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# **SOCIO-HEALTH AND PHYSICAL VULNERABILITY OF CHILD LABOURERS IN FARMING COMMUNITIES OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## **SUMMARY**

*In traditional farming communities of Southwest Nigeria, the distinction between child labour and socialization into adult and normative roles was difficult to establish. As societies and patterns of relationships signalled increasing complexity, the differences became evident. This qualitative study investigated the social, economic, health and physical vulnerability of children engaged in labourious cocoa farming activities in selected communities of Southwest Nigeria. Employing Structural Functionalism and Ethno-methodology as theoretical perspectives, findings reveal contextual differences both in perception and existence of child labour in selected study locations. Although the incidence of child labour in cocoa farming has waned markedly in the area compared to what obtained several years earlier, individual and household socioeconomic empowerment is a critical factor for positive attitudinal and behavioural change. This will go a long way to redefining the dynamics and extent to which children can be involved in cocoa farming.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The need to care for the physical, mental and social well-being of children is a reflection of the value placed on them not only for what they represent in families but also the implications for the future of society. Therefore, maltreatment, deprivation or exploitation of children in any form contradicts the principle of adequate upbringing and development. In a number of cases however, perpetrators of child abuse do not perceive the connection between demographic, social and economic wellbeing of children and the future potentials of communities. Hence, a study on child abuse in any part of Nigeria is timely not only due to its record of pervasive abuse of children but also its very youthful population (Nigeria, 2010). As Isiugo-Abanihe (2011) observed, about 42 per cent (76 million) of Nigerians are children in the 0-14 age group. In specific terms therefore, this segment of the Nigerian population is higher than the population of Ghana, Gambia, Togo, Benin Republic, Senegal, Liberia and Sierra Leone put together (Population Reference Bureau 2015). The implication of these statistics is clear and suggests that adequate attention should be paid to issues affecting this category of people.

Due to its high poverty profile, Nigeria is a breeding ground for a catalogue of human abuses particularly child labour which manifests in several forms with concomitant multifaceted implications (Tade 2014; Okafor 2010). The World Bank

president had noted that Nigeria ranks third among countries with the highest number of poor people, accounting for 7 percent of the global figures on the poor (Vanguard 2015). Thus, an estimated 54 percent of Nigeria's population live below the poverty line (Unicef 2013). The immediate and long term effects of poverty on the social, physical and psychological welfare of child labourers and their families are enormous. Yet, the magnitude of this problem is not fully appreciated in several quarters as a result of ignorance, illiteracy, cultural beliefs and practices that situate child labour within the context of rite of passage into adulthood among others. These and other factors undermine attempts at reversing the trend in relevant situations. Although there are several studies on child labour in Nigeria, they largely focussed on street trading and begging, domestic servitude, rape, verbal abuse and battery. Negligible attention has been paid to children that are engaged in labourious activities particularly in cocoa farming. On one hand, this lack of emphasis may be explained by a shift in focus from cocoa farming, which used to be the main income earner in Western Nigeria, to other forms of economic activities. On the other, some families who exploit the labour of younger members classify it as part of the socialization process.

This investigation on child labour was carried out in selected cocoa producing communities of Southwestern, Nigeria in order to ascertain the existence, scale, community perception and level of knowledge of child labour in relevant locations. These issues were examined within the context of Nigeria's ratification of the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) to reduce and eventually eliminate child labour from cocoa farms and other agricultural activities (Ben-Chendo *et al.* 2014; Gockowski and Oduwole 2001).

## **Literature Review**

Since the transformation of world of work in the wake of the industrial revolution, child labour has become one of the most discussed phenomena in policy and academic circles. From regional, global and civil society organisations to specialised scholarly communities the nature, drivers, dynamics, forms and consequences of child labour have been subjected to empirical research inquiries and critical analyses given its multidimensional consequences (Awka, 2014, Tade, 2014). This review highlights contemporary views on child labour issues as they pertain to Africa, focussing more on their involvement in cocoa farming in Southwest Nigeria.

### *Defining Child Labour*

Child labour is an old, complex and widespread phenomenon (Dessy and Pallage, 2005; Osiruemu, 2007). However, the concept is characterised by definitional discrepancies arising from variations in conceptualization of both Child and Labour in different contexts. Controversies surround the designation of under-eighteens as children in official regional and global policy frameworks. It has been argued, for instance, that classifying engagement of children at work across different socio-geographical settings as laborious must first deal with a range of issues. However, the

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention no. 138 of 1973 clearly defined and categorized child labour for different kinds of activities of children. For instance, the minimum age of 18 was prescribed for work which is likely to be hazardous to children's wellbeing, health, safety and morals (Boas and Huser 2006). Furthermore, ILO Convention no. 182 of 1999 described the Worst Forms of Child Labour as any individual under age 18 for the purposes of slavery, trafficking, bondage, serfdom and forced compulsory labour, child soldiering, child prostitution and use of children in drugs smuggling and other criminal activities (Kielland and Tovo, 2006; Boas and Huser 2006).

Convention (no 138) further clarifies the categorization of child labour by age and activities thus:

- from 5-11 years-old, all children at work in economic activities are classified as involved in child labour; and
- between 12 and 14 years-old, all children at work in economic activities, minus those in light works (light work being non-hazardous work for up to 14 hours a week).

These clarifications suggest that contrary to notions held in several quarters, not all activities undertaken by children under 18 years constitute child labour. Consequent on the above categorizations, Boas and Huser (2006) opined that child labour in cocoa farms will constitute in activities such as spraying pesticides and working with machetes.

Aside from criticism relating to the exclusion of works around the household in the above, which Kielland and Tovo (2006) articulated in their book, scholars with constructionist leaning maintain that childhood is not a static category that can be understood in terms of chronological age. Positions cautioning such straightforward views have been explored by Ansell (2005), Hindman (2009), and Kehily (2009) – to mention a few.

Western notions of childhood as carefree, secure, and happy phase is popular and often generalised and universalised (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005) which does not reflect the views in certain places including Africa. They are largely conceived as bourgeois and elitist construction that is not sensitive to cross-cultural variations in meanings and expressions about what "child" denotes (Gittins, 2009). Thus, losing sight of these cultural differences ignores the social and economic peculiarities within which meanings of childhood and child-work are constructed. In Ghana, child labour in cocoa farming is seen mainly as a social and cultural experience and thus part of young people's socialization even though worries are expressed when a cohort of these children are engaged in hazardous activities (Ghana Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment 2007). This is similar to what obtains in Cote d'Ivoire where a study found that 87 percent of the permanent labour force used in cocoa farming derives from the family (Boas and Huser 2006). On the average, between US\$30-US\$110 annual cocoa revenue accrued to each household member involved in cocoa farming in West Africa (IITA 2002).

With regard to defining 'child', issues of lack of consensus are also evident. In most less developed countries of the world, for instance, being a child seems to have little to do with age, and more with social roles, expectations and responsibilities (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). In Africa, a study on the child migration phenomenon revealed that children who migrate alone in search of work, even beyond their own countries of origin, demonstrate strong agency through thoughtful choices and active decision-making (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). This often makes the line between childhood and adulthood fuzzy, fluid and overlapping. Hence, young people in Africa, including children blur the line between social divides of childhood and adulthood as they create and recreate their roles in the face of changing conditions (De Boeck and Honwana, 2005).

In spite of the conceptual challenges, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) noted that child labour involves works that are mentally, physically, socially and morally harmful to children, as well as those that interfere with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity of having a sound education (ILO, 2014; Aliyu, 2006). As Andvig Canagarajah and Kielland (2001) had stated earlier, child labour is the activity of children, conceived to be quite young to perform tasks that undermine their present economic welfare or future income earning capabilities, either by limiting future choice options or their respective individual productive capabilities.

#### Child labour in cocoa producing countries of West Africa

For several reasons such as underreporting, perception of what constitutes child labour and lack of interest by governments in the phenomenon, it is difficult to state the actual number of children involved in laborious activities in cocoa farms in West Africa (ILO 2007; Boas and Huser 2006). What is however known is that all over West Africa, child migration related to work activities is on the increase (Hashim & Thorsen, 2011), and that in 2002 the majority of children (64 percent) working in cocoa farms in the sub-region were below the age of 14 (IITA 2002) among whom 59 percent were boys. An ethnographic study revealed that in some rural villages of Ghana and Burkina Faso many children are migrating in order to engage in one form of paid laborious activity or the other (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011).

As Gamlin and Hesketh (2007) observed, the rural nature of agricultural work where millions of children from West Africa and other regions of the developing countries are employed exposes them to extreme climatic conditions, harmful chemicals, hazards, animals and insects, parasites and infection. Indeed, cocoa farming in West Africa has been described as labour intensive with little or no emphasis on mechanization (IITA 2002). Realising the dehumanizing condition of children on cocoa plantations in Cote d'Ivoire, Manzo (2005) cautioned that a new form of slavery was underway in West Africa.

As research indicated, as many as 284,000 children worked under dangerous conditions in Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroun and Ghana with about 70 percent of these occurring in Cote d'Ivoire alone (CRS Report 2005). A study by IITA (2002) revealed that an estimated 2,500 children were recruited to work in cocoa farming in Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria by intermediaries. Thus, recourse to child labour in West African cocoa farms has been described as the darkest spot on the chocolate industry where thousands of children are employed, with enormous consequences

([www.worldvision.ca/wp-content](http://www.worldvision.ca/wp-content)). It has been revealed that absenteeism among pupils and teachers in rural schools in Ghana is most evident during cocoa harvesting season, which usually coincides with the beginning of the school year (International Cocoa Initiative 2011).

One often cited cause of child labour in West African farms is severe poverty that compels some parents to send their children to work under exploitative terms and in hazardous conditions (see Morsel, 2000; Hodges, 2001; Dottridge, 2001; ILO, 2002; Anugwom, 2003; Aliyu, 2006; Ugal and Undyaundeye, 2009; ILO, 2010a, 2014; Salawu and Adekeye, 2010; Ben-Chendo, et al., 2012; Ben-Chendo, et al., 2014). Cocoa farmers in West Africa are themselves poor, with many earning less than \$2 per day and resort to child labour in order to break even ([www.foodispower.org](http://www.foodispower.org)). According to the UNICEF (2006), Nigeria had about 15 million child labourers below 14 years. Many of them work in hazardous conditions having the major part of their income connected to their impoverished families' income. The labour profile of Nigeria showed that most of these children work in the agricultural and domestic services engaging in the worst forms of child labour. Those in agriculture and in Southwest Nigeria mainly in cocoa farms were found to be working long hours using dangerous tools, carrying heavy loads, are exposed to pesticides and are assigned to apply chemical fertilizers without protective instruments (Nigeria, 2010).

A study conducted in 2005 on 1,500 cocoa farms in four West African countries, including Nigeria found that while 64 percent of the labourers were under age 14, about 54 percent of them applied pesticides without protective equipment as well as used machetes for field clearing (Gamlin and Hesketh, 2007). To a large extent, dependence of Nigerian cocoa farmers on child labour is closely linked to the economic downturn of the 1980s. As with other sectors of the Nigerian economy, cocoa production in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era was undermined by slow economic growth, which negatively impacted families in variety of ways, including recourse to child labour as a response to the overarching effects of the situation. For instance, a study revealed that in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria, alone about two thousand workers lost their jobs in the wake of the economic crisis (Guyer, Denzer and Agbaje, 2002, p. xxxiii).

Indeed, child labour in cocoa farms in Nigeria existed before the eventual scrapping of the Cocoa Board. Through a system of buying directly from cocoa farmers and then marketing the crop overseas, the Cocoa Board hitherto cushioned the effects of price instability and ensured that the crop remained profitable for producers. Once the Board was scrapped coupled with the apparent under-investment in agriculture generally by the government, returns declined rapidly, and it became increasingly difficult for farmers to meet labour wage obligations at the regular amount. Adult labourers became expensive to engage and in order not to produce at a loss, a more affordable cohort of workers was needed to continue the production process. Consequently, child labourers were used to fill this cheap labour gap (Gockowski and Oduwole 2001).

*Efforts at eliminating child labour in cocoa farming*



Although there is consensus on the negative consequences of child labour in cocoa farming, countries have evolved different strategies towards its eradication. Most of the efforts are traceable to the 2001 Harkin-Engel Protocol, which was an agreement, signed by cocoa and chocolate companies from the US, Canada and Europe to take responsibility for addressing issues related to the most dehumanizing form of child labour (Ghana Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment 2007). The main aim of the protocol was to ensure that cocoa cultivation and processing were undertaken according to the ILO child labour standards (ILO 2005). By so doing, these organizations undertook a commitment to eliminate the worst forms of child labour on cocoa farms by 2005 and ensure that purchased cocoa was indeed free of child labour (Griek *et al.* 2010). In addition, the protocol mandates relevant governments to put in place a robust monitoring system which is necessary to track the state of child labour and efforts at improving the situation where necessary (Ghana Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment 2007). Report shows that the companies neither met the 2005 deadline nor the July 2008 extension to reduce by half child labour in cocoa farms (Anti-Slavery International, 2014).

To be sure, several programmes have been introduced to address the main causes of the worst forms of child labour in West Africa, whose success will depend on the extent to which the chocolate industry is genuinely committed to this goal. In Cote d'Ivoire for instance, Nestle Cocoa Plan which aims to make farmers generate profits from their farms, eradicate child labour and at the same time ensure stable supply of cocoa, had different action components. These included training more than 12,000 farmers in 2012 alone; opening the first school built for a Cocoa Plan Cooperative; and a plan to build and/or refurbish 40 schools in communities that desperately need them ([www.nestlecocoa.com](http://www.nestlecocoa.com)).

As reported by the ILO (2005) Cote d'Ivoire had ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and in October 2010 passed a comprehensive law against extreme form of child labour (Fair Labour Association (2012) ; set up a national steering mechanism for a country-wide programme to eliminate child labour especially cocoa cultivation and other agricultural activities; and a workshop was organized in 2004 by the Ministry of Labour to draw up a plan to address child labour issues nationally. In 2012, Cote d'Ivoire officially defined hazardous tasks for children with a view to sensitizing the people against it, and that way discourage harmful work for individuals less than age 18 (Fair Labour Association (2012).

In Ghana, the government took several steps from 2002 to intensify action against child labour generally through a project that was tied to poverty reduction (ILO 2005). The ILO (2005) also stated that both Nigeria and Ghana were having national programmes aimed at eliminating child labour with support from ILO/IPEC. With regard to Cocoa farming, a nationwide programme was launched in 2006 for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in cocoa production. That initiative resulted in taking off cocoa farms about 12,000 children and who were subsequently enrolled in school and provided necessary materials. The programme also included education of parents and communities on adequate tasks for children and the essence of schooling. In order to sustain such awareness,

Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) made up of advocates moved round relevant cocoa producing areas to spread the information ([www.irinnews.org/report/93805/ghana](http://www.irinnews.org/report/93805/ghana)).

Efforts made by Nigeria included the ratification of United Nations conventions on minimum age and the worst forms of child labour (Ben-Chendo *et al.* 2014; Gockowski and Oduwole 2001), which Oloko (1999) equated with government's positive stance at combating child labour in the country. Although the ILO (2007) noted the existence of child labour in Ondo State Nigeria, it observed that over 1500 children were withdrawn from child labour through education and training that prevented several children from exposure to hazardous cocoa farming activities.

The pressure to eliminate child labour in agriculture and cocoa farming in particular, from different quarters, has been mounting over the years given the inherent consequences. For instance, the US Department of Labour released a document containing the list of countries producing cocoa using child labour, including Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroun, Ghana and Guinea. It was a strategy to increase public awareness about the magnitude of the problem on one hand and promote action to combat child labour in relevant contexts on the other (Griek 2010). Though a noble initiative, much will not be achieved without a firm resolve by the chocolate industry to take significant steps to remedy the situation, particularly by paying cocoa farmers wages that improve their livelihood ([www.foodispower.org](http://www.foodispower.org)). It is observed that countries like Germany, Switzerland, and United Kingdom among others have a big role to play in any strategy at eliminating child labour in cocoa production by buying only products that are certified as child labour free ([www.pqsystems.com/eline/2013/09/data\\_in\\_everyday\\_life\\_large.png](http://www.pqsystems.com/eline/2013/09/data_in_everyday_life_large.png)). Surely, a robust and effective monitoring system is central to addressing conformity related to agreements on combating child labour in cocoa farms given that 95 percent of the global chocolate production is not confirmed to be free from child labour ([www.worldvision.ca/wp-content](http://www.worldvision.ca/wp-content)). The major limitation of these efforts at discouraging child labour is the apparent lack of awareness among a large majority of people about the details of international law on the rights of children (Buono and Babo 2010).

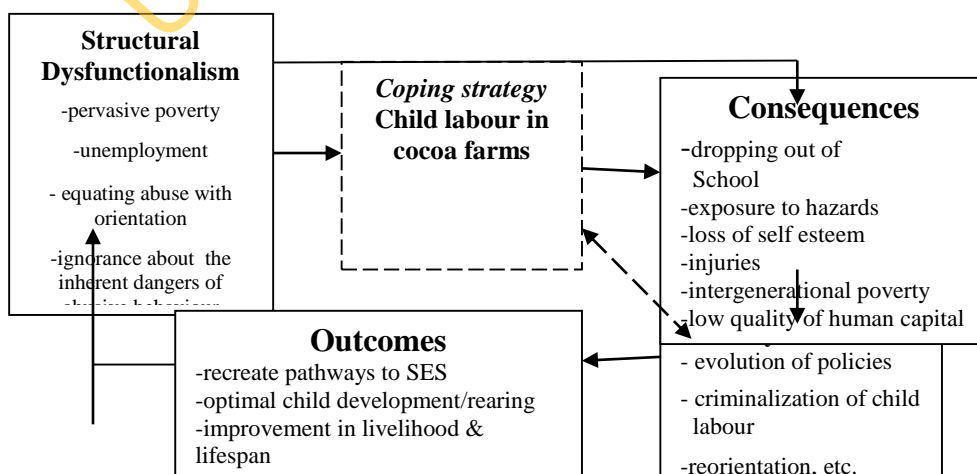
### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theoretical perspectives are employed in explaining child labour in cocoa farming in Southwest Nigeria – Structural Functionalism and Ethnomethodology. Structural Functionalism views the society as a system made up of interrelated parts that interact on the basis of a common value system. Each agency or subsystem is seen as functional and contributes to the survival of the entire system. Thus, an enlightened and progressive society would more likely contribute to growth and development of various sectors of the community than would a vulnerable citizenry. As a corollary, the malfunctioning of any of the parts affects others and the entire system. Functionalism conceives society as a self-regulating system that relies on some prerequisites for actualisation of order and latent maintenance (Macionis and Plummer 2005; Haralambos). Thus, a functioning society is one in which a greater number of its citizens is able to overcome the limitations that may undermine access to Maslow's basic necessities of life, particularly self-actualization and self-esteem. Nigeria for instance, is characterized by dysfunction occasioned by lack of basic

needs, insensitivity to the conditions of the citizenry, breakdown of law and order, ignorance and high incidence of avoidable deaths (Nwokocha 2012a; Nwokocha and Awomoyi 2009).

The situation in Nigeria contradicts the Structural Functionalist's view of society as a summation of unified, ordered and contributory sub-systems (Ritzer 2008). The reality of the Nigerian situation is manifest in government insensitivity, dissensus at different levels of individual and group relations, lack of motivation to make meaningful contributions to the maintenance of the system as a whole. Indeed, Ekeh's (1983) conclusions on primordial and civic publics are recurring behavioural decimal, in the country, wherein peoples are guided by traditional sentiments and cleavages rather than the zeal to contribute to the common good through adjustments to changing taste and fashion. Apparent governmental failure in economic, infrastructural and human development explains high rate of unemployment, abuse, neglect and early exposure to risky behaviours that have implications for morbidity and mortality.

Ethno-methodology which has been adopted as a complementary model for explaining child labour as a strategy for indicating poverty at individual and household levels shares some similarity with Structural dysfunctions and how a weak socioeconomic and moral system determines what people do on daily basis. Interpreted as the common-sense strategy (Haralambos, Holborn and Heald 2004), it describes how individuals adjust their actions in everyday interaction to cope with and/or overcome perceived or real challenges of life. The basis of strategizing is in an actor's perception of inherent weakness related to a system or activity and the possibility of overcoming some of these threats that may act as proxies for socioeconomic powerlessness. Engaging children in labourious cocoa farming although conceived in several quarters as anti-progressive and dehumanizing, is adopted in some context as a necessary strategy towards augmenting family income. In what follows, we present a conceptual framework that synthesizes the above perspectives diagrammatically. Figure 1 shows that the major factor explaining child abuse including engagement in labourious activities such as cocoa farming is systemic, particularly as evident in the structural maladjustment of society and/ or creation of dysfunctional elements that bolster and perpetuate underdevelopment at different levels. Often, poverty and unemployment are implicated as predisposing factors to child labour in some context; others construct labourious activities among children as part and parcel of socialization towards impartation of the culture of diligence and perseverance.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Child Labour**

**Source:** Author, 2016

The framework indicates that a structurally functional society would not only condemn child labour but will also create conditions that discourage abusive behaviour. The broken lines signify that child labour in cocoa farming is an antithesis and should not be conceived as a coping strategy in a progressive environment. As a corollary, child labour in 21<sup>st</sup> century societies is a major indicator of regression and failure to address core issues of human development. Identifiable consequences include but not limited to dropping out of school syndrome, exposure to hazards, loss of self esteem, injuries, intergenerational poverty and low quality of human capital.

As Figure 1 reveals, when communities become more sensitive to the conditions of its members, it may evolve conditions that may challenge existing structures or attitudes such as formulating and implementing intervention policies, reorientation and even outlawing abusive behaviours to deter potential perpetrators. The likely reactions or outcomes of alterations will include adjustment and re-creation of pathways to socioeconomic status, optimal development of young members of society, better livelihood conditions and marked increase in lifespan among others. In the long run, these changes will impact the entire system to the extent that the structures begin to function again.

**Materials and Methods**

Data collection for the study was undertaken using qualitative methods. A triangulation of In-depth Interviews (IDIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) was employed for this purpose. Information was elicited from different stakeholders. Six cocoa farming communities in Southwestern Nigeria were purposively selected. These included Owo, Odigbo, Ijare, Ilesha, Modakeke and Apomu communities.

A total of 31 IDIs were conducted. Respondents included village elders and chiefs, cocoa farmers, youth, staff of NGOs and local government officials. Each of these interviews, which took place in serene locations lasted for an average of one hour. In addition, 12 FGDs were conducted among different groups including community elders, cocoa farmers among others in each of the study locations. Eight KIIs were conducted among child labourers for the purpose of eliciting the insider information on the thematic phenomenon.

Data analysis involved the use of ethnographic summaries and manual content analysis. The procedure began with the translation and transcription of tape-

recordings from the IDIs, FGDs and KIs. These were followed by careful examination and, later isolation of various responses according to themes reflected in the objectives of the research. We note here that pseudonyms (fictitious names) have been used, in reporting the findings, to represent study participants and respondents in line with the ethical principle on anonymity of research subjects.

## **Findings**

### **Opinion about child labour**

The views of community members on child labour were largely similar especially on the causes, inherent dangers and the possible remedies in places where it is still evident. Opinions expressed by respondents and participants ranged from very strong to moderate. For instance, a community elder opined:

In my view, child labour can be compared to slavery. Just as a slave has no right, so also a child labourer... s/he lacks the power to negotiate his/her income and working conditions. He/she is often overburdened and underpaid. Such practices expose children to all manner of ill health and endanger their future. It is immoral and criminal. It must be condemned, (Afolabi/Village elder/IDI/Ijare).

By equating child labour with slavery and calling for its criminalization, the above interviewee was drawing attention to the many consequences that these labourers are exposed to, for which total condemnation is imperative. One of the interviewees stated the condition upon which child labour occurs:

Child labour occurs mostly in settings where parents are extremely poor and are unable to meet their daily obligation to the family. Such parents are often forced to present their children to recruitment agents or third party to be engaged in farm work, at times in faraway places, (Adesoji/Opinion Leader/IDI/Modakeke).

Another respondent corroborated the above statement by observing that:

Some of the children who lost their parents are involved in servitude especially those whose close relatives are unwilling to take up the responsibility of their upbringing. You know, in this area people marry up to four or five wives and have so many children to cater for. Bringing in orphans would automatically amount to extra burden. Such children are sometimes handed over to agents who negotiate their conditions of service and get them engaged, (Adekunle/Community member/IDI/Apomu).

The difficulty of eliminating child labour in places where it already exists was explained by some group discussants as reflected in the views of one participant:

In places where child labour exists, eliminating such practice could be very difficult. Survival is at the heart of this issue. Some of these kids don't have parents anymore and their relatives are struggling to even give the minimum comfort they can afford to their own biological kids; what then will be left to the orphans. If you say an under aged child should not be involved in paid labour and his parents are unable to care

for him/her, how would such a child survive? It is easier done in nations where social welfare scheme is in place. In this case, we have to choose between allowing a child to work and earn a living or let him/her live a life of destitution and later become a hardened criminal or a child prostitute, (Kayode/FGD/Men/Ilesha).

The above view ordinarily seems supportive of child labour given the justification adduced by the participants. But, it is important to note that the aim of this section is to analyze people's perception about child labour, not necessarily what obtains in their communities with regard to that. Another respondent who captured the views of stakeholders that equate child labour with socialization provided these children are treated humanely by their engagers pointed out:

With the issue of school here and there, child labour is no longer fashionable. Although it has its own disadvantages, I think it is more of socialization. European values have made us all lazy. If people can be humane a little, I don't think children working to make ends meet would be such a repulsive crime, (Oluwasegun/Farmer/IDI/Apomu)

On the contrary, the next respondent declared out-rightly that child labour is not beneficial by pointing out its negative implications for the education and future of the child generally:

There is no benefit in child labour because even the money the children make is not useful for their future. The consequences of working as child labourer in cocoa farms are enormous. The child will not be able to go to school like his/her age mates. The child's future is mortgaged given that these children hardly ever go out to look for any other job... once s/he is old, that is the end. The government should help to stop it because it is bad, (Adebimpe/IDI/Woman Leader/Ijare).

### **Existence of child labour in cocoa farms in sampled communities**

In this section, we examine the views of community members on the occurrence of child labour in their localities. In the views of FGD discussants as reflected in the statement of one of the participants:

I know that some people in the past engaged labourers of about thirteen years, fourteen years, or fifteen years to work in their farms. It doesn't exist anymore. Not here. In fact in our union, we frown at it seriously, (Ibikunle/FGD/Farmer/Ilesha).

Supporting the earlier observation that though it was taking place in the community but waned and eventually got eliminated, an interviewee submitted:

In the early seventies, so many children were involved in it. Standing outside one's house then, it was common to see so many of them heading for various farms before six o'clock in the morning. The majority of them were boys, while only few girls were involved. They looked frail and sickly. I used to wonder if they could really do anything meaningful in those farms. But people tell me they were strong and very productive, (Pastor Popoola/IDI/Religious Leader/Ilesha)

Another respondent not only denied its existence but also vehemently condemned the act to the extent of suggesting very stiff penalties for perpetrators, given the rigors involved and the dangers that children labourers are exposed to. He stated:

I don't know of such farm. All the workers I know of are adults. I don't think such category of workers could be found in this community. The workers are adults and many of them are even married... children can't cope with the rigors of farm work. It is not an easy task. Walking for hours to and fro the farm is very labourious not to talk of the actual task where you spend over ten to eleven hours working. Children cannot cope... Any farmer caught engaging such children should be sent to jail and his farm seized and sold. The parents of such children should also be sent to jail, (Kadiri/IDI/Youth Farmer from Benin Republic/Apomu).

Accepting that child labour is possible in his community, though not in cocoa farms, a respondent argued that:

Some may engage them in restaurants and other small scale businesses that don't require much physical labour. But for cocoa farm, I think it is very rear. I have not heard of it for quite a long time now. Such thing cannot be done in secret, (Esther/IDI/NGO staff/Modakeke)

Equating child labour with slavery in the present day reality and which is condemnable, an FGD participant made a statement that largely reflected the views of other discussants by stating:

There are no such persons in this site. In fact, we frown against it seriously. Here we believe such practices amount to 21<sup>st</sup> century slavery, (Adigun/FGD/Cocoa farm owners/Ijare).

Confident that child labour was a thing of the past, and that the activities of government and their union would not support its reoccurrence, a farmer stated:

Child labour cannot happen here again. There is so much awareness. We all want our children to go to school. Moreover, the government is now against it. Our union has made its stands known on this too, (Shola/IDI/Cocoa farmer/Apomu).

Unlike responses from other locations claiming that child labour was no longer occurring, an elder in Owo pointed out that presently children are engaged in labourious farm activities on their own accord:

There is child labour here and it has been happening since I came to this place in 1976. Sometimes, after my children helped me, they collected jobs on their own from another person to work in cocoa farms for which they were paid. The children labourers are usually between age 15 and 16 and are mostly male from poor homes. Some of them are in secondary schools while some have dropped out (Olupitan/IDI/Village elder/Owo).

Confirming the existence of child labour and its relationship with socioeconomic status of families, a youth community member in an FGD session described vividly:

What determines child labour is the economic status of children's families and whether they see it as bad or not. The community is telling our people to stop child labour because it is affecting children's education and their future. The effect is that sometimes when they call our youth to come out in the public, they cannot speak or

represent the community well; they are neither educated nor could speak English. This is a great setback for the community, (Femi/FGD/young people/Owo).

The above statement was corroborated by a child who claimed to have been engaged in cocoa farming activities. He narrated among other things specific tasks and issues upon which agreements were reached between the cocoa farmer owner and the child labourer:

This issue of child labour is common in this our community and from what we were told, it started a long time ago. We clear cocoa farms, pull cocoa from trees, and help to deseed. Most of us are male from poor backgrounds. Many of us are secondary school students and dropouts. During the recruitment process, we negotiate the prices ourselves and when we finish the job, we get paid, (Busari/IDI/Child labourer/Ipele Owo).

Implicit in the preceding statement is that some of the children that are engaged in cocoa farming presented themselves for the task for monetary reasons. Confirming the high level of independence in decision making concerning involvement and fee determination, another young respondent noted that farming was largely a part time activity which is dependent on periods and as occasion may demand. He stated:

Usually the Cocoa farmers initiate the process of recruitment by requesting for people that could work in their farms; we then go to these farms ourselves to find out the extent of the work and the price. We normally do that during holidays and weekends. Sometimes too during school days; if we don't have money we try to do some work (Aremu/IDI/Child labourer/Owo).

The point that what largely determines child labour is the economic status of parents was buttressed by a child labourer who among others also revealed the existence of networks among these children; their patterns of farm engagement according to seasons and partaking in hawking activities in some instances. He narrated:

I don't know when child labour started here; I can only say when I began working in farms in this area. My sister came for me in Ede and brought me down here a few years ago to make some money so that I can continue my education which had to stop due to the sudden death of our father; and our mother being sick. So, when I came here I made some friends with whom I work on farms. There is no defined way of recruitment. My friends call me when they have jobs to do and I reciprocate this gesture too. So, getting jobs done is made easier with this network and we share the proceeds together. During harvest season, we get work done almost every day but during off-season, we don't have much to do in the farm than weeding and application of insecticides on cocoa crops. I'm 16 years old now; we are in the same age group. Some of my friends are 2 year older while some are younger by a year. We engage in farm work mostly but sometimes during off-seasons, some of us help our sisters or mothers to hawk goods on the highway, (Olaseinde/IDI/child labourer/Odigbo)

The above explanation indicates that some of these labourers are migrants from other locations in the country and beyond.



## DISCUSSION

Results of this research have shown that although the six communities where the investigation took place are located in the Southwest zone of Nigeria and by implication comprise the Yoruba, there existed perceptual and attitudinal differences. Even in locations with confirmed cases of child labour in cocoa farming, most study participants painted a negative picture of the phenomenon which they described as slavery, criminal and occasioned by underpayment, labourious activities, exposure to ill health among others (Awka 2014; Boas and Huser 2006). They seem to recognize the fact that apart from the immediate health, psychological and physical consequences of child labour, it has lasting effect on the educational and mental development of affected children (ILO 2014).

As is common in the literature, this study also found that extreme poverty among parents was identified as a major determinant of children's involvement in labourious and, at times, dangerous cocoa farming (Ben-Chendo *et al.* 2014; Ugal and Undyaundeye 2009). The argument is that in the absence of a functional welfare system, parents are persuaded by circumstances to present their children to cocoa farm owners for engagement in farms. Findings of this study also reveal that most children whose parents are dead and relatives are unable or unwilling to take responsibility for their social security and welfare are left with limited options including voluntary engagement with economic activities that undermine their health and physical development in order to survive. These scenarios explain the difficulty of eliminating child labour in different contexts.

For some respondents, there is a thin line between conceptualizing farming activities of children as child labour and socialization into adulthood. It is thus imperative to understand how respondents define child labour in order to better appreciate the context within which such position is taken. Unless it is conceptualized as any form of work that exerts significant or undue pressure on children given their carrying capacity and not only on the basis of paid jobs, equating it with socialization becomes ill-conceived and misleading. To be sure, labourious activities do not necessarily constitute only in engagements that have monetary implications but any work that is hazardous to the mental, psychological and physical wellbeing of children. We note here also that it is essential to recognize the danger in relating child labour with diligence and the absence of it to laziness that is said to find expression in European values.

On the existence of child labour in cocoa farming, most people noted its occurrence in the time past when so many children particularly boys were involved, but argued that it is no longer experienced. We are persuaded to argue that dwindling revenues from cocoa farming following the discovery of oil in commercial quantity explains reduction in farming activities and relevant factors of production including labour (Guyer, Denzer and Agbaje 2002). As a corollary, engagement of children in labourious farming is both situational and contextual; hence the possibility of relapse among individuals and communities that claim its non-existence presently. Although Farmers' Union in some of the locations were emphatic in condemning child labour in

cocoa farming and in fact insisted that its re-emergence is not feasible, pervasive poverty may undermine such aspiration.

Admitting that other forms of child labour such as serving in restaurants, hawking of wares along major streets and working as house-helpers among others which may portend higher risk exist in these communities, it means that under pressure, these children may succumb to overtures from cocoa farm owners. Moreover, it is also possible that some children on the threshold of adulthood, at age 16 or 17, may by their stature be perceived as adults and hence not classified as child labourers in community discourses on the phenomenon (De Boeck and Honwana 2005); hence, the claim to non-existence should be expressed with caution.

Apart from Owo community in Ondo State, where respondents and participants stated clearly the existence of child labour in cocoa farms presently, other communities reported moderate or non-existence of such phenomenon. Perhaps, the position of these communities reflects their construction of child labour as anti-normative, criminal and inhuman and would therefore not contradict an earlier stand that condemned it. However, the conditions that engender child labour in cocoa farming namely, absolute individual freedom to decide on work activities and poverty are visible in the six communities sampled for this study and therefore ought not to depict conditions that are significantly different from each other as the findings reveal. The latter view is premised on the fact that none of the communities demonstrated inherent peculiarities that could moderate the effects of the aforementioned conditions in order to bolster avoidance of child abuse in cocoa farming.

One major pattern that emerged from the study is that, contrary to popular opinion that parents always presented their children for engagement in cocoa farming due to economic hardship, in some instances children exercised unfettered freedom in negotiating their activities in terms of wages, timing and other rules of engagement. It then means that children from middle or high income families could precipitate their own involvement in labourious activities. There is a possibility for instance for young people, irrespective of the socioeconomic status of their families, to engage in all kinds of activities in order to cover up for misused funds; a situation that may arise from peer pressure, expressed in youth culture (Nwokocha 2012b). The implication is that any campaign that aims at eradicating child labour not only in cocoa farming but also other facets of activities should include young people as target audience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that the occurrence of child labour in cocoa farming in Southwest Nigeria once reputed for its vast revenue generation for the region, just like other aspects of agriculture received little attention upon discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity. The long term implication of a mismanaged economy is evolution of the survival-of-the-fittest syndrome wherein unguided competition and rugged individualism crept into the existential reality of everyday life. Consequently, the structural fabrics of the society caved-in to the extent that systemic dysfunctionality was gradually introduced and sustained for a long time. Child abuse generally and child labour in particular is one of the manifestations of this developmental distortion.

Results of this investigation reveal community peculiarities in terms of perception and the extent of occurrence of child labour in relevant locations. From responses, it is easy to categorize child labour in cocoa farming into three, which include non-existence, few cases and a large number of cases. For each of these categories, the need for advocacy is essential to bring about attitudinal change or to ensure that communities where it was reported not to occur presently do not relapse especially at a time of economic downturn. Moreover, as Nigeria begins to have a rethink towards reverting to agriculture, including cocoa farming, in the wake of significant fall in the global oil prices, precautionary advocacy is essential to forestall abusive behaviours that were synonymous with pre and post-colonial agriculture in Southwest Nigeria.

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