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ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS THROUGH FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

R. A. ILIYAS & S. LAWAL

Abstract

Child labour and human trafficking are two societal challenges that have continually threatened the hope of a prosperous and transformed future for the nation. The child on whom the expectation of peaceful, stable, economically viable, technologically advanced and harmonious nation is hung is from early life put through engagements that impact negatively on her normal development. Several youths are scurried out of the country like packs of sardine. This paper attempts a discourse of the two concepts, their causes, manifestations and implication for life long beneficial literacy. A gradual but dependable panacea to the social menace is suggested in functional literacy which inspires self-discovery, self-reliance and sustains conscientiousness and human dignity.

Keywords: *Child labour, Trafficking, Functional Literacy.*

Introduction

Child labour describes the unwholesome practice of engaging children of less than working age. The duration of childhood is a period characterized by inability in terms of physical, emotional, cognitive and social. A child can be seen as one who is innocent, gullible and available to imbibe the manipulations, either directly or otherwise, of the milieu. The period of childhood is crucially significant as it is the foundation of whatever personality attainable by the child. The practice or prevalence of child labour has not been as a result of lack of preventive legal framework in most cases, but existing protective law is unpracticable owing to precarious family status and inadequate schools (ultimate reference, 2008). Several attempts are being made to stem the tide of child labour even at the global level of United Nations (UN). For instance, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 1960 goal is to identify and resolve the "worst forms" of child labour; this is described as any form of labour that negatively impacts a child's normal growth and development. Others like the 1992 International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) are some of the numerous moves to confront the ugly practice.

Human trafficking, as described by Macmillan English dictionary (2002) is the act of helping people to another country and subjecting such people to work for pittance because of lack of rights. This form of human movement in contemporary practice can be in two ways: a. voluntary desire to be 'helped' out of a country; b. deceptive or mischievous means of moving people (at times minors) out of a country.

Functional literacy is an all-embracing phrase that captures holistic understanding and discovery of place for individual potential in the complex world (Iliyas, Lawal & Sheriff, 2008). Kachru (1986) views this term as literacy education programme that

is intended to enable access to most scientific, technological, humanities and cross cultural domains of knowledge and interaction. Functional literacy, according to UNESCO (1965), *'is a way of preparing man for social, civic and economic roles especially when this goes beyond the bounds of rudimentary literacy training of reading and writing, but embraces general knowledge for work, increased productivity, a greater participation in civic life, better understanding of the human culture' (pg.3).*

Inyang-Abia (1993) describes functional literacy as the overall, calculated endeavour targeted at stimulating a learners' creative ability such as visual literacy, computer literacy, environmental literacy, technological literacy among others that are basic entries for human emancipation. Babatunde (1997) posits that functional literacy is a double barreled system, namely, a distinctive form of social organization, a literate society and with a distinctive form of thought and talk, a literate mind. Although determining the extent of such proposition (especially the later part), may be relative, the expression provides basis for understanding the ever-expanding benefits of being able to read and write. It is the technology that offers the key to other technologies (Ahmed, 1992). Julius (2010) views a lack of literacy as a source of backwardness and a tendency to become outdated. He advocates for such adaptable literacy skill that inspires update of beholder's horizon and new ideas, which he describes makes one ever living. Functional literacy encompasses the study of numeracy, reading and writing. It, as well, covers the requirements (intrinsic and extrinsic) for metacognitive and psycho-economic activities of man which when appropriately explored could lead to enhanced and fulfilling human living.

Source of the menace

Catalogues of reasons abound for the occurrence and prevalence of child labour and human trafficking. A casual consideration of the two problems may push one to the hasty conclusion that only economic concern instigates child labour and human trafficking. Though quite prominent, of course, other sources can also be linked to this societal menace:

A. Gender inequity, or what Okeke (2005), Onifade (2005) separately describe as gender stereotyping. This, Okeke submits occur when discriminatory treatment is made to bear on one sex as male or female by the parents or teachers either to favour or disfavour one sex. Gender stereotyping also includes those mostly held views or assumptions on what behaviours or roles that are apt for males and females in any given society (Okeke, 2005). These would include gender consideration on access to, and extent of education, tolerance to devote adequate time to school activities within and outside the school environment, motivating (also psycho-social) opportunities based on gender; inbalance reference to particular gender notation (especially masculine 'he') when giving supportive illustrations by parents and teachers respectively, have strong potent to induce child labour and human trafficking.

B. Aggressive/authoritarian style of parents/teachers clearly reflected in the use of corporal punishment, non-recognition of the right of the child to be heard, use of fowl demeaning utterances, outright absence of interaction with the child amongst others are common source of child labour. These factors illustrate high selfish tendency that drives a child off the normal path.

C. Unhealthy cultural practice, inform of belief or opinions dictated by some traditional norms and misinterpreted religious provisions induce child labour and human trafficking. This is demonstrated in the child access to education (especially the girl-child), mass donation of male minors to fosters for supposed informal religious education and its attendant juvenile street-begging (Almajiri); and unguided strict adherence to traditional family trades are a few instances of how cultural belies stir these problems.

D. Sudden and premature death or reversal of status of parent (the breadwinner) is pitiably another major cause of the child being vulnerable to child labour and human trafficking.

E. Insatiable greed for wealth by parent/guardian and the desire to gather prosperity through other means often lead to child labour and human trafficking respectively. This situation becomes so alarming to the point that some State Governments in Eastern Nigeria have to mount advocacy programme to encourage education of the male child and the enforcement and monitoring activities of National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is more concentrated on some States in Nigeria due to their notoriety respectively.

Nevertheless, manifestations of child labour and human trafficking as observable in Nigeria can be grouped under these broad groups as domestic, outward and critical levels. At the domestic level is the common practice of engaging minors as housemaids and outright denial or restricted access of a child to education. The outward manifestation is seen in child hawking, minors leading beggars or independently begging for alms, use of minors in hard labour on farmland, construction sites, as bus conductors and so on. At the critical level which has the most immediate damming impacts on the lives of the citizenry and the psyche of the nation are such untoward occurrences of involvement and engagement of minors in political thuggery, prostitution, armed robbery, drug addiction and drug trafficking, self or deceitful human exportation (renaissance of slave trading) among several others are the more obvious manifestation of child labour and human trafficking.

However, the case of unguided early marriage or child marriage as some observers have put it requires careful study. A critical understanding of the divine provision deters quite many prevailing social malaise, decadence and degeneration of the female gender. Relative maturation has today heightened promiscuity and debased womanhood to the point that the society accepts single parenthood ostensibly as a matter of choice. This writer has as neighbour females who were married at teen age but later pursued carrier in government establishments as university graduates. Be

that as it may, it is paramount to advocate that when marriage is to be consummated for teenagers, it should be guided and the guidance has to be consistently sustained until the girl- wife attains reasonable level of self-reliance. In addition, it is apt to add at this point too that it amounts to gender insensitivity when married women are restricted to pursue their life time career in the kitchen and child rearing like layers. This practice is not only dangerous but retrogressive because experiences have shown how vulnerable and susceptible the child could be in the death or reversal of status of the sole breadwinner.

Functional Literacy and Child Abuse

Scholars like Oyedeji (1997), Olaofe (1997), Lawal (2004) have highlighted the pre-eminent influence of functional literacy in the well - being and unfettered development of the child, human community as a whole and invariably the nation. For instance, Oyedeji (1997) posits that functional literacy reduces instances of maternal and infant mortality, child abuse, improves personal hygiene, facilitates poverty reduction drives and engenders good governance. Iliyas (2005) citing Moyle (1975) captures the parlous state of adult illiterates as restricted access to job opportunities which cause shameful subterfuges to cover their illiteracy disability from employers and neighbours. He writes that inability to read in our society leads often to social ostracism, a lowering of personal self-image and monotonous employment. To underscore the import of functional literacy, Babatunde (1997) remarks that to be functionally literate is to be a potential occupier of the highest rung on the social strata. It is a common trend that genuinely literate people have higher self-esteem, as a result, functional literacy can be a veritable source of social security: a core requirement for social stability, cohesion and national development. As such, attaining functional literacy by greater percentage of people would make no one to even contemplate nor subject the country's future, the child to horrendous labour nor have idle lay abouts to be trafficked.

To continually challenge child labour and trafficking in persons, the 1989 convention on the Rights of the child to functional education in article 28, has to be seen to be fully implemented. This, obviously inspired the National Policy on Education (2004); as earlier stated in the Universal Basic Education (1999) that make education compulsory and free in the first 12 years of the child's life (Onifade, 2005). When functional literacy is spread and common, grounds would be level for people to challenge oppressive and irresponsive regimes and give them the courage to sustain such challenges. This will change the trend of the current illiteracy-ridden society, where people become helpless in the face of all oddities (Iliyas, 2005).

Strategies for Improving Functional Literacy

Below are a few suggestions on how to improve the cultivation of functional literacy skills among people as a very steadily assured way of curbing child labour and trafficking in persons:

(i) A revamp of the existing mass literacy programmes to include specific task

based components so that graduates of the programme would have to apply the experience/knowledge gained to confront legitimately challenges relating to their means of livelihood (Iliyas, 2004);

(ii) an institution of continuing education opportunity for adult graduates of the basic literacy programmes so that these latter years learners could obtain basis to be a potential candidate for the highest rung in the social ladder;

(iii) Government should increase commitment to mass literacy programmes to make it really serve to liberate people from poverty and backwardness and not be apprehensive of having too many literate minds who could challenge misrules and its antics. Failure to immediately indulge this will only keep Nigerian child vulnerable to be abused by illiterate parents/guardians and make many youths open to be trafficked abroad;

(iv) a vigorous and unsparing fight against corruption in public and private institutions to make people see integrity and hard work as the only requirements for success. This will also re-ignite heuristic feelings when the nation's resources are no longer siphoned into private coffers but used to engage meaningfully the many idle youthful hands; and

(v) a promotion of compulsory civic and faith based instruction at all levels, not just at the Secondary school of the nation's school system. This is necessary so that knowledge of divine instructions can further serve as catalyst for technological discoveries, and moderate contemporary excesses for the benefit of mankind.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the hydra headed societal problems of child labour and human trafficking and its multifarious causes and manifestations.

It is hoped that when the formal school system and the existing mass literacy programmes are further synergized to provide functional literacy to Nigerians, and Government become more alive to its responsibilities and accountable to the people the scourge of child labour and human trafficking would become mere academic concepts. In the words of Seattle (1854) cited by Iliyas (2005), *'we do not weave the web of life, we are just a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves' (p.8).*

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