

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Child Labour: A Militating Factor to Primary School Education in Nigeria

Pastor (Dr) Paul Nwakpa

Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Foundations, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

Abstract:

The Education for all movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults. The movement was launched at the World Conference on Education For All in 1990 by UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UMCEF and the World Bank. Participants endorsed an expanded vision of learning and pledged to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade. EFA, an international initiative aimed at bringing the benefits of education to "every citizen in every society". To realize this aim, a board coalition of national governments, civil society groups and development agencies committed to achieving specific educational goals of which the first goal is to; expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. This goal calls for better and more possibilities to support young children and their families and communities in all the areas where the child is growing; physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. It also lays special emphasis on children who suffer disadvantage or who are particularly vulnerable, for example, those living in poverty, AIDS, Orphans, rural and minority children, etc. with the presence of child labour and the burden of poverty in Nigeria, the question remain; is, Education For All (EFA) by 2015 feasible?.

1. Introduction

Nations have paid heavy prices for their failure to invest in the care of children in their earliest years. Like a health system that struggles desperately to cure illness and diseases instead of investing in prevention, the education system wrestles with illiteracy, school dropout, underachievement and other related problems that would be avoided if sufficient attention had been paid to the care of children in their first years of life. This is not to say that the care of the early years is and confined to the education sector. Care is all encompassing, and involving multi spectral commitment.

UNICEF (1999) opined that the survival, growth and development of young children are treated as interdependent objectives achievable through a broad range of basic services including health, nutrition, education, safe environment, poverty eradication, empowerment of mothers, social mobilization and water sanitation etc. Weakness in one of the mentioned area translates to weakness in all other areas. For example, a malnourished child is not likely to benefit from educational services no matter how good the services may be.

Poverty poses a very strong challenge to child care and one of the eight United Nation Millennium Development goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger which is the underlying issue in child labour. Ebigbo, (1985) defined child labour as work that is essentially exploitative and injurious to the physical, social, cognitive and moral development of the child. Child labour occurs when children, especially young ones, are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous or unhealthy environments with too much responsibility for their age and at the expense of their schooling.

Child work should be distinguished from child labour. Child labour is often facilitated by the level of poverty in the society. Poverty in Nigeria has been a long standing issue. Its reality manifests in worsening incidence and severity over the years, despite the vast human and natural resources and economic development potential the country is blessed with. How then is Education For All by 2015 feasible as child labour is one of the faces of poverty?

2. Rights of the Child

Nigeria has more than a fair share of problems in the challenges posed by citizens who did not receive childhood care. We may never know how much the incidence of prostitution, HIV/AEDS, armed robbery, school dropout, poverty, early marriages with resultant VVF and all forms of indiscipline among the citizen which have to do with neglecting childhood care. The global outcry against these problems led to the convention of the UN General Assembly in 1989 on the right of the child. At this convention, it was unanimously agreed that the child holds the rights to care. It did not stop at the pronouncement of right-holders, but went further to identify the duty of learners in childhood care.

According to Otaala, (2004), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes that the particular status of children engenders specific forms of vulnerability, and particular interests and entitlements. This means that it sets out the inherent rights and entitlements needed to guarantee a child's right to survival, development and good quality of life. These rights encourage entitlements to basic standards such as health, education, food, shelter, welfare, protection from exploitation and violence.

3. Initiatives in Support of Child Rights

Education for All (EFA) at the World Conference on Education for All by the International Community (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990), it reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the right to education for the child and all. The conference agreed that serving the basic learning needs for all implied more than just commitment to Education as it then existed. What was needed was an "expanded vision" that surpassed existing resource levels, institutional structures, curricular and conventional delivering systems.

Education for All was declared and this was accompanied by the framework for action to meet learning needs. The World community affirmed its commitment to ensuring the right to education and broadening the scope of basic education to include early childhood development (ECD). Prominent among the EFA goals is the "expansion of early childhood care and education". The goals of EFA were buttressed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There are targets internationally set out by UN. And the MDGs are the reduction of poverty by 2015 and acceleration of the pace of economic, social and human development. Some of the goals include:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Reduce child mortality
4. Improve maternal health, etc.

New Partnership for Development (NEPAD:2002) agreed that there is a common need to eradicate poverty in the region and place African countries on the path of sustainable development. The appeal is that all Africans should become aware of the seriousness of the African situation and the need to bridge the gap between Africa and other industrialized continents of the world. The goals of NEPAD that directly address child care include;

1. To reduce infant and child mortality ratio by two thirds between 1990 and 2015.
2. To enroll all children of school age in primary school by 2015 etc.

It is clear that poverty has caused a significant shift in the consumption patterns, resulting in a monumental decline in daily food/snack intake for the average child because inflation depreciated real incomes over the years. There is also insufficient and poor quality of day care centres and pre-primary schools as well as high fees which creates a barrier for the poor. Poverty has taken a toll, through;

1. The declining pre-primary and primary school enrollment rates due to fairly expanded capacity, high opportunity cost of education for increasing number of poor families.
2. Low learning achievements resulting from impediments in the home (poverty child labour)
3. Increasing numbers of pre-teen children involved in exploitative and hazardous forms of child's labour/work, as well as the related problems of child merchandising and trafficking.

4. Oloko, (1996) Explained That

The child virtually suffers for everything under the instruction of adults who are expected to protect them, because of the necessity to survive, adults selfishly offer their god-given "resource child" as commodity of sale, cheap labour and outright abandonment or cruel neglect. The eventual consequence is the continued child labour fuelled through child trafficking.

There is no doubt that the poverty in Nigeria worsened by chronic economic digression, debt burden and unfavourable socioeconomic policies, have affected children more than any other group in the country. The National concord, January 13, 1997, published a report titled "The Cruel face of child labour". The report states:

The United Nations children's fund (UNICEF) has released a gripping report about the state of the world's children, with specific focus on child labour. It is a report which will make, every parent tremble at the levels of privation children face worldwide, even as they strive to economically sustain not only themselves, but their parents as well. It is a report which shows that unless governments of the nations of the world take immediate steps, there may no longer be a period called childhood. And the world would then be populated by hard, cynical and toughened youngsters, who are only children in stature and features, none of the softness and innocence of childhood again.

The deterioration of the health care industry and the near collapse of the education sector have reduced the quality of life of the average Nigerian child. To worsen matters, the social environment is not friendly. Many Nigerian children are subject to, or survive through child labour (hawking and street trading) prostitution and street begging. Ebigo (1988) opined that: It is clear that poverty has caused a significant shift in the consumption patterns, resulting in a monumental decline in daily food/snack intake for the average child because inflation depreciated real incomes over the years. There is also insufficient and poor quality of day care centres and pre-primary schools as well as high fees which creates a barrier for the poor. Poverty has taken a toll, through;

1. The declining pre-primary and primary school enrollment rates due to fairly expanded capacity, high opportunity cost of education for increasing number of poor families.
2. Low learning achievements resulting from impediments in the home (poverty child labour)
3. Increasing numbers of pre-teen children involved in exploitative and hazardous forms of child's labour/work, as well as the related problems of child merchandising and trafficking.

Oloko, (1996) explained that: the child virtually suffers for everything under the instruction of adults who are expected to protect them, because of the necessity to survive, adults selfishly offer their god-given "resource child" as commodity of sale, cheap labour and outright abandonment or cruel neglect. The eventual consequence is the continued child labour fuelled through child trafficking.

There is no doubt that the poverty in Nigeria worsened by chronic economic digression, debt burden and unfavourable socio-economic policies, has affected children more than any other group in the country. The National concord, January 13, 1997, published a report titled "The Cruel face of child labour". The report states: The United Nations children's fund (UNICEF) has released a gripping report about the state of the world's children, with specific focus on child labour. It is a report which will make, every parent tremble at the levels of privation children face worldwide, even as they strive to economically sustain not only themselves, but their parents as well. It is a report which shows that unless governments of nations of the world take immediate steps, there may no longer be a period called childhood. And the world would then be populated by hard, cynical and toughened youngsters, who are only children in stature and features, none of the softness and innocence of childhood again.

The deterioration of the health care industry and the near collapse of the education sector have reduced the quality of life of the average Nigerian child. To worsen matters, the social environment is not friendly. Many Nigerian children are subject to, or survive through child labour (hawking and street trading) prostitution and street begging. Ebigbo (1988) opined that:

Children aged 5-14 years with more girls than boys are used as domestic servants in Nigeria, under aged prostitution/marriage, pawning and some have even taken to all manner of petty crimes from the picking of pockets to the sale of articles of dubious value.

Poverty has forced many children into the labour market, especially into areas that are simply exploitative and detrimental to their development. Various difficult circumstances with which young children are faced in Nigeria include hawking, children living in the street, trafficking, abuse and neglect, exploitation (sexual or otherwise) conflict situation, orphaned, emergency situation (flooding, erosion, fires) and some other labour forms.

5. Analysis of Child Labour Forms and Effects

5.1. Street Hawking

This is by far the largest single form of child labour probably accounting for well over half of total urban child labour. Both boys and girls work as street hawkers. Fubura, (1986) highlighted street hawking as an aspect of child abuse and neglect. In his survey, he revealed that major city centres are filled with children hawking; 87% of respondents believed that hawking was not a good way of preparing a child for future employment. 95% indicated that children are not generally free from harm. The survey also revealed that the major factors responsible for street hawking are economic reason.

5.2. Street Children

Ebigbo (2003) identified two categories of street *Children in Nigeria, They are:*

"children in the street", Children of the street". Children in the street go there to trade or hawk goods for some hours during the day mostly (some for few hours, others for long hours) but they always return home at night. For this category, there is somewhere- a home to return to. Children of the street on the other hand, actually live and survive on the street frequently on their own. The street is their home, they device strategic which include stealing, use of violence, lying, cheating among other undesirable behaviours.

The first category-children in the street have been a familiar feature of Nigerian life style. Traditionally, children help their parents in occupations involving physical labour in rural and low income urban families. Children work in the farms with their parents and carry farm produce to the market to sell under the supervision of their parents. Today, the situation has changed drastically where parents no longer supervise. Children are now sent to the street alone to sell goods by themselves. Okolo (1986) as cited in Maduewesi (2004) opined that:

Other activities of street children include displaying and selling goods, hawking in markets, motor parks or along the street, loitering, doing odd jobs, at the same time pretending to play. Street families are also becoming prominent in certain urban slum areas. There are street children who maintain little or no contact with their families; this is the group that is most vulnerable.

Some factors which push children out of their homes vary from physical maltreatment and emotional problems to being sent out of the home because of misdemeanors or family financial problems. The family backgrounds of these children are quite varied. The younger street children sleep in more visible places such as dilapidated or abandoned buildings, markets and school buildings etc.

This trend has been on the increase and as such, how feasible is EFA-2015?. The present child labour represents aberration of child work, new type of child labour has emerged which has no traditional root. These include scavenging, begging and prostitution, bus conducting, etc. Just as the internal and external trafficking in children have become prominent issues in recent times.

5.3. Child trafficking

A conference of stakeholders on trafficking in human, especially women and children identified child trafficking as the 21st century slavery and an emerging global crime by organized crime syndicates. The group made up of International Human Rights Agencies, Rights Lawyers, further declared that the crime involved coercion, deceit and forced labour, transportation recruitment and purchase, harboring and debt bondage slavery and servitude within and across borders.

Children obviously are most vulnerable because they are imitative and unable to physically fight against it. These children come from poverty-stricken families; they are often helpless, easy to coerce, hypnotize and brainwash to move freely to destination points. Due to the ignorance of the new dangers that lie behind the old practices of fostering and weakening family ties poverty and solidarity mechanisms have become entry points for child trafficking.

UNICEF (2004) orally:

In volume, about 8 million Nigerian children are reported to be engaged in exploitative child labour, putting them at great risk of human trafficking through our borders from local sources to various destinations. Socio-cultural and religious practices have been shown to facilitate movement of children from place to place.

However, UNICEF (2002) outlined the following as some major cause of child trafficking:

- a. Widespread poverty sparking the push pulls factors to urban centres.
- b. High level of illiteracy, unemployment and poor standards of living.
- c. Abuse of the common practice of placement and fostering along with weakened extended family safety net.
- d. Desperation of poor and illiterate parents with larger families ignorant of the impact of child trafficking etc.

5.4. Sexual Exploitation

Sexual abuse is a grave abuse of rights. It requires all meaningful hands to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuses and in particular to prevent the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in unlawful sexual activity and the exploitative use of children in prostitution.

MWASDRS/UNICEF (1999) in their report explained that commercial sexual exploitation has scale and its links in some cases with commercial trafficking in women and girls and because of its role in the development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic now sweeping the country.

5.5. Child Begging

This has negative psychological, social and health consequences. Three categories of child beggars are found in urban centres, they are: those who lead blind parents, those who beg entirely on their own and those who act as fronts for parents; especially, mothers who are usually hidden from public view but supervise them from close distance. These children are among the most vulnerable in Nigeria, coming from families that are among the poorest of the poor. The children involved in child begging run enormous risks darting between cars in heavy traffic begging for alms from motorists. These children are often extremely young sometimes as little as four or five years old, putting them at very high risk of accidents. They suffer a lot and are being exposed to constant abuse and aggression. In recent times, however, it has become more common to see destitute mothers begging with their children in major cities. Albert (1994) concerning begging in the Northern part of Nigeria opined that:

.....begging is much more widespread where alms giving is widely regarded as a religious duty. By far the largest category of beggars in this part of the country is associated with the almajirance system - which means migrated. Begging has many negative effects on the almajirai (child beggar) it is time consuming and reduces the hours pupils be available for learning. Many of them end up engaging in deviant types of behaviour such as pick pocketing, thuggery and vandalism in contradiction with the upright moral code they are supposed to be learning. Bands of almajirai have also been used to carry out crimes of arson and murder during communal conflicts in the North.

5.6. Abandoned Children /Orphans

Anumuu (1996) wrote about the abandonment of newly born children in public places such as markets and toilet by young mothers, who feared being disgraced and stigmatized. There have been also cases of mothers leaving home because they are unable to cope and simply abandoning their children while some sick children have been abandoned in hospitals, near railway lines, market places and near police stations. Abandoned children and orphans for who surrogate parents cannot be found among extended family relatives are sent to orphanages which are owned and administered by private individuals and organizations.

5.7. Conflict Situation

Boko (1995) highlighted on how children and women lose their lives as a result of bloody conflicts, communal clashes, ethnic conflicts or religious rivalries and clashes. Others are the sharia, Muslim legal code which began in Zafara and which caused communal violence in the city of Kaduna and other violent incidents including military actions against a background of poverty and grievance. Thousands have been displaced for varying lengths of time from their home areas. Also were the border conflicts such as Cameroon/Bakassi. In these various situations, children have been the principal victims in very many ways.

5.8. Emergency Situation

Various acute emergencies such as oil pipeline explosion, floods, cholera/ measles outbreaks, yellow fever, etc. have affected children negatively to a large extent. Oloko (1994) in a study compared the educational achievement of working and non-working children in Lagos, and found that working pupils performed consistently and significantly worse than non working pupils. The study further showed that agricultural child labour in the state is spread in the family all through the years, leaving no time for school and formal education. Besides educational deprivation, it is known that in many cases, the health and physical development of these children are also adversely affected by the nature of their employment. It also disrupts school attendance especially during period of intense agricultural activity, such as planting and harvesting.

Talking about education for all by 2015, then the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous to interfere with the child's education, to be harmful to the child's health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Children can become hawkers, street children, prostitutes, beggars, roadside beggars, orphans juvenile delinquents, etc. It is implicit in the Convention Right of the Child (CRC) that protection of children means much more than

just ensuring their survival. It should necessarily involve guaranteeing quality nutrition, basic education and adequate shelter. In fact, child protection should be an all embracing investment in the present that guarantees the future of human species. Basic education develops the mental faculties of children and prepares them for the challenges of the modern day life.

6. Conclusion

This paper highlighted the rights of the child, as far as childhood care is concerned; children are the "right" holders and not until this is achieved, education for all may not be feasible. Poverty as the underlying issue in child labour; the many faces of poverty in child labour have been highlighted. An analysis of the various forms of child labour, (hawking, street children, sexual exploitation, child begging, child trafficking and others) were presented. Furthermore, issues of conflicts and emergency and their various effects on children were highlighted. Useful recommendations were suggested for alleviating poverty and the burden

7. Recommendations

It is obvious that child labour is mostly driven by poverty and as such, militates against the early childhood care as well as hinders the education of the child generally; therefore.

1. A national policy on the care, education and total development of the child should be formulated as a guiding document for ECCE and everyone involved with children.
2. The child Rights Bill passed should be implemented so as to ensure the best interest of the child Vis-a -Vis survival, growth, developments, protection and participation.
3. Priority attention should be given to families and communities where children are at risk or disadvantaged.
4. Government should participate more actively in ECCE especially in setting up special centres for under-privileged children and providing more access.
5. Families and societies should work towards bringing into the world only children that they have resources to fully protect and support.
6. Preventive strategies need to be put in place to prevent more children joining those already on the street.
7. Fundamental membership of Interpol, massive sensitization through workshop and the twin intervention strategies of poverty alleviation programme and universal basic education are some of the national approaches to the problem.
8. A sustainable education intervention in child labour, child trafficking eradication related to the curriculum based initiative in which pre-services/in-service primary and secondary and non-formal child labour education should be formulated.

8. References

1. Albert, I.O (1994). "Violence in Metropolitan Kano: A Historical perspective", in Urban violence in Africa pilot studies institute of Africa studies .University of Ibadan.
2. Anumnu, CM. (1995). "A survey of Abandoned Babies in Enugu and Environ
3. Bako, S. (1985). Maitasine revolts in Nigeria: Another case struggle, paper personated at Nigeria Anthropological and sociological Association Conference, University of Illorin.
4. Ebigbo, P.O (1985). Child labour in market places in Enugu: Socio-Economic
5. Background proceedings of the Regional pre- Workshop on children especially Disadvantage circumstance Nairobi Kenya.
6. Ebigbo, P.O. (1988). Child Abuse and neglect, General information ANPPCAN advocacy series chukka printing co. Enugu.
7. Ebigbo. P.O. (2003). The State of the rights of the child in Nigeria. Paper delivered at an ILO/IPEC sponsored workshop on main steaming CLE into Teacher Training Programme in Nigeria, Niger State college of Education, and Minna.
8. Fubura, M.S.W. (1986), Street Hawking as an aspect of child Abuse and neglect in child labour in Africa (proceedings of the first international workshop on child Abuse in Africa 27th - 2nd May, 1986, Enugu.
9. Ikediashi, A.E. (1986). "A study of Epidemiology of child abandonment and Deprivation in lino State, Nigeria" in child Labour in Africa, UNICEF, Lagos.
10. Maduwesi, EJ (2004). Child Labour the Burden of poverty in Nigeria paper presented at XXIV OMEP World congress in Melbourne, Australia, July.
11. NWASORS/UNJCEF (1999). Report on situation analysis of children and women of local plan of action of UBS and CNSPM project in Port Harcourt" & workshop, 18-20 May, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Rivers State and UNICEF
12. Okolo. B.A (1986). Children's Domestic Versus Economic work and school achievement. In; Ebigbo (Eds) child labour in Africa. First International conference on Child Abuse in Africa. Enugu, 1988.
13. Oloko, S.B.A.(1999). Nigeria Study on Child Labour in Nigeria, Report for International Labour Organization, Lagos.
14. Otaala, B. (2004). Equally opportunity for all? Perspective from Africa. Keynote Address delivered at OMED XXIV World Congress, Melbourne, Australia. The National Concord January 13th 1997- The cruel face of Child Labour
15. UNICEF (1999). Parents Education; Supporting Children's First Teachers. The state of World's Children p. 73
16. UNICEF (2002). Fact sheet Nigeria child trafficking, June, UNICEF. Lagos
17. Zakariya, J.O (2002). A case for Right Education in Nigeria, A paper presented at the 3rd Annual Conference of the World Council on curriculum and Instruction WCCT held at the University of Abuja 25-29 April 2002. Gwagwalada, Abuja.