

# **CHILD LABOUR ERADICATION POLICIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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## **Abstract**

Considerable evidence indicates that child labour is one social problem that governments across the developing world are finding increasingly difficult to effectively contend. The situation in Nigeria has become more pathetic and disturbing despite the implementation of many and varied policies aimed at child labour eradication. In Akwa Ibom State, the government in recent times has stepped up the fight against child labour. This is clearly indicated by the promulgation of the Child Right Acts, the declaration of free and compulsory education up to secondary school level, and spirited public education programmes. Drawing experiences from a study conducted in 2012 and findings from empirical studies elsewhere, it is argued in this article that the current war against child labour in Akwa Ibom State may not yield the desired result in the long term. However, for the fight against child labour to be successful, efforts should be made to comprehensively address the primary causal factor of child labour – poverty, promote social justice and access to skill based (qualitative) education.

**Keywords:** child labour, government policies, poverty and education.

## **Introduction**

There is no doubt that child labour has become one of the greatest social problems confronting humanity today. Its incidence has become widespread and its prevalence clearly disturbing and of great concern not only to scholars and policy makers, but also to governments and international organisations all over the world. The attention child labour is receiving

today according to Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (1995) is in view of its impact on the socio-economic development of nations and especially on the future of the child labourers. For example Cigno and Rosati (2006) assert that children that engage in child labour cannot develop their productive skills and because they are unskilled, they cannot contribute meaningfully to the growth of their nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Hence, they

are affected negatively and so also their society. In the foregoing state, child labour breeds and reinforces poverty and its attendant social problems (Rogers and Swinnerton, 2000; Brown, et al 2001; Bhalotra and Heady, 2001).

No where else in the world is child labour so prevalent and its effects so glaringly manifesting than in the Third World. Basu (1999) ranked Africa highest among the worst hit continents on incidence and prevalence of child labour. It is estimated that 48 million or 32% of the 250 million children that are involved in child labour in the developing countries are from Africa (ILO Report, 1991). In Nigeria, the situation is not different. According to the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) State of the World's Children Report (2005), 39% of Nigerian children aged 5-14 years are involved in some form of child labour. This trend is worrisome and generates a lot of concerns.

The situation of child labour in Akwa Ibom State is not different from what obtains in other states across the country. A large number of Akwa Ibom children are engaged in some form of child labour. These children participate in mild to worst forms of child labour. Though no comprehensive study has been carried out across the state to determine the actual number of children involved in child labour, case studies have revealed that its determinants are

similar to what obtains in other states and the patterns of prevalence are also similar.

However, it is intriguing to note that everywhere in the world that child labour has been successfully combated government played a leading role through the implementation of innovative policies and programmes (Brown et al 2001) that are designed to eradicate or minimize child labour practices. And most countries (including States) are encouraged to adopt, adapt and implement these policies.

In attempt to control/eradicate child labour, the Akwa Ibom State government in partnership with various organisations have implemented various policies and initiated many programmes. Despite these efforts over the years, the incidence of child labour is still large enough to warrant serious attention. Arguably, effective and efficient implementation of result oriented policies and programmes have the potential of drastically reducing, if not eliminate child labour in Nigeria and elsewhere. Thus, this study, set out to assess the impact of Akwa Ibom State government policies on child labour eradication. The study also attempts to address the following questions:

- (a) What government policies and programmes specially aim at addressing child labour in Akwa Ibom State?

- (b) What has been the impact of these government policies?
- (c) What factors hinder or enhance the attainment of objectives of these policies?
- (d) What is the prospect of eradicating child labour through public policies? Answers to the above questions will contribute to the reduction and even eradication of child labour in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Causes and Consequences of Child Labour**

Poverty theorists such as Basu and Van (1998), and Gatti and Dehajia (2002) see child labour as a rational response to compulsions of household poverty. What this means is that parents put their children to child labour as a way of freeing or ameliorating the dire consequences of poverty. Child labour seen from the above perspective is a way of rising above poverty (Lieten, 2000; Grootaert and Patrinos, 1985).

The above theoretical framework identifies poverty as the major cause of child labour. This in their view explains why child labour is more prevalent in the developing countries than in the developed countries and why child labourers are mostly from poor households. Thus, Bonnet (1993) concludes that wherever there is mass poverty child labour becomes rampant. The theory clearly identifies parents as the

perpetrators of child labour. It is the parents who decide and engage their children in child labour as a way of raising family income (Boyden and Holden, 1991). It further assumes that the relationship between poverty and child labour is a two way traffic. That is, poverty breeds child labour and child labour reinforces poverty (Boozer (2001). What this assumption is saying is that parents in their bid to improve household income vis a vis escape from poverty, drive their children to work quite early, and because these children are unskilled/ill equipped, their productivity is low as well as their remuneration. The impact of their low skills and wages on them and their families are multiple. This often results in today child labourers producing children who become child labourers in the future. Hence, in a way, they are trapped in a cycle of poverty and child labour across generations.

The poverty theory of child labour has several policy implications. For example, its proponents believe that to effectively combat child labour, its fundamental determinant, poverty – must be addressed first. In other words, for any child labour eradication effort to be successful, the fundamental condition that compelled parents to engage their children in child labour should be tackled. If not child labour will continue to thrive, since the survival of many families depends on it. Hence, any serious attempt at controlling/eradicating child

labour must not be symptoms control driven but anchored on a comprehensive policy frame that can address poverty, accelerate genuine economic growth and as well promote social justice.

On the effect of child labour, scholars and policy makers argue that it generates negative impact with grave social consequences on the child labourer, his/her family and the society at large. Child labour affects the psyche of its victims. This is so since child labourers are usually exploited and abused in the work place. This affects their functioning as "normal adults" later in life. Child labour according to Baland and Robinson (2000) takes children away from the school. Therefore, a nation with high prevalence of child labour cannot be productive today and in the future, because children – the future of the society – can only be prepared for future challenges through education. We argue that child labour is destructive to children's intellectual and physical development. It challenges human capital development, exposes children to exploitation and abuse, and as well affect the socio-economic development of any society it plagues. Therefore, it is of no tangible benefit to the child (victim) and the society in general.

### **Child Labour Eradication Policies**

Since child labour is seen as detrimental to the child labourer, his

family and the society in general, several attempts have been made to eradicate/manage it. This is done mostly through the formulation and implementation of policies. Engerman (2001) argues that the strategies for controlling child labour in Industrial England included policies that excluded children from participating in hazardous work, limit on the number of hours a child could be allowed to work, introduction of minimum age which a child is allowed to join the labour force, prohibition against children's involvement in night work and introduction of minimum educational attainments of working children, and other policies that promote general economic growth.

To Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2006), child labour can be controlled through the implementation of effective policies that (in the case of Akwa Ibom State) take account of variables, like age, income, status of child labourers households, education level of parents as well sector and zone differentials. Fetuga, et al (2006), and Anker and Melkas (1996) assert that effective policies targeted against child labour can only significantly reduce child labour incidence but not capable of eradicating it. They added that policies that can keep children in school can be effective. The logic is simple, children aged 5 – 14 years, who are vulnerable to child labour are supposed to be in school and if they are in school, then they cannot

participate in child labour on full time basis.

Bhalotra (2003) noted that policies targeted against child labour should not only target keeping children in school but should attempt to address the socio economic conditions that drive child labourers to work in the first instance. Doftori (2004) argue that there is a linkage between education and child labour. That child labour could be addressed through consistent implementation of educational policies. He went a step further to argue that free and compulsory basic education can reduce the incidence of child labour if efforts are made to redistribute public wealth to favour the poor. His position could be explained in the light of the fact that education in developing countries is seen majorly as a tool for achieving credentials for white collar jobs.

Cigno and Rosati (2006) argue that policies against child labour should not only aim at increasing school enrolment but should emphasis school attendance. Their point is that when school policies are implemented, at the initial stage people buy into it because it present to them, an alternative (a step that will guarantee their children white collar job, by implication, higher pay in the future) to escape absolute poverty. But as education takes time, they become frustrated and their situation get compounded; they normally fall back on their children to ensure survival.

Hence, Brown et al (2001) in their study findings reported that policy targeted against child labour that seems to fair better is a comprehensive policy that combines education policies with poverty alleviation programmes and spirited public education. To them a policy package comprising school based incentives, remedial education, income generating activities for families and awareness training for parents and child labourers proves to be more effective than any one component individually.

Fyfe (1993) argue that prohibitions of some child labour practices do not always yield desired result. For example, Levison (1991) in his study of India found that outlawing street vending did not prove effective. The same result was obtained in Bangladesh and Nepal where prohibition of children from working in the garment industry only worsen the child labourers' situation. They were by that policy forced to go underground. That is, from the formal to the informal sector where their welfare only became worst. The reason why prohibition of child labour via the promulgation of laws does not solve the problem is quite simple. Children work to survive and support their families. Proscribing their activity without ensuring viable alternatives will only make them to defy the law and damn the consequences. After all, one needs to be alive first to obey laws.

In this study, it is assumed that prohibitions of (some) child labour practices cannot be effective, especially as it is not capable of addressing the fundamental cause of child labour. The study further assumes that it is only when school based programmes is combined with poverty alleviation programmes and public education that child labour prevalence in any society can be controlled/managed. In the foregoing direction, attempts shall be made to evaluate the efficacy of some government policies targeted against child labour in developing societies using Akwa Ibom State as the case study.

### **Methodology**

The study was descriptive in nature and relied on primary and secondary data which formed the basis for (data) analysis. Three hundred (300) respondents were drawn from three local government areas of Akwa Ibom State; one from each of the three senatorial districts that make up the State. The study was concentrated in urban areas that included Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene. Cluster sampling technique was used, while the final respondents were purposively selected and it involves child labourers, parents/guardians, school administrators, policy makers and implementers and key stakeholders. Data generated in the course of the study were analysed using simple quantitative and qualitative techniques.

### **Child Labour Eradication Policies in Akwa Ibom State**

Analysis of data generated in the course of the study reveals that the policies adopted by the government of Akwa Ibom State include:-

- (a) Proscription of child labour in its entire forms through the enactment of the child's right law in 2008.
- (b) Declaration of free and compulsory primary and secondary schools education in 2009.
- (c) Increased funding and rehabilitation of schools
- (d) Public education through the use of media.

From the above mentioned policies, it is arguable that the intent of the government in implementing the above mentioned policies is not far from the thinking of Fetuga et al (2006) that policies that can keep children in schools could be effective. The declaration of free and compulsory primary and secondary education in the state is aimed at giving (poor) children access to school, the proscription of child labour activities especially during school hours is to discourage child labour, and public education is targeted at persuading parents from engaging their children in child labour.

## **Assessment Of Child Labour Eradication Policies In Akwa Ibom State**

### **(a) Proscription of child labour:**

The edict proscribing child labour in Akwa Ibom State is quite clear, well documented and to the knowledge of the generality of people in the state. For example the law prohibits street hawking among school children, especially during school hours. It further prescribes punishment for the child labourer and their parents. It mandates the law enforcement agents to arrest and prosecute defaulters.

With the above measures in place one expects streets in Uyo the State capital and in other urban centres to be free from child hawkers. However, the reality is quite different. Children still hawk their wares even during school hours unrestraint. For example, all the child labourers (respondents) used in this study were deliberately interviewed during school hours (9am - 1 pm). They were all aware of the free and compulsory primary and secondary school education in the state and the existing ban on hawking by children of school age. Their parents also acknowledged their awareness of the free and compulsory basic education in the state and the ban on street hawking by children especially during school hours. Further investigation reveals that no parent/child to date has been prosecuted by the law enforcement

agency for violating the ban on street hawking by children of school age especially during school hours. However, 228 or 76% of these interviewed in the study agreed that the number of children that has abandoned the "street" for the school has increased with the declaration of free education in the state. The above analysis shows that the ban on child labour especially street hawking during school hours by school aged children in Akwa Ibom State is not effective. Further investigation reveals 72.83% of the children were still engaged in child labour activities because their parents and guardians so decide, while parents and guardians said the push their children to child labour due to:

- (a) Survival needs - 68.42%
- (b) Lack of alternative source of income 14.7%
- (c) Parental unemployment - 12.3%

The above reaffirms Fyfe (1993) Basu and Van (2000) argument that proscription of child labour cannot yield desired results as it cannot address the fundamental cause of child labour poverty.

### **(b) Implementation of free and compulsory primary and secondary schools education in the state:**

Analysis of data collected in the course of the study shows that the free and compulsory primary and secondary education is the most

popular government policy in the state. All the respondents used in the study acknowledge their awareness of the policy. 27.38% of the child labourers agreed that they enrolled schools because of the policy. Also, The Sensor of May 30, 2010, acknowledges the fact that enrolment figure has jumped by 300% in Junior Secondary Schools across the State. This is by any standard, a no mean success. However, beyond this increase in school enrolment and probably attendance what other indicators are there to point to the success of the free and compulsory education policy? A good number of child labourers 13.68% admitted to dropping out of school in the last school year (2011) and gave their reasons to include; inability to meet sundry school charges by school heads, uniforms and challenges of feeding in their family. Others point to factors like teachers' absenteeism, corporal punishment, non availability of teachers especially in key subject like mathematics and English language.

The above confirms Doftori (2004) view that education could fight child labour to a limited extent, but cannot eradicate child labour. According to Cigno and Rosati (2006), Basu and Van (2000) and Rosati and Rosati, C. (2001) so long as the primary conditions that gives rise to child labour exist, parents will always fall back on child labour as the only viable guarantee to the survival of

the family. Hence, this study submits here that both enrolment and attendance rates recorded in schools in the short run will not continue due to the fact that without genuine attempt to alleviate poverty, parents will become disenchanted with education of their children as that cannot guarantee food on their table.

**(c) Increased funding and rehabilitation of schools and school facilities:**

The government no doubt has intensified actions in funding and rehabilitation of schools especially in the last two years (2010 and 2011). New classrooms are built, and schools are even built. But if enrolment has jumped by 300% as publicly acknowledge by government functionaries then there is doubt if the level of funding and rehabilitations could cope with the enrolment figures up-surfed. Also there is serious doubt if teacher – students ratio could be maintained especially as recruitment of teachers has not been done in the last four years (2008-2011) in the State.

**(d) Public education policy:**

The public education campaign strategy of the Akwa Ibom State government pertaining child trafficking/child labour is quite commendable. For example, all the child labourers interviewed in the study agreed to being aware of the ban on child labour and the free and



compulsory primary and secondary school education, so also their parents. Moreover, child labourers parents 86.2% admitted to knowing the dangers of child labour.

What the foregoing data implies is that the public campaign against child labour is penetrating the public psyche. However, what is still questionable is the fact that parental attitude – that of engaging their children in child labour, is yet to change positively this questions the seemingly apparent success of public education policy of child labour.

### **Challenges of Child Labour Eradication in Akwa Ibom State**

From the analysis of data generated in the course of the study, it became obvious that one of the major challenges confronting child labour eradication in the state is lack of proper perception of child labour and it causes. A scrutiny of the various policies implemented by the government in Akwa Ibom State reveals that the state seems to explain the engagement of children in child labour as caused by non accessibility of schools especially to children of the poor and parental attitude.

This appears to explain why the government war against child labour is predicted on proscription of child labour, public education and opening up access to schools especially at primary and secondary schools level. There are no specific attempts to

address the fundamental cause of child labour – poverty - because the government does not (by its action or inaction) see the linkage between poverty and child labour. This has tremendous impact on the overall child labour situation in the state. This wrong perception is to a large extent, responsible for why the public is yet to really feel the impact of child labour eradication policies.

Another challenge facing child labour eradication in Akwa Ibom State is the attitude of parents and guardians. Even when government has taken up the task of educating parents and the public on the dangers of child labour, they are yet to demonstrate knowledge of having been educated on child Labour. This is so, as they still push their children to child labour.

Also, lack of government will to enforce the existing ban on street hawking by school aged children especially during school hours is also a major challenge to the eradication of child labour in the state. The child rights law was promulgated in 2008 and till date, no parent/guardian has been charged nor convicted on grounds of child labour. This is what is responsible for the high number of school aged children that are still plying their trade on the streets today.

### **Conclusion**

It is apparent from the study that the various policies implemented by the government of Akwa Ibom to

fight child labour is not achieving the desired impacts. These measures have not succeeded in taking the child labourers from the street. This is so because government efforts are concentrated on addressing symptoms of child labour while the fundamental cause - poverty - is not effectively addressed. Policies against child labour should not only target keeping children in school, but should attempt to address the socio-economic conditions that drive child labourers to work in the first instance.

Based on findings, it is observed that outright proscription of child labour cannot produce tangible result until poverty is addressed. It is also concluded that child labour could be effectively addressed if functionaries of government should demonstrate greater will and commitment to enforce government policies and laws across the state.

### **Recommendation**

It was observed in the course of the study that there is no central agency coordinating the implementation of the various policies of government on child labour eradication. Different agencies independently implement the various

policies. This creates lapses that impact negatively on the success of the policies. Hence, this study recommends that a central agency or committee be set up to coordinate government activities towards child labour eradication.

Based on findings, this study recommends also that serious attempt be made to fight poverty across the state. This could be done through identifying and empowering people who are operating below a set standard of living. These recommendations if taken seriously can reduce to barest minimum, the incidence of child labour in Akwa Ibom State.

This study also recommends that the State government should reemphasise vocational education since such kind of education can equip students with skills that can prepare them for their future. The impact of this kind of education will be far reaching as it is capable of free a large section of participants from poverty at least at the abject level. The State should also explore better and equitable ways of redistributing the commonwealth of the people as this will lessen poverty among the people across the State.

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