

Child Trafficking in Nigeria: An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Free and Compulsory Basic Education as an Intervention Programme

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Abstract

Among the most important factors responsible for the continued prevalence of the incidence of child trafficking in Nigeria are Poverty, ignorance, and inaccessible Educational opportunities. These factors are prevalent in very poor countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the free and compulsory basic education (consisted in the universal Basic Education) programme in curbing child trafficking in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, a state both labeled as educationally backward and source state of child trafficking. The design for the study is survey design. The likert scaling format, in-dept interviews, and focus group discussions were instruments for data collection. Documentary sources enabled a comparative evaluation. The study revealed that sufficiency and accessibility of educational opportunities are the most effective means of curbing child trafficking. The researcher, while not neglecting other important measures, recommends increased budgetary allocation to the education sector and very judicious use of same to promote human development.

Keywords: *Child trafficking, Free, Compulsory, Effectiveness, Basic Education, intervention.*

Child trafficking in Nigeria began receiving increase media and international attention in Nigeria since 1998 although child labour and child abuse had long been an issue for social concern. This underground criminal activity was a response to the negative effect of the falling world oil price, prolonged serious mismanagement of the economy by the military and extreme human rights violations resulting in severe international sanctions which had a devastating impact on the already crippled economy and aggravated the poverty burden. These in turn led to an increase in social tension, inter-ethnic clashes, and deterioration of basic social services. Juvenile delinquency, child abuse, child neglect and unemployment were quite evident consequences. The proportion of the population living in extreme poverty, a group described as the core poor, rose from 15 percent in 1960 to 28 percent by 1980 (UNICEF, 2002). This deterioration in social conditions affected millions of people. By 1996 the percent of people below the poverty line had swelled to 66 percent (Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), 1999; Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 2001).

The rural areas of Nigeria, which harbour over 70 Percent of the population, were hardest hit. Folks reacted to the extreme hardship in various ways. Mass migration swelled the population of the major cities. As the circle of poverty continued, parents, families and guardians began to take greater risk in an attempt to escape poverty and improve their standard of living. Consequently, accepted traditional practices such as placing and fostering children in the home of their relations were turned into lucrative money-making ventures for parents, families and guardians. Thus, the phenomenon of cheap labour through child trafficking

escalated, drawing larger number of children into the streets to work, and engage in exploitative and inhuman enterprises.

Nigeria is largely a traditional society. The ethnic groups that make up Nigeria strive to identify with their traditional practices. Extended family system is an integral part of these traditional practices. Placing and fostering children in the home of extended relations are core traditional means of human development. Also, traditionally, in Nigeria children have been seen as assets to assist with household, business, and farm chores. This socialization process and its related activities have been carried out within the social safety net of the community. However, with the increasing unemployment, a weak institutional framework, and a weakening extended family system, millions of children have been forced into new types of labour that are exploitative, hazardous and prejudicial to their welfare and development. Middlemen have now emerged who exploit the poor situation and ignorance of parents, particularly those in the rural areas to procure children for commercial and exploitative labour. This practice has become known as child trafficking.

To tackle the problem of child trafficking, the government of Ebonyi State embarked upon many intervention programmes to improve the lot of the people and stem the incident of child trafficking. Some of the intervention programmes include the poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in which loans were given to rural dwellers and monthly allowances given to the unemployed; Housing programme in which the government built houses to accommodate citizens and ease the accommodation problem; construction of feeder roads to link the rural areas to urban centers for easy disposal of farm produce; Rural electrification where the rural areas were connected to the national grid to enhance economic activities. Employment programme and media campaign against child trafficking. Ebonyi State being virtually agrarian and mainly rural is also educationally backward. Long period of military denomination of politics in Nigeria also left the state virtually undeveloped. Ebonyi is a source state for child trafficking and to a little extent also a consumer. Following a general election in Nigeria, the civilians took over government from the military in 1999. The civilian government of Ebonyi State initiated programmes aimed at reducing child trafficking and other social problems. Such intervention programmes include Universal Basic Education in (In Ebonyi State, free and compulsory), housing programme, road construction to link rural areas to urban areas, rural electrification programme etc. This research is aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the Free Basic Education programme in reducing the incidence of child trafficking in Ebonyi State. Our concern here is to find out the impact of the free education programme on child trafficking in Ebonyi state. It is to find out whether the programme has helped in reducing the incidence of child trafficking in Ebonyi State.

Literature Review

U.S. Department of States (2002, 2012) described child trafficking as “all acts involved in the transport, harbouring or sale of persons within national or across international borders through coercions, force, kidnapping, deception or fraud, for purpose of placing persons in situations of force labour or services, such as forced prostitution, domestic servitude debt bondage or other slavery-like practices.” In the case of minors, there is general agreement in the United States and the international community that the trafficking term applies whether a child was taken forcibly or voluntarily (United Nations, 2012; International Labour Organization, 2010).

The United Nations sees child trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child by means of treat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over a child, for the purpose of exploitation” (Salah, 2004; UN, 2012). In the case of those aged 18 years or above the term applies if force was applied in their recruitment or movement.

Trafficking children and women has internal and international manifestations. The enterprise of trafficking in people especially women and children for prostitution and exploitative labour is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity and one that is of increasing concern to Nigeria, non-governmental organizations, and the international community (UNICEF, 2002; 2014). Although men are also among the victims, the overwhelming majority of the trafficked are women and children. According to “Children’s and Women’s Rights in Nigeria” about ten (10) children pass daily through Nigeria’s borders especially at Seme, Maiduguri, Sokoto, and Calabar. In Nigeria, many families are poor and according to UNICEF (2002) about eight million Nigerian children are engaged in child labour, putting them at great risk of human trafficking.

A critical look at child trafficking shows that it is not very different from the slavery of centuries ago. Many do not survive the perilous journey of trafficking, and for those who do, the future is bleak indeed. Sometimes, they end up in child slave markets to await buyers. Once sold, they may be forced to work 10 to 20 hours a day, up to seven days a week, as domestic servants, as beggars in the streets, in bars and restaurant, or in hazardous agricultural and factory jobs. Worse yet, many are forced into pornography or prostitution. Perilously yet, some countries press children into military service where they face armed conflicts and are exposed to heavy drug use, and may be forced to provide sex favours to adult soldiers.

Nigeria is a major consumer, supplier and transit route for human trafficking (UNICEF, 2002, 2012). The Nigerian immigration service has identified Edo, Ondo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Imo, Enugu, Lagos Kano, Maiduguru and Ebonyi, as source States for child trafficking. Criminals are involved in the smuggling of children and women across the border to regional destinations as labourers, and to Europe, particularly Italy, where 60 percent of girls trafficked for commercial sex are Nigerians. It is estimated that 20,000 Nigerian girls are engaged in commercial sex in Europe. Most of these girls are from Edo state, and the rest from other states in Nigeria.

In general, child trafficking has poverty as its ubiquitous causal factor. Other causes are despair, war, crisis, high-level illiteracy, unemployment, poor standard of living, materialism among youths, poor reporting and monitoring, high school drop-out, ignorance, desperation of youths, globalization, high demand for cheap labour, etc. (UNICEF, 2002, 2012; Osaghale, 2001, Salah, 2004).

Theoretical issues

Two theories are here reviewed to explain child trafficking and the intervention programmes. The first theory is the *anomie theory*. Durkheim (1951, original copy 1897) introduced the term *anomie* in sociological literature to describe a loss of direction felt in a society when social control of individual behaviour has become ineffective. *Anomie* (derived from Greek, means lack of law) is state of normlessness, which typically occurs during a period of profound social change and disorder, such as a time of economic collapse (Schaeffer, 1999). Robertson (1998) contributes that as *anomie* spreads people feel ever more detached from their fellows. Having little commitment to share norms, they lack social guidelines for personal conduct and are inclined to pursue their private desires without regard to interest of society as a whole. Turner (1995) adds that quick and easy solutions are sought to manipulate the environment in order to reduce any personal pain and bring about a state of pleasure and comfort. This theory explains the reason for people engaging in such heinous criminal activity as selling fellow human beings to slavery, prostitution and pornography.

The next model for this work is the *manipulable solution model*. According to Shadish, Cook, and Leviton (1991) the manipulable solution model of evaluation practice posits that the greatest priority in programme evaluation is to serve the public interest, the interest of the stakeholders who have vested interest in a programme. Advocates of the model believe that

summative evaluation which tests out whether programmes really work - whether they are effective in delivering the public benefits they promise, are more important than finding out how and why they work. The model helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of the education programme as an intervention programme to curb the rising incidence of child trafficking in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

In this evaluation research, the survey design was used. The evaluation covered the three senatorial zones of Ebonyi State, which has a population of two million, one hundred thousand (Aliyu, 2001). Three Local Government Areas were selected from each geo-political zone. The multi-stage cluster sampling, stratified sampling technique, and purposive sampling technique were adopted in distribution of questionnaires. In the questionnaire, the Likert scaling format was used to elicit responses from participants. The questionnaire also contained both open and close ended questionnaire items, in all a total of 1020 questionnaires were distributed while 1000 were used for the analysis. Other instruments of data collection included in-dept interviews, direct observation, focus group discussions, and government documents - government blue prints, office of statistics and other publications. The in-dept interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Afikpo North, Afikpo South (in Ebonyi South), Abakaliki, Ezza South (in Ebonyi Central), Ishielu and Ohaukwu (in Ebonyi North). Twelve in-dept interviews were conducted with respondents purposively selected from each of the Local Government Areas. A total of 18 focus group discussions conducted, 3 in each of the selected local government areas. Each discussion session was made up of 8 participants of the same background in terms of sex, age, and social status. Tables were used to organize the data. Percentages were used to analyse the quantitative data while thematic analytical method was used to analyse qualitative data.

Findings and Discussion

The Universal Basic Education Programme instituted by the Federal Government of Nigeria and made free and compulsory in Ebonyi State, is a programme that was meant to benefit peasants, the rural poor, and urban dwellers both rich and poor. In the evaluation research, 77.6 percent of the one thousand respondents interviewed responded that the free education programme was very effective in tackling the problem of child trafficking. However, 16.8 percent of the respondent rated the programme as ineffective for reasons bothering on some shortcoming of the programme.

Data from oral interview and focus group discussions concur with the 77.6 percent who view the programme as effective, and focus group discussions pointed out that:

Many of the children enjoying free primary and secondary education would not have had the wherewithal to get basic education. Many would have been available to one child labour or the other thereby exposing them to child trafficking. The major beneficiaries are the peasant farmers who find it difficult to eat not to talk of paying fees for their children.

The interview and discussions also revealed that many parents and guardians have withdrawn their children and wards from their exploiters and enrolled them into public schools. Also, one major provision for placement and fostering children these days in Ebonyi State is that the guardians, relations or foster parents must send the wards to school as a condition for living with him. Many respondents extolled the compulsory aspect of the programme because many parents, guardians and relations were still reluctant to avail themselves of the free education opportunities to educate their children and wards.

Government documents from both Secondary Education Management Board and State Primary Education Board give statistical support to the claims above. Below is a table showing pupils' and students' enrollment into secondary and primary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 1: Enrollment of pupils in the L.G.As of study (1999-2004)

L.G.A	1999	2004	Percent increase
Afikpo South	9,154	27,293	198.2
Abakaliki	17,741	35,325	99.1
Ohaukwu	32,245	52,608	62.6

Source: Planning, Research and Statistics - State Primary Education Board.

An analysis of the table above shows that in Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, enrollment into state primary schools increased from 9,154 to 27,293; in Abakaliki, it increased from 17,741 to 35,325; while in Ohaukwu, it increased from 32,342 to 52,608 within the same period. This shows an increase of 198.2 percent, and 62.6 percent Afikpo South, Abakaliki, and Ohaukwu, respectively. It can be noted that Afikpo South Local Government recorded 198.2 percent increase in enrollment. This, interviews and focus group discussions revealed, was because a greater number of the people in this area are domiciled in Abia and other States outside Ebonyi. So, when the free education programme first kicked off in Ebonyi State, many parents withdrew their children from abroad and enrolled them in Ebonyi State schools to benefit from the free education programme. This drastically reduced the number of Ebonyi children available for child trafficking.

In the study, documents from state education boards were used to examine the rate of enrolment of pupils and students in Ebonyi State before and after the introduction of the free education programme. Table two below shows the annual enrolment of pupil into primary schools between 1997 and 2004.

Table 2: Total annual enrollment pupils between 1997 and 2004

Year	No of pupils	Increase	% incr	No of teachers
1997	263,666			7,946
1998	274,407	10,741	4.1	8477
1999	274,653	246	0.1	8773
2000	327,307	52,654	19.3	9860
2001	414,265	86,958	26.8	11325
2002	435,765	21,500	5.2	10922
2003	434,445	-1,320	-.03	11380
2004	460,245	25,800	5.9	11465

Source: Planning, Research and Statistics - State Primary Education Board.

From 1997 to 2004, the enrollment of pupils in primary school in Ebonyi State is shown on the table above. It can be seen that between 1997 and 1999, just before the institution of the free education programme there was not any significant increase in annual school enrollment. In 1997/1998, the percent was a negligible 0.1 percent. But after the introduction of the free education programme in the year 2000, there was a significant upsurge in the population of pupils. There was 15.5 percent increase between 1999 and 2000. The increase is precisely 52,654 pupils. It has to be noted that most of these pupil who were not in school prior to the free education programme were engaged in one labour or the other - farming, quarrying, fishing, conducting buses, hawking or domestic servitude. Again, the table excludes pupils of Ebonyi origin studying outside the state.

In all, after the introduction of free education programme and the application of compulsion basic education programme, the number of pupils in primary school increased from 274,653 in 1999 to 460,245 in 2004. This means an increase of 185,592 pupils being 67.87%

increase within the period. The implication of the effect of compulsion in this programme is that poor traditional societies where children are traditionally seen as source of assistance in business and family chores, parents and guardians need to be coerced into sending their children and wards to school. In an interview a government official posited:

Government understands that, unlike states like Imo and Abia where sending children to school is a tradition, many parents here in Ebonyi are reluctant to send their children and wards to school. Therefore, the State Government pays particular attention to the 'compulsory' aspect of the programme. However we encounter challenges in enforcing it. There are still many children out there who do not go to school but with concerted campaign many will see the need to comply.

The effect of the free education programme was also evaluated by studying the enrollment of the students into secondary schools before and during the introduction of free education programme

Table 3: L.G.A and State Enrollment in Secondary Schools 1997-2003.

L.G.A/State	1997	1999	2001	2003
Afikpo South (Edda)	4705	6978	9951	9514
Abakaliki	2063	3111	7336	9405
Ohaukwu	3843	9400	16664	19518
Ebonyi State	50,869			165,842

Source: *Planning, Research and Statistics Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board Ai.*

A look at table below shows a stunning revelation of the education backwardness of Ebonyi State, especially in the year prior to civilian rule. The backwardness was most manifest in the central and northern zones of the State. Ohaukwu Local Government Area with the highest population (237,986) (EBSMI, 2000) had 3,843 students in secondary schools in 1997 Whereas, Afikpo South (Edda) Local Government Area with a population of 96,543 had 4,705 students in public schools. In the same vein, Abakaliki with a population of 136,065 had 2,063 students in the year under study.

The educational status of the state before the introduction of the free education programme was indeed dire. This could explain why Ebonyi children and women were available for trafficking. Available data shows that with the introduction of the free education programme, there was a very significant rise in the enrollment into both primary and secondary schools. For examples by 2001 Afikpo South (Edda) had 9,951 students in Government approved schools while Abakaliki had 7,336, and Ohaukwu had 16,664. At the state level, there was very significant positive difference in the enrollment of students in 1997, during military regime, the number of secondary students in the entire Ebonyi State was 50,896. In 2003, after the introduction of free education programme, the number had risen to 165,842 students. This increase was largely a function of the free education programme. Parents, even very poor parents retrieved their children from their servitude in cities, plantations, and slavery and enrolled them in schools.

In a focus group discussion in Ekoli, Afikpo South Local Government Area, participants argued that free and compulsory education was not the only factor responsible the increase in enrollment of children into schools:

Free education contributed much, but it was not the only factor responsible the increase. Increased employment opportunities, creation of Development Centers, increased business opportunities, political activities resulting in availability of more money, various empowerment programmes, increased business activities, and numerous other factors all contributed to the drastic increase in population of pupils and students.

It is now eleven years since the introduction of the Universal Basic Education programme. The tables below show recent figures of enrollment into both primary and secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 4: Enrollment of (primary) pupils in the selected LGAS and Ebonyi State in 2004 to 2010

Year	2007	2010
Afikpo South	28737	25084
Abakaliki	34724	25918
Ohaukwu	55727	66737
State total	458239	395,927

Source: *Ebonyi State primary Education management Board, 2010.*

The table above shows the enrolment of primary school students in Ebonyi State between year 2007 and year 2010. The table above shows a sustained enrollment of students into primary schools in the entire state. Interviews and focus group discussions conducted with parents, guardians and staff of schools reveal that many children who come back from their sojourn are asked by their parents or relations to stay behind and benefit from the education programme for self-development.

Table 5: Enrollment of students in the LGAs of study between 2006 and 2009

Year	A/south	Abakaliki	Ohaukwu
2005/6	6051	7618	20,296
2006/7	6,578	8,478	18,075
2008/9	6,550	6,595	15,260

Source: *Secondary Education Management Board, Abakaliki, 2009*

The table above shows a sustained enrollment of students in selected secondary schools in Ebonyi secondary schools. The figures have remained high. This according to interviewees and focus group discussion participants is due to the commitment of successive governments to the free and compulsory basic education programme.

Table 6: Enrollment of students (secondary) in Ebonyi State in selected years.

Year	No. of student	Tutorial staff
2003/2004	175,792	2,041
2006/2007	160056	2,642
2008/2009	122,482	2,540

Source: *Secondary Education Management Board, Abakaliki, 2009.*

Table 6 above shows the total enrollment of students into secondary schools in Ebonyi State from 2003/4 to 2008/9 academic years. The table shows a dwindling total enrollment of pupils into Ebonyi State Secondary schools. It also shows a heavy workload on tutorial staff of

the secondary education board. It also reveals a decreasing proportion of students/tutorial staff ratio. Information from interviewees and focus group discussion participants identify two factors as possible causes of the dwindling enrollment of students. One is falsification of figures, which reduce when exposed by auditors. The next one is that when other states kick-started the free education programme, many children relocated to other towns and cities to join their parents and continue their free education.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper is giving a critical evaluation of the free education programme to ascertain its effectiveness in curbing child trafficking in Nigeria. From this empirical evaluation, there is every evidence and convincing data to show that the free and compulsory education programme (Universal Basic Education Programme) is an effective programme for fighting child trafficking in Nigeria. However this study acknowledges that other factors contributed to the rise in enrollment into within the period under study. The peasants and traditional folks who largely make up Ebonyi State hold the fatalistic belief that education is very costly and so, a venture for the rich. Without the free education programme, many peasants would prefer keeping their children to help in farms and other business or give them out to city dwellers for some unrealistic benefits. This explained why Ebonyi children were the ones providing domestic services, menial jobs and odd services in neighbouring States. However, with the introduction of free education programme, many peasants have retrieved their children and wards from their exploiters, from their slavery like, engagements and menial jobs to come back home and enjoy free education. The programme, more than any other, has helped immensely in removing children from the streets. It has helped tremendously in developing the human capital of the state. It is raising the social status of the state, for prior to the institution of the programme. Ebonyi state was ridiculed even by her sister Igbo states for her high illiteracy rate and mainly ignobly known as a source state for domestic servants, hawkers, and itinerant labourers. This study shows that the Universal Basic Programme (the free and compulsory basic education) has drastically reduced the incidence of child trafficking in Ebonyi State.

Every child has the right to free and compulsory basic education. This means that basic education should be free, that no school fees/tuition should be charged to the parents for the first nine years of schooling. Compulsory means that parents do not have a choice. All children must go to school, by law. Parents should send their children/wards to approved schools. Parents should also complement school education with positive traditional values and moral training in the home. Parents and government should ensure that both boys and girls attend schools. This drastically reduces the possibility of exposing them to agents of trafficking.

The two theories used in understanding this inquiry proved helpful in appreciating the study. The study has that Durkheim's anomie theory was useful in understanding social conditions that may lead to such problems as trafficking children for exploitation. When people are hit hard by social circumstances, they resort to unethical means of making ends meet. Likewise, the Manipulable Solution Model of Shadish, Cook and Levito (1991) provided summative evaluation approach which has enabled assessment of whether the programme was effective in delivering the public benefits it promised.

Recommendations

An intervention programme, as laudable as the Universal Basic Education Programme, should be guarded against the destructive evil of corruption. The corrupt leadership has already started having the effect at diminishing the moral and productivity of staff. Parents have already started questioning how free the free education programme is. Government, non-government organizations and stakeholders should collectively work to guard against corruption in the programme.

Since solution to social problems inevitably creates other problems, the free education programme has created accommodation problems in the public schools. In many school pupils and students learn under trees. In some other schools, pupils and students sit on mats instead of on benches or desks. The federal, state and local governments should increase allocations to the education sector to enable adequate provisioning of facilities which in turn will facilitate effective learning.

There is gross shortage of teachers in the public schools studied. In some secondary schools you have only 5 or 4 tutors manning the entire secondary school. This problem affects the rural areas most. Teachers should be employed to match the rate of increase of students' enrollment. Between 1998 and 2004, increase in enrollment of students was 185,592 (67.6%) whereas recruitment of teachers only increased from 8,773 to 11,465 representing 30.7 per cent increase.

The boarding schools instituted by the present administration of Ebony state is an excellent means of curbing child trafficking and other forms of child abuse. Lack of educational opportunities is a major causal factor of child trafficking. Lack of educational opportunity does not simply mean absence of schools. It includes inaccessibility of those schools. Many children do not have homes from which to go to school. Many live in homes that are not conducive for academic activities. Many have homes that are also conducive for learning but are far away from the location of schools. Establishment of boarding schools effectively solves these identified hindrances and many more. To this end, therefore, more of the boarding schools should be established to provide more boarding opportunities to the teeming potential victims of child trafficking

The 'compulsory' aspect of the programme should be enforced by government. Many parents still keep their children away from schools, preferring them to stay behind and provide domestic and farm services. Parents and guardians should be made to understand that basic education is an inalienable right of the child. To this end, government should enforce the legislation that compels parents and guardians to send their children and wards to school. The basic principle of the right to education of the child is "every child (male or female) is entitled to free and compulsory basic education; and equal opportunity for higher education, based on their individual ability". The goals include: preparing the child for a responsible life in society, and developing the personality of the child, his talents, and mental and physical potential to maximum level.

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