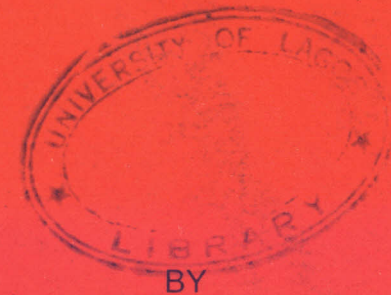


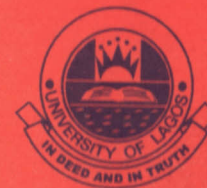
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**CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR IN NIGERIA:  
CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATION**



**SARAH B. A. OLOKO**

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An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of  
Lagos on Wednesday, 16th April, 2003

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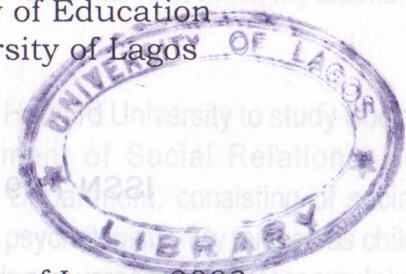
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## CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR IN NIGERIA: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATION

### GENESIS OF INTEREST IN CHILD-RELATED ISSUES INCLUDING CHILD LABOUR

Over the years, people have asked me how I became involved with children's issues. My interest in carrying out research on child related issues began in 1962 when I had the good fortune of being selected as a research assistant in a Child Socialization Project located in Oje, Ibadan. The research project was headed by distinguished anthropologists and child development specialists: Prof. John W. Whiting and Prof. Beatrice B. Whiting of Harvard University who had as collaborators, Prof. Robert Levine and Dr. Barbara Lloyd. My pleasant assignment was to observe and record behaviour of selected children in specific households in Oje. I very much enjoyed the task and was assessed as a natural social scientist by these distinguished scientists I worked for, whose names were previously mentioned. They encouraged me to consider pursuing postgraduate studies in Social Anthropology. The choice between Social Anthropology and English Literature which I was studying then at the undergraduate level was not an easy one in view of my passion for the latter and the flair for it which my teachers credited me with.

Subsequently, I was admitted at Harvard University to study Social Anthropology in the Department of Social Relations, an interdisciplinary Social Science Department, consisting of social anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists. My minor was child development and apart from taking courses from Professors John W. Whiting and Beatrice B. Whiting, I had the singular privilege of



being taught by famous scholars such as Professors Jerome Kagan, Jerome Bruner, David McLelland, and Erik Erikson who have impacted significantly on either theories or practice of child development.

My interest in child development crystallized when I became a graduate teaching Fellow in the Department of Social Relations and the Department of Psychology at Harvard in May 1967-68. As a teaching Fellow, I gave tutorials and occasional lectures in child development courses taught by Professor Beatrice B. Whiting and Professor Gerald Stechler as well as courses in personality and human motivation respectively taught by Professor Robert W. White and Professor Irvin Staub. Harvard left an indelible impression on me namely; the need for meticulous and relentless hardwork in scholarship and research in general and in particular in the field of social anthropology and child development.

### THE CHOICE OF THE TOPIC

In the over 20 years in which I have carried out research on **child labour** in several Nigerian towns, I have gradually come to the realization that one of the greatest obstacles to the recognition of **child labour** as a social problem which should be combated by all and eradicated, is the tradition of child work in which members of the civil society participated in their childhood. In several seminars mounted to raise awareness on child labour in the 1980s and 1990s, professional Nigerians have asked questions akin to “**what is wrong with work which we did joyfully ourselves?**” They proceed to narrate pleasant episodes connected with their work in childhood. It took some explanation to convince them that significant differences exist between the work, which they did in childhood and what is termed child labour. Consequently, I chose the present

title out of other alternatives which I could have addressed on child labour in the hope that it will promote greater understanding of child labour issues and further breakdown resistance to addressing the phenomenon which is increasing in our country and which is causing many children untold silent suffering.

### DEFINITION OF CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR

The term **child labour** according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), refers to the engagement of children below 15 years in work or employment on a regular basis with the aim of earning a livelihood for themselves or their families. ILO has, except in respect of hazardous work for which the minimum age is 18 years, gradually abandoned the fixing of a single minimum age to describe child labour without account being taken of the economic, social and administrative conditions of different countries.

The “standard” minimum age fixed by ILO convention, for admission to employment at 15 years, which was contained in the definition of child labour may however be adjusted downwards (14 years) or upward (16 years) under article 2 of Convention 138. It may also be adjusted in the light of the type of work by fixing an age of 12 or 13 years for light work.

**Child work** and **child labour** can best be conceptualized as forming a continuum. When children, especially young ones are exposed to long hours of work in harsh and dangerous environments, which threaten their lives and limbs as well as jeopardize their normal physical, mental, emotional and moral development, it is termed child labour. Thus any type of work, which among other things interferes with schooling by:



- \* depriving children of the opportunity to attend school, especially when schooling is available;
- \* obliging them to leave school permanently; or
- \* requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work, is exploitative.

However, when work carried out by children does not involve risks and danger but rather contributes to the welfare of the children, especially their self-esteem and their ability to be integrated within their families, their work is labelled '**work**' and not '**labour**'.

It should be made clear that the line between child work and child labour is not as clear cut as one would wish in view of the dynamic nature of children's work especially in the informal sector of urban areas. Non-hazardous work may become hazardous in a short while because of changes in the immediate and societal environment of work as discussed subsequently in this lecture when the example of street trading is considered.

### **WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR**

Important differences exist among occupational activities termed 'child labour'. The Worst Forms of Child Labour addressed by ILO Convention (No. 182, 1999) is defined as the engagement of children under 18 years in all forms of slavery and similar practices, child prostitution and pornography, illicit activities and hazardous work; and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The Convention provides that hazardous work shall be defined by the competent national authority, after consultation with organizations of employers and workers.

### **GLOBAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS IN CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR**

Recent estimates provided by ILO put the number of economically active children between 5 to 17 years at 352 million; made up as follows: 5-9 years old, 73 million; 10-14 years old, 138 million; 15-17 years old, 141 million (ILO, 2002).

*Table Showing Age and Number of Economically Active Children*

Age	Number (Million)
5-9	73
10-14	138
15-17	141

It is known that whilst Asia has the largest number of child workers in the 5-14 age category, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of working children. The literature on child labour maintains that whilst approximately one out of three children below the age of 15 is economically active in Sub-Saharan Africa, the child work ratio in other major world regions are all below 20%.

### **STATISTICS OF CHILD WORK AND CHILD LABOUR IN NIGERIA**

Until very recently, national, zonal and state statistics on the numbers of working children and those in child labour were not available. The recently concluded Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour Survey (SIMPOC) found that there are 15 million (15,027,612) working children in Nigeria consisting of 7,812,756 males and 7,214,856 females of whom at



least 6 million (6,102,406) can be categorized as being in child labour because they were found not to be attending school whilst over 2 million children were exposed to 15 or more hours of work daily. The children in labour who were not schooling consisted of 3,110,033 (51%) girls and 2,992,373 (49%) boys. Of the 2,366,449 child labourers who were exposed to very long hours of work (15 hours and above), 1,334,605 (56.4%) were attending school whereas 1,021,764 (43.2%) and 10,080 (0.4%) found in house keeping activity, were not attending school.

### **TRADITION OF CHILDREN'S WORK IN NIGERIA, AS SOCIALISATION AND TRAINING**

Children in Nigeria have always worked in farming, fishing, cattle herding, trading and various types of craft work in which their parents specialized, as documented by several ethnographers including Meek, 1925; Nadel, 1933; Leith Ross, 1939; Forde, 1950; Galleti et al, 1956; Green, 1964; Uchendu, 1965; Basden, 1966; Hill, 1968; Bascom, 1960; Fadipe, 1970; Smith, 1971; Bradbury, 1973; and Azu, 1974. The cited ethnographers and many others perceived the participation of children in parental work as responsibility training which was a critical component of socialization through which important values were inculcated.

Seven factors ensured that children who worked in the pre-independence and early post colonial era did so in relative safety and if they had the opportunity to attend school, combined it with work without jeopardizing their student role.

- (i) The environment in which children worked was relatively physically and socially safe. The availability of parents and other adults in work environments were protective of children even when there were threats and dangers in the

environment. The communities in which children worked were mostly homogenous, rural and traditional settings in which normal adults had custodial and protective attitudes towards children even if they were not related to them. Since children worked with or for parents and their surrogates, the latter within limits of their knowledge and circumstances, ensured that children worked within their capabilities and sex-role expectations thus promoting their best interest.

- (ii) The division of labour in ethnic groups in Nigeria in the past was based on gender and age. In all occupations in which children participated, there was a complementarity of tasks between adults and their children of the same gender. In some trades, for example, particularly among secluded women, children's work was so vital to women's economic role that particular trades were adopted or rejected depending upon access to child workers (Hill, 1969; Pittin, 1979). Moreover it has been reported that the profitability of a woman's trade especially among the Hausa varies directly with her utilization of child workers who were either the woman's own children or foster children (Schildkrout, 1981).

- (iii) The then prevalent extended family living arrangement provided a pool of knowledge especially from grandparents, which informed and monitored the activities of children with respect to the timing and intensity of their involvement in work.

- (iv) The availability of several children within a specific age group in an extended family, ensured that younger children



had ample opportunities to tag along and learn from working older ones. By the time children began to work on their own, they had imbibed technical and attitudinal requirements of their work such that they knew how to handle some work problems. Moreover, the workload of any child was reduced by the availability of many children of similar age and gender in the household.

(v) There was fusion of work and play; children in early years anticipated their economic role through role-play. The simplicity of work tools facilitated their being used as play items. The intermingling of work and play is succinctly and vividly described by Camara Laye (1954) who in the award-winning biography was so captivated by the music-supported and rhythmic work of Malinki reapers that he wished he was a reaper rather than a school boy. The description of the Malinki of Guinea at work is similar to those of the other West African peoples including the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

(vi) There was continuity between the work children carried out in childhood and their occupation later as adults. Thus childhood involvement in work has occupational-preparation value in a society with little differentiation in which generations of members of particular families carried out the same trade. The traditional apprenticeship system, otherwise known as the indigenous educational system rested on the expertise of master craftsmen in these families.

(vii) The type of evaluation utilised in schools in the early phase of social change, namely yearly examination, facilitated the ability of intellectually gifted children who combined work with schooling to attain good scholastic grades in spite of their irregular school attendance.

In sum, in the social arrangement which existed in Nigeria in the not too distant past, the exclusion of children from work, would have negatively affected their integration into their social and cultural milieu.

The norms, which undergirded responsibility training, were derived from a collectivistic orientation or familism, which pervaded the social structure. The norms included hardwork for the common good, cooperation, reciprocity, respect and obedience, which ensured ready compliance on the part of children. Hardwork occupied a central position among the other norms, in view of the high dependency ratio, which characterized and still characterizes our society. Training children to work hard was adaptive for their survival and those of their families.

### THE NORM OF HARDWORK

Hardwork has been found to be mentioned as one of the three most important values in child socialization in studies which have investigated the goals of socialization among different social groups in Nigeria. Hardwork was ranked the second most important value of socialization by a cross-section of Nigerians in a survey officially commissioned by a government department (Nkeora Associates, 1982) whilst obedience was ranked third among respondents from some ethnic groups. Similarly, in a survey carried out among Lagos subjects in 1988 by the speaker, mothers ranked hardwork as the second most important value after respect.



Between the ages of six to nine years, children imitated adults' performance of domestic chores in role-play and were encouraged to actually perform simple tasks within their physical capabilities. From nine to twelve years, previous small duties of children were fully established so that the workload of children began to approach those of their same sex parent, except with respect to hazardous tasks (Harris, 1942; Bartel, 1975; Ford, 1975). The self-esteem of children was enhanced by their participation in work, which they knew contributed to their own welfare.

The benefits of responsibility training included the reduction of the workload of adults who had more free time to engage in other interests. Two benefits of responsibility training for adults and children in the past deserve special mention; namely it facilitated the institutions of bride help among the Yoruba and fostering in all the ethnic groups. The role of fostering in domestic employment is discussed in a subsequent section of this lecture.

### **CONTINUITIES IN AND TRANSFORMATION OF CHILDREN'S WORK**

In contemporary times especially in urban areas, depending on the specific work, the involvement of children in work cannot be described as wholly benign as they were in the past as the subsequent discussion indicates. The process of modernization, the essential components of which are structural differentiation, complex division of labour, rapid urbanization and industrialization, which began in the colonial era, has become accelerated in the post-colonial period. The process of modernization has created a crisis of moral values, such that the collective orientation which undergirded the social structure which was protective of children's work is being gradually and unevenly displaced by technological

values intrinsic in specialized organizations like schools which are competing with or have replaced kin-based structures (Oloko, 1985).

Owing to the foregoing aspects of modernization, there have been changes in the nature and environment of work. With respect to the nature of work, there have been important changes in scope, types, and intensity as well as some changes in agents for whom children work. As is subsequently documented, some children's work have become more of strategies of survival of families than socialization and training which they facilitated in the past, whilst some still constitute socialization and training. Other things being equal, the greater the changes that have occurred in traditional children's work along six of the seven criteria, which were previously presented, the more exploitative trends they manifest.

The process by which traditional work in some respect continues to be benign whilst in other respect they have become exploitative is subsequently discussed utilizing three examples namely street trading, domestic service and apprenticeship. Street trading is treated in greater detail than domestic work and apprenticeship because it is the most visible category of child labour in which millions of children participate throughout the federation. In view of the ubiquity of street trading it tends to be accepted as normal.

### **STREET TRADING IN THE PAST**

Street trading is rooted in tradition and derives from the undifferentiated location of market places on or near roads and streets. Five cultural and economic factors, namely the division of labour, limited credit, shortage of storage facilities, wife seclusion, and early marriage facilitated the involvement of children in street trading in the past. To give an example with respect to the division of labour in some ethnic groups in Nigeria, street vending by adults



is disesteemed (Nadel, 1967). Adult traders who wished to dispose of perishable goods, required the assistance of their children to sell on as many fronts as there were available children.

In the Northern and largely Islamic part of the country in which wife seclusion or purdah is practiced, street trading served as marital preparation for girls, since they were and are still expected to meet suitors during vending. Moreover the profit made from vending is not used for subsistence but for the provision of dowry, which is a pre-requisite for marriage (Schildkrout, 1981). It is not far fetched to assume that street vending by girls seems to provide socio-psychological compensation for restricted physical mobility associated with purdah, which most of the girls will experience as adult women (Oloko, 1986, 1994).

Adult Nigerians who participated in street trading in the 1930s and 1940s have identified adaptive functions of their childhood work. Street trading in the past trained children to acquire technical and interpersonal skills, which are necessary for effective functioning in the informal sector, in which a majority of urban persons worked and which is characterized by attributes such as inadequate access to capital, ease of entry, and excessive competition among others. The competitive yet affiliative setting in which children worked on the street tended to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, attitude and skills necessary for the solution of problems associated with trading. The skills included interpersonal ones such as ability to woo customers and sometimes induce impulsive buying in them; elbow other sellers away from the bargaining process; distinguish bona fide customers from fraudulent ones and technical skills such as learning to gradually accumulate capital, compute sales quickly and provide correct change as well as account for sales mentally

without having to record them on paper. Moreover, children learned to slightly increase the price of goods in order to derive some profit termed as 'gain' for themselves, a practice which is still current.

The complex interpersonal skills which children learn during street trading have been summed up thus

"On the one hand young street vendors recognized that their objective was to dispose of their wares quickly and profitably, on the other hand, they seemed to recognize that financial success should not be obtained at the expense of maintaining cordial relationship with other young vendors who provide assistance with detecting forged currencies, and other exigencies" (Oloko, 1995, p.210).

Moreover, adults who traded in the 1920s and 1930s and beyond, maintained that street trading contributed to the development of their personalities since it facilitated the inculcation of attributes such as self-reliance, perseverance and resourcefulness. It also provided greater opportunities for the exploration of their physical and social environment, making them more street-wise than their peers who were not engaged in work.

### **STREET TRADING IN THE PRESENT DAY**

Whatever positive function street trading had in the past, there have been important changes in the scope and intensity of work as well as some changes in agents for whom children street traded and the environment of street trading that act as risk factors for young vendors at the present time.



The findings of three studies carried out from 1970 to 1997 (Oloko, 1979, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1999) indicate that some children's work have become sufficiently transformed in the negative direction to justify their being classified as child labour, for the following reasons.

In the first place, more children are working for employers than they did previously and thereby experiencing exploitation. Secondly, whereas, in the past children traded in their immediate neighbourhood, in modern times they trek several kilometers across different types of neighbourhood in order to beat the atomistic competition of the market place in which hundreds of traders sell similar goods. The further children walk away from location of intense competition, the greater the likelihood that they would have greater sales and of course encounter greater safety problems.

Thirdly, some of the traditional restrictions that protected children's street trading activities have been eroded with social change. Whereas in the past, trading by children was limited to morning and early evening periods to avoid the heat of the sun, in the present times, children trade throughout the day even in inclement weather. Fourthly, the physical and social environments in which children worked in traditional times are different from those of the present time. Increase in motorable roads as well as vehicular traffic expose children to accidents. The number of adults who have deviant rather than custodial orientation to children have increased. Kidnappers, ritual killers, murderers, and rapists pose real threats to children who vend on the street as several media reports have shown.

Whilst it may be valid to maintain that only few criminal elements desire to murder children, the number of adults who attempt to defraud children are not so few. They either present fake currency, or delay paying for purchased goods until their vehicles drive off compelling children to run after them to no avail or slap, push and curse children for real or imagined minor mistakes.

Another important change in children's street vending is associated with attempts to enforce the law against street vending. From the 1970s several military edicts against street trading were promulgated<sup>1</sup>. Children were arrested along with adults; they were confined until parents appeared to pay the stipulated fines. Children lost valuable school days during arrest and trial, and were traumatized by the experience.

One of the major risk factors in street vending is its dynamic nature. With respect to the immediate context of trading, the creative packaging of iced water in small polythene bags vended by very young vendors has led to the lowering of the ages of children who vend in nodes of transportation (Oloko, 1990). Since very young vendors were in charge of an essential commodity they had to work in areas, which were tabooed in the past but which provide more opportunities for quick disposal of their goods. However, such areas are fraught with too many risks for inexperienced young children. In order to reduce the risks children run, they tend to sell in small groups of 4 to 8 in order to protect themselves. However, such protection is usually inadequate.

1 "Street Trading and Illegal Markets" (Prohibition) Edict 1984, "Environmental sanitation Edict, the Street Trading and Illegal Market" (Prohibition) Edict 1985 (Lagos State of Nigeria Official Gazette, No. 14, Vol. 17 of 5th April, 1984, No. D1, Vol.15, 11th December, 1985, No. 45, Vol.19, 17th July, 1986), "Hawking by Children" (Prohibition) Edict Cap 58 Law of Bauchi State.



Another example illustrating the rapid changes that occur in the environment of work which pose hazards to children, is the post June 1993 political violence. In the wake of tension associated with the rejection of a democratically conducted election, dissident groups planted bombs on the street which killed and maimed passers-by, including young vendors. Furthermore, the recrudescence of kidnapping of children for ritual murder motivated by the harsh economic circumstances has further curtailed the safety of vendors.

One of the factors which is responsible for the dysfunctionality of street vending and other categories of children's work is associated with the introduction of continuous assessment. The educational evaluation method which continuous assessment replaced, namely the one shot yearly examination, facilitated the educational attainment of bright street traders in the past by providing compensatory opportunities for studying at examination period even though they had missed substantial amount of school days. With the introduction of continuous assessment, contemporary gifted working children cannot compete effectively with non-working children as their counterparts did in the past. In view of the fact that teachers do not provide make up tests, students who attend school irregularly or unpunctually will manifest a cumulative deficit phenomenon depending on the gravity of their absenteeism.

### **DOMESTIC SERVICE**

As far as can be ascertained, domestic employment did not constitute wage employment until during the colonial period (Oloko, 1992, 1995). In the colonial times, British households usually included adult domestics such as stewards, cooks, drivers and so on, as well as young domestics known as 'small boys' and 'baby

nurses'. Baby nurses took care of British officers' children. In the colonial era, only very few elite Nigerians who were concentrated in the then capital, Lagos, emulated the tradition started by the British to employ adults as well as young domestics. Those who did so were highly educated and westernized. They emulated British aristocratic life and lived the concept of 'noblesse oblige'. Most of them were repatriates from Sierra Leone, Brazil and Cuba. As put by a historian of Lagos old society,

"The educated elite, both black and white could be considered as members of the same social group. They lived like Victorian gentlemen, their entertainment consisting of numerous 'conversazienes', 'soirees', 'levees', 'at homes', 'tea-fights' and concerts of the works of Bach, Beethoven, Handel and so on. All the elite seemed to lack was snow" (Cole, 1975, p.43).

Of course, such high level of living needed the service of domestics. Even as late as the 1930s and 1940s, informants reported that it was a privilege to serve as domestics in elite homes in view of the relatively high wages and opportunity to imbibe a Western life style which were socially esteemed.

The remainder of the elites who could not afford domestics obtained the assistance of their older and younger relatives. Up till the early 1950s most educated women who worked in structurally differentiated settings and therefore required assistance with respect to domestic chores and child care relied on the assistance of their adult and young relatives who also were remunerated in a system of reciprocity that did not involve a cash nexus. The young relatives were usually fostered by them.



## THE ROLE OF FOSTERING

Fostering, defined as the assumption of rights and duties of parenthood by adults who are not the child's natural parents without the latter surrendering their full rights, was prevalent in traditional society and was still a strong practice even in the early post colonial period. Since children were usually fostered to successful and prominent relatives and even non-relatives, foster-parents were educationally, and economically better placed to provide benefits to children. In exchange for providing domestic and sometimes economic assistance, the future prospects of children were ensured. Such benefits included provision of primary and sometimes secondary education, some form of occupational training mostly in craftwork, provision of appropriate work-equipment and for girls, enhancement of marriage prospects.

The participation of children in domestic work was protected by expectations that foster children be treated like their own children. Ideally, good foster parents ensured that foster children were not palpably discriminated against in the household. In the average household, domestic work was equally shared among foster and natural children. Moreover, foster children were rarely discriminated against with respect to food, clothing, and leisure. The fostering institution was so successful that in some instances girls did not leave their foster parents before marriage neither did the boys depart until they were ready to set up their own workshops. As a matter of fact once a system of reciprocity was entered into the relationship endured, sometimes for more than one generation.

Unfortunately, the fostering institution has undergone much change; although, rural parents who give their children to middlemen who subsequently traffic them, internally and externally, believe that they

are still participating in the traditional and benign fostering arrangement.

## DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRESENT DAY

Several factors in the recent decades militate against the ability of educated women to have their younger relatives provide them with domestic assistance. The Universal Primary Education scheme (UPE) launched nationally in 1976 has made it difficult for educated women to obtain domestic assistance from their relatives who began to attend school in large numbers in some regions.

Moreover, educated women found it increasingly difficult to meet their own basic needs as well as the demands made by the extended family members who provided them with young relatives. Furthermore, educated women who desired the independence of the conjugal family began to realize that once reciprocal obligations were entered into between the nuclear and extended families, the former could not justify the claim to be an exclusively private and independent group (Oloko, 1992).

In view of the above factors, educated women who worked in structurally differentiated settings began to employ children from rural areas as young domestics especially from the 1970s. Other factors which necessitated the employment of young domestics include inadequacy of crèches, large family size, the tendency of women to work when they have pre-school children, lack of mechanization in households, scarcity and costliness of time and effort saving commercial products, unavailability of specialised household-related services which are available to traditional women, the tendency of spouses not to be routinely involved with house-chores and the tendency for their own children to be preoccupied with homework assignments and remedial studies.



## PRESENT WORK-CONDITIONS OF YOUNG DOMESTICS

The findings of a UNICEF supported survey of **Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances** (CEDC) in five towns namely Lagos, Oshogbo, Kaduna, Calabar and Bauchi in 1992 which included as one of the six sub-samples, domestics and their employers, indicated that young domestics were far from being in the privileged position accorded to foster children as previously discussed. In addition to childcare and routine house chores some young domestics were found to double as street traders and shop minders. The foregoing finding was supported by another one from the employer sample, in which women including teachers, nurses, secretaries and office assistants indicated that their young domestics assisted them with their side employment.

The survey found that the specific volume of work which young domestics did depended on the size of the family they served, the number of domestics employed, the extent to which the employers children assisted them as well as the availability of labour-saving gadgets. Some of the findings of the survey are particularly worrisome. Firstly, about 37% of young domestics reported that they never had any work-free days except when it was absolutely necessary. The mentioned trend agreed with the findings from the employers sample. About 33% of employers reported that they gave young domestics time off only on a monthly basis whilst 54% indicated that they gave their employees work-free days on weekly basis and 15% gave it on a fortnightly basis. For young persons who worked an average of about 12 to 15 hours a day, the reported rest pauses were adjudged to be inadequate.

Secondly, the turnover rate among young domestics was found to be high. As high as 25% of female domestics interviewed reported

that they left their first and second employment in less than 6 months, whilst 21% remained with the mentioned categories of employers for a duration of 6 to 12 months. The finding was congruent with that obtained from the employers sample in which only 35% of employers reported that they have ever had domestics who worked for them for one or more years. The high turnover rate among young domestics is attributable partly to work condition especially to the tendency for them to be overworked as well as factors associated with middlemen. About two-fifths of young domestics reported that they were brought to the cities by middlemen, who especially in Lagos and Kaduna, tended to abandon them to their fate except to collect part of their wages when these become due.

Apparently, middlemen deliberately destabilised young domestics from their employment for economic gains. They were reported to dream up heart-moving stories to justify premature departure of domestics whom they promptly contracted to unsuspecting new employers from whom they collected fresh transport allowance as though the domestics had just emerged from rural areas.

It is noteworthy from the perspective of future intervention programmes that the young domestics in five cities, originated from Abia, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Anambra and Oyo States although at least 15 other states were represented among states of origin of domestics. As it is to be expected, each city had a slightly different profile of the origin of domestics. For an example, in Lagos, one third originated from Akwa Ibom, Anambra and Imo whilst another one third originated from Oyo and Ondo. In Kaduna, half of the domestics studied were from Abia while the rest came from other states.



Thirdly, the income of young domestics was paltry. The finding that young domestics were paid paltry sums is of major concern in view of the fact that middlemen collected part of the inadequate income as was previously stated and in view of the fact that employers complained that many domestics tended to steal. Young domestics, who perceived their future as bleak, erroneously attempted to accumulate property for the future by stealing from their employers in the hope that when they leave a particular employment they would at least have some personal belongings. Perhaps, if employers addressed the future prospects of their servants as was done in the old fostering arrangement, domestics would not have felt the need to help themselves to some of their belongings. Overworked, sometimes abused and exploited, young domestics perceived themselves to be in a class warfare against their employers whom they perceived to have surplus of alluring goods and consequently should not mind that they were losing some. Rather than earn them benefits, the habit of stealing lead to domestics being stigmatized and persecuted.

Fourthly, young domestics were more subject to punishment in their jobs than in their homes. Even though the children experienced physical beating and verbal abuse from their parents, the availability of some mechanisms in traditional settings regulated the severity of these modes of punishment, so that they were not as intense as those administered by their employers.

Fifthly, young domestic were educationally disadvantaged vis-à-vis children of their employers. All the children of the employers, except 6.9% of them who were aged 1 to 3 years old, were attending schools at various levels. Children aged 4 to 5 years who constituted 18.8% of children of employers were in pre-primary institutions

Most of the elite children – 31.9% - were in secondary schools, whilst 14.8% were in tertiary institutions. In view of the quality of the schools which elite children were attending, it is expected that they will manifest prolonged schooling and thereby maintain the socio-economic status of their parents in the future. Most unfortunately young domestics were rarely sent to school by their employers who recognised the value of education enough to send their own children to school.

Apart from young domestics being worse off than their fostered counterparts who did similar work in the past they were also found to experience greater relative deprivation compared to other groups of working children. The details of this finding are discussed under the consequences of work.

### **YOUNG APPRENTICES IN COTTAGE INDUSTRIES AND MECHANICS' WORKSHOPS**

As was mentioned in the opening part of this lecture, generations of some families practiced the same crafts and became so distinguished in them that relations and others gave their children to such master craftsmen and women as apprentices. The master craftsmen on the average treated the children whose parents were already known to them as extension of their own families. If the master craftsmen were harsh with their apprentices it would be supposed that their intention was to ensure that their apprentices would not be spoilt. During the training period, an apprentice would, like a good son provide domestic assistance to his master's wife in exchange for the free feeding and other benefits which he received.

There was usually an agreement between parents and craftsmen with respect to the number of years their children would serve as



apprentices. However, some flexibility was built into the training period in recognition of individual differences in aptitude and speed of learning. At the end of his training period, the apprentice gained his freedom which was usually celebrated. The apprentice would either choose to set up his own trade, with his parents providing the necessary equipment or he could also work for his master until he acquired enough money to set up his own cottage industry. There continued to exist between master and former apprentice, good will and respect. In many small town settings, the relationship between masters and their apprentices was reported to be so cordial that an enduring putative kinship relationship was established.

In order to maintain a good reputation and thereby attract more apprentices, master craftsmen treated their apprentices decently. When an apprentice offended his master, the master like a father disciplined him without finding it necessary to report him to his parents. Reporting the child to his parents was taken as an indication that either the master craftsman could not keep his house in order or that he did not fully accept the apprentice as his own son.

### **APPRENTICESHIP IN THE PRESENT TIME**

In the 1992 CEDC study in five towns which was previously mentioned, apprenticeship was found to be still prevalent. Children in apprenticeship were engaged in several types of work including bus conducting, vulcanizing, catering, iron metal work, carpentry, tailoring, hairdressing and mechanic work<sup>2</sup>. There were however, varying patterns in the popularity of the jobs/trades from one town

to the other. In Lagos and Kaduna which are large cities with sizeable number of commuters, bus conducting was the favourite of the children. In three other towns, mechanic work and vulcanizing were in the lead. This trend is attributable to the fact that bus conducting was the most lucrative in terms of children's daily pay, and in terms of ample opportunity to hold back part of the takings without the driver suspecting them. Of all the work in this category, children in large cities where opportunities are available to do this type of job, tend to go for it. Children in less metropolitan cities who did not have as many opportunities settled for the next lucrative jobs which were mechanic work and vulcanizing. A mechanic or vulcanizing workshop could take up to twenty apprentices working at the same time, whereas, only very big commuter buses could accommodate up to two conductors at the same time.

However, apprenticeship was found to have changed significantly especially in urban areas in which employers and the parents of apprentices no longer share common values as in the past. At least one-third of surveyed apprentices reported that there was no definite agreement between the employers and their parents with respect to the period of training. Consequently, the loophole was exploited by employers in several ways including undue prolongation of the training period in which apprentices were used as sources of cheap labour both on the work and the domestic fronts. The quality of the training some apprentices received was suspect. The master craftsmen rarely taught apprentices the principles of their crafts but rather encouraged them to learn by observation. In craftwork such as weaving in which in some famous centers, adults abandoned their work roles to children, except to supervise, apprentices learned far more from their older peers than from their masters.

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2 Mechanic work refers to repair of motor vehicles.



It is important to observe that exploitative tendencies are not new features of the apprenticeship system in view of the fact that some of the studies carried out in the late 1960s notably by Peter Kilby (1969), found that master craftsmen in Lagos unnecessarily prolonged the period of apprenticeship training in order to use them as sources of cheap labour.

### **NEW TYPES OF CHILDREN WORK**

Whilst it is true as has been discussed in this lecture that present day child labour represents aberrations of child work, it is important to state that new types of child labour have emerged which have no traditional roots. These new types of child labour include scavenging, bus conducting, begging and prostitution. Moreover, the internal and external trafficking in children has become a prominent issue in recent times. They are not discussed in this lecture because we are primarily concerned with the relationship between past and present work carried out by children.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR: SILENT SUFFERING OF CHILDREN**

During the discussion of the various factors which were identified as being responsible for the transformation of child work into child labour, the often unrecognized suffering and deprivation which confront child labourers were discussed. In this section, the suffering of children are expatiated under headings which depict well-known dimensions of child development namely physical, cognitive and emotional development.

### **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

The extent to which children were exposed to accidents was assessed in the four previously cited studies carried out by the

lecturer. With respect to children who worked in the street, four categories were found to be particularly accident prone.

- (i) Children who worked regularly and worked throughout the day.
- (ii) Children who combined several work activities especially when these activities constituted high risks, e.g. scavenging and head loading.
- (iii) Children who worked in multiple settings including bus stops and highways.
- (iv) Children who worked at dusk or at dawn when visibility is low.

The most common accident reported by these children were grave falls, collusion with cyclists, and sometimes motor cyclists. Other risks run by street trading children included contamination of cuts and sores due to the fact that 70% of street trading children were found to walk barefooted. This finding is important in view of the fact that 55% of children were observed or interviewed in refuse-clustered areas. During raids by law enforcement agencies, street vendors confronted the risk of falling into open and dirty gutters. About 45% of street workers were exposed to sharp objects in their environment of work while about 35% of them were exposed to high-tension cable wires. It is startling that more than half of the total number of children in two towns and especially those who worked in the four previously mentioned conditions, admitted to having been physically assaulted at least once. The sources of the assaults were pickpockets, street gangs, fraudulent and criminal customers. The recrudescence of ritual murder in several parts of the country pose dire risk for children who work on the street as the "Otokoto" scandal demonstrated.

STAFF PUBLICATION



With respect to apprentices, they were found to experience accidents during work more than other groups of working children. Whereas one-quarter of street children reported that they had had accidents during work, 31% of apprentices so admitted. Some of the accidents occurred either because apprentices wore no protective clothing. Sharp or heated equipment were handled with bare hands. Other accidents occurred because the work they did was hazardous. It was revealing that when asked whether they knew any children who died during work, apprentices more than other categories of workers, replied in the affirmative. Young bus conductors, for example, who are in the habit of standing or hanging precariously in the doorway of vehicles get thrown off sometimes when buses ply bad roads or when accidents occurred.

Apart from accidents, apprentices ran risks associated with work intrinsic factors. To give an example, even though iron and other metal workers were found to be seemingly happy making music with their work implements to ameliorate the tedium of their work, a cursory look at them revealed that heat and chemical fumes produced toxic effect on their eyes changing them to a dull yellow colour.

The major problem confronted by young domestics was prolonged working hours and excessive pacing which tended to exhaust them in view of their relative young ages. The play, "Omo-Odo" by Bode Osanyin vividly portrays the excessive demands which employers make on domestic servants. Young domestics reported fewer accidents than the other two categories of children. Those of them who were not yet adept at coping with wobbling cooking utensils without handles sustained mild to moderate degree of burns.

A major complaint of young domestics was that they experienced brutality from members of their employers' households. The issue of sexual exploitation of young domestics was too sensitive to be handled directly. A significant proportion of young domestics reported that they knew peers who had either been sexually harassed or sexually exploited but were reticent as to whether they themselves had experienced sexual exploitation at work. In view of the hidden nature of domestic employment, it was not surprising that some children narrated atrocious incidents which their peers suffered without hope of redress except escape, when they had enough support to effect it.

The health of working children was assessed in one of the previously mentioned studies carried out by the speaker by requesting children to provide self reports on some health related issues as well as having a sub-sample of children medically examined in the five research towns. Working children complained of frequent body aches, headache, and fevers. The reported high incidence of headache and fever among tested children was attributed to the nature of their work which often entailed long, tedious hours under not very comfortable working conditions and in most cases, being exposed to unfavourable weather conditions. Many of the children worked in places which lacked adequate shelter or protection from sunshine and rainfall. The health-seeking behaviour of working children indicated that they confronted risks as well during treatment in view of the fact that only half of all working children reported visiting hospitals and clinics while the other half resorted to self and home treatments as well as visits to faith healers.



## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Although each of the scores of observations carried out on children in labour situation revealed that they developed competencies during work which deserve respect and which may facilitate their gainful employment in the future, it was consistently found that work hindered various aspects of schooling.

Among vendors, depending upon the town in which the observation was made, 26.2% to 9.8% never attended school. Among apprentices, the percentage of children who had never attended school was low except in one town – Bauchi – in which these constituted 29.4%.

Young domestics had less educational opportunities than their counterparts who, for example, street vended for their parents. Whereas a majority of children who vended on the streets were found to attend schools except in educationally disadvantaged areas, 18% of domestics had never attended school for reasons associated with their work. The quality of education of those who had attended schools was poor. Unlike street vending and certain types of crafts work which were time-compatible with schooling, domestic work tended either to preclude or stop the schooling of the children. About 59.9% of the children had spent a few years in primary school before they dropped out whilst 24.9% and 15.2% had attended secondary and vocational schools respectively before they commenced work. With respect to quality of education, only approximately one-third of the young domestics by their own admission, could read in their mother tongues compared with half of vendors who could do so. Considering the fact that the reading ability of street vendors was assessed by reading tests whilst those of young domestics was rated on the basis of their self-report, the

discrepancy in achievement was likely to be greater than the one previously presented. Self-report may have tended to inflate reading achievement more than objective tests.

The drop-out rate of child workers compared to those of their non-working counterparts was found to be high. Approximately, 11.5% to 15% of children dropped out of school from the first three and the last two years of primary and secondary education. The reasons provided for dropping out of school either at the primary or secondary levels were associated mostly with finance and health. The fact that 45% of school drop outs gave financial reasons for stopping school deserve some attention especially in view of the fact that education at the primary and secondary levels is highly subsidized. In spite of this, it is observed that parents can still not afford incidental expenses such as uniform, transportation and school material tests.

Another finding which indicated that working children manifested poor scholastic achievement is that, one out of three of them admitted that they had repeated at least a class. Moreover, in the four studies carried out by the lecturer (Oloko, 1979, 1986; Owoseni, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994) it was observed that non-working children consistently and significantly out-achieved their working counterparts in results of centralized and teacher made examinations in English, Arithmetic and General Knowledge. In the three mentioned subject areas, younger children and boys out-achieved their counterparts; namely older children and girls, for reasons associated with greater physical and emotional involvement of girls and older children with work.

## STAFF PUBLICATION



Even though it is popularly believed that street trading facilitates greater arithmetical skills, a belief shared by a few of the subjects, the finding of the survey did not confirm that opinion. As a matter of fact, judging from the level of statistical significance obtained from the comparison of working and non-working students in the three previously mentioned subjects, non-working children outperformed their working counterparts mostly in arithmetic (Oloko, 1994).

The reasons for the relatively low scholastic achievement of working students was found to be associated with their inattentiveness in class due to fatigue, illness, non-punctual and irregular school attendance coupled with poor motivation due to the abstract nature of school learning (Oloko, 1979). The introduction of continuous assessment into primary and secondary education has aggravated the learning deficit of working children some of whom tended to attend school irregularly and consequently missed some tests (Oloko, 1993, 1994).

### EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the previous section on physical development, emphasis was placed on the stressful nature of children's work and the environment of work. However, the extent to which children developed affection towards their work may decrease or increase their perception of the previously discussed hazards and accordingly promote or obstruct the development of resilience to work problems and hazards. The fact that 81.7% of the child vendors studied in Lagos and 62.7% of those studied in Kaduna and Calabar, liked work (Oloko, 1990), with 51.4% of young apprentices indicating that they liked their work (Oloko, 1992), is indicative of the differential impact of work on various types of child workers and the extent to which

work constituted emotionally rewarding or punishing experience. It is interesting to observe, especially among vendors, that work regularity and work periods influenced the extent to which children liked work. Regular workers and those who worked all day tended to report that they did not like work whereas those who worked irregularly and for relatively shorter periods expressed likeness for work.

One of the aspects of work, which children did not like, was being called awful names by the public. To give an example, in recent times head loaders are called 'basket' in market because they carry loads in baskets. Those who so call them are unaware of the emotional harm they inflict. Interviews conducted on head loaders indicate that they felt humiliated by the name and wished they were called differently.

The extent to which work promotes or fragments the attachment of the children to their families is significant for their development. Among vendors who worked with or for their parents, work seemed to facilitate the attachment of the children to their families, whereas with respect to domestic workers, work tended to separate them emotionally from their families. The attachment of children to their families was indirectly measured by an interview item that requested children to indicate their choice of family if it were possible for them to be born a second time. About 25.5% of vendors in two towns wished to be re-born into their present families, whereas 42.8% of vendors preferred to be born into rich families and 25.6% preferred being born into more educated families. The corresponding figures for non-working children was present family – 39.5%, rich family 26.4% and educated family 33.7%.



The finding indicates that non-working children seemed to be more attached to their families than working ones. Among domestic workers, the percentage of children preferring to be reborn into their present families ranged from 2.8% in Kaduna, 13.5% in Oshogbo, 27.6% in Lagos to 35% in Bauchi. The majority of domestic workers preferred to be born into rich and educated families. The preceding finding is not too surprising in view of the fact that in towns like Kaduna in which domestic workers preferred other types of families to their own, 67.7% of them had escaped to the town through middlemen without informing their parents, whilst 32.4% reported that they had the consent of their parents to come to the town. Among apprentices, about 35% wished to be reborn into their present families, whilst 45% wished to be reborn into rich families and 20% wished to be reborn into educated families. It would seem from these findings that apprentices were more attached to their families than vendors and domestics. Vendors more than domestics were on the whole more attached to their families as was previously mentioned.

Self-esteem is widely believed to be important in the ability of children to relate to their environment. The self-esteem of young workers was indirectly assessed by an item that requested them to state the amount of relative deprivation they felt vis-à-vis their peers, that is, whether they considered themselves as fortunate, more fortunate or less fortunate than their peers. Whereas 33.6% of young vendors perceived themselves as being less fortunate than other children, 66.3% perceived themselves either as more fortunate or just as fortunate as other children.

It would seem that the work carried out by young domestics was associated with a negative self-image compared to the work carried

out by street vendors. As shown on Table 1 whereas the percentage of young vendors and young domestics who rated themselves as more fortunate than others did not differ, the percentage of young domestics who considered themselves less fortunate exceeded by 12 percentage points, those of young vendors who gave similar responses.

Table 1: A Comparison of Young Vendors, Young Domestics' and Non-Working Children's Response Distribution on a Self-Concept Item

Self-Rating vis-à-vis Peers	Young Vendors	Young Domestics	Non-Working Children
More fortunate	186 (25.4%)	59 (24.6%)	57 (29.6%)
As fortunate	300 (40.9%)	80 (30.4%)	101 (52.6%)
Less fortunate	247 (33.7%)	118 (45.0%)	34 (17.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>192</b>

Similarly, whilst only 30.4% of young domestics perceived themselves as fortunate as their peers, 40.9% of young vendors gave similar responses. A comparison of the responses of non-working children of similar ages to young vendors and young domestics indicated that the pattern of responses of street vendors, is more similar to those of non-working children than to those of young domestics. It could be inferred from the foregoing findings that domestic employment is associated with a greater erosion of self-esteem than street vending and probably other kinds of child labour.



The contrast in status and authority between employers and young domestics seem to lead to an acute sense of relative deprivation on the part of the young domestics. In view of the rural background of domestics, they found the material possession of their employers alluring, particularly when their employers' children have free access to those possessions. It is not surprising that theft and willful damage of property were the two types of undesirable behaviour which employers mentioned as characterizing domestics, as was previously mentioned.

## CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

### Poverty

Worldwide, poverty is regarded as one of the most important risk factors in child labour. The preceding statement is valid for Sub-Saharan Africa (S.S.A). The S.S.A region is indeed poor. In 1992 between 45 and 50 per cent of the approximately 525 million people in the region were estimated as being below poverty line. The World Bank assessment is that the depth of poverty in the S.S.A region is typically higher than elsewhere (World Bank, 1995 cited in FOS, 1996). In Nigeria, to give an example, in 1988, one assessment placed 59 per cent of the population that is 46 million below the poverty level, it was found that the lowest 40 per cent of population spent 79 per cent of their total expenditure on food. By 1992, the percentage had increased to 90 per cent. It is revealing that even among the top 20 per cent of the population food share of total expenditure increased from 61 per cent in 1985 to 66 per cent in 1992 (Federal office of Statistics (FOS, 1996).

The reasons for the high level of poverty in the region and in Nigeria has been attributed to 6 factors among others:

- (i) Inadequate access to employment opportunities for the poor due to stunted economic growth.
- (ii) Lack of inadequate access to assets especially land and capital by the poor owing to absence of land reform and minimal opportunities for small-scale credit.
- (iii) Inadequate access to the means of fostering rural development in poor regions: the preference for high potential areas and the strong urban bias in the design of development programmes.
- (iv) Inadequate access to markets for the goods and services that the poor can sell, caused by competition of their products with those from factories and abroad, which are preferred by consumers.
- (v) Inadequate access to services and facilities such as education, health, sanitation and water, due to uneven location of these services and facilities especially in areas which have concentrations of the poor. These services rob the poor of opportunities to live healthy and active lives and take advantage of employment opportunities which are scantily available in their environment.
- (vi) The destruction of the natural resource endowments which has led to reduced productivity in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This trend is attributable to the desperate survival strategies of the poor as well as inadequate and ineffective



public policy on natural resource management. Time limitation prevents a discussion of these factors. We turn attention to examining the economic profile of the families of working children compared to those of their non-working counterparts.

The findings of the three large-scale surveys carried out in 5 towns in Nigeria between 1989 and 1992 on approximately 4000 working children and their non-working counterparts who served as their control group which we have referred to frequently in this lecture indicated that although the economic profile of families of working children varied, depending on the categories of the work they did, on the whole, working children as a group significantly more than their non-working children counterparts, originated from poor families. One of the indicators of economic status in the studies was the number of rooms in which families were accommodated. It was found that whereas about 70 per cent of working children lived in 1 or 2 rooms less than 50 per cent of the families of non-working children lived in similar accommodation.

The use of type of accommodation to assess economic status which is well established in sociological studies in Nigeria revealed four types of poor families. Firstly, there are very poor families, who can hardly meet their basic needs and who live on the reciprocal obligations of others who are their kinsmen and for whom they provide social and economic services. This category of persons can be termed "poorest of the poor" and were found to be either disabled or destitute. They were found to live mostly in buildings owned by their extended families. They were usually migrants and were illiterate or semi-literate. They grossly lacked good water, bathing and cooking facilities. This category of persons depended

almost exclusively on the work carried out by their children to survive in view of the fact that they lacked the capital with which to engage in informal sector work themselves.

Secondly, there were poor families who eke out an existence from different occupational tasks and who because they are integrated into the network of social redistribution and reciprocity, manage to meet all their basic needs. These are often respectable in their communities even though they may only occupy a room in relatively better accommodation than do the "poorest of the poor". This category of parents also depend on the productivity of their children but with a difference. The adults as well as the children work, whereas among members of the first category, only the children tended to work. Consequently, the work load of children in this category was less than those of children in category one.

The third group of poor persons were those who were disadvantaged because of the extended family obligations which they incurred. If they had to manage by themselves they could have been better off but because of the large number of dependants they maintained, they find life rather uncomfortable. They possessed television sets and means of transportation such as motorcycles because some of them were repairers of those items (Oloko, 1992), but the quality of life lived in their households, was barely beyond those of members of category two. Children worked very hard in these households but because there were usually a large number of children to share chores, the work-load of any one child tended to be less than those of category one and two.

The fourth category of poor persons who were found to live in one room were those who worked in lower rungs of bureaucratic organisations. They were literate but lacked purchasing power due



to sky-rocketing inflation which eroded their relatively meagre income. The work of children, especially in street vending was one of the strategies of survival among this category of persons. It was found that children of policemen and soldiers constituted significantly large proportions of young vendors in neighbourhood in which police and army barracks were located.

From the foregoing discussion, a valid generalisation can be made, namely that outside metropolitan areas - in which housing is scarce and expensive and consequently relatively more affluent persons are accommodated in one room - living in one-room accommodation is among others a valid indicator of poverty that should be targeted for alleviation to curb child labour.

### **Unemployment:**

Unemployment of primary and secondary school leavers is another major economic reason why many children and their parents prefer work to schooling. Because many school graduates including holders of higher degrees now roam the streets unemployed, the motivation for formal education has been greatly reduced. Many families only send their children to school to be partially literate and then withdraw them after primary or junior secondary education – or even midstream – to cottage industries and retail businesses as apprentices or workers. This alternative is very attractive to both parents and children because it offers immediate monetary gratification and automatic employment later, unlike schooling which delays gratification and yet does not guarantee future employment. Thus, many cottage industries in sewing/tailoring, hair dressing, electronics repair, interior decoration and so on are springing up almost on a daily basis and are usually heavily patronized by apprentices.

The informal sector which is characterized by ease of entry, small-scale operation, unregulated and competitive markets as well as fluctuations in prices is associated in the minds of some parents with providing opportunities for entrepreneurship and visible economic success unlike formal sector employment which yields low and unsteady income which is whittled by high inflation. In some South Eastern states such as Anambra, the boys drop out of school to engage in apprenticeship. The startling success which some of them have made has become a model to be emulated by young males.

### **Education:**

The educational status of parents determined the involvement of their children in exploitative work. In the previously cited surveys, it was found that whereas approximately 67 per cent of mothers of working children were illiterate; depending on the region, only 5 to 25 per cent, of mothers of non-working children were reportedly illiterate. Maternal education is critical in view of polygyny which tends to make mothers appropriate the labour of their children particularly in urban areas. As has been discussed elsewhere the relationship between parental education and child labour is complex. For the time we have, suffice it to say that illiterate and semi-illiterate persons whose experience of schooling is limited, tend to plunge children into work without sufficient regard for their student role whilst relatively more educated parents either provide remedial lessons for their working children or protected them entirely from work. Highly educated parents tended to employ young domestics but kept their own children from premature work thus facilitating their future social mobility.



The school curriculum at the primary and secondary levels should be indicted for some of the educational problems of working children. Predicated on the need to provide a broad based education for beginners, the primary school curriculum is wide and varied, providing for instruction in as many as sixteen subjects which has serious implication for adequacy of support services and materials. It is anomalous that the curriculum did not provide for the teaching of local crafts which could have motivated parents and children to be more committed to schooling as practical preparation for the future.

Furthermore, it could be validly maintained that the educational system does not recognize the fact that the majority of the students at the primary and lower secondary school levels are primarily working students rather than full time students as it is erroneously assumed. The training of teachers need to recognize the fact that the majority of students combine work with schooling and consequently require strategic handling in order to manifest adequate scholastic achievement.

#### **Culture and Tradition:**

The type of activities the children engage in and the priorities which determine the choice among them, are governed by values, beliefs and norms of the social system which are significant to them. In a country in which because of a low level of technological development and other factors previously discussed, several persons are unable to meet their basic needs without considerable strain and uncertainty; the trend in which most poor families utilize the labour of their children makes rational sense. The latent and negative consequences of the involvement of children in various economic activities are not usually perceived and therefore do not constitute

social problems as far as they are concerned. Although the modernization process has been indicted in this lecture and elsewhere for much of child labour, as a matter of fact, each of the broad categories of child labour as formerly discussed, has cultural roots which has become exacerbated with rapid social change.

The influence of tradition on child labour becomes apparent in the case of offsprings of relatively affluent persons who engage in intensive work. In craftwork which is passed on from one generation to another, it was found in a Rapid Assessment in 1992 that in towns reputed for the excellence of their work, despite parental affluence, the involvement of children especially during peak seasons in work was sometimes greater than that of their poorer counterparts in cities which were not reputed for craftwork.

The desire for large family size and polygyny both of which constitute risk factors in child labour stem from tradition.

#### **SOCIETAL RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF CHILD LABOUR**

Societal response to the phenomenon of child labour has been slow in the past but has increased in the last few years. In the past, response has been mostly legislative. The Children and Young Persons Law (CYPL) in Lagos State contains the regulation which prohibited young girls from street trading in places like barracks and beer parlours where they could be sexually molested and exploited.

The **Labour Law** of 1974, sections 58-60 and 65 contains provisions designed to protect children under the age of 15 years from working in industrial undertakings, in mines or in employment which is dangerous.



Under section 59(A) of the law, a young person under the age of 15 years is prohibited from working for more than four consecutive hours and from being permitted to work for more than eight hours a day. Under sections 49-62, young apprentices are protected from hazardous work and night work.

The Labour Act has been criticized for several lapses. Firstly, for the omission of young domestics from the category of child workers who were addressed. Secondly, for lack of implementation of the provisions. To give an example, the work condition of apprentices are supposed to be monitored by the Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity. But three types of lapses frustrated the required monitoring.

- (i) the Labour Inspectorate system monitors only apprentices in the formal sector because of organizational, cultural and logistics factors. The numbers of inspectors at national and regional levels were too few to enable them monitor the conditions of work of apprentices effectively.
- (ii) inspectors have not been sensitized to identifying the presence of apprentices in this sector and observing their work conditions.
- (iii) apprentices and their parents tend to by-pass the laid-down law by signing contracts without the attestation of authorized labour officers.

Labour Inspectors indicated during interviews that they had come to realise that attempting to enforce the law was disadvantageous to the apprentices since enterprises refused to recruit them as soon as they knew that law-enforcing officers were taking a keen interest in monitoring their work conditions. As a consequence of lack of monitoring, the detailed provisions in the Labour Act are not useful

to apprentices since apprenticeship is usually carried on as if the provisions do not exist. As was previously discussed young apprentices are exploited in several ways. Government needs to do much in the area of enforcement, to ensure that children apprentices obtain the protection they deserve under the legal system. Urgent action is important in view of the fact that large numbers of children are engaged as apprentices since this option is considered a viable alternative to formal education by many poor families as was previously discussed.

Thirdly, the section of the Labour Act which addresses child labour has been criticised for being outdated. To give an example, the penalty for contravening any of the provisions from sections 49-62 of the Labour Act is a fine of N100 to be paid by the employer of the young person and the parent or guardian who permitted the employment. This **fine** is grossly inadequate for the punishment of any offender in this present time. There is an obvious and urgent need for a review of the different provisions of the Labour Act.

### **MILITARY EDICTS AND STREET TRADING LAWS**

The laws and edicts previously mentioned, have not achieved the desired goal of keeping street traders including children off the streets. In the 1980s and 1990s, the military regimes attempted to enforce various street-trading edict. It is well known that local government officials who attempted to enforce the law, met with stiff opposition from both adults and street children. Officials who were interviewed confirmed that children were kept in custody until their relatives were able to pay the stipulated fine (Oloko, 1991). Children who were kept in custody for short periods lost valuable school days and were traumatized by the experience.



One of the unfortunate aspects of the conflict between law enforcement officials and traders is that it reached a stalemate. As soon as government officials swooped down on traders and effected ruthless raids during which they carried persons and wares into vans, whisking them off to face prosecution by special tribunals, new waves of young and old traders took their places as though nothing had happened. One is particularly concerned that the game or war of nerves in which children engage with law enforcement officers may constitute an undesirable training on how to indulge in illegalities and not be caught.

### **CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

In March 1991, the Nigerian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and in 1994, inaugurated the National Child Rights Implementation Committee (NCRIC) with similar structures at some state and local government levels. However, the implementation of the provisions of the UNCRC which targets the elimination of child labour, have been weak.

In recent times, government agencies and departments have mounted sensitization workshops to combat child labour. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Nigerian Government and ILO/IPEC on August 8, 2000, constitutes the peak of Government commitment to address the issue of child labour.

### **NATIONAL PROGRAMME**

The National programme has four types of intervention, namely **Policy Development and Legislation Reforms, Capacity Building, Awareness Raising and Mobilization** and **Direct Action for Withdrawal and Rehabilitation of Working Children.**

### **\* Policy Development and Legislation Reforms:**

One of the aims of the National programme is to assist the Federal Government in its effort to carry out necessary legislative reforms in line with international standards on elimination of worst forms of child labour. The signing of ILO conventions 138, 182 by the President of the country is a major milestone in the process of eradication of child labour in the country. Although the National programme did not control the signing and ratification of the two mentioned conventions, it is believed that the programme contributed to the achievement of the milestone through the sensitization workshops of the Child Labour Unit and the campaigns manned by the Nigeria Labour Congress.

### **\* Capacity Building:**

Since child labour is basically an informal sector problem and the Inspectorate Department of the Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (FMELP) which has the core mandate to enforce legal provisions relating to conditions of work and the protection of workers, covers the formal sector, it became clear that child labour concerns were relatively new to the Ministry. With the intervention, the officials of the Child Labour Unit (CLU) and the Inspectorate Department of the Ministry, have been sensitized through participation in the various workshops and seminars organised by the National Programme. Furthermore, 50 labour inspectors have been trained on the appropriate knowledge, skills and orientation required to function in the informal sector where child labour is rife. A trainer document to facilitate the training of future labour



inspectors was also made available at the workshop, thus building sustainability into the programme.

#### \* **Awareness Raising and Mobilization:**

The National Programme has certainly increased awareness of the dangers of child labour among parents and the members in those communities in which IPEC activities were undertaken. The IEC materials developed by each of the direct action programmes has penetrated several sections of the civil society. Commendably, the NGOs have continued to advance the cause of elimination of child labour even when IPEC programme officially ended.

#### \* **Direct Action for Withdrawal and Rehabilitation of Working Children:**

Three NGOs – **Human Development Initiatives (HDI)**, **Women Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON)** and **Galilee Foundation**, have implemented Direct Action programmes. The programmes targeted 3,000 working children who were either domestic servants, headloaders, young bus conductors or child prostitutes, for withdrawal and rehabilitation. With a record of 510 child workers withdrawn at the end of the two-year programme (HDI – 84, WOCON – 261 and Galilee Foundation – 165), it is evident that given the necessary support, time and cooperation of all the stakeholders, there will be increased awareness which would lead to more effective policies, legislation and intervention programmes against child labour.

## **CONCLUSION**

The foregoing lecture has distinguished between child work and child labour. It has maintained that whilst it was functional for children to participate in the occupational activities of their parents in the past, in the present time, such participation especially in street trading and domestic employment has become dysfunctional in view of risks that they pose to the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. Even the indigenous educational system, apprenticeship, does tend to trap children in a hidden way into exploitative work.

### **PRACTICAL ACTIONS**

From the research findings provided, it is clear that urgent action needs to be taken with respect to eradicating street trading activities of young children as well as their participation in domestic service. The apprenticeship system needs to be overhauled in a way that would make it part of the solution rather than part of the problem of child labour.

The eradication of child labour requires adequate political will institutionalization of policy and legal measures as well as massive awareness raising and mobilization of all sectors of civil society. To this end a way forward is proposed.

### **A Way Forward**

#### \* **Policy Measures**

Several poverty alleviation measures exist in our country; these programmes should be urgently assessed for their impact on families of working children as a first step towards action to curb child labour.



Draw up and implement a time-bound programme of action to prevent and eliminate all forms of child labour starting with worst forms namely those activities conducted under hazardous, abusive or slave like conditions.

### **Educational Measures**

Ensure full implementation of the Universal Basic Education Scheme, with provision of free, and compulsory education covering deprived groups.

Enrich teacher education programmes to facilitate curriculum content, need and methodology.

Incorporate local craft into primary and secondary school curriculum to provide incentives for working children and update the technology under girding local crafts.

### **Legal Measures**

Adopt and implement national legislation and policies on child labour in conformity with international standards and harmonize child labour legislation and policies.

Strengthen and improve the judiciary and the legal enforcement processes by sensitizing and training such personnel as prosecutors and judges, police and correction officers in child labour related legislation.

Create an organ with the responsibility of informing, sensitizing and mobilizing the public against child labour.

Complement national legislation on child labour by establishing at national and local levels, an enforcement mechanism including government workers, employers and non-governmental organisation.

### **PRACTICAL ACTIONS**

Promote awareness in the community with regards to the right of child, especially the right to basic education and to protect children from economic exploitation.

Include traditional leaders and religious organizations in awareness raising of the dangers and negative effects of child labour.

Identify all stakeholders on child labour and define the different strategies necessary for creating awareness within each group.

Hold advocacy meeting with the policy makers especially with the law makers at all the level of government on the relevance of passing the bill on the child's right, recently rejected by lower house of the National Assembly.

STAFF PUBLICATION



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