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## **The dramatist's dimensions in tackling child labour in Nigeria: the exemplar of Faith Ken-Aminipko's *Say no to child abuse***

**ABSTRACT.** It has been observed over the years that child labour has been a trending phenomenon in our society. It has also been noticed that poverty has driven a lot of parents and guidance to painfully force their children into early work. And this has caused a lot of hazards in our society especially Nigeria. It is on this note that this paper explains the reasons why children are forced to work, the effects of child labour upon our society, the causes of child labour, policies that have been made by government to impede it, types of child labour and how Nigerian Dramatist perceive the issue through their works. Lewis' "Culture of poverty theory" and Stouffer's "Relative deprivation theory" provide this paper with fibre and framework to interrogate the subject matter and provide the critical consciousness and promoting change of attitude. This research has its root in educating the minds of the people, enlightening the society on the dangers of child labour and creatively proffering solutions. Hence, the thrust of this research is to educate people on the danger of child labour and creating the desired awareness on the issue of child labour and the effects on our society. This paper adopts qualitative method of research since it will be engaged in much textual analysis. Following the methodology, this study summarises a finding which states that the prevalence of child labour in Nigeria is largely an internal problem with poverty, ignorance and bad government as leading causes. To this end, this study draws conclusion that the government, parents, institutions and the general public should cooperate in the best manner to put an end to child labour practice or reduce it to a bearable state. Further suggestions arouse at the end of this study.

**KEYWORDS:** Child Labour, Nigeria, Poverty, Childhood, Children's rights

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, as we may have it in any other nation of the world, many children's health, education and childhood are threatened and thereby put on the line by an evil phenomenon known as child labour. This

shows that children between ages of 5–17 heavily toil under long hours to earn a few naira which are usually too little for a meal despite the severity of the work. In most cases, they suffer close to their death in their homes and outside without proper reward simply because the society they find themselves either feel reluctance about them or believe that children too must work like adults do in order to meet up with the socio-economic and cultural expectations without considering keenly the effects on them and the society at large. No matter the reason why children work, child labour is a negative phenomenon that should be eliminated in order to secure the health of children socially, physically, mentally, morally and intellectually. This explains the severity of the problem and quickly brings to mind the question; what has the government, institution and even the general public done about it? Unfortunately, not enough have been done to ensure its dearth or decline. Such likely response explains the prevalence of the problem and as such requires a quick response.

From the global standpoint, child labour has been in existence through history, in Nigeria, it has long been harmonised and has become part and parcel of our traditional culture whereby a child is expected to help the parent in augmenting some basic duties of economic inclination especially in farming however, the difficult conditions under which children work occasionally today has become more evident in Nigeria. This perhaps may be as a result of the increasing industrialised society which began from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The aftermath effect of the 1967–1970 Nigerian civil war and other social inadequacies in the country are closest responsible factors of child labour incidents in Nigeria. According to Edem;

Currently, child labour has become more visible because of the increase in the number of children producing goods for export. Most under-developed countries due to rapid population growth, high rates of unemployment, inflation, poverty, malnutrition, bad leadership, corruption and low wages (p. 149).

Edem's assertion creates the necessary impression that the apparentness of child labour is a problem emanating from within and as such may also be treated from within. Relatively, the possibility of addressing child labour problem may be large if only it will be granted the necessary attention it requires. This further explains the thought that many may have undermined its existence but its increasing rate as well as its consequent effect upon the Nigerian society have become an issue of serious

concern. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Nigeria in 2006:

A staggering 15 million children under the age of 14 are working across Nigeria exposed to long hour of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments carrying too much responsibility for their age. ([http://www.unicef.org/Nigeria/children\\_1935.html](http://www.unicef.org/Nigeria/children_1935.html))

To support the above, Borgen magazine in 2014 expresses the belief that 20 million Nigerian children are victims of child labour. This is to say that the child labour rate is daily on the increase meanwhile, child labourers are expose to several dangers which affect them physically, mentally, medically, psychological and socially. Children are believed to be weak at the stage of childhood hence, are highly vulnerable to road risks as labourers. Consequently, common incidents such as rape, kidnap, road accident, and drug abuse are not far from what children suffer on account of child labour. This is a worrying fact and has attracted multiple attentions, especially from the international circles, apparently aware of the danger of child labour;

...the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989 came out with a convention on the Rights of a Child, which 198 countries including Nigeria endorsed. Earlier before 1973, the United Nations through its organ, the International Labour Organization in convention C138, had advised State parties to ensure a minimum age of employment, which usually should correspond to the age of leaving primary school (p. 150).

Regardless of the worries and warnings of the UN and other related bodies, the ridiculous sight of children under school age in most big cities, as well as rural villages today, trading food on the streets, herding animals, tanning and drying raw leather products, fetching water for commercial purposes, washing dishes at restaurants, serving as domestic hands, selling wares at kiosks, collecting firewood for business, harvesting crops in family farms or commercial plantations, amongst other activities is still on the increase. This worrying reality can be easily attributed to poverty with clear reasons that amongst poor families in Nigeria child labour is a major source of income. This may be of direct concern to child labourers and their relatives however; the apparentness of child labour and its effects upon the Nigerian society is a greater concern. This is because in its mere form, child labour appears weak and harmless as part of the social body but in actuality is a complex and de-

generating phenomenon. That is why Nwokoro aptly suggests that the phenomenon of Child Labour is arguably the tallest of social challenges as it impacts directly on school enrolment, attendance, completion rates as well as health rest, leisure and the general psychological disposition of children. This is a clear indication that the menace of child labour is a complex problem. It is of the interest of this research to examine the concept of child labour from the holistic angle-historical frameworks, causes and consequences on the individual, the family and the society at large. It will however attempt to proffer solutions to the condition.

This paper is set to educate both the young and the old the dangers of child labour and at the same time diagnose the problem and suggest treatments to the already harmed children. It will expose the danger of child labour in Nigeria through play text the role and the impact of dramatist in the fight against child labour and provide information on how to minimize child labour practice or completely discourage the practice of child labour in Nigeria.

It is an overheard statement that “children are the future of tomorrow” it is therefore crucial to engage in efforts that will enhance their well-being by drawing attention to their predicament. To this regard, this research is an attempt at improving the well-being of children because its attitude will stir institutions, the government and even the general public to the favour of children by discouraging the existence and growth of one of their greatest threat. By so doing, child labour and its related effect will be reduced to a barest minimum. To this end, the society will be a larger beneficiary because if children are given the best in all ramifications it is expected that they will equally deliver the best to the society.

Owing to the fact that the idea of child labour is a universal one, extremely broad and complex phenomenon, this paper limits itself to child labour in Nigeria. It shall therefore focus itself on the examination and analysis of child labour as well as an action against its practice as expressed and documented in the play texts; Faith Aminikpo’s *Say no to child abuse*.

## Conceptual Framework

Child labour is any work or task undertaken by a child below the age of 18 with a view of being rewarded in cash or kind or for any other reason and which deprives him or her of good health, education, nutrition,

childhood and other important necessities. It is considered child labour because those under consideration are children within 18 years of age which is below adult and working age. Child labour has forced an unaccountable number of Nigerian children out of the comfort of their homes and out of school into the dreaded Nigerian labour market and beyond. It goes further to plague children with all kinds of ill-health including illiteracy and meanwhile it has been fought from many angles both internationally and locally. From the international circle, the United Nations and some of its sub-bodies like the International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and others are relevant teams that have fought child labour existence for several decades. Locally, the Nigerian government, NGO's and philanthropists are also doing their bit in the same fight, however, child labour still remains an increasing menace bothering the society. Among Nigerian streets, motor parks and roads especially on traffic jams it is common to see children hawking, trading in stalls and begging for alms while others engage in domestic services, farm work and other menial jobs during school, siesta and sacred hours. Although, it is estimated around 15 to 20 million the actual amount of child labourers in Nigeria is still uncertain, meanwhile the reasons for its prevalence is a galactic and plural idea. The proceeding column will provide theoretical bases for child labour existence in Nigeria after a conceptual review of the topic.

Affirmatively, child labour as a concept bears various definitions from different individual scholars, group scholars and organisations according to their different experiences and understanding of it. The international Labour Organisation (ILO) defines child labour as;

Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity and is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to such work that is mutually, physically, socially, or morally hazardous to children and or interfere with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely, or requiring them to combine school attendance with an excessively long and heavy work load (<https://libguides.ilo.org>child-labour-en>).

The International Program for the Elimination of Child Labour defines the concept as:

Work situation where children are compelled to work on a regular bases to earn a living for themselves and their families and as a result are disad-

vantage educationally and socially; where children work in conditions that are exploitative and damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development; where children are separated from their families often deprived of educational training opportunities; where children are forced to lead prematurely adult lives (<https://libguides.ilo.org>child-labour-en>).

The United Nations International Children Emergency fund (UNICEF) submits that child labour:

Is a much narrower concept and refers to children working in contravention of ILO standards contained in Conventions 138 and 182. This means all children below 12 years are of age working in any economic activities, those aged between 12 and 14 engaged in more than light work, and all children engaged in worse form of child labour (<https://www.unicef.org>protection>files>).

In addition, the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC), observes that child labour is work that is likely to be hazardous, or interfere with the child's education; or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, or spiritual development (CRC 1989, Art. 32; Nwokoro, 2011, p. 13).

From the foregoing definitions of child labour, what is observable is that opinions differ regarding "when and how" a particular work is to be truly regarded as harmful to the future of a child or even interferes with his well-being. However, one agreeable aspects of the various view on child labour is that of deprivation. Any work that deprive children of essential privileges and that hamper their future is negative and anti-development to children. Another concordance on child labour is that, it involves hard-works on children under severe and tough circumstances. Hard work here refers to work that ordinarily goes beyond the limit of a child's physical and mental capacity. Another point to note is that child labour in its dangerousness, have the capacity of endangering the future of children. According to the definitions above, important to mention is that child labour is harmful to the development of children.

This lingering menace of child labour puts children under various forms and shades which are prominently under the economic umbrella. According to ILO convention;

Child labourers would refer to children younger than 12 who are economically active; children 12 years old engaged in more that light work; and all children engage in the worse forms of child labours in which they are ens-

laved, forcibly, recruited, prostituted, trafficked, forced into legal activities or exposed to hazards (Nwokoro, 2011, p. 13).

The above gives an impression that children engaged in child labour do so in order to attract some kind of reward even though they are sometimes forced to do so. Drawing from the above is to sharply say that child labourers are not just products of the poor and wretched class but also of the less privileged. This premise will lead us to the theoretical bases of child labour.

From the theoretical level it is essential to draw our minds back to the forces that are responsible for child labour incidents. From the beginning, just as expressed earlier in the foregoing column, children with their parents usually engage in work-related activities which were mostly domestic, family establishments. Such activities were seen as normal; being part of the child's socialization process, but today, all that have changed. Fyfe captured this change in cultural attitude by saying:

Child labour was once common and considered morally acceptable in many industrializing societies. Attitudes about work and childhood have undergone a great transformation since the late 18th century however, in many countries; the notion that children should work has been rejected. Within the developing world where child labour often remains prevalent, such attitudes about childhood and child labour often still persists (p. 151).

This change however, excluding poverty and other related issues can be attributed to newer factors such as industrialisation and massive population growth. As Nigeria became industrialised and with an increase industrial activities all over the country, coupled with her heavy population growth, the incidents of child labour is not only increasing but is also overwhelming in its eminence. According to Lopez, in an attempt to meet with the growing rate of industrialization, especially in developing countries like Asia and Latin America, they found it expedient to engage children in labour. Wright, expressed a similar view in his article "The Littlest Victims of Global Progress". He comments that the drive by Thailand to join the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICS) of Asia impacts heavily on the children (p. 151). These views are not only to proof the point above but to also say calmly that due to a general need for man power following the massive growth in industrialization which is in alignment with the massive unemployment rate, poverty and the need to survive child labour case becomes a developing menace.

Expectedly, children from wealthy and comfortable homes can be hardly seen today engaging in works synonymous with child labour. This perhaps is due to their status of privilege and some level of comfort. While this remains a standing point, children from extremely poor background are not only denied of some essential privileges as in; education, good parental care and other childhood privileges but also suffer bigger mayhem in their efforts for self survival. Most times they suffer from mental related sickness such as; stigmatization from the press and public, feelings of disheartenment, stress and irritability, personality disorders and anti-social behaviour, and alienation and isolation from their family (p. 152). Arends-kuenning equally concurs when he observe that;

It also has a significant negative effect upon the level of education, school attendance, grades, literacy, leisure time, and overall human capital formation of the child worker (p. 152).

In a nut shell, it is expected that children of this description due to huge deprivation make up child labourers in our society today. In view of this, it is of essence in this study to bring to limelight the theoretical issues of child labour. The research shall be examined with the application of Lewis' "Culture of Poverty theory" and Stouffer's "Relative Deprivation Theory".

The culture of poverty is a concept in social theory that asserts that the values of people experiencing poverty play a significant role in upholding their poverty-stricken condition, sustaining a circle of poverty across generations. It was proposed by Oscar Lewis an American Anthropologist, in the late 1950s and although it was heavily criticised in the 1970s by scholars it maintained and made a significant comeback in the 21st century. It offers one way to explain why poverty exists despite anti-poverty programmes. Early proponents of the theory argued that the poor are not only lacking resources but also acquire a poverty-perpetuating life pattern. According to Oscar Lewis, "The subculture [of the poor] develops mechanisms that tend to perpetuate it, especially because of what happens to the world-view, aspirations, and character of the children who grow up in it" (p. 191). The latter struggled to render "the poor" as legitimate subjects whose lives were transformed by poverty. This explains a simple theory of "generational fluidity" being that a child who is born and breed in a poor home is likely to remain so and even transfer to his future kids. Lewis developed this concept from

his field work experience among the urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico and contends thus:

The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging. They are like aliens in their own country, convinced that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs. Along with this feeling of powerlessness is a widespread feeling of inferiority, of personal unworthiness. This is true of the slum dwellers of Mexico City, who do not constitute a distinct ethnic or racial group and do not suffer from racial discrimination. In the United States the culture of poverty that exists in the black community has the additional disadvantage of perceived racial discrimination. People with a culture of poverty had very little sense of history. They are a marginal people who know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighbourhood, their own way of life. Usually, they have neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves elsewhere in the world. In other words, they are not class conscious, although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions. When the poor become class conscious or members of trade union organizations, or when they adopt an internationalist outlook on the world they are, in my view, no longer part of the culture of poverty although they may still be desperately poor (p. 204).

The latter also submits that the “culture of poverty” theory has the following elements on; the level of individual, the parents, care givers and guardians who experience the above feelings suffer from weak ego structures, lack impulse control and show little ability to defer gratification, have a sense of resignation, fatalism and an unstable family structure (p. 206). These qualities therefore make them to believe that the only source for hope is by giving out their children to labour with a view to earning extra income for the upkeep of the family. In Nigeria, the poor often develop various strategies by which they cope with their conditions in form of doing things their own ways. These feelings compel them to take actions and engage in many activities that will ensure a quick escape from the realities of poverty, one of which is child labour. It is seen as a normal way since it is common among them. Even the children themselves may in subsequent times compel their own children to embrace child labour so that they do likewise as they did and this will continue with succeeding generations.

Pettigrew submits that the Relative Deprivation theory is credited to sociologist Samuel Stouffer, who developed the approach while studying

social psychology during World War II. Stouffer found that soldiers of that era measured their personal success not with the standards set by the military but on the experience they had within their individual units. Take, for example, a private in the Military Police and an Air Force private. In addition to their rank, they both also have the same level of education and have been in the military for the same amount of time. Despite their likenesses, the Air Force private feels a sense of deprivation due to the nature of rapid promotions in the Air Force; he has not acquired a promotion yet and feels deprived. However, the private in the Military Police does not have this same sense of deprivation because in his unit promotions are not as prevalent. Peter Townsend gives a clearer explanation:

Relative deprivation is the lack of resources to sustain the diet, lifestyle, activities and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong.

Simanda informs that measuring relative deprivation allows an objective comparison between the situation of the individual or group compared to the rest of society. Relative deprivation may also emphasize the individual experience of discontent when being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled, however emphasizing the perspective of the individual makes objective measurement problematic.

Drawing from the above, and in relation with child labour case it is relative to say that one who is unsatisfied with a feeling of discontent is almost a choice less fellow and is capable of doing anything within his limited reach to attain some level of satisfaction in his frustration. This sought of individual is deprived and also suffer neglect that is why Graham and Martins make bold to say the following:

Physical neglect can be defined as failure to provide the necessity of life for a child. The lack medical care, adequate nourishment, appropriate clothing, supervision and adequate housing are all factors that constitute neglect. Where to draw a line between neglect and a low, but adequate standard of care is more difficult. It may be that social workers and health visitors who are overexposed to deprived families become more accepting of lower standards (Hall & Martin, 1993, p. 9).

Such level of neglect is a social issue being that there is a strict display of social stratification wherein, there is the upper class, middle

class and low class who suffer the highest social neglect. This low class of poor citizens find it very difficult to survive since they are lacking heavily in both primary and secondary human requirements for living. Being in this state is indeed dangerous and can result to various negative effects including physical, psychological, and medical. The worse of all is perhaps psychological since it affects the mind box and mentality. Victims of this condition think very little but to survive.

The theory of Relative Deprivation also highlight on “relativeness”. In view of the subject of discuss, it is needful to say that those who are poor and considered deprived plays a mental game of comparison. This simply explains a measure of condition and living standard by the poor against those considered wealthy. By comparing, they see themselves in a very weak position and may get more frustrated. Relative deprivation theory flags a point which state that “one is only deprived when he finds himself in a situation of lack when some others are not lacking”. This is just the case of child labour, if one is not lacking he or she will hardly seek presence in hard and difficult labour involvements and conditions.

### **Child Labour History in Nigeria**

Child labour has a long history; it exists in both rural and urban areas in various forms such as street trading, gardening, child caring, handicraft, house chores, prostitution and trafficking etc. Leading factors such as poverty, ignorance, culture, corruption, in effective laws and lack of will to enforce them are some causes of child labour. Although, the phenomenon of child labour is known to exist in virtually all parts of the world, the prevalence is very high in sub-Saharan Africa especially in Nigeria, the most populous black nation of the world with an estimated population of 170 million people. Typically, child labour is an age-long practice in the history of mankind. It has existed in various forms and in various parts of the world since ancient times. There are various conjecturing or claims by various scholars as regards the history of child labour. Nwokoro asserts that;

The earliest form of child labour is perhaps slavery which was big business, as it both created and relied on the support network of big merchants and some well placed members of the societies where it flourished (Nwokoro, 2011, p. 14).

For Lana Osment, tradition or culture is a responsible factor for child labour. Many societies have it in their culture that children in their growing age are liable to work and so are high responsibilities. Older generations assumes that children need to learn skills for the good of their future (Osment, 2014, p. 20).

The foregoing are claims of the history of child labour, and there are many more out there. This nuances in child labour history has made it difficult to reach an agreeable point regards its history. In Nigeria, it has never been easy to know the definite beginning or history of child labour because of the inefficiency in documentation in the prehistoric era. However, the origin of child labour can be traced to some factors/concepts.

**Culture and tradition:** The researcher in this study, shares a side with Lana Osment's view that child labour history can be traced to traditions and cultures of many societies. In Nigeria, many tribes or people have it in their culture to make children start work at a very young age. In Igbo culture of Nigeria for instance, where yam production is a major agricultural engagement, parents engage their children in farm duties at young age to support as man power. Obinna and Osita-Oleribe assume that many families in Africa want their children to help in contributing towards family income (Osment, 2014, p. 21). Apart from the Igbos, the Yoruba and Hausa races in Nigeria encourage young children as a matter of culture to engage in work. Just like earlier said, this cultural practice was not seen as evil, but was only a part of a child's training to become economically and socially responsible. Hence, this cultural practice (child labour) made children learn from their parent's occupational skills and crafts for the good of their future.

**Poverty:** Is not an alien phenomenon of man-kind from the prehistoric era till date. Therefore, poverty as an ageless phenomenon has a link and hence, shares much history with child labour in Nigeria. Many families in Nigeria live below the poverty line and so apart from engaging children in family duties as earlier observed, children from poor families are lured or prone to do certain things to survive on their own or with their family. Many have heard stories where parents send their children away to live with strangers as maid servants, messengers, cleaners, and other menial jobs. Poor parents often do this in order to reduce the load of responsibility from their shoulders and sometimes to generate income for survival. This practice of giving out children still hovers in today's Nigeria as it was in history. In fact, in olden days it shifted from

just child giving to slave trade as some parents had to sell their children in order to make ends meet. Nwokoro (2011, p. 14) may not be wrong when he conjures that slavery is responsible for the earliest form of child labour. Akamo and Mtwewe may also be right in their suggestion that poverty may not just be responsible for child labour origin or history but also a leading factor and driving force of the epidemic of child labour in today's world as they observe that tackling poverty can be a perfect solution to reducing child labour.

**Civil War:** War is world phenomenon that is highly negative to mankind and with its consuming ability is capable of mass destruction. The Nigerian civil that spanned between July 1967–January 1970 is largely synonymous with the description above as its destructiveness claimed millions of lives, destroyed properties worth millions and displaced thousands all over the nation. As an originating factor of child labour, the Nigerian civil war destroyed the economy of the country, more resources were directed to the war and so people became poorer. What is even worse was that lots of children were separated from their parents and so had to survive on their own. Osakwe and Lipede posit that;

The loss of parents during the war placed on children the demands of early and unprepared responsibility. Some children were victims of the war while others were voluntary or forced child soldiers (Osakwe & Lipede, 2017, p. 65).

In addition, Amnesty International (2007) estimated that there are 300 thousand child soldiers in the world, actively involved in fighting in more than thirty countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Columbia and Afghanistan. Some of them have been victims of torture and some are beaten to make sure they obey orders. The availability of light and cheap weapons means that children age ten or even younger are some time used to fight. Children have also been forced to kill members of their own families, and female child soldiers have been raped or used to provide sexual services (Haranlambos & Holborn, 2008, p. 758).

Although, at the close of the war in 1970, the Nigerian economy improved drastically following the oil boom that brought about a super-increased revenue, the war still had a major effect on children as the internally displaced children scattered all over the country had to survive and by the surest means child labour.

## Causes of Child Labour in Nigeria

A number of remote and immediate causes as proposed by different researchers are responsible causes or factors of child labour incidents. Prominent among them are:

**Poverty:** Is in fact, the biggest and greatest cause of child labour. Sunandamma affirms in her article *Child Labour, Social and Economic Realities which effecting Child Development* that;

The most important cause of wide spread child labour is the chronic poverty which forces the parents to send their children to seek employment. Parents are not only incapable of investing in their children's development due to poverty, also reluctant to support them and want them to start learning as soon as possible (Sunandamma, 2014, p. 2).

The above line of thought may be considered true since poverty is highly depriving in nature. The National Human Development Report sees poverty as "A state of long term deprivation of those essential materials and non-material attributes of well-being which are considered necessary for a decent living". (NHDR 2008–2009). (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdrs2010/news/africa/>)

Nwokoro also submit thus;

Child poverty which involves deprivation of young people below the age of 18 has been identified as a major development challenge in recent years (Nwokoro, 2011, p. 19).

Child labours as supported by the foregoing body of thoughts holds poverty firmly as its major initiator. Basically, a poor home is left with little choice; what is important is just about survival and nothing else. Hence, in the bid to survive, different approaches may be needed and child labour is above the most prominent. Poverty is a leading figure in developing and under-developed nations of the world. This simple explains why child labour plagues these countries including Nigeria who is fully a member of countries in this category. It has been observed that an increase in house hold income and rising standard of living brings about significant decline in child labour trends (Edmond, qtd in Nwokoro, 2011, p. 18). This is a clear indication that the incidence of child labour faces a major decline in countries with developing economy as in the case of Malaysia, India, and China.

**Illiteracy:** Is a global anomaly which generally explains the inability to read and write, this ailment is also linked to child labour as one of its major causes. In Nigeria, illiteracy rate is still on the high side. Nwokoro observes thus; "Illiteracy rate in Nigeria is still said to be high as the country ranked 118<sup>th</sup> in educational attainment with males disproportionately higher than females" (Nwokoro, 2011, p. 20).

Illiterate parents develop a high tendency of sending their children to engage in paid works than literate parents who are less likely to do. Observably too, illiteracy and poverty are tied friends. However, the incidence of child labour is prone to reduce considerably if parents take keen decision concerning their children's welfare and consider their education as a primary concern.

**Culture:** Is primarily the way of life of a people transferred from one generation to another. Although, it changes through time, it retains some important element of its identity. In Nigeria, different tribes and culture directly and indirectly pose a leading role to the cause of child labour. For instance, in the northern part of the country where child labour flourished greatly, it is widely observed that little children below 10 years of age go about rearing cattle, trekking long distances and covering kilometres as they graze. In the same geographical terrain, there are evidence of "almajiranci system" an Islamic culture where very little children are trained and encourage by (Mallam) adult guidance to go about begging for money and other things; and return back at the day's end and account for their gains. This practice makes for a method of sourcing income. More so, in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, among the Igbos there is a belief that children must begin early in life to learn and acquire important skills for the future. Hence, children follow their parents to farms, market, paid jobs, stream etc. This practice however, in its initial state was to teach children and not for just profit derivation sake but today following independence and the heightened state of corruption in Nigeria which had brought about poverty and social inequality, the early practice of child work have transfigured into child labour with a high growing effect.

**Poor government regulation as regard child labour:** Observably, today there are various existing and developing laws and policies which if properly applied and implemented will considerably help to reduce the practices of child labour. According to Nwokoro (2011, p. 24) the following are examples;

The Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) of the United Nations. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 12(3), which seeks to ensure that all citizens have adequate security, suitable employment with just conditions of work, freedom and protection from exploitation and abuse.

The Child Right Act (CRA) of 2003, which provides for the protection of children against discrimination, harmful and exploitative practices such as child marriage, prostitution and child Labour etc. The Education for All (EFA), of 1990 which seeks to guarantee quality education for all Nigerians of school age. The Universal Primary Education packaged by the Military Government in 1976 to develop the educational capacity of Nigerians The Universal Basic Education of 1999, which made the first 9 years of schooling both free and compulsory for all Nigerian children of primary school age. The Adult Literacy Program which targeted adult illiterate. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003, provides for the prohibition and prescription of punishment for traffic in persons, particularly women and children. However, corruption, weak institutions, poor funding, and lack of will to execute and implement are the scourge of these laws and policies in Nigeria.

**Unemployment:** Due to Nigeria's economic state, unemployment is a growing disease. It is the lack of job opportunities for the proportion of labour force available for work and is linked to the high prevalence of child labour in Nigeria. Parents who are unemployed easily encourage their children to engage in work in order to generate income. This situation is prominent in urban centres like Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Aba etc. and female children appears to be more engaged in it than their male counterpart.

**Large family size:** In the earlier days in African society large household size is used to qualify the wealth and social-status of a man. Courtesy of this practice is in the Igbo tribe where polygamy was a common practice. In recent times, the case is different and even widely spread given that the appearance of large family size amongst Nigerian families today is prominent among the middle class and low class citizens. The reason for this reality is unclear however, according to Nwokoro (2011, p. 22) many research are of the opinion that one possible reason parents in developing countries have many children is because they believe children can be profitable economically as they seem to be much less economic burden in a developing versus developed countries.

High infant death rate is another reason for large family size. More so, amongst the low class child birth is believed to be the reason for marriage. They may as well be other reasons for the appearance of large family size, however, what is important is the social reality of today whereby large families who live below average sees it necessary to send their numerous children out for work in order to meet up home demands.

**Early loss of parents, destitute, bastard, and orphan children:** Children within this category most times suffer negligence and helplessness from the society. And since one of man's ultimate will is survive, abandon children must survive by either working menial jobs, prostituting, hawking/street trading, begging etc. This social reality today in Nigeria is a cause of child labour incident.

### **Types of Child Labour**

Child labourers in Nigeria are engaged in various work activities. Prominent among them are: Prostitution, Street trading/ hawking, Agricultural labour/Industrial labour, Vehicle loaders and bus conductors, Domestic keepers, Child begging, Child criminals etc.

### **Child begging**

This has negative psychological, social and health consequences. The three categories of child beggars are—those who lead blind parents or relatives, those who beg entirely on their own and those who act as fronts for their parents, especially mothers, who are usually hidden from public view but supervise them from a close distance. These children are the most vulnerable because they are from families of the poorest of the poor. In all three categories, they run enormous risks of running or darting between cars in heavy traffic putting them in dangers of accidents. They also suffer the severe psycho-social consequences of engaging in demeaning type of activity and being exposed to constant abuse and aggression from the general public. In the southern part of Nigeria, begging was not significant though among the Yoruba's, it was culturally expected that mothers with many children would beg (normally for a few days) as a symbolic expression of their willingness to demean

themselves for the survival of the children. In recent times however, this has changed as beggars can be spotted in several cities. Begging is most wide-spread in the North where alms giving widely regarded as a religious obligation. The largest percentage here belongs to the almajiranci system—a semi-formal system of qu’ranic education, in which children mostly boys are sent by their parents to take up residence with Islamic teachers or mallamai for instructions in the qu’ran and other texts.

### **Prostitution/sexual exploitation**

Commercial sexual exploitation has become a problem of special concern in Nigeria, both because of its scale and links with commercial trafficking in women and girls and because of its role in the development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic now sweeping the country. Though studies on it is scarce owing to its undercover nature and the shy nature and attitude of people to make discussions on it. It has been widely observed that in most commercial cities of Nigeria such as Port Harcourt, Calabar, Owerri, Lagos and other parts of the country child prostitution is common. Surveys carried out between 1989 and 1993 by the West African Research Group on sexual Networking Orubuloye et.al (Betelwhobel & Undyaundeye, 2009, p. 7) identified the characteristics of commercial sex workers in five cities—Lagos, Ado-Ekiti and Benin, in for the west, Port Harcourt in the South and Kaduna in the North. The commercial sex workers were found in hotels, brothels, bars and streets, many below twenty years and comparatively educated. They operated outside their local governments, from different ethnic groups, most of them were single (separated or divorced). Those who had children were left with grandmothers in their local areas and there was tendencies to have them originate from Polygamous homes. They were on the average found to have about thirty clients a week. The clients were both single and married.

### **Child Labour in Agricultural Sector**

Most child labour occurs in agriculture and in the informal sector of the economy, where these and other provisions of the Labour act neither are neither monitored nor enforced. Child labour in this sector by a stu-

dy has shown areas like Ondo, Ado Ekiti, Ibadan and others, areas as destinations of these children. Some of them are engaged in such humiliating practices related to slavery such as a sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced labour.

### **Vehicle loaders and bus conductors**

In bus stations and motors parks across cities of Nigeria, children especially males are usually seen amongst many activities surrounding such environment calling passengers for taxis and buses, many carry bigger responsibilities as bus conductors. This is a trending reality that subject children to great risks in the Nigerian express where a lot of bad things happen. Apart from road risks of accident and robbery, children in this category are exposed to hash weather conditions and are at the mercy of kidnappers.

These are the major manifestation of child labour cases and types in Nigeria. Others include: child trading which involves the act of hawking and engaging in all forms of trade activities as in the case of urban centres, child criminal which engages children in drug trafficking, "Yahoo" and other illicit activities; domestic keepers which see children working as maids and servants in homes, small business outlets and others.

### **Synopsis of the Play**

The play *Say no to child abuse* centres on the deviants happenings perpetuated by Mrs Braye and her team of workers at St. Mumbasa Orphanage and the suffering of the parentless children at the orphanage. Spotlight is on a set of twin children Nelly and Nelson who were abandon on their birth, years ago at the gate of St. Mumbasa Orphanage home. Nelly and Nelson amongst other children suffer malnutrition, maltreatment, force child labour and general abuse from Mrs Braye and her attendants who are driven by greed and wickedness. Further abuse is rendered by a foster father who instead of protecting Nelly by seeing to her needs and desires decides to defile her sexually after which, she is thrown out of the house. However, this level of wickedness and abuse witness some levels of justice as Mrs. Braye runs out of luck. The police put her on arrest for engaging the children in child labour and trafficking

instead of taking good care of them, with the relieve items donated by good citizens and well-wishers. The story is complicated further as Mrs. Inemo, the mother of the abandoned twin returns after many years to claim her children.

### Plot Analysis

Conventionally, every drama has an order or arrangement of which the events or happenings must follow so as to create a meaningful impact on the audience. In view of this, plot is that element that drives the concept of the playwright following the interpretative ability of the actors on stage. Hence, in accordance to Aristotle's interpretation, plot is the sequential arrangement of incidents in an art (drama). It is the soul of drama. The plot of *Say no to child abuse* runs like this:

Opens with a prologue where children sit in a classroom, receiving lectures from their teacher. The question and answer session on child violation leads the teacher to telling them a story of St. Mumbasa's Orphanage. At the orphanage, the first that is shown is the set of abandon twin at the entrance which are taken in by two attendants. Ten years later, the twin children Nelly and Nelson were divided as a foster parent Mr and Mrs James adopts Nelly for a fee of 1.5 million naira. Three months after Nelly's adoption, Mrs Braye begins to engage the other children in child labour practice by forcing them to go out in the street to hawk petty items (Banana) meanwhile, they suffer under-feeding. In the process of their trading activity, one of them named Mabel encountered a bad individual who lured her with a trick of buying all her goods and then rapes her.

As the story unfolds, Nelly also encounters same fate with Mabel as her foster father Mr James rapes her. To this effect, Mrs James throws her out of the house claiming she seduces her husband. Nelly in her devastated disposition return to St. Mumbasa Orphanage and is slightly accepted by Mrs Braye while the children sympathize with her. This same occasion witness Mrs Braye and the attendants sharing items of donation brought by visitors for the children. The next action is the apprehension of some children from St Mumbasa Orphanage by police officers for hawking on the street during school hours. And the last is the arrest of Mrs Braye for her deep involvement in child abuse and treachery and Mrs Inemo the mother of Nelly and Nelson for neglect and abandonment.

## Plot structure

As earlier stated, plot is the sequential arrangement of events or happenings in a play from the beginning, middle to the end. This form of arrangement is the make-up of plot structure; it can either be climatic or episodic. An episodic plot structure, takes over a long period of time and also do not obey the law of three unity as stipulated by structure their plays using this structure are worse because the incidents happens without proper necessary sequence. (p. 18) Whereas, the climatic plot structure is designed with an exposition, climax and resolution, few setting and obeys the unity of time, place and action. In plays of this structure, shortly after the climax comes the resolution. In view of the above, *Say no to child abuse* as authored by Faith-Ken Aminikpo is of the climatic plot structure with the following reasons.

This one act play with eight (p. 8) scenes centres its action at St Mumbasa Orphanage home even though two actions happened outside the vicinity. This is to state that the plays setting is restricted hence, limited. More so, in terms of time and action, there is an agreement with climatic plot structure being that although, there is reference to a sharp shift in time after scene one as the stage direction indicates "Ten years later" and in scene three direction which indicates "Three years later" majority of the happenings takes effect at St Mumbasa Orphanage. Also, it is discovered that if exposition is the introduction of the plays character and situation, it is noted that from the beginning to the middle (where the climax is) the play is stretched and falls immediately after the climax. From the above, it is registered that the plot structure obeys the three unity of: place, time, action.

## Character in *Say no to child abuse*

Characters are dramatic personae created to carry out dramatic action in a work of art. Every dramatic art cannot function without the employment of characters, because they serve as the vehicle that carries the concept, idea and ideologies of the playwright to the audience through their dialogue and action.

Character is a very fundamental element of drama and works closely with the plot being that, it is through the character that plot develops proper arrangement. According to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, characters

reveal civil life (man's action) and moral purpose (imitation). Characters imitate life hence, dwells on imitation. The following are the characters in *Say no to child abuse*: Mrs Braye, Mrs Inemo, Mr James, Mrs James, Nelson, Nelly, Sunday, Mabel, Young-man, Teacher, Pupils (Joy, Junior, Henry, and Prince), Miss Lilly, Mr Daniel, Police Officer, Orphanage Inmates.

The following characters were designed by the playwright to portray different characterization. Characterization is the manner a character is being portrayed in a play. Characterization is what relates or distinguishes one character from another. It also explains how a character lives his life differently in the plays world. Importantly, it is the construct of the playwright. More so, since character carries emotions of several kinds including pity and fear, characterization becomes that interpretation style a character embodies. Is the character a Protagonist or an Antagonist? That will be known through characterization.

In summary, characterization defines a character's physical attributes (height, sex, age, complexities etc) social status (profession, family, relationship and religious background) psychological state and moral value. It creates a general idea or conception of an individual in a play.

### **Thematic Thrust**

Thematic thrust defines the overriding idea in a play. Therefore, the overriding idea in the play *Say no to child abuse* is child neglect and abuse. Children in the play who are the main subject suffered from various forms of abuse which includes; malnutrition, maltreatment, under-feeding, deprivation of education, unnecessary beating and assault, oral abuse (foul use of words on them), neglect, rape, child labour, trafficking and lack of parenthood. Among the listed item of child abuse, trafficking and labour appears to be the focus in the play. On an occasion, Mrs Braye traffics a child, named John, to a ritual killer in the play. More so, is the use of children in St. Mumbasa Orphanage as hawkers to sell petty items.

This unlikely act exposes children to lots of danger and as kids who are not yet responsible to themselves is very vulnerable and so can be easily taken advantage of just like the case of Mabel, a 13 year old orphan who suffered rape from a young man on one of her hawking expeditions, courtesy of Mrs Braye. Nelly also suffered rape on account of adoption by Mr James. Mr James raped her to satisfy himself and Mrs James sent her packing without listening to any explanation. The high level of child mal-

treatment and abuse comes to play so cheaply on account of the children's condition, weakness and vulnerability. They were exploited by Mrs Braye and her team. The worse is that even when the philanthropist aid the orphanage, Mrs Brayer diverts everything for her selfish pocket. This is to state clearly that a big stake of the children's suffering of abuse is hinged on the greed of Mrs Braye and the attendants.

Sunday: "See the way mummy and all the attendants are sharing the provision meant for our upkeep" (Aminikpo, 2017, p. 20).

### Style and Technique

The author's choice of words, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement all work together to establish mood, image and meaning in text. Style describes how the author describes events, objects and ideas. It could be original, formal, or informal.

Therefore, in *Say no to child abuse* the author's style reflects simplicity and originality in word usage. Formalized use of words is also employed. Most of the characters in the play especially the children tries to be expressive and so the writer attaches them with simple terms that are easily comprehensible in order for them to effectively express their torment and suffering. They sounded original too even though their speech seems formal.

Sunday: But ma, we have not eaten since this morning.

Mrs Braye: What? (Gets up and slap him) you are very stupid! Why didn't your parents thought about it before they dumped a miserable child like you? Can you talk to your parent like this? Idiot? Now will you get out of my sight before I kill you? (Aminikpo, 2017, p. 14).

Both Sunday and Mrs Braye speech shows originality because their innermost thought is what played out. However, they were a bit formal in that the lines tries to obey the law of English Language.

### Societal Relevance

One of the major assignments of written plays is to impact changes on the lives of its audience. Drama therefore, stands to educate, edify while entertaining. Aminikpo's *Say no to child abuse* is very relevant to

our society because the major issue raised in the play is not just a global one but a peculiar one in our immediate society. Child abuse is a problematic phenomenon with an intense negative effect on the society, but yet people still practice it in full-fledged.

## Conclusion

This research is carefully carried out to probe into the problem of child labour in Nigeria. Child labour phenomenon is a fact in our society and has apparent effects upon the Nigerian citizenry; some have already been address in the foregoing chapters. Specifically, this column is aimed at noting salient points and significant findings before administering recommendations. This study discovered the following: Child labour as an offshoot of child abuse is an evident social ill. Child labour as a global phenomenon engages children below age 17 in unlikely and disfavoured work conditions. Although, child labour is a global issue many people in Nigeria are ignorant of its nature and vices. Child labour in Nigeria is a growing disease. Child labour is not just terrorising to its victims (children) but even the general public suffers as well from the sickening effects now and in the nearest future. The problem of child labour in Nigeria is overlooked or undermined by many ignorantly not considering its impediment to national development. Poverty, illiteracy, large family size, culture amongst others is relative factors and causes of child labour. Corruption amongst public administrators has affected various efforts both locally and internationally to tackle the issue of child labour. There are various policies and laws stipulated locally and internationally to control child labour incidents but they appear weak due to poor implementation and follow up by the law enforcement agency. Those that engage in child labour are economically and socially deprived. Child labourers due to vulnerability and irresponsibleness often indulge in negative activities or criminal involvements, such as prostitution, armed-robbery, and pick pocketing, all of which can lead to arrest, imprisonment, maiming or even death by mob action.

To begin any statement here is to comfortably say that the issue of child labour is not just a problem for those who may be involved in it either as victims or as initiators/instigators. Child labour is a social ill and as such is a concern for all whether rich or poor, adult or children. It is also important to say that parents who instigate their children to

engage in inappropriate work because of economic or some other reasons should desist from such act because whatever result it may bring is more harmful than good to them and to the larger society. Children are the leaders of tomorrow and so the future may suffer if our supposed leaders are in their childhood deprived of essential ingredients to make up good individuals and countrymen to take up the future and move it to a greater height. This is an impending issue and so government and reliable stake holders should create more awareness, solutions and alternatives to the practice, and establish stiff penalties for those who may insist on defaulting. In addition, the researcher is appealing to the general public to desist from this ill practice and join hands with the government as critical stakeholders in tackling it. Just like what the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Children Emergency Funds (UNICEF), United Nations (UN) and other organisations are doing today, more should follow suit to see that issues like this be extinguished completely from the society of man.

Playwrights and dramatist has also done greatly to have been able to fish out hidden realities facing children in Nigeria today as they UN-preferentially engage in child labour practice. Thanks to the likes of Faith Ken-Aminikpo and others who deemed it fit to address this bordering issue through their dramatic art, more of this should be encourage as they act as awareness strategy to facing this problem. It is on a closing note that the researcher will like to observe that the needs of children must be considered first above all priorities. It is essential that children and youth be sound and well prepared in body and mind for the task of tomorrow. Their child hood, education and other related privileges should not be traded for anything else. This task is a concern for all; government, organisations, institutions, the general public etc. In UNISON we can make our society a better place for all.

### **Way forward**

Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of child Labour is a rising challenge that must essentially be overcome for a better and more developed society. Therefore, having made several findings in the previous column the researcher in this column will administer the following recommendations:

Policies and laws against child labour occurrences should be treated with strict seriousness.

Since poverty is one of the greatest causes of child labour incident then, the government should install more focus on the economic sector; develop more industries by diversifying into different economic areas and engage Nigerians (Not foreigners/expert rates) to do most of the jobs thereby, reducing unemployment rate.

Many a time, engagement in child labour seems to be more of a survival strategy than real preference hence, the government as well as NGO's should provide cheap or free platform where children can engage in acquiring good skills and education. This will disengage them from idleness and improper activities and expose them to a veritable platform for gaining knowledge that will be beneficial to their future.

Particular attention must be given to the education sector on account of its importance in human capital formation of the citizens. Federal budgetary allocation to the sector should be increased at both the national, state and local levels to secure adequate funding. A situation where school tuition is made free for both primary and secondary education will go a long way to reducing child labour incidents.

Since large family sizes is also a cause of child labour then, efforts from government and NGOs should be committed towards addressing issues of reproductive health and family planning. Religion plays a fundamental role in this regard and as such government may liaise with various religious groups to ensure that resource persons who are knowledgeable about the effective and acceptable family planning method are adequately available and create forums for teaching their adherents accordingly.

Young people and couples should ensure that they adequately prepared to fulfil the obligations of parenthood before giving birth to children.

More so, the government should put in place effective safety measures to see that children born out of wedlock (victims of broken marriage, bastard, displaced children, orphans etc) do not rely on their own but on the provisions of the government; social/charity homes.

Government and stake holders should be committed towards investing to reduce maternal mortality. This will reduce the rate of motherless and abandoned children.

International agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Town Unions, religious and social bodies should continue to mobilize for resource allocation, effective advocacy, research, capacity building, and public debate to develop strategies, fashion intervention policies and more to ensure that child labour issues meets a major decline and if possible an eventual death.

The media should intensify and create more enlightenment campaigns to let both children and parents understand that child Labour is a misnomer and that the best place for the child to work is in school.

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