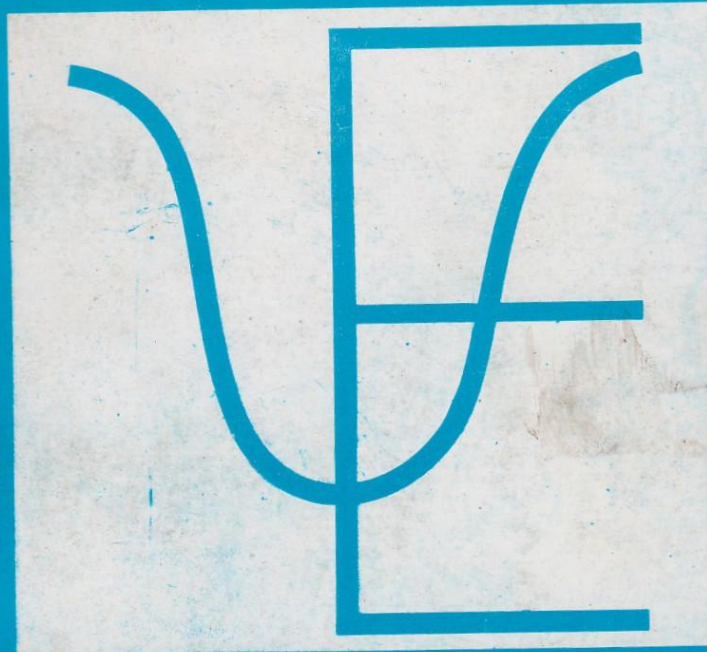


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# **CHILD LABOUR: ITS CAUSES AND SUGGESTED MEASURES FOR CURBING IT**

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## **Abstract**

*Child labour has become an issue of profound concern to every nation, including Nigeria. This paper has attempted to identify some causes of this malady and then went further to suggest measures that should be taken to curb it. These measures comprise poverty alleviation, ensuring that every child compulsorily attends school, legislation and enforcement of labour law, community mobilisation and awareness, population policy and birth control, and finally, the incorporation in the school curriculum, some issues relating to child labour.*

## **Introduction**

The world is gradually becoming a global village. Therefore Nigeria must not be left out in all efforts geared towards combating problems that are of global concern. Child labour is one of such issues that have attracted local, national and international interest. Although the convention on the "Right of the Child" clearly underscores the need to protect the child from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous, incidence of child labour is still on the increase especially in developing countries (UNICEF 1986). Today in Nigeria, many children are still being forced to work under hazardous and unhygienic conditions often for long hours.

Child labour of course is not a new phenomenon. What is new today is the increased awareness of and concern for children who work as labourers as a result of globalization process (Basu, 1999). Today, child labour has emerged as one of the most important issues on the global agenda and a subject of heated debates. Private

agencies, NGOs, government and international organizations such as ILO and UNICEF have therefore been logged into seeking ways to reduce the incidence of child labour.

Reasons for increased interest in practice of child labour stems from the fact that child labour is actually a violation of children's human rights. This implies that young children are forced to undertake work that may be abusive and beyond their physical capability. Again child labour is equally viewed as a disinvestment in human resources formation. This is as a result of the detrimental effect of child labour on the individual child and the nation as a whole. Explanation lies on the fact that, child labourers are deprived of freedom, childhood education, fun, play and natural development. But childhood should be a period of learning, of recreation, of physical, mental and social development. Therefore, understanding child labour as a dimension of child abuse is important primarily because of the long term effect on the children's future welfare (Revallion and Wodon, 1999).

In line with the above assertions, UNICE (1997) posited that the perpetuation of child labour is neither in the best interest of children and their families, nor is it in the best interest of the social and economic wealth of nations. Although child labour is often perceived as unavoidable and a necessary part of the child's socialization process, in a developing country like Nigeria where societal and cultural consideration commonly require children to participate in domestic work, manual work on the fields and so on, care should be taken to avoid excessive engagement in it, which may otherwise be classified under child abuse. The main focus of this paper is on the causes of child labour as well as ways of curbing it.

## **Causes of Child Labour**

Despite the universal declaration that children should have right to free primary education, in Nigeria, a great number of children of school age do not attend school. This suggests that they may be in either paid or unpaid work in one sector or another. This is evident in the millions of children littering the streets of Nigeria, hawking, engaging in domestic work, selling in stores, restaurants

and hotels, working in factories and companies, engaging in prostitution and arm begging to mention but a few. Children are involved in child labour in dirty conditions and are deprived of education among other basic rights, for the sake of money, in order to help provide food for the family, buy the essentials and provide a sense of hope for deprived families (ZEF, 2000).

Precise statistics on child labour are difficult to arrive at. However, the Anti-slavery Intervention gave the following estimates by country for children below the age of 15 years enduring exploitative child labour: Bangladesh, 5-6 million; Brazil, up to 5million; Egypt, 1.4million; Guatemala, 1million; India, up to 40million; Indonesia, over 2 million; Mexico, up to 8million; Nepal, up to 2million; Nigeria, 12million; Pakistan, over 2 million; the Philippines, 5million; Thailand 4million (Microsoft Bricarta, 2004). From the available record, Nigeria ranks second highest in child exploitation.

A number of factors account for and sustain the incidence of child labour in Nigeria. These factors stem from culture, social, political, economic structures and traditions of societies. Basically, attitude prevailing in the Nigerian society maintains that child labour, among others, is a normal phenomenon and a necessary part of child's socialization process. Therefore children are commonly required to participate in domestic work, manual work in the field and so on. Baquella and Boyden, (1988) in support of the above assertion opined that child work will contribute towards socialization, training and self-esteem if it is conducted under appropriate protection and supervision.

Again the un-regulated pattern in human procreation in Nigeria has led to an escalating growth and expansion in population of the country, leading to divergent socio-economic problems. The over-population problem has brought about imbalance between citizens and the sustainable growing population. The consequence of population crisis manifests significantly in poor standard of living of the populace. It is pertinent at this point to emphasize that the high population growth and high incidence of poverty are rated as the major causes of child labour in developing countries, Nigeria

inclusive (UNICEF, 1992). In support of above assertions, Dakore, (2003) stated that the fundamental reason why children are working is parental poverty. This has resulted in many children working in order to contribute to the family budget. In other words child labour is one of the ways families cope with poverty. Other causes range from high cost of education, death and orphan-hood, marital disintegration to gender disparity in education.

Nigeria, like every other developing nation in Africa, is characterized by frequent natural disaster, armed conflicts, famine and hunger, all of which are fertile grounds for child labour (Ravallion and Wodon, 1999).

Weak labour law and enforcement base on child labour have also contributed to increased incidence of child labour in Nigeria. Labour law is the law regulating labour relations. Labour law per se can hardly prevent or abolish child labour because it is still being viewed as a social phenomenon especially in the unorganized sectors like agriculture, industry and services. The adoption of legislation can help in specifying the minimum age for entry into employment; it will help in establishing labour standards also and norms to which society can aspire and which can serve as a framework for policy formulation in addition to laws prohibiting the formal employment of children below the age of 15 years. Child labour legislation should also consider the informal work in family enterprises, domestic work, work in agriculture and work in educational and training institutions. This is necessary primarily because of the immediate and long-term effects of child labour on the child and the entire society.

#### **A 6 Point Action Plan For Curbing Child Labour in Nigeria**

There is an urgent need to fashion out possible measures for curbing the problem of child labour in Nigeria in order to reduce its multiple ills on the child and the society at large. Combating child labour is necessary especially as Nigeria ranks 2nd among the African countries that are plagued with the menace of child labour (ILO, 1996).

The problem of child labour cuts across all aspects of activities such as economic, social, cultural, political and legal issues.



Therefore, any formula for curbing it must consider these issues. Combating child labour requires an integrated approach against a single intervention strategy. However, measures such as, poverty alleviation, education and training, legislation and enforcement of labour law, community mobilization and awareness creation, population policy and birth registrations are considered appropriate in mitigating the problem of child labour in developing countries (ZEF,2000). The above measures constitute the 6-point action plan formula for curbing child labour in Nigeria, and are discussed in the sections that follow.

**Poverty Alleviation Measures:** One of the most effective and sustainable instruments for reducing the incidence of child labour rests on the ability to reduce poverty and bring about sustainable development. This is because in situations where the family income is inadequate and cannot provide necessities like food, shelter, health care and clothing child labour becomes unavoidable. Mendelievich (1979) was of the opinion that any strategy to combat the problem of child labour should be combined with anti-poverty measures. This can be done through promoting income-generating schemes or direct cash transfer for families and child workers. Again, provision and expansion of health services and welfare support scheme could prove important intervention mechanisms.

**Education and Training:** In order to reduce the percentage of out-of-school children and thereby reduce child labour, government should endeavour to make universal, free and compulsory education a national priority. Education is probably the most important and powerful tool for combating the problem of child labour. This is so because, where education is compulsory and attendance and enrolment are effectively enforced, children are no longer available for work. Access to education, especially for girls, is of paramount importance and needs to be enhanced. Measures to reduce direct and indirect cost of enrolment subsidy (cash or kind) Back-to-school programme should be introduced for school dropouts. Schools should be provided within reasonable distance from home in order to allow poor children to attend and be retained.

**Legislation and Enforcement of the Labour Law:** Labour law is the law regulating labour relations. The adoption of legislature according to ZEF, (2000) has been historically the simple most important approach to the problem of child labour. Again legislation specifying on the minimum age for entry into employment will help to establish labour standard and norms to which society can aspire and which can serve as a framework for policy formulations; thus the rationale for passing the child's right bill into law recently in Nigeria.

Although the problem of child labour cannot be solved through legislation alone, because it is generally viewed as a social problem, child labour cannot also be fought without it. Legislation must form the backbone of any strategy against child labour (ZEF, 2000). Therefore, in curbing child labour, legal protection should extend beyond the urban areas to include small enterprises, farms and homes outside the formal system. This is because a greater number of children are exploited in the informal sector unnoticed.

**Community Mobilization and Awareness:** The eradication of child labour would yield a more positive result with the co-operation and involvement of the entire society. Lack of awareness of the negative implication of child labour has posed a serious impediment to the abolition of child labour. Therefore curbing child labour demands an urgent and intensive sensitization programmes during which the content of the labour law, the UN convention on the rights of the child, the ILO convention on the minimum age for work and the child's right to education be clearly spelt out to the public. The major aim is to ensure that every society lives up to their civic and moral expectations by protecting the rights of the child.

**Population Policy and Birth Registration:** Population growth has been identified as one of the reasons for high incidence of child labour. Therefore putting appropriate population policy in place could serve as a long-term measure for curbing child labour. Family planning measures need to be adequately promoted. There is also an urgent need to ensure accurate birth registration and immigration

data as these can aid accuracy in population census. Accurate population census data is indispensable to national policy planning.

**School Curriculum:** Education is the machinery for change. Therefore in addressing the problem of child labour, the school curriculum content should be enriched with value education that borders around the worth of the child as present and future heritage and leaders of tomorrow. The curriculum should further be expanded to accommodate contents like:-

- i. The UN convention on the rights of the child
- ii. ILO convention on the minimum age of work
- iii. International labour laws
- iv. Child Right Act, 2003 in Nigeria
- v. Gender Equity in educational opportunities
- vi. Population education should also be intensified by featuring it in major courses in school curriculum.

These concepts could best be introduced into subjects like social studies, government, political science, sociology, psychology, guidance and counselling and education law.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nigeria and indeed every other nation the world over should view child labour as a global threat, because of its numerous negative consequences on the child in particular and the nation at large. There is therefore an urgent need to fashion out possible measures for curbing the problem of child labour in Nigeria. Curbing or at least ameliorating child labour in Nigeria can be achieved through paying prompt and adroit attention to the Six Point Action Plan Formula earlier discussed in this paper which emphasized the use of poverty alleviation measures, education and training, legislation and enforcement of labour law, community mobilization and awareness, population policy and birth registration/control and curriculum content enrichment as possible measures for combating the menace of child labour.

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