

## THE SITUATION ON CHILD LABOUR IN GHANA AND THE WAY FORWARD

### CHILD LABOUR

#### Definition:

Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous or harmful. It is the employment of children in work, industry or business especially when illegal or considered exploitative. It is the employment of children in work that deprives children of the childhood and interferes with their ability to attend regular school.

This practice is considered exploitative by many international organizations and governments. Legislations across the work prohibit child labour. Child labour is a serious problem in Ghana where about one-third of children between the ages of seven and fourteen work full time. In the lake Volta of Volta region, children as young as six are sent to their relatives in hope of learning a trade. Instead, they are led to the lake where they battle for their lives in order to make good catch for their masters.

Under the Ghanaian Children Act 1988, a minimum age of children into employment is fifteen (15). However, children may be employed at the age of 13 to do light work. The minimum age for engagement of persons in hazardous work is 18 although in Ghana, children as young as 12 are made to quarry stones and vendor items the whole day.

Child labour can be local and international. In Ghana, most of these children are often engaged in fishing, stone quarrying, illegal mining and other acts that deprive the child of education. Sad to say, the 2014 living standards survey on child labour reports that there is child labour in every region of the country with every child directly affected and more than one in ten children engages in hazardous work.

## CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

- Poverty: High level of poverty and unemployment of parents is one major cause of child labour. Many families are poor in Ghana and in many households; unemployment and insufficient income have caused children to engage in labour to support family income and in most cases, for their own survival since their parents are unable to cater for even the most basic need of the Ghanaian child. As child labour persists in such households, an intergenerational cycle of poverty is perpetuated. Unemployment and Underemployment is caused by lack of employable skills and knowledge resulting from the lack of education of the person when he or she was a child. The phenomenon of “Kayaye;” in markets of Accra is a sordid manifestation of an economic cause of child labour.
- Laws and enforcements are inadequate: child labour laws around the world are often not enforced include exemptions that allows for child labour to persist in certain sectors such as agriculture, or domestic work. Even in countries where strong labour laws exist, labour departments and labour expectation and inspection offices are often underfunded and under-staffed, or even courts may fail to enforce the laws-similarly, many state governments allocate few resources to enforce child labour laws. The unregulated labour market seems to have been entrenched and acceptably nicknamed “the informal sector”. Today more than 50% of Ghana’s economy is in the informal sector.
- Due to weak enforcement labour laws and regulations, employers prefer to exploit children rather than adults since children are regarded as “minors” of the society. Many of these children are unpaid or underpaid and have low connective of bargaining rights. Because of their difficult economic circumstances these children accept any offer of their labour.
- Customs/beliefs: there is still some percentage of people who believe that the girl child should not be educated at all but be engaged in domestic/agricultural labour.
- Greed for cheap labour: employers and people engage children in child labour to solicit for cheap cost of labour
- Laziness on the part of some children: children who refuse to attend school due to sheer laziness or lack of interest in education tend to engage in labour that is beyond their capacity
- Limited access to free and compulsory education: statistics held in 2006 estimate that about 75 million children worldwide were not in school. In 2009, suggested solutions and the estimated cost involved for making sure that children are in school is approximately 30billion US Dollars.
- Socio-cultural cause. There is a pervasive disrespect for the right of children both at the family and state level. The needs of children are the first to be sacrificed in the times of financial difficulties and challenges. Breakdown of extended family care, atomization of local communities, single parenting, negative cultural and traditional practices, gender discrimination, poor family management and child training are other socio-cultural causes of child labour.

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## RECENT CASES

### Statistics:

- In Ghana, Brong Ahafo region is the region with the highest cases of child labour.
- 8,697,602 children aged 5 to 17 engage in economic activities.
- 21.8% constitute child labour
- 14.2% is hazardous work.
- Brong-Ahafo region records 302,972 children -33.5%
- Central region records; 70,535 children 8.9%
- Greater Accra region; 62,526 children 5.2%

The chief of Staff, Honourable Fremah Akua Oare Osei has ensured Ghanaians that the NPP'S free SHS policy will go a long way to eradicate child labour in Ghana. According to her, engaging kids in formal education in schools will keep them busy, help and restrain wards and also provide guidance for kids who engage in child labour. She further pleaded with parents and guardians to be more cautious about the future of the wards and also find better ways to help the SHS school policy to benefit children in child labour. She passed these comment at the National Policy durbar held at the Accra international conference center to mark world day against child labour under the theme "In conflict And Disaster, Protect Children from Child Labour".

## EFFECTS

- Children are exposed to accidental injuries and abuses like cuts, burns, lacerations, fractures, tiredness, excessive fears and nightmares.
- Sexual abuse, particularly sexual exploitation of girls by adults, eg. Rape, prostitution which will lead to early an unwanted pregnancies, abortions, drug and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases.
- Physical abuse that involves corporal punishment, emotional maltreatment such as belittling, blaming, verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation, desolation and bad remarks, physical attacks from employers.
- Physical neglect like lack of adequate provision of food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment
- Lack of schooling resulting in missing educational qualifications, higher skills and educational opportunities, thus perpetuating their lives in poverty.
- Competition of children with adult workers leads to depressing wages and salaries.

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## SOLUTIONS

- Increased family incomes
- Education that helps children to learn skills that will help them earn a living
- Social services that help children and families survive crisis such as diseases, or loss of home and shelter
- Family controls (Family planning) so that families are not burden with children they cannot cater for.
- Eliminate poverty: the duty of the government and the legal working force to work effectively to enhance production and eradicate poverty.
- Enforce labour laws: laws that have been set up by the government and institutions such as the International Labour organization on the control of child labour must be enforced by law enforcement agencies such as the police. When this happen, it will serve as deterrent to others.
- Abolishing child trafficking
- Replacement of child workers already existing in the system by adult workers.

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