

Universal Primary Education, Poverty and Child Labor in Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper discusses the relationship between universal/free primary educations, poverty and child labour in Trans-nzoia County. The paper has been critically written at a time when the country is striving towards achieving millennium development goals as well as vision 2030 where the government of Kenya is pushing towards social, economic, political as well as environmental development through education for all. However, with all this in mind, the nightmare of poverty amidst the populace in most Counties in Kenya cannot be evaded. For instance, the poverty index in Trans-nzoia County is 50.2% which has been quoted as being a key contributor to school dropout and entry into child labour. The paper recommends that for quality education to be realized and further decrease in child labour in the County, there is need to increase resources in terms of personnel/human, and physical resources as well as putting other infrastructure in place that greatly contribute to improved quality education aligned to vision 2030, increased retention rate, increased completion rate and reduction in child labour.

Keywords: universal primary education, poverty, child labour.

INTRODUCTION

According to Weston [1], child labour gaining familiarity as a crime against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The labour is likely to interfere with the education and normal development of the children which can be harmful to their health and morals.

Child labourer's risk to be exposed for abuse, violence and hazards which can be dangerous to their life. Effects of labour on children are not the same as on adults as there are major psychological, physical and social differences between the two groups. Makes little or no risk to adults. Hazardous work during development and growth during the childhood can have lasting effects which can affect the children for the rest of their lives [2].

Children may be seriously harmed by work which at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, governments from around the world including those in sub-Saharan African governments recommitted themselves to achieving universal education. Although overall access to basic education has risen substantially over the last decade in the region, the attainment of universal primary education remains difficult. UNESCO's Institute of Statistics estimates that about 45 million [3] children of primary school age in sub-Saharan Africa were out of school.

In 2002, the government introduced free primary education that saw enrolment rates double. In 2007, the government further waived the tuition fee in secondary schools, a move that was aimed at making the secondary education at least affordable. Unfortunately, the current harsh economic time, makes education to remain a pipe dream to children from families with low income. Ultimately, households, not governments, make decisions on children's time allocation. Whether or not a child will attend school and/or work will depend on the household they live in and their status within the household. Many researchers hold the view that household poverty is the main reason children work. Economists have used the "luxury axiom" to explain the relationship between child labor and poverty. According to the luxury axiom, children enter the labor market to ensure their survival and that of their families; therefore, schooling and leisure are luxury goods. These poor households cannot afford to keep children in school and in other non-work activities. It assumes that only when household incomes rise sufficiently will children leave the labor force, implying that child labor will persist as long as scarcity exists.

According to the population census of 2009, Trans-nzoia County has a population of 818,757, with a poverty rate index of 50.2% [4]. Seventy point nine percent of the population has primary education while only 10.9% has secondary education. This shows that the transition rate from primary to secondary schools is very low. This may be enhanced by the poverty level in the County (50.2%).

The situation of poverty and child labour was amplified by the elected Trans Nzoia county leadership led by governor elect Patrick Simiyu Khameba and the county representatives who urged to put in place modalities that shall eradicate child labor in the area and improve education standards [5].

Trans Nzoia County secondary school heads association chairman Bernard Lukuya told West FM that it is prudent that the new county leadership moves with speed to aide thousands of children who end up in large farms as casual workers at the expense of their education.

The situation has been exacerbated by Cross nationally, Fallon and Tzannatos [6] find an inverse relationship between child labor force participation and per capita GDP. At the micro level, empirical evidence also appears to confirm the relationship. Admassie [1] asserts that “poverty is the main, if not the most important factor compelling parents to deploy their children into work obligations” (p. 261). In poor households, the struggle to survive makes it very difficult for parents to invest in their children’s education. According to various scholars [7, 9].

Patrinos and Psacharopoulos [9, 1], the incidence of child labor falls as the income and resources of households increase. However, in Trans-nzoia County, ironically, it is termed as the gallery or store (meaning agriculturally productive county) for the country (Kenya) yet the poverty index in the County Further, increases in income are likely to reduce the likelihood of children dropping out of school [9, 10]. Children’s schooling competes with other commodities for scarce household resources, which makes access to schooling positively associated with household wealth [9].

The poor have few options when it comes to protecting themselves against loss of income. Children may be sent to work to reduce the potential impact of loss of family income due to poor crop yields, job losses, the death of a breadwinner, etc. Baland and Robinson [11] showed theoretically that households with a lack of credit will choose to send their children into the labor market. Emerson and de Souza [11] found that child labor perpetuates poverty across

generations; a parent who was a child laborer is much more likely to send his or her own child to work.

However, a different school of thought contends that researchers need to look beyond poverty to the policy environment [12-14]. Hiraoka [14] argues that “a closer look at the socioeconomic structures in which childlabor is embedded seem to suggest that the nature and trend of child labor is not independent of the surrounding structures” (p. 59). Post and Weiner find that differences in school attendance and child labor rates in Latin America and Asia reflect differences in education policies and national laws. Weiner maintains that in India the regional variations in child labor and school attendance rates are due to “the belief systems governing the elites and the political coalitions toward the expansion of school education” (p. 154). Therefore, to fully understand the child labor and schooling patterns, we need to look at household decisions in the context of socioeconomic, cultural, and political forces that constrain those decisions.

Child Labour and Poverty Linked To Poor Education

Child labour and poverty have been attributed to decline in education standards in Trans Nzoia county. Addressing the media on Friday at his office in Kitale, Kenya secondary school heads Association Trans Nzoia County chairperson Bernard Lukuya said that the county has the potential to produce the best student’s nationally, but poverty and child labour have been pulling behind stakeholders' efforts. He reiterated that many students come from poor background and are forced to help their parents raise school fees by working in the maize plantations. future of many youths would be flattened if the menace continues.

“During planting season, the number of students attending classes is very low because they are away helping their parents,” he said. He also noted that the situation has affected their performance immensely. He said that many parents and guardians have failed to pay school fees for their children on time thus affecting the daily running of schools. “We are forced to send students home most of the time due to huge arrears and this is a problem affecting most schools in the county. Maost of them take more than a month to resume their studies hence affecting their performance,” he added. He urged the county's new leaders to bring to task those who are responsible for employing underage children in maize plantations saying that the Earlier, the Trans Nzoia county director of education Joseph Wamocho had warned school heads and management in the county that have been hiking school fees by adding additional levies to desist. “We would not allow parents to be added extra load as many of them are poor and are not even able to pay half of it; all levies should be confirmed by ministry of education,” he cautioned.

Lukuya applauded schools in the county for their exemplary performance.

In the other parts of the country particularly Nyanza (Western part of the country), it was reported by IRIN on 13th, February, 2012 that gold mining in Kenya pulls children out of school. It is estimated that 15,000 children are working in gold mines in Kenya instead of attending school in order to help them and their families escape poverty. In an interview with IRIN for an article on child labour in Kenya, one child stated that "I would rather work for people here at the mine and at the end of the day they will give me money to spend. Even my parents say what I am doing is right; I can buy my own clothes. What is the point of being in school?" The attitude that children are better off employed in child labour than gaining an education has much to do with the fact that there are few formal job opportunities in the region.

Many children are able to earn around \$1.20 for their labour. An estimated 15,000 children are working in gold mines in western Kenya's Nyanza province, either the mines themselves or selling food. Some children come only on weekends and holidays to make some extra money working in dangerous conditions, but some end up missing school altogether.

The information from IRIN clearly proves that children with their parents' approval are dropping out of schools to fend not only for themselves but also for their families. Poverty emerges as the key driving force for school children to engage in child labour. Thus, the government of Kenya needs to act fast in order to rescue children from engaging in early employment.

The government of Kenya produced a Policy Framework for Education with a major aim of aligning Education and Training to the Constitution of Kenya [15] and Kenya Vision 2030 and beyond. It should be noted that the vision for the framework policy is to provide quality education and training to all Kenyans which is fundamental to the success of the Government as well as country's development. However, the main question is; how is the government intending to achieve this education policy without improving on its resources?

Kenya Vision 2030 articulates the development of a middle income country in which all citizens will have embraced entrepreneurship, be able to engage in lifelong learning, learn new things quickly, perform more non-routine tasks, be capable of more complex problem-solving, willing and able to take more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, and as vital tools towards these ends, have better reading, quantitative, reasoning and

expository skills. All these can only be possible by not only improving the quality of education at all levels (primary, secondary, and training colleges) but also eradicating child labour in all sectors of the economy.

Poverty-Child Labour Theory

The theory of poverty and child labour was expounded by Boyden, Jo, Birgitta Ling and William Myers [16] in their book "What Works for Children". According to them, child labour as a result of poverty is one of the most common theories about the causes behind underage work. A majority of studies in developing countries show that poor families put their children in child labour more often than families in a better economic situation. Increase of the household income is one reason but it is also a safety strategy to even out the risk of losing economic income, for example with the loss of an adult income earner or a failed harvest.

According to ILO child labour commonly may represent around 20 per cent of the household income, and as poor families spend the majority of its income on food, consequently the children's incomes are crucial. In many households not all income is equally allocated to meet basic needs. Income earned by the mother of the household is more likely to be available for the family than income earned by the father. Children's earnings given to mothers may therefore be more important for the family than the earnings gained by the father. It is common that children are think about such factors, they are fully aware of their work as an important part to support their family [2].

Economic dependence of households on the work contributed by their children varies extremely, ranging from almost none in industrializing countries to nearly total dependence in families with an absent or disabled adult which is common in many African countries being desolated by HIV/AIDS. The fundamental importance of child labour as a result of poverty is so widely accepted and well demonstrated that there is no need to question the theory. But, there exist disagreements about to what degree poverty is fundamental to child labour – if poverty was the sole determinant for child labour, the highest rates of child labour would be found in the poorest parts of the world. This is not always the case.

The relationship between child labour and poverty is varied, vague and indirect. If poverty would be the only determinant, the same patterns would be found over the world, but they are not. In rich countries it is often the opposite; children from high-income families are more likely to work. The explanation is that children from wealthier families have more work opportunities and are less exposed to ethnic and racial discrimination. In African countries and particularly

Kenya, it should be noted that employment opportunities in formal sectors are limited. As a result, unemployment rate is very high and therefore some parents are unable to provide for their family members thus, activating their children into child labour so that they can supplement the meager income.

Children's schooling competes with other commodities for scarce household resources, which makes access to schooling positively associated with household wealth [9]. The poor have few options when it comes to protecting themselves against loss of income. Children may be sent to work to reduce the potential impact of loss of family income due to poor crop yields, job losses, and the death of a breadwinner, among others. Baland and Robinson [17] showed theoretically that households with a lack of credit will choose to send their children into the labor market. Emerson and de Souza [18] found that child labor perpetuates poverty across generations; a parent who was a child laborer is much more likely to send his or her own child to work. Some children have also been motivated to drop out of school because of the school factors; inadequate facilities, inadequate structures, inadequate teachers among other factors, which has compromised the quality of education.

Critical Analysis for the Relationship among Education, Poverty and Child Labour

From the literature, different scholars have argued that poverty is the main cause of child labour. Parents who have no means of generating income use their children for making income by accepting them to venture into labour market. This implies that the children have to dropout of schools and work at the expense of their education. In trans-nzoia, this has been a common phenomenon where every year, a lot of children are moving of school to work in farms (particularly in Agricultural Development Cooperation {ADC}) where cheap labour is being utilized during planting, weeding, stocking and finally harvesting of the maize made for Kenya Seed Company. There are no stern policies in these ADCs prohibiting child labour or if there is, then the management assumes them and they end up exploiting children.

Apart from working in ADCs, some other individual persons also have large tracts of land (schemes) that also need labour. They however, end up using more labour from children which is cheaper. The worst thing is that parents are aware and they are doing nothing to stop the menace of child labour. In addition, the government is partly to blame due to lack of framework that guard the universal primary education where the beneficiaries (pupils) drop out of school without being restricted.

In a nutshell, there is a relationship between education, poverty and child labour. When the population is poor, they will do anything in order to fend for themselves (including allowing children to work) and at this juncture, education will not be useful if people are economically disadvantaged. In addition, the introduction of free primary education in 2002 by the government of Kenya saw the number double yet little was done about the resources in general. This culminated into serious problems where few teachers were managing a very huge number of students, there was inadequate facilities (few classrooms forcing students to study under tree shades), inadequate playing fields, lack of reading and writing materials among other factors. All these factors contributed to poor relationship between the school and the pupils who find a gap and reasons enough to drop out and do other things among them child-labour, early marriages among others.

Although the government has pulled its efforts towards addressing these factors, a lot still need to be done. Many schools in Trans-nzoia are poorly developed, the ratio between pupils and teachers is still high and therefore more teachers need to be employed, classrooms are still inadequate, reading materials are inadequate, among other factors which have kept school dropouts high. Majority of the dropout eventually enter into workforce where they work for pay.

In order to eradicate child labour in Trans-nzoia, there is need to address the issue of poverty where parents and youth who have completed school need to be involved in income generating activities. The attitude that after training one has to be employed should be uprooted from people and let them be encouraged to be self-reliant through self-employment.

Development of schools is not only a government affair but also a community issue. There is need for the community to be enlightened on the importance of supporting and developing their schools for the benefits of their own children. They need to be educated and sensitized on the importance of education by the government as well as non-governmental agents.

CONCLUSION

Amidst free and compulsory primary education in Kenya, it is clear that in most parts/regions of the country many people still live in poverty; a condition which has exacerbated child labour. Despite Trans-nzoia is being rated as one of the productive region in the country in terms of agriculture, it is ironical that it is among those regions with high rates of poverty. Child labour is harmful to children in terms of their health physically, socially and intellectually. Parents ought to be responsible in terms of providing the basic needs to their family members and allow their children to access

basic education for it will be of great help to them in future.

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