Child Labor in Nona Region of Western Kenya and Implications on the Rights of Children: Critical Reflections

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Abstract: Child labour is a global problem and it is one of the obstacles in the achievement of international frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals as well as national ones like vision 2030 in Kenya. It equally has caused death of about twenty two thousand children in the world annually. The malpractice is widespread and indicates a paradigm shift in the prevalence especially in developing countries whereby it causes negative consequences on sustainable community development. The overall objective of the study was to assess the prevalence of child labour in Vihiga, Kakamega, Busia and Bungoma in Nzoia region of Kenya. This was with specific interest on the dynamics currently caressing the child labour. This study used the descriptive survey design with a sample size of 500 people. The study population included household heads, caretakers, child labourers, entrepreneurs, farmers and Government officers who included teachers, health officers, security officers and chiefs. The samples were obtained using multistage, random, purposive and snowball sampling methods. The instruments used for primary data collection were; questionnaires, observation guides and key informant interviews. Secondary data was obtained from websites, documents from relevant government ministries and departments. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study revealed that the overall prevalence of child labour in the four Counties was high (87%). The distribution of child labour was almost uniform across the four Counties however there were variations in the frequencies of types of child labour activities. Busia County had higher frequencies of child labour in; fishing, prostitution and entertainment: Kakamega County had higher frequencies in mining and street work: Vihiga County had higher frequencies in brick making and mining while Bungoma County had higher frequencies in entertainment. Although many studies indicate that the agricultural sector is the largest employer of child labourers, results of this study contradict by showing the commercial sector as the largest employer of child labourers in the region. It was also observed that the transport sector had attracted a significant number of child labourers. Factors that influence the high prevalence of child labour in these Counties were economic sectors, community types, peer influence, culture and economic status of families. It is hoped that understanding the ever changing paradigms of child labour will attract joint efforts by all stake holders not only in resolving the impasse but also pave way for achievement of both national and international declarations over the problem.

Key words: child labour, Child labourers, Counties, Prevalence, sustainable community development

I. INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a global problem (ILO 2010) and therefore requires global efforts for its elimination. This subject has remained an area of growing interest in relation to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and Kenya's Vision 2030. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention defines child labour as exploitative, harmful, hazardous or inappropriate occupations or work activities in the labour market or their own household involving children below 18 years. It negates efforts to attain full potentials in physical, mental, socio-economic and cultural development of children. Child labour limits formation of quality labour force and social capital in the community. It is therefore a hindrance to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as implementation of the social, economic and political pillars of Kenya's Vision 2030 which call for education and training, prosperity and protection of rights for all Kenyans.

Study reports convey a continuous increase and change in the forms of child labour (Rena 2007; Odeny 20013). The reports further indicate that about 246 million children work as labourers in the world and 73 million of them are less than 10 years old (Roschansky 2007; World Bank 2010). It was also revealed that the child labour accounts for 22% of the workforce in Asia, 32% in Africa, 17% in Latin America, 1% in US, Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations (ILO 2010). Reports by World Bank (2010) assert that about 22 000 children die every year in work related activities in the world. Child labour practice seems however to be more widespread in developing countries and it has negative consequences on socio-economic development and the

quality of the future labour force (Stone et al. 2003; KNBS 2010). There has been growing international consensus on issues related to child labour as evidenced in various declarations, platforms, conventions, programmes of action among others (Maul 2007; Nehaluddin 2011).

The Nzoia region has the second highest population density in the country (KNBS 2010) and due to the high population growth, farm sizes have reduced resulting not only into migration to urban areas in search for employment (KDHS, 2010) but also majority (95%) of people remain food insecure (Netondo *et al*., 2010; Akkaro & Mtweve 2011 and Njeru 2013). Child labour has remained high and dynamic in this study area affecting hence children's' physical, mental and social health (UNICEF 2007) and also interfering with children's education (Word Bank 2010 and Mutia 2012). It is therefore evident that the magnitude of the practice has seriously interfered with human development in the region. Child labour practices have also negated the global efforts to achieve targets set in frameworks like SDGs as well Kenya's Vision 2030 that aim at sustainable development (Kaunga 2008). It is ironical that limited studies have been conducted to establish the ever evolving forms and distribution of child labour practices in the study area. This study therefore aimed at assessing the prevalence and factors influencing the distribution of child labour in region in bid to shed light to appropriate solutions to the problem.

A critical first step towards reducing child labour is to seek understanding on the prevalence of child labour and the factors that influence the distribution in the region. This would shed light to relevant policy formulation that enhances appropriate participation of children in labour market to enhance sustainable development. Understanding of the child labour paradigms will enhance proper evaluation of strategies for effective reduction of the malpractice. This will further enhance efficient human and social capital development which will positively contribute to the achievement of SDG and Kenya Vision 2030. The results could guide policy makers as well as provide a platform for further research on the plight of child labourers.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in four counties of Nzoia region of Kenya that is on $0^030'0"$N and $34^034'60"$E. Although the study area is currently divided into six counties namely Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega, Vihiga, Trans Nzoia and West Pokot, only the first four counties were considered for the study. The study used descriptive survey research design. The target population of the study was 4,334,282 people. The accessible population however was composed of household heads, child labourers, teachers, lecturers, officers in charge of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) dealing with child labour, government officers and general public.

The sample size for proportions was determined using statistical formula for large populations by Krejcie R.V and Daryle W.M. (1970). A sample size of 500 respondents was selected from the study population. Quantitative data was mainly collected from a sample of 400 household heads and caretakers in the study area. Qualitative data was obtained from a total sample of 100 people who included; child labourers, teachers, officers in charge of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) dealing with child labour, government officers and general public proportionately selected. The sampling methods were random, purposive and snowball. The instruments used were; questionnaires, observation, Interviews and Key Informant Interviews (KII). Data was analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 13 and qualitative analysis using narratives. Results were presented in tables and graphs.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
3.1 Distribution of Child Labour in Economic Sector in Nzoia Region of Kenya

The descriptive survey provided information on the distribution of child labour in various sectors of the study area. This study considered the following four categories of economic sectors that engage child labour; **a**griculture and related chores, commercial, domestic and related chores and transport. Table 1 presents the distribution of the children in various economic and sub-economic sectors in the Nzoia region of Western Kenya.

Table 1: Distribution of Child Labour by Economic Sectors in Nzoia Region, Kenya.

Sector	Child labour Activities	Households	%
Unknown	None	**54**	**13.5**
	Farming	29	7.25
	Herding	16	4
Agriculture and related chores	Fishing	10	2.25
	Mining	17	4.25
	Sub-total	**72**	**18**

	Business	50	12.5
	Prostitution	22	5.5
	Earth baking (pots, bricks)	21	5.25
Commercial	Entertainment	18	4.5
	Trafficking/smuggling	8	2
	Sub-total	**119**	**29.75**
Domestic and related chores	Domestic assistance	79	19.75
	Street work	15	3.75
	Sub-total	**94**	**23.5**
Transport	Bicycle transport	20	5
	Boats transport	8	2
	Motor cycle transport	20	5
	Porter/cart transport	4	1
	Touting	9	2.25
	Sub-total	**61**	**15.25**
	Grand Totals	**400**	**100**

Source: Survey Data 2014

Results of the study indicated that majority (86.5%) of the households had children engaged in various forms of child labour in the four economic sectors. According to the results, the distribution of child labour by economic sector was portrayed as commercial (29%), domestic and related chores (24%), agriculture (18%) and transport (15%) in order of importance. Although the results almost resembled those in a study conducted in Kenya by Kaunga (2008), reports by ILO-IPEC (2013) and World Bank (2010) on the contrary pointed out that the distribution of child labour was highest in the agricultural sector. The contradiction in the findings could be an indicator of a dynamic change in the trend of prevalence in child labour.

The study results further identified some of the child labour activities in each of the economic sectors. It was indicated that the commercial sector had child labour activities like business, prostitution, brick making, entertainment and child trafficking/smuggling of goods. Agricultural sector was portrayed as having child labour activities like farming, herding, fishing and mining. The domestic and related chores sector was shown as having domestic and street labour while transport sector involved child labour activities like riding bicycles, motor cycles, boats and pottering and touting. Other child labourers identified through KII were; barbers waiters, tailors, weavers (baskets, brooms and mats), potters, welders, masons, hairdressers, criminals/burglars, carpenters and barmaids all under business.

There seems to be a shift of child labour from agriculture to business and transport. Although Onyango (2003) maintains that child labour prevails because children were a cheap substitute for adult obligations, Alimi and Micah (2010) attribute the high prevalence of the practice to lack of awareness in communities. On the other hand Amutabi & Mukhebi (2001) assert that children often engage in income generating child labour activities because of poverty in their households.

Child labour is seen as normal and often parents/caretakers may not understand the difference between children's work and child labour.

Agriculture sector was observed as having 18% child labourers. Although previous studies indicate a higher percentage of child labourers being engaged in agricultural sector (Otieno 2012 and Njeru 2013), results of this study show a contradiction. The study results however concur with findings by ILO (2013) which document that the agricultural sector is one of the most dangerous sectors in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational diseases for child labourers. Through Key informant interviews it was noted that child labourers involved in agriculture worked for long hours, with dangerous tools and machinery, carried heavy loads, and were exposed to toxic substances and harmful pests. According to ILO (2012) 59 percent of all children in hazardous work aged 5–17 were in agriculture and were susceptible to risks such as drowning and physical injuries. However, reports by Maya (2010) and ILO (2013) approving participation of children in labour activities as be positive because it contributes to the inter-generational transfer of skills, food security and improved household livelihoods.

Results of the study indicated that transport sector engaged about15% of child labourers. Most of them were observed to be frequently engaged in bicycle and motor bike transport. Results obtained through KII indicated that the two modes of transport had become significant (10%) in the region in the recent. According to the report by World Bank (2010) the two modes of transport were deemed convenient for facilitating short distance transport. The qualitative analysis of child labour in the transport sector indicated that there were quick financial returns to the child labourers however this sector attracted many children hence making them to run

away from schools. The study also deems the transport sector not appropriate for the child labourers based on documentation by the GOK (2001) on the transport policy in Kenya.

3.2 Distribution of Child Labour by Sex and Age in the Nzoia region of Kenya.

Results of the study portrayed male-child dominance in the child labour activities. There were 55% male child labours as compared to 32% of the female child labourers. According the results the male child labourers dominated in all the economic sectors except the one of domestic and related chores sector. The ratio of male to female child labourers was highest in transport (14:1), followed by agriculture (4:1) and commercial (2:1) sub-sectors respectively. Results of the study portrayed child labour as gender related. Alimi and Micah (2010) further pointed out that cultural pressure exposed children to labour practices at expense of education, especially for girl children. Although some studies report that cultural emphasis is on the boy child to attend school while the girl child goes into child labour, this study shows that a higher percentage of boys as child labourers.

A higher number of boys than girls were involved in transport, business, farming, brick making, mining, entertainment, herding, street children and smuggling. No girls were recorded as being involved in fishing. Child labour for boys in the mentioned areas was probably because boys were more energetic and aggressive than girls. On the other hand more girls than boys were involved in domestic activities. The results corroborated those of ILO (2007) where it was noted that child labour activities often relate to gender roles.

The study revealed a relationship between child labour activities and age of the child labourers. Findings of the study indicated that the most frequent age range of child labourers in Nzoia region of Kenya was 12-17 years (53%) followed by 8-11 years (22%). The least frequent age of the child labour was 5-7 years (11%). Accordingly engagement of child labourers seemed to increase with age. Although child labour has been shown to involve children aged 5 – 17 years, the results of the study indicated that there was higher percentage of child labourers among children aged 12 years and above. It was further pointed out through KII results that a higher number of children engaged in labour activities at age 12-17 years probably because, of lack of school fees, peer pressure, and culture. Findings from interview sessions with employers of the children seemed to suggest that children of this age were recruited into child labour because it was assumed that they had capacities and were a cheaper source of labour.

A comparatively smaller percentage of children in the age bracket of 5 – 7 years (11%) were reported to be involved in child labour. Most child labourers in this age category were shown to be involved in domestic work, street work and business activities. Most of them were observed to be working in the company of parents or caregivers. A study by Otieno (2012) pointed out that large numbers of children in this age category were also subjected by parents, caregivers or peers to beg, scavenge for scrap metals and plastics and also to traffic drugs, and guns. Accordingly this made some of them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and harassment that could result into serious health implications (Chege 2012).

3.3 Child labour distribution by Counties in the Nzoia region, Kenya.

In all the Counties child labour was highest in the commercial sector, domestic and related chores and transport sectors respectively. However there were variations in the frequencies of child labour in the four Counties (Table 2). The high frequencies child labour in these three sectors could probably be due to devolution in Kenya. According to the report documented by GOK (2010), devolution had increased employment, population expansion through immigration and development of buildings and infrastructure with rigorous construction activities. All these could have created employment opportunities for children especially in urban communities. Urbanization and population growth in the Counties may also have attracted child labour in the business, transport and domestic economic sectors.

Table 2: Child Labour by County
Source ; Survey Data, 2014

TYPE OF CHILD LABOUR	BUNGOMA COUNTY	BUSIA COUNTY	KAKAMEGA COUNTY	VIHIGA COUNTY
1.Farming	8	8	7	6
2.Business	12	14	11	13
3.Transport	12	17	16	16
4.Domestic assistance	20	21	19	19
6.Fishing	3	5	2	0
7.Mining	3	3	5	6
8.Trafficking	3	5	0	0
9. Prostitution	5	7	5	5
10.Herding	5	5	5	1

11.Brick making	3	3	8	7
12.Street work	3	3	5	4
13. Entertainment	6	5	4	3
TOTAL	84 (21%)	95(24%)	87(22%)	80(20%)
TOTAL %	24%	28%	25%	23%

The study findings on the distribution of child labour in Busia County presented a higher percentage (24%) as compared to the other Counties. The child labour activities where the children were engaged were transport, business, prostitution, fishing and trafficking of drugs and guns respectively. Child labour in form of trafficking was only observed in Busia and Bungoma counties. The results concurred with the report by Wafula (2013) on child labour at the border Counties which revealed that traders used children aged 5-17 to smuggle weapons and goods and for other types of crime.

The study portrayed Bungoma County as having higher frequencies of child labourers in entertainment activities as compared to other Counties. The findings concurred with the report by KNBS (2010) which described Bungoma County as rich in cultural practices. The FGD attributed the high frequency of entertainment to cultural practices and to the increasing economic benefits associated with traditional entertainment especially during traditional ceremonies like; circumcision, weddings, political rallies, funerals and traditional marriages. It was also noted that during the ceremonies there was significant absence of children from school. Alimi and Micah (2010) concurred with these findings by noting that cultural pressures undermined perception of the long term values of education in some communities which eventually impacted negatively on sustainable development.

Vihiga and Kakamega Counties were shown to have higher frequencies in the mining activities. The child labourers in these Counties shown to be involved in mining stone, ballast, gold, sand making bricks. The results agreed with the study by Amutabi & Mukhebi (2001) on the "Mukibira" mines in Vihiga District which revealed that women and children were the majority in the gold mining activities and this distracted children from school attendance as well as exposed children to mercury infections and other hazards (ILO 2007).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study it can be deduced that child labour is dominant in Nzoia region. According to the study child labour was portrayed to be evenly distributed in in the region. It was also revealed that majority of child labourers were engaged in commercial activities which indicated a shift from child labour in the agricultural sector. This was further verified by records that indicated a lower percentage of child labourers in the domestic, agricultural sectors. The higher percentage of boy child labourers could also be an indicator of changing attitudes towards children in the community. The study results also reflected that the distribution of child labour was influenced by age and sex of the child labourers. Most child labourers were aged 12-17 years. Culture was also revealed as a factor that influences child labour practice.

According to the study children in households were likely to become socio-culturally vulnerable to child labour because of socio-economic pressures. Therefore there is need for a shift from general to specific reduction interventions based on the findings of the study area. Policy changes that emphasize on community participation in control and reduction of the malpractice appear to be the way forward to sustainable development. This conclusion is based on the expectation that the devolved Governments have the mandates to manage local resources and implement the targeted strategies in the reduction of the malpractice.

RECOMMENDATION

The study therefore recommends further study on suitable strategies that can be used to further reduce child labour in Nzoia region.

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