

CHILD LABOR DYNAMICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The prevalent of child laborers in Nigerian urban centers has remained a very intractable problem. Over the years, this phenomenon has changed both in form and characterization covering a wide range of work activities, such as domestic service, bus conducting, industrial work, street hawking, and child trafficking, with enormous adverse consequences both for the children and the nation, at large. The implication of this dynamism for sustainable development has not adequately been explored and analyzed by the scholars. Locating the dynamism of child labor in Nigeria within the theoretical context of poverty hypothesis, the paper argues that the engagement of children as laborers to supplement the family income is not only an aberration in a richly endowed nation, like Nigeria, but amounts to compromising the future development of these children and the nation. With this precarious situation, the paper argues that Nigeria will undoubtedly continue to be a backbencher in her quest for sustainable development among the comity of nations because of her present lack of investment in the future of these children trapped in child labor activities.

Key words: Child Labor, Sustainable Development, Nigeria, Domestic Service, Poverty.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the incidence of the use of children for labor outside the homes has been on the increase. To this end, the children-for-labor, as a phenomenon, has become an intrinsic component of survival for most families. As a result, there is an increase of poverty in many homes in the developing countries (PILER, 2004; Bass, 2004). It has been argued that more than 650 million children live in poverty while 130 million children do not have access to education. Also, almost 250 million children are working world-wide. It is widely believed that poverty is the main reason for children working outside their homes. In sub Saharan Africa, this situation has worsened. In the region, over 35.0% of the children are working and Nigeria has an estimated 15 million child laborers (Bass, 2004; Oloko, 2004). Several factors, such as poverty, low socio-economic status, and cultural and religious factors coupled with the lack of enforcement of labor restrictions and inconsistencies in the anti-child labor legislation, have been identified as reasons for the upsurge and pervasiveness of the child laborers, especially in the developing countries. These factors, have thus, accounted for Africa and Asia as having over 90.0% of world's total child employment (Rau, 2002; Bass, 2004; Oloko, 2004; Ruwanpura & Rai, 2004)

In Nigeria, the upsurge in child laborers has been partly attributed to the introduction of the economic policy of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) since the late 1980s. This economic policy affected the country's economy, leading to massive devaluation of the nation's currency and a decline in the standard of living and quality of life of most Nigerians (Okafor, 1998; Okafor, 2000). It also resulted in a decay of public infrastructure and an increase in unemployment, especially in the urban centers. Consequently, most children have been forced to venture into various areas of labor in their attempts to survive and to assist their impoverished families (Okafor and Amayo, 2006). In addition to the economic downturn, there has been a rapid growth in the Nigeria's population over the years, resulting in a massive rural-urban drift. This, in turn, has led to more demand for white collar jobs and other basic services (National Population Commission, 2003). With the downturn in the nation's economy, millions of poor families, especially in the urban areas have resorted to sourcing for alternative means of supplementing their meager incomes. This has made more and more children take up various kinds of laborious economic activities in their bid to survive and supplement family incomes (Obi, 1997; Isamah & Okunola, 2002; Oloko, 2004; Okafor & Bode-Okunade, 2003; Kuti, 2006; Nwaobiala, 2006).

In urban centers in Nigeria, it is very common to see children working as carpenters, motor mechanics, vulcanisers, welders, bus conductors, and domestic servants, just to mention a few (Isamah & Okunola, 2002; Okafor & Bode-Okunade, 2003; Tade, 2010). When children work as wage earners outside the homes to survive and supplement the family incomes, it may solve some family economic problems and create new ones both for children and the society, at large. Besides stunting their personality development and hardening their aptitude prematurely, it could also lead to compromising sustainable development, since children are the future of any nation. Although several studies had been done on the types of laborious economic activities engaged by the children in Nigeria (Olutayo, 1994; Okafor, 2000; Okafor & Bode-Okunade, 2003; Kuti, 2006; Tade, 2010), linking this precarious situation of the Nigerian child to the implications of sustainable development has remained the neglected aspect of various studies in Nigeria. This study intends to fill this gap. As Nigeria attempts attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to become one of the 20 largest economies by the 2020, this paper becomes very crucial in discussing the objective situation of the Nigerian child. Against this background, this paper intends to highlight the issue of child labor across human societies, examine the dynamics of child labor in Nigeria, and discuss the implications of child labor for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Children in Laborious Economic Activities Across the Nations

The concept of child labor has attracted a number of definitions. According to International Labour Organization, ILO (2005) child labor is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with an excessively long and heavy workload (Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997).

One of the primary difficulties in addressing child labor is how to define it. Each country's circumstances may dictate what forms of "work" can be called "child labor". Factors to consider are the child's age, the hours and work performed, and the

conditions that may vary between sectors (Okafor & Bode-Okunade, 2003; Kuti, 2006). It is important not to confuse child labor with activities that assist in child development, such as helping around the house, doing chores, and assisting in the family business to earn extra money during the school holidays. The largest sector that employs children is agriculture. Estimates show that 1 out of 3 children involved in child labor must work for their own and/or their family's livelihood (Mishra, 2000; Mishra, 2001; Okpukpara, Chine, Uguru, & Chukwuone, 2006). This regularly exposes the child to long hours, hazardous equipment, and often harsh weather conditions. In addition, they are frequently exposed to pesticides and physical labor that is detrimental to a child's physical development. Their immune systems are not fully developed to mitigate the exposure to the pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers that contain toxins that hinder healthy development into adulthood. Beyond the farms, other industries that use child labor experience higher occurrences of injuries as children must use tools otherwise designed for adults, such as construction equipment, knitting looms, working in mines, and manufacturing assembly lines.

According to UNICEF (2008) an estimated 218 million children aged 5-17 are engaged in child labor, excluding child domestic labor all over the world. Some 126 million of these children are believed to be engaged in hazardous situation or condition such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. The highest numbers of child laborers are in the Asia/Pacific region, where there are 122 million working children. The highest proportion of child laborers is in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 26% of children (49 million) are involved in work (Bass, 2004). In 2004, figures from the ILO show that 218 million children, aged 5 – 17, are involved in child labor world-wide; 73 million of those working children are less than 10 years old; every year, 22,000 children die in work-related accidents; 8.4 million children are trapped in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, and other illicit activities; and 1.2 million of these children have been trafficked (ILO, 2005).

Specifically, ILO (1998) stated that the use of children as laborers has a global dimension and cut across every continent. It further argues that in Asia, it constituted 61%; 32% in Africa; 7% in Latin America; 1% in US, Canada, Europe, and other wealthy nations; 22% in Asia; and 17% in Latin America. The proportion of child laborers varies a lot among countries and even regions inside those countries. In some regions, the situation has worsened (Ennew, 2002; Brown, Larson & Saraswathi, 2002; Bohning, 2003; Ruwanpura & Rai, 2004). The UNICEF (1998) argues that in Africa, one of three children is at work, and, in Latin America, one of five children works. In both continents, only a tiny proportion of child workers are involved in the formal sector and the vast majority of work is for their families, in homes, in the fields, or on the streets.

It is important to note that the use of child laborers, as a social problem, is not peculiar to developing countries or Africa, but it is a problem that exists, even in developed countries. In the United States, for example, it is estimated that about 72,700 children worked in garment sweatshops Evensen, Schulman, Runyan, [Zakocs & Dunn, 2000](#); [Kruse & Mahony, 2000](#); Moskowitz, 2000). Besides United States, the use of child laborers is also very prevalent in other countries outside Africa. Some studies done in specific countries, such as Russia ([Stephenson, 2002](#)), India (Mishra, 2000; 2001), Pakistan (Ercelewa & Nauman, 2001; PILER, 2004), Bangladesh, ([Alam, Mondal, & Rahmanm, 2008](#)), European countries ([Liemt, 2004](#)), and among the Chinese in Europe ([Yun, 2004](#)), confirmed that the engagement of children in laborious economic activities

outside the home is still very prevalent. It is also pertinent to note, however, that in some of these countries, most of the child laborers are likely to be migrants. According to the ILO(2005) in northern Europe, for example, child laborers are likely to be Africans or Turkish; in Argentina, many are Bolivians or Paraguayans; in Thailand, many are from Myanmar.

The use of children as laborers has a number of causes. Poverty is widely considered the main reason why the children do works that are inappropriate for their ages outside their homes. Across countries and cultures, other causes include: family expectations and traditions; institutional collapse; decay in social services, such as health care, education, and transportation; public opinion that downplays the risk of early work for children; violation of labor standards by the employers; illiteracy, and family disorganization; traditional beliefs; massive rural-urban migration; and large family size ([Lopez-Calva, 2001](#); [Brown, et al., 2002](#); [Tomasevski, 2003](#); [Bass, 2004](#); [Liebel, 2004](#); [Nwaobiala, 2006](#); [Alam et al, 2008](#)).

Although, there are some economic benefits derived by these children when they work outside the home for survival and assist their impoverished families. However, the negative effects of the use of children as laborers are enormous and have been well documented. These include occupational hazards, cognitive problem, and denial of right to qualitative education. Being tender, physically, children are susceptible to various work-related injuries and illnesses more than the adults doing the same kind of work. Also, because they are not yet matured mentally, they are less aware, even completely unaware, of the potential risks involved in their specific occupations or at the workplace. As a result, a large number of working children are affected by various occupational hazards ([Weiner, 1991](#); [Mishra, 2001](#); [Stephenson, 2002](#); [Arnett, 2004](#); [Bass, 2004](#); [Oloko, 2004](#); [Nwaobiala, 2006](#); [Tade, 2010](#)).

Dynamics of Child Labor in Nigeria

In Nigeria, there is an upsurge in the incidence of child laborers in the past decades, making it a full blown industry, especially in the urban areas. This is largely attributed to the economic situation of the country, which has led to the involvement of the children as substantial contributors to their family's incomes by working as carriers in market places, street hawkers, workshop apprentices, domestic servants, motor park touts, and bus conductors in the urban center ([Onuikwe, 1998](#); [Okafor & Bode-Okunade, 2003](#); [Okafor and Amayo, 2006](#); [Folarin, 2009](#); [Tade, 2010](#); [Taiwo, 2010](#)). Over 4 million children in Nigeria are engaged in economic or labor activities, working long hours (average of 12 hours, daily) in poor and unhealthy conditions. They receive a token fee less than 1/3 of legislated minimum wage ([Oloko, 2004](#)). Over the years, the use of children for labor outside the home has continued to change in form and character in Nigeria ([Okpukpara & Odurukwe, 2003](#)). The many dynamics of child labor in Nigeria can be captured in the following forms. These are:

Domestic Service: Largely, most child workers in Nigeria are in domestic service ([Kuti, 2006](#)). Such laborers have been called 'the world most forgotten children'. Ordinarily, domestic service needs not be hazardous. Nevertheless, it often is. Children in the domestic servitude, living with or without their parents, are poorly catered for. The use of children for domestic service is very prevalent in urban cities in Nigeria. In most instances, the demand for the use of children for domestic services in Nigeria is anchored on the push and pull factor. According to [Kuti \(2006\)](#), [Okafor and Amayo \(2006\)](#), and [Tade \(2010\)](#), the main push factor, resulting in the demand of use of children for domestic service, is poverty, while the

main pull factor has been identified as an increasing entry of working women into the labor market, thus necessitating their demand for house-helpers. For these children who work outside their home as domestic servants, quite a number of them are trafficked. The middlemen or agents are always very instrumental to this deal (Kuti, 2006; Tade, 2010). In the case of 'rented' children in domestic services, performing household chores, usually their bosses set terms and conditions of their services. These children are, in most cases, deprived of affection, adequate and functional schooling, play, and other social activities. He or she may, in the long run, be vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse (Kuti, 2006; Tade, 2010).

Children in domestic service in Nigeria can be in several forms. Firstly, it may include or involve children from other families, parents, or another society employed by certain people which are believed to be wealthy and sometimes of modest income. The child is expected to work as 'house help' (domestic servant), taking care of the house and making sure that the needs of the entire family are meant. He or she gets up very early in the morning and begins his or her work by fetching of water from a nearby well, balancing the heavy jug on his or her head as he or she returns. Then he/she prepares breakfast and serves it to the members of the household. In addition, he/she later does the remaining jobs in the evenings and late in the night (Oloko, 2004; [Okafor & Amayo, 2006](#); Tade, 2010).

Another type of domestic service that can be rendered by a child at home is whereby the child stays with his/her parents or guardian, though he/she is not paid wages like the domestic servant, but he/she is born or socialized into the family to help the household by doing most of the work. This is most common among all the labor done by the child, which may be beneficial and give the child a sense of self worth and esteem in the family. But the fact that the labor is not paid for and that the labor deprives the child of needed rest and recreation, constitutes as child labor (Kuti, 2006).

Industrial Work: This is a form of child labor that has evolved over a period of time in Nigeria. This form of child labor is common in most urban areas in Nigeria, where children are engaged to do all kinds of work in the factories, especially in Asian firms in Nigeria. For instance, children carry molten loads of glass stuck on the tips of iron rods. In big and commercial centers in Nigeria, it is often a common sight seen children working in factories under very deplorable conditions (Mokwenye, 2008). Under this form of child labor, children do all sorts of hazardous work in factories as casual workers for the sake of profit maximization by the employers, which sometimes are considered too risky for adults, even in the industrialized societies ([Barker & Knaul, 1991](#)).

Street hawking: This form of child labor is very common in most cities in Nigeria, where the incomes are low and have proved inadequate to cater for a whole family. Under this circumstance, a child may be made to hawk along the busy streets and major highways in order to supplement the family income. Some commonly hawked items include cold soft drinks, fruits of every kind, cold water sachets, clothing materials, foot wears, and other materials (Isamah & Okunola, 2002). Studies conducted in most Nigerian cities showed that street hawking is the most common form of child labor in Nigeria. This cuts across major cities in Nigeria, including Lagos, Ibadan, Sokoto, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Jos, Benin, etc. (Obikeze, 1986; Okpara, 1986; Adewuyi, 1998; Okafor, 2000; UNICEF, 2001).

Bus conducting: In the recent times, bus conducting has become a common feature of child labor in urban Nigeria. The population pressure, brought about by a massive rural-urban drift, has resulted in high demand for buses and taxis for commercial purpose. Some studies of motor garages in some major cities, especially Lagos, showed the growing use of children as bus conductors (Onuikwe, 1998; Folarin, 2009; Taiwo, 2010). These children, who are mostly of tender age, were recruited into these activities with or without the consent of their parents, to generate income, either for their families or for themselves. In some cases, these children may combine bus conducting with education or may be out of school entirely. If they are combining bus conducting with education they may be working part-time to generate income to assist their impoverished family and pay their school fees, in which case they may be working full-time during the weekends. On the other hand, if they are out of school, they may be working full-time with no prospect of returning to school. Often time, their bosses (the drivers) determine their terms and conditions of service. Children engaging in bus conducting in major cities in Nigeria may be subjected to all kinds of exploitation by their bosses and aggressive passengers. If such children failed to return home at the end of every working day, they may be exposed to all kinds of clandestine activities in the motor parks and garages, like petty thievery and exposure to HIV/ AIDS (Onuikwe, 1998; Taiwo, 2010).

Child Trafficking: Discussing the dynamism of child labor will be incomplete without highlighting the issues of child trafficking in Nigeria. According to Ebigbo (2006), the average age of trafficked children is 15 years, although age could vary, especially among girls. These children (primarily girls) engage in sex trade outside the country. Ebigbo (2006) further estimated that 60%-80% of girls in the sex trade outside the country are in Italy (over 700 in Italy, while Belgium and the Netherlands are experiencing an upsurge in number of Nigerian girls). The common routes most traffickers usually used include, the west coast of Nigeria to Mali, Morocco and then by boat to Spain or the west coast of Nigeria to Libya and Saudi Arabia. Also, 90% travelled by road across the Sahara desert and others through airports, seaports, and bush paths (Ebigbo, 2006).

The impact trafficking on children as identified by Ebigbo (2006) included; the loss of lives, the increase of prevalence of STDs, including HIV/AIDS, the increase in the violence and crime rate, the increase of school drop-outs, the impaired child development, the poor national image, and the massive deportation of Nigerian girls. Furthermore, on the categories of child laborers, Ebigbo (2006) argued that the girls are used mostly for domestic help and prostitution, while boys were used as scavengers, car washers, bus conductors, drug peddlers, and farmers. Both sexes can be involved in head leading, community based brass melting, and menial jobs. On the volume of trafficking he argued that, on average, 10 children, daily, pass through the Nigerian borders, especially originating from fostering and extended family systems.

Finally, on the major causes of child trafficking in Nigeria, Ebigbo (2006) identified widespread poverty, sparking the push-pull factors to the urban center, as high level of illiteracy, unemployment, and poor living standards. He concluded that the burdens of poverty, desperation of poor and illiterate parents with large families as well as ignorant of the impact of child trafficking make parents to succumb to this illicit transaction.

Theoretical Context and Implications for Sustainable Development

Following from the above dynamism of child labor, it is evident that most child laborers are working to support themselves and their poverty stricken families. Against this background, this paper has adopted a *poverty hypothesis* in understanding and explaining the dynamics of child labor in Nigeria.

Poverty is defined as a lack of empowerment and security. Poverty has two basic dimensions namely relative and absolute. Poverty is measured in terms of US \$1 a day for low-income countries, US \$2 for middle-income, and US \$4 for transitional economies (OECD, 2001; UNDP, 2002). Poverty has a number of causes. Among the root cause of poverty, some are linked to immutable factors, like climate, geography, and history, while others are linked to a deficient governance, which is subject to change, and includes a core set of factors that perpetuate poverty, such as entrenched corruption, lack of respect for human rights, weak institutions and inefficient bureaucracies, lack of social cohesion, and political will to undertake reforms. The current situation in Nigeria portrays this scenario well, which depicts chaos at all levels of institutions (Offiong, 2001; Akinyele, 2005).

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievement in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: longevity, knowledge, and decent standard of living. As a composite index, it has three variables of life expectancy, educational attainment, and real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. The Human Poverty Index measures deprivation in basic human development in the same dimension as the HDI. The variables used are the percentage of people expected to die before age 40, percentage of adults who are illiterate, and overall economic provisions, in terms of the percentages of people without access to health services and safe water, and the percentage of children under age 5 who are underweight (UNDP, 2002).

Poverty is very pervasive in Nigeria. Using the above indicators, Nigeria's score sheet has been very poor. A trend analysis shows that the value was 0.328 in 1975, and increased to 0.388 in 1980, 0.403 in 1985, 0.425 in 1990, 0.448 in 1995, and 0.462 in 2000. Despite this fact, Nigeria's ranking only improved to the 148th position out of 177 countries. Infact the two United States (U.S)-based influential organizations, *The Heritage Foundation* and *the Wall Street Journal*, ranked Nigeria 146th out of 157 countries listed. In fact, in sub-Saharan Africa, the report rated Nigeria above only one country, Zimbabwe (Oloja, 2006).

The preceding discussion shows that Nigeria has, indeed, sunk into a quagmire of poverty and, incidentally the culture of poverty is being replicated in all its major institutions, especially the family institution, from where child laborers are recruited, incubated, and sent to the large society. Many theorists have noted that the lifestyle of the poor differ in certain respects from that of other members of the society. The argument is that similar circumstances and problems tend to produce similar response, and these responses can develop into a culture, that is the learned shared and socially transmitted behavior of a social group. This line of reasoning has led to the concept of the culture of poverty. This basically refers to a relatively distinct subculture of the poor, with its own norms and values. The idea of a culture of poverty was first introduced in the late 1950's by an American anthropologist, Oscar Lewis (1959, [1961](#), and 1966). According to Lewis (1959), the culture of

poverty is a response by the poor to their place in society. In other words, it is a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified and highly individualistic society.

He further argued that the culture of poverty goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation. It takes on the force of culture because its characteristics are guides to actions that are internalized by the poor and passed on from one generation to the next. As such, the culture of poverty tends to perpetuate poverty since its characteristics can be mechanisms that reinforce poverty. Such mechanisms are attitude of fatalism and resignation to fate.

According to Lewis (1959) once established, the culture of poverty tends to perpetuate itself from one generation to the next generation because of its effect on children. Therefore by the time the 'slum children' are aged 6 or 7, they had absorbed values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically predisposed to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities, which may occur in their lifetime ([Haralambos & Holborn, 2004](#)).

As a design for living, which directs behavior, the culture of poverty hypothesis argued that it has the following elements:

- On the individual level, according to [Lewis \(1961\)](#), the major characteristics are a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence, and of inferiority, a strong present time orientation, with relatively little ability to defer gratification, and a sense of resignation and fatalism.
- On the family level, life is characterized by free union or consensual marriage, a relatively high incidence of abandonment of mothers and children, a trend towards mother – centered families and a much greater knowledge of divorce and desertion by the male-headed resulting in matrifocal families, headed by women.
- On the community level, the lack of effective participation and integration in the major institutions of the larger society is one of the crucial characteristics of the culture of poverty. For most the family is the only institution in which they directly participate.

From the above characterizations, it is evident that poverty may be produced and reproduced over time through the process of socialization, of which the family institution is very central. Within the context of socialization, the family is considered as the most important because it is within this institution that behavior is formed and maintained, and where rudimentary skills and knowledge that would assist the individual in the future are learned. Parents are expected to do their best to guide, encourage, and support their children in their educational and occupational choices and careers ([Wahba, 2001](#); [Alam et al, 2008](#)). However, a family trapped in the poverty condition will not fulfill this basic and, perhaps, this crucial function to its members.

In a stratified capitalist society composed mostly of the poor families, the family institution would find it difficult to socialize its members ([Copper, 1972](#)). The children would be deprived of education, good health and, more importantly, be socialized to produce and reproduce the conditions and situations of their family. The child brought up in such institutions, deprived of basic necessities of life, would develop a stunt personality, develop fatalistic attitude of life, and constitute a potential social miscreant and child laborer in the society ([Woodhead &Montgomery, 2003](#)).

Predictably, when families are faced with the kind of precarious, economic condition enunciated above, they may resort to trafficking the children away from homes to urban center for the child labor in order to generate incomes to take care of other members of the family (Okafor & Amayo, 2006; Tade, 2010). It is not uncommon to see in Nigerian cities' under-aged children already involved in economic activities to augment their parents' meager incomes (Ayoade, 2010). This is unlike Western societies, which provide various forms of social safety nets against total family impoverishments and collapses. On a daily basis, desperate impoverished Nigerian parents are forced to adopt various clandestine measures to keep their families afloat in the absence of any social safety net. The deplorable situations of most families in Nigeria have pushed the children out of their own homes to work in urban centers to earn money to assist their families, with little or no prospect of them acquiring their formal education, which would have broken the cycle of poverty, inherited from their parents (Isamah & Okunola, 2002; Ayoade, 2010).

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report (Barbier, 1987; Anderson, 2002). According to the Report, sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains, within it, two key concepts:

- the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organizations on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

In every society, children and extension the youths are the future of their society. That explains why every society ensures that every child is given every available opportunity to live, survive, and develop their full potentials for the future. All educational and youth programs are geared towards the achievement of this goal. This cannot be said to be the case with the average Nigerian child, who is enmeshed in child labor and other forms of deprivation. The case of the Nigeria children is precarious, but amounts to compromising the future.

For instance, in Nigeria, one in every five children do not live beyond their fifth birthday (UNICEF, 2004) In the area of education, the report issued by the nation's Ministry of Education (Olatunji, 2006; Adeoye, 2007) showed that out of 42.1 million Nigerian children eligible for primary education; only 22.3 million were in school. The remaining 19.8 million were out of school. The situation for secondary schools, where most adolescents fall into, was even worse. Of 33.9 million of children eligible for secondary education, only 6.4 million were in school. That is not because parents are not desirous of sending their children to school, but because of a lack of economic power to actualize a wish for a better future of the children.

Granted, these children may work to meet the immediate and present needs of their poverty stricken families, working as domestic servants, bus conductors, street hawkers, and sex workers, but they are compromising not only their future, but the

collective future of the nation. A child who is compelled by the nation's socio-economic condition to work as domestic servants, bus conductors, street hawkers, and sex workers will grow up to become a burden, rather than asset, to him/herself and the nation because the child will lack basic survival skills and knowledge that will benefit him/herself and the nation, in the long run (Okpukpara *et al*, 2006; Ayoade, 2010).

Nations that have now become developed are those that maximized the potential of sustainable development by investing in the future of the children and the youths, by investing in their education and providing conducive environments for the families to meet the needs of their members. Sustainable development, in this context, therefore, depends not only in investing the present needs of the working children, but also eradicating all forms of child labor that will compromise the future development of these children and the nation, at large. The situation of a working Nigeria child, therefore, does not guaranteed sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that most children get involved in laborious activities out their homes for a number of reasons, but mostly to help their poverty stricken families and to complement the family income. By engaging these children as child laborers, the personalities and attitudes of these are prematurely damaged and are irreparable. Since these children are the future of the Nigerian society, evidently the sustainable development of the large society is present being compromised. For Nigeria to meet the challenges of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to become one of the leading economies in the year 2020, special interests and investments must be made in the education of millions of children trapped in the quagmire of child labor. Furthermore, it is incumbent on the government in Nigeria to provide conducive environment that will enable family institutions to fulfill its obligations to its members, without compromising the future of the children and the entire society at large.

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