

HIGH POINTS IN DEVELOPMENT

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First Published in September 1994,
by Dorand Publishers P. O. Box 1350, Uyo

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University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State
Nigeria

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University of Uyo 1994

ISBN 978 - 001 - 516 - 7



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**THE PERILS AND BLESSINGS OF
CHILD LABOUR IN A DEVELOPING
ECONOMY: THE CASE OF NIGERIA**

BY

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INTRODUCTION:

Until recently (Umanah 1989) not much academic attention was given to the issue of child labour in Nigeria inspite of its prevalence in most Nigerian cities. Earlier studies on this subject concentrated upon the self-image and future aspirations of children involved in street trading (Nwachukwu, 1987) and child abuse (Win, 1987), while the 1989 UNICEF study on 'working and street children in Calabar and Kaduna' provided mostly socio-economic and demographic data about this category of children.

In African countries and infact the world over, the birth of a child is heralded with celebrations. Most African writers have acknowledged the importance of the child in their work. Some cultures have immortalised the importance of children through names given to some of them. For instance, igbos of Eastern Nigeria have names like "Nwakago" meaning "the child is superior to money" or "Nwakaego" meaning "the child is superior to wealth". In Akwa Ibom State, names like 'Akanimoh' is given to some children meaning the supremacy of the child over wealth.

Surprisingly, in the same system that acknowledges the pre-eminence of the child, the child has been equally abused, maltreated and used in the pursuit of wealth over which he was esteemed. This has, persisted inspite of the 1974 child labour prevention and treatment Act' which called for a full and complete eradication of child labour especially in the area of street trading.

As used in this work, child labour involves "The intentional, non-accidental acts or omission of the part of the parent or caretaker interacting with the child in his care or acts made for the child to work contrary to the child's opinion, aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the family, (Gil 1970:12).

In Nigeria, the incidence of child labour became more pronounced after the Second World War as scores of children who lost their parents or relations had to roam the streets, in search of food and shelter. This posed a serious problem which attracted the attention of the international communities. Before the Second World War (1925), the International

organisations made several declarations of the Right of the Child. After the Second World War, (1959), the United Nations adopted the declaration of the right of the child that formed the subject matter of the International year of the child in 1979. Other countries like Poland in 1979 promulgated a Decree to enhance and recognise the right of the child. In 1989, the United Nations adopted the bill and Nigeria as a nation adopted same in 1990. By this adoption, Nigeria is obliged to recognise the inalienable right of the child to life as well as ensure the survival of the child and the child access to good education.

But contrary to the bill of right, Nigerian children in almost all cities are seen loitering the street in the name of trading as well as maltreated. This forms the basis of this work. The work will unfold the reality of child labour; its perils and blessings in a developing country like Nigeria. This is necessary especially in the face of the debate and controversy about child labour. A child as used in this work refers to a person or persons (male or female) between the ages of eight and sixteen.

CAUSES AND TYPES OF CHILD LABOUR:

The term child labour has been preferred in this study to child abuse because of the cultural cleavages attached by different groups of people to child abuse. Child labour as used in this work refers to acts ranging from hawking, carrying heavy loads, intensive labour in farms or at home as domestics, the use of children as sacrificial lambs/materials, slaves, plantation workers, to battery, child neglect, child deprivation as well as forced to early marriages. It means any developments or acts which live a blow or dent on the psychological psyche of a child who grows up only to feel a sense of humiliation or dejection.

Many causes of child labour have been identified. These include parents' socio-economic position, lack of acquisition of relevant skills, the need to improve through formal education for employment, greed on the part of children or their parents or caretakers as well as family tension.

Child labour has been caused in most cases by the parents/caretakers poor socio economic positions. It is common experience that most children found hawking are children from poor parental background. This opinion was supported by Hunt and Hilton, (1975:44) who saw child labour as helping many parents. To them, large families, overcrowding, low income and poor educational level of parents/caretakers are the principal causes of child labour. That due to poverty, the child will be deprived of being given some basic necessities or essentials of life. They felt that deprivation of needs will act as a means of disrupting the individual attachment bond which may adversely affect the child on the long run.

Supporting child labour, Hunt, Dollaff and Resnick (1972) explained that every protective parent should be able to give his child decent place to live, adequate food and clothing and as much schooling as his capacities warrants. Where the parents are poor and cannot afford these necessities, child labour may be useful in improving the family's finances as well as

contribute to the child's education.

Ignorance on the part of some parents or caretakers can cause child labour. Pickunas (1961:19) has explained that ignorance of the realities of parenthood can cause child labour. According to him, unforeseeable contingencies may distort the desire for parenthood even more and arouse feelings of rejection and hostility towards the off-spring. Writing in support of ignorance, Cohen and Short (1961) explained that "there appears to be both quantitative and qualitative differences in child labour involvement among parents of different social background". Those of high socio-economic background tend to know and respect the rights of the child while parents of low socio-economic standard seem to act in ignorance of their duties as parents.

Family size is another cause of child labour in Nigeria. If the family size is very large and the parents are not financially strong to take care of these children, there is bound to be child labour (Ebigbo 1990). He explained that, "if children must work at all, their interest must be paramount to their parents". To Ebigbo, all forms of child labour does not consider the interest of the children and hence can be termed as an abuse.

Another cause of child labour is family tension. As Iapp (1983); stemberg et al (1981), puts it "child labour and abuse is unique in families that are tension-ridden". The cause of this kind of tension which may eventually lead to child labour is teenage parents. As (John 1974, Smith Mumford, Goldfrab and Kaufman, 1945) explained the children of teenage parents suffer a higher incidence of labour and abuse.

Greed by most of the children themselves can cause child labour. Most children seem not satisfied with the money given to them by their parents. They feel that there is too much money in the streets and that the best way is to start looking for it. Most of them do this unaware of the hazards involved in the trade. As reported by Kisakka (1989:6) in a research involving eight hundred street children survey in Nigeria, it was noticed that 78% of children interviewed in Kaduna joined the trade because of the gains involved. In the manner only 22% of children in Calabar agreed making less profit, (Ogbuagu 1989-6). From their work, it was noticed that most children take to street trading mostly because there is a substantial gain and interest in the trade. Some of the street traders are doing it to augment their parents financial expenses in schools as well as assisting their parents to procure some basic essentials of life. This to a large extent has helped in the upkeep of the different families. However, it is generally accepted that the financial remuneration of child labour is paltry.

Finally, though studies point to a number of plausible conditions that may lead to child labour, Nguyen and Caspi (1988:19) have explained that children of unemployed parents or parents suffering from stress as result of low economic/ social status are liable to subject their children to child labour. However, Spinetta and Risher (1975) have pointed that the socio-economic status of parents does not contribute to child labour or

THE AGE AND SEX MOST AFFECTED IN CHILD LABOUR:

Scholars have accepted that the male children are mostly affected in child labour. This is in line with the belief that the males are stronger than the females and that the females should help their parents at home. It is important to mention that though some females are seen hawking and even serving as maids, the proportion is lower comparatively with male children. In a study of eight hundred children drawn from two cities in Nigeria involved in street-trading, it was observed that the sex most affected was the male children. Though their research involved mostly street trading (did not cover all aspects of child labour), their findings were of immense importance to this work. Below is the sample of their work.

Sample Composition:

The sample of 800 children about equally divided by city and sex

CITY	TOTAL	SEX		AGE		15- 16Years
		Boys	Girls	Under	Yrs9-14	
Calabar	410	249	165	47	323	33
%	51.3	59.8	40.2	11.4	78.8	8.0
		SAMPLE				
Kaduna	390	231	159	58	278	44
%	48.7	59.2	40.8	14.9	71.3	11.3
11.3		SAMPLE				
TOTALS	800	476	324	105	602	77
		59.5	40.5	13.1	75.1	9.6

Age Unknown for 17 respondents (2.1%)

CULLED FROM: A street children survey in Two cities of Nigeria (UNICEF 1989)

From the above it was agreed that 59.5% represented boys who participated in street trading while 40.5% represented girls from these cities. Equally important is the fact that 601 respondents out of the 800 representing 75.1% were of the age bracket of 9-14 years while only 105 representing 13.1% were of the ages below nine years. However, only 77 representing 9.6% were of the age bracket of 15 - 16 years.

The above sample support the view that the male children who are mostly within ages of 9-14 years are most affected in child labour than other sexes and ages. As mentioned earlier, the above report covered street trading and not those involved in domestics and farming. It was noticed that most of the children involved in street trading in Calabar did not live

with parents. Equally, it was discovered that such parents who gave their children out were from the low socio-economic class.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILD LABOUR:

The problems arising from child labour are many and varied. These among others include:

- The paltry remuneration from the caretakers or masters even when their sales are good.
- Inclement weather is another problem associated with child labour. This involves those working as hawkers or street traders as well as those working in the farms.
- Maltreatment from the parents or caretakers. This involved feeding, lack of health care and at times battering.
- Another associated problem is low-sales as well as illness on the parts of the children.
- Accident along our roads.
- Sexual abuse and rape on the female children by our adults.

Finally embarrassment and harassment of the children by law enforcement agents is another crucial problem facing child labour. While the incidence of these problems fall more directly on the young children who participate in it, the society does not escape completely from its implications.

It is important to realise that the problems of child labour can be fruitfully discussed as an outgrowth of urban poverty and migration. Both phenomena give rise to low income and inability to cope with the daily demands in the urban situation. It is this condition which often give rise to a search for additional income that may lead to child labour. Unequipped with relevant skills for employment in the formal sector, the only openings for these unfortunate children and parents to some form of employment is in the private, non-formal sector. As earlier mentioned, this sector is characterised by long labour hours, low wages, exploitation, lack of good health-care, and feeding. The long distances covered by the street children in their daily roles, the inclement weather conditions and resulting strain and tiredness create physical, moral and psychological problems for the child and worse still, reinforce the dependency syndrome from childhood.

IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD LABOUR ON THE SOCIETY:

It has been generally argued that child labour is not only uneconomic to society but inhuman. This formed the basis of the United Nations' declaration of the rights of children.

Though not immediately manifest, these problems have some implications for the society. One of these implications is society's involvement in crime and drugs as a result of their participation in child labour. The funds used for these purpose would have been used for development or

for the provision of social facilities.

Secondly, the income generated through child labour does not constitute a base for taxation and hardly generate any funds for development.

Thirdly, child labour especially hawking is believed to add to the degradation of the environment through insanitary littering of the streets, Government's commitment towards the removal of these wastes involve the use of huge sum of money which otherwise would have been used for development of other sectors of the economy.

Apart from the purely economic implications, there are social implication of child labour such as: Increase in crime rate due to children exposure during child labour and sexual harassment of female children involve in the trade.

Since child labour affects the children's participation in school activities and thus hinders effective learning of the children, it has a long run effect on the future development of the society as children are the makers of tomorrow.

ADVANTAGE OF CHILD LABOUR:

Though the perilous nature of child labour is often stressed by most scholars, there are however some inherent advantages. These include:

1. Provision of additional finances to the family as well as the children.
2. It serves as a training ground for future businessmen and women
3. It facilitates society members' access to goods and services, thus limiting their transportation cost.
4. Child labour engages an otherwise idle child and prevents him from using his time in uncreative ventures.
5. It serves as a means of providing cheap or unpaid labour in the farms.
6. It provides an opportunity for the children to contribute towards their/other essential and school needs.

Overall, "child labour", according to UNICEF report provides an opportunity to help parents and contribute to the children's preparations for the future and opportunity to gain experience".

SUGGESTIONS:

Since child labour is an outgrowth of the economic situation in the country, it could be reduced by improving upon the present economic situation of both the parents and the country.

This can be done by:

1. Reducing the inflationary rate which has harshly reduced the Purchasing power of the people.
2. Granting soft loans to poor parents without much collateral demanded in order to enhance their economic situation.

8. Encouraging free education to the secondary school level in order to reduce educational burden on parents.

CONCLUSION:

This paper has examined the perils and blessings of child labour in a developing economy such as Nigeria. It takes the stand that the perils of child labour have been over-emphasized.

In an economy such as ours where no provisions are made for meeting the survival needs of the poor, where majority of the poor are dying of hunger and disease, where children of the poor have little or no access to employment or other opportunities, indeed, in an economy where earning a living is a harsh struggle with nature, it is justifiable for the poor to use their available resources of children or wards to meet their needs.

It must not be forgotten that a one time condemned use of motorcycle as a means of transport is serving most major towns in Nigeria today.

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