

CHILD LABOUR: IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL IMPLICATION: A CASE OF NORTHEAST UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

The article reports the constraint of implementing the child labor policy by education stakeholders in North-East Uganda. Child labor is believed has impact on the physical, social and intellectual development of a child. Despite government effort to combat child labor by enacting child labor law and policies, the rate of child labor is still prevalent in some districts in Uganda. Parents should be sensitized about the value of education to their children. Government should find ways of fighting poverty, and all the stakeholders should join hands in order to eradicate child labor.

KEYWORDS: Child Labour, Law and Policies, Socio-Economic Effects, Implementation

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is the most innocent stage of human life. It is that phase of life where a child is free from all tensions, for loving, playing, and learning new things, and this the sweetheart of the family members. But this is only one side of the story. The other side is full of tension and burden. Here the innocent child instead is an earning machine of the family, working the entire day in order to satisfy the needs and wants of the family. This is child labor (Anyagarwal 2009).

Child labor is widely spread in Uganda. According to Government figure, household census (1999), 1.7 million of Uganda children age 5-7 years old are involved in some kind of work and may have to miss schools to go out for work instead, while many are putting themselves in arms way. Report survey published by an Aid agency, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and AVSI foundation (2006) showed that 15% of children in Northern Uganda are involved in harsh, dangerous labor such as breaking stones, collecting firewood and prostitution. Uganda's constitution (1995) chapter 1, article 34 (4) provides for protection of a child from hazardous and exploitative work. It was estimated that 7.9 million children in Uganda aged 5-17 years were working as child labor. Simply 1 in 3 children, majority of whom are from rural areas.

In the context of this article, policy is defined as a cause of action intentionally undertaken with specific purpose in mind, Owolabi (2005). In its simplest form, policy refers to a broad statement that reflects future goals and aspirations and provides guidelines for carrying out those goals. The government constituted child labor law to guide the child from hazardous work that could otherwise interfere with their physical and mental development. However, the implementation of the child labor policy has attracted the interest of some academicians. Academic performance is all the performance reflected on the education of the child. Meers, (1987) stated that education performance reflects the total involvement of a child or youth in the school environment which includes social and emotional development, communication and participation in the classrooms as well as out of class activities. Poor performance means a child does not conform to a required standards i.e. late arrival, dodging lessons, poor examination achievement. When the academic performance of pupils in Pakwach Town Council was looked at, it gave a sign for justification of existence poor performance among the pupils. It was viewed in terms of late arrival, absenteeism, examination results. According to data obtained from NorthEast Uganda, specifically in Nebbi District; out of 2307 pupils who sat for Primary Leaving Examination from 2005 to 2010,

only 21 pupils passed in Division 1, 176 in Division 2 and 278 failed in Division U. Many of the school going age children are being seen by the road side either selling food items or loitering, despite all the efforts being put by the government to combat child labor.

Child labor has been rampant in Nebbi District, especially after the Northern insurgency caused by LRA war. The war disrupted peace in Northern region of Uganda and led to influx of people from Acholi sub-region to neighboring, especially Pakwach town council. Many parents lost their lives leaving behind a number of orphans. Some parents were abducted by LRA making many people to flee the war -torn zone for their safety. Condition of living became difficult, education of pupils was disrupted; most children resorted to cheap labor like fetching water and selling small items by the roadside. Pakwach being gateway to west Nile, Democratic Republic of Congo and Northern Sudan; many young girls resorted to commercial sex to earn a living for their families. The impact of the LRA war is still being felt in Northern region including Nebbi District as many people refused to go back to their base due to trauma caused by the war. People of Pakwach town council in Nebbi District depend on fishing in the river Nile. However, the number of fish in the river has reduced tremendously due to overfishing and the small sized fishing nets being used. The people, consequently, have resorted to using their children for petty business and cheap labor for survival.

Impact of Child Labor on Academic Performance of Pupils

Abraka (2010) found that 22% of student's academic performance was influenced by attending classes in secondary schools of Delta State of Nigeria. He therefore identified that increase in attendance will also increase academic performance of students.

Child labor is a facet of poverty their connection is well entrenched in the empirical literature. The dilemma is whether this child labor is efficient from economic point of view and whether it is a hindrance on the child achievement at school and personal development. The conventional argument for government intervention in child labor market is based on the existence of externalities-parents do not fully internalize the positive externalities accruing from higher educational attainment to their children and hence under provide In terms of education for their offspring, Annabel (2008).

Many children were abducted by LRA; some of them managed to escape and came back, but could not continue with education due to the trauma they went through. According to US department of state, country report (2006), the orphans drop out of school to work to survive and to fend their siblings. Children from northern Uganda and Southern Sudan were abducted by (LRA) and trafficked to Eastern Republic of Congo and other areas within Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan. Upon being abducted, they are forced to become cooks, porters, agricultural workers, soldiers and guards. Many were also beaten, raped and repaired to participate in the murder of other children who attempt to escape.

Child labor is perceived to be a serious problem, as it is believed to be destructive to children's intellectual and physical development especially that of young children. The danger is exacerbated for those children who work in hazardous industries. This is the theory behind the child labor trap. If a child is employed all through the day, the child remains un-educated and subsequently has low productivity as an adult. So child labor can directly contribute to adult un-employment in developing countries. A major caveat is that there is very little treatment of such long term dynamic consequences of child labor, (Annabel 2008).

Parents' Perceptions about Child Labor

Werner (2006) argues in favor of child labor. He sated that in many impoverished locales, child labor is all that stands between the family and unit and all pervasive, life threatening, destitution. Child labor declines markedly as income

per-capita grows. To deprive these bread earners the opportunities to lift themselves and their immoral hypocrisy. Just because they are under age does not mean that we should completely reject them, they have a right to survive. One can not just say that they can not work, but should provide the alternatives. Stopping child labor without doing anything else could create more challenges. If they are working out of necessity, as most of them are, stopping them could force them into prostitution or other employment with greater personal dangers. The most important thing is that they be in school and receive the education to help them obtain basic education and improve their mind- set on issues on life and survival.

Rural and poor communities rarely prefer education on regular basis to more than two thirds of their eligible school going age children. This is especially true in rural areas where child labor is widely spread. Education especially of women is considered un-affordable luxury by many hard pressed parents. In many cultures work is still considered indispensable in shaping the child's morality and strength of character and in teaching him or her trade, (Venin, 2009).

Beyond the basic need for education to support oneself and family in later years, many social ills appear in the vacuum of free and accessible education. According too UNICEF, over 100 million children work in agriculture in rural areas world wide where access of education, availability of trained teachers and educational supply is severely limited. However, poverty remains the largest barrier to access. Paying school fees is an impossibility to many families struggling to make ends meet, especially on light of the ongoing food crisis and when faced with burden of HIV/AIDS in their families and community. Complete school fees abolition is necessary to ensure that children are able to receive education, (Wassema, 2000).

Socio Economic Effects of Child Labor

In Africa, children are normally treated as mini adults; from an early age every child will have task to perform in the home, such as sweeping or fetching water. It is also common to see children working in shops or on the streets. Poor families will often send their children to a richer relation as a housemaid or houseboy in the hope that he will get an education, (Vaknin, 2009).

According to Bennet, Hodne and Shere (2010), the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 246 million children age of 5-17 years currently work under conditions that are considered illegal, hazardous, or extremely exploitative. Underage children work at all sorts of jobs around the world, usually because they and their families are extremely poor. Large numbers of children work in commercial agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, mining and domestic services. Some children work in illicit activities like drug trade and prostitution or other traumatic activities such as serving soldiers. Children involvement in child labor is a violation of nation's Minimum Age Law and prevents them from school thereby undermining labor standards and threatens children physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Involves them into labor abuse such as slavery, child trafficking, debt bondage, forced labor and illicit activities.

Constraint in the Implementation of Child Labor Policy

Mwebaze (2010) stated that, despite the prevalence and the many dangers associated with child labor, the phenomenon has received the attention of researchers academicians and policy makers only recently, and not until International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates show a large and increasing number of working children worldwide. It is now recognized that in order to combat child labor effectively, policies should be formulated in an informed understanding of its cause, roles and implications. Child labor is still common and starts with early age in Uganda. The policy implementation of child labor is not straight forward. For example an outright ban on child labor would be a substantial short term cost to the economic welfare of the household and in very poor regions; the alternative to work may be to suffer acute hunger or starvation.

Wamakuyu (2010) found that over 2.7 million children in Uganda are involved in child labor, of these 35% work and attend classes at the same time, 3% percent work without going to school, about 4.7% are neither involved in work nor attend school.

US embassy- Kampala (2006) stated that child work is common in Uganda. Children work in crop farming and in commercial agriculture related to tea, tobacco and rice. In urban areas, children sell small items on the streets, work in shops, or are involved in commercial sex industries. Children are also engaged in domestic work, stone quarrying, and stone crashing and across order smuggling within Uganda.

Girls are trafficked from rural areas to urban areas for sexual exploitation that results to high risk of HIV/AIDS infection which has left many orphaned.

Bataningaya (2010) found that about 60% of UPE pupils who start primary school complete primary seven (p7). However, out of 1,712,420 pupils, who started p1 in 2002, only 516,890 pupils sat PLE in 2009, representing only 30%. Ministry's statistics indicate that the rest repeat or drop out. It also revealed that distribution of pupils by class, P1 25%, P2 25%, P3 16%, P4 14%, P5 13%, P6 10%, and P7 6%. It attributed the drastic decline to the following reasons, lack of interest 46% family responsibility 15%, sickness 12% employment 4%, marriage 4%, school fees 3%, pregnancy 2%, dismissal 1% and others 13%.

The employment Act 32(1-3) sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years. Child between the age of 12 and 14 may engage in light work that does not hinder their education and is supervised by adult of 18 years and above. Children under 12 are prohibited from working in any business or work place. The law states that no child will be employed in hazardous work or between 7pm and 7am.

The constitution of Uganda chapter 4, states that children under 16 years have the right to be protected from social and economic exploitation and should not be employed in any hazardous work that would otherwise endanger their health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, or work that would interfere with their education.

The main division in policy design is between legal intervention such as banning child labor and collaborative interventions; public action, which offers the economic environment to induce parents to withdraw children from the labor force of their own accord. These policies may include advances in technology, improvement in the adult; labor market and greater availability of goods schooling.

Owolabi (2005) noted that successful implementation of education policy requires the mobilization of political; support. Systematic experimentation and recorded experience show that involving people to be affected by the policy in the planning implantation and evaluation process will make the policy more acceptable. However, the UPE policy is encountering some problems. There was a very high pupils teacher ratio of 100:1, the book ratio was 1 book to 6.7 pupils. It was being evident that the policy was not affordable. The amount the government could afford was also too small to provide quality education. There were high drop out rate; the desirability of the policy was already in question.

Combating child labor requires different methods by all the stakeholders. According to IRC (2006), the government is participating in opportunities for reducing adolescent and child labor through education (ORACLE) project, a 4 year USD three million project funded by USDOL and implemented by International Rescue Committee and the Italian Association for volunteers in International service. The ORACLE project contributes to the elimination and prevention of the worst form of child labor amongst conflict-affected children in Northern Uganda provision of transitional and non-formal education and family based poverty reduction strategies.

An extreme shortage of teacher in many countries, due to many factors ranging from budget ceiling to the HIV/AIDS epidemics has become problematic in achieving EFA goals. Teachers must be properly trained and paid in order to provide quality education, Mead (2005).

CONCLUSIONS

Successful implementation of child policy requires efforts by all the stake holders to participate in the policy making process. The government, educational managers and administrators, teachers and the community at large should all be involved in the process. Poverty which has majorly been the cause of the child labor should be tackled adequately. This could be done by creating employment, provision of low interest loan to the community, and opening of technical institutes in each district, that trains production skills which is necessary for self employment.

Introduction of free education was a crucial way of combating child labor, especially in sub-saharan African regions, where majority of the community could not afford to pay school fees for their children. However, for the policy to achieve its objectives, corruption must be fought hard. However the policy to achieve its objectives, corruption must be fought hard. This corruption, ranging from the ministry, local government and the school system, has been the bottle neck of achieving the goal of Education for all (EFA).

Other problems emanating from poor leadership, poor program management overlapping jurisdiction, poor clarity of goals and inadequate resources should not be tackled in isolation. The government should take drastic action on the law breakers, fund UPE program adequately, making sure no fee is being charged in the schools.

The community should be sensitized about the value of education to both the child and the family and the community at large.

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