

Scaling-down Domestic Violence against Children in Nigeria for Sustainable National Development

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Abstract

Children are priceless asset to parents. They are biologically different from the adults in the ways and manners by which they do their things. All children, normal or special, need certain basic provisions of life to grow from the helplessness of infancy and childhood to become mature and independent adults. It is the contention of this paper that, children are the basis for all dimensions of sustainable development and as such, they have a right to prosper, develop to their full potential and live in a sustainable world. However, when children are deprived of their basic rights and are subjected to unnecessary hardships through various forms of unfavourable domestic activities and practices, then their normal physical, social, emotional and cognitive developments are put at risk. The paper provides highlights on child labour, trafficking, street hawking and begging as well as the almajiri phenomenon as forms of domestic violation against children's rights in Nigeria. The paper is of the view that making children vulnerable to domestic violence is a breach to their universal rights and as such, the paper strongly suggest among other things that, in order to scale down or minimize the menace of domestic violent practices against Nigerian children, the federal government should establish a security outfit with powers to provide protection to children against every form of domestic activities that shows tendencies of violating children rights to quality life and freedom in the society. The federal government should equally come up with a law that will make all children the 'property' of the nation; as soon as a child is born the government takes over his or her care in totality while parents serve as mare nurses till the age of 18 years.

Key Words: Children, Domestic violence, Scaling down, Sustainable and National development

Introduction

The 21st century began with a vision for the children of the world. In this vision, all children without exception are to live full and healthy lives, with rights secured and protected; free from poverty, violence and discrimination. Chowdhury and Choudhury (2002) pointed out that the call of the state of world's children in the year 2000 requires a commitment on the part of the world's nations to spare no effort in ascertaining that all infants start life healthy, all young children are nurtured in caring environments, all children including the poorest and the most disadvantaged, complete basic education of good quality and all adolescents have the opportunity to develop fully and to participate in their societies. In tune with the efforts for caring, protecting and preserving the rights of Nigerian children, the purpose of this paper is to draw the attention of the Nigerian public on the need for according children their universal rights by scaling down (i.e. reducing to the barest minimum) the various forms of domestic practices that expose children to unnecessary hardships. Children are the basis for all dimensions of sustainable development; they have a right to thrive, develop to their full potential, and live in a sustainable world and as such children should be placed at the center of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The poor socioeconomic condition in Nigeria and the inability of the leaders to create conditions necessary for higher national development after 20 years of the nation's return to civil rule should be a thing of worry to all concerned citizens of Nigeria. National development in terms of economic, political and social advancement, is to bring about valuable and positive changes that improves the living standards of the people; creating employment opportunities, social equality and poverty reduction, among other things. The situation in Nigeria is however a different one. More worry some is the way and manner by which children are handle in the society today. At the United Nations submit of 25th September 2015, Nigeria together with other countries in the world, set and adopted a 17 points agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) achievable by the year 2030. The goals are set to alleviate poverty, increase educational opportunities, health, general well being and ensure prosperity for all children in the world. However, the global community is now about a decade closer to the 2030 deadline for the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), and when it comes to education and poverty alleviation, it does not appear that many developing countries Nigeria inclusive, are on the track. To this effect, Gillard and Robinson (2017) noted that, if the current trends on the issue of quality in the education sector continue, certainly by the year 2030 nearly one billion school-aged children would not acquire the basic skills needed to succeed in life and work. The implication of this assertion is that the life and well being of more children could be subjected to domestic violent practices, and this would be a major threat to global development as well as the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (DGs)

Conceptual clarifications

The Child

The Dictionary refers to the 'child' as a young person from birth to the age of full physical development; a boy or girl. However, defining the word 'child' may also depend on the context within which it is used. Section 277 of the Child Rights Act cited in USAI/NEI (2012) refers to the child as a person under the age of eighteen (18) years. Similarly, Section 91 of the Labour Act defines a child as a young person under the age of 12 years, while the young person means a person under the age of 18 years. However, in Nigeria the legal definition of a child is difficult to operate due to certain communal norms that encourage hard work at childhood stage; once a child is considered as having come of age by physical appearance he or she may be saddled with task meant for the adults, even before he or she attains 18 years of age. Nevertheless, a child in Nigeria is constitutionally considered as someone (male or female) that is between 0 to 18 years of age. As such, in the 2003 Child's Right Act which was an adaptation of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, children are provided for with certain rights and privileges that they are entitled to, with respect for their worth and dignity, so that they can be protected in all aspects of life with a view to giving them what they need from parents and care givers to grow up as a healthy individuals (Udosen, Oko and Ekanem, 2011).

Domestic Violence

In the context of this paper, domestic violence is referred to as the violent practices against humanity which exists in many forms in the society and involving individuals or groups of children. It is a pattern of threat or discrimination imposed on a person or group of persons by another person or group of persons without due consideration of the rights, feeling and degree of freedom of the former by the later. Domestic violence in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon; it is an age long psycho-social issue which has often been triggered by cultural practices, norms and beliefs of the society. It involves violence at the family or home level which today is widely spread among communities in Nigeria. Domestic violent practices in Nigeria today have subjected many children to unnecessary hardships by having some of their fundamental rights such as nutrition, health, education, love, care and freedom, usually tempered with or totally denied; thereby destroying children's self-confidence and esteem as well as undermining their ability to grow into well adjusted adults.

National Development

The concept of development has been viewed from different angles and within the national outlook; it implies to positive change or growth in socio-economic and political conditions or situations of the society. According to Akintayo and Oghenekohwo (2004) development is a process of economic, social, political and cultural change engineered in a given society by the efforts of all stakeholders both internal and external. The thrust is on the realization of human potential expressed in social liberation and improvement of moral, intellectual and technical capabilities. National development incorporates economic growth as well as cultural, educational, political and social advancement of the people, specifically the young and upcoming generation. In fact, no meaningful

development can take place in any society where the young generation is without quality education and is prone to societal ills resulting from various forms domestic violent practices. Osokoya (2008) perceived National development as the development of a nation's human and material resources; and education, health, good diet and peace, freedom and security as means to equipping individuals for participation in national development. National development is about removing the obstacles to what a citizen can do in life, obstacles such as illiteracy, ill health, lack of resources, or lack of civil and political freedom.

The Rights of the Child

Rights are legal entitlement of human beings for the guarantee of basic quality of life. Therefore, going by the Child Rights Acts, children in Nigeria should constitutionally be fully accorded the following rights and protections:

S/N	Rights to	Protections from
1.	Life	Abuse and Neglect
2.	Name	Torture
3.	Nationality	Drugs
4.	Education	Maltreatments from Care Givers/ Guardians
5.	Play	Slander
5.	Freedom of Association	Economic Exploitation
6.	Freedom of Expression	
7.	Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion	
8.	Health / Medical Care	
9.	Special Care for Disabled Child	
10.	Standard of Living	
11.	Full Development	
12.	Exemption from Recruited into Armed Forces below the age of 18 years	

USAID: Nigeria, Northern Education Initiative, NEI, Training Manual on Life Skills, 2012)

In the light of this, all the Child Rights stated above, are applicable to the Nigerian child and the withdrawal or acting contrary to any, signifies violation of the rights of the child.

Violation against Children rights in Nigeria

In Nigeria today, children are domestically subjected to various forms of social Violence; ranging from child labour, abuse, neglect, hawking, begging, Almajirism, trafficking, kidnapping for ransom and for rituals, sexual abuse and forced marriage as well as the recruitment of children into insurgency; carrying bombs to detonate among crowds of people to cause maximum terrorism. These practices which are no doubt negation to the rights of children are ubiquitous in some communities in Nigeria. Children are forced by social circumstances to live and grow up on streets. As noted by Dungurawa (2012), among the categories of street children in northern Nigeria, there are those that live permanently on the streets; working and begging and those that work on the streets full or part time capacities but do return home to pass the night with their parents or guardians. Children living in these conditions are victims of domestic Violence living and operating ignorantly within the dangerous circle of life. In the light of this, it is very clear that millions of Nigerian children have been deprived of certain rights entitled to their age limits; specifically their right to education, since the long hours usually spent at work have correspondingly deprived them the number of hours for schooling per day. This is perhaps a pointer to the Federal Government indication that the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria as at 2017 has increased to 10.7 million (FGN, 2017).

Scaling Down Violence against Children in Nigeria for National Development

Scaling down is a term used in this paper to refer to the act of reducing to the barest minimum all forms of domestic practices that expose children to unnecessary hardships in Nigeria. The commonest among these forms of domestic violent practices include; child labour, trafficking, street hawking and begging as well as the almajiri phenomenon. Highlights on ways by which these cruel practices affect children's rights and ways of scaling down the situations have been given below:

a. Child labour as a form of Violence against Children

Child Labour can be described as one of the forms of violence against children because it involves exposing young children to certain domestic activities which are difficult, demanding and hazardous and in some cases very immoral. The National Policy on Child Labour in Nigeria, describes the term 'Child Labour' as the engagement of children below the age of 18 years in any activity that is essentially exploitative by nature and injurious to physical, social, cognitive and moral development of the child (Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity , 2013). According to Brown (2000), child labour is not all that easy to document and measure, because the oppressive and degrading forms of the labour are under –reported simply because they are illegal activities and the victims are voiceless. Also, Chess (2005) cited in Muhammad, Ihisota and Ujah (2018) asserted that child labour emanates from poverty and results in illiteracy, which is then passed from generation to generation. Corroborating this assertion, Aqil (2012) pointed out that when parents have worked in their childhood time their children will work as well, passing it from generation to a generation. As such, the children grow up and become uneducated and low-skilled adults. Child Labour is a pervasive problem in the world, which is persistent especially in developing countries. In Nigeria, it is especially prevalent in the rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking and as such children work for a variety of reasons. Poverty pressure make families to send children out in search of the means for meals; young children work on farms or gardens, some engage in fishing or gathering of firewood in tick forest areas. However, in urban areas of Nigeria, it is very common to see young children (most of whom are of school – age) being engaged in activities such as moving from one refuse dumping center to another, under the harsh sun or in the rain, searching for wasteful and discarded domestic items. Working in unhealthy environments exposes the children to hazardous substances that could be detrimental to their health. Some of these children work as apprentices to the mechanic, vulcanizer and carpenter; dealing with dangerous machine tools and working for long hours during the day or night under difficult condition, all in the name of making money for life sustenance. This is however a violation of the international law which ascertains that every individual should perform within the limit of his or her ability, so that works done by people are based on age, physical and economic needs.

Child labour: the scaling down outlook

In most communities in Nigeria, children serve as major contributors to family income and in most cases majority of these working children are not well paid and this signify the gross exploitation and violation of children's rights, which in turns lead to their growing into 'hard adults' who may tend to always put personal gains above national development. In order to remedy this situation therefore, it has become a matter of urgency for the federal government of Nigeria to sign into a social security outfit and empowers it to provide protection to children below the age of 18 against every form of domestic activities that shows tendencies of violating children rights to quality life and freedom in the society. This security agency should see to it that parents and guardians who have the custody of young children are made to realize the consequences of `child labour and the importance of providing quality care and best rearing practices to their children.

b. Child trafficking as a form of Violence against Children

Child trafficking can also be described as a form of violence against children because it has been a medium through which children are detached from their families and subjected to unnecessary hardship and their lives jeopardized by wicked adults. Trafficking, like insurgency has been a source of worries to the government and people of Nigeria in recent years; there seem to be virtually no part of Nigeria that is unique from this ugly and anti-social movement. The United State (2010) trafficking in person report described Nigeria as a source, transits and destination country for women and children subjected to trafficking in persons including force labour and forced prostitution. Women and children are recruited from rural areas within Nigeria's borders, trafficked and used for various purposes; the boys are engaged in domestic servitude associated with forced labour, while the women and girls are put into involuntary domestic servitude and sexual exploitation. The traffickers usually take children by persuasion or kidnapping and in some cases it is the parents who readily accept or arrange for their children to be trafficked for social and economic reasons. The Pathfinders Justice Initiative (2018) reported the Nigerian national agency for the prohibition of trafficking in persons (NAPTIP) as saying that, in the 2018 Global Slavery Index, Nigeria ranks 32 out of the 167 countries with the highest number of slaves-trafficked children and who are within the age average of 15 years.

Child trafficking: the scaling down outlook

It is evident from the above submissions that, children in Nigeria are removed from their families and transported illegally and placed into an exploitative context. This is therefore an indication that, the parental and societal roles with regard to child rearing and care in Nigeria has falls short of the requirements of the Right of the Child Act and Universal Human Right Law. In order to safeguard Nigerian children from this ugly situation, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) should expedite effort toward providing protection to children against every form of domestic activities that shows tendencies of victimizing children into trafficking. The agency should as a matter of urgency set of control offices across the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. Traditional rulers, NGOs, approved youth vigilante groups and other stake holders in social security should be involved to monitor youths and children movement and activities in every community.

c. Street hawking as a form of Violence against Children

Hawking involves the use of children to sell goods on the street. Tambuwal (2012) viewed hawking as the act of canvassing for sale of items by hawkers along the street, from house to house or in public places in town. Corroborating this view, Muhammad, Ihisota and Ujah (2018) pointed out that a greater percentage of young children both males and females can be seen on daily basis hawking along major roads in every city in Nigeria selling various things, apart from those that also hawk within the market area. Children hawk at different periods throughout the day; some will attend school in the morning and hawk after school hours. It is very disheartening that the population of children in hawking is dominated by the under-aged children who are neither conscious of their safety nor have they the opportunity to decline parents, guardians' directives to hawk and sometimes these children become victims to unscrupulous adults in the society. This situation has therefore established the fact that, parental and societal roles with regard to child rearing and care in Nigeria has falls short of the requirements of the Right of the Child Act and Universal Human Right Law.

Street hawking: the scaling down outlook

The situation by which young children are engaged in street hawking has become a strong indication that, children in Nigeria are placed into an exploitative and dangerous condition of living through parental poor rearing and care. In order to remedy this situation, the Federal Government of Nigeria should come up with a law that will make all children the 'property' of the nation. This will empower the three tiers of government to take over in totality, the care and rearing of the child soon after birth while parents serve as mare nurses till the age of 18 years. To this effect, the Federal Government should consider setting up a National Children Fund (NCF) to provide child rearing and parenting stimulation interventions. Taking this step requires political will from the federal government, but if implemented however, it will help safeguard young Nigerian children from every form of domestic Violence.

d. Child begging as a form of Violence against Children

According to Dungurawa and Abdullahi (2012) child begging in Nigeria can be regarded as an income supplement necessary for survival at some level. Poverty, natural disasters and helplessness due to physical disabilities, poor mental health as well as rural-urban migration are some of the identified factors behind this social phenomenon. Child beggars are found mostly in urban centres of Nigeria; leading blind parents or begging entirely on their own and those who act as fronts for the female parents. These children, most of whom are very young (sometimes as little as four or five years old) are being exposed to enormous risks often darting between cars, in heavy traffic begging for alms from motorists. This ugly situation put children at very high risk of accidents and exposed to constant abuse and aggression, while their counterparts are in nursery and primary school (Ebele 2005). Other forms of child beggars are the abandoned children and the orphans who are on the street on daily basis begging for survival. From the foregoing, it becomes clear children's rights are highly jeopardized in Nigeria; parents and the community unfortunately take undue advantages of these children by taking them away from normal family care and placing them into unnecessary hardships thereby exposing them to negative psychological, social and health consequences. This is also a pointer that, parental and societal roles with regard to child rearing and care in Nigeria have fallen short of the requirements of the Right of the Child Act and Universal Human Right Law.

Child begging: the scaling down outlook

The situation by which young children are engaged into begging might be connected with the persistent rural-urban drift in Nigeria. In order to remedy this situation therefore, the three tiers of

government in Nigeria should expedite efforts toward transforming rural areas into places fit for human tenancy. They should essentially provide all basic social amenities and security necessary to keep rural dwellers lively and functional within their territories. This requires political will from the three tiers of government, but if put in place, it will help reduce the rate of flow of rural people into cities where they end up living on streets and their children expose to unnecessary domestic hardships

e. Almajiri phenomenon as a form of Violence against Children

The word Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word “Almuhajirun” meaning immigrant. Almajiri are boys and young men from school age to their early twenties who are sent out by their parents or guardians to villages, towns or cities for Qur’anic education under a knowledgeable Islamic scholar called Malam. According to AbdulQadir (2003) the National Council for the Welfare of Destitute (NCWD) puts the current population of the Almajiri at about 7 million. This means 7 million potential judges, accountants, engineers, medical doctors, academicians and security personnel being wasted away. Almajiri system of education as practiced today in the northern Nigeria is a complete deviation of what the system was and its output before and soon after the independence period. The system as it is practiced today is one in which the pupils struggle to cater for themselves and to support the Malams; which makes them spent most of their time begging rather than engaging in learning.

Almajiri phenomenon: the scaling down outlook

Careful observation of the almajiri syndrome, revealed that most of the almajiri children have become expose to child abuse, child neglect, health hazard, child hawking and other forms of social vices and this tend to keep them away from Quranic school and at the same time deprive them access to formal education. Therefore, in order to remedy the situation, state governments in the entire northern Nigeria should complement the federal government’s effort in curbing the almajiri phenomenon by urgent establishment of almajiri integrated schools in all their local government areas. The exodus of children and youths from villages to the cities in the name of quest for Quranic knowledge should be considered as a form of trafficking in person and should be constitutionally addressed within the legal framework of state governments in northern Nigeria.

Parenting Styles Causative factor of Child Domestic Problems

The home is first most significant environment of the child and as such, the way and manner in which parents relate to the child have great influence on the child’s personality. Ikoh (2018) recognizes parents-child relationship as being democratic, laissez-faire and autocratic. The democratic family raises its members based on love, care, friendliness and a network of good monitoring and supervision, the resultant effect is usually production of well behave children. The laissez-faire parents usually leave children on their own, without proper monitoring or supervision. As noted by Manga (2015), in the lessez-faire outfit, the leader takes a passive stand on problems; there is unlimited freedom for everyone to do whatever he or she want as parents have no time to observe their children’s actions and activities. Children from laissez-faire family usually face a lot of challenges in life as they grow at the mercy of the community. The autocratic type of family is governed by parents who are usually very strict and seldom give the child ample opportunity or freedom to act contrary to the family rules; children are made to be disciplined through extrinsic force rather than genuine intrinsic discipline. Thus, as soon as there is a chance of being away from home, children tend to do whatever they like, including taking the company of bad peers. From the foregoing therefore, it could be logically deducted that, both autocratic and laissez-faire parenting styles have contributed directly or indirectly to the formation of an army of children roaming along Nigerian streets in the name of working, hawking or begging.

Children and Sustainable Development

Nutrition, health and quality education during early years of life are foundational to children success and their capacity to contribute meaningfully to societal development. Children’s growth and development is profoundly shaped by the type care they receive from adults in a range of contexts. As pointed out by Chowdhury and Choudhury (2002) the early childhood period is a critical stage of human development as early experiences in the home and community interact with genes to shape the nature and quality of the brain, supporting the development of a range of early skills; each of which is predictive of the child’s success in academics, higher earnings and communal participation as well as reduced odds of delinquency and crimes. However, each year many children worldwide die before

their fifth birthday and those that do survive do not normally reach their full developmental potentials due to early exposure to some unfavourable conditions which interfere with their normal physical, intellectual and social development. Persistent hunger, lack of access to clean water, medical care and dirty places of domicile as well as over labored are powerful factors jeopardizing children well being in many developing countries, thus, children face high probability of early mortality, school failure; early pregnancy; joblessness; and costly diseases across their lifespan. This is therefore clear evidence to global loss of human potentials which in turn represents an enormous challenge to global sustainable development (Shonkoff, J. P., Richter, L., Van der Gaag, J., & Bhutta, Z. A, 2012). Domestic violence against children in Nigeria has dual effect; it retards children's development as individuals and also hinders national development. It is worthy to point out that the problem of poverty and hard life among many families and households in Nigeria is central to the issue of social quandary affecting children's survival and freedom. The vast majority of children are in the work force for the survival of their families and the intensity of the kind of job they do affect their development in negative ways and equally lowers their contributions to national development; since lack of quality education coupled with early exposure to hardships and sufferings may likely lead to their growing into uneducated and hard adults with the mindset of breaching societal peace and consequently contribute negatively to national development. According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2014), the capacity of nations to grow, innovate, and strengthen depends on a healthy and productive population. Therefore, the large number of children starting life at severe risk threatens all other Sustainable Development Goals.

National Effort toward Curtailing the Problems of Children and Youths in Nigeria

It is worthy to note that successive administrations in Nigeria since the nation's return to civil rule in 1999 have made several attempts to tackle the problems facing children and youths in the country. The launching of Universal Basic Education (UBE), enactment of the Child Rights Act and establishment of the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPIP), establishment of National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Agency for Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS), the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) and the N-Power Programme of the present administration. These programmes are some of the Federal Government's policies designed to drastically reduce social hostilities and hardships and to promote the living standard of people in Nigeria. However, most of these programmes have failed to live up to expectations due to corrupt practices in the management as well as the attitudes of people to the programmes. To this effect, Salami cited in Philip, Samson & Ogwu (2013) noted that, in spite of the various policies and programmes, social empowerment remains a major challenge to the Nigeria's national development process.

Conclusion

Domestic Violence against children appears in several forms and various factors are involved. The prevalence of certain domestic violent practices against the rights of children in Nigeria is complex and deeply rooted into the societal mode of life in urban and rural settlements. In many communities in Nigeria, thousands of children have had their destinies re-engineered and they are turned into hardened criminals who are engaged in social vices instead of the most desired developmental activities in their communities and this add up to signify the gross exploitation and violation of children's birth and universal rights. Economic hardships have forced several families to require their young children to contribute to the household income. Faulty parental rearing system is another contributing factor to the social problems faced by children in Nigeria. Insurgency as a global problem has hit Nigeria and school children have fallen victims of several terror attacks in many states in northern Nigeria. The quests for quick wealth and success in politics have brought about the use of humans for rituals activities and children are special target in this callous business. The increasing spate of domestic violence against children in Nigeria, calls for urgent consideration, prevention and lessening of its severe consequences in order to secure the future of Nigerian children.

Suggestions

1. Nigerian government should establish a security outfit with powers to provide protection to children against every form of domestic activities that show tendencies of exposing children to hard labour so that children's moral, physical, mental, health and emotional development could be enhanced.

2. Parents in Nigeria shall continue to be enlightened on the consequences of child trafficking. State governments should come up with state executive orders on the rights of the child and stipulate jail terms for parents who submit their children into trafficking.
3. Traditional rulers, NGOs, Youth clubs and other stake holders in social security should reach out to rural and urban communities to advocate for the need of quality care and best rearing practices of children so as to reduce the incidence of street hawking by young children in Nigeria
4. The state governments should support primary schools feeding programme to boost school enrolment and retention as well as to reduce school dropouts, wipe out almajiri children from the street and thereby reduce the incidence of child begging in Nigeria
5. The Federal Government of Nigeria should consider setting up a National Children Fund (NCF) to provide child rearing and parenting stimulation interventions. The Funds can be jointly finance by the three tiers of governments in Nigeria or by cutting down the 'over-lucrative' wages of political office holders and commit the excess to finance the NCF project.

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