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## Child Labour in the Gambia

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*Introduction-* Children are the pillars of the future of every society. Thus we need to research all aspects related to them, as what they are today, is what they will be tomorrow. For any child labor study to be of any essence it must be understood as part and parcel of the societal interaction in which children are the principal actors in the different stages. Essentially, child labor study cannot be separated from the human family.

Data on child labour are very scarce particularly in The Gambia and it is often difficult to measure the largely “hidden” work of children. The ILO has recently designed a new approach which has been piloted in four countries, including developing nations and the results used to generate global estimates.

At present, the worldwide record suggests that the estimate of children involved in child labour ranges from 300-400 million which is approximately 4% to 5% of 2.8 billion economically active persons. Furthermore, some 250 million children (aged 5-14 years) in developing countries that are economically active are working. Nearly half of them (120 million), this work is full time, while for the remainder it is combined with schooling or other “non-economic” services. But the number of “economically active” understates the full extents of child work.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### I. INTRODUCTION

Children are the pillars of the future of every society. Thus we need to research all aspects related to them, as what they are today, is what they will be tomorrow. For any child labor study to be of any essence it must be understood as part and parcel of the societal interaction in which children are the principal actors in the different stages. Essentially, child labor study cannot be separated from the human family.

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At present, the worldwide record suggests that the estimate of children involved in child labour ranges from 300-400 million which is approximately 4% to 5% of 2.8 billion economically active persons.

Furthermore, some 250 million children (aged 5-14 years) in developing countries that are economically active are working. Nearly half of them (120 million), this work is full time, while for the remainder it is combined with schooling or other “non-economic” services. But the number of “economically active” understates the full extents of child work.

In absolute terms, Asia (excluding Japan) has the most child workers – approximately 61% of the world’s total, compared with 32% in Africa, and 7% in Latin America. In all nations, available data suggest that more boys than girls participate in economic activity. But again these figures may understate the number of working girls as they are more likely to be involved in domestic work.

Child labour is said to be the engagement of a class of persons, known as children below age of 18 in activities that do not commensurate with their age therefore, resulting to physical; mental; moral, spiritual and social development impairment.

Worldwide, children undertake different activities to subsidize household income so as to ensure family survival and sometimes their own upkeeps. Some employers are claimed to employ adults on conditions that their children will be involved in assisting them

which has devastating effects on children’s academic performance (Bedwell R. 2003).

In some urban settlements the problem is growing at an alarming rate. Many children are found working outside their home environment for personal upkeep. Studies revealed that children are employed in places such as brick making, petty trading, construction, car mechanic workshop, metal workshop, tinsmithery and carpentry. Some of these sites are both hazardous and dangerous for their survival and development. Generally speaking in child labour, children are not only exploited but also cruelly treated and exposed to pathetic health conditions.

In Africa, in the past, children work within the family circle which was a mere process of socialization and through this they were trained to grow physically, emotionally and intellectually mature without any exploitation. Thus, children were dedicated various responsibilities according to the culture of a given community. In Ivory Coast for example such responsibilities are part and parcel of traditional education process. According to some activists, it was out of such circumstances that child labour is claimed to emerge in Africa where children were forced to work over and above their will in the name of socialization.

Child labour in Africa and The Gambia in particular to some extent is also a byproduct of development of capitalism imposed by colonial agents. Actually the pre-condition for the existence of capitalism makes it necessary for the existence of people who have nothing to depend upon for their livelihood except their labour power. In the efforts to maximize profit, capitalists seek wage-labour which is cheapest to spend on capital so as to extract the profit they desire. Consequently, children fall victim to this trap.

Most recent studies in Africa opined that child labour is still a major problem because of the number of children involved, the degree of the abuse and risk they run (ILO Magazine 2008). For example, The Gambia to date has a growing number of children engaged in various activities in the informal sector in its urban communities. These activities include work markets and transport in almost all urban settlements and growth centres. They often work long hours with very little or sometimes no pay. Many of them are exposed to various degrees of occupational hazards with no protection and insurance. Besides, Baquele (1998) observes that the whole increase in child labour has been absorbed in non-agricultural activities especially in urban and commercial centres. It is the most striking

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problem whereby children work on and in the streets of the urban areas in a variety of activities such as roasting maize, washing cars, selling different items, working in various kind of workshops; and sometimes begging.

Industrialization, urbanization and the escalating economic conditions are the causes for paid laborer in Africa and The Gambia in particular. These have stimulated a cry for cheap-labour and hence subject children to be vulnerable group. It is such basis that the family sends a child out to work in an attempt to escape from economic situations deteriorating daily. It is in this process that the family violates children's rights to grow and learn.

Although there are some laws formulated both at national and international level to criminalize the employment of children, yet they continue to work worldwide. Therefore, children work under the violation of both national and international laws. In view of these facts, more efforts should be initiated to curb the situation.

This study intended to assess and evaluate the interrelationship between child labour and academic performance in Lower and Upper Basic Schools. It covered Serekunda East and West which is a sample of Kanifing municipality.

#### a) *Statement of the problem*

Child labour is a worldwide social problem. It is both widespread and pervasive especially in developing countries, The Gambia inclusive. The problem has stimulated a considerable concern in relationship to children's school performance, bearing in mind that children are the base of future national development.

In the urban communities, the problem is increasingly shocking. Indeed child labour is becoming a common practice in most urban areas. Kingston (2006) observed that: "in urban areas today, one finds children working in different sectors ranging from tinsmithery, domestic work, street trade and brick making; washing and cleaning cars, selling food, selling newspapers, books and magazine, prostitution and repairing bicycles and cars. Some of these are self-employed and in some incidences parents send them to trade in the streets".

The above quotation reveals that children are used in some instances to supplement the household income in urban communities. This malady deprives doesn't only deny them regular class attendance but leads to truancy which affects the academic performance at last. The contention is, it is very difficult to reconcile school and child labour. More especially school demands a great deal of energy from the child and a well balanced psychological atmosphere. Consequently, engaging children in child labour deprives them necessary minimum time to rest. Hence these children lack a healthy mind capable of enduring rigorous academic exercises.

With this regard it is assumed that a pupil cannot serve two masters simultaneously. A child cannot be involved in child labour and at the same time continue to perform well in school.

Fundamentally, child labour hampers the physical, mental, moral spiritual and social development of a child which negatively influences the academic performance of the child and school at large.

Based on such parameters, I am of the opinion that if child labour is not properly diagnosed and given appropriate attention, it will undoubtedly persists to undermine children's academic performance. Finally it will deprive the nation of the most valuable and potential future resources.

It is under this trajectory where the present study sought to research the problem of child labour in The Gambia. More especially it attempted to analyze different forms of child labour and its adverse effects on academic performance. Beside, the study intended also to find out the attitude of children involved in child labour and schooling. Finally it attempted to suggest some alternatives which can be devised as strategies to curb the problem in Gambian schools.

#### b) *Objectives*

Given the research problem, the main objectives of this study were three fold"

- To find out the attitudes of children engaged in child labour towards schooling;
- To expose the impact of child labour on school academic performance;
- To document some tentative strategies to the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education which are applied in primary schools to perpetuate child labour?

#### i. *Hypotheses*

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

- For majority of children schooling is a wastage of time than an undertaken for future prospect;
- Child labour is a causal factor for poor academic performance among many primary school pupils in Kanifing municipality;
- The introduction of different contributions in primary schools encourages the existence of child labour among school children.

#### c) *Significance of the Study*

Children are not only the tomorrow leaders but parents as well. Thus equipping them with necessary academic skills is a positive investment for future national development. The significance of the study stemmed from the followings:

- It will contribute to the stock of existing knowledge as sources of information for academia and other interested parties;

- It will act as an input for policy makers, thus new insight to improve their ability to design effective policies to curb the undesirable situation;
- It will provide a base for evaluating children's attitude towards the existence of child labour in their schools and how to change their attitudes.

## II. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

### a) *Child*

Any person under the age of 18 years.

### b) *Work*

Any activity that conforms to the laws, norms and values of a society or any activity meant to socialize or prepare a child to be a good citizen.

### c) *Child labour*

The involvement of a child in any activity that harms his/her health, educational development or general well-being.

## CHAPTER TWO

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### a) *Area of Study*

The study was conducted in Serekunda East and West. This area is densely populated with low income earners whose children are assumed to be susceptible to many forms of child abuse child labour included. The area has recently witnessed the proliferation of many informal and formal economic activities which act as a magnet for school children involvement in many activities to assist in family sustenance.

#### b) *Sample and Sampling Technique*

Due to the nature of the population studied, I employed the stratified and simple random sampling techniques. This was necessary as the aim was to collect information from strata of the society with at least a population of approximately sixty. That is 30 (thirty) children, 15 (fifteen) parents and 15 (fifteen) teachers.

#### c) *Data Collection*

Due to the sensitivity of child abuse in The Gambia, the most suitable and convenient method of data collection was the quantitative method through questionnaires. This method was found practical and effective. Focus group discussions were also held to complement the questionnaire method.

*Table 1* : Children's attitude towards schooling and child labour

Respondent	Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
School children	Schooling	10	33%
	Child labour	20	67%
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2009

Table 1 reveals that 20 (67%) of the respondents perceived child labour as worthy in their

### d) *Data Analysis*

The data analysis process entailed two staged: the initial analysis was coding and table creation, preparation of variables by combining a number of codes, converting codes into variable or developing completely new variables. This was used to provide a summary of patterns that emerged from the responses of the sample. Inferential statistics on the other hand were used to provide an overview of the application of the resulting patterns to the population.

Tables are the favorite here because among other things they are easier to read and interpret, easier to note the magnitude of the phenomenon via the comparison of the presented data reduces explanatory and descriptive statements and above all facilitate the summation of items and detection of errors and omissions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The discussion was guided by the three hypotheses, namely:

- For majority of children schooling is a wastage of time than an undertaken for future prospect;
- Child labour is a causal factor for poor academic performance among many primary school pupils;
- The introduction of different contributions in primary schools encourages child labour among school children.

### V. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### a) *Hypothesis one*

The research hypothesized that:

*"For majority of children schooling is wastage of time than an undertaken for future prospects".*

The purpose of this hypothesis was to find out whether children engaged in child labour considered schooling as important or not. The basic assumption was that children are no longer interested in schooling but child labour. The information was solicited from 30 (thirty) school children. The children's attitude towards schooling is summarized by table 1:

life. They strongly asserted that work is a determinant of humanity. For example, they mentioned the money

obtained from child labour assist them to meet their basic needs. Some respondents said that child labour was important since it enabled them to meet school requirements. They observed that child labour was a backbone of their future life. Therefore majority of the children engaged in child labour, 20 (67%) confirmed that school to them was not quite important. Whereas other 10 (33%) showed interest in schooling than being employed.

This negative attitude highly influenced their willingness either to attend or abscond studies. Such perception made children engaged in child labour perceive schooling as worthless.

Substantial number of respondents showed that if they complete school they would not gain anything. Believing that even if they have successfully completed their education, they wouldn't be employed; continuing with schooling was wastage of time.

To a large extent the findings concurred with what Roser (2006) discovered that:

*"Children who are working in streets and attending school speak that it is a matter of proud to earn money and sustain personal desires".*

However, 10 (33%) respondents viewed school as important for skill acquisition. the respondents stated that through schooling they would make their families have good future life. When asked why they engaged in child labour while they like school; most of them said that they were in need of money to meet both their school and family needs.

The study also wanted to know whether children were employed or doing their own petty business. Also the study was interested to investigate whether children are doing this business from their own personal interest or are externally motivated by parents or the like. Table 2 clearly illustrates their views.

*Table 2 : Whether children work for family needs or personal desires, in wage employment or vending*

Respondent	Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Pupils	Family needs	10	33%
	Personal desires	20	67%
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>
Pupils	Wage employment	4	13%
	Street vending	26	87%
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

Table 2 shows that 20 (67%) respondents were doing child labour as the only alternative to meet their needs such as new dresses, shoes, transports fares, phones, games' fee, bites, drinks, soaps, and other small items like their colleagues at school as they found it difficult to ask money from their parents because sometimes it angered their parents even if the request was genuine. In a bid to meet their daily needs, they are circumstantially compelled to engage in child labour. Hence child labour as a form of income generating activity.

Other 10 (33%) of respondents indicated that they worked to subsidize their family income. For example, they mentioned that they were staying with relatives who can't always afford to support them financially.

The study identified that some of the children are either employed on wage basis or engaged in their petty business. Statistically, 4 (13%) of respondents were employed in small shops and private homes and worked after school or on weekend and holidays. However, 26 (87%) confirmed that they are street vendors. Most asserted that it is cheap business which can be started with mearge capital that they can use to procure things like stationary items (pens, pencils, rubbers, etc) and groundnut from the market and make cakes to sell in the streets.

To this end the findings confirmed the hypothesis which holds that for majority of children schooling is a wastage of time than an undertaken for future prospect.

#### *b) Hypothesis two*

The study also hypothesized that child labour is a

*"Contributing factor for poor academic performance among many school going children"*

The purpose of this hypothesis was to examine the effects of child labour on school children's academic performance.

The study assumed that child labour jeopardizes the future academic life of school children. To test this hypothesis, 60 respondents were interviewed including teachers and parents/guardians. Table 3 summarizes the responses.

**Table 3 :** Whether child labour adversely affect children's academic performance or not

Respondents	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Working children	Yes	24	80
	No	6	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>
Teacher	Yes	15	100%
	No	00	00
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Parents/guardians	Yes	14	93
	No	1	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

Table 3 reveals that 24 (80%) of the working school children, 15 (100%) of teachers and 14 (93%) parents confirmed that child labour is detrimental to children's academic performance. All the respondents mentioned that, children spent most of their time vending items like groundnuts, ice cream, cooked potatoes, water and fish. Hence lacked the time for revision and doing assignments.

However, 6 (20%) working children and 1 (7%) parents rejected that child labour adversely affected pupil's academic performance. They strongly argued that time for child labour never coincided with schooling as they work after school hours. Besides they attend extra tuition since they have means to pay for it.

The study also showed that some children vending cigarette and selling illegal substance were tempted to use it. To some extents it made good number to develop smoking behaviors which is a potential threat to pupils' mental and psychological functioning. Such behaviors might not only lead to poor academic performance but also delinquency.

Study observed that 19 (63%) of the school going children were engaged in street employment from afternoon to night. 6 (20%) said they were engaged in child labour from morning to afternoon. Also the findings found that 5 (18%) engaged in child labour throughout the day. Their views summarized by table 4.

**Table 4 :** Time spent by working children in street vending

Respondents	Time on street vending	Frequency	Percentage
Children	2pm – 10pm	19	63
	8am -12pm	6	20
	8am – late night	5	17
<b>total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

The findings showed that school girls engaged in petty business up to 10.00pm were also vulnerable to all type of child abuse especially early sexual intercourse and early prostitution. This practice made some of them to get early and unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

It also revealed that children engaged in child labour usually absconded afternoon classes at the

expense of child labour. To a greater extent, this negatively affected their academic performance. For example, all children interviewed said that they have absconded studies at least twice per week. Also they said they absented themselves because they were extremely tired. Table 5 illustrates their perceptions about school attendance.

**Table 5 :** Relationship between child labour and truancy

Respondents	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Children	Yes	21	70
	No	9	30
<b>Total</b>			<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

Table 5 reveals that 21 (70%) of the pupils engaged in child labour confirmed their businesses sometimes made them forgo studies. However, 9 (30%) never accepted that truancy is influenced by child

labour. For example they argued that child labour was done after school activities and not before.

A study by ILO (2007) reveals that:

*"Work by children is no longer occasional; it is practice on everyday of the year for long hours, which is incompatible with school attendance".*

The study findings indicated that poor school attendance marginalized pupil's academic competence. This concurs with Laboreh K. (2000) assertion that:

*"A child who attends school irregularly is unable to learn the subject matter taught; he is always out of step, he cannot keep up with the others, which means that he will always lag behind".*

The findings also indicated that 15 (100%) of the teachers in table 4 agreed that child labour is detrimental to academic performance. In showing how hazardous is child labour to academic performance, they cited pupils' poor performance in both weekly and monthly tests. Even their classroom participation was seldom or none.

The study identified that there are certain students who influence their peers not to attend classes

and studies regularly which contributed to poor academic achievement at school.

The negative impact of child labour on pupils' academic performance is greatly reflected in the final examination of grade six and nine.

### c) Hypothesis three

The study hypothesis that:

*"The introduction of different contributions in the primary schools encourages child labour among school children".*

The purpose of this hypothesis was to investigate whether various contributions in primary schools can be a cause of child labour. It was assumed that, this mostly affected children from families with low socio-economic background. Thus it was concluded that if they continued to lack money for their education, child labour would continue to persist. 30 participants who included the parents and teachers were interviewed. Table 6 summarizes the responses.

**Table 6 :** The relationship between increased in school contributions and child labour

Respondents	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Teachers	Yes	13	87
	No	2	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>
Parents	Yes	11	73
	No	4	27
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

Table 6 shows that 13 (86%) of the parents were seriously hit by school costs and considered it some how a burden. The same was confirmed by 11 (73%) of teachers.

Therefore child labour was viewed by many poor families as the only alternative to subsidize their income as well as meet various school contributions. Guskul W. (1985) findings confirmed that:

*"Contributions in many cases leave disadvantaged parents find such imposition as a burden, as it has been happening that a child who cannot afford school costs is*

*subjected to punishment, warning of discontinuation, etc".*

However 2 (13%) of the parents and 4 (27%) of the teachers pointed out that, children engaged in child labour don't do so as an alternative to supplement household income but to find money for their own use. Furthermore they argued that many contributions are so meager they cannot justify child labour. Table 7 shows the different kinds of contributions existing in The Gambian primary schools.

**Table 7 :** Education related costs in the Lower and Upper basic schools

Type of contributions		Amount charged in Dalasis
1	School fees	D125.00
2	Uniform	D200.00
3	School batch	D50.00
4	Book fee/rental	D50.00
5	Study fee	D200.00
6	Saturday classes	D100.00
7	Afternoon classes	D200.00
8	School feeding	D30.00
9	School development fund	D5.00
10	Total	D960.00

Source: Compiled by the author, 2007

Table 7 shows that there are different numbers of contributions existing in The Gambian Lower and Upper Basic schools which can be easily mused together. For example, study fee, Saturday classes, afternoon classes, development fund, etc could have been combined with that of school fees. Thus findings doubted if all those contributions were really meant to improve school services and pupils performance.

Poor parents who have more than five children in schools for example, experienced problems in paying school costs, at times others had to drop out. This concurred with views of Tutts (1996) that:

*"A large family is likely to draw near the poverty line and so makes it impossible for family to pay for school facilities such as fees, books and uniforms."*

It is due to such circumstances Robert (1999) concluded that:

*"Drop outs rates, truancy and absenteeism are rooted in socio-economic backgrounds of the pupils."*

Some school environments appears tempting as some schools' campus or next had been nearly transformed into small markets. Indirectly the environment tempted children to find money to buy the available items. At worst it was noted that in some schools, teachers bring commodities and do encourage children to buy in cash or on load. Such unethical behaviors can compelled children to engage in child labour, so as to get money to pay.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### a) Summary

In recent years, child labour has received considerable attention and concern from a wide range of organizations and even individuals, since it continues to have significant impacts on children's physical, social, psychological and intellectual development. The findings revealed that the persistence of child labour has been caused and sustained by weak households' resource base to meet basic needs. The findings also identified that children involved in child labour, it consumes most of their school time and healthy condition which are necessary ingredients for learning which seriously affects their academic performance.

Furthermore findings showed that increased involvement of students in child labour has been necessitated by inter alia, changing life conditions, the unprecedented rise in the cost of living and the imposed introduction of cost sharing in many social services sectors. Today it is painful to see that many families struggle extremely hard to provide quality education to beloved children and as such disadvantaged parents are compelled to subject their children to child labour as

an alternative to pay for some services. To some extent such situation has been blamed by teachers' lack of time and skills on how to identify poor families and assist them accordingly.

The primary goals of the study were to examine the impacts of child labour on pupils' academic performance at primary level.

The study was guided by three hypotheses:

- *For majority of children schooling is wastage of time than an undertaken for future prospect.* The findings showed that 20 (67%) like child labour. They argued that child labour helped them to meet their basic necessities for life, while at school they gained nothing. However, 10 (33%) viewed schooling as important for future life. The findings therefore confirmed the hypothesis.
- *Child labour is a causal factor for poor academic performance among many school students.* The findings revealed that 24 (80%) children, 15 (10%) teachers and 14 (93%) parents agreed that child labour negatively affected students' academic performance. They argued that labour consumed most of students' time for studies. Whereas 6 (20%) children and 1 (7%) parents rejected the hypothesis. They said that child labour don't coincide with schooling timetable. The hypothesis was positively tested.
- *The introduction of different contributions in primary schools encouraged the existence of child labour among school children.* The findings confirmed by 13 (87%) parents and 11 (73%) teachers who asserted that increased in social services contributions including school seriously affected the low income families. Therefore their children had no other way than child labour. The other 2 (13%) parents and 4 (27%) teachers disagreed with the hypothesis. they argued that children engaged in child labour to meet their own personal needs. The hypothesis was accepted.

### VI. CONCLUSION

Educating children is a very important undertaken for any national development. Therefore any abnormality in the process of delivery of such vital social service is very much likely to affect the future of both the nation and individual citizenry. Hence it is of paramount importance that parents of all walks of life are able to ensure that their children acquire quality education with minimum burden.

Children the future of any nation should be protected from any form of abuse rather than being subjected to hazardous activities such as child labour which seriously compromises their social and intellectual development.



## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, I wish to make the following recommendations:

### a) *To the government*

- The government should continue encouraging and supporting small income generating activities for under privileged families, via grants if not soft loans to alleviate poverty in the families;
- It is essential that government starts looking into families' contributions in educating their children with a view to reducing these contributions and supporting and continuing to assist poor families who cannot afford to them;
- Review the idea of "cost sharing" in view of the present socio-economic conditions;
- Ban or reduce teachers' participation in businesses that are conducted within the education sector;
- Increase the budget of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.
- Continue providing training opportunities for family members as it is an important mean to enhance their skill base that would enable them to seek better paid employment.

### b) *To non-governmental organization (NGOs)*

- Support poor families by giving scholarships to their children;
- Support school in areas where parents are asked to pay for;
- Come up with schools that don't charge or charge less to children from disadvantaged families;
- Continue and expand their complementing government efforts in building and maintaining schools;
- Encourage and support income generating projects for disadvantaged families;
- Continue and strengthen their efforts of being part of the fight against child labour, etc.

### c) *To schools*

- To initiate school projects that can generate some income with the view of reducing parents' contributions;
- Devise more strategies to facilitate the identification of disadvantaged families for scholarships and exemption in "cost sharing";
- Parents, teachers and school committee must work towards abolishing unnecessary contributions, etc.

### d) *To parents*

- Must make sure that their children are not involved in any kind of child labour for any reason;

- Should monitor the attendance and academic progress of their school children.
- Should participate in projects meant to improve their children's school's status;
- Parents who are financial able should support schools when the need arises, etc.

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