



WELFARE ISSUES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTHS: NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

PREAMBLE:

- ▶ There are many efforts being put into welfare issues for children and youths in Nigeria for which the people are happy and grateful to the government. However, the question is whether these efforts are correct in their forms, contents, methods and directions.
- ▶ Welfare is the provision of a minimal level of wellbeing and social support for citizens and eligible residents that have no sufficient means to provide their basic needs. In most developed countries, welfare is mostly provided by the government from tax revenue and to a lesser extent by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), charities, informal and social groups, religious groups and Inter-Governmental Organizations.
- ▶ Welfare system is complex and involves many programs and users. There are many views on what works and what doesn't and how to improve the system and individual programs.

CHILD RIGHTS

- ▶ In 2003, Nigeria adopted the Child Right Acts to domesticate the convention on the rights of the child. Although this law was passed at the National Level, it is only effective in about 16 out of the 36 states in Nigeria because the state assemblies need to enact this law for it to be effective. This explains that this land mark legislative achievement has not yet been translated into improved legal protection throughout the country. Nigeria has not been able to deal with several issues hindering the protection of rights of the children; such as children living on the streets, children affected by communal conflicts, drug abuse, human trafficking and the weakness of the juvenile justice system.
- ▶ Children conflict with the law for a variety of reasons – poverty, social inequality, failed educational system, family problems, peer pressure, social and religious conflicts in which children are used as foot soldiers are some of the factors that account for a number of children in conflict with the law. Unfortunately, the child offenders are often treated like adults and mixed with adults in prisons. Many are convicted and jailed without making contact with a social worker or getting opportunity to be heard.
- ▶ A record report to the Africa Union on the rights and welfare of the Nigerian child showed that about 6,000 children are in prisons and detention centers across the country.

CHILD PARTICIPATION



- ▶ Increased participation of children in issues affecting their lives can have a positive and far reaching effect on their health and socio-economic conditions. When children participate in decision making, they tend to be more creative, positive and energetic offering ideas devoid of prejudice and stereotypes.
- ▶ The Federal Government of Nigeria inaugurated the children's parliament in 2003 to enhance children's participation. Since then, 26 states have inaugurated the children's parliament. The main challenge is to make these parliaments true representation of the broad categories of Nigerian children including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.
- ▶ There is also increase participation of children in the media and their opinion at the public domain is now sought and publicized to give them some measure of participation and responsibility.

YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

- ▶ According to Wikipedia, youths in Nigeria include citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged between 18 to 35 years. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with one of the largest population of youths in the world comprising about 33,652,424 members.
- ▶ Chief Olusegun Obasanjo a former President of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 believes that identifying and addressing issues that would enhance the lives of the youths would improve overall national development. The Nigerian government categorizes the youth as ambitious, enthusiastic, energetic and promising. They are considered vulnerable in the society because of the rapid pace of change they experience at this time of their lives.
- ▶ A national youth development policy was created and designed to advocate for youth and youth development. The policy views youth welfare as vital to the Nigerian nation and its socio-economic development. This policy is seen as youth participation project versus a project identifying problems and needs.

YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

- ▶ In order to serve as a hub through which all youth related issues can be actualized, a Federal Ministry of Youth Affairs was created to give youths some cause to relax and help them engage in activities such as skill acquisition, crafts, trades etc. To prevent infiltration of evil lessons which promote unrestrained immoral and terrible lifestyles into the schools, the relevant department in the Federal Ministry of Education, formulate policies for the maintenance of standards to ensure quality education for children.
- ▶ However, as a result of the economic situation in the country, we acknowledge there are not enough job opportunities for the youths. Some of them take to different vices like robbery, kidnapping, cultism, militancy all in a bid to make quick money. The youth should therefore be carried along in decision making and job opportunities to encourage and empower them positively as empowerment of the youth is empowerment of the nation.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

▶ **POVERTY:**

Despite high level of profit in the oil sector, distribution of wealth is unequal. A large number of people still live in extreme poverty. People living in the rural areas are mostly affected. Poverty has a negative impact on the lives of young Nigerians creating widespread malnutrition, sickness, and limited educational opportunities.

▶ **DISCRIMINATION:**

Handicapped children suffering from physical and mental deficiencies and difficulties are often victims of discriminatory practices in Nigeria. There are insufficient shelters and basic schools for these disadvantaged children who are also denied access to institutions due to financial situations.

▶ **RIGHT TO HEALTH:**

The high rate of mortality for children under 5 years remains high especially in the rural areas due to inadequate water supply, sewage disposal, lack of clean water and deficient health services.

Malnutrition is also a principal cause of death among Nigerian children, including neonatal maladies, malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia etc.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

▶ RIGHT TO EDUCATION:

Education at basic and post primary school levels is a fundamental right of every child as it unveils their great potentials. It is essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom, empowerment and yields important developmental benefits. Education inculcates in the individual, knowledge, skills, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self actualization (Asiegbu, Okorie and Bosah, 2014). Also Agbekwu (2002) says education equips one with the marketable skills thereby lifting the possessor up from poverty arena.

Through education, the learner learns good health habits, principles and practices which promote healthy living and longevity.

▶ CHILD ABUSE:

Though corporal punishment is not acceptable in schools and homes, some people believe that such is good for discipline among children. Violence is also very common in Nigeria and children are frequently victims. There is the advocacy to put an end to this as it is not morally acceptable.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

▶ **STREET CHILDREN:**

This is on the increase in Nigeria as youths can be seen taking refuge under the bridges and are faced with the problem of human trafficking, sexual harassment, abduction, disease, vehicular accidents etc.

▶ **CHILD MARRIAGE:**

Though forbidden in Nigeria law, this still occurs on regular basis especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. Child marriage has negative repercussions on child health and overall development and the children run the risk of premature pregnancy which can be dangerous and result in severe consequences.

▶ **FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION:**

Although some states have promulgated laws against this act, some rural dwellers still practice it. Many NGO's have also carried out campaigns against it as the children run the risk of infections and difficult labour which could result to conditions like maternal morbidity and mortality.

CONCLUSION

- ▶ Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has the largest population of youths. Nigeria is also a very rich country and ironically very poor. Her economic situation remains difficult and as a result, progression in the area of children's right and welfare remains sluggish. However, with the contributions from NGOs especially those of the previous and present First Lady, we believe welfare for children and youth will improve.



Thank you.

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