

CHILD LABOUR FOR FAMILY POVERTY ALLEVIATION: A DEBACLE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD: ‘LESSONS FROM RURAL COMMUNITIES OF EBONYI STATE’

Okechukwu Egwu Ibiam, Francis A. Akwara,

Godwin I. Udeuhele, Okechukwu Groupson P.

Christopher C. Arua, Emmanuel O. Agha, Joy U. Egwu. Ibiam

¹Department of Political Science, ³Department of sociology
Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu- Alike, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State,
Nigeria, ²¹Department of Political Science, Ebonyi State University,
Abakaliki, Independent researcher, Enugu

Abstract

Child labour for family poverty alleviation is a daunting challenge facing both the children and their poor families in Ebonyi state rural communities. This phenomenon constitutes a debacle to impacted families because it is dehumanizing, erodes societal values and prolongs economic woes, (ILO, (2007 and Global child labour conference, 2010). Its preponderance is not only detrimental to the health of the children involved, it also distorts their educational and overall development. Inferences from studies on child labour by World Bank, (2000), UNICEF (2004), Human Right Watch, (2004) and UNRISD, (2005), revealed the existence of between 100 and 200 million child labourers across the globe, with an embarrassing 20% of the data coming from Africa, (UNICEF 2004), showing that African children, which of course include our research population; between the ages of 10-14 years, representing 17% of Africa’s total labour force, are actively engaged in this practice, (Word Bank, 2000, CBN 1999, Olaitan. et al, 2000). Using the social exclusion theory for the content analyses of qualitative data collected from the study, it was revealed that child labour practices remains a thriving enterprise among our research population in Ebonyi state rural communities, with adverse consequences on those impacted. The existence of these rural families under Nigerian government’s neglect having ossified extreme poverty among them, has also exacerbated child labour in the area. This paper there called to question the continued practice of child labour for family poverty alleviation despite its negative effects on this population. Accordingly, some recommendations as lasting solutions were in the areas of the need for the Nigerian Ebonyi state and government to enact stringent anti-child labour laws with punitive measures against its perpetrators, to serve as deterrent for its furtherance. Other recommendations were for greater involvement of help agencies through mitigations, advocacies, increased rural child education and the introduction of people-oriented programmes that promote improved socio-economic life and welfare for the rural dwellers of Ebonyi state.

Key words: Child labour, family, poverty alleviation, debacle, Nigerian child, development, rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a form of wage earning activity in which children are engaged

that has come over the years to constitute serious challenges to the development of



all affected children, (UNICEF 2004 and Human Right Watch 2004). It is a menace spreading across societies with devastating impact on rural communities of most developing nations such as those in the rural areas of Ebonyi state of Nigeria. There are incidences of high level of child abuses through illegal labour services which experts say ossifies underdevelopment among impacted families, (Immink and Olagoke, 1997). Some worse forms of child labour, which also exists among our research population; have been recorded to include child forced labour, child slavery, child debt bondage, child prostitution, and pornography as well as child trafficking, that impact negatively on the child's overall development, (ILO Convention 182, 1999a and 1999b).

In weak Nations of the World such as Nigeria whose economies have maintained a steady depreciation under inept and corrupt political rulers, studies have mainstreamed inherent challenges of child labour as a major area highlighted as needing to be addressed, with clarion calls for concerted efforts being made on stake holders to pay greater attention to the scourge, ((Muhammed, Gbenga, John, Tunji, Frank and Edward, 2008). Among nations of sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and Latin America where various forms of poverty are associated with low level of socio-economic development, there also records of their having the highest level of child labour practices in their land, (UNRISD, 2005, World Bank, 2000), Olaitan et al, 2000). There

are indices of poverty as a cause and effect of child labour with great impacts among citizens of nations of these societies due to the prevalence of political instability, leadership ineptitude and infrastructural decay, official corruption leading to consequential increases in discontent among the citizens, who then resort to child labour as a last option, (Nwachukwu et al 2000).

The high prevalence of child labour among economically disadvantaged families of Ebonyi State rural communities is corroborated by reports of the United Nations International Children Education Fund which reveals the existence of between 100 and 200 million child labourers across the globe with African children constituting an embarrassing 20% of the data, (UNICEF 2004). The UNICEF data furthered that African children between the ages of 10-14 years, (and even far lesser ages); represent 17% of Africa's total labour force. This is a disturbing vicious circle which African leaders are hamstrung to address, evidenced among the rural dwellers of Ebonyi state of Nigeria, as a practice spiraling into variants of problems such denial of the child's access to basic education which ossifies mass illiteracy across generations of these communities and their neighbors. Associated with these practices are child slavery, child abuses in social relations embedded in morality and sexuality, child prostitution, delinquency, engagement of school age youths as political thug, cultists, alcohol and drug

related offences. Within these communities are also families thrown into generational pauperization arising from child abuses that lead them into fixated deprivations, physical and psychological trauma. These conditions are common among the rural dwellers that are unable to meet their daily social and economic obligations due to lack of access to farmland, health facilities, basic skills and education, a situation that places affected in near total losses of self-esteem, high risks of exposure to diseases, infections, illness and high mortality rate, (CBN 1999).

Despite the jamborees, publicity and gimmickry by both the Ebonyi state and Nigerian government about their achievements in poverty alleviation programmes for the rural dwellers, it is obvious that the positive impacts of such programmes are yet to be felt by the rural dwellers. There hardly seem to be any recorded success story by these rural dwellers regarding such programmes ostensibly initiated by government to alleviate their poverty. The failures of government in checkmating family poverty and child labour are alleged to be associated with sharp practices and infamies strengthened in government circles through a confederacy of profligacy in governance (Ibiam, 2014), between a decadent officials of the executive arm of government, inept political jobbers in the legislature, a compromised judiciary, corrupt law enforcement agencies, a weak civil society and a haplessly idle and self-indulgent bureaucracy who have

elevated corruption to an official instrument of governance in Nigeria. These failures of government and her agencies in addressing Nigeria's development challenges having exacerbated the nation's socio-economic woes, have inadvertently, ossified child labour practices for family poverty alleviation.

Beyond governments' illusory policy postures, grandstanding and propaganda towards poverty alleviation exemplified in a legion of phony socio economic relieve packages such as NAPEP and other agencies for poverty alleviation among impacted families, (NAPEP,2006; www.Nigeria.first.org, NAPEP: 2008, www.NAPEP.Ng.org.), it is an indisputable fact that such programmes recorded colossal failures across the Niger in rural dwellers. Such failures have culminated into endless challenges facing rural communities in both Ebonyi state and other parts of Nigeria, with impacted families taking the painful decision of engaging their children in unwholesome practices such as child labour and other dehumanizing activities as a last resort to meet their family economic needs at the detriment of such children's development.

It can therefore be argued that child labour among families of Ebonyi state rural communities is partly a fall out of failed governance as well as a cause and effect of family poverty which has grown into a cankerworm with multi-dimensional consequences on our research population.



The Problem

Child labour for family poverty alleviation constitutes a daunting challenge to the development of children of the families of the rural communities of Ebonyi state, Nigeria. Whatever the reasons may be, child labour is not only detrimental and inimical to the development of children of these rural communities of Ebonyi state, it is also a debacle to the future development of these people as its continued practice portend great danger of reversing their civilization back to the state of nature, (UNICEF 2004 and Human Right Watch 2004).

In an effort to address this menace, this paper called to question all circumstances that condition the exploitation of child labour for family poverty alleviation in the rural communities of Ebonyi state of Nigeria, in line with the growing concerns and contentions by researchers. The emphasis here was the need to expose the ills associated with child labour, draw strength from already existing mitigation efforts which may have been in existence across the globe, (ILO Convention 182, 1999a; ILO, 1999b and Carneiro, 1977) and in that order provide alternative resolutions to the practice.

Child labour has become Nigeria's national dilemma which condition and dispose citizens to incidences of cruelty to the child against their call by nature to the responsibilities of providing for our children's wellbeing. This is a major failure by the government and society at

large in their duties to families that have rendered families vulnerable, thus causing them to resort to the use of available means to source economic relieve which are readily found in child labour. This conversely exposes the children so engaged in child labour to other forms of challenges such as vagrancy, wondering, destitution, crime and diseases. With the child so encumbered, other forms of challenges emerge in forms of family dislocation and disintegration, community disorder, socio-economic insecurity, general malady and sudden death of those impacted.

This practice having become a challenge to human dignity and development, especially among Ebonyi state rural communities, require concerted efforts at its exposure, with lasting solutions provided through studies such as this that highlights specific cases within specific localities.

Method:

The methodology adopted in this study was exploratory design which dealt with qualitative research that did not require numerical data. Exploratory design was applied here in view of the prevalence of deviant characteristics within the study population which dealt with specific historical data regarding the circumstances under which the phenomena of child labour suffused and pervades, (Eboh, 2009; Shafi, 2011), guided by secondary literature arising from findings of previous related studies.

As much as the purposes for the use of previous data from secondary sources as shown here may not have been envisaged by the original collectors who got such from quantitative analyses, the diverse usefulness of such data was duly acknowledged, (Bryman, 2016,). Furtherance to this, content analysis was applied in drawing inferences about child labour and related poverty conditions among the research population through processes that created a paradigm shift from being a mere academic exercise to a reality check that gave the study a 'human face' within simple people oriented communally based contextual perspectives that addressed the challenges of child labour for family poverty alleviation in Ebonyi state.

Population and area of study

The population of study was drawn from some rural communities of Ebonyi state of Nigeria. Out of the total state population of 2,176,947 citizens spread across the thirteen local government areas, (NPC 2006), some rural communities were purposeful chosen to provide manageable data for this study. The decision for the selection of some of the rural communities out of the entire population was occasioned by the challenges that faced this study in the area of capacity to manage the large populations under the circumstances of time and limited resources. Here the purposeful or judgmental technique (Black and Champion 1976 and Obasi, 2005), was adopted as an approach which assured that the chosen rural

communities possessed similar representative elements and characteristics for the entire population.

As much as there have been studies on child labour among populations across climes by scholars based on wide ranges of perspectives, (UNICEF 2004 and Human Right Watch 2004, ILO Convention 182, 1999a; ILO, 1999b), our study focused on this specific portion of the population of Ebonyi state of Nigeria because of the dominant characteristics of child labour practices among most families in these areas. Such characteristics include abject poverty, rural slum life and poor sanitation and lack of basic socio-economic amenities for the families as well as dearth of basic infrastructure such as good roads, electricity and good water supply. Others include low school enrolment and high dropout among their school age children, early girl child out of wedlock pregnancies, child marriage, child abandonment and homelessness for orphaned children as well as general community underdevelopment. All these pervaded among the research population of Ebonyi state to condition them to engage in child labour for poverty family alleviation.

Poverty

In generic terms, poverty is a condition under which persons, groups or communities lack the basic necessities of socio-economic existence. This involves endemic cases of lack of food, clothing, medical care and shelter as well as lack of access to financial



resources and other material requirements for a reasonable good human existence needed to give meaning to human social and economic life.

Here, we can adopt a working definition of poverty as:

a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, and portable water, but has high risks of exposure to illness and even death...
(Central Bank of Nigeria, 1999:23)

For the World Bank (2000:10) the dimensions of poverty are also in the areas of lack 'in psychological wellbeing, social exclusion, basic infrastructure, good health and assets. Arising from here, it can be argued that poverty is a historical phenomenon that has existed with mankind with diverse global impacts on people's socio-economic conditions. It afflicts and affects people in various depths across nations, continents and clime subject to the dialectics of the materialist conditions of existence of men as they contend for the 'equitable' allocation of the scarce resources of their societies, (Ake, 1982). 'Poverty increases citizen's

vulnerabilities by depriving them basic education, leading to stagnated illiteracy which in turn poses multitudes of other challenges to contemporary ideals and values of civilized life. It creates a state of deprivation that makes the deprived vulnerable and violent in nature', (Onah; 2006), which in turn create situations with negative impacts on a nation's body polity.

Among our research population in Ebonyi state of Nigeria, poverty occurs to them fundamentally at the two fronts of lack of access to basic education and politically motivated socio-economic cleavages within which are subsumed other issues of bad governance, inept and corrupt political leadership as well as state complicity in orchestrated ethno-religious differences that aggravate inequitable resource distribution. Stemming from these are other factors that range from national class characterization of citizens for vested interests, citizen's rights deprivation and lack, as well as debt burden with adverse effects under which impacted families have continued to seek alternatives for survival which they find in the 'dictum of using what one has, to get what he needs'; which finds expression in child labour and other unwholesome practices among impacted families. Pressured by challenges of low industrialization, low productivity, unemployment, high population growth rate, massive rural-urban migration, poor human resource development and gender bias common among dependent nations such as Nigeria, (Otu, Ibiyam, and Agha, 2015),

citizens have continued to get by through unwholesome practices such as child labour.

Our research population exist as part of the citizens of the Nigerian nation cited by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with high poverty burden in its debut on Human Development index (HDI) report of 2006 which ranked Nigeria at the 137th position out of 174 nations bedeviled by poverty, measured at a value of 0.4, (UNRISD, 2005, Ekpeyong and Assian 2011). The indicators in these reports show that any country with HDI value below 0.5 is considered to house very extremely poor citizens which is the pathetic case of Nigeria with an HDI value of 0.4 that falls below the 0.5 standard, under which poverty pervades to continue pushing the citizens into various forms of unethical practices that does not even spare children.

This is a vice that entangles the families involved into greater socio-economic woes, exemplified in the experiences of families among our research population in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Here families who engage their children in child labour have not only lost their children to this menace, they have also suffered double jeopardy in the hands of unscrupulous child labour agents and merchants. They experience disruptions of regular payment of agreed stipends often offered to them through indirect contact persons and channels who do not only enslave these children but also betray the social contract trusts reposed

on them by deliberately defaulting in the payment of agreed sums to these impoverished families. In many instances, this ordeal has often led to conflicts between the parties with violence meted against such families because impacted families have gone too far to put pressure on such unscrupulous individuals and groups to keep their bond. Punitive and extreme measures have often been taken by the agents and merchants that 'uncooperative and recalcitrant' families have suffered permanent losses such as disconnections of contact with their children in the process, as their children are often carted away like cargo to distant farm lands and factories in unknown cities where they face perpetual affliction. Under deliberately orchestrated antagonistic relations between the families and the child labour agents, children from blacklisted families have often been separated and subjected to untold hardship that include physical, psychological torture to modern day slavery, sexual abuses, child prostitution, various forms of inhuman treatments and sudden death.

These families are alleged to have suffered such losses without any form of legal actions undertaken on their behalf because of their families' poverty, illiteracy and lack of access to legal services. In few cases where some of the children subjected to these indignities were fortunate to escape from their task masters in the ensuing imbroglio, they have often ended up in strange lands and urban areas as street urchins, child



prostitutes, street gang stars, illicit drug peddlers or addicts and armed robbers who feed on society as agents of the criminal underworld.

Beyond the socio-economic, health, security and other forms of hazards poverty poses to those impacted, it also triggers off processes of endemic generational poverty in their children and the society, (Nwabueze, 1992). These are abundantly evidenced in the life of those impacted among the helpless rural dwellers under study in Ebonyi State, whose common characteristics include stark illiteracy, ignorance and social malaise, (Okojie, 1987 and Nmom, 2003), as well as structural inequalities that ossify national under development, (Appel 2009). Faced with these general societal challenges and other personal problems of lack of access to basic needs of life and avenues of redressing abuses associated with their poverty conditions, (UNICCE, 1999), families so impacted have often increased their vulnerability by sending more of their children into the labour market for family poverty alleviation, thus engaging in situations that accelerate them to higher vulnerability to extreme poverty, (Ekpeyong ed., 2011).

Chester surveys published by Nigeria's Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) and UNICEF, (2009), as well other related studies under (UNDP), UNFPA, World Bank and WHO, (2012b), buttress our position with serious indicators of extreme poverty among a greater

number of citizens of developing nations that include Nigerians in forms that lead citizens into risky survivalist tendencies such as child prostitution, theft, armed robbery, street gang life styles, illicit drugs peddling and child labour.

In Nigeria, the failure of governments over the decades at addressing the nation's socio-economic woes such as inept national leadership, impunity and corruption and other economic debacles which have been elevated to state crafts, it was established that indeed our research population which falls within the strata of citizens in Nigeria's rural communities with high poverty incidence, (Okojie, 1987), are brazenly motivated into vices.

There can therefore be no over emphasizing the fact that the end of poverty occasioned by child labour and all its other associated ills may remain a mirage among our research population Ebonyi State rural communities of Nigeria, if the ever increasing catastrophe of citizen's income levels and access to secure socio-economic livelihood. This assertion stems from ever increasing challenges of social insecurity, citizens' unequal access to economic and wealth distribution as well as high level of external national economic dependency (Olaitan. et al, 2000 cited by Okonkwo, 2006) that cumulatively dispose poor rural families to adopt survivalist strategies such as child labour.

Child Labour

In generic terms, child labour is the engagement of a child in activities demanding the exertion of such a child's burgeoning energy in highly demanding rigorous socio-economic reproduction process beyond such a child's capacities for wages that often accrue to other persons. This practice which has become a global socio-economic phenomenon traces its wide spread to outset of the industrial revolution in the interest of bourgeoisie's wealth accumulation which many scholars have continued to contend against in view of its challenges to the development of the young child.

Anugwom (1997:8)

opines that;

at the onset of industrial revolution when displaced citizens of England's sources of livelihood could no longer be guaranteed by access to land occasioned by capitalists' enclosure movement, families' quest to meet economic needs amidst rising cost of living; had them mobilize every member of the family into paid employment. In this process, many poor and uneducated parents put their children to work in factories in order to earn money for the upkeep of the family,

Arising from the above and other vagaries of industrial revolution, labour in general and child labour in particular, became commoditized to be bought and sold across societies for economic benefits of the highest bidder. While

bourgeois capitalism continued to exert dominance over the labour of men in their socio-economic re-production processes, class divisions among citizens of societies became ossified along the strata of the rich and poor, resulting to wealth accumulation in the interest of the rich. This in turn created a corresponding order of alienation, misery, conflict, physical and mental poverty which remains the lot of those the system adversely impacted, (Marx cited in Ake, 1981).

Inferring from these arguments, it is furthered that historically, industrial revolution marked the water shed to the involvement of children in the labour market as beasts of burden for their task masters as a means of earning paltry wages for family up keep.

With the acceleration of industrialization and its vagaries and subsequent invasion of Africa for the supply of cheap raw materials and cheap labour which led to unhealthy rivalry among European interests in Africa, resulting to the 1885 Berlin conference where Africa was partitioned for European colonization for their effective economic interests (Coleman, 1958). Following on the heels of this partitioning was the excruciating cheap labour services engaged in by indigenous Africans in favour of the colonial administrators within which African children were subjected to harrowing conditions for European economic development, (Rodney, 2005). Child labour exploitation was



engaged in by the opportune class without a thought for the consequences on the labourers, their gender and ages, a situation that left in its wake a vicious circle that deepened child labour exploitation across Africa.

Data on the vagaries of child labour in human society across climes exist in literature under which scholars such as Amin (1994); created distinctions about its practice based on some motivators for families' engagement of their children in such labours. Research findings by the UNDP (1994), United Nations (UN) (1998), UNICEF (2009) and ILO (2007), UCW and ILO, (2010), also provide guide, relevant information and succinct reference data that give deeper insight and understanding of the vicious circle of poverty occasioned by child labour practices.

Contemporary Africa is on its part becoming entangled in the commoditization of the labour of children, lip service efforts being made to mitigate its practice. This situation which has pressured affected families into the unholy act of child labour for family poverty alleviation is common place among poor rural and urban slum dwellers who continue to engage in child labour practices without the consent and willingness of the child in question, (ILO, 2007 and Dobson, 2009). Despite perceived and actual challenges child labour pose to the over-all development of the child and their families, the practice continues to gather obnoxious momentum among the rural

communities of Ebonyi State where cherished decades old traditional communal family life styles are being swept away. The infamies of child labour for family poverty alleviation has indeed truncated familial bonds that strengthen the mental, emotional, physical, social, educational and overall development of affected children.

The debate on child labour for family poverty alleviation

Amidst all the arguments for and against child labour, liberalist proponents have maintained that child labour is not as problematic as it is being presented, considering the various opportunities it offers the affected child in terms of employment, skill acquisition and empowerment as well as wealth creation to the families involved. These proponents justify their position on socio-economic determinants as the major factors that dispose poor families and guardians towards child child labour practices, (Bass, 2004).

They further that the necessities of socio-economic survival are major imperatives that cause pauperized families to seek for other sources of extra income for family poverty alleviation, by engaging all family hands on deck. These scholars aver that it is only those with a positive outlook on life that survive today's challenges based on the motivation to think and act outside the box. To these pro-child labour analysts, surviving today's competitive socio-economic life demands that poor families must put all available hands on

the plough and if doing so requires factoring in their children's labour to improve family income, then efforts have to be made to accommodate the same in families. These proponents further that under severe domestic and socio-economic challenges, parents are required to fend for their families within legitimate bounds, to this end, such families are compelled to engage in inwards sourcing which many easily find in child labour, (Binder and Sorgin, 1999). Popular opinion here holds that though such situations have in few cases posed some degrees of physical, psychological and emotional disorder to members of some families, the fact remains that in the competitive world of today, families must work out survival strategies beyond the dependency syndrome. Unfortunately, most parents operating on this mantra have become enmeshed in greater problems with their responsibilities as parents, resulting to greater problems such as the distortion of family bonds and loss of children.

On the contrary, proponents of egalitarianism and child rights protection who stand vehemently opposed to child labour of any kind have argued that as much as the capitalist system encourages individualist endeavours by citizens for socio-economic survival, the conditions that foster labour practices differ from one clime to another. Subject to existing customs, values and laws that protect the right of citizens against abuses, the exploitation of the labour of individuals must not encourage practices that

jeopardize the proper development of children.

Accepted that families' abject poverty remains a cause and effect of child labour which arise from wider socio-economic improprieties that frustrate individuals and families access to the welfare provisions of society, it does not imply that the future of children should be compromised for the family succor. As much as families may lack access to employment opportunities, social security and services, such must not compel parents to engage their children in child labour as a means of getting by on daily needs, (Okojie, 1987 and Crosson, 2008).

Anti-child labour scholars argue further that family decisions to engage in child labour are often taken as last resorts, compulsion and in some cases such decisions are often taken under pressure from child labour merchants whose impunity often creates room for them to take undue advantage of impacted families. Other factors here include; a failed state welfare system occasioned by elite conspiracy with the rentier state to expropriate the resources of dependent societies such as Nigeria, for vested interests to the detriment of citizen's welfare, (Ibiam, 2014). Such situations can be found in circumstances such as structural inequalities, adverse socio-economic environment that negatively affect poor and weak families, wide spread illiteracy among the rural dwellers, family members' health challenges, poor wages, mass



retrenchment of workers, unemployment and general national under development, (Appel, 2009, and Nwabueze, 1992).

Evidence abound about the adverse consequences of child labour to show how children are often permanently separated from their families and homes while in a faraway wild world where their only choice for staying alive is to yield to the dictates of their tormentors in fear of punishment, rejection, destitution and other dangers they stand to face in lands if their masters or mistresses rejects them. A few have taken the brave decision of taking their destiny in their hands by running away from their tormentors to distant cities where they live at nature's mercies.

Despite these arguments, the fact remains that child labour is a serious socio-economic problem to humanity that must be eliminated. As much as children need to be engaged in some form of work as a means of training them to acquire skills and relevant knowledge, preparatory to their adult life, there is also the need for the separation of child labour from child work. Child work is an acceptable African child development processes within the African socio-cultural compacts, because of its focus on the values of treating the child as a divine gift from God to be cherished, protected and trained to sustain the genealogy of the family, without commoditizing their labour, (Haspels and Suriyasrn 2003). Since African families pride themselves in the proper upbringing of their children by nurturing

and training them to acquire skills with which they can sustain their own families at adulthood, children in this order should always be engaged in child work, each according to his or her age and ability; based on laid down African traditional educational practices for the development of children beyond any consideration that subject them to unnecessary hardship and exploitation.

Juxtaposing child work or domestic work in traditional African societies against child labour in contemporary capitalist Africa respectively, we argue that while the former is operated, moderated and superintended within the family, for the greater benefit of the child and family without any considerations for profit motive, the latter being the contemporary child labour practice based on capitalist values, does not coincide in domain with the interests of the African child and the family, (Okpara, 1986, Okojie, 1987 and Adudu, 1989).

Mitigations

Mitigations against poverty, child labour and related practices do exist in both Ebonyi state and Nigeria as well as at the international arena in forms of advocacy, public policies and laws coupled with public-private sector partnerships and international collaborations aimed at discouraging the practice.

The ILO convention No.182 identifies as the worse form of child abuse among nations to include all forms of child

slavery, forced or compulsory child labour, compulsory recruitment of child soldiers into armed conflicts, engagement of children in child prostitution, pornography, illicit drug related activities and involvement of children in work that may be injurious to their health, (Ugbaja, 1999:20).

The year 2009 United Nations' adoption of the Secretary General's report number 110, which sought for global support for the elimination of child labour emphasized that child labour being; 'any work carried out by children in conditions below those established by the United Nations Convention or by ILO standards should be considered as economic exploitation against the child which must be discouraged'. Article 32 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989 outlines the right of children including their being protected from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous to their wellbeing, interferes with their education or is harmful to their health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development as well as work which exposes them to economic exploitation. Paragraph 2, of the same article further encourages member states to have regard to 'the relevant provisions of other international instruments', when setting rules governing the minimum age and conditions of employment of young persons.

Within this domain, some solutions have been projected in the areas of broad protection, prevention, law enforcement,

and victim assistance as are documented in the UNO resolutions on child labour exemplified in the declaration of the International Year of the Child in 1979 (Ebigbo, 1988). These efforts gave salvo to the enactment of national laws by member states pursuant to the protection of the right of the child. These are the areas where 1989 U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1999 I.L.O. documents on 'Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention', and the year 2000 U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children becomes fundamental.

It can however be conceded that Nigerian government has made efforts at the protection of the child since 1899, under the colony of Southern Nigeria, (Akukwe, 1979), followed by other legal pronouncements of 1958, 1966, 1974, (Okeke, 1988), capped with the 1974 Labour Act. This 1974 act collated all other efforts to state clearly that no child shall be employed to work under any form of labour for wages in whatever capacity except in the light of work done for family agricultural, horticultural and domestic good as may be permitted by the family with the approval of the Labour Minister. The Nigerian Government also took the child labour show boat to the UN presumably to join serious member states to formally adopt the three International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions which set the minimum rules for the employment of children at sea, in industry and underground. In addition,



the country signed a memorandum of understanding in August 2003 in collaboration with ILO to launch a country wide programme under the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), (Akukwe, 1979). Government went a step further to attempt the implementation of the West Africa Cocoa Agriculture Project (WACAP) and passed the law on child Rights Act Sections 28 and 29 which sought to prohibit exploitative labour, enforceable under sections 58 – 64 of the labour Decree of 1974, now the Labour act. Other mitigations against child labour practices have also been approached from a broad consensus which focuses on preventing children from entering into child labour in the first instance, through advocacies among the citizens with a focus on the economically disadvantaged families at the rural areas who form the vulnerable target groups in the efforts at ending child labour.

Unfortunately, our study population in the rural communities of Ebonyi state presents a test case of a people who these mitigations against child labour practices may not have impacted positively. As much as these mitigations may have in principle, existed in Nigeria and indeed in Ebonyi state for ages, the level of awareness among the rural dwellers of the areas studied remains dismal. There is a near total absence of government efforts at bringing mitigation policies against child labour to the people. This explains the reason

for the massive involvement of those in the rural communities in child labour practices. Common efforts at advocacies and mass education of the rural dwellers about the ills of child labours have remained a tall order, beyond the lame policies enacted by government and the international jamborees on child labour attended by Nigerian rulers. Child labour has remained on the increase in the absence of the enabling environment, infrastructure and social welfare security in these Ebonyi State rural communities needed to encourage poor families to seek for their poverty alleviation beyond child labour.

Theoretical underpinning

The social exclusion theory was adopted for this study based on its explanation of the processes and consequences of marginalization and exclusion of individuals and groups or segments of the people of a given society from participating in sharing the resources and opportunities available in their society.

This theory opines that through the political calculations of the dominant exploiter class in control of specific states' apparatuses, (Ibiam, 2014), the trajectory of citizens' access to the distribution and consumption of public wealth are often skewed to favour specific individuals or groups to the detriment of the larger population.

Proponents of this theory include Lee, (ed.), (1975), Pacione, (1977), Walker, (1977) and Hills, (1997) whose works

have contributed immensely to the efforts being made to address the challenges of socio-economic inequality among societies. There are various forms of negative and inhuman practices sustained by the ruling class in most crude capitalist societies that ossify discrimination, marginalization, rights denials and expropriation of the masses by the few opportune class. Social exclusion often occurs in such societies through varying form of systematic deprivations that may have started as acts of social bias, stereotype and prejudice which then grow into social stigma, degenerating into discrimination and rejection. Here a systematic separation of specific segments of the given society are often mobilized through an elitist instigation of their sectarian, religious and ethnic group alliances to threaten the interest of those targeted for negative actions. This is then followed by other actions motivated by political actors at different societal levels for purposes of consolidating their access to the control of the national economy, environment, resources and other forms of social benefits in favour of their class.

In Nigeria, this class has continued to create differentials among the citizens through acts of deprivation, marginalization, disempowerment and alienation which crystallize into forms of relations that pitch those perpetually disadvantaged against the opportune class, who the former see as their oppressors, (Otu, Ibiam and Agha 2015). Responses to this order by those

excluded have often resulted to discontent and acrimony which permeate through the fabrics of the society to impact the nation's socio-economic and other forms of development and in that process create new forms of social order that leaves in its wake social actions that include civil disobedience, demonstrations, upheavals and internal strife (Ibiam 2011, 2014). By extension, this order has unwittingly degenerated into citizen malaise towards their state which often causes affected citizens to quest for solutions to their needs by other means possible, now found common among the rural communities of Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

Among our research population in the rural communities of Ebonyi exist these conditions created by the 'dominant class in control of the state structures', (Ibiam, and Itumo, 2014), instituted through definite state policies which benefit their idiosyncratic pervasions through political actions that orchestrate economic deprivations, that ossify abject poverty among the larger populace in the state.

The relevance of this theory to this study lies in its advocacy that resolving problems of poverty and child labour require mitigations aimed at re-focusing re-invigorating the inherent capacities of those impoverished to encourage their resilience and ingenuity as a means to increasing their socio-economic productivity. It requires taking proactive measures through advocacy and material



empowerment to encourage marginalized persons to shift their efforts away from child labour practices as a last resort towards other forms of survival strategies such as entrepreneurial activities that promote human dignity.

Beyond the hue and cry as well as the grandstanding of the ruling class on issues of poverty alleviation in Nigeria, (NAPEP, 2001) this theory exposes the inherent contradictions regarding the roles of the ruling class in the sustenance of various forms of exploitation of the impoverished populace, which propel the poor rural dwellers into child labour practices. The theory advocates for conditions that encourage citizens to stand against exploitation, marginalization, segregation and dehumanization as well as other acts of citizen exclusion from participating in the distribution of their society's resources.

This theory furthers that citizens negatively impacted under social exclusion in their societies should be discouraged from resorting to survivalist tendencies with grave implications on both their families and their children, which rural dwellers find solace in child labour for family poverty alleviation and that often degenerate into a life time family albatross. We can therefore argue under the social exclusion theory that the pauperized condition of the rural dwellers forces them to negatively oriented self-reliance within which they resort to the use of what they have to get what they need, easily found in child labour for family poverty alleviation.

Positive attitudes towards life challenges is what is required of those marginalized in society based on their ability to mobilize their inner energies and social contacts to forge new forms of frontiers to create new social and economic relations within which they re-tool themselves inwardly and outwardly based on humane positive approaches.

They must reach out to each other to form clusters of self-help and improvise with available resources that include their inner capacities, intelligence, creativity, craftsmanship, and social relationships to build cohesions and cooperative groups and deploy the same to challenge their environment to eke out a living beyond self-defeatist and destructive practices such as child labour.

On a wider perspective, this theory seeks for concerned individuals and groups who can gather support around those negatively impacted by child labour practices to create turn around conditions that give rise to positive actions for their development. The challenges of child labour within this domain requires that positive actions are taken by help agencies and Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs) and humanitarian bodies to aid those marginalized and impoverished among our research population in the rural communities of Ebonyi state so they can reach out to self-help programmes beyond expectations of

help from the government that may never come their way.

Findings

This study established existent correlations between child labour and family poverty under which indicators in the two variables exist as twin challenges to citizens of the rural communities of Ebonyi state, Nigeria. There are consequential impacts of child labour as a cause and effect of poverty across various socio-economic strata of our research population and indeed among other societies. The relationship family poverty and child labour existing as economic linkages to each other such that each constitutes a conditioner and outcome of the other in a vicious circle. Out of these are variants of challenges that include perpetual abject poverty, child abuse in forms of denial of the child's access to basic education, which ossifies mass illiteracy across generations, child slave labour leading to other occurrences which are embedded in moral and sexual abuses, child prostitution, delinquency, alcoholism, drug abuse and violent crimes.

Without their consent and sometimes forcefully, children from the rural communities of Ebonyi State, Nigeria are shipped to various cities of Nigeria to serve as house helps, shop or bar tenders depending on their ages and farm or factory workers. Some also are taken by brothel operators as child prostitutes, pimps, street beggars and agents of various unimaginable anti-social activities that rake in huge sums

of money for their exploiters. In exchange for these services to be rendered by these children that are not usually disclosed to their families; some inconsequential monetary payments, stipends and gifts in kind are made to parents by agents on behalf of their would-be masters or mistresses. These children are then taken to various cities and locations across the length and breadth of Nigeria where they are subjected to dehumanizing conditions that often cut them off from the social ties of family life.

There are often intricate webs of linkages that create difficulties for the child labourers entangled in the system to abscond or be saved from their exploiters orchestrated through contracts with ignoramus and greedy uncles, aunties, relatives and friends. Such transactions are designed to hoodwink and commit the small minded poor parents of such children unwittingly into eternal contracts that place their children on a perpetual servitude and sometimes modern day slavery that undermines their future development.

Within this circle are specific challenges faced by the child involved in this practice in forms like physical and psychological cruelty, destitution, various kinds of deprivation and health challenges. There are also issues of problems of family dislocation, disintegration, poverty of various shapes and shades, community disorder, socio-economic insecurity and general malady



for all so enmeshed in the imbroglia culminating into violence and sudden death for the parents and even the child in some cases.

This study further established that children from our population of study in Ebonyi state of Nigeria are often contracted out into the labour market at very tender ages through syndicates. A great number of such child labourers from these rural communities of the state are either migratory, transitional or permanent labourers whose wages accrue to some other persons than their parents or themselves. They are provided with bare necessities that keep them alive for the next day's labour as hawkers, farm workers, menial workers in factories, peddlers and traffickers of various forms of illicit products sourced through middlemen and subsidiary business syndicates who hold hegemonic control over them.

Poverty, inequality and insecurity remain the major factors responsible for child labour among the communities where the percentage of absolute poverty continues to rise with the levels of incomes of over 65 percent of citizens dropping continually, (Aniekwe, 2002). Under the pressure of survivalist tendencies, most parents and guardians have resorted to subjecting their children and wards to one form of child labour or the other. Other factors responsible for child labour among the research population were identified in the areas of parental death, separation of parents or guardians, illiteracy, (Aniekwe 2002),

traditional believes, customs, values systems, social insecurity, (Onukwuli 2002). As well as parental negligence of responsibilities to their children, and ineptitude on the part of government officials involved in the enforcement of child protection acts and laws of Nigeria, (Illoh, 1999).

Discussion

The burden of resolving child labour practices is principally anchored on the need for concerted efforts at prevention against the odds of seeking solutions to the challenges posed by the practice in our society. As onerous and tasking as preventing child labour may seem, considering its wide range and diverse dimensions; the basis lies in preventing the circumstances that compel families to engage in it for family poverty alleviation.

It is disturbing and disappointing that despite all the mitigations through international and national declarations, advocacies official state policies and legal frameworks against child labour, the practice has continued unabated. In the midst of all the mitigations, child labour practices remains on the increase, leaving in its wake emotional, psychological and physical dislocations for both the children and their families. Associated with these are family disintegration, rural poverty, varying degrees of child abuse, rural-urban slum, misery, high mortality, sicknesses, diseases and death, (Word Bank, 2000, CBN, 1999, Olaitan. et al, 2000 and Global child labour conference, 2010 and Ekpeyong, 2011). Child labour

practices have not only come to stay as a menacing socio-economic way of life, it has also put rural communities in a multi-phased dilemma. Just as many communities of Nations of Sub-Sahara Africa are overwhelmed by poverty that leads them to attempt getting by through child labour, (UNICEF, 2004), the same is predictably playing out in the abject poverty of citizens of Ebonyi state rural communities.

Without succor and external help, many pauperized families have accepted the failure of their political leaders and have accordingly resorted to child labour. Rather than engage in street begging, or sit at home to wait for death induced by hunger and diseases, or even engage in contentions, agitations, strive and social action that may endanger them and exacerbate their conditions, (Ikejiaku, 2009), those impacted have reluctantly resorted to child labour practices. Cases exist of families discovering too late that they have been hoodwinked into enslaving their children to perpetual bondage under unprofitable child labour. Such discoveries have led such families into depression and other forms of psychological disorder which sooner than later result into disasters for the family in various forms that includes terminal diseases and sudden death.

Most of the families among our research population are living with tales of woes that befell them from the consequences of child labour, with affected children growing into adulthood imbued with negative and anti-social traits that often

cause other members of the society to see them as outcasts, social deviants and criminals. As adults, they exist along deviant life patterns that lead to negative parenting models within which they construe child labour as a norm. They wallow in ignorance and illiteracy while degenerating into a life that is disinclined to the norms of a civilized society. Seeing nothing wrong in engaging children as labourers, they establish a pattern of transaction that subjects every child within their neighborhood, including theirs to various forms of trauma associated with child labour.

Conclusion

Child labour is a human catastrophe which rural families of Ebonyi state are recycling among themselves despite the harrowing experiences evidenced in the lives of escapee and returnee child labourers who have told tales of woes to others. Child labour and the associated problems have lingered among citizens due to class appropriation interests orchestrated through 'the conspiracy between the Nigerian hegemonic predatory elite and the rentier state' that viciously expropriate the society's resources, (Ibiam, and Itumo, 2014). This has led to alarming increases in incidence of poverty level and other development problems profoundly felt among the rural populace, which are evidently found among our research population.

The sources of the problems of child labour were also identified in this study



as being multi-phased with the environment, the government, political leaders, cultural practices, families and individuals having a fair share of the blame. It was established in this study that among the rural dwellers of Ebonyi state of Nigeria, child labour is primarily induced by family poverty which conversely rebounds to encumber family challenges and multiply the poverty conditions of these rural dwellers. No matter the arguments and semantics in the discourse across the divide to either justify or condemn child labour practices, the fact remains that child labour cannot help family poverty alleviation; its entry into any family deepens the poverty of families so impacted.

We can conclude here by asserting that there was a near total lack of advocacy from public spirited individuals, help agencies, the civil society and social partners against child labour practices across these communities with necessary awareness among our research population of the rural communities of Ebonyi state about the challenges of this practice being at a near zero level. Child labour remains a thriving way of life among the rural communities of Ebonyi state, despite claims by the government and other help agencies that family poverty alleviation services were being provided for these rural communities as a means of discouraging them from such harmful practices.

Recommendations

As much as the solutions to the challenges of child labour for family poverty alleviation are in their legions, the first step lies in the recognition by all citizens of nations that it is an endemic problem that must be eradicated. We must all recognize that children are gifts of God bestowed on us to cherish, nurture and groom to develop the best of their abilities, each according to his or her calling by nature for the sustenance of our generations. We must all agree that it is unacceptable for the same adults who enjoyed the best of society's love and care under our fore fathers during their time as children of the past, to turn around and form cartels and syndicates that engage in obnoxious and inhuman practices that compromise today's children under child labour for profit motives.

To overcome child labour challenges, there is need for political leaders and governments to be responsive in fulfilling their primary duties through the provision of necessary development infrastructure and social welfare services for the citizens. There is need for new strategic approaches to the design and adoption of public policies which touch on citizen's welfare that will in turn re-position families for improved socio-economic conditions needed to discourage child labour and its challenges. Emphasis should be placed on prevention and protection of children in vulnerable families and communities against the merchants of child labour

with criminal legal imperatives put in place to prosecute offenders.

Higher premium should be placed on the provision of palliatives, welfare services and economic empowerment for pauperized rural families in both Ebonyi state and other communities ravaged by this menace. This should include strategies for victim assistance, reconciliations and compensation with financial and material provisions made from proceeds of fines and property confiscated from the sponsors and perpetrators of child labour. There should be greater emphasis placed on addressing household vulnerabilities and poverty conditions that dispose families to child labour. There can never be the over emphasizing the fact that family poverty remains the root cause of other forms of social problems and criminalities involving. There is therefore an urgent need for primacy to be placed on the provision of basic needs of families in the areas of food, clothing, shelter, health care and improved welfare services as well as the creation of easy access to credit opportunities to diminish the vulnerabilities that exposure such families to poverty which in itself becomes the high way to child labour.

Child labour victims should be provided opportunities for formal education while those who cannot continue their education can be encouraged to acquire skills and other capabilities to cause their gainful employed. This will go a long way in reducing their frustration

which can force them to return to the old ways that had impoverished and dehumanized them.

There is also a great need for social mobilization, re-socialization, re-orientation and value re-positioning aimed at building the capacities of the children impacted by child labours, their parents and critical take holders about the need for collective efforts aimed at discouraging child labour in our societies. Beyond the moribund traditional approaches of continental boundary deterrence and protectionism for myopic national interests, African leaders must be encouraged by the international community, help agencies and concerned citizens to address the rising tide of child labour through a vigorous pursuit of poverty alleviation policies that can protect our children from all forms of abuses.

References

- Ake, C., (1982), *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development*, Ibadan University Press
- Aziaki, S. (2003), *Inequities in Nigerian politics*, Yenagoa: Treasure Communications Research Limited.
- Carneiro, Robert L. (1977) *A Theory of the Origin of the State*, Studies in Social Theory No 3. Menlo Park, CA:
- Central Bank of Nigeria (1999), *Nigeria's Development Prospects, Poverty Assessment*



- and Alleviation Study of Community Conflicts in Nigeria, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Coleman, J.S (1958). *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. California: University of California Press.
- Deng, L. A. (1995). Poverty reduction: Lessons and experience from Sub-Saharan Africa. *Working paper Series on development: Paper presented at the workshop for Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Councilors in Cross River, Nigeria*
- Eboh, E. C. (2009). *Social and Economic Research: Principles and Methods*. Enugu: African Institute for Applied Economics
- Ebegbulem, J. C., Ekpe, D and Adejumo, T.O, (2013). Oil exploration and poverty in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A critical analysis. *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 4, 3. Ekekwe, E. (1986). *Class and State in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Longman Production
- Central Bank of Nigeria (1999). *Nigeria's Development Prospects, Poverty Assessment and Alleviation Study. Community Conflicts in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Eboh, E. C. (2009). *Social and Economic Research: Principles and Methods*. Enugu: African Institute for Applied Economics.
- Ibiam, O.E (2014); The dominant class and the state in Nigeria: a confederacy of profligacy. *African Journal of politics and administrative studies (AJPAS)* 6,2
- Ibiam, O.E and Itumo, A (2014), A rentier state and the predatory elite: The dilemma of Nigerians, *African journal of politics and administrative studies (AJPAS)* 6,1.
- Igwe, O (2005) *Politics and Globe Dictionary*; Aba, Eagle Publishers
- Ikejiaku, B.U. (2009). The relationship between poverty, conflict and development. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 2 (1):16-25.
- Ile, N. M (1999) *Management and Organizational Theory and Practice*, Enugu: Vougasen Ltd.
- ILO, (2010), *Joining forces against child labour, Inter-agency report for the Hague Global Child Labour Conference of 2010 / Understanding Children's Work (UCW) Programme – Geneva*: Matunhu, J. (2011). A critique of modernization and dependency theories in Africa: Critical assessment, *African Journal of History and Culture*, 3,5, 65-72.
- Muhammed, K.Y., Gbenga, A. John, P., Tunji, A., Frank, I. and

- Edward, K. (2008). 'From the ground- Up impacts of a pro-poor community-driven development project in Nigeria. IFPRI Discussion Paper, 0756.1-4.
- NPC (2009), National Population Commission report on 2006 Census gazette 2, 96. Abuja
- Otu E, Ibiam, O.E, & Agha, E.O, (2015), Politics In Nigeria: To What Extent Has The Gender Agenda Gained Momentum? *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 20, Issue 5, Ver. 1, PP 01-10 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org DOI:*
- Rodney, W, (2005). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Abuja: Panaf Publishing.
- United Nations (UN). 1998. Debt Bondage, UN Economic and Social Council, Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Geneva.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), (2009), the state of the world's children: Special edition: Celebrating 20 years of the convention on the rights of the child (New York, NY).
- UNDP (1994). Human Development Report, New York: Oxford University Press Limited.3,12, 2013Washington D.C, World Bank, 329-337.
- Varma, S. P. (2009), Modern Political Theory. New Delhi: Vikas, Publishing House PVT Ltd.
- Vogelin, E. (1952), *The New Science of Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- World Health Organization (2012b) WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and World Bank,
- World Bank (1990). *World Development Report*, Washington D. C.: The World Bank.
- <http://www.onusida-aoc.org/eng/publications/poverty.htm>; 'The United Nations Development Programmes and Poverty Eradication for Sustainable Lively hood'. Journal on the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Abuja, NAPEP Publications April (2001)
- <http://www.dawodu/poverty.com>
- Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria: A Perspective.
- <http://www.iiste.org>
- <http://www.ucw-project.org>
- <http://www.dawodu/poverty.com>;
- <http://www.iiste.org>
- <http://www.ucw-project.org>
- <http://www.wikipedia.com>
- <http://www.dawodu/poverty.com>;
- <http://www.onusida-aoc.org/eng/publications/poverty.htm>;
- <http://www.Nigeria>
- <http://www.unrisd.org>.
- <http://www.africa.org>. Nigeria