobacco companies' lack of commitment.

“Tobacco companies do not take the issue of child labour seriously. They pretend that they do, they set up associations and programs, but after all, they do not really care and they do their best to delay the process”.

The former director of TECS attributed this lack of commitment partially to tensions between local and multinational tobacco companies, whereas local companies often claimed that multinationals had more resources and should take greater responsibility than local companies. Multinational tobacco companies, on the other hand, put pressure on local companies and suppliers, fearing negative publicity being attributed to them. Several of the interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Malawi also indicated conflicting ideas around what should be a tobacco company's responsibility and the government's responsibility. This conflict was identified as one of the major obstacles in the work against child labour. The former director of TECS stated that it was often argued by tobacco companies that child labour issues should be the government's responsibility, both in terms of implementing policies and laws, and enforcing these. This reasoning also becomes clear in BAT's statements, highlighting that although they “support universally recognised fundamental human rights and high standards of ethical behaviour”, they are “concerned that clumsy pursuit of global standards can become a form of moral and cultural imperialism, based on assumptions that west is best” (BAT, 2009e).

It is also argued by BAT that they “do not believe that global companies have, or seek, the power that is sometimes attributed to them” (BAT, 2009e). In addition, BAT states that:

“If a government is thought to be failing in its duties to its citizens, we do not believe that business can, or should, take on the role of international diplomacy or direct countries on how they should be governed. However large and successful they are, companies do not have the ability nor the mandate to step into areas of authority or decision making that are rightly for governments or communities” (BAT, 2009e).

According to Young, being a large and successful corporation is often an indicator as to why they would have greater responsibility, as this would often entail power and privilege. Defensive responses like BAT’s, however, are common amongst those who believe they are “targets of blame” (Young, 2006, p 124). Instead of responding to the issues, they identify other entities to blame or generate other excuses.

The interview with the Child Labour Unit at the Ministry of Labour did not indicate that the government put any blame on the tobacco companies for the child labour issue. Rather, the interview clarified several strategies the government is taking to eliminate child labour such as conducting child labour inspections, lending money to withdrawn children for school uniforms and books, and organizing child labour days. However, it has often been argued by government representatives that child labour is not a problem in Malawi. The Minister of Labour, Mr. Yunus Mussa, responded to the results of Plan Malawi’s child labour study by arguing that child labour had been a problem in the past but was now addressed. What Plan Malawi presented in their study, according to Mr. Mussa, were examples of children working part-time on tobacco estates or helping their parents on their farms but still attending school;

“There are no longer children working in tobacco estates. (...) It’s normal in the village for children over 10 years old to be taken to the garden to learn gardening. If children are not taught gardening at this age, when are they going to learn? They need to learn what their parents do for survival for their good when they grow up” (Daily Times, 2009).

The eleven children participating in the focus groups and the additional 44 children in Plan Malawi's participatory workshops indicated something completely different than just helping their parents in the garden. This is how Rafiq described a typical day at work:

"I start at 4.00 am. I wake up and go to the river with watering cans to water the tobacco nurseries. When we get to the farm at around 10.30 am after walking there from the river for an hour. We go to the bushes to cut the branches for making tobacco shed. Getting back from the bush it also takes about an hour. After coming back from the bush, we start constructing the shed which it takes us about two hours. Then we take a small break for lunch. After lunch we get back to the field doing the digging. After the digging, at 4.00 pm we get back to the nursery to water the seedlings and that journey will take us about an hour. We would knock off at the nursery at 6.00 pm and walk back to the farm for an hour. We would eat around 7.00 pm. After that we would start digging again until 10.00 pm" (Plan Malawi, 2009, p 30).

In view of the inaction by the government and tobacco companies on the child labour issue, child labourers themselves are likely the ones with the greatest interest in changing the conditions and the current structure. Young (2006) also highlights that in addition to their interest, victims of injustice have great insights to the issue and knowledge of what effects certain changes to the structure would have. Given their interest and knowledge, Young believes that the children and other victims also have a responsibility for the improvement of their conditions. Acknowledging that this might be challenging due to the power differentials; Young states that collaboration with more powerful people is often necessary (2006).

Collective action against child labour could result in greater pressure on tobacco companies to act on these issues. Children's own voices, however, are often not included in child labour committee meetings or projects conducted by NGOs in Malawi. In BAT and PMI's CSR statements and business codes, they highlight their collaboration with other stakeholders on child labour;

“We work to eliminate child labour in partnership with labour organisations and governments, to develop the skills of our employees, to provide fair employment and apply high standards of pay and benefits worldwide” (BAT, 2009h).

A recurrent theme in the statements made by the tobacco companies and in the interviews with government officials and NGO representatives in Malawi was the lack of dialogue between these groups. Although BAT and PMI repeatedly highlight their interest in working together with other stakeholders (BAT, 2008a; PMI, 2008a), they are concerned that other stakeholders are not willing to engage with them. Partially, they blame the lack of dialogue on the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), “which are recommending the implementation of national laws and measures to limit interactions between the tobacco industry and governments” (BAT, 2008a). First-hand experience from Malawi, however, indicates that tobacco companies are often the barrier in collaborative efforts. Discussions with community members and interviews with key stakeholders indicated the same scenario. The representative from Save the Children argued that the tobacco companies funded ECLT and TECS to deal with the child labour issue as a way of not having to deal with other NGOs;

“They (tobacco companies) feel like TECS should deal with the issues on child labour, that’s why they fund them, and if they aren’t, then they are failing, not the tobacco companies”.

It was also highlighted that many senior managers in the tobacco industry felt like the child labour discussions had been ongoing for such a long period of time and unless there was something new presented, they were already addressing the issues.

In addition to the work on child labour through ECLT, BAT also presents their Social Responsibility in Tobacco Production (SRTP) program that focuses on farmers and issues related to tobacco growing and processing. Child labour is one of the issues addressed in the program, along with soil and water conservation, use of agrochemicals, and occupational health and safety standards (BAT, 2008; BAT, 2008a). The 2008 Sustainability Report was the first time that BAT publicly reported their SRTP scores

related to child labour. The average self-assessment scores, based on tobacco suppliers' own assessment of how well they are dealing with the child labour issue in their operations, increased from 3.48 in 2006 to 3.72 in 2008 (out of a maximum score of 4.00) (BAT, 2008a). The obvious shortcoming of these numbers is the use of the self-assessment model. Without an independent third party doing assessments the incentives for tobacco suppliers to be forthcoming on their child labour practices are negligible. The high aiming CSR statements and tobacco companies' lack of action in regards to health outcomes as stated earlier are echoed in their child labour practices.

4.3. Local Stakeholder Action and Children's Recommendations

Interviews with representatives from NGOs, ILO and the child labour unit at the Ministry of Labour resulted in some recommendations on how to move forward and best practices in dealing with child labour. The discussions primarily evolved around three topics; *legislation and enforcement*, *collaboration* and; *support*. As it was argued by some organizations and the Ministry of Labour that policies specifically about child labour should be implemented, others were concerned with the tenancy system and argued that child labour could only be prevented if farmers received salaries as opposed to payments through the tobacco market system. It was also noted by some local stakeholders that introducing more policies would not make a difference as the issue is primarily related to enforcement. The second category that emerged, *collaboration*, involved ideas around better infrastructure for dialogue and working groups that included politicians, stakeholders and group leaders. Several representatives noted that partnerships with the private sector were important although challenging. The third category related to the provision of *support* to vulnerable families and children. Many organisations emphasised the importance of assessing each individual situation before children were withdrawn from labour and the need to combine withdrawal with rehabilitation. As younger children were often provided with schools fees and uniforms to attend school, older children could sometimes be offered vocational skills training.

On the preventative side, NASFAM recommended assisting farmers to make more income from their agri-business and organize diversification programs with farmer-to-farmer training where farmers are encouraged to produce other crops than tobacco. This

included soya, groundnuts and sunflowers which would provide families with food and potentially greater profit so that they could afford to send their children to school.

The importance of supporting vulnerable families and children was reemphasized by parents interviewed by Plan Malawi and children themselves as they realized that withdrawal from labour was not always a possibility for many children due to their circumstances. One of the children in Kasungu shared his concerns:

“I started working because I don’t have anyone to help me, my granny is very old. There were no school fees. The work would also help with food. So I think just saying ‘no child labour’ is a problem. It means the government must think about it so that the poverty that the children are facing is reduced and children go back to school” (Plan Malawi, 2009, p 51).

Some parents mentioned that children’s income from labour was often not enough to make a difference in the household. They also realized that taking children away from school would prevent them from getting a better paid job in the future and explained that the time children spent on tobacco farms could be better spent at the family’s farm ensuring that they have enough food.

Many of the children also described their great desire to attend school. Although they saw no way of returning to school full time, they often suggested that attending school in the morning and work in the afternoons could be a solution. To enable this combination, they expressed a need for financial support to be able to afford school uniforms and books. Many of the children indicated that they were not being paid as much as they were promised, which was the reason why they started working in the first place.

“I am not making enough to support our needs. I use the money from the farm for food at home. So I had to borrow money from another friend to pay school fees. I still have the debt with the friend” (Plan Malawi, 2009, p 21).

This project highlights that behind BAT and PMI's CSR reports and business codes are vulnerable children that are being heavily exploited in tobacco production. Tobacco companies are not only paying them minimal salaries, their operations are also severely impacting children's health and limiting their future opportunities. On top of it, tobacco companies are benefiting financially from their vulnerable situation. The CSR documents placing health, working conditions and human rights at the core are, at the end of the day, placed in the shadow of strictly financial performance indicators in tobacco companies' annual reports.

5. DISCUSSION

The review of British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International's (PMI) CSR documents show that the two tobacco companies are communicating to their shareholders that they are taking significant measures to ensure the health of their workers and to prevent child labour. Their messages of socially responsible business practices might seem appealing to those investors who take on more than a purely financial perspective when making investment decisions. However, it would be naïve for these investors to accept these claims at face value. On closer inspection, tobacco companies' statements are at odds with their actual performance. The contradictions are not only evident within the tobacco companies' own statements but become even more obvious when comparing these statements with children's own experiences of working in tobacco farms.

One of the main contradictions is related to the breadth of BAT and PMI's responsibilities. In several statements, the two tobacco companies clarified their great responsibility for employees, local communities and business practices in all countries where they operate. When confronted with more concrete actions, however, their responses contradict earlier statements. This is clearly highlighted in BAT's promises of protecting the human rights of those within their sphere of influence which, for a multibillion dollar multinational corporation, would include a large global community including their own suppliers. This statement appeared particularly unsubstantiated in light of children's reports regarding the absence of protective clothing and existence of green tobacco sickness (GTS). Further, the claim that they do not bear responsibility because they do not own the tobacco farms and cannot be held responsible for independent suppliers is a particularly troubling sidestepping of responsibility. Their articulated principles clearly contradict their actions, or lack thereof, and have significant health impact on the children who are suffering from long term exposure to nicotine and pesticides. Such behaviour is clearly in violation of child labour protections by ILO standards.

In view of Young's argument that some people are more responsible for the welfare of others, the power component clearly indicates that tobacco companies have greater responsibility than other stakeholders for changing the conditions leading to health

injustices. As tobacco companies benefit from the unjust structures supporting child labour, given their financial gains of approximately US\$10 million every year, they also have a social obligation to change this structure. In several of their CSR statements, BAT indicates an awareness of their ability to change the current structures. BAT also highlights their connection and relationship with farmers and local communities in their statements. According to Young, it is the purchasing processes and relationships between farmers and tobacco companies that give rise to moral obligations for child labour and working conditions. Given the hazardous working conditions and stringent labour contracts currently offered to tobacco workers and the fact that tobacco companies benefit from these conditions, I argue that it is an ethical violation on the part of the tobacco companies to leave these issues unaddressed.

Several health recommendations made by BAT and PMI indicate that they ignore the realities facing children and tobacco farmers in Malawi. The disconnect between their recommendations and children's realities is particularly evident in PMI's prevention strategies for GTS where their information material focuses on protective clothing and short working days as well as the importance of changing tobacco-soaked clothes and taking breaks. None of the recommendations indicate that an assessment of the economic realities or the labour contracts has been conducted. As many of the children and farmers struggle to make ends meet under the low paying contracts they are offered, they would most likely not take loans to purchase protective clothing even though they are aware of the risks, which were indicated by some of the children in the study. Considering that BAT and PMI make statements on respecting human rights, the provision of protective clothing in the workplace would represent the absolute minimum of all responsibilities. Providing reasonable salaries and ensuring that their suppliers have reasonable standards of living would be more appropriate steps if the tobacco companies were to actively act on the principles behind their statements.

In some of BAT's statements they also argue that absolute reliance on universally recognised fundamental human rights and ethical behaviour in their actions could, in some situations, be considered a form of cultural imperialism where values and priorities from one country are forced onto another country. To avoid this imposition, or what they call "west is best", BAT believes that multinational corporations should respect local integrity and not impose global solutions. Several of the situations facing child labourers

on tobacco farms, however, would be hard to view as unacceptable based only on western values, such as denying children education, cleaning facilities and reasonable living standards. The working conditions that the children in this project described clearly represent major violations of children's rights. BAT's reference to cultural imperialism in these situations, as a way of making their inaction more acceptable, is particularly problematic in a country like Malawi where the government is economically dependent on tobacco production. This dependence makes the government a weak stakeholder in the tobacco discussion as they are often forced to be responsive to tobacco companies' requests. The government's dependence on tobacco is, yet again, an indication that the tobacco companies possess the most power to initiate a change of the working conditions.

In their efforts to address the child labour issue, it becomes clear that BAT and PMI are using various strategies to defer their responsibilities. One of these strategies is related to outsourcing. BAT and PMI are both outsourcing most of their work on child labour to ECLT, whose office is in a country with no tobacco production, Switzerland. The foundation has therefore outsourced most of their work to a coordinating partner in Malawi. First-hand observations in-country indicated that the diffusion did not end there as the assigned partner organisation changed from one organisation to another but with the same staff members. When going beyond strategies applied within their own industry, BAT and PMI also defer responsibilities to governments little able and generally uninterested in enforcing labour regulations.

The fact that corporations are making CSR statements without any enforcement or monitoring mechanism in place makes me wonder whether CSR as a movement is contributing to the diffusion of responsibilities. Corporations include highly principled business codes and CSR initiatives in their annual reports and are most likely convincing a large number of people that they are actually doing something significant for their workforce and local communities. This project, however, shows that Waddock (2004) had strong justification for her concerns related to CSR initiatives in countries where expectations are low and when business codes provide a floor but not a ceiling to their responsibilities. For tobacco companies operating in Malawi, where there is no enforced legislation on child labour or working conditions on tobacco farms, the floor is starting extremely low. This is especially true in Malawi, where corporations have used the

tenancy system as an excuse to pursue more harmful conditions rather than protective working conditions. Any CSR initiative that addresses the child labour issue or working conditions in substantial terms would therefore be better than what already exists. In view of the tremendous potential for BAT and PMI to address these issues, they appear to have done the absolute minimum. Despite this, they are still receiving awards and high scores on CSR and sustainability indexes for their performance.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Comparing British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International's (PMI) CSR initiatives with children's experiences of working in tobacco production clearly demonstrates that BAT and PMI are not walking the talk. Whilst promoting their child labour policies and high standards in health and safety, the two tobacco companies are allowing some of the worst forms of human rights violations on tobacco farms in Malawi. Given the conditions under which these children work, child labour in tobacco production could be seen as a form of slavery. The children are often forced to labour, they have no voice, no control of their own life and are often deprived the right to receive compensation and refuse work. On the tobacco fields, as this project has shown, children's health and education are hostage to tobacco companies' pursuit of profit. BAT and PMI's pathetic CSR contributions in addressing the issue of child labour and hazardous working conditions must be brought to light. BAT and PMI have to be held accountable as they have the power to initiate change and are the main beneficiaries of the unjust structures.

One of the challenges with CSR is related to the voluntary nature of these initiatives and the fact that success in CSR is often based on self-assessment. A country like Malawi that is economically dependent on multinational tobacco companies and do not have an enforceable regulatory framework is not likely to risk relations by imposing potentially disruptive policies. Ensuring that BAT and PMI meet their ethical responsibilities therefore becomes the responsibility of NGOs and shareholders. Public pressure on tobacco companies, coordinated by NGOs, could be influential in changing tobacco companies' behaviour, especially in view of their aversion to negative publicity. Although NGOs' influence might be limited, shareholders are probably the ones with most influence on tobacco companies as they have significant financial influence.

Moving CSR beyond self-assessment could also include efforts to make social initiatives auditable the way financial practices are. The recent introduction of standardised measurement and evaluation systems for CSR, like the Global Reporting Initiative that provides guidelines to measure and report economic, environmental and social performance, might address this challenge to some extent. In view of BAT and PMI's general lack of business ethics, however, I believe that financial incentives are required

to ensure that these corporations take action. Introducing strict punitive measures for CSR statements that fail to match empirical documentation could be more effective than relying on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index. This would mimic the current financial reporting accountability and the legal ramifications resulting from misrepresentation. Increased competition could be another incentive but would require that competition between corporations move beyond a comparison of CSR statements to the comparison of audited and verified CSR actions.

In relation to public health policy and practice and some of the more concrete actions multinational corporations could take, I believe that public health expertise could be useful in understanding the needs of the children and translate these needs into policies, business codes and actual implementation. This would be particularly relevant in the improvement of BAT and PMI's health recommendations and in the development of child labour strategies. In the focus groups with former child labourers and the interviews with key informants, it became clear that in the decision between a) attending school on empty stomachs with a hope of succeeding and have a comfortable life in the future or b) working on tobacco farms in order to earn barely enough money to keep themselves and their families alive, the children would rather work long hours under dangerous conditions for 17 US cents per day to contribute to their families' income. Poverty and orphanhood have provided these children with very limited options and in their decision between the lesser of two evils, working is their survival strategy. This has to be considered when policies and programmes are being developed against child labour. As blanket bans on child labour cannot always be considered viable solutions in practice, providing improved working conditions, shorter work days and a salary that would be enough to provide at least a minimum standard of living certainly lie within the tobacco companies' sphere of influence.

School fees, stated by the children as one of the main reasons why they entered labour in the first place, could also easily be addressed by the tobacco companies. I believe that education is one of the key strategies in the fight against child labour. Initiatives in Brazil and the southern states of the US have shown that providing stipends to child labourers have been successful in ensuring their return to school. This stipend would not only cover school fees, uniforms and books but should also be enough to cover what the children would have made if they had continued working. This would mean that the

children are being paid to go to school, a strategy that is frequently used in more resourced countries to ensure higher education.

In conclusion, British American Tobacco and Philip Morris International are morally obligated to implement their health and safety standards and enforce their child labour policies. The tobacco companies' financial savings from cheap labour and their unthreatened position of power in Malawi make them the most responsible player in changing the unjust structures from which at least 78,000 children are suffering. These children are the lost human capital of Malawi. As long as multinational corporations like BAT and PMI continue to build their wealth on the sacrifice of the health and education of children, this human capital deficit will continue. BAT and PMI's blame shifting strategies, deflection of responsibility, contradictory messages and deceptive, unsubstantiated CSR statements on universal standards for health and the elimination of child labour are causing one of the worst forms of human rights violations.

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