

**CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN REDUCING POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS:  
CASE STUDY OF THE EDUCATION FOR INCOME PROGRAMME AT LIGHTHOUSE  
INSTITUTE, HARARE**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Children’s agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks: Case study of the Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare**

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In 2017, of the 6.4 million boys and girls in Zimbabwe, 4.9 million lived in poverty, including 1.5 million in extreme poverty, and these children mostly come from households where adults are unemployed (ZIMSTAT, 2018). Poverty and environmental risks present the biggest threat to children in the form of pollution, violence, poor sanitation, poor diets and a lack of access to rights like education, health and a safe living environment. However, whilst children can be the biggest casualty of poverty and environmental risks, they have the agency to reduce the impact of poverty and environmental risks through their participation in designing, implementing and the monitoring and evaluation of programmes aimed at mitigating poverty and environmental risks.

The goal of the study was to explore and describe how children’s agency is recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare. The study adopted a qualitative research approach; it was exploratory and applied and the research design was an instrumental case study. The sample for the study was purposively chosen and included five key informants and five child participants from the Education for Income programme at the Lighthouse Institute. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and the data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings revealed that children are vulnerable to poverty and environmental risks and this vulnerability, together with lack of knowledge, violation of rights, lack of education, culture and the perception of children, have hindered the full participation of children in mitigating poverty and environmental risks. However, it was also found that children have agency and have the capacity to fully participate in mitigating poverty and environmental risks when they are empowered and understand the scope of their participation and their rights.

The study concluded that children should not be defined by their vulnerability and need for protection, but rather by their agency to make a contribution in matters that affect their lives. They should be recognised and respected by including them in all the phases of programmes intended to mitigate poverty and environmental risks. Recommendations made include creating awareness of the importance of child agency, adoption of policies that promote child agency and the use of a human rights-based approach when dealing with children.

### **Key words**

Child

Agency

Child participation

Poverty

Environmental risks

Education for Income Programme, Lighthouse Institute, Harare

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## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction

In 2018, Zimbabwe had a population of 16.53 million of which 48% were children. The majority of the population live in rural areas which are typically worse off in terms of education, nutrition, health, access to information, water and sanitation, and other basic indicators of well-being and quality of life (ZIMSTAT, 2019). Of the 6.4 million boys and girls in Zimbabwe in 2017, 4.9 million lived in poverty, including 1.5 million in extreme poverty. These children mostly come from households where adults are unemployed (ZIMSTAT, 2018). The precarious socio-economic and environmental situation of Zimbabwe can be traced back to 2008 when much of the health and education systems severely deteriorated. Children inherited the worst of this period's adverse results and to this day, poverty in Zimbabwe has a child's face. The poor educational foundation of many children from early childhood and "the weak social structures and associated problems of violence and abuse" have kept children trapped in poverty and excluded socially and physically from mainstream society (UNICEF, 2014:6). Furthermore, in such a situation the most vulnerable people, which include children, are more likely to live in the most degraded of environments (Hawkins, 2010:68) where they are exposed to environmental risks such as poor sanitation, pollution and lack of clean water. Exposure to such conditions is a gross violation of children's human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which seeks the enjoyment of human rights for all through the attainment of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets (UN, 2015). Children are the stakeholders inheriting and shaping future societies, and as Eurochild (2017:3) rightfully claims, "We [children] have not inherited the Earth from our parents, but we have borrowed it from our children." This claim stresses the importance of children, inter-generational equity and justice, and a continued focus on development to ensure child development. However, equity and justice for children are threatened by external circumstances like environmental risks, poverty and violations of their rights. This means that all efforts

to end poverty and environmental risks for children and to bring equality and prosperity should include the participation of children and respect of their views.

Children have the right to participate in decisions that impact their lives and future. Involving children in discourses and decision-making processes on poverty and environmental risk reduction and sustainable livelihoods expands their human capital through their involvement, while also helping them to develop new skills, responsibilities, acceptable ways of living and sharing space with others as well as tolerating and working with people who are holding views that differ from theirs (Katunga & Lombard, 2016: 200-201). Child participation also broadens children's social capital by introducing them to various socio-economic, political, environmental and cultural setups, systems and resources that they might not have been aware of had they not contributed in poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood programmes (Katunga & Lombard, 2016: 200;201). Children have the right to participate in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes that affect their current and future lives, and not be inert bystanders. Children have agency and should be acknowledged for the contribution they can make in reducing poverty, creating income and mitigating environmental risks for sustainable development in their communities. This study investigated how children's agency was established in reducing poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare.

The following were the key concepts relevant to the study

- Child

In Zimbabwe, a child is any person under the age of 16 years and includes an infant (ZIM Children's Act 5:06 of 1971).

- Agency

Agency refers to a human being's (irrespective of age) capacity to make meaningful choices and decisions about events that influence her or his life today and in the future. To exert agency, people must be presented with opportunities to express their views and experience being capable and valued as human beings and citizens of their communities (Gowrie SA research summary – Sense of agency, 2015). In this study, unless otherwise indicated, agency means the agency of children.

- Poverty

In the context of this study, poverty is more than low income. It is also about social and physical exclusion, a sense of powerlessness, exclusion from decision-making and lack of access to education, healthcare and clean and safe environments (Green, 2012:6). Poverty reduction is about giving people opportunities to access education, healthcare, water, and sanitation “to cope with the shocks of everyday life” (Green, 2012:10). These opportunities are embedded in human rights and the recognition that children have agency to influence outcomes leading to a sustainable future.

- Environmental risks

In a sustainable development and human rights framework where SDGs and human rights are intertwined (UN, 2015), environmental risks are regarded as an environmental justice issue, which means, “the human right to live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment” (Hawkins, 2010:68). Environmental risks can derive from physical and social environments. For purposes of this study, the researcher will focus on poverty, the lack of access to clean water, poor sanitation, pollution, and violence.

- Education for Income Programme, Lighthouse Institute, Harare

The research study was conducted at Lighthouse Institute in Harare. The Institute is a Non-Governmental Organisation which is focused on providing education for children in the Harare region. The Institute deals with vulnerable children, that is, orphans and children considered to be at risk. The Lighthouse Institute offers these children educational services and conducts programmes which are targeted at alleviating poverty and environmental risks. These educational programmes are an addition to school-based learning and are developed to equip vulnerable children with added skills to alleviate poverty. Amongst the programmes that are offered by the organisation is the Education for Income Programme where the vulnerable children are taught many ways to earn an income during and after their time of study at the organisation. The Lighthouse Institute Brochure (2019:5) notes that the Education for Income Programme provides the children with many opportunities to learn vast ways of alleviating poverty through using materials available to them in their environments.

It is interesting to note that the programme is not only targeted at one age group but is targeted at all age groups at the Institution.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

Theory-informed practice is valuable in social work. Teater (2010:1) holds that theory is an essential constituent in practice because it guides how social workers approach their work. In enhancing human well-being and addressing life's impediments, the social work profession is underpinned by a set of theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge (International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) & International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 2014: para.1). A human rights-based approach served as the theoretical framework for this study. This human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for facilitating sustainable human development outcomes embedded in international human rights standards and is intended to promote and protect human rights (UN HBRA Portal, 2018:1). It anchors programmes, policies, plans and processes of development in a system of rights which promote sustainable development outcomes and the empowerment of people (UN HBRA Portal, 2018:1). The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) "treasures [the] duty to lessen poverty" (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013c). Poverty and environmental risks violate human rights; therefore, a human rights-based approach was a suitable theoretical framework for the study. Guided by this theoretical framework, the researcher undertook to explore how child agency is respected in efforts meant to end poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute in Zimbabwe. A more detailed discussion of the human rights-based theoretical approach follows in Chapter 2.

## **1.3 Rationale and problem statement**

The rationale of this study was linked to the fact that ending poverty in all forms is the highest priority of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). Elimination of child poverty is crucial for sustainable economic and social development (UNICEF 2014:12). For children living in poverty, inadequate healthcare, poor nutrition, poor quality education, social and physical exclusion and environmental risks restricts their 'aspirations and hopes' to create a more prosperous future (UNICEF, 2014:7). Thus, children have the right to access social services and programmes on

education and healthcare, including protection against environmental risks such as pollution, poor sanitation and lack of access to clean water, to ensure that they are not left behind (UNICEF, 2018). Childhood constitutes both vulnerabilities and evolving capacities, which require a balance between children's protection rights and their participation rights. It is thus important to recognise that being a child does not automatically render an individual as helpless and/or passive in his/her environment. Children should be regarded as individuals with agency that can and want to participate in creating a sustainable future for themselves and others by providing input into the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes that concern them to achieve the intended outcomes.

A literature review indicated that there was little research evidence to indicate the extent of children's inclusion in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes that are meant to lead to the attainment of sustainable development outcomes that reduce poverty and environmental risks. Therefore, this study explored how children are involved in the conceptualisation, development, implementation and evaluation of programmes that are intended to reduce the impact of poverty and environmental risks on their livelihoods and well-being for a sustainable future. It was envisaged that the outcomes of the study will inform policy and practice, especially how the recognition and respect of children's agency can be incorporated in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes and outcomes that reduce poverty and environmental risks.

The research question for the study was as follows: How is the agency of children recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed to reduce poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare?

The research question was informed by the following sub-questions:

- What is the goal and what are the intended outcomes of programmes/interventions that are meant to reduce children's poverty and environment risks?

- How are children involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?
- What factors influenced the recognition and respect/ non-recognition and disrespect of children's agency in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?
- What must change for children's agency to be recognised and respected in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?

#### **1.4 Goal and objectives**

The goal and objectives of the study were as follows:

##### 1.4.1 Goal of the study

The goal of the study was to explore and describe how children's agency is recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risk in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare.

##### 1.4.2 Objectives of the study

- To conceptualise and contextualise poverty and environmental risks of children within a human rights-based framework.
- To explore and describe the goal and intended outcomes of programmes/interventions that are meant to reduce children's poverty and environment risks.
- To explore and describe how children are involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.
- To explore and describe the factors that influenced the recognition and respect / non-recognition and disrespect of children's agency in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.
- To make recommendations on how children's agency can be recognised and respected in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.

## **1.5 Research methodology**

This study made use of a qualitative research approach in order to allow the researcher to mirror as much as possible the subjective feelings, thoughts, and experiences of the research participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2015:46). The study was an applied one (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95) and used an instrumental case study design (Mertens, 2010:324). The study population encompassed children and key informants from Lighthouse Institution that are involved in the Education for Income Programme for vulnerable children. The researcher used purposive sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198) to select five children and five key informants that were involved in the Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute as research participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which allowed the researcher to have flexibility and obtain more in-depth information (Greeff, 2011:352). The data was then analysed through thematic analysis which is a flexible technique to respond to data as the researcher engages with it (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015: 224). A more in-depth discussion of the research methodology will be presented in Chapter 3, including the ethical aspects relevant to the research study.

## **1.6 Chapter outline of the research report**

The research is divided into four chapters. Chapter one gave a general introduction and orientation to the study. It provided an overview of the theoretical framework and presents the problem statement, research questions and the goal and objectives of the study. A broad overview of the research methodology of the study was given and the relevant concepts of the study defined. Finally, it outlined the chapters of the whole research.

Chapter two provides a literature review on children's agency in ending poverty and environmental risks within the human rights-based framework from a local, regional and global perspective.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology of the study, the ethical aspects of the study and the limitations of the study. Furthermore, it presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study.

Chapter four presents the key findings of the study, draws conclusions and makes recommendations based on the findings of the study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation among children is very essential as children are a vulnerable group and have multiple and complex needs (UNICEF, 2018). It is from this assertion that under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is a need to understand the threat poverty and environmental risks pose to children, anticipate the impacts of these on their well-being and health, and advocate for strategies that will lessen these effects and promote their well-being. Concerning child poverty, the Constitution of Zimbabwe highlights the need to embrace child rights. Under Section 19, it notes that the state must adopt policies and measures that ensure poverty reduction among children (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013c). In addition, Zimbabwe's neighbour, the Republic of South Africa, shares the same view in their Constitution (1996), with a cherished vital "duty to alleviate poverty" (Republic of South Africa, 2013:12). Poverty and environmental risks are gross violations of human rights. Therefore, a human rights-based approach is a suitable theoretical basis for the study on children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks. A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework that facilitates sustainable human development outcomes embedded in international human rights standards and is intended to promote and protect human rights (UN HBRA Portal, 2018:1). This framework anchors programmes, policies, plans and processes of development in a system of rights which promote sustainable development outcomes and people empowerment (UN HBRA Portal, 2018:1). The right to development thus distinguishes "that development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom" (UN, 1986:1). UNICEF (2014:13) merges the 44 child-related indicators integrated across the 17 SDGs into five dimensions of children's rights; namely, the right to survive, to learn, to be protected from violence, to live in a safe and clean environment, and to have an

equal opportunity to succeed. These indicators cannot be mentioned without including the participation of children in dealing with matters that concern or affect them.

The theme of human rights will be integrated in the chapter to anchor the discussion in a human rights-based framework. The chapter starts with a discussion of what children's rights are. The section that follows this discussion will focus on what poverty and environmental risks entail, how they impact children and what protection and participation mean in terms of children's rights. After that, the discussion will concentrate on what child agency is in relation to national, regional and global agendas. A discussion then follows on the sustainable development framework and its dimensions to combat poverty and environmental risks. The researcher will also discuss how children can be stakeholders of development, followed by a discussion on child poverty and the different interventions that can be employed to end child poverty and promote sustainable development. The chapter will conclude with a summary of its central concerns.

## **2.2. Children and children's rights**

The Constitution of Zimbabwe defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years who has specific rights targeted at ensuring a good and sustainable life (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013c). This affirms that children occupy a very important segment of the population who have designated rights channelled towards them. This also suggests their precarious and yet crucial position in society and matters that concern them. According to Heimer and Palme (2016:435), the UNCRC "organises the rights of children in terms of provision, protection and participation." Rights that facilitate the participation of children are protected in the Constitution (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013), as well as in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (OAU, 1990) both of which Zimbabwe has ratified. The UNCRC (1989) makes provision for a thematic organisational model, where the rights of children are categorised into four themes: survival, protection, development, and participation. It also makes provision for general principles in organising rights (known as general principles); namely, non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child (UN, 1989). In this study, the organisation of child

rights is based on the view of Heimer and Palme (2016:435) that the UNCRC organises the rights of children in terms of provision, protection and participation. This framework of UNCRC provides for an integrated analysis of the interrelationship between the rights of children and how these rights affect the construction of children's agency as rights-holders with a particular focus on children's right to participate in decisions that influence their current and future development. Promoting such a holistic approach to children's rights means that children are not only seen as part of vulnerable groups but, first and foremost, as individuals who have agency and whose participation is fundamental in any initiative to reduce poverty and environmental risks. Hence, the focus of the protection of children's rights and participation in the context of poverty and environmental risks will be argued in this chapter in the context of sustainable development which includes social, economic and environmental dimensions (see 2.5) whilst environmental risks will be argued in relation to social justice and environmental justice. However, it is important to first establish what poverty and environmental risks entail.

### **2.3. Poverty and environmental risks**

Children under the age of 15 represent 26% of the world's population (893 million girls and 956 million boys) (Statistics South Africa, 2018) and these children mainly live in low- and middle-income countries. The trend is also visible in the Global South. For instance, South Africa has a population of 57 million, of which 19.6 million (35%) are children (Statistics South Africa, 2018). However, Statistics in 2017 revealed that 65 percent of children in South Africa lived below the "upper bound poverty line (with a per capita income below R1, 138 per month)", and 30% were in households where no adult was employed (Hall, Richter, Mokomane & Lake, 2018:131). Gordon (2016:27) points out that it is in these low- and middle-income countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe and many other third world countries that children are robbed of their childhoods due to "childhood enders or life changing events like child marriage, early pregnancy, exclusion from education, sicknesses, malnutrition, environmental risks and violent deaths." It thus becomes imperative to avoid measuring narrowly through income alone, but see it in broader terms and in a multi-dimensional way. This means the focus shifts to considering poverty as lacking the resources to participate fully in society across a number of dimensions. For example, it would be possible to consider

the extent of a child's deprivation in the areas of health, education, housing, employment, access to services, as well as income. Furthermore, children are also exposed to environmental risks in their day to day lives. UN (2015) states that in a sustainable development and human rights framework where SDGs and human rights are intertwined, environmental risks are regarded as an environmental justice issue which, according to Hawkins (2010:68), means "the human right to live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment". Environmental risks can thus stem from physical and social environments. For the purposes of this study, focus was on poverty, lack of access to clean water, poor sanitation, pollution, and violence. From this argument, it becomes clear that children are exposed to current and future social, economic, political and environmental sustainability problems, yet they are also potentially active participants for sustainable change through their agency.

To eliminate income poverty and reduce inequality, reference can be made to The National Development Plan of South Africa which is a strategic framework developed with the goal of eliminating income poverty and reducing inequality in the country by 2030 (National Development Plan, 2012:34). It is evident that South Africa is committed to eradicating poverty through legislation, policies and intervention strategies. However, the extent of implementation and the effectiveness of these efforts ought to be reviewed when considering the current statistics regarding poverty. Lombard (2014:45) highlights that social workers play a central role in poverty eradication and addressing the various needs of individuals, families and communities. Lombard and Viviers (2014:83) bring to light that social workers with their well-developed policy understanding, strength-building capabilities and trans-disciplinary knowledge are uniquely situated to be key players in poverty reduction and mitigation of environmental risks. These services should be aligned with the 2012 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, which echoes a call for practitioners to fight poverty and promote all people's right to human dignity and worth. In South Africa, the South African White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) underpins the importance of the involvement of the social work profession through social work's commitment to a developmental approach to fighting poverty and inequality. The Developmental approach to social work is embedded in a human rights-based framework (Patel, 2016:82) and promotes social change, use of strengths, empowerment, capacity enhancement, self-determination and client participation (Midgley & Conley, 2010:13).

Heimer, Näsman and Palme (2018:43) write that the emergence of child-focused systems within child protection and family services was influenced by the understanding of children as "beings", meaning they are viewed as social actors and as bearers of rights (Heimer et al., 2018: 317). This reconceptualisation of childhood has led to the development of social work methodologies that facilitate working directly with children and young people. In this regard, the paradigm shift in childhood and children's study has further gone towards emphasising the notion of children as having agency and a voice of their own that must be heard. The idea that children can be seen as independent social actors underscores children's capacities to make choices about the things they do, express their own ideas to get their perspectives heard and to ensure that their position in society is better understood in their efforts to end poverty and environmental challenges. Social workers are therefore challenged to ensure that children's agency is recognised through their participation and that they have a voice in policy making and intervention strategies to address poverty in a sustainable manner (Lombard, 2014:46). Child agency and participation are intertwined as will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4. The Importance of child agency and child participation**

Agency refers to a human being's (irrespective of age) capacity to make meaningful choices and decisions about events that influence her or his life today and in the future (Gowrie SA research summary - Sense of agency, 2015). To exercise agency, people must be presented with opportunities to express their views and experience being capable and valued as human beings and citizens of their communities. To support this assertion, Durham (2011:13) reflects that, one of the key ideas in the social studies of childhood is the recognition that children are social actors and that they have agency. In fact, the concept of agency has become so pervasive that it has come to represent something that all children should have the right to apply. Children's right to practice agency is exemplified by the application of a universal, rights-based framework in the planning and provision of services targeting them. In this way, human beings, including children, are neither passive recipients nor mere dependents on others or social structures, but are instead social actors capable of shaping a future that they want. The recognition of children's potential role as agents of change implies that concepts of investment in education should not just be guided by human capital

formation for life-time earnings in markets and by cultural dimensions, but should be expanded through the inclusion of externalities of children's contributions in dealing with the matters that affect them positively and negatively. Badham (1999:23) avers that the participation of children and youth in their communities in matters affecting them is not only essential, but a fundamental right. The UN Convention (2014:38), article 12, provides that, "all children have the right to express their views on all matters of concern to them and to have those views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity." In other words, it means children have the agency and right to be consulted when decisions that affect them in terms of poverty and environmental risks are being made, either as individuals or as a group. This emphasises that children's best interests cannot be determined without involving them in the process. Respecting children's right to be heard is an important mechanism through which children can contribute toward their own health and protection (UNICEF 2014).

This assertion means that adults can make informed decisions about children if they first listen to children in relation to the reduction of poverty and environmental risks. Child participation is used to describe forms of social engagements by children and it is part of their belonging within a family or community (Lansdown, 2013:43). The Zimbabwe National Child Participation and Protection Guidelines (2010:6) highlights that, "child participation is a process whereby children are given opportunities to make decisions on issues that affect them." In support of that assertion, Lansdown (2013:51) points out that participation, particularly of children as a previously excluded or marginalised group, has entered mainstream development vocabulary and must be responded to constructively. This implies mindfulness of how children's participation is facilitated. Children's right to participation is embedded in human rights provisions across a range of international treaties and domestic legislation. Speaking on the effects of climate change on Zimbabwean children, the former Minister of Health and Child Welfare in Zimbabwe, Dr Moyo, mentioned that "as climate change will affect the future of children, they have the right to be included and to participate in the process for developing climate change strategies, policies and action plans." This will allow children to take mitigatory and adaptive actions on climate change. As a civil and political right, participation is safeguarded in multiple articles of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) as one of the fundamental principles, together with a) the best interests of the child; b) survival, protection and development; and c) non-discrimination

(Hodgkin & Newell, 2011:89). With this in mind, the consideration of children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks has to include an overview of the global, national and regional agendas affirming children's agency.

#### 2.4.1. Global, national and regional agendas affirming children's agency

Peeters (2012:208) highlights that communities are places where normal everyday inequality, exploitation, oppression and maliciousness are mixed into the basic fabric of relationships and these are scaled up to form part of the national, regional and global social, economic and environmental problems. In this way, various global, regional and national agendas have been adopted in response to vast inequality and injustice internationally, regionally and within Zimbabwe. Such agendas are evidently also applicable in the consideration of children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks. For example, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to realise human rights for all through the attainment of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets which seek to meet the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 2015). Children are affected by all of the SDGs, whether related to poverty, hunger, inequality or climate change, among others. Though the goals focus on sustainable development, they are inextricably linked to human rights generally and the rights of children specifically. As UNICEF (2018 in UN, 2015) has noted, the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child run through the SDGs; therefore, the realisation of any one of these goals must take into account the corresponding rights of children. The SDGs are not a revolutionary or radical reinvention of rights and development standards; they set targets for development and the realisation of rights that already exist. As alluded to in the introduction, UNICEF (2014:13) identified child-related indicators which are expressed through rights like the right to survive, to learn, to be protected from violence, to live in a safe and clean environment and to have equal opportunity to succeed. The latter is linked to SDG number one that calls for nations to eliminate extreme forms of poverty and to provide social protection systems. UNICEF (2018:9) asserts that the SDGs place the world's most vulnerable and marginalised, including children, at the top of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). The placement of children as the first goal of the 2030 Agenda for Social Development only serves to confirm that the inclusion

and participation of children in matters that affect them cannot be overstated. Child participation is thus a right that should be respected through inclusion of child agency in the fight against poverty and environmental risks.

Child poverty is a human rights matter; thus, according to Tisdall (2008:243–9), children’s participation “demands a shift from a paternalistic approach to one where children are seen as stakeholders in decision making with a right to have the same input rather than merely being the object of concern or the subject of the decision.” Tisdall (2008:240) add that within the field of sociology of childhood, children have long been perceived as social actors and holders of rights. Furthermore, children and young people have also been promoted in a range of other disciplines and more general settings to be a part of decision-making about their lives. This can, for example, be seen in policies and global frameworks regarding children's rights (Tisdall, 2008:249). In the same way, Martin (2000) confirms that children should no longer be content with being treated as second-class citizens and that society and the law must accept children as rights-bearing national and global citizens. Tisdall (2008: 249) highlight that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) particularly constructs children as social actors and human ‘beings’ with their own rights (Tisdall, 2008:250-251,257).

To this end, Zimbabwe has signed and ratified both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and is, therefore, bound to promote and protect children’s rights and children’s right to exercise agency as espoused in these treaties (Hall et al., 2018:48). Central to these treaties are the four main principles; namely, “non-discrimination; the right to life, survival and development; child participation; and the best interests of the child” (Hall et al., 2018:49). The UNCRC organises the rights of children in terms of provision, protection and participation (Heimer & Palme, 2016:435). This organisation of rights suggests a multi-pronged view of children’s welfare with an emphasis on child agency. To meet the above international obligations, the Zimbabwean government has made progress in developing a comprehensive child protection system which is underpinned by the Constitution of Zimbabwe, through Amendment No. 20 of 2013 and other related legislation. South Africa has made a commitment to poverty alleviation as reflected in the Framework for Social Welfare



Services which presents social assistance and relief services as a strategy to provide a safety net for people who cannot care for themselves or may be too young, too old or sick to take care of their basic needs (Republic of South Africa, 2013:32). In this regard, the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004 makes provision for non-contributory cash transfer programmes, such as the Child Support Grant, targeting eligible children living in poverty in order to meet their basic needs (Republic of South Africa, 2015:34).

To highlight the unprecedented levels of child poverty, Hall et al (2018:139) reveal that in 2018, there were 12 273 900 children receiving a child support grant in South Africa for the betterment of their lives, much like in Zimbabwe where more than 6 million children were getting food aid monthly (Government of Zimbabwe, 2016:209). In this regard, “social assistance in South Africa has grown substantially over the past 20 years, driven largely by the introduction and expansion of the Child Support Grant (CSG)” (Patel & Plagerson, 2016:39). Studies have shown the positive impacts of social grants, and the CSG in particular, in alleviating poverty and promoting child well-being. In the face of persistently high unemployment, social grants and food aid, together with access to quality education, health and social services and other measures, support families to care for their children, and are a core component of broader social protection strategies to enable all children to realise their full potential. This is in line with the Zimbabwean Constitution which guarantees everyone the right to have access to social security. This is important in a country like Zimbabwe where high levels of inequality, unemployment and poverty mean that many people do not have the financial resources to provide for their children. Thus, the focus of fulfilling the rights of children can be used in the context of them being a tool that can be used to end poverty and environmental risks for children. Patel and Plagerson (2016:39) support this claim by providing functions of social assistance saying that it helps boost the protection of children through providing relief from poverty and deprivation, for example, through social assistance and other social services that give children a platform or level field to be able to participate and be heard.

Social assistance also focuses on prevention of and averting deprivation, for example, by using social insurance, savings clubs and funeral societies, and boosting promotion through enhancing real incomes and capabilities like nutrition support programmes, microfinance as well as promoting social equity and inclusion through upholding the

rights of socially vulnerable groups, sensitisation and campaigns. All these aspects cover the notion of upholding the rights of children in the ending of poverty and environmental risks through their participation and inclusion in interventions to end these problems. In addition, social grants can also contribute to the upholding of human dignity, a founding value of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Recognising the country's history of discrimination and exclusion, the preamble to the Constitution includes a commitment to equality and social justice, and to "[improving] the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person" (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013c). The social support system in Zimbabwe, together with taxes and spending on social services, contributes to building a more equitable society by redistributing income. Social assistance provides support to disadvantaged children, including children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, to level the playing field and promote substantive equality. Thus, although social protection can be used as a human rights yardstick, it can also be used as a catalyst for social justice in the quest to end poverty and environmental risks through the inclusion of children socially and economically and through ensuring their participation and agency.

In line with the UNCRC's call for respect of the rights of children in ending poverty and environmental risks, the Lighthouse Institute in Zimbabwe offers education for vulnerable children in the field of income generation. In their operations, the institution upholds the right to education and uses this right to prepare learners for the battle against poverty and environmental risks (Lighthouse Institute Brochure, 2019:5). The institute's work dovetails with the sustainable development framework (UN, 2015) which seeks to save the planet while also delivering services that address both poverty and environmental risks. As laid out in the 2012 Rio Declaration (1992), sustainable development can be achieved when green growth, which is the combination of economic and environmental strands, complements 'inclusive growth', the nexus of economic and social strands underpinned by a human-rights based approach. It further emphasises "that broad public participation and access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are essential," and that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of regional, national and subnational legislatures and judiciaries, and all major groups including children (UNICEF, 2018:12). This means that nationally, regionally and globally, children are a vital group of the population that must be heard in the development of

policies, actions and ideas as their agency is very instrumental in ending poverty and environmental risks while ensuring sustainable development for their generation and generations to come. This is further elaborated in the next section.

## **2.5. A Sustainable development framework to combat poverty and environmental risks**

In 2018, UNICEF Zimbabwe (2018:3) highlighted that of the 6.3 million boys and girls in the country, 4.8 million live in poverty and 1, 6 million in extreme poverty. The statistics depicting child poverty in Zimbabwe contradict the principle of leaving no one behind in relation to sustainable development. The achievement of sustainable development must include a balance of three dimensions: social, economic and environmental (UN, 2015). Vallance, Parkins and Dixon (2011:343) indicate that sustainability efforts are currently failing to meet the needs of the poor, and that wider developmental goals should include the fulfilment of people's basic needs everywhere, including children. The notion of human development is universal and must be attained for all, without anyone being left behind and that includes children (Human Development Report, 2014). Since children are the key stakeholders supporting and being affected by sustainable development, the framework for the Sustainable Child Development Index (SCDI) was proposed by the UNDP (Chang, 2018:3). It addresses social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development by considering seven relevant themes of child development, which are, health, education, safety, economic status, relationship, environmental aspects, and participation. It is therefore crucial to ensure that as key participants of sustainable development, children should be consulted in social, economic and environmental efforts to ensure sustainable development. To support this assertion, Eurochild asserts that the earth is borrowed from children, which emphasises the importance of children, inter-generational equity and justice, and the need for the continued sustenance of development that will benefit children (Eurochild, 2017:3). However, despite the importance of sustainable development, it is under threat from external circumstances like environmental risks, poverty and violation of children's rights. It is at this juncture that the sustainable development framework can be put into use to ensure that children's rights are included in the combatting of poverty and environmental risks in the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

### 2.5.1. The social dimension of sustainable development

Marshall and Aboagye (2014:21) highlight that freedom from poverty is not explicitly recognised as a human right in any international human rights treaty, but poverty can prevent the realisation of the full range of children's rights. For instance, if left unchecked poverty can threaten several of children's rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living which includes housing, food, health, education and freedom from discrimination. To add to this, UNESCO (2010:13) states that no social phenomenon is as comprehensive in its assault on human rights as poverty since it erodes and nullifies social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education. In this way, promoting a holistic approach to children's rights means that children are not only seen as part of vulnerable groups but, first and foremost, as individuals having agency and who therefore should be treated with respect, which in turn, is fundamental in any poverty reduction initiative. Engelbrecht (2008:169) adds that children in any society are usually the most vulnerable and suffer the most in circumstances of social, economic or political predicament. In the majority of African states, including Zimbabwe, the plight of children is dismal which in turn affects child development negatively. Many children reside on the streets, are trafficked, subjugated to child labour or plunged into combat in civil wars (Behrendt, 2008:79). The matter is complicated by the fact that children in most of these countries face the intricate combination of regular bouts of chronic but preventable diseases, malnourishment as well as a lack of access to basic education (WFP 2006). Children in the sub-region also bear the brunt of political upheaval and displacement which are detrimental to their well-being, and the already endemically poor socio-economic conditions of these children deteriorate with the existence of political ills.

As recorded in 2014, children aged 0-18 years constitute 34% of the total population of Southern Africa (Hall et al., 2018:106). These children mainly live in low- and middle-income communities where they are exposed to current and future social, economic and environmental sustainability problems, but are also potential agents of change for sustainability, even in childhood. It is interesting to note that many of these challenges hamper the achievement of the social dimension of sustainable development through social exclusion. Manderson (2018:134) highlights that social exclusion is about more

than income poverty. Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill-health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle of poverty and environmental risks. Social exclusion can happen as a result of problems that confront one person in their life, but it can also start from birth, for example, by being born into poverty or to parents with low skills which has a major influence on children's future chances in life. Gordon (2016:71) regards social exclusion as a process that deprives individuals and families, groups and neighborhoods of the resources required for participation in the social, economic and political activity of society as a whole. For Manderson (2018:140), social exclusion is a dynamic process of progressive multidimensional rupturing of the social bond at the individual and collective levels. Hence for the researcher, social exclusion undermines the ability of groups, including children's full participation in the normatively prescribed duties and activities of a society, and reduces capabilities to achieve personal and group goals. This process is primarily a consequence of poverty and low income, but other factors such as discrimination, low educational attainment and depleted living environments also underpin it. Through this process, people are, for a significant period in their lives, cut off from institutions, services, social networks and developmental opportunities that the great majority of a society enjoys. In this regard, to ensure that there is sustainable development, children should be seen as active participants with agency in the fight against social exclusion which is a structural process that brings social isolation and strips away multiple dimensions of social involvement. This exclusion can thus be ended through improvement of the education system, health sector and people's settlements as well as child protection. UNHCR (2014:3) advocates for the protection of children by responding to their specific needs and the risks they face. The responses include: protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; social protection; ensuring immediate access to appropriate services; and ensuring durable solutions in the child's best interests (UNHCR, 2014:3).

With the best interests of the child being central to ending the social exclusion of children, social protection, as well as 'social investment' in policy initiatives that not only improve the social well-being of children but raise human and social capital for the wider project of creating a globally competitive and integrated national economy,

are justified. Children become a natural target for social investment because many of the worrying problems in today's society (including poor educational attainment, drug abuse, crime, unemployment, early pregnancy and the transmission of social disadvantage) have their origins in the deprived childhoods of many future citizens (Gordon, 2016:51). This means that central to ending social challenges that affect children today and their sustainable development is the need to arrest these social vices in their earliest forms. Mukusha (2013:27) opines that "one of the best established findings in social research is the beneficial effect of quality early intervention and pre-school on children from markedly disadvantaged backgrounds." Hence, to ensure that there is sustainable development, the researcher is of the opinion that there should be adequate investment in child-centered education and an increase in labour-market participation where vigorous ways are used to improve social capability and opportunity creation. In addition, Manderson (2018:143) postulates that when children are not given a voice or a chance to influence the framing of what "the problem" is, the design of protection and care tends to be poorly matched to the actual problems documented in child investigation. It is also true that when children influence the framing, the associated result is well-matched protection and care for children. In this view, the researcher is of the opinion that protection should not be done in such a way that children become 'protected' from participation. Social workers need to move from such mindsets and advocate for the participation of children and use of child agency, for these are the bedrock that sustainable development can be built upon in order to end poverty and environmental risks.

#### 2.5.2. The economic dimension of sustainable development

Economic sustainability as described by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to create sustained economic growth, technological innovation and high levels of economic growth (UN, 2015). The involvement of children's voices in economic activities is vital for sustainable development, eradication of child poverty and environmental risks. UN (2015) states that poverty is a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. Its presence is not only measured in terms of income but also in terms of access to social services. It is essential to note that poverty denies children their fundamental human rights and shares with social exclusion the multidimensional notion of disadvantage. Severe or

extreme poverty can cause permanent damage both physically and mentally on children, stunt and distort their development and destroy opportunities of fulfilment, including the roles they are expected to play successively as they get older in family, community and society (UN, 2015). In addition, UN (2015) points that fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, and a violation of human dignity. It perpetuates the lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. Hence, for the researcher, the denial of child participation and agency is a confirmation of the presence of the dark hand of poverty. In this way, Taylor and Wu (2009:8) point out that child income poverty is closely linked to adult unemployment. In 2016, more than a quarter of the global South's economically active population was unemployed leading to less income per household. Statistics South Africa (2018:5) adds that those who do not have their own livelihoods, for example children and people who are disabled, are dependent on other household members or on welfare and charity from the state or other organisations. This means that children are dependent on their kin or others for survival, and if those that they look up to are entrenched in poverty they automatically become victims of the same poverty. However, Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, has argued that in developing countries, poverty is best measured directly using indicators of standard of living rather than indirectly using income or consumption measurements (Taylor & Wu, 2009:32). Income is important, but access to public goods, safe water supply, roads, healthcare, and education are of equal or greater importance, particularly in developing countries like Zimbabwe. These are the views of both the governments of the world and the institutions of the UN, and poverty measurement clearly needs to respond to these views (UN, 2015). Hence, there is a need to look beyond income and consumption expenditure, and poverty measures to both the effects of low family income on children and the effects of inadequate service provision for children (Vandemoortele, 2011:48). Structural factors contributing to poverty include a lack of investment in good quality education, health and other public services in many parts of the world that are as significant a cause of child poverty as low family incomes as well as the lack of demand for unskilled labour, and economic opportunities that are often located far from where people live (Gracious, 2015:39). As a result, many are unable to participate in the economy and almost a third (30% or 5.5 million) of children in developing countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa live in households where no adults are employed (Van der Berg & Moses, 2012:129).

It is widely recognised that the reduction of child poverty is crucial for sustainable economic and social development (UNICEF, 2014:12). The Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs recognises that growth and development should particularly benefit children (UN, 2014:24). This goes back to reinforce the idea that children should be economically empowered through learning about entrepreneurship and being asked for their voices on solutions to poverty issues so that they can contribute to ending poverty and environmental risks that they face every day. However, serious implications and threats await the future of children economically if they are not prepared according to current occurrences such as the current Fourth Industrial Revolution in which economies are rapidly influenced by innovative technologies.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has transformative power that is global; nevertheless, this transformation should be placed within the local context of Zimbabwe's structural unfairness and political turbulence. The digital economy holds great threat for children of the Anthropocene Era, especially if long-term, intensive and adequate planning are not put in place (Zucconi, 2016:1). Machine-to-machine communications, autonomous systems and robots will eventually take over repetitive unskilled jobs that provide sustenance to millions of Africans (ANC, 2017:16). To escape the trap of poverty, the children and youth of the 21st century will need a different set of skills to work in collaboration and in harmony with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Zucconi (2016:1) mention collaboration, creativity, self-awareness, technology and computer skills, critical thinking, communication and social and interpersonal skills, such as empathy, as imperative and highly valued for adaptation to a fast-changing world. Thus, it is vital for economic development to be improved in an integrated manner to ensure that children are not caught unaware by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and to safeguard sustainable economic development for children so that they can escape the clutching jaws of poverty and environmental risks. In addition, the researcher is of the view that the development of locally relevant policies that reflect global declarations on poverty and the alleviation of environmental risks is very important to ensure a sustainable future for children. However, Munowenyu (2017:43) brings to light that policy inconsistencies affect sustainability and toxify the environment which people live in, thereby posing environmental threats that promote poverty. It is upon this assertion that the discussion of the next dimension of sustainable development is anchored in the next section.



### 2.5.3. Environmental dimension of sustainable development

Globally, children are disproportionately exposed to a myriad of environmental threats and evidence is mounting that worsening trends of global environmental degradation, including the erosion of ecosystems, increased pollution, and the effects of climatic changes, contribute to the burden of diseases confronting children, in both developed and developing countries. For example, Manyena, Fordham and Collins (2008:313) give evidence that droughts and climate change coupled with lack of governmental preparedness for these environmental risks in Zimbabwe have led to hunger, infant mortality and stunted growth. These circumstances as highlighted by Manyena et al. (2008:313) are affecting the world's ability to meet the SDGs and the other internationally ratified development goals (UN, 2015). In addition, UN (2015) brought to light that health implications of environmental degradation for children are profound and every year, around three million children under five die from preventable environment-related causes and conditions which makes the environment one of the most critical contributors to the global toll of 8.8 million child deaths annually (UN, 2015). In the same vein, Manyena et al. (2008:315) highlight that air pollution, unsafe water, lead in soil, pesticide residues in food, and ultra-violet radiation are a few of the multitude of environmental threats that may alter the delicate organism of a growing child, causing disease, developmental problems or adverse effects later in life and death from noteworthy killers like respiratory and diarrhoeal diseases, and malaria. In light of this, Gumbau (2015:83) argues that children are especially vulnerable, as they respond differently than adults when exposed to environmental factors, because their immune defences are not fully mature and their developing organs are more easily harmed; thus, environmental contaminants may affect children disproportionately. In addition, Gumbau (2015:83) posits that children's airways are smaller than those of adults, and irritating particles may act very fast, causing respiratory difficulties. They generally spend more time active and outdoors than adults, increasing their risk of exposure considerably. Also proportionate to their size, children ingest more food, drink more water and breathe more air than adults, and children's normal activities such as putting their hands in their mouths or playing outdoors can result in higher exposures to certain contaminants. Even while in the womb, the child-to-be can also be exposed to adverse environmental risk factors that may give rise to diseases later

in life imposing a heavy burden on public health systems (Gumbau, 2015:83). Hence, the researcher argues that efforts to deal with environmental risks that affect children need to be addressed with great urgency and the involvement of children's voices not only saves the lives of children but also ensures the safeguarding of the environment which is equally important.

From the environmental dimension of sustainable development, Dominelli (2012:6) mentions the Brundtland 1987 definition which states that people ought to conserve the environmental resources that they have so that they will be available for future use by coming generations. From this definition by Dominelli, the researcher is of the view that failure to sustain these environmental resources will lead to a wide array of environmental risks such as climate change, global warming, and conflicts that emanate from environmentally induced problems like drought and famine. Galvin (2011:82) posits that environmental challenges in the natural realm have brought conflicts and wars as people now fight for the few food resources and little water available. From these conflicts, the usual casualties are children because children are the most vulnerable group in conflict and emergency situations. Children "are too often forced to flee their homes, witness atrocities or even perpetrate war crimes themselves. Children are not responsible for war, yet it robs them of their childhood" (Galvin, 2011:83). Armed conflict deprives children of basic needs. According to a study by the International Rescue Committee and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women & Children, 27 million children and youth in conflict areas were deprived of formal education (Women's Commission for Refugees and Women, 2004). Similarly, children in armed conflict are deprived of other basic needs, such as shelter, proper nutrition, and healthcare. These children need special attention; however, conventional emergency response and anti-poverty programmes may not recognise the importance of addressing the critical needs of children during these times (Galvin, 2011:79). The researcher is of the opinion that, in emergency situations, like natural disasters, children must be a priority group. Their special needs and vulnerability to illness, malnutrition and lack of security must be addressed to avoid catastrophic consequences for the children. Providing children with a voice to help shape responses to emergency situations is also crucial to their own survival and development (Galvin, 2011:79).

Dylan (2013: 62) notes that the growing attention to climate change is a result of the recognition of the interdependence of the human-environment well-being. Although climate change affects everyone globally it is the disadvantaged and marginalised countries like Zimbabwe that bear the brunt of its worst repercussions, and children are the most hit by these effects. Children are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This means that the nature of children's vulnerability is multidimensional, shaped by the social, physical and emotional changes that take place over the course of childhood. Alston (2015:356) states that the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of 2013 shows with 95% certainty that global warming is a result of human activities through greenhouse gas emissions and land degradation. Sadly, according to Gibbons (2014:23), political leaders are failing to make important decisions regarding climate change and this failure impacts on present children and future generations. This means that children need to be involved in environmental issues as they will inherit the environment, and their input in the safeguarding of the environment should be heard, respected and valued. Children's right to be heard is a core principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Boyden & Mann, 2008:17), a right in itself and a tool to interpret and apply all other rights under the Convention. In this context of environmental rights, children's participation in decision-making processes, including those related to climate adaptation and mitigation policies, is essential to a children's rights-based approach. The full realisation of this principle requires children's views to be heard and given due weight in legislation, policy debates and before courts and complaint mechanisms.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration and that children have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. However, despite this legal requirement, children's voices are hardly heard in climate policy dialogues (UN, 1989). Lombard and Viviers (2014:80) point out that in 2011, during the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate change (COP17) in South Africa, particular attention was drawn to the widespread impact of climate change on vulnerable groups, especially children, who are likely to bear the brunt of climate change although they contribute least to the problem. In this regard, children should be made aware of the environmental implications of the current generation on the fortunes of their future generations so that they can be advocates and campaigners of the safeguarding of

the environment, be it politically or legally, so as to curb environmental problems and risks as well as environmentally driven poverty. Social workers should thus be the advocates who pave the way for the participation of children in the discussions of creating solutions to the environmental challenges that children face. However, talking about environmental challenges, Dominelli (2012:6) highlights that another challenge attributed to social work's failure to involve children is that social workers are reactive in dealing with problems. This shows that social work often assumes a back seat role and as Dominelli (2012:6) highlights, concentrates on disaster management and providing people with blankets and water when environmental disasters strike, but are less visible in debates on policies that need to be crafted in order to avoid disasters like climate change and global warming.

In a nutshell, environmental risks threaten sustainable development for children and therefore measures that mitigate environmental risks must be implemented for the benefit of children. Such measures include child poverty interventions where programmes that address both environmental and poverty issues are created for children by children. In addition to the participation of children, social work interventions must include environmental justice, that is, the human right to live in a clean and safe environment every day. Currently, the most vulnerable, especially children, live in degraded environments and have no control over resources and this threatens sustainability for the children. Therefore, children are stakeholders in their own development as will be discussed next.

## **2.6. Child poverty and poverty interventions**

Various studies on child poverty, like the reintegration of street children in Burundi by Crombach and Elbert (2014:18), the impacts of poverty on children and young people by Treanor (2016:38), and child poverty studies in Kenya and Macedonia by UNICEF (2014) conclude that children who are born in families living in poverty tend to have less resilience and suffer from being exposed to both personal and societal challenges. Personal problems include poor health, poor academic performance and exposure to vices such as drugs and crime. With regard to societal problems, these children have a higher chance of being subjected to social exclusion. Treanor (2016:38) maintains that over half of the children in the developing world live in poverty, one in six children is underweight or suffering from stunting, one in seven has no healthcare

at all, one in five has no safe water and one in three has no toilet or sanitation facilities at home. Over 640 million children live in dwellings with mud floors or extreme overcrowding, and over 300 million children have no television, radio, telephone or newspaper (Treaor, 2016:38). Over 120 million children are shut out of primary schools, the majority of them girls, and more than 30,000 children die of preventable causes worldwide every day (Save the Children, 2004:6). These statistics show the extent of the poverty that is bedeviling children all over the world. Crombach and Elbert (2014:28) rightfully note that children living in poverty are those who experience deprivation of material, spiritual and emotional resources that are needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society, and exposed to environmental risks. This definition suggests that “the poverty children experience with their hands, minds and hearts is interrelated” (UNICEF, 2014b: 8). For example, material poverty leads to malnutrition, which in turn affects health and education, which may impact a child’s long-term development (Crombach & Elbert, 2014:28).

Furthermore, to address the lack of financial resources, children from poor households may become engaged in child labour which negatively impacts a child’s cognitive and physical development by depriving the child of school education (Nyamukapa & Gregson, 2010:28). Children in rich households are not necessarily free from suffering from deprivation as UNICEF (2014:8) articulates: “Living in an environment that provides little stimulation or emotional support to children can remove much of the positive effect of growing up in a materially rich household”. In essence, UNICEF’s finding stresses the multidimensional and interrelated nature of child poverty and environmental risks, which if not dealt with, will affect the wellbeing and effective functioning of the child. Development economists, like Prebisch, Sen and Solow have, according to Barshow (2014:31), all pointed to the importance of investing in people’s human capital to help an economy develop and grow. For the researcher, investing in children’s human capital is investing in the development of a country since children embody the future. If they grow up in poverty without the resources to develop physical, mental, and emotional skills to become productive adults, then they are likely to grow up to be poor adults who tax instead of contribute to society. UNICEF (2018:6) indicates that child poverty negatively influences a child’s physical, cognitive and social development and, in turn, impacts their level of education, productivity and

contribution to the economy. It is likely that children living in poverty become adults in poverty, resulting in a maintained intergenerational cycle of poverty (Moses, 2008:37).

The researcher argues that this cycle of poverty emphasises the need for correction through education and development which will, in turn, improve the resilience of the household and the quality of life that will be provided to the children. It is, therefore, a challenge to civil society, NGOs, government, social workers and other technocrats like education providers to promote, provide and advocate for better policies and interventions to alleviate child poverty and poverty at large (UNICEF, 2018:6). In the same vein, SDGs urge UN member states, including African countries, to come up with implementable mechanisms that will see poverty and food insecurity eradicated by 2030 (UN, 2015). Though this is the intention, it is still estimated that over 233 million Africans are battling with unsustainable food production, malnutrition, hunger and poverty (Nkrumah, 2019:2). Poverty in this context may be defined as a denial of means to attain a sustainable livelihood (Moses, 2008:211). In fact, a large fragment of the population who are deemed poor are those who lack adequate access to food, housing, education and quality healthcare (Nkrumah, 2019:4). Ironically, although children often carry the burden of these deprivations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (2011:34) indicates that the voice of this vulnerable group is often silenced or underrepresented in the formulation and implementation of interventions which seek to address poverty and environmental risks, thus prioritising top-down decision-making. On the contrary, Nkrumah (2019:122) highlight the importance of moving away from top-down decision-making towards a bottom-up approach which encourages the participation and empowerment of local communities, including children. It is imperative to add that a lack of participation makes children more prone to the effects of poverty, environmental hazards and endemic hunger since their experiences and fears are not adequately represented. For the researcher, the inclusion of children's voices in specific interventions and programmes, such as social entrepreneurship, Asset-Based Community Development Approach (ABCD), the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes can be implemented in order to effectively combat poverty and the resultant environmental risks as will be discussed next.

### 2.6.1. Social entrepreneurship

For the researcher, ending poverty and environmental risks is of utmost importance to have fully functional societies which are sustainable and which foster the participation of everyone. Engelbrecht (2008:167) shows that “many people in Sub-Saharan Africa remain trapped in the poverty cycle and are therefore excluded from participating in mainstream economic activities.” Since social work is concerned primarily with people who find themselves in vulnerable positions such as children, the profession is challenged to accept its full share of addressing inequality and poverty. In this regard, the introduction of social entrepreneurship cannot be overlooked. Frisk and Larson (2011:151) highlight that using a strength-based perspective to enable children and communities to recognise their inner strengths, resources and skills will help them create their own survival mechanisms that can end poverty. Shedding the same light, Germak (2009:80) points out that the common denominator in definitions of social entrepreneurship is the creation of social value for the public good. In this way, children can be active participants in the creation of projects that can help create social value in their communities to benefit them and the general public just like how the Lighthouse Institute has managed to include children to create economic projects that seek to end poverty and environmental risks for their child participants (Lighthouse Institute Brochure 2019:5). Forsyth (2013:81) adds that social value is noted through the social benefits that are accrued by children as a result of the profits created from the income producing projects they participate in and the idea that community members place a great deal in the consideration of children’s welfare before their own. Speaking in a Zimbabwean context, Manyena et al. (2008:180) highlight that there are many initiatives and projects that have been designed to help children in the Mberengwa region. In this regard, children can also be the designers, implementers and evaluators of social entrepreneurship programmes so that they feel empowered to contribute to ending poverty and the environmental challenges that they face, for example, the children from the Lighthouse Institution who make use of their school education to design, implement and evaluate several projects like recycling to sell and earn a profit to take home (Lighthouse Institute Brochure, 2019:5). For the researcher, this is in line with a sustainable livelihood approach as it gives the poor the right to develop and to decide for themselves in their communities how they would like to address their poverty and become economically, socially and environmentally

sustainable. Hence, from this approach and the Lighthouse Institute example given above, it is clear to note that the poor and especially the children are not just government intervention beneficiaries and weak, passive recipients of hand-outs but full participants in the twin processes of socio-economic development from the design level up to the implementation and evaluation of the projects. Ultimately, social workers and those in the profession who have shifted to the social entrepreneurship gear should take this as an opportunity to add value to communities through their involvement in strategies that end poverty and environmental risks.

#### 2.6.2. Asset Based Community Development Approach

The Asset Based Community Development Approach (ABCD) is an approach used to assess the sustainable development of communities based on their assets, strengths and potential (Nel, 2015:511). ABCD highlights the differences and diversity that define the reality or daily activities of individuals while highlighting how they survive and cope with their various challenges (Nel, 2015:511). ABCD is specifically concerned with identifying assets in the community and tapping into these assets to meet community needs. In other words, the approach promotes knowledge on community assets and strengths to aid the poverty and environmental risks mitigation process (Nel, 2015:511). Assets mentioned here are both visible and invisible. Examples of visible assets are land, tools and livestock, whereas invisible assets entail human capacity, agency, values and the access that people have to the visible assets (DFID, 2009). The ABCD approach enhances community ownership and participation as it places emphasis on beginning at the individual level and eventually adopting resolutions reached at policy and community level. In other words, there is use of the bottom-up approach (DFID, 2009). An example that can be beneficial to children would be to build family strengths and prevent social problems associated with income poverty. It will recognise that families living in difficult circumstances may for instance need more than just the Child Support Grant (CSG) to ensure child well-being. ABCD programmes may be designed to strengthen families and the care they already provide to children, based on research that demonstrates how a warm and caring family environment, social and community support structures, and access to responsive services all have an important protective effect for disadvantaged children. Central to this approach would be to involve the children in the designing, conceptualisation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such programmes so as to ensure that



children are active participants in matters that are important to them and use their inherent strengths to develop ways that could end poverty and environmental challenges. This approach acknowledges that humans, including children, have assets and capabilities to determine their own future through their agency which needs to be developed through the empowerment of people to participate in ensuring that there is mitigation of poverty and environmental risks to enable sustainable livelihoods

### 2.6.3. The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) gives social workers the tools and insights needed to understand livelihoods and particularly the livelihoods of the poor (DFID, 2009). Ungar (2011:1743) posits that people's livelihoods are their first line of defence against disasters, poverty and environmental challenges. This is because livelihoods determine people's nutrition, level of education, general health as well as welfare and the educational level that they will be able to secure for their children who will eventually inherit this as an intangible asset in their own livelihood patterns. Interestingly, Goldwin (2013:21) mentions that the SLA provides one of the most holistic views into people's resources, as it includes the five key capitals; namely, human, social, financial, physical, and natural capital. These capitals are needed and should be utilised in conjunction with families to improve their livelihoods. The social work profession should use this as an opportunity to play a pivotal role in spearheading a locally relevant and globally responsive approach to poverty.

For the researcher, to end impediments of poverty and environmental challenges, it is imperative to improve social capital. In the context of a sustainable livelihoods framework, social capital is taken to mean the social resources that people draw from in the pursuit of their livelihood objectives (Prilleltensky, 2010:63). These resources are developed through the networks and connectedness of the people in the community through education and awareness creation to support the usually disadvantaged who include the disabled, women and children, as well as to increase trust and unity in the community for people to work together for their own betterment (Prilleltensky, 2010:63). In the Afrocentric perspective, a community is characterised by an organic interdependence among its component individuals that results from shared understanding, and is driven by reciprocity and a mutual existence (Mkhize, 2007:67). This means that a collective community can be seen to function as a system.

The researcher argues that all community members, which include children, are responsible for contributing towards the functioning and well-being of the whole community. It is through increased social cohesion and connectedness that the community becomes better, which in turn will benefit everyone. This relatedness between community and individuals is pertinent in attempts to understand well-being and hope in communal-oriented cultures, which are “premised on the notion that a strong community benefits everyone” (Prilleltensky, 2010:244). In this case, a community with social capital respects the input that children bring to the community and uphold the role that they play in the creation of community programmes that affect them in dealing with both poverty and environmental challenges.

Financial capital is another form of capital that can help aid the fight against poverty and environmental challenges and it denotes the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives (DID, 2015:27). In this regard, the children should be involved in the financial or income generating schemes that are aimed at ending poverty and environmental challenges. In this way, social workers can be brokers that link children in different communities with necessary financial resources that can benefit them and their communities. It is important to connect children to financial literacy and education for them to become economically responsible and develop their human assets which will help them end poverty and deal with the consequences of environmental challenges.

The researcher is of the opinion that human capital can be used to improve the efforts of poverty alleviation and environmental challenges. There is also need to facilitate the development of human capital through the creation of opportunities for children to develop as healthy persons who will fulfill their potential in life. According to DID (2015:27), these opportunities include access to quality education and life skills, health and water/sanitation (social, cultural and physical resources). Brianston (2010:11) notes that education is not only a right, but in situations of emergencies, chronic crises and early reconstruction, it provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection which can be both life-saving and life-sustaining.

Another important aspect is that of child survival, which can also be described as child health (UN, 2015). Child health looks at the things that are important to make sure that

babies are born healthy and stay alive, for example, things like health services for children, good food for children, and quality care children living with HIV and AIDS. For the researcher, to ensure that human capital is secured, the health of the children needs to be secured by government health departments, communities and the families through investing in access to health services and education so that they can be able to be functional members of the society that can contribute in the fight against poverty and environmental risks. UN (2015) mentions the importance of good standards of living, including those of children who are poor; the houses that children live in; children's access to clean water and toilets; clean and safe cities, towns and communities; parks and recreational facilities for children; and children receiving grants. The researcher is of the view that it is very important to note that good standards of living are conducive for the development of children. The researcher also argues that for children to end challenges associated with poverty and environmental risks, they need to be recognised and included as active participants in the designing, implementation and evaluation of programmes that seek to end poverty and environmental risks. The researcher's argument is in line with Goldwin's (2013:12) observation that children's participation identifies ways through which children's voices can be heard in their homes, at schools, in communities and by people and organisations who provide services to them; including government. Children should be part of the development and implementation of policies that cater for them. This is their right as children.

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#### 2.6.4. Early Childhood Development (ECD)

For the researcher, children are very important contributors to sustainable development. The UN (2015:8X) argues that "no advances in sustainable development will occur in coming decades without multiple generations contributing to societal improvement." Moreover, the UN reiterates that beyond sheer survival, children have a right to thrive, develop to their full potential and live in a sustainable world. For the researcher, this statement presents the rationale for putting children at the centre of sustainable development and this development can be made possible through ECD services. ECD can be defined as a method designed to provide all-inclusive development to children between the ages of 0-8 years (Nair & Radhakrishnan, 2004:227). It can also be defined as "a programme that promotes

school readiness by promoting the cognitive and social development of children through the provision of basic social services to enrolled children and their families” (Deming, 2009:111). From this definition by Deming, the researcher is of the opinion that ECD programmes can be used in combination with other programmes, for example, health, nutritional, psychosocial development and early childhood education. These ECD programmes appear to provide an effective pathway to combatting poverty and environmental risks as indicated by the findings of a case study by Nair and Radhakrishnan (2004:227). These findings established that ECD programmes play a key role in combating the detrimental effects of poverty on child development. Rolnick and Grunewald (2003:6) opine that money invested in ECD programmes not only benefits the individual who attends the programme but the society at large. For the UN, the target will be for all children under the age of 5 to reach their developmental potential through access to quality early childhood development programmes and policies (UN, 2015). Indicators of the success of ECD include the proportion of children receiving at least one year of a quality pre-primary education programme and the children’s development across language, literacy, numeracy, and physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development. The UN also argues that children’s health, learning and behaviour during the early years are the foundation, not only for later school success and completion, but also their capacity to participate in the community, workplace and society (UN, 2015). The researcher is of the view that young children’s growth and development are profoundly shaped by the opportunities for learning, education, economic resources and interactions provided to them in ECD. These opportunities give children the power to be equipped with tools to fight poverty and environmental risks through building their agency from a tender age and getting them accustomed to participating in issues that are important for sustainable development.

## **Summary**

In summary, this chapter discussed children’s rights, poverty and environmental risks. Poverty and environmental risks are a major human rights concern and pose a huge threat to children’s current well-being and their future. It is at this juncture that it is worth noting that all discussions in this chapter focused on the idea that policies on

poverty and environmental risks, and strategies and plans at all levels need to be child sensitive and incorporate children's issues and needs. Children have agency, capabilities and assets that are and can be instrumental in the fight against poverty and environmental risks. Furthermore, as the future will affect them most, children have the right to participate in policies, strategies and action plans that are aimed at ending poverty and environmental risks that affect them. Global, regional and national development agendas affirm children's agency and that they have an active role to play in reducing poverty through the use of approaches and programmes such as social entrepreneurship, ABCD, SLA and ECD. In conclusion, children should participate in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes that affect their current and future lives.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology, and presents the empirical study and findings of the study. Social workers throughout the world have a mandate to play a role in the promotion of socio-economic equality, upholding of human rights and advocating for social and environmental justice as directed by the Global Agenda (2012:2). Social workers can achieve this through various methods including research. The research question that guided this study was: How are children's agency recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare?

The following sub-questions informed the research question:

- What is the goal and what are the intended outcomes of programmes/interventions aimed at reducing children's poverty and environment risks?
- How are children involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?
- What factors influenced the recognition and respect/ non-recognition and disrespect of children's agency in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?
- What must change to recognise and respect children's agency in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes/interventions?

This chapter starts with the research approach, the research type and research design utilised for the study. In the next section the research methodology is discussed, including the research population and sampling, data collection and data analysis methods, the trustworthiness of the data and the pilot study. The ethical considerations that guided the researcher are then presented, followed by the limitations of the study.

Subsequently, the empirical findings which emanated from this study will be presented and discussed. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **3.2. Research approach**

The study used a qualitative research approach which permitted the researcher to understand the phenomena from the participants' point of view (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to obtain unadulterated and quality information based on the meaning and experiences of children and key informants that are assigned to the programme (Rubin & Babbie, 2014:471). In relation to this study, the researcher intended to understand children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks from children's and key informants' points of view. The study was both exploratory and descriptive in nature. The exploratory approach was meant to answer the "what" question and thus gain insight into children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96). The exploratory study enabled the researcher to gain insight into the situation, programme or community involved (Babbie, 2017:92). The study answered the question, "How are children's agency recognised and respected in programmes aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risks in the intended programme?" The descriptive approach was intended to answer the "why" and "how" questions (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). The researcher gathered this descriptive data through asking questions to gather participants' spoken or written word responses (Fouché & Delport, 2011:65). In this study, child participants and key informants involved in the programme explained and gave a detailed description of the degree and nature of children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks which aided the researcher to construct detailed accounts of the social reality.

The study made use of an interpretivist paradigm by consulting literature which informed the researcher in conducting the research study as postulated by Nieuwenhuis (2016a:60). In the case of this study, the researcher was informed by the human rights framework. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm allowed the researcher to understand social reality through the eyes of different participants, who, in relation to this study, were children and key informants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:60). In the context of this study, the researcher sought to understand how children are involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

of the Education for Income programme at the Lighthouse Institute in Harare. The study has immediate relevance to current social work practices, policies and procedures relating to recognising and respecting children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks and as such can be regarded as applied research

### **3.3. Research type**

The study fits under applied research as it was aimed at solving specific practice problems and developing new knowledge on a practical situation (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95); namely, how children's agency was recognised and respected in reducing poverty and environmental risks. The knowledge will thus be generated through the investigation of a practical situation that is, how children participate in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions which, in turn, will result in possible solutions in the practice of reducing poverty and environmental risks (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:74). Findings from this study may serve to inform social work decision making and can be of value to researchers and policy makers in addressing policy challenges concerning children's participation in interventions that affect their well-being (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95).

### **3.4. Research design**

For this study, the researcher used a case study design. A case study is a preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are posed and enables participants to share their stories due to close collaboration between the researcher and participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:82). Moreover, case study provides insights into an issue (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:82). They allow for the attainment of familiarity with the social world of a small number of people, identification of patterns and themes within the participants' worlds (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:320), as well as the gaining of new knowledge about a social issue (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:321). More specifically, the researcher utilised an instrumental case study design to conduct the study as it allows for the development of an understanding of a phenomenon with the goal of increasing the ability to generalise the findings to other cases (Mertens, 2010:324). For the researcher, the advantage of a case study design is that it provides an in-depth and detailed account of a case in a real-life context (Creswell, 2013:97) and it has the



ability to enable participants to share their stories due to close cooperation between the researcher and participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:82). Additionally, the case study is specifically “useful when exploring those situations in which the interventions being evaluated have no clear single set of outcomes and provides awareness into an issue or help to enhance a theory” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b: 82). For that reason, it assisted the researcher “to learn more about a little known or poorly understood situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:141) which, in the case of the study, was the unknown terrain of child agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks.

### **3.5. Research methods**

In this section, a more comprehensive account of the specific methods that were employed in the study is provided. This account will shed more light on the population of the study, the sampling benchmarks used, data collection as well as data analysis methods.

#### **3.5.1. Study population and sampling**

A study population is that aggregation of elements from which a sample is actually selected (Rubin & Babbie, 2011:360). From this definition, the study population for this research study encompassed the children and key informants from the Lighthouse Institute that were involved in the Education for Income Programme for vulnerable children. Fouché (2011:467) posits that key informants are the people who are involved in the implementation of a programme and are known for their expertise or for having the power to make decisions on the programme. In the case of this study, the key informants were members of staff at the Lighthouse Institute, which is a team of 35 staff members comprising social workers, teachers, members of the monitoring and evaluation team, care workers and the administrators. For this study, the key informants were two social workers, one teacher, one monitoring and evaluation member and one administrator. These key informants are part of the members of the team responsible for the spearheading of the Education for Income Programme. Strydom and Delpont (2011:192) highlights that sampling means taking any representative portion of a population or universe. In this regard, the researcher took the five children and the five key informants respectively from the study population as a sample that represented the population of the Education for Income Programme.

The sampling approach used was the non-probability sampling method which was relevant as the participants were not randomly selected (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:197). The purposive sampling method was used to select the sample. Purposive sampling is based on the researcher's knowledge of the population which enables the selection of participants who will be able to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research (Maree & Pietersen, 2016:198). The following criteria was used to select five children and five key informants for the study:

Children willing to participate in the study who met the following criteria:

- Aged between 10 and 17.
- At least one year's involvement in the programme.
- Male or female.
- Conversant with English
- Able to share their views and experiences on the programme.

Key informants willing to participate in the study who met the following criteria:

- Involved in the development and / or implementation of the programme.
- Familiar with the involvement of children in the programme.
- At least two years' involvement in/with the programme.
- Conversant in English.
- Preferably male and female
- Willing to share their views and experiences on the programme.

To access the required sample, the researcher approached the director of the Lighthouse Institute to get a list of names of both the key informants and the children who met the selection criteria. With the permission of the director, the researcher then approached the possible participants individually until he got the required number of participants for the sample. In qualitative studies, it is imperative that the researcher stop collecting data when the categories or themes are saturated, that is, when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties (Creswell, 2014:239). In the case that data was not saturated after the ten interviews, the researcher would recruit more participants according to the criteria.

### 3.5.2. Data collection

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were the primary data collection methods used. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) that guided the interview consisted of cautiously thought-through questions and these questions were suitable as they allowed the researcher to have flexibility, which then led to the acquisition of more in-depth information (Greeff, 2011:352). Interviews are a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks participants questions and collects data and learns about the views of the participants from their responses (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:92). The interviews were guided by predetermined questions, but the researcher and participants were afforded a chance to pursue the themes differently (Greeff, 2011:353). Semi-structured interviewing, therefore, allows for more natural interaction between the researcher and the participant (Rubin & Babbie, 2015:168). It makes provision for the researcher to make use of probes to clear up vague responses and ask for elaboration. However, Greeff (2011:353) posits that interviews may have a drawback of being time-consuming and strenuous to complete. Nonetheless, for the researcher, spending more time in interviews allowed him to harvest more all-inclusive and comparable information. Appointments were made with research participants in advance and this prior arrangement gave each participant an opportunity to set aside ample time for their interview session

### 3.5.3. Data analysis

In qualitative research studies, data analysis includes the organisation of data into specific criteria, putting it into more manageable forms and displaying it in forms that make it easy to aid its analysis and interpretation (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005:203). Fouché and De Vos (2011:405) demonstrate in literature that qualitative data collection and analysis are so much intertwined that during data collection, ideas about directions for analysis may occur as patterns take shape and possible themes that guide subsequent data collection spring to mind. The researcher adopted thematic analysis to examine the research data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that allows the researcher to develop codes and themes.

It is flexible, allowing researchers to respond to data as they engage with it (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:224). Creswell (2014:196-200) provides a thematic means

through which a researcher can analyse the data acquired from one-on-one interviews. According to this process, the researcher organised the data, read through it, coded the data, generated themes and sub-themes from the coded data and in the end presented and interpreted the data. Even though these steps are presented in a linear format, Creswell (2014:196) states that in practice these steps are more interrelated and interactive and hence not always followed in the order presented. The overview of the process that the researcher followed in the qualitative data analysis is presented next.

- Step 1: Familiarisation

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were electronically recorded with to capture their responses verbatim. This electronic data was organised and prepared for analysis by transcribing the audio-taped interviews, typing field notes and sorting the data. A researcher becomes familiar with the transcribed data by reading it at least twice from a curious and critical perspective, asking why a participant answered a particular question as he/she did (Clarke, et al., 2015:231).

- Step 2: Coding

Coding begins with closely reading through the data and identifying short phrases, which can be semantic or latent in nature (Clarke et al., 2015:235). The researcher went through all the compiled transcripts to become intimately familiar with the contents of the transcripts. The researcher also systematically identified and labelled the features from the data that were relevant to the study and research question (Clarke et al., 2015:230). The researcher made some space available on the right side of the transcripts to be able to code the data related to the research question. Clarke et al. (2015:235) suggest that it is preferable to start with the latent coding first in order to search for the deeper meaning and afterwards shift to the semantic phrases that are on the surface. Such repeated reading was very important in identifying emerging themes and sub-themes and linking the relationships among emerging themes.

- Step 3: Searching for themes

Searching for themes does not mean that the researcher finds themes that already exist in the data, but rather, “[the researcher is] aiming to create a plausible and coherent thematic mapping of [the] data” (Clarke et al., 2015:236). In other words, the

researcher develops themes which are comprehensible to the data and tells him a bit more about the research question. Three theme levels are recommended; namely, a) overarching themes, b) themes and c) sub-themes (Clarke et al., 2015:236). In this study, the researcher colour-coded the data and generated themes and detailed descriptions. Creswell (2013:199) suggests that description involves a detailed rendering of data about participants, places or events, their sex and age groups. From the coded data, the researcher managed to come up with themes and sub-themes which are discussed in sub-section 3.11

- Step 4: Reviewing themes

The researcher had to determine whether the identified themes fit well enough with the meanings in the coded data. It required that the researcher pause throughout the process of generating themes in order to check where there is an appropriate fit between the themes and codes and each had a clear feature or “distinct essence – or central organising concept” (Clarke et al., 2015:230). In reviewing the themes, the researcher could decide not to change anything, or discard all and re-start the theme development process (Clarke, et al., 2015:238). The researcher opted not to change anything.

- Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This step required the researcher to write a short description of each theme, which explained the core, the coverage, the scope, and the limitations of each theme. It also entailed naming the themes, particularly to capture the essence of each theme as well as to develop a creative ‘spirit’ in this process (Clarke et al., 2015:240).

- Step 6: Writing the report

Report writing happens simultaneously with the analysis and the definition of themes. This process assists the researcher in identifying the main points in presenting the themes (Clarke et al., 2015:241). Writing the report should typically include the quotes from the researcher’s key observations and the more expressive participants (Clarke et al., 2015:241) because strong evidence is needed to provide a clear understanding of participants’ views and experiences on the studied programme. The researcher

presented the direct views of the participants in writing up the findings as reflected in section 3.11 below.

### **3.6. Data quality**

In this research study, data quality was ensured by means of establishing trustworthiness. Neuman (2006:153) states that trustworthiness helps to guard against the researcher's bias and ensures an honest and truthful research. Trustworthiness is thus established when findings reflect as closely as possible the meanings as described by the research participants. The four concepts that inform trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability/auditability and confirmability (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:191). However, for the purposes of this study, trustworthiness was guided by conformability, dependability and credibility.

#### **3.6.1. Credibility**

In qualitative studies, the researcher attains an exhaustive understanding and comprehension of the research topic from participants (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014:258). In the process of instituting credibility, the researcher asks if there is a fit between the views of the participants and how he restructures and epitomises them (De Vos et al., 2011:420). In this research study, the researcher had to ensure that the research participants' views were reflected in the study's findings (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:191). The researcher also made sure to be aware of his possible bias that might influence the credibility of the data (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:192). In this regard, the researcher made use of the strategy of member checking by referring the findings to available participants so that they could clarify whether their meanings were presented according to their perspectives (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:194). In this study, the interested participants were given the transcribed interviews so that they could check if their responses matched their perspectives. The participants were all happy with what they had said. Member checking serves as a very potent tool for establishing credibility as it affords research participants the opportunity to react to the presented data and to correct any mishaps that may have occurred in the collection and interpretation of data. The credibility of the findings was also enhanced by triangulating the data from two participant groups, the child participants and key informants. In this regard, Drisco (1997, cited in Lietz & Zayas, 2012:193) states that data triangulation and observer

triangulation are both important in reaching a “completeness” or an exhaustive response to the research question’. In relation to this, the researcher kept an audit trail of the research process and observations and went through debriefing by discussing the research and findings with a peer (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:192).

### 3.6.2. Dependability

The researcher in this study also employed dependability to ensure the trustworthiness of the gathered data. Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings if the study was to be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One strategy that the researcher used as an approach to evaluate dependability was auditability which encompassed recording and permitting others from an external point of reference to the study to observe and critique the study that the researcher had conducted (Leitz & Zayas, 2012:191). In this study, auditability was applied by the continuous supervision and critique of the research study by the researcher’s supervisor from the University of Pretoria.

### 3.6.3. Transferability

The researcher also made use of transferability. In qualitative studies, findings cannot be generalised (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:195), but can be applicable to other similar populations or settings (De Vos et al., 2011:420). As an evaluation technique, transferability is therefore “achieved when the findings have applicability to another setting, to theory, to practice, or to future research” (Lietz & Zayas 2012:195). To increase transferability, researchers focus on how typical the participants in the studied context have been and how the findings apply to this context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c:124). The researcher made use of thick descriptions by both the key informants from the Lighthouse Institute as well as the child participants to increase the transferability of the findings to other similar settings. The researcher gave in-depth accounts of the phenomenon of child participation, and participants’ views on how children are recognised in conceptualising, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes for children (Lietz & Zayas, 2012:194).

#### 3.6.4. Conformability

Conformability denotes that the participants and not the interest and biases of the researcher moulded the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conformability therefore refers to the impartiality of the researcher which could be confirmed by others using the conclusions of the study (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:421). Nieuwenhuis (2016c:125) highlights that research findings should replicate participants' true contributions, which confirms that the researcher should refrain from being biased and allowing his/her interest in the study to impact the research findings. To counteract possible prejudice in this study, the researcher used reflexivity as a tactic to analyse possible self-interest and its effect on the research study (Drisko, 1997 in Lietz & Zayas, 2012:192). The researcher achieved reflexivity by cooperatively acknowledging his personal prejudices and exploring how these would impact on the research study. The study of child agency is still in its infancy in the terrain of Zimbabwean social work practice and the researcher was doubtful concerning the extent to which child agency is respected and valued. Nevertheless, instead of pursuing cases that would endorse his bias, the researcher made use of a pre-set sampling benchmark to enable him to learn more about the cases that promised to offer a chance to learn more about child agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks. To remain aware of the research processes and observations, the researcher also made use of an audit trail by keeping a diary specifying the research course from the beginning to the final reporting on the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, confirmation of the findings was also strengthened by the triangulation of data.

#### 3.7. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted preceding the main investigation and this pilot study acted as a trial of the actual research study. Barker (2003:327) advises that a pilot study tests and authenticates an instrument by using a small group of participants to run it. Therefore, the pilot study functioned as a feasibility study before the research study was conducted in order to determine the adequacy and relevance of the research methodology, sampling, data collection instruments and data analysis. This pilot study entailed choosing two participants from the sampling group, that is, the first child participant and the first key informant from the Lighthouse Institute Education for Income Programme. The pilot study confirmed the selected research methodology for



the study and no challenges were discovered in the interview schedule. The findings from the pilot study were added to the main study.

### **3.8. Ethical considerations**

Data should not be obtained at the expense of human beings and therefore researchers should handle all ethical aspects relevant to the study (Strydom, 2011:113). The researcher was guided by a set of ethical values and principles that provided moral principles, rules and expectations on how to conduct himself towards the research participants (Babbie, 2017:63). As part of the vital ethical considerations, the researcher requested the participants to complete the consent form (see Appendix B) and asked participants for their consent to be audio-taped during the interviews and to have their anonymised quotes included in the research narratives as suggested by Atkinson & Delamont (2010:5-8).

#### **3.8.1. Avoidance of harm and debriefing**

Case study research is characterised by an intense interest in the personal views and circumstances of people (Stake, 2005:495). This means that those involved in these studies and whose lives and expressions are portrayed in a study run the risk of getting exposed and embarrassed, and losing social standing, employment, self-esteem and respect (Stake, 2005:495). With this in mind, the researcher was obliged to protect the participants from unnecessary physical as well as psychological harm (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:101). To achieve this, the researcher strictly stuck to the case study research design and avoided asking low priority and sensitive issues (Stake, 2005:459) that were irrelevant to the goal of the study. Protection from harm was also achieved by maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of research subjects and the concerned data. The researcher also debriefed the participants. Debriefing entails “sessions during which subjects get the opportunity, after the study, to work through their experience and its aftermath, and where they have their questions answered and misconceptions removed” (McBurney, 2001, cited in Strydom, 2011:122). Debriefing offers an opportunity to clarify any matters or concerns about the research study. Therefore, it is best to debrief participants directly after the session as was the case in this study (Strydom, 2011:122). No referrals for further follow up were required by any participant.

### 3.8.2. Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

Ellsberg and Heise (2005:38) state that privacy, anonymity and confidentiality can be seen as complementary ethical principles and they are all important in the guaranteeing of the safety of research participants. However, although shielding the identity of the participants was considered as an important aspect of this study, the participants were known to the researcher; hence, anonymity could not be guaranteed, only confidentiality. The researcher was committed to confidentiality in that the research findings were not presented in a manner that would identify any particular participant (Babbie, 2017:67). The upholding of confidentiality was also indicated in the informed consent and assent forms that the participants signed when they agreed to participate in the study. The researcher also employed anonymity by not attaching the names of the participants to any response; instead, pseudo-names were used in transcribing the data. In addition, since the researcher also had a task of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study and at the same moment maintaining confidentiality, participants were only given or shown the option to view their own transcripts.

### 3.8.3. Informed consent and voluntary participation

The researcher is responsible for and has an obligation to thoroughly explain the study to the participants in order to establish a platform for informed consent (Babbie, 2017:65; Strydom, 2011:118). Informed assent is a term that is used to convey an agreement to participate in research by those who are not yet eligible to enter into a legal contract (Strydom, 2011:118). Hence, the legal guardians were requested to provide their informed consent for the participation of their children. The letters of informed consent/assent also included the fact that all interviews would be audio-recorded and that all information would be treated with confidentiality. In this case, the research participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. To make sure that the participation of the research participants was completely voluntary, no incentive or payment was offered or promised to the participants (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg & Watts, 2005:22). The informed consent of the participants was sent to all prospective participants before the actual study and this assisted them in making an informed

decision regarding their participation. Having read and gone through the informed consent and assent letters, the participants were free to either consent or refuse to participate in the study without any negative repercussions to them or to their organisation. Atkinson and Delamont (2010:6) state that obtaining proper written informed consent before data collection ensures that participants are not exploited in the research process.

#### 3.8.4. Competence of the researcher

The researcher also had to abide by the ethical principles governing researches of this kind and ensure that he was competent and thoroughly skilled to undertake the research concerning child agency in alleviating poverty and environmental risks (Strydom, 2011:124). In this regard, since the researcher is also a student in the Master of Social Work: Social Development and Policy programme, he considered himself to be competent to do a study of this nature as it fitted well with the goals and objectives of the degree programme mentioned above. In addition, the researcher successfully completed the research methodology module of the programme.

#### 3.8.5. Dissemination of information

Since the research study is targeted at contributing and adding to the broader spectrum of the body of knowledge, the researcher had an ethical obligation to ultimately report his findings with honesty and due diligence (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:102). The research findings presented in this research report are in the arrangement of a mini-dissertation which was submitted to the Department of Social Work and Criminology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. The findings of this study were reported in this research report in a complete and honest manner without any misrepresentations as espoused by Leedy and Ormrod (2013:103). Therefore, none of the research results/findings were fashioned or designed to aid and support a particular predetermined conclusion or to deceive the readers.

### **3.9. Limitations of the study**

Because of the qualitative nature of the research study, there are certain limitations that have to be mentioned. Due to the fact that the study was based on collecting subjective data in the form of research participants' own words, the likelihood that some participants gave biased data with the aim of presenting themselves in good standing cannot be excluded. To minimise the effects of this possible drawback, participants were informed beforehand that their responses will be quoted anonymously and could not be traced back to them.

### **3.10. Empirical findings**

This section presents the participants' biographical data as well as the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The findings are presented in the form of narratives and supported by quotes from the participants. Where applicable, findings are compared and contrasted with the evidence from literature. As a way to uphold confidentiality, participants are named KI for key informants, and CP for child participants, followed by a sequential number respectively.

#### **3.10.1 Biographical details of research participants**

As required by the study criteria, the five key informants (KI) were all employees of the Lighthouse Institute and have been with the organisation for more than 2 years. Child participants were also enrolled for school at the same institution and have been part of the organisation for more than 2 years. Other biographical details that are presented in this section include the participants' gender, age, number of years in the programme as well as the phase of the programme that the participants are involved in.

##### **3.10.1.1 Biographical information of key Informants**

The biographical information of the key informants is presented in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1: Biographical information for key informants (KI)**

Key Informants	KI1	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
<b>Age group</b>	26-30	31-35	31-35	26-30	31-35
<b>Years in organisation</b>	4	4	3	4	3
<b>Years involved in programme</b>	3	3	3	2	3
<b>Phase of programme</b>	✓ Planning Designing Monitoring Implementation Evaluation	Planning ✓ Designing Monitoring Implementation Evaluation	Planning Designing ✓ Monitoring Implementation Evaluation	Planning Designing Monitoring ✓ Implementation Evaluation	Planning Designing Monitoring Implementation ✓ Evaluation

As depicted in Table 3.1 above, three of the five key informant participants were females whilst two were male. The participants who took part in this study were relatively young adults with the youngest falling in the 26-30-year range and the oldest in the 31-35-year range. These findings correlate with the Zimbabwe Demographics report (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2019:86) that Zimbabwe has an increasingly young population and a median age of 20 years. In relation to their young age, the participants have been employed with the organisation for not more than four years. Four participants have been involved in the programme for at least three years, while one participant has been involved for at least two years. These participants represent the different phases of the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, which are, the planning, programme design, monitoring, implementation and the evaluation phases. This aided the researcher to get rich data as all phases of the programme had a representative in the study.

### 3.10.1.2 Biographical information of child participants

Table 3.2 presents the biographical information of the child participants.

**Table 3.2: Biographical information for child participants**

Key Informants	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male
<b>Age</b>	15	14	16	15	16
<b>Enrolled in school</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Years involved in programme</b>	2	2	3	2	3

As shown in Table 3.2, three of the five child participants were male whilst two were female. Their ages ranged from 14 (the youngest) to 16 (the oldest). All the child participants indicated that they had been in the programme for at least two years with the longest participant in the programme being involved for three years. All the child participants were enrolled in school. Besides being a requirement of the Lighthouse Institute that the children attend school, the findings support the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's report that in 2019, about 93% of children in the school-going ages of 7 to 18 were enrolled in school (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2019:05). This tendency was also noted by UNICEF Zimbabwe (2018), stating that "in the years between 2017 and 2018, there was a 20% increase in the gross enrolment rates for children in primary school education and secondary education."

### 3.11 Key themes and sub-themes

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study will be presented in this section. Findings will be complemented by the voices of the participants and verified by literature. Table 3.3 presents a summary of the themes and sub-themes of the findings.

**Table 3.3: Themes and sub-themes**

Theme	Sub-themes
<p><b>1. Conceptualisation of poverty</b></p>	<p>1.1 Poverty is more than income 1.2 Poverty as a colonial legacy 1.3 Vulnerability of children to poverty</p>
<p><b>2. How the programme mitigates poverty and environmental risks</b></p>	<p>2.1 Education for mitigating poverty and environmental risks 2.2 Recognising children’s rights in the fight against poverty and environmental risks</p>
<p><b>3. Defining the child concept</b></p>	<p>3.1 A child is vulnerable and needs protection 3.2 A child has agency</p>
<p><b>4. Child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks</b></p>	<p>4.1 Understanding child agency as a poverty and environmental risks mitigating tool 4.2 Participation of children in mitigating poverty and environmental risks 4.3 Children’s awareness of their right to participate</p>
<p><b>5. Challenges that hinder child agency</b></p>	<p>5.1 Culture 5.2 Lack of knowledge on the role of child participation</p>
<p><b>6. Strategies for promoting child agency</b></p>	<p>6.1 Education 6.2 Social work intervention 6.3 Advocating for children’s rights</p>

## **Theme 1: Conceptualisation of poverty**

Findings indicate that participants define poverty as much more than income. It is embedded in the colonial history of Zimbabwe and contributes to the vulnerability of children. These sub-themes are associated with the conceptualisation of poverty and are discussed below.

### **Sub-theme 1.1: Poverty is more than income**

Participants generally viewed poverty as a state of lacking access to personal needs and that it has social, economic and political bearings shown in inequality of access to basic services such as health.

Key informants expressed their views as follows:

- KI2 *“...for me poverty is when one is extremely poor that they cannot have access to things like employment, education, food and health which leads to the lack of means of survival.”*
- KI3 *“...poverty is lacking the capacity to access personal needs in life, but sometimes this poverty can be seen in the unequal access to employment opportunities, health and education in our communities.”*
- KI5 *“... to me it is the general lack of things that we need, but I also think it is really in the unequal distribution of resources since the colonial era because we see that every day the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting worse off.”*

Munowenyu (2017:39) supports this view that poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. In 2018, 4.8 children in Zimbabwe lived in poverty and 60% of them were from households where no adult had employment (Zimstats, 2018:5). According to Gordon (2016:27), in poverty-stricken countries, a characteristic that applies to Zimbabwe, “children are robbed of their childhoods due to life changing events like child marriage, early pregnancy, exclusion from education, sicknesses, malnutrition, environmental risks and violent deaths.” It thus becomes imperative to not measure poverty narrowly, through income alone, but see it in broader terms in a multi-dimensional way. For Gordon, this means the focus shifts to considering poverty as lacking the resources to



participate fully in society across a number of dimensions; for example, a child's deprivation in the areas of health, education, housing, adult employment, access to services, as well as income (Gordon, 2016:28).

### **Sub-theme 1.2: Poverty as a colonial legacy**

Key informants were quick to note that poverty in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the colonial history of Zimbabwe. They were of the view that although Zimbabwe was now independent, colonisation left a legacy in terms of lack of opportunities and the continued disparity between the poor and the rich.

The following are some of the participants' views:

KI2 *"...I think that this unequal distribution of resources and opportunities started in the past. You see, in the colonial times people were put in different classes, the rich in their class had everything whilst the poor had nothing and they could not access anything; we see that today."*

KI4 *"...you can actually see that what our parents went through before independence is what we are going through today. We inherited their poverty from the colonial times and now our children are inheriting our poverty; It will not end my brother"*

These interpretations corroborate the views of the United Nations General Assembly (2013:5) that some inequalities are often born from historical circumstances. One would assume that after forty years of independence, Zimbabwe should have escaped the legacy of colonialism but the high levels of poverty and inequality suggest otherwise. This is supported by UNICEF Zimbabwe (2018:43) which says that since 1980 Zimbabwe has not been able to consistently develop economically, socially and politically.

### **Sub-theme 1.3 Vulnerability of children to poverty**

Whilst the participants agreed that poverty was a risk to everyone, most participants acknowledged that it is the children that are the most vulnerable to the gripping jaws of poverty.

The effect of poverty is reflected in the words of both key informant and child participants:

- KI3 *“...it is just painful that the innocent children are the ones that usually suffer the most because of poverty.”*
- CP2 *“...sometimes we can go for days without eating a proper meal and I can see that my mother wants to cry. That is why I am in this programme to help her.”*
- CP5 *“...my brother had some sores on his leg but we had no money to take him to a doctor; we also needed money to buy food.”*

The findings are in alignment with Engelbrecht’s (2008:169) observation that children in any society are usually the most vulnerable and suffer the most in circumstances of social, economic or political predicament. Likewise, UNICEF (2014:31) states that children are often the most vulnerable to adverse conditions from health and environmental hazards because they are not fully developed physically and physiologically. However, the Global Agenda (2012:7) posits that there are many initiatives that can be taken to fight poverty and environmental risks and it is important to involve children in these initiatives.

## **Theme 2: How the programme mitigates poverty and environmental risks**

Participants were of the view that the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute was a poverty and environmental risks reduction tool. Participants were generally of the view that poverty and environmental risks reduce an individual’s chances of accessing services such as education, healthcare, clean water and information. However, although poverty and environmental risks were a threat to children, the participants also highlighted how they could be ended by the Education for Income Programme.

Kaswan (2013:67) indicates that poverty is a tremendous challenge to human life but it should not stop humans from devising plans to end it. This concurs with how the Education for Income Programme was created to end poverty and environmental risks. Findings indicate that the programme invests in education and recognises children’s rights as will be discussed in the sub-themes below.

## **Sub-theme: 2.1 Education for mitigating poverty and environmental risks**

Both the key informant and child participants affirmed that the Education for Income Programme contributes to mitigating poverty and environmental risks by giving children access to an education, and also to a better future by teaching them different ways to earn an income. Furthermore, reducing poverty and environmental risks targets both children and their parents or guardians.

Participants articulated the investment in children's education as follows:

- CP1 *"...we learn about school so that we become good children, and we also learn about getting money to use at home."*
- CP3 *"...here I like that we are taught about school work in general like at other schools, but I also love that we are taught ways of generating money to go home and help our parents."*
- CP1 *"...yes sir, I love things that make us get money. We are educated here on how to stop problems, for example, we make many things from old things and we sell them to get money to use at home and even here at school."*
- KI1 *"...in this district we are one of the few that can say, we pride ourselves in providing an education curriculum that tries to end poverty and environmental challenges."*
- KI3 *"...I can say that our children here are not only given their right to education but they also enjoy that right by also learning how to make money which ends poverty and gives them access to all the things that require an income."*

Findings further indicated that child education focuses on the link between poverty and the environment. As reflected in the following statements, the environmental issues include a focus on pollution, sanitation and water:

- KI2 *“...yes, they have problems back home where they come from. For example, they come from areas that have poor sanitation, and here, we educate them about the importance of having proper sanitation. We even educate them on how to create their own sanitation methods at home.”*
- KI5 *“...pollution I think is one of the red spots here that I think this programme tries to address, along with sanitation and access to water. We have water challenges in this area and people, especially children, get tempted to use water from any source they find. So we try to educate them to shun from using water from every source.”*
- KI4 *“...for me it is important that this programme addresses issues to do with poverty, for example, we have projects that we teach our children to end poverty, but the programme doesn’t end there; we also address sanitation issues, like we have done reusable sanitary pads here, we have done water purification here, so we do all these things.”*

Participants also referred to the importance of education in ending domestic violence which they related to poverty and the environment. Furthermore, according to the participants, the education platform is extended to include children and their parents or guardians.

- KI3 *“...we have been doing this for a long time now, and we have seen the damage that domestic violence has on the development of children. So we also incorporate the parents and guardians as much as we can and do plays and dramas that educate both the children and the adults on the dangers of domestic violence. We also do the same for climate change, pollution and sanitation; we cover everything I think.”*
- CP4 *“...we learn so many things here. For example, we have learnt to do bins for stopping land pollution and water pollution. We have also been educated on the dangers of violence here at school and back at home.”*
- CP2 *“...and I enjoy it, especially doing the dramas; I love acting and I think we learn more when we act. We act real things like violence at home, cleaning water and cleaning ourselves. We are helped in this programme”*

Participants' views are in line with the arguments by Green (2012:10) who says that poverty reduction is about giving people opportunities to access services like education, healthcare, water, and sanitation "to cope with the shocks of everyday life". From the analysis of the participants' views, the Education for Income Programme is a useful poverty and environmental risks alleviation instrument which shows the power of education in ending poverty and environmental risks. Similarly, SAHR and UNICEF (2014:6) observe that exposing children to a poor educational foundation from early childhood keeps them trapped in poverty and environmental risks and thus, socially and physically excluded from mainstream society. Furthermore, the most vulnerable people, including children, are more likely to live in the most degraded environments where they are exposed to environmental risks such as poor sanitation, pollution and lack of clean water, and continue to be exposed to poverty unless they are educated on how to escape the shadow of poverty (Hawkins, 2010:68). However, although education is a vital strategy to end environmental risks and poverty, Werner (2016:28) is of the view that education should also be accompanied by extra-curricular activities that are specifically aimed at dealing with a specific challenge. In the case of the Education for Income Programme, the participants showed that the education of children goes a step further where children and their parents or guardians are engaged in programmes that are aimed at eliminating poverty and environmental risks.

### **Sub-theme 2.2: Recognising children's rights in the fight against poverty and environmental risks**

Zimbabwe has signed and ratified both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and is, therefore, bound to promote and protect children's rights. In the same vein, Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013 embraces child rights. Under section 19, the State must adopt policies and measures to ensure that in matters relating to children, the best interests of the child concerned are paramount. These policies must specifically ensure comprehensive child care and child protection (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). It is from these sentiments that the participants were so eager to show that in their programme, children's access to rights was of great importance. The following are the participants' responses in relation to children's rights:

- KI2 *“...I think I can safely say the programme fulfills the rights of children to education, to a clean environment which includes sanitation and access to clean water, as well as a safe environment. For instance, here our children have access to clean borehole water, female children have access to sanitary wear in the lavatories which is a basic human right they should get. And they learn in a safe environment.”*
- CP1 *“...in this programme we give each other a chance to talk by lifting our hands in class. We have right to education, we receive food during breaks, and we also have a right of shelter and safety here. Our teachers give us many rights sir.”*
- KI4 *“...we have had cases of children coming to school crying because at home things are not well, parents are fighting and so on. That is not good for children so here we give them the right to be in a safe environment free of violence and you can see they are happy in those settings.”*
- CP5 *“...the children’s rights that are protected by this programme are the right to education, shelter and food, and we also participate here, even the small ones. The teachers give us all equal opportunities to have our rights.”*
- KI3 *“...our programme here is not just confined to the walls of this institution. Sometimes we meet with their parents in the communities to discuss environmental issues, sanitation issues, avoiding domestic violence, child nutrition as well as reducing environmental degradation and its effects on children. This is all about children’s rights I think.”*

Findings concur with the views of the UN (2012) which suggest that every child has the right to a safe, healthy environment in which to develop and grow. The United Nations World Fit for Children Declaration of 2002 clearly articulates that states should give assistance to protect children and minimise the impacts of poverty, natural disasters and environmental degradation (UN, 2002). UNICEF (2018:64) agrees by

saying that actions taken to enhance the quality of the environment help to meet the basic needs of children such as education, health and access to clean water.

### **Theme 3: Defining the child concept**

Findings showed that participants did not view the child concept from the same lens. This is evidenced by the contrasting views of key informants on the child concept. While some see a child as vulnerable, others view a child as an empowered individual with agency. The ensuing sub-themes shed more light on these perspectives.

#### **Sub-theme 3.1: A child is vulnerable and needs protection**

A small number of the key informants were strongly of the view that children are vulnerable individuals who need protection:

- KI1 *“...but whilst we still need them to be proactive and be involved, children will still need our protection and guidance because on their own I feel like they will be overshadowed by the intense challenges of poverty and environmental risks.”*
- KI3 *“...it’s a complex situation isn’t it? We need them to be in the mix of things when it comes to poverty and environmental risks, but a child will always be a child; they sometimes encounter things that affect their childhood. They are vulnerable and their childhood should be protected by us the adults.”*

The views of the key informant participants corroborate Mandizvidza’s (2017:23) opinion that children are an especially vulnerable group that is exposed to increased risks because of poverty, diseases, malnutrition, water scarcity, disasters and environmental injustice issues. In support, UNICEF (2014) declares that children are often most vulnerable to the adverse effects of poverty, environmental hazards and climate change due to their physical and physiological immaturity and therefore, depend on adults for provision and protection. ZIMSTAT (2012:69) provides statistics which attest to the vulnerability of children saying that 75.3% of children in Zimbabwe are exposed to attributes of poverty and environmental risks like stunted growth, nutritional diseases, lack of education and information and a general lack of water and sanitation which require their protection by adults. Children risk being ignored because

of their vulnerability. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (2011:34) indicates that the most vulnerable usually get ignored because of their vulnerable status and that the voice of such vulnerable group is often silenced or underrepresented in the formulation and implementation of interventions which seek to address poverty and environmental challenges.

### **Sub-theme 3.2: A child has agency**

In contrast with seeing a child as being vulnerable and in need of protection, more key informants viewed children as integral contributors in the fight against poverty and environmental risks. They saw children as having ideas, being able to make decisions and, moreover, acting on their decisions to advance their own and others' interests.

KI2 *"...of course they are children but they are not vulnerable individuals, one example is when one of our children suggested collecting used cement sacks and we used them to grow potatoes that they could sell to earn an income. This was a good idea; we all supported as an organisation."*

KI4 *"...most of them are so clever they even know how to take care of the environment they live in. For example, they recycle bottles that will be thrown away and make very nice water glasses to sell. Incredible, these children."*

KI5 *"... You will be surprised with their little minds. Did you know green plant leaves could make a nice floor polish? They made it and they are selling it in their communities unlike the one we are used to which is made from paraffin and candles. To me that does not sound like vulnerability."*

The sentiments of the key informants who viewed children as key participants in mitigating poverty and environmental risks coincide with the views of Dean (2013:02) who argues that whilst it is noble to acknowledge the vulnerability of children, it is also equally important to acknowledge the strengths of children and allow them to take mitigatory and adaptive actions on poverty and environmental hazards.

It was interesting to note that all the child participants were in agreement with the key informants who refuted the idea that they were vulnerable individuals when it comes to poverty and environmental risks.



- CP1 *“...I have experienced that they see us as small children who need help on everything but we can do many things alone with no help. For example, we have created projects alone that work for us.”*
- CP2 *“...they listen to us most of the times. I asked teacher if we could make water glasses from empty bottles and teacher said yes and we made them and sold them. I was very happy sir because we could get money to use at home.”*
- CP4 *“...yah, some adults think like that. They see us as helpless but it is not correct; we are helpful and we have good ideas that are useful in how we live everyday.”*
- CP5 *“...we are children and we respect our elders but I think we also deserve a chance to make our own decisions in things that we see in our lives. We have good ideas also just like the adults.”*
- CP3 *“...yes they think they know what is best for us but now the adults also listen to us because they have seen what we can do. They now see that we are important and we can contribute. For example, I also do work at home to help my mother in the garden and make things to sell. I have to do that work and she does the cooking and washing of clothes.”*

These responses confirm what the Food and Nutrition Council (2010:21) mentions in saying, “children are not simply victims but active agents of change and possess unique knowledge and skills about poverty alleviation and climate change from which we can learn”. This solidifies the importance of children in the fight against poverty as highlighted by Tisdall (2008:249) who state that, “the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is particularly constructing children as social actors and human ‘beings’ with their own rights.” This means that children should no longer be content with being treated as second-class citizens and that society and the law must accept children as rights-bearing national and global citizens who are capable of helping in the fight against poverty and environmental risks (UN, 2016:3).

#### **Theme 4: Child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks**

Findings showed that participants acknowledged that children have agency and have a pivotal role to play in reducing poverty and environmental risks. What was also

interesting to the researcher is that whilst the participants agreed that child agency was important in mitigating poverty and environmental risks, the participation of children was not fully supported by all key informants and even the children showed a lack of awareness of the importance of their participation from a rights-based perspective. The following sub-themes highlight these findings.

#### **Sub-theme 4.1: Understanding child agency as a poverty and environmental risks mitigation tool**

Key informant participants showed impressive knowledge of how child agency can serve as a tool to mitigate poverty and environmental risks. In their responses, key informant participants highlighted child agency as evident in the involvement of the children in all the phases of the programme, from the designing phase through to the evaluation phase. In this regard, key informants saw child agency as a tool to reduce poverty and environmental risks.

- KI2 *“...to a greater extent I can say that children in our programme and even other programmes that we offer have agency. I understand that children have to play a bigger role now and in their future. That is why we give them access to being part of the creators of these programmes and the assessment as well because we know it is important in addressing the challenges they face.”*
- KI1 *“...looking at their involvement from the designing, implementation and evaluation of these programmes, I can say that they have agency to a larger extent. We have come to understand that their involvement is very important if we are to mount a fight against poverty and the challenges they face in the environments they live in.”*
- KI4 *“...you see, because they are so much invested in everything about this programme from the designing stage to the evaluation stage, I can safely say that they have agency to a greater extent. For me it all starts with comprehending the importance of their involvement and seeing how it is very important in ending poverty and the effects of poverty in their environments.”*

When it comes to understanding the importance of child agency in ending poverty and environmental risks, child participants affirmed that their participation and contributions are recognised and valued.

CP3 *“...but what I like for me very much is that adults know that we also have good points and what works well for me is that they let us create new ideas in our programme and we can do it and then change some of the things that we don’t like and add other things we like.”*

CP2 *“...what works for me is that we can all sit down and create new ideas, do some corrections to remove what is not working and add what will work. We understand that what we do here is very important to make us and our parents happy.”*

CP5 *“... what we do here is important. Some of us find our next meal from this programme so we take it seriously. We also learn a lot about our hygiene and being good children who are not violent here. So what works for me is that we get a chance to create ideas and monitor them all.”*

These responses echo the view of Chilemba (2015:16) that, “it is important to understand why children should be involved in creating a future for themselves as they will be in that future”. This cements the fact that child agency has a special place in reducing poverty and environmental risks. In the same vein, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) (2017:13) adds that children are not merely passive recipients of environmental stimulation. Rather, they actively engage with their surroundings in purposeful ways, even from babyhood. Studies of both early and middle childhood development show that while children are dependent on adults, they often exercise great agency or capacity for interactive action (IICD, 2017:13). In a guide for Save the Children staff, Save the Children (2018:12) highlights that children’s participation is about children having the opportunity to express a view, influence decision-making and achieve change. It is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalised and those of different ages and abilities, in any matter concerning them. Children’s participation is an essential principle that informs the way of working with children, cutting across all arenas from homes and schools to government, from local to international levels. In addition, Sibanda

(2011:46) points out that a child rights programming approach uses the principles of children's rights to plan, implement and monitor programmes, with the overall goal of improving children's social position so that all boys and girls can fully enjoy their rights and live in societies that acknowledge and respect those rights.

#### **Sub-theme 4.2 Participation of children in mitigating poverty and environmental risks**

Both the key informants and the child participants pointed out how children are showing agency in the Education for Income programme at the Lighthouse Institute and, through their participation, acknowledge the importance of understanding how child agency can be a poverty and environmental risks reduction tool. The following were their responses

- KI3 *"...of course we ask them to give their views and be active participants in this programme, but they are also proactive and they sometimes give their views without being asked. For example, they have grasped the idea of evaluating their work and they are always looking for ways to improve this programme and we have to respect that."*
- KI5 *"... as educators we have to elicit a reaction from our learners, so yes, we sometimes ask them to give their views. Not that we want to find fault in them, no, we just want to invite them to give us their ideas. We might have those shy ones who cannot share without being asked to. For example, we have a child who taught us to grow vegetables in old tyres; that was excellent and we listened."*
- KI2 *"...I can say yes and no to that because we do ask them, which I think is normal, but these kids ... they are forward thinking most of the times; they are the ones that initiate their own involvement. They plan and strategise, they implement, they evaluate and it's funny when they do it but it works and we respect that about them."*

The child participants confirmed the approach of key informants of engaging and being responsive to their views in ending poverty and environmental risks. The child

participants also affirmed their own participation but at the same time highlighted how the adults perceived their participation.

CP1 *“...yes they ask us to participate and tell them what we want out of the programme and what we think should be maintained or changed. For example, we have been asked to change many programmes that were not really working and we enjoyed it. I think adults take our ideas seriously.”*

CP4 *“...they ask us to participate but we also participate before they even ask us to participate. I was part of creating the new programme of the making of those candles you saw in the kiosk. The adults took our ideas seriously and they also promote us by buying our products.”*

CP2 *“...oh yes, they ask us to give our ideas but we also ask them for their opinion on what we will be planning. Like we have created so many programmes as students that give us money and improve our environment. I feel that our ideas are valued because our ideas are taken seriously.”*

The responses from the participants resonate well with Hart's views (2016:123) when he mentions that children have the ideas to make a revolution in their lives and it is now the duty of the adults to trust the ideas of the children and fully support them. Save the Children (2018:23) also highlights that experiences with earnest child participation show that the benefits of involving children far outweigh any benefits derived from keeping them away from decisions and actions influencing their own lives. Children are highly capable of analysing how particular decisions or actions will serve their best interests, and their considerations ensure that projects, programmes and services are relevant and sustainable (Save the Children, 2018:24). Hart (2016:124) adds that children are the real experts of their own lives and act as important change-makers for their peers and for the community at large. Although harder to measure, almost all children who experience meaningful participation immensely improve their self-esteem and gain much more respect in their local communities (Hart, 2016:125). Through participation, children become empowered and confident as well as gain insight and understanding and this is why Hart (2016:125) argues that participation is not a process but an important value.

### **Sub-theme 4.3: Children’s awareness of their right to participate**

Findings showed that whilst child participation is important in ending poverty and environmental risks, the awareness of children of their right to participate was not a concept which was known by every child. The following responses support this view:

- KI4 *“...we try to make this environment stimulating as much as possible in making children participate which is okay but in my mind, I always ask myself if the children know that they have to participate. For me that is a challenge in itself.”*
- KI1 *“...poverty and environmental risks have no master so we make it possible for children to come forward and give suggestions on how to end them, but that is us inviting children to be participants. Don’t get me wrong, they do participate but I think they participate for their own fun but not because they are aware they have to.”*
- KI3 *“...I think our knowledge on the importance of child participation in ending poverty and environmental risks as well as sustainability makes it possible and easier for the children to participate. However, it is unfortunate that the awareness that we have is not the same awareness that the children have.”*

The views of the key informants were echoed in the children’s responses in which they showed a lack of awareness that they have to be active participants because they have the right to do so. As reflected in the child participants views, they participate because they want to, are encouraged to do so, and have the freedom to share their views or not.

- CP3 *“...I think the environment here makes it fun to participate and show our ideas to the teachers, but some of my friends don’t know that they can participate as well. Maybe they are shy.”*
- CP5 *“...our teachers make it possible to participate all the time and they listen to us, but I really don’t know if I should be giving ideas all the time. It is confusing because others are sometimes mostly quiet.”*

CP4 *“...we enjoy everything here and I think that is what makes everything here much possible, to participate and feel valued. Sometimes I feel that we become too much with our ideas and we don’t know what to do with them and we keep them to ourselves; we don’t want to be a problem.”*

The findings corroborate Mugari’s (2010:69) thinking that whilst major efforts are put into making children participate, equal efforts should be made in making children aware that they ought to participate to get desired results. In the same vein, Ortiz (2011:2) suggests that in the context of ending the effects of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is also fundamental to have children know their role in combating poverty, the effects of climate change and the adverse effects of disasters that they face. It is in the same frame of thinking that Paulie (2014:64) states that social workers have to change the mindset of the disadvantaged, especially of children, that they have to wait for handouts; they should rather be made aware that they have the tools to create a way out for themselves.

## **Theme 5: Challenges that hinder child agency**

The participants alluded that several challenges were standing in the way of ensuring that child agency is considered in reducing poverty and environmental risks. These challenges included culture and a general lack of knowledge. These challenges will constitute the subsequent sub-themes.

### **Sub-theme 5.1: Culture**

The participants lamented the severe effect that culture has on ensuring that child agency is respected in reducing poverty and environmental risks. This, according to the participants, compromises the chances of children taking part in activities of the programme that are aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risks. The following responses highlight participants’ views in this regard:

KI1 *“...for me I think that in terms of planning and carrying out these programmes, children are sometimes disregarded not because they are incapable of what is expected but because of our culture. In our culture children listen and adults talk and give direction so children end up doing what the adults want.”*

- KI3 *“...it’s possible to recognise and respect children’s contributions and decisions in reducing poverty and environmental risks, but often the stumbling block is culture. In my culture, children are supposed to keep quiet whilst the adults speak. So you can imagine, how are they supposed to contribute when their lips are sewn with culture?”*
- KI5 *“...children are the best participants; they are innovative but their worst adversary is culture. Our culture makes it impossible for children to plan, implement and evaluate programmes on their own. It’s bad but it’s culture.”*
- KI4 *“I think when it comes to children, we take two steps forward in letting them participate but we take three steps back with culture. For me culture is being used to keep children in the back seat I think.”*

To strengthen the views of the key informants, child participants confirmed that culture is a very bad stumbling block towards respecting their contribution in ending poverty and environmental risks.

- CP1 *“...sometimes we do important things but sometimes I don’t feel appreciated when adults say we should listen to them because they are like our parents.”*
- CP3 *“...in our culture we are told that children should listen to the adults and not be too forward thinking. So, we end up not doing anything sir.”*
- CP5 *“...for example sometimes they use a proverb and say their sight can see much far sitting down than how me as a child can see when I am standing up. This shows that in our culture adults have better choices than us children.”*

The views of the participants are well documented by International Labour Organisation (2012:18) when they mention that in nearly all countries, to varying degrees, age, sex, disability and culture have been grounds for social exclusion. In the same vein, Gasperini (2016:31) notes that children have been alienated in the spheres of participation on the basis of culture and this has perpetuated the cycle of social exclusion. Whilst noting the importance of having an all-inclusive approach when dealing with poverty and the effects of poverty, Charangwa (2011:46) also highlighted



that culture has become a tool in contemporary society to relegate other sections of the society from taking part in the mainstream poverty reduction efforts. Lombard and Viviers (2012:11) also allude to the role that power, status and relationships play in child participation, mentioning that despite global progress on the importance and value of children's participation, tension persists between children's right to participation and society's construction of children and childhood.

### **Sub-theme 5.2: Lack of knowledge on the role of child participation**

Findings highlighted that there is a lack of knowledge of what child participation entails in relation to agency when it comes to how children participate in reducing poverty and environmental risks and how their contributions are valued. Their views are reflected in the following responses:

KI2 *"...in relation to every aspect of this programme, I would say that lack of knowledge on the children's part affects their participation in trying to end poverty and associated environmental problems."*

KI5 *"...we do wish to see our children participating and being proactive but the issue is lack of knowledge about this agency. Lack of knowledge breeds confusion and where there is confusion there is hesitation from the children because they don't know if they should participate or not. You get it, right?"*

Interestingly, the child participants also reiterated that they in some cases lack the necessary knowledge as to whether they should be participating or not. Some of the child participants showcased that they do not know that they have a right to be participating in issues that concern them, in this case, reducing poverty and environmental risks. The following were their responses:

CP2 *"...I think that my contributions are taken seriously and are important but sometimes it is difficult because I don't know if I can participate all the time. It is not clear, I don't know."*

CP1 *"...what makes it possible is that we can share our ideas but what makes it difficult is that we don't really know much about our boundary, if we can participate all the time or not."*

These findings link with children and key informants' perceptions on children's right to participate as has been discussed in sub-theme 4.3. As illustrated in the following responses of the participants, children sometimes do not know whether they should contribute or not and as a result some of them participate less leading to their right of participating being violated.

KI1 *"...poverty and environmental risks have no master so we make it possible for children to come forward and give suggestions on how to end them, but that is us inviting children to be participants. Don't get me wrong, they do participate but I think they participate for their own fun but not because they are aware they have to."*

KI3 *"...I think our knowledge on the importance of child participation in ending poverty and environmental risks as well as sustainability makes it possible and easier for the children to participate. However, it is unfortunate that the awareness that we have is not the same awareness that the children have."*

The findings are buttressed by Charangwa (2011:21) when he mentions that knowledge gaps in poverty reduction literature can be in themselves be a reinforcement of poverty. In line with the same thinking, Turgot (2013:45) claims that lack of knowledge slows down the process of ending poverty as some may not know their place and role in ending poverty. In the case of this study, it is the lack of understanding of the role of child participation and how it links with child agency. In support, Turgot (2013:04) mentions that children as constructivists play a major role in the social environment in shaping a brighter future for themselves, but lack of knowledge and education of what their role is can make them redundant.

Adamassie (2012:69) reflects that the recognition of children's potential role as change agents implies that they should be made aware of their rights to participate and the impact of their participation. Furthermore, Lombard and Viviers (2012:11) state that even if children have the opportunity to participate, the manner in which this is done should reflect respect for their rights. They add that if children's participation is not conducted in an ethical manner, their rights are violated and adults involved in children's participation should thus have the capacity (knowledge, skill and attitude) to

facilitate meaningful and authentic child participation (Lombard & Viviers, 2012:14). This means that the participation of children and the manner in which they participate cannot be overstated. Speaking about the ethics of child participation, Lombard and Viviers shed light on children getting access to information concerning their participation and the importance of communication. Communication and information-sharing with children prior to their involvement in the participation process must take into account their age, language and culture, and must contain as many details as necessary for them to decide whether they wish to participate or not (Lombard & Vivier, 2012:15).

### **Theme 6: Strategies for promoting child agency**

An analysis of the interviews showed that participants knew that child agency had to be promoted in order to reduce poverty and environmental risks. Amongst the strategies that the participants shared were education, social work intervention and advocating for children's rights. These strategies form the ensuing sub-themes.

#### **Sub-theme 6.1: Education**

The findings indicate that the participants place education on the top of the agenda when it comes to promoting child agency in reducing poverty and environmental risks. The following were their responses:

KI1 *"...but with education you know that you have planted a seed that will remain fruitful in the coming years for the child. For us here educating children about their role in reducing poverty is important because they only know if they are educated."*

KI3 *"... and of course education cannot be left out. With education our children will be able to know what participating really is, and I think that is when they get to know when and how they can participate."*

KI5 *"...if there are any misconceptions about child agency, education can change those misconceptions and place the children in their rightful place so that when the time comes for them to participate they will be ready."*

In support of the views of the key informants, child participants also reinforced the view that education was important. Some of the child participants even went on to suggest how education can be implemented to respect child agency in ending poverty and environmental risks.

CP1 *“...they should educate us. We need to know a lot of things especially what we can do and what we cannot do as children to fight poverty and environmental risks. Sometimes lack of knowledge stops us from doing some things.”*

CP4 *“...but the best is education because they even always tell us that education is power and that it is a weapon that can end poverty. So we need to be given that weapon every day when we come here so that when we leave we will be full of knowledge on how we can be involved in ending poverty.”*

CP5 *“...they need to give us education. The education to help us understand our role and position well in this fight against poverty. They can also educate us through different ways like in practical work because I think it is easier to forget theory but practical work sticks to the mind.”*

CP2 *“...and I think more practical education with visual learning aids and educational tours, going different places, seeing how other children do it, will be the best. We can learn from seeing others doing it because theory can be confusing as well.”*

CP3 *“...we can be educated so that we know, and I think when we are educated we will be better at participating in everything that can reduce poverty. I also think that this education for us should start in crèche so that we grow knowing about this.”*

In relation to the views of the participants, Di Stacio, Solga and Usyk (2017:316) mention that educational attainment is both a cumulative skill formation process that

unfolds over the life course and a means for status attainment and intergenerational reproduction. Several authors (Arrizabalaga & Caballero, 2009:27; Silva, 2014:7) attest to the fact that children need education and special consideration in the development process as they are one of the most marginalised groups of society. Maintaining the same idea, Mount (2014:143) suggests combining the education of children with other activities like the development of a children's radio station and children's community development centres to give them a platform to learn to be responsible to tackle poverty and the risks they face. Alongside these activities, the young people develop their communication and organising skills, and also an awareness of key issues such as environmental conservation, poverty alleviation, children's rights, non-violence and gender equality (Mount, 2014:143). Their community education work gives them a platform for active organisation and engagement in poverty alleviation activities, and direct action in defense of children's rights, through which they influence political processes at different levels and improve their social standing as children.

### **Sub-theme 6.2: Social work intervention**

Apart from education, participants also identified social work intervention as another way that can be used to reduce poverty and environmental risks as well as boost child agency. In their responses, participants highlighted how social work occupies a special place in empowering children to become active participants in mitigating poverty and environmental risks. The following are the participants' accounts in this regard:

K11 *"...in my view, social workers have the necessary knowledge to make it possible for children's contributions to be respected and recognised to reduce poverty and environmental risks."*

K15 *"...with their knowledge and expertise, social workers can prove to be very effective in this discussion. They know about child policies more and child participation and how important it is for children to be involved in things that involve them."*

K13 *"...what I believe is that social workers are best placed to know how to incorporate these children's views in a way that the views of children will*

*be respected and recognised because alone we are not so well equipped with the necessary knowledge.”*

The International Federation of Social Workers (2016:5) strengthens the views of the participants by saying that social work in its different roles can help people discover their own resources and their own ability to influence and cause positive change. In the same vein, the British Association for Social Workers (2018:14) mentions that poverty implies a lack of participation and social workers are conveniently situated in a position that can put people into situations where they can participate in anti-poverty practice. This is a sign that social work has a pivotal role to play in mitigating poverty. To further put more emphasis on the role of social work, Wetherby (2009:67) points out that social work intervention can bring awareness to the people that were not aware that in themselves there is a way out of poverty if they just participate in changing their situation. This is the same view that Greencroft (2013:49) had when he mentioned that social workers in their work can create a set of activities designed to influence the policies and actions of others to achieve positive change for children’s lives based on the experience and knowledge of social workers working directly with children, their families and communities.

### **6.3. Advocating for children’s rights**

Participants viewed advocating for children’s rights as another strategy for promoting child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks. Some of the participants highlighted that advocating for children’s rights would produce ripple effects that would sustain the children’s future. The following were the participants’ views:

K12 *“...luckily we are informed by the constitution and the Ministry of Education, so we can use the channel of advocating for these children’s rights where we can give them their rights to be on the forefront to change the things that affect them; it will benefit them now and for their future.”*

K14 *“...in situations where culture can be a stumbling block to child agency, I think we can just publicly recommend the importance of children’s rights*

*to participate in matters that influence their lives. There is no other way in my opinion I think.”*

CP5 *“...especially where we are not taken seriously, we can campaign for our rights to be heard and respected so that we can give our voice as well which will make our future better.”*

CP2 *“...we can push for our rights as children to be heard so that we don’t get left out in these discussions, and so that we can be able to participate without fear or favour and improve our future.”*

Greencroft (2013:52) concurs saying children’s rights are often violated through a combination of complex processes on different levels, ranging from family and community to national, regional and international levels. Thus, there is need to influence and lobby duty bearers so that they meet their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Save the Children (2019:3) states that children are individuals with their own rights; they are vital and competent actors in society and full citizens with equal rights and, as such, their rights should be rigorously advocated for. Equally important, Ridge (2009:33) avers that children’s rights to participate should not be overlooked but advocated for as participation is not only a right but is also a tool that children can use to realise their demands and rights, express their views, influence decision-making and achieve change.

### **3.12 Summary**

Chapter three has provided an overview of the research methodology which was used in the study and presented the ethical principles followed by the limitations of the study. The chapter explored personal narratives of how child agency is respected in mitigating poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare. The empirical findings were presented under various themes and sub-themes. Six themes emerged from the data; namely, conceptualisation of poverty; how the programme mitigates poverty and environmental risks; defining the child concept; child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks; challenges that hinder child agency, and strategies for promoting child agency.

The following chapter presents the study's key findings, conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER 4

### KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter wraps up the research report. It starts by outlining the extent to which the research goal and objectives were accomplished. It also presents the key findings with regard to how children's agency is respected in reducing poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute in Harare. Thereafter, the conclusions are drawn and recommendations offered.

#### 4.2 Goal and objectives

The goal of the study was to explore and describe how children's agency is recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risk in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare

This goal was achieved by means of the following objectives:

##### Objective 1

- ❖ To conceptualise and contextualise the poverty and environmental risks of children within a human rights-based framework.

This objective was achieved in chapter two (see sub-section 2.3) where it was discussed that poverty and environmental risks are a human rights issue. In the same sub-section, Hawkins (2010:68) highlights that poverty and environmental risks are a threat to accomplishing the human rights of access to clean water, health, education and proper sanitation. To further conceptualise and contextualise poverty and environmental risks within a human rights framework, in chapter three, the participants indicated how the Education for Income programme respected children's rights and was a tool to reduce poverty and environmental risks within a human rights framework (see sub-theme 2.2). According to Heimer and Palme (2016:435), the UNCRC "organises the rights of children in terms of provision, protection and participation." Rights that facilitate the participation of children are protected in the Constitution

(Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). In this regard, in chapter three (see sub-section 2.1), participants highlighted how they respected the rights of children in reducing poverty and environmental risks through education. In the same section, participants emphasised the importance of reducing the impact of poverty and environmental risks through advocating for children's rights. Furthermore, in chapter three (see sub-section 3.2, para.5) it was highlighted that throughout the research study, the researcher was informed by the human rights framework.

## **Objective 2**

- ❖ To explore and describe the goal and intended outcomes of programmes/interventions aimed at reducing children's poverty and environmental risks.

This objective was meant to discover and describe how the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute mitigates poverty and environmental risks among children. The objective was addressed in chapter one (paragraph 8) when the researcher highlighted from the Lighthouse Institute Brochure (2019:5) different avenues through which the programme provides the children with vast ways of mitigating poverty. Furthermore, in chapter three (sub-theme 2.1), the participants indicated that the programme's intended outcome was to reduce poverty and environmental risks through the participation of children in education. In the same vein of reducing the effects of poverty and environmental risks, the participants also mentioned that the goal of the programme is to afford children a chance to reduce poverty and environmental risks through giving them opportunities to create different socio-entrepreneurial ventures (see sub-theme 4.2).

## **Objective 3**

- ❖ To explore and describe how children are involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.

The objective was addressed in chapter three (see sub-theme 4.1) when participants showed impressive knowledge of how child agency can serve as a tool to reduce poverty and environmental risks. In their responses, the participants affirmed the presence of child agency in the programme as they gave evidence of the involvement

of the children in all the phases of the programme, which are, the designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. Chapter two also addressed this objective where Manyena et al. (2008:180) highlighted that there are many initiatives and projects that have been designed to help children in the Mberengwa region where children have been the designers, implementers and evaluators of social entrepreneurship programmes that empowered them to contribute to ending poverty and environmental challenges that they face (see chapter 2, section 2.6.1). That is the same with the children from the Lighthouse Institute who make use of their school education to design, implement and evaluate several projects like recycling to sell and earn a profit to take home (Lighthouse Institute Brochure, 2019:5). A discussion about the Asset Based Community Development approach also addressed this objective (see chapter 2 section 2.6.2), emphasising that involving children in all the phases of the programme makes them feel that they are active participants in matters that are important to them. This also enables them to use their inherent strengths to develop ways that could mitigate poverty and environmental challenges. Chapter one (see para.2) also addressed this objective saying that children have the right to participate in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes that affect their current and future lives, and not be inert bystanders. It was argued that children have agency and should be acknowledged for the contribution they can make in reducing poverty, creating an income and mitigating environmental risks towards sustainable development in their communities.

#### **Objective 4**

- ❖ To explore and describe the factors that influenced the recognition and respect / non-recognition and disrespect of children's agency in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.

This goal was addressed in chapter three (see theme 3). Participants showed how child agency can be respected and be disrespected at the same time. Participants highlighted that child agency may sometimes be disrespected because children are perceived as vulnerable and in need of protection. On the contrary, some of the participants highlighted that they perceive children as having agency and capable of participating in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes that mitigate poverty and environmental risks (see sub-theme 3.2). The objective was also

met in chapter three (see sub-theme 4.1) when the participants mentioned that knowledge on the importance of child agency was a vital factor which enabled them to respect child agency. In the same chapter, the participants also posited that another important factor which has led to the respect of child agency is the fact that children themselves have not accepted being second-class citizens which has enabled them to initiate and exercise agency (see sub-theme 4.2). In addition, the participants aided in the realisation of this objective by showing that using a rights-based approach is another factor which has led to the respecting of child agency. Sub-theme 2.2 highlights that children's right to participation is respected in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute

However, an analysis of chapter three shows that there are also other factors which lead to the disrespecting of child agency. Sub-theme 4.3 shows that a lack of awareness on the part of some children on what constitutes child agency was a serious factor which impeded child agency. Not only that, sub-theme 5.2 also shows that lack of knowledge by key informants was also another factor. Charangwa (201:21) mentions that knowledge gaps in poverty reduction literature can be in itself a reinforcement of poverty while Turgot (2013:45), in the same line of thinking, claims that lack of knowledge slows down the process of ending poverty as some may not know their place and role in ending poverty. Equally important in achieving this objective, chapter three highlighted the thoughts of participants when they singled out culture as a factor that reinforces the disrespecting of child agency. Participants pointed out that culture was a bane of child agency which corroborates Charangwa's (2011:46) view that culture has become a tool in contemporary society to relegate other sections of the society from taking part in the mainstream poverty reduction efforts which, according to Lombard and Viviers (2012:11), may be a problem of how power, status and relationships play out in child participation.

### **Objective 5**

- ❖ To make recommendations on how children's agency can be recognised and respected in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.

This objective was addressed in chapters two and three and finalised in this chapter where the researcher presents recommendations based on the study (see 4.4). In Chapter two (see section 2.4), where it was mentioned that to exercise agency, people must be presented with opportunities to express their views and experience what it means to be capable and valued as human beings and citizens of their communities. To support this assertion, Durham (2011:13) reflects that one of the key ideas in the social studies of childhood is the recognition that children are social actors and that they have agency. In this way, both child participants and key informants suggested that the first opportunity to respect child agency is to offer them adequate education to gather knowledge of child agency. In the same chapter (see sub-theme 6.3), participants viewed advocating for children's rights as another strategy for promoting child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks. Some of the participants highlighted that advocating for children's rights would produce great results and empower children to be proactive in reducing poverty and environmental risks. In agreement, Badham (1999:23) states that the participation of children in their communities on matters affecting them is not only essential, but a fundamental right. Lastly, the objective was met when the participants suggested that social work intervention can be a cornerstone in making sure that child agency is respected (see sub-theme 6.2). The participants cited that social workers, with their vast knowledge, can advocate for child participation and thus fill in knowledge gaps. This point is reinforced by Lombard and Viviers (2014:83) when they say that social workers, with their well-developed policy understanding, strength-building capabilities and trans-disciplinary knowledge base, are uniquely situated to be key players in poverty reduction and mitigation of environmental risks.

### **4.3 Key findings and conclusions**

In this section, the key findings and conclusions drawn from these discoveries are respectively presented.

- ❖ The literature review and empirical findings point out to the fact that children are vulnerable to poverty and environmental risks.

- It can be concluded that the continued marginalisation of children from participating in matters that affect them will perpetuate children's vulnerability to poverty and environmental risks.
  
- ❖ The findings showed that there is divided opinion on the perception of the child concept; some perceive children as vulnerable and in need of protection whilst others see children as having agency. Furthermore, findings revealed that power, status and relationships between adults and children based on culture were an impediment to achieving child agency in the efforts to mitigate poverty and environmental risks. Lombard and Viviers (2012:11) mention that despite global progress on the importance and value of child participation, tension persists between children's right to participation and society's construction of children and childhood. Findings also highlighted that child agency, amongst other poverty and environmental risks reduction initiatives, is an effective tool that could be utilised to contribute to sustainable communities.
  
- It can be concluded that to reduce the impact of poverty and environmental risks, there should be a shift from seeing children as vulnerable and in need of protection to seeing them as having agency and crucial contributors in the fight against poverty and environmental risks that threaten the sustainability of communities. Furthermore, child agency should be boosted and there is a need to create human rights-based policies at all levels of service delivery that advocate for child agency in mitigating poverty and environmental risks. This includes equally respecting adults and children's cultural right to give an opinion on matters that affect them.
  
- ❖ Findings showed that children are capable of mitigating poverty and environmental risks through their creativity, imagination and hard work in designing, implementing and monitoring programmes that mitigate poverty and environmental risks. This was shown when key participants acknowledged how child participants surprised them with great ideas in designing and implementing projects that reduce poverty and environmental risks in the Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute.

- It can be concluded that children should not be defined by their vulnerability and need for adult protection, but rather by their agency to make a contribution in matters that affect their lives. They should be recognised and respected for their efforts in programme designing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating, by including them in all the phases of programmes intended to mitigate poverty and environmental risks.
- ❖ Findings demonstrate that whilst child participants were engaged in some phases of the Education for Income programme, both key participants and child participants recognised that there is a lack of knowledge on the role of child participation in reducing poverty and environmental risks. Findings highlighted that education is not prioritised as a platform to inform children that they may participate in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risks.
  - It can be concluded that information gaps on the role of child agency continue to exclude children from participating in matters that affect their lives. Hence, there is need for efforts like this study which seeks to bridge the information gaps by engaging children's views and decisions on mitigating poverty and environmental risks to promote sustainable communities. Furthermore, education curricula should enable learners to know that they have a right to participate in activities that reduce poverty and environmental risks.
- ❖ The findings show that not all participants were aware that children's knowledge of their rights will strengthen their agency to participate in discussions that affect their lives such as poverty and environmental risks in their communities. This was shown through confusion among child participants who did not know where and when they could participate in terms of designing, implementing and evaluating programmes aimed at mitigating poverty and environmental risk.
  - The promotion of socio-economic equality begins with knowing what socio-economic rights are (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014:323). It can be concluded that

many children are not aware of their right to participate in all the phases of programmes that are meant to reduce poverty and environmental risks; this exposes their vulnerability to poverty and environmental risks. The findings also revealed that children's lack of knowledge of their rights to participate reduce their chances of participation. Hence it can be concluded that children should be made aware of their rights to participate to boost their chances of participating.

- ❖ The findings show that social work has a special role to play in making sure that child agency is respected in programmes/efforts that mitigate poverty and environmental risks through the knowledge that social workers possess in matters of child agency and the reduction of poverty and environmental risks.
  - It can be concluded that social work has an important role to play in advocating for children's right to participate and influence policies that will recognise and respect child agency in contributing to a more equal society.

#### 4.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations on how children's agency can be recognised and respected in the conceptualisation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes/interventions.:

➤ **Education and awareness campaigns on the importance of child agency**

Since the findings pointed to a lack of awareness on the issue of child agency in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes that reduce poverty and environmental risks, the researcher recommends that children and those who work with them be educated on the importance of child participation in all phases of programmes that reduce poverty and environmental risks. Social workers and other experts in the field of child participation can collaborate and facilitate training opportunities for children and professionals on child rights and the development of child agency.



➤ **Formulation of policies that recognise and promote child agency**

The researcher firmly recommends the creation of policies that recognise, respect and promote child agency. The findings highlighted that culture, lack of knowledge and the perception of the child concept hinder children's participation in matters that affect them. Hence to counter that, the researcher recommends that there be national policies that are binding that promote and recognise the impact that child participation has on efforts to mitigate poverty and environmental risks. Zimbabwe has signed and ratified both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and is, therefore, bound to promote and protect children's rights and children's right to exercise agency as espoused in these treaties (Hall et al., 2018:48). However, although current policies define aspects of child agency, gaps continue to exist in Zimbabwean policies as evidenced by lack of awareness by both adults and children which lead to children not fully exercising agency. Children must be included and have opportunities to take the lead in sharing their views in formulation of policies that affect their lives. Furthermore, those who implement these policies should take responsibility to make it known to children that they should be fully involved and then recognise and respect their views by ensuring that their opinions are reflected in adopted policies.

➤ **Formulation of child-driven social entrepreneurial ventures**

Throughout the research study, the researcher came to realise that children are capable of mitigating poverty and environmental risks through their creativity, imagination and hard work. The researcher thus recommends the creation of child-driven entrepreneurial ventures. These entrepreneurial ventures can be realised in conjunction with education programmes like the one at the Lighthouse Institute where they also include their parents and guardians as well as members of the communities where they come from. These ventures will develop their agency and will prepare them to create sustainable livelihoods as opposed to the exploitation of child labour.

➤ **Adoption of a human rights-based approach in dealing with poverty and environmental risks in children**

The Constitution of Zimbabwe on child poverty highlights the need to embrace child rights. Under Section 19, it notes that the state must adopt policies and measures that ensure poverty reduction in children (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013c). Poverty and

environmental risks are a gross violation of human rights and therefore a human rights-based approach needs to be adopted when dealing with child poverty and environmental risks. Since the government of Zimbabwe has already made provision for adopting poverty reduction mechanisms for children, the researcher strongly recommends adopting a human rights-based approach by those who work with children, for example, the key informants at the Lighthouse Institute. This can be achieved by giving children the right to participate in matters that affect them. Central to this approach is the embedded opportunity to make children aware of their rights and in particular to know their right to participate as the lack of awareness means lack of participation.

➤ **Integrating developmental social work in social work intervention**

Findings showed that social workers are held in high esteem and are being looked upon to provide lasting solutions in the fight against poverty and environmental risks. The researcher recommends that social service organisations in Zimbabwe integrate developmental social work in their interventions to promote child participation. Developmental social work is embedded in a human rights-based approach and through this approach, social workers can influence and participate in the formulation of policies that recognise and respect child agency in matters that affect children.

➤ **Recommendations for further research**

Recommendations for further research are twofold:

- The study was exploratory in nature, hence the findings could be used as a foundation for further research on the role of child agency in Zimbabwe in improving child well-being for sustainable futures and for the building of resilience against environmental challenges.
- A study that focuses on the challenges that impede and/or facilitate child agency, for example, the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, children's rights and the absence of social work's voice in policy debates concerning children, needs to be undertaken.

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## Appendix 1. Request for Permission to Conduct Research at Lighthouse Institute



25/04/2019

**Our ref:** TINASHE SAKAVAPO  
**E-mail:** U13158768@tuks.co.za  
**Tel:** +263773716935

Director: Lighthouse Institute  
Mr. T Bvumbi  
Lighthouse Institute ZG 186 Zengeza,  
Chitungwiza

Dear Mr Bvumbi

### **Re: Request for permission to conduct a research study in your organisation**

Mr Tinashe Sakavapo is enrolled for a master's study in social development and policy in the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria. He is one student in a class of nine, who has completed the theory component of the MSW (Social Development & Policy) programme in 2018 and has to complete the research component in 2019. The students have a collective research topic, that is, *Children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risk*. However, each student focuses on a different programme as a case study. Mr Sakavapo would like to do his research study in your organisation on the education for vulnerable children and children at risk programme. His research topic for the study will therefore be: *Children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risk: Case study on Education for the vulnerable children at Lighthouse Institute, Harare*

The goal of the study will be to explore and describe how children's agency influences reducing poverty and environmental risk in the education for vulnerable children programmes. In essence, it means exploring how children are involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a programme designed for them. It is a qualitative study and the data will be



collected through one-on-one interviews with involved key informants and children in the selected programme for the study. The key informants should include five people who have been engaged in the development and implementation of the programme for at least two years and who are conversant in English. In addition, he wants to interview five children between the ages of 10 and 17 years who have been beneficiaries of the programme for at least one year, and who are conversant in English. He will need your assistance with arranging access to the participants. This includes obtaining permission from the parents/guardians to engage their children in the study, if the organisation does not already have permission to do so.

The study will commence within the course of this year, after the Postgraduate Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities has granted ethical clearance to proceed with the study. For purposes of ethical clearance, He requires written permission from your organisation, on your official letterhead. The letter should specify that you give Mr Sakavapo permission to approach and engage key informants and children involved in the programme to participate in the study. Furthermore, that you will assist him to get access to the research participants. Participation is voluntary and participants can decide whether they want to participate in the study or not. If they do participate, they will complete an informed consent or assent (children) form which will inform them exactly what the research is about.

You can send the permission letter to Mr Sakavapo's e-mail address at [u13158768@tuks.co.za](mailto:u13158768@tuks.co.za) and you are welcome to copy me in, if you wish to do so. You can contact him on his e-mail address or mobile phone: +263773716935

The study will be conducted under my supervision and you can find my contact details in the footer of this letterhead.

Your kind support in giving Mr Sakavapo permission to conduct the study in your organisation will be highly appreciated. Mr Sakavapo will give you feedback on the findings of the study once it has been completed.


Yours sincerely,



Prof Antoinette Lombard  
HEAD: DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

## Appendix 2. Lighthouse Institute Permission letter

**LIGHTHOUSE INSTITUTE**  
"Moving with vision"  
Registered in terms of section 43 of the Education Act 1987  
(Revised in 1996)



26/04/2019

Director: Lighthouse Institute  
Mr. T Bvumbi  
Lighthouse Institute ZG 186  
Zengeza, Chitungwiza

Mr Sakavapo Tinashe  
+236773716935  
[U13158768@tuks.co.za](mailto:U13158768@tuks.co.za)

Dear Mr. Sakavapo

**Re: Acceptance for your request to conduct research at Lighthouse Institute**

I would like to convey a message of delight into informing you that after careful deliberations with the members of the Institution, we were all in accord with your request for conducting research at our Institute. We will open our doors for your exploration of the Education for Income Programme that we are currently running with the hope that you will meet the goal of your research study and answer all the questions that you might have.


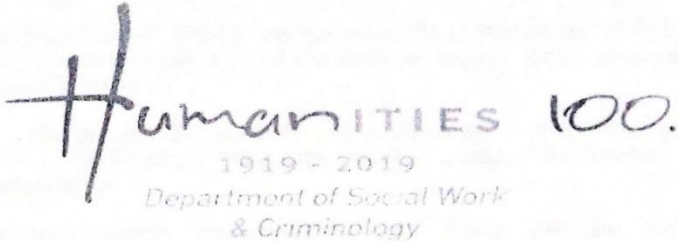
Should you or your supervisor(s) need any assistance in the course of your research study at our Institute, you can contact me at my office line (0270) 23024 or email: [tbvumbi@lighthouseinstitute.co.zw](mailto:tbvumbi@lighthouseinstitute.co.zw)

As an Institution we support and encourage you in your journey towards sustainable development and we wish you all the best in your studies

Yours sincerely,  
Mr. T Bvumbi  
Director: Lighthouse Institute

Email: [tbvumbi@lighthouseinstitute.co.zw](mailto:tbvumbi@lighthouseinstitute.co.zw) Tel: (0270)23024

### Appendix 3: Informed consent key informants

 <p>UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA</p>	 <p>1919 - 2019 Department of Social Work &amp; Criminology</p>
06/06/2019	
Researcher: Tinashe Sakavapo Tel: +263773716935 E-mail: u13158768@tuks.co.za	
<b>INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY: KEY INFORMANTS</b>	
Dear Participant,	
<p>My name is Tinashe Sakavapo. I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria in the programme MSW Social Development and Policy. I am doing a study to determine how children are engaged and participating in programmes that are intended for them to reduce poverty and environmental risk. Your participation in the study will assist me to understand the topic and achieve the goal of my study.</p>	
<b>Title of the study:</b> Children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risk: Case study of Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare	
<b>Goal of the study:</b> To explore and describe how children's agency influence reducing poverty and environmental risk in Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare.	
<b>Procedures:</b> The study will use one-on-one interviews to collect data from participants. Each interview is expected to take approximately one hour. The interviews will be tape recorded with your permission. The tape recordings will be transcribed for purposes of data analysis. Only the researcher and the study supervisor will have access to the tapes and transcripts which will be stored in a secure place by the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. If data is used again, it will be for research purposes.	
<b>Risks and discomforts:</b> There are no known risks and discomforts that may be endured by participants in this study. The participants will be debriefed by me after the interview. If needed, they will be referred to the Director of the organisation, Mr Bvumbi, to discuss any discomfort that may have developed during the interview.	
Room 10 21, Humanities Building University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20 Hatfield 0028, South Africa Tel +27 (0)12 420 2325/2030	Faculty of Humanities Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe Lefapha la Bomotheo

**Benefits:** Participants will not receive any incentives for being involved in the study. The study will benefit the participants indirectly in that they will contribute to social work knowledge regarding social work and environmental justice.

**Participants' rights:** Participation in the study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any question that they do not wish to respond to.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Information collected in the study will be treated confidentially and the names of participants will not appear in the research report or the scientific journal in which the results will be published. Findings will not be presented in a way that could be directly linked to any specific participant.

**Person to contact:** If participants have questions or concerns relating to the study, they may contact the researcher at +263773716935 or email him at [u13158768@tuks.co.za](mailto:u13158768@tuks.co.za)

#### Declaration

I, ....., understand my rights as a research participant, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being conducted.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature parent/guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form: Parents/Guardians



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Humanities 100.  
1919 - 2019  
Department of Social Work  
& Criminology

04/06/2019

**Researcher:** Tinashe Sakavapo  
**Tel:** +263773716935  
**E-mail:** u13158768@tuks.co.za

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Tinashe Sakavapo. I am a master's student at the University of Pretoria in the programme MSW Social Development and Policy. I am doing a study to determine how children are engaged and participating in programmes that are intended for them to reduce poverty and environmental risk. In this study, I would like to talk to your child to hear how they see their involvement and participation in the programme to ensure that they benefit as intended by the programme. Your child will have the opportunity to say whether he/she wants to participate in the study, and whatever the decision, it will be respected. If they are willing to participate, they will sign an assent form that contain the following information.

#### **Title of the study**

Children's agency in reducing poverty and environmental risk: Case study of Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare

#### **Goal of the study**

To explore and describe how children's agency influence reducing poverty and environmental risk in Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare.

#### **What will happen in the study?**

If you give permission for your child to join the study, I will talk to him/her one-on-one, asking questions in relation to the goal of the study, that is; how they see their involvement and participation recognised in shaping the programme so that they can benefit from it to reduce their poverty and environmental risks. Your child will be one of five children in the programme that I will be interviewing. The discussion should be between 45 and 60 minutes. With the child's permission, I will be voice recording the conversation so that I do not miss any important information that he/she shares. The interview will take place at Lighthouse Institute on a date and time agreed with the organisation.

Room 10.21, Humanities Building  
University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20  
Hatfield 0028, South Africa  
Tel +27 (0)12 420 2325/2030  
Email antoinette.lombard@up.ac.za  
www.up.ac.za

Faculty of Humanities  
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotho

### **Risks and discomforts**

There will be no risks or danger to your child to participate in the study. Your child will know that he/she will have the freedom to not answer any question if they do not wish to respond to. I will be available after the interview to talk to the child on his/her experience of the interview. If needed, I will refer the child to speak to the social worker who oversee the Education for Income Programme at Lighthouse Institute, Harare.

### **Are there any benefits for joining the study?**

Your child will not receive any money or gifts for his/her participation. The study is intended to recognise that children's views are important and that they should be listened at to ensure that programmes that are designed and implemented for them, serve their best interests.

### **Participants' rights**

Even if you give permission for your child to participate in the study, he/she will still have the choice to indicate whether he/she wants to participate. If your child agrees to participate, he/she will sign an assent form to indicate that he/she fully understands that participation is voluntary, and what his/her rights are. If your child agrees to participate, but at any time during the interview, decide to withdraw, he/she will be welcome to do so without any consequences.

### **Confidentiality**

The information that your child will share with me, will be treated confidentially. Nobody will be able to see which information was provided by which participant. I will use the information obtained from the study to write a research report for submission to the University of Pretoria and for academic journals. Your child's name, as in the case of all the other participants' names, will not be displayed in any of these documents. I will give participants an imaginary name to protect their identity. When the study is complete, I will submit all my research information to the University of Pretoria for safe keeping for 15 years where after it will be destroyed. If data is used again, it will be for research purposes.

### **Inquiries**

If you have any questions or want to discuss any aspect of the research with me, you are welcome to call me on +263773716935 or send me an e-mail at: [u13158768@tuks.co.za](mailto:u13158768@tuks.co.za)

### **CONSENT DECLARATION BY PARENT/GUARDIAN**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby give permission for my child,  
\_\_\_\_\_ (write name of child) to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature parent/guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Faculty of Humanities  
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Bomotho

## Appendix 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILD PARTICIPANTS

**Goal of the study:** The goal of the study is to explore and describe how children's agency is recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risk in Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare [To determine how children are engaged and participating in programmes that are intended for them to reduce poverty and dangers in the environment.]

Participant number: CP .....

### Biographical information

Male:  Female:

How old are you? .....

Are you in school? Yes  No

If yes, what grade are you in? .....

If no, what are you currently doing? .....

How long have you been involved in the programme/intervention? .....years..... months

### Questions:

1. Can you tell me what the programme/intervention is all about and what it means to you?
2. How did you get involved in the programme/intervention?
  - Could you decide for yourself whether you wanted to join and do you have a choice to stay in the programme or not?
3. How does the programme/intervention help you to deal with problems in your life? [If vague, prompt what kind of problems they have in relation to poverty and environmental risks such as pollution; no access to clean water, poor sanitation and violence).
4. How does this programme/intervention help you with
  - Your school work?
  - Taking better care of your health?
  - Learning about clean water?
  - How to have a safe and clean environment?
5. Tell me about your participation in the programme/intervention. How do you participate, and what are the things you do?

6. What children's rights do you think the programme/intervention protect?
  - How does the programme/intervention respect your right to participate and have a say in what the programme/intervention should look like and do for you?
7. What is your experience of how adults in the programme/intervention see a child?
  - A child is a person who is helpless and must be protected. Adults know best what a child needs and should take decisions for her/him.
  - A child is a person who has ideas on how to approach and resolve society's problems such as poverty and unsafe and unhealthy environments. A child needs an opportunity to choose and decide what she/he wants and what is best for her-/ himself now and in the future. A child wants to be recognised and respected as a person who can speak for her-/himself and make decisions about things that involve them. [We call this agency.]
  - A child is a person who needs protection but who also has opinions that adults should listen to and respect. [Agency]
8. Which aspects of the programme/intervention do you think work well for the children, or do not work well for them, and why do you say so?
9. Have you ever been asked to give your ideas on any aspect of the programme/intervention – e.g. what the programme should include and do for you; or what you like or don't like about the programme?
  - If so, in what way did you feel these ideas were heard and taken seriously by adults?
10. Do you have any example(s) of where you had the opportunity to share your ideas on any aspect of the programme/intervention and your contribution was heard and considered / or not heard and considered?
  - How does it make you feel if adults listen to your ideas and take them seriously?
  - How does it make you feel if adults do not listen to your ideas or do not take them seriously?
11. What are the factors (things) that make it possible or difficult for you to participate in the programme/intervention in a way that you feel you and your contributions are important and appreciated?
12. What can the organisation do to involve children more in the planning and decisions on the programme/intervention so that it can contribute to a better life for you?
  - What should the programme focus more on to reduce children's poverty and make the environment cleaner and safer for them?



13. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me on how children can contribute to the programme/intervention?

Thank you for participating in the study.

## Appendix 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: KEY INFORMANTS

**Goal of the study:** The goal of the study is to explore and describe how children’s agency is recognised and respected in programmes/interventions aimed at reducing poverty and environmental risk in Education for Income Programme at the Lighthouse Institute, Harare.

Participant number: KI .....

### Biographical information

Male:  Female:

How long have you been with the organisation? ..... years

How long have you been involved in the programmes/interventions? .....years..... months

In what age category do you fall?

20-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	41-45 years	46-50 years	51-55 years	56+ years
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In what phase of the programmes/interventions are you involved? (Tick all applicable.)

Planning / conceptualisation	Design of content	Implementation	Monitoring	Evaluation
---------------------------------	----------------------	----------------	------------	------------

### Questions:

14. What is the goal and what are the intended outcomes of the programme/intervention for the children?
15. How do the children get involved in the programme?
  - What choices do the children have with regard to staying or leaving the programme/intervention if they so wish?
16. To what extent does the programme/intervention help children to ease the burden of poverty and possible environmental risks (such as pollution; no access to clean water, poor sanitation and violence)?
17. In what way does the programme/intervention promote the children’s access and rights to
  - Education
  - Healthcare
  - Clean water,
  - Sanitation, and
  - A safe and clean environment?

18. How would you describe the children's participation in the programme/intervention?

- Do they participate out of their own initiative or only if they are requested, or told to participate?

19. Do you think children have a right to participate and make decisions on the programme/intervention that affects them?

- If so, are the children aware of their right to participate and influence decisions on the programme/intervention and why do you say so?

20. How do you see and approach the 'child' concept?

- As a person who is vulnerable and who should be protected.
- As a person who has the ability to make meaningful choices and decisions about events that influence her or his life today and in the future [agency].
- As a person who needs protection and who has agency.

21. To what extent would you say the children in your programme/intervention have agency if you look at their participation and involvement in decisions that affect them? The involvement refers to any one or more phases of the programme/intervention, that is, planning/ conceptualisation of (new) ideas, the design of the content of the programme, the format and implementation of the programme/intervention, and the monitoring and evaluation of the programme/intervention.

22. Are children asked to give their views on the programme/intervention, and if so, in what way are these views considered and respected, or not?

23. Could you share any example of where children have made inputs to the programme/intervention which were considered and respected, or not, in any of the phases of the programme/intervention [planning/ conceptualisation, the design, the implementation, the monitoring and evaluation]?

24. What factors make it possible or difficult to recognise and respect children's contributions and decisions (agency) in relation to the planning/ conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a programme/intervention intended to reduce their poverty and environmental risks?

25. What in your view must change to recognise and respect children's contributions, decisions (agency) and participation in the respective phases [planning/ conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation] of the programme/intervention to reduce poverty and environmental risks?

26. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share on the topic that may benefit my study?

Thank you for participating in the study.