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19. J.F. Rippy *op. cit.* p. 211.
 20. M. Winkler Investment of U.S.A. in Latin America (Boston, 1928), pp. 30 & 57.
 21. D.C.M. Platt *op. cit.* p. 91.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
 23. J.F. Rippy *op. cit.* p. 23.

RASHEED OLANIYI

CHILD LABOUR AND NIGERIA'S INFORMAL ECONOMY SINCE THE 1990s

Abstract

From the early 1990s, the powerful forces represented by structural adjustment and the globalisation process have transformed the traditional conception of childhood in Nigeria. As the means of livelihood, which for many poor families, children became more visible than adults in the labour process to either supplement family income or as free independent entrepreneurs. Economic recession was compounded by political transition, which weakened government clout in providing essential social services and pushed children from school to the street. The presence of rural children trading in urban centres and on "fast lanes" on highways has reached alarming proportion. The scale of the informal sector of the economy became widened and witnessed an impressive growth. More children tried to make a living on the streets. The street children, while many working children became breadwinners, many adults, boys perpetually remained "children" due to the bleak prospect of earning a living. The work concluded by affirming that child labour is a drain on human capital and threatens economic development.

Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has raised the polemical question of why millions of children are missing out on their childhood. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has not yet elaborated that,

...the situation of most African children is a result of inadequate social conditions, internal and external conflicts, economic deprivation, exploitation, disability and that the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguard and care.

In the 1990s, there was a boom in child labor due to the combined political repression of military rule and neo-liberal economic reforms. These led to the greater expansion of the informal sector of the economy and plantation agriculture especially cocoa production for the global economy. In both the informal sector and cocoa plantations, there was unprecedented demand for the cheap labor of children. Children were bought from their poor parents in the rural areas and in the neighboring countries while some were kidnapped or enslaved under the guise of fostering. Under parlous economic conditions, the institution of social support system and child fostering collapsed. The expanding informal economy depended heavily on cheap labor of the marginalized social categories especially children who worked without social protection, labor laws, control over their income and who lacked negotiation skills.

Article 1 of the Child Right Convention (CRC) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 defines a child as a "...person under 18, unless national laws recognize the age of *maturity* earlier." From this definition, however, accurate statistics on children in the labour process becomes unreliable since those who work between the ages of 14 and 15 are unaccounted for. There are also children who have been working from the age of 5.

Child labour, defined as working for wages to supplement family income or to cater for the child himself or herself occur in different economic contexts including hawking, commercial sex work, domestic servant and auxiliary beggars amongst others. According to UNICEF, in Nigeria, "the working children most at risk include those in domestic service, who are at the mercy of unethical employers and beyond public view, and those working on the streets, mainly as hawkers, who are exposed to serious safety risks. Child beggars, some of whom are extremely young, face similar risks on the roads. Even more serious are the health risks facing child scavengers and head loaders, who, like the beggars, are among the poorest of the poor."¹

The main features of child labourers include:

- § start working when they are too young;
- § work between 12 and 16 hours a day;
- § work under great physical, social and psychological strain;
- § often work in dangerous and unhealthy conditions;

- § work for very little pay or no pay;
- § work at dull, repetitive tasks which stunt their physical, social and psychological development;
- § work in situations requiring responsibility beyond their years; and
- § work under threat of intimidation which inhibits their self-confidence and self-esteem.²

The survival of many families is anchored on the work done by children. In 1994, UNICEF estimated that 24 per cent (12million) of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Nigeria were working. According to ILO estimate, more than 73 million children were economic active in 1995, representing 13.2 per cent of all 10-14 years old globally. In Nigeria in 1995, the estimated percentage of economically active children between 10 and 14 years was 25.75.³ By 1997, ILO statistics indicated that 12 million children below the ages of 15 years were working.⁴ In 1998, the ILO estimated that 24.6 per cent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Nigeria were working. ILO statistics in 2000 indicated that there were 352 million economically active children aged between 5 and 17 years. About 60 per cent of them were less than 14 years old.

Africa south of the Sahara accounted for the highest proportion of working children for all age categories considered by ILO. In the region, almost one child in three aged 5-17 was economically active.⁵ A 2003 study carried out in Nigeria by the ILO and the Federal Office of Statistics discovered that at least 15million children were engaged in child labor in Nigeria. The National Human Rights Commission, Abuja, equally reported that 22 million Nigerian children under the age of fifteen years were in the workforce by the end of 2004.⁶ About 45 per cent of children hawking in Nigerian cities were products of child trafficking especially from rural areas, poor urban neighborhoods and neighboring countries.⁷ The forms of recruitment used by child traffickers include complete coercion through abduction and kidnapping; deception by promises of legitimate employment.⁸

Children have become the cheapest sources of labor.⁹ Across urban centers in Nigeria, streets are filled with working children who engage in commercial activities including hawking, begging, laundry services and other menial jobs. In 1996, the Child Welfare League estimated that 100 000

boys and girls were living and working on the streets of Lagos. In northern Nigeria, *Quranic* students (*Almajirai*), survive on the street by begging.

There existed a nexus between the deregulation of the labor market and social deregulation, which perpetuated the menace of child labor.¹⁰ Child labour became more prevalent as poor families experienced the "severity and frequency of negative income shocks." The economic downturn precipitated by the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) had devastating impact on social reproduction processes in which the customary capacities of the family to protect and socialize children have been eroded. It was within this context that the tradition of child fostering was exploited for the purpose of pushing children into the labor process or outright sale. Economic downturn was marked by 'domestic deregulation,' the break of family units "combined with the increasing fragility and destabilization of households which has been gathering pace and becoming more serious under the impact of the policies of liberalization through structural adjustment." In this way, child labour constituted manifestations of "household crisis."¹¹ Within the context of labour deregulation many parents lost the position of being family breadwinners, the protector as well as the cornerstone of the household.¹²

The trend of "domestic deregulation," twisted the conception of childhood due to grinding poverty and opportunity constraints that precipitated negative income shocks for many adults. It is astonishing to note the growing number of children working while the traditionally active working category (18-60 years) was either unemployed or underemployed. The social consequences of poverty produced paradoxical contexts by "pushing 'social age' both downwards (for many adults) and upwards of the 'biological,' for many children."¹³ Well before 18 years of age, many children assumed adult responsibilities such as "being breadwinners for their families, being married, looking after entire families.... children are given birth to other children, heading households, are enrolled in armies as soldiers..."¹⁴ On the contrary, poverty and bleak employment prospects induced many young people to prolong their childhood in terms of undertaking tasks and responsibilities required of them in their community. In Nigeria, many university graduates have remained perpetually 'children' being dependent and controlled due to lack of employment opportunities that could guarantee their autonomy and capacity to reproduce themselves. According to Sall,

Poverty, economic crises and political problems have led to both a de facto revision of the notions of age and childhood and adulthood, as well as the perceptions of childhoods and the self-perceptions of children. When defined in terms of social roles and responsibilities (e. g. responsibility for a family), which is how it is actually defined in most communities in Africa, many of those who would normally fall under the category of 'children' as defined by the CRC would be found performing the functions of adults.¹⁵

In this way, children influenced the economy and society because their labour had value.¹⁶ Children worked to guarantee the survival of their families. In this way, child labour could be viewed from the perspective of cost-benefit analysis.¹⁷ The factors that pushed them into the labour market included economic crisis, poverty, HIV/AIDS, social instability principally, conflicts; and cultural practices. Though children receive meagre income in the informal sector, they serve as major contributors to the family income.¹⁸ In many parts of northern Nigeria, a female child from the age of 8 was required to engage in money-making ventures such as hawking and or being employed as domestic servants in order to assist the family in financing the procurement of customary marriage items. Another category of children entered into the labour process on their own volition due to lack of alternative mode of survival. They acted as independent entrepreneurs.

This work argues that four fundamental strands characterized the supply of children into the labour process:

- § child labour occurs when families are credit-constrained. Poor parents without access to credit markets turn to domestic assets, their children. In this scenario, parents "borrow" from the future by putting their children to work rather than investing in human capital that will make their children more productive in the future;
- § economic crisis and its effect on income volatility can affect household decision making through a number of channels. For families that are credit-constrained or lack access to employment, children may be withdrawn from school and put to work in order to cope with the negative effects of economic downturn. To the extent that it is used to stabilize income, child labour will be

correlated with the severity and frequency of negative income shocks;¹⁹

- § scourge of HIV/AIDS and conflicts left many children as orphans thereby pushing them into the labor process; and
- § Cultural practices perpetuate child labour

The work further discussed the patterns of child labor; HIV/AIDS and child labour; orphanages, Child Care Centers and child labor; children in sex work; child labor in agriculture, and child scavengers.

Most impoverished parents in the rural and peri-urban communities often depended on the income accruing from the labour of their children who performed arduous tasks in the urban centers. In 1996, there was an estimated population of 67.1 million people out of the population of 102.3 million in Nigeria, compared to 18.4 million poor people in 1980. Indeed, during the sixteen year period, 1980-1996, the proportion of the core poor, increased five fold, rising from 6.2 per cent in 1980 to 29.3 per cent in 1996. About 30 million people were core poor in 1996, compared to 4 million in 1980.²⁰ Rural poverty, which increased by 22 per cent between 1980 and 1985, slightly plummeted during the period 1985-1992, but soared between 1992 and 1996. In 1980, the poverty level was 29.3 per cent, in 1985 it increased to 51.4 per cent and in 1992, it reduced to 46.1 per cent. By 1996, the gain of the previous period was squared and rural population in poverty increased to 69.8 per cent.²¹ Urban poverty rose between 1980 and 1985, remained pervasive between 1985 and 1992 and soared between 1992 and 1996, the figures were 17.6 per cent in 1980, 37.8 per cent in 1985, 37.5 per cent in 1992 and 55.2 per cent in 1996.²² Economic contraction in the formal sector resulted in massive loss of jobs. At the end of the 1990s, Nigeria had the 15th lowest purchasing power in the world; per capital income of less than \$1; 10 per cent inflation rate was 44th highest in the world; and 21st highest foreign debtor.²³ Economic crises was characterized by sluggish growth, interest rate instability and diminishing capacity utilization and unbridled rise in the unsold inventory among manufacturing firms. From 60 Kobo per litre in 1980 for both private and commercial vehicles fuel price increased to N20.00 in 1999.²⁴

According to the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN), in 2003, of the 2,500 members of MAN, only 10 per cent operated at a sustainable level; 30 per cent were dead and shut down; 60 per cent of

those still operating were collapsing to some degrees. Industrial capacity utilization plummeted to 48.8 per cent by 2003. This era also recorded infrastructural degradation, appalling road network, poor water supply as well as difficult access to investment capacity. Towards the end of 2004, the Ministry of Finance estimated that poverty level in Nigeria had reached 70 per cent stressing than an average growth rate of 3.5 per cent per year of the Country's GDP was incapable of stemming the trend. Nigeria ranked 152nd out of 175 countries on the UN Human Development Index.²⁵

Indeed, the supply of child labour was predicated by the living standards of a family, and children were sent to work in order to meet the subsistence needs of the family.²⁶ Poor families added children to the family labor force to generate income to meet their subsistence and school fees. Parents who were beneficiaries of the economic activities of their children had little or no impulse to discourage them from dropping out of school and enter the labour process.²⁷ In the 1990s, the contraction in the formal sector of the economy fuelled the dramatic expansion of informal economy characterized by micro-enterprises, hawking, and street trading. In most of urban centers in Nigeria, however, government outlawed hawking and street trading in which police patrol and high-handedness has driven child trafficking and child labor underground. Trafficked children worked under economic spheres without labor legislation and social protection.

Indeed, the turbulent transformation in the economy resulted in children playing roles traditionally considered the exclusive domain of adults. The concept of labour force had been used to define a set of people or citizens of a country who were willing and able to make available, at any given point in time, their efforts for gainful employment.²⁸ The population is often classified into two major categories: the dependants consisting of young (aged 0 to 14 years) and the old (aged 60 and above) and the economically active population- persons between 15 and 60 years. This classification has remained basically theoretical. Emerging evidence indicates that a high proportion of people below the age of 15 years are actively engaged in the labour process.²⁹

Indeed, pushing more household members into the labour process has become a major survival strategy of the poor in both the rural and urban centers in Nigeria. Many children were withdrawn from school only to participate in petty trading and hawking for the survival of the family. Young girls were pushed into hawking (*tala* in Hausa) to make enough money to fulfill their marriage rites of providing household items (*kayan*

daki and *kayan jere* in Hausa). Some children hawked to pay school fees or other expenses while others hawked to boost their parents personal income. Some of these children drifted into armed robbery and brigandage through the consumption of intoxicants- robbing, maiming and killing people out of desperation.³⁰ In Nigeria, Prison statistics of people under 16 years were as follows: 147 in 1989; 473 in 1990; 204 in 1991; and 209 in 1993. People between ages 16-20 years were: 7,084 in 1989; 12,617 in 1990; 5,344 in 1991; 7,854 in 1992; and 3,996 in 1993.³¹

The luxury axiom theory asserts that households send their children to work especially when under the pressure of poverty. Many households whose adult incomes diminished cannot afford to keep children out of productive activity. When adult incomes increase, households withdraw their children from the labour process. This suggests that the pressure of poverty coerced the parents to place their children into the labor process.³² Equally, "the higher the father's wage, the lower the probability of the child participating in the labor force."³³ Indeed, "Credit-constrained parents make a transition out of the child labor equilibrium only after the wage of unskilled adults rises above the subsistence level."³⁴

Child labor was equally a by-product of the collapse in the public education system. The roll-back of the state in funding education threw many children out of school. By the end of the 1990s, the Federal Ministry of Education reported that 12 million Nigerian children were drop-outs.³⁵ Many of them became victims of trafficking. Like commodities children and young women were bought and sold through subterranean network of organized syndicates to the tune of N1 billion per year. Gross primary school enrollment declined in Nigeria from approximately 86.2 per cent in 1993 to 70.3 per cent in 1996. Teacher Pupil Ratio in Primary schools: 1:36 in 1990; 1:37 in 1991; 1:39 in 1992; 1:27 in 1993; and 1:37 in 1994.³⁶ In post Primary schools: 1:21 in 1990; 1:22 in 1991; 1:25 in 1992; 1:27 in 1993; and 1:29 in 1994. In many parts of northern Nigeria, girls are often withdrawn from school for the purpose of early marriages and commercial activities such as hawking and street vending.³⁷

Under the Basic Primary Education (BPE) scheme, states and local governments passed laws for compulsory education which were not enforced. The situation has exacerbated in the South-west where states hitherto offered free education now charge fees which many parents faced with diminishing purchasing power, find difficult to pay. Among females aged 15-24 who have left school 29 per cent of them dropped out because

they could not pay school fees. In 1998, it was indicated that in Lagos State, the annual average cost borne by families to send their children to school was N16,500 for public schools in urban centres; N9,250 for rural public schools; N43,200 for private urban schools and N28,000 for private rural schools. The number of children out of school increased: 45 per cent for female between the ages of 6-10 years; and 45 per cent for male of the same age. For the 10-15 years categories: it was 35 per cent for female and 31 per cent for male.³⁸ Teacher Pupil Ratio in Primary schools: 1:36 in 1990; 1:37 in 1991; 1:39 in 1992; 1:27 in 1993; and 1:37 in 1994.³⁹ In post Primary schools: 1:21 in 1990; 1:22 in 1991; 1:25 in 1992; 1:27 in 1993; and 1:29 in 1994.

Primary Education in Nigeria: A Fact File, c. 2000

No. of Pupils	20,900,451
No. of Teachers	448,414
No. of Classrooms	332,408
No. of Classrooms in Good Conditions	140,134
No. of Classrooms in Bad Conditions	192,274
Annual Teachers Wage Bill	N100million

Source: *Crystal Magazine*, December, 2000, p. 18.

As the above chart indicates, infrastructure deteriorated in public schools and teachers are poorly motivated contributing to poor and irregular attendance among children. Children were pushed out of school into the labour market. In many cases, the lack of quality education characterized by overcrowding, apathetic teachers and dilapidating infrastructure in public schools prompted parents who could not afford expensive private schools to enter their children in more profitable ventures. In search of financial relief from the avalanche of economic and social distress, some parents began to depend on the labor of their children. Indeed, the greater majority of child hawkers conditioned by the privation of the street veered into crime and sex work to supplement what they make from hawking.

About one per cent of the GDP was spent on funding education. A large chunk of this meager amount often went to private pockets. The assessment and collection of Education Tax was marked by massive fraud

by the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), which mismanaged over N50 billion through fraudulent practices.⁴⁰ In Kogi State, the Commissioner for Education Chief James Akor and three other Principal officers of the Ministry of Education were indicted for embezzling N45 million out of the N136 million meant for the bursary grants to students.⁴¹ In March 2005, the corrupt practices connected with the budgetary allocation of the Ministry of Education led to the sacking of the Minister of Education, Prof. Fabian Osuji and the removal of the Senate President Adolphus Wabara. The fraud threatened the education opportunities of the Nigerian children and compromised them for child labor.

Lack of educational, vocational and economic opportunities for the youth in the rural areas made children vulnerable in the labor process, especially in the informal sector of the economy. The erosion of living standards gave impetus to many households to seek additional income by engaging in multiple mode of livelihood in the informal sector.⁴² The children out of school were readily employed by their market women mothers as additional workforce to generate income through hawking that supplement their sales in the competitive informal sector. Children joined their parents in petty-trading and city street hawking; participation in agricultural production, cattle grazing, marketing of fresh produce, housing construction and in the transport sector.⁴³ Nevertheless, some parents often withdrew their children from labour process as soon as they could sustain the family.

In Oyo State, children trafficked from rural areas and surrounding states were put "on hire" in Ibadan.⁴⁴ Such children were put up for recruitment by their parents or guardians, who contract them out for wages between N2,000.00 and N3,000.00 per year. An agreed fee was paid in advance to the parents or guardians, on the agreement that the amount would be deducted from the wages paid to the child over a period of time. In Ibadan, they were deployed to clients who used them as domestic servants or traders. Parents often put pressure on the trafficked children to remain on the job even though they were ignorant of the nature of the work children carried out or the social conditions under which they worked. In the tobacco growing community of Elewure in Kajola Local Government of Oyo State, women and children of school age most of them trafficked were engaged in barns picking tobacco leaves for curing. They were offered a pittance of N100.00 per day for the women and less for the children who were denied education.

Child Labour in the Informal Sector

In Nigeria, child labour largely occurs in the informal sector where labour laws are not often enforced. Despite the growing unemployment for highly qualified adults, there was high demand for cheap and submissive child labour in the informal sector predominantly for street hawking, hackney business (conductorship), scavenging and in cocoa plantations producing for the global market. These children often endured long hours of work, poor remuneration, health hazards and a variety of abuses. Employers exploited the docility of children knowing fully well that they could not form unions to alter harrowing labor conditions.

The British Anthropologist Keith Hart first used the concept of informal economy in Africa in 1973. The ILO popularized the term in the 1970s. The informal sector is characterized by 'its ease entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small scale of operations, labor intensive and adapted technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system and unregulated and competitive markets.'⁴⁵

In the 1980s, the capacity of the fiscally weakened state to control and oversee the labour process declined. This ushered in the diversification of remunerative occupations in order to reproduce and survive excruciating crisis.⁴⁶ The urban employment has changed dramatically from employment in the public sector to self-employment or wage work in the unregistered economy.⁴⁷ Under the parlous state of the economy spurred by SAP, an estimated 70 per cent of the urban working population depends on the informal sector of the economy where they simultaneously seek multiple modes of livelihoods.⁴⁸ With the economic crisis, working condition in the informal sector deteriorated dramatically.⁴⁹ Parents withdrew their children from school in order to join them in petty-trading and roadside vending.⁵⁰

Since the middle of the 1980s, regular wages plummeted in the formal sector, to the extent that wage income no longer sufficient for family survival.⁵¹ Indeed, many workers in the rural areas combined wage earning in the formal sector with farming while workers in the urban centers combined penny capitalism (*kabukabu*-unregistered taxi services and petty trading) with formal employment. With the diminishing real wages and banality of unemployment among men, women's earnings and those of the children assumed the main source of livelihood for many households. Poverty among urban dwellers manifested in various dimensions especially lower school attendance and spiraling incidence of child labour.⁵²

CBN/ NISER (2001) defined the informal sector of the economy as "that which operates without binding official regulations (but it may or may not regulate itself internally) as well as one which operates under official regulations that do not compel rendition of official returns on its operations or production process."⁵³ The informal sector consists of enterprises which renders no account to any statutory bodies. Such enterprises compose of heterogeneous set of economic activities including petty trading, personal services, informal construction, transport, money lending, manufacturing and repairs.⁵⁴ The informal sector lie largely "outside national accounting, labor legislation, and social protection," typically performed in the contexts of self employment, family businesses, and insecure wage work.⁵⁵ In 1998, the aggregate contribution of the informal sector to the GDP was 7.2 per cent (excluding agriculture), and 37.8 per cent (including agriculture). During the same period, the contributions of the informal manufacturing sector to the GDP was only 4.7 per cent in 1998.⁵⁶ CBN/FOS/NISER concludes that "in view of the large number of enterprises and workers involved in the non-agricultural informal sector activities, the contribution of just 7.2 per cent to the GDP is very low and underscores the low productivity and this is prevalent in the sector."⁵⁷

The total estimated number of informal enterprises in Nigeria amounted to 8,604,048. Wholesales and Retails sector comprised 49.0 per cent while the informal manufacturing had 30.1 per cent. Other informal economic activities constituted a small proportion with financial intermediation at the rear with 0.1 per cent.⁵⁸ The age and sex distribution of persons in informal sector in Nigeria indicated that children aged 0-14 years accounted for about 46.0 per cent for males and 40.0 per cent for females. The age group 60 and above accounted for less than 10.0 per cent for both sexes.⁵⁹

The informal sector is highly labor intensive and was dominated by small-size operators in terms of number of people employed.⁶⁰ In the informal manufacturing enterprises, the average capital outlay was low at N765, 195 per enterprise.⁶¹ The informal non-manufacturing enterprises offered employment to 8, 967,411 persons with the largest proportion in Wholesales and Retails Trade. The total wages and salaries paid to non-manufacturing workers for the period was N18,039.09 million. Wholesales and Retails Trade workers got the lion share (70.2 per cent) of the total amount. The average amount of wages and salaries received by a worker

whether paid or unpaid was N2,011.63 per year. Only a marginal proportion of the informal sector enterprises belonged to union/associations; had binding official regulations and internal regulations. In Nigeria, the unregulatory mode and lack of labor legislations made it difficult for the children in the labor process to organize some of labor union.⁶² Since the SAP era, the informal sector has been considered as the driving force of the economy. However, it is also characterized by low income mainly utilized by the owners of the enterprises without adequate provision for capital accumulation needed to strengthen and expand the enterprises.⁶³ Operations in the informal are highly labour intensive and labour productivity very low.

Patterns of Child Labour.

Children were pushed into the labour process as they experienced extreme deprivations from poverty, war and HIV/AIDS conditions that denied children a childhood. The lucrative nature of child labour was adumbrated by Mrs. Victoria Abodunrin, a Beninoise woman married to a Nigerian who had served as a domestic servant and who became a child trafficker,

We were about 20 that came to Lagos at that time (early 1980s) and I was given to this woman who took me to her house in Gbagada. ... When I went home (Benin Republic) after a year... the joy of my parents knew no bounds when I gave them N6,000 I earned for a whole year. Each time I went home, I would come with three or four children but later the demands were so high that If I had 50 children I won't meet up.⁶⁴

According to her, the business of child trafficking fetched her N70,000 per month. A prospective client would purchase a form at N2,000.00. Then the client would pay transport fee of between N6,000.00 and N7, 500.00 to bring the maid, then wait for the time 'supply' would arrive.⁶⁵ "For those who wanted to engage the maid without signing an undertaking of either sending her to school or allowing her to engage in any vocational training, such clients pay as much as N6,000.00 per month while those who wanted to train the maid pay between N3,000.00 and N3,500.00. The client pays directly to the (trafficker) who sends the money to the parents of the maid

at the end of the year.⁶⁶ The trafficker deducted 20 per cent as her service charge. The maids are often instructed not to give their real names to the family they are living with for security reasons and to prevent the attention of the police.

Mrs. Abodunrin argued that,

There is nothing illegal or immoral about this business (child labour), you have to see it as a social service. If a couple work in Lagos Island and they need somebody who is hungry somewhere to assist them in looking after their children, is that forced labour? Why are many Nigerians going to America to go and wash toilets and nobody legislates to stop them from doing so? We know that the dirtiest jobs in London are being done by Nigerians... If somebody has eight children, doesn't have a means of feeding them and there is no government ready to assist and that person sees somebody who wants to take two or three away, how would you convince such fellow that he should just watch the children die of hunger?⁶⁷

In 1990, Fulani pastoralists were involved in the clandestine buying of children between the ages of seven and eleven years in Enugu.⁶⁸ The children were engaged in cattle rearing. Hausa traders bought children at the rates of as low as ₦100,000.00 and as high as ₦1 million. By December 1991, the increasing menace of trafficking came to public limelight when 26 children of Imo State origin were deported from Libreville, Gabon. In February 1992, 250 children of Rivers State origin were deported from Gabon. In May 1995, the deportation of 330 children from Gabon who were kept in a camp in Calabar further threw the case of child trafficking into national consciousness.

Children from poor families in Saki in Oyo State and Ilorin Kwara State were trafficked to Guinea, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire to work as hawkers and domestic servants. Children from Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara were also trafficked to Benin Republic, Togo, Mali through Dole Kaina and Bagudo borders of Kebbi State.⁶⁹ Children from Borno and Yobe were trafficked to Chad and Cameroon through Baga and Doron Baga borders of Borno State, which linked with Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

In 2003, the Nigerian police estimated that between 6,000 and 15,000 children trafficked from Benin Republic were used mainly in the cocoa belt and granite quarries of Western Nigeria. The Nigerian police carried out several raids and released children working in the stone quarries and returned them to Benin Republic.⁷⁰ Since 1991 child trafficking continued to flourish supplying children in slave colonies at granite quarries. The slave colonies were located in Ogun, Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. Children were trafficked to Nigeria in sacks which were often declared as containing foodstuffs at the border.

The child slave owners had over 250 illegal routes for smuggling children into Nigeria from Benin Republic. The child slaves aged between four to thirteen years lived and worked in appalling conditions. They were often fed once a day, lived and slept completely exposed to nature since they resided in the bush and had no shelter. The children who earned ₦50.00 (\$0.38) a week, each worked 12-16 hours, crushing enough gravel to generate ₦35,000 (\$269). Every evening lorries delivered the gravel to construction sites in Western Nigeria. About 194 of the children were liberated by the Nigerian police from the various work sites in Ogun State and deported to Benin Republic. The Nigerian immigration Service confirmed that in March 1994, 51 prospective child slaves were liberated in Akwa Ibom state before they could be trafficked abroad. Another set of 77 children were freed between March and July; 236 others among them 38 Beninoise and 23 Togolese were rescued within the first two months of 1997.⁷¹

Despite police surveillance and patrol, trafficking in Beninoise children continued unabated in Nigeria. One Iyabo Olasope was arrested by the police at Ojuwoye market in Mushin Lagos with twelve Sabe Beninoise children used for child labour. According to her,

I didn't steal them neither did I kidnap any of them. They were brought to me by somebody (trafficker) to learn trade. And on each of them I paid between ₦500.00 and ₦600.00 for their services even though they're trainees. I am into direct marketing of some confectioneries, pepper, tomatoes and seasonings. And they were learning how to do this business. Beninoise children are easier to keep than Nigerian ones who are fond of unruly behaviours particularly stealing.⁷²

The Sabe children were given Yoruba names by their employer and considered her as their "biological" mother. Contrary to her claims, the stereotypes that Benin children are trustworthy, trafficked children particularly from neighbouring countries were often coerced into submission. Most of the trafficked children often became stranded and trapped and therefore had to rely on their traffickers and employers. A children's market or "child labour camp" was tracked down in a five storey building at Ojuelegba, Lagos, where residents used to go and chose the children they needed for domestic work. In April 1996, this illegal market was discovered full of malnourished children, aged between seven and seventeen years old, waiting for buyers or hirers. Most of the children were employed as house-helpers, shop assistants, car washers, bus conductors and scavengers collecting scraps from refuse or dump sites.⁷³

According to traffickers, girls from Benin and Togo were particularly in high demand in Lagos. More than thirty children crossed the Benin-Nigeria border every other month while twenty children were trafficked monthly through the Calabar, Sokoto and Maiduguri borders. Some aged between eight and fifteen years were bought from families for the equivalent of \$30.⁷⁴ In April 1996, a trafficker was arrested in Lagos with ten Benin girls aged between ten and twelve. Two suspected human traffickers were arrested by the police in Ogun State while attempting to ferry twenty-four teenagers across the border to Cotonou in Benin Republic. They included eight males and sixteen females in a chartered commercial bus at Owode Egbado a border town of Ogun State. They were between the ages of nine and twenty. Traffickers were returning them to their parents at Cotonou for the Christmas break after serving as house-helpers in Nigeria.⁷⁵

The clampdown on the traffickers drove the trade underground. Parents then began to supply the children directly to the traffickers who merely negotiated jobs for them. The profit accruing to the traffickers has plummeted in this way. For example, instead of making ₦10,000.00 profit per child, traffickers began to earn ₦4,500.00. Indeed, cultural philanthropy often ended in endemic exploitation as guardians turned the mystery of the poor children to their own fortune. Hidden from the sight of the law, these children were often confined to the four walls of the home; and denied western education, basic healthcare, adequate nutrition, leisure time and security.⁷⁶

The children provided cheap labor and were condemned to appalling conditions. They were treated like slaves and often ended up as domestic

servants. The Lagos middle class has a bountiful supply of houseboys and girls brought from villages across the country by "helpful aunts and uncles" who pocketed the cash and disappear. But the complicity of the parents is obvious. According to a respondent,

Their parents are involved. They say to the girls, 'why don't you go with this man and work. We have no money, we have nothing to eat. You can send us money.' And so the girls go.⁷⁷

In March 2005, the menace of child trafficking further came to limelight when police in Amukoko, Lagos, intercepted 52 children from Mokwa town in Niger state. The prime suspect, Fatima Mohammed Baba confessed to the police that the kids were brought to Lagos with the consent of their parents to be hired out as domestic servants or engage in hawking groundnuts and menial jobs.⁷⁸ Indeed, child trafficking has plagued many communities in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. The migration for the child laborers often begin from Yakurr, Bekwara and Abi in Cross River State, to Ondo, Ogun, Osun and Lagos States. In Akwa Ibom, migration begins for local government councils to PortHarcourt, River State and Lagos. The victims were predominantly young children between the ages of eight and fifteen recruited to work in the cocoa plantations in many parts of western Nigeria. The girls serve as house helps and their employers and agents exploited most of them sexually. Some returned mentally derailed, others return with pregnancy while some of the boys engaged in armed robbery.⁷⁹

HIV/AIDS and Child Labour

Globally, orphans of HIV/AIDS have increased exponentially to 15million. Children experienced the pernicious outcome of HIV/AIDS even before they are orphaned. The death of a parent pervades all aspects of a child's life from emotional well-being to physical security, mental development and overall health.⁸⁰ HIV/AIDS weakened the capacity of adults to earn income and provide for children, thereby making them poorer. Indeed, HIV/AIDS diminish labor reproduction process.⁸¹ Small farming households or low-wage earning households experienced pressure of adult morbidity on farm production due to the effect of HIV/AIDS.⁸² According to Love, "the net result is that the burden of the costs of AIDS falls primarily

upon families of those infected, generating at the micro level a downward spiral of decreased productivity, diminished income, reduced nutritional levels, increased proneness to opportunistic disease, eventual death of one or more adults and the likely collapse and break-up of the household. The latter outcome in turn puts pressure on other households within the extended family as increasing numbers of orphans and other dependents have to be accommodated, often accompanied by significant gender implications for widows and orphaned daughters... Poor peasants households thus break up and middle peasantries increasingly impoverished.⁸³ Tile observes that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS scourge produces 'family violence.' It is characterized by neglect and inability of the breadwinner to provide basic needs and train the children.⁸⁴ HIV/AIDS leads to financial losses and debt due to prolonged illness and treatment that drain all family income and resources.⁸⁵ In this scenario, HIV/AIDS perpetuate conflicts within the family and often led to single parenthood.

Many children whose families were affected by HIV/AIDS, especially girls were forced to drop out of school in order to work or provide care for the rest of the family. They entered into the labor process from a vulnerable position without skill and power to negotiate. HIV/AIDS not only kill adults, but destroys the protective network for children. Many teachers, health workers and other adults on whom children depend on are dying.⁸⁶

The scourge of HIV/AIDS orphans in some parts of Benue State aptly explains this scenario.⁸⁷ Otukpo local government area of Benue state was devastated by the menace of HIV/AIDS, which produced about 3000 Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). The magnitude of the epidemic overwhelmed the resources of the local government, which had little capacity to care for the growing OVC population in the area.⁸⁸ Many children whose parents died of the HIV/AIDS were left behind in the care of other children, poor people or people who are pretty older than their deceased parents without capacity to generate substantial income for their livelihood. Until 2002, Otukpo orphans and vulnerable children got reprieve from a USAID programme that provided micro-credit for relations taken care of the OVCs. When the programme folded up, the care of the OVCs was partly taken over by some Community Based Organisations especially the Ohioa Foundation for Development, OFUD in partnership with Compassion and Love Ministries, CALM based in London.⁸⁹

Many of the OVCs were pushed into the child labour market to cater for themselves and their younger ones. The story of Clement Odisi from Alan Akpa in Otukpo local government provided an empirical case. In 1999, he became the head of the family prematurely and began to play the role of adults to provide for the sustenance of himself and seven brothers who became orphans after their parents died of HIV/AIDS. He dropped out of school to make a living from a cassava and corn-grating machine which was donated to the family by seven students of George Washington University, USA through the support of Ohioa Foundation. The grating machine serves over 5000 people in Alan Akpa community, which allowed Odisi to earn about ₦400.00 on a good market day. However, much of the grinding was carried out on credit and his customers often remitted the money on weekly market days. Besides the prohibitive cost of the maintaining the machine, Odisi spends about ₦300.00 for the upkeep of the family.⁹⁰ In a related case, Ladi Ibrahim, a 70 year old grandmother in Otukpo town took care of her 14 grandchildren aged between 5 and 21 whose parents died of HIV/AIDS related illness.⁹¹ Her meager income from retail business of selling sachet 'pure' water could cater for the children making them to stay out of school for most part of the school session.

According to the 2004 UNDP Nigerian National Human Development report, Nigeria has over one million HIV/AIDS orphans.⁹² *The Brink 2000* estimated that Nigeria had an estimated 4.3 million orphans produced from accidents; violent ethnic, communal and religious conflicts; HIV/AIDS and other contagious diseases.⁹³

In Benue state, the precarious condition of OVCs was aggravated by armed conflicts and excruciating poverty. In Zaki-Biam, Benue State the trauma of the carnage caused by the military invasion of October 23rd, 2001 produced many orphans and displaced children. Many of the children became destitutes living at refugee centers. They could neither go to school nor engage in learning artisanship skills.⁹⁴ Social instability arising from sporadic ethnic and communal conflicts further pushed many children into the labor process. For example, the children survivors of the carnage in Zaki-Biam, Benue State during the military invasion of the town on October 23rd, 2001 were traumatized. Many of the children became orphans due to the military attack. The children who became refugees experienced all sorts of abuses in order to survive.⁹⁵

Orphanages, Child Care Centers and Child Labour

Rather than being safety nets and shelter for vulnerable children, orphanages and childcare centers became transformed into huge industry specifically for surreptitious child trafficking, child labour, child-making factory and illegal adoption of children as well as child rituals. The collapse of government funding for the Orphanages and Child Care Centers gave rise to privately owned ones that further abused the rights of the child using their vulnerable positions. Government orphanages remained highly inorganic with dilapidating facilities. Despite the Child Rights Acts, comprehensive laws regulating the operation of orphanages and child care centers remained under-developed. This gave ample prospect for entrepreneurs to set up orphanages and child care centers without proper approval from government. In 2001, one Mrs. Bisi Dan Musa (also known as Bisket) was arrested in Lagos by the police for child trafficking and illegal operation of a Child Care Centre. She allegedly kidnapped 15 children who were found in a bus that brought them to Lagos from Igbaja town in Kwara State. In Katsina State, the orphanage became crowded with old and untrained women employed as staff. Many of the children engaged in begging and the growing-up females had been in and out of marriages. In Okota Lagos, government uncovered a notorious orphanage, Good Shepherd Orphanage established by Pastor Gift John (also known as 'Woman of God') in 2002.⁹⁶ It was discovered that the orphanage veered off its track and began camping pregnant teenage girls on condition that they give their babies 'to government for people to adopt.' Teenage mothers were offered between ₦40,000.00 and ₦70,000.00 for surrendering their babies 'to the government for adoption.' She allegedly operated a syndicate that recruited pregnant teenagers and who sold the babies to women in need of a child through 'arranged pregnancies.' Some of the pregnant teenagers went to the orphanage themselves or were brought by their parents. When the government swooped on the orphanage, 18 babies and six pregnant teenagers were rescued. She operated illegal maternity with various medical tools including syringes, maternity beds, medical scissors, surgical equipment and drips. In addition, she operated a sacred room for occult practices.

There was a growing trend of hiring children for begging on the streets. The streets of Lagos and other major cities in Nigeria became infested with kid-beggars who helped adults to meander through streets

and vehicles. Indeed, lending out children to beggars became pervasive.⁹⁷ Day-Care centers added a new twist to their business of child fostering. Some of the children that acted as auxiliary beggars were actually those of some civil servants and working mothers who took their children to day-care centers from where they were often hired out for alms begging.⁹⁸ In order to prick the conscience of alms givers, some beggars hired babies from Nannies and Day Care Centers. In Lagos, with a token of ₦500.00, the owner of Day Care Centers "rented out" children for at least four hours to women who disguised as beggars in the streets.⁹⁹ In this process, what was referred to in local parlance as "jet age begging" using children to solicit for emerged. Such children were "displayed", carried by women who often hired them to attract public sympathy and financial assistance.¹⁰⁰ Con-men and child traffickers transformed street begging in Nigeria into a lucrative venture. Young children and teenagers were co-opted into street begging by the old professional beggars who lured them with fabulous stories of the money spinning advantages of street begging.¹⁰¹ Most of the auxiliary beggars are below age of ten without any hope of going to school or learning a skill. They were largely recruited from rural areas through women traffickers. They remitted the money earned to the trafficking agents who in turn presented parts thereof to the parents in the rural areas having deducted their fees. The auxiliary beggars made a living from escorting elderly blind men and women and other destitute.¹⁰² In major metropolis, women beggars were found with twins begging for alms to enable them take care of them as their husbands had abandoned them due to harsh economic condition or who claimed they were fulfilling local custom of begging for alms on behalf of twin children.

Child Scavengers

Scavenging became a way of life in major cities across Nigeria. Curiously, there was competition among scavengers collecting scraps from refuse dumps that littered urban centres with the collapse of urban governance. Despite the hazards involved, child scavengers competed with unemployed youths at the refuse dumps. Scavenging became a new form of "self-employment" to keep "body and soul" together.¹⁰³ Child scavengers otherwise called "*kombis*" earned between ₦3,500.00 and ₦4,000.00 per week. In many urban centers child scavengers are seen carrying sacks and

sticks, searching through the heaps of refuse for scraps of iron, bottles, motor spare parts, plastics, rubber, tins, leathers, polythene products and so on. Some of the scraps were often recycled and used as industrial raw materials.

Children in Sex work

Teenage pregnancies became rampant in all villages and towns in Nigeria.¹⁰⁴ Traffickers often engaged trafficked girls in the illicit baby-making factories. In Enugu, Onitsha and Owerri, syndicates hoarded trafficked girls for baby-making purposes. At Abakpa Nike on the outskirts of Enugu, thirteen girls mainly teenagers at different stages of pregnancy were found by the police in a small, dark, poorly ventilated make-shift clinic.¹⁰⁵ In Abia State, 50 pregnant girls mostly teenagers were discovered by the police at the All Saints Hospital, Tenant Road, Aba. The hospital had served as a center for illegal abortion and sale of day old babies. Female babies attracted between ₦10,000.00 and ₦20,000.00 for boys. The proprietor of the hospital apparently profited from the pregnant teenagers who were recruited to seek refuge in the hospital to hide their condition from parental indignation and public scorn.¹⁰⁶

In 1995, police discovered a hideout for a sex syndicate called *Oju Ina* sandwiched between Oke-Arin/Idumagbo and Enu Owa in Lagos where teenage girls between the ages of eleven and eighteen were camped for sex-work.¹⁰⁷ Some of them were either kidnapped or abducted and were placed under the custody of some middle-aged women, who groomed them to patronise men sexually. In Kaduna, child prostitution abounded in drinking joints and dancing halls. In Kano, trafficked children aged between eight and ten were recruited yearly from neighboring countries such as Niger, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon and Sierra-Leone and neighboring states like Kogi, Plateau, Katsina, Kaduna and Bauchi states in Nigeria for sex and domestic work.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion highlighted the growing value of children in the household as the income of the adults plummeted. Children however, seldom have control over their own income since it was

largely meant for family survival or to support their own education. Child labour perpetuates poverty and increasingly leads to vicious circle of social exclusion as well as discrimination. The grinding poverty coupled with unemployment, job loses and low income made the scourge of child labour to flourish. Social displacements arising from ethnic conflicts and civil disturbances gave added boost to child labour. The weak institutional and law enforcement mechanism characterised by poor supervision and enforcement of labour laws in the informal sector have inevitably placed children at a great disadvantage. Child labour in Nigeria has prevented several children from realizing their human potential through education and skill. According to the ILO, "the long-term solution (to child labour) lies in sustained economic growth leading to social progress, in particular poverty alleviation and universal education."¹¹ The revival of social support schemes and fostering practices would no doubt help to mitigate the problems of child labour in Africa's most populous nation.

Many state governments have tried to wean children from labour to education by legislating against child hawking and begging and making education compulsory. However, this policy cannot be sustained without proper restructuring of the economy in such a way that it guarantees employment and job security for adults/ parents. In many instances, children were picked from the streets and kept in government established schools or vocational training centers. This did not halt the flood of children into street or minimize child labour practices. Since 1985, this problem has made the efforts by the Kano State government to eradicate the *Almajiri* problem a mirage. This chapter further suggests that child labourers in Nigeria should embrace the challenge of the Association of Working Children and Youth (AWCY) by forming labour unions that protects their interests and serve as medium of negotiation with employers and government.

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