

CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE AMONG POOR RURAL HOUSEHOLDS: SOME ISSUES AND FACTS

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is one of the faces of poverty and is a great concern in many developing countries Nigeria inclusive. There is a paucity of information on child labour among the rural poor in Southern Nigeria. This study attempts to fill this lacuna by examining some issues and facts on child labour. This paper reviews the supply factors that influence the use of child labour in agriculture and some of the policy implications. Among the important factors that push children into the work force highlighted in this paper are family poverty, larger household size, lack of accessible and quality education, culture or family traditions and HIV/AIDS pandemic. The major factor influencing the supply of child labour in agriculture is poverty. Families with larger number of children are more susceptible to give their children to work in order to augment family income. Although there is free and compulsory education policy in most countries including Nigeria, and the enrolment rate in public schools has increased. The cost of a child's education is not equal to zero for the poorest of poor rural households when there is free education. Parents are unable to send their children to school when direct costs of uniform, transportation to and from school, books, and writing materials need to be supplied from meagre to household income. Children's social and cultural background also play an important role in their participation in work and educational opportunities. This study underscores the need for government at all levels and development stakeholders to mainstream child labour considerations in relevant development and management policies, strategies, programmes and plans and to effectively tackle child labour, and create a pathway for the elimination of child labour.

Keywords: Child, labour, poverty, households.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is work that harms children's well being and hinders their education development and future livelihoods. Child labour is work which by its nature and/or the way it is carried out, harms, abuses and exploits the child or deprives the child of an education (ILO, 2006). Worldwide, agriculture is the sector where by far the largest share of child labourers is found-nearly 60 percent. According to ILO (2006) and ILO (2010), over 129 million girls and boys aged 5 to 17 years old work in crop and livestock production, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry helping supply some of the food and drink we consume and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products. Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases. About 59 percent (or 70 million) of all children in hazardous work aged 5-17 are in agriculture. Child labour is a great concern in many parts of the world including Nigeria and it appears to be particularly widespread in the informal small and medium-scale sectors. It is important to distinguish between child labour and child work. Child work is considered to have essential socialization functions while child labour tends to take place outside the family and sometimes could be exploitative (Mendelievich, 1979). Child labour is considered as work performed by children under 18 years of age which is exploitative, hazardous or

inappropriate for their age, as well as detrimental to their schooling, social, mental, spiritual and moral development. According to Akarro and Mtweve (2011), this shrinks their opportunities for schooling and also enslaves them and separate them from their families. In most cases, this practice is often violation of international laws and national legislation on children's rights.

Child labour is one of the impediments to achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 for all developing countries including Nigeria. However, tackling child labour is not an easy task as its occurrence is entwined in poverty and social injustice and cannot be addressed in isolation. In order to address child labour, an understanding of some issues and facts about child labour and agriculture, poverty and factors that pre-dispose children to difficult labour is imperative. This paper therefore examines some issues and facts about child labour in agriculture, and the factors influencing the supply of children to work.

CHILD LABOURERS IN AGRICULTURE

Agricultural child labourers work on all types of undertakings, ranging from family farms (small, medium and large-sized), corporate-run farms, plantations, and agro-industrial complexes (ILO, 2006). Child labour in agriculture is a global phenomenon and is found in all regions of the world including Nigeria. An estimated 246 million children (ILO-IPEC, 2002) around the world carry out work that harms their well-being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. Seventy percent of all child labourers work in agriculture. While many children have traditionally been employed in family enterprises, children also work in large-scale commercial plantations and in agriculture as migrant farm workers. As majority of work in rural areas is agricultural, nine out of ten working children in rural areas are engaged in agriculture or similar activities. Though agriculture takes place mainly in a rural setting, urban agriculture, which is labour intensive and occurs on small plots of land, is found in both developing and developed countries. An estimated 200 million farmers work part time in urban agriculture. Thus, agricultural child labourers may also be found in urban areas (ILO, 2006).

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUPPLY OF CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

Poverty, household size, lack of accessible, affordable, quality education (including skills training and apprenticeships), cultural traditions and HIV/AIDS are among the important factors pushing children into workforce.

(a) Poverty

In many low-income countries, agriculture accounts for a large proportion of economic activity and even higher proportion of employment. According to ILO (2006), seventy-five percent of the 1.1 billion poor with less than one dollar per day live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. Pinstrup-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch (2001), Okunmadewa (2001); Etim *et al.* (2009); Etim and Udofia (2013) documented that poverty in Nigeria is essentially a rural phenomenon as most of the impoverished people (about 70 percent) live in rural areas where they derive their livelihood from farming.

Poverty is the major cause behind child labour but it is further influenced by the effects of social inequality, structural unemployment, vulnerability to shocks, demographic and migratory developments. Poverty has many aspects of which malnutrition is a central aspect. According to ILO (2006), malnutrition or undernourishment also deepens other aspects of

poverty by reducing the capacity to work and resistance to disease and by adversely affecting children's physical and mental development or achievements. Poverty in childhood is much more likely to have long-term impacts on the future poverty of that child. In many instances, working children represent a plentiful source of cheap labour. The prevalence of child labour in agriculture undermines decent work for adults, sustainable agriculture and food security as it maintains a cycle where household income for both farmers and waged workers is insufficient to meet their economic needs. Children who have lost their father are more likely to be poor than those who have not (World Bank, 2003; Ahmed *et al.*, 2007). Many children need to work for hours to raise money for their schooling and supplement household income. The incidence of poverty has caused children to work for their survival and many parents depend on their children's work even if they know it is wrong (ILO, 2010). To effectively tackle and curb child labour, the incidence of rural poverty should not be overlooked.

(b) Household Sizes

Household size is an important determining factor of children's labour activities and educational opportunities. This is because families with larger number of children are more likely to give their children to work in order to earn income for the family. There is an association between household size and poverty, since larger households are found to be poorer (Similer *et al.*, 2004). However, the association does not imply a causal link between household size and poverty since there are complex, dynamic links between demographic variables and poverty that prevent us from drawing conclusions from this. It has been argued that high fertility rate is positively correlated with the incidence of child labour (HBS, 2007). High fertility increases the chances that children from large families have to do work to support household income (Akarro and Mtweve, 2011). In the context of poverty and basic survival needs, children are considered as preferred commodity by their parents compared with other goods because of their economic utility.

The household production theory assumes that the quality of children in a household is a decisive determinant of child labour. Studies of Mexican households have found a significant negative relationship between quantity of children and quality of their lifestyle (Levison, Moe and Knaul, 2000; Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Christenson and Juarez, 1987). Similarly, Patrinos and Psacharopolous (1997) cite a positive relationship between a large number of siblings and child development. Furthermore, the distribution of the children's age within the family has been found to be related to the likelihood of child employment. Older children repeatedly face an increased rate of labour especially when younger children are accounted for (DeGraff, Bilsborrow and Herriman, 1993; Binder and Scrogin, 1999; Levison, Moe and Knaul, 2001).

Canagarajah and Nielsen (2001) in a comparative review of child labour studies based on only five African countries, tested the utility of the household production framework. The comparison of the five studies – Grootaert (1998), Coulombe (1998); Canagarajah and Coulombe (1998); Bhalotra and Heady (1998) and Nielsen (1998) lends further credence to the significance of household factors in the explanation of child labour. For example, the presence of siblings within the household influences a child's employment status in the household (Grootaert, 1998).

(c) Lack of Accessible, Affordable and Quality Education

Education is one of the basic rights of every child. Poverty is one of the major reasons for poor parents keeping their children away from school. The agricultural sector is often characterized by lack of schools, schools of variable quality, problems of retaining teachers in remote rural areas, lack of accessible education for children, poor/variable rates of rural school attendance and low standards of educational performance and achievements (ILO, 2006). In remote rural areas where access to schools is poor, child labour is expected to be common. The absence of formal education, lack of government presence, costs of schooling and low levels of parental education are pre-disposing factors to child labour. According to World Bank (2005), primary and secondary school attendance rates continue to be low because millions of school children work instead of attending school in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is an indication that child labour is one of impediments to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of universal education by 2015 in Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria. It is not disputable that some state governments in Nigeria, like the case of Akwa Ibom State has advocated and actually implemented the free and compulsory education policy. And it is not in doubt that the enrolment rate in public primary and secondary schools has increased tremendously. But for poor rural households, the cost of a child's education are not equal's to zero when there is free education. Many parents are still unable and disheartened to send their children to school when direct costs of uniform, transportation to and from school, books and writing materials need to be supplied from the meager family income. According to Akarro and Mtwere (2011), these immediate and direct costs of schooling also lower the likelihood of the child ever entering school.

Although children from some of the poor households are enrolled in schools, they tend to do seasonal or part-time employment and carryout household responsibilities and chores. The periodic absence of these children from school due to participation in seasonal work is not usually and cannot be compensated by their teachers or family members. This results in poor performance in school, class repetition, failure and finally drop out from school. According to ILO-IPEC (2001), this productivity gap and uneven development between urban and rural attract the influx of rural poor in urban areas where most of them migrate to seek job. One of the factors affecting the supply of child labour is the high cost, in real terms, of obtaining an education. Many children work to cover the costs of school expenses. But, many schools serving the poor are of such abysmal quality or chances of upward mobility for graduates are so slim that the expected return is not equal to the sacrifice made. Narasiah (2003) reported that although many children drop out of school because they have to work, it is equally true that many children become so discouraged by school that they prefer to work.

(d) Cultural or Family Traditions

In some societies, children working alongside adults is considered an essential element of their socialization (ILO, 2006). Such work is a valued tradition in parts of Africa. Children's social and cultural background plays an important role in their participation in work and educational opportunities. Religious affiliation, myths and tradition define childhood and generational role in African societies which differ significantly from that of the western world. As reported by Akarro and Mtwere (2011), in many African societies, children are never accorded with an identity of their own as they are objects of their parents' wishes and family needs. The cultural aspect for household's head gives the adults authority over children.

In the traditional African society, many parents emphasize on their children following their footsteps. According to ILO (2006), this tradition may reinforce prevailing social biases, girls imitate their mothers and boys their father and grandfathers. A family whose tradition is engagement in hazardous work is likely to raise children who will follow the same line of work.

(e) HIV/AIDS Pandemic

AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) is a disease caused by destruction of the immuno system by a virus called HIV (Human Immuno Deficiency Virus). The majority of the 40 million people infected with HIV are in the prime of their working lives (Derrien, 2002). Child labourers in agriculture are often at direct risk of infection from HIV. According to ILO (2006), through their vulnerability to sexual exploitation or harassment they can be victims and can also fuel the spread of the disease. Poor working conditions and low wages have driven many workers into behavioural patterns that increase the risk of infection and transmission of the disease. Such as involvement in commercial sex and sexual favours. Increased use of child labour due to HIV/AIDS can come about in a variety of ways. Children can be used to fill jobs previously undertaken by adult agricultural workers who have died of AIDS or when parents develop AIDS, children, particularly older ones, often get pushed into the labour market. When an adult in a family becomes sick with AIDS-related illness, children especially girls, are likely to have to take on more household task or seek income generating work to make up for lost income (ILO, 2006). When both parents pass on, older children are usually under pressure and are forced to become household heads and cater for 6 younger siblings. They are usually forced to work in farms as a survival strategy. Nola (2000) reported that in agricultural communities, the number of child-headed households has increased as the parents have died from the virus and extended family network cannot cope with the sheer number of orphans. A series of IPEC rapid assessment studies in Africa documented by ILO (1998) suggest that HIV/AIDS is among the major causes of child labour.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined some issues and facts about child labourers in agriculture and specifically highlighted the causes of child labour to include family poverty, household size, lack of accessible, affordable and quality education, culture and family tradition, and HIV/AIDS pandemic. Agriculture cannot be sustainable while labour of children is exploitative. Poverty seems to be the driving force for child labour. For agriculture to be sustainable, conscious efforts must be made to curb poverty. The paper posits that households with many children are more susceptible to child labour. Religious affiliation, culture, norms and tradition also play vital role in the participation of children in work. Since poverty is the driving force of child labour, policy options that will reduce poverty through the improvement of income and wages for agricultural workers and farmers in the long run should be formulated. Because education is one of the basic rights of every child, there is need to formulate policies that will improve access to education for children particularly in the rural areas in order to eliminate child labour.

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