

# **NGO PERIODIC REPORT FOR NIGERIA**

Indeed, for almost all social indicators Nigeria appears in a bad light, not just in comparison with developed countries, but also with other African countries, despite the fact that Nigeria has vastly greater resources than most of these countries and so could have been expected to have vaccination coverage rates, primary school enrolment ratios and educational disparity within the country. The long years of military usurpation of political power accompanied by longer period of mismanagement of public affairs that characterized earlier civilian as well as military governments have no doubt left a terrible legacy.

The return to elected, civilian government has raised hopes of a new beginning. Although there are formidable obstacles to achieving improved standards of governance and public resource management, even under a civilian government, millions of Nigerian welcomed the return to democratic rule, which expect to nurture greater responsiveness to the people's rights and aspirations.

In reordering priorities and strengthening public management, no group deserves greater attention than the country's estimated 60 million children.

## ***DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES***

As Nigeria enters a period of new hopes and aspirations, a number of looming challenges cast a threatening shadow over her future. The first challenge is that of confronting and controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS, which poses the greatest danger to sexually active young people (teenagers and young adults), as well as to young children due to the risk of mother-to-child transmission and the socio-economic consequences of family impoverishment and orphanhood. After the first AIDS case was officially reported to the Federal authorities in Nigeria in 1986, it took more than a decade to begin to establish the reality of the epidemic in the minds of the general public and political leaders. Already about 6 percent of the population is infected and the rate is rising rapidly. In fact, an estimated 700,000 children have lost one or both parents as a result of AIDS and it is projected that this number will climb to 2.5 million by 2010. No substantial support for these children has yet been planned. In view of the adverse economic situation facing Nigerian families, it should be expected that most of the orphans would not receive the same care and attention from relatives as they would have got from their own parents. If the epidemic is not effectively controlled, Nigeria and its children will face a grim future.

In another development, there are major disparities between the situation of children living in the urban cities and those living in the rural areas. Further, there are disparities between boys and girls, and between men and women in many spheres of life in Nigeria. Education is one of the most striking cases in point, with lower enrolment ratios for girls than boys, especially in the north of the country, and lower enrolment ratios for boys than girls in some parts of the South-East Nigeria experiencing heavy commercial activities.

Trafficking in children mainly for the purpose of domestic service or prostitution, is a relatively new phenomenon that has received wide media coverage in Nigeria but has been the subject of few research studies. In view of the clandestine nature of trafficking, accurate and reliable information on the phenomenon is sparse. The only recent study on child trafficking was conducted on behalf of ILO in locations that were already suspected to have a

high population of trafficked children (Ebigbo 2000). These were sites in Owerri, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Lagos, Kano, Sokoto and Maiduguri.

There has been some form of confusion between commercial trafficking and migration through traditional fostering arrangements, which have traditionally been a common practice in Nigeria. The trafficking of children is not a purely local phenomenon, within Nigeria's borders. It has a significant regional and international dimension too. It is a well-known phenomenon that children are being smuggled across international frontiers, mainly for menial work in the heavily immigration – dependent economy of Garbon, plantation work in Cameroon and commercial sex work in Europe.

The number of children who live and sleep on the streets has been on the increase in most major urban areas in Nigeria. There are so many locations in which children are found to be living on the street. Street families are also becoming prominent in certain urban slum areas. These destitute families can be found living under bridges, in public toilets and in markets. Their children too are in extremely precarious condition and urgently require intervention and assistance.

Commercial sexual exploitation has become a problem of special concern in Nigeria, both because of its scale and because of its role in the development of the HIV/AIDS epidemic now sweeping the country. Studies of sexual exploitation are scarce, owing to the clandestine nature of the phenomenon and the traditional inhibitions on discussion of sexual behaviour. Few studies however, indicate that child prostitution is now common in towns such as Owerri, Port Harcourt, Calabar and Edo in the South East and South South geo-political zones, Markurdi and Ilorin in the North central zone, Maiduguri in the North East and Lagos in the South West.

Poverty, although might not be seen as main driving force of child labour, child trafficking, boys school drop out, still remains an important factor in child protection issues in Nigeria. Apart from the effort of the Federal Govt. of Nigeria, addressing the issue of poverty through its poverty reduction strategies, some states government are now coming up with their poverty reduction strategies to complement the effort of the Federal Government. For instance the school meal plus programme introduced by the Enugu State government where children in primary schools are provided with food at least once a day. The programme also provide for medical evaluation of school children. Various donor agencies, NGO's and government ministries have come up with action programme aimed at addressing the issue of disparity in education between boys and girls, and between Northern and Southern Nigeria. So far success has been recorded over these years as figures show improvement in boys school enrolment in the southern part of Nigeria and improvement in girls school enrolment in the Northern part of Nigeria. Now in some Southern states it is an offence punishable under the law for a child to hawk good during school hours. Ogun and Anambra states have so far passed the child rights bill into law. It is expected that more states will follow suit.

The journey to the child's right Act has come a long way. It was initiated during the military era, the bill suffered two major set backs before its final destination. The first one during General Abdulsalami's regime, and the second in 2003 during the lifetime of the immediate past National Assembly before it was eventually passed into law.

In her contribution to the public hearing on the child's rights bill, the former Minister of women Affairs Hajiya Aisha Ismail opined that Nigeria can only be humane nation whenever our children have their three-square meals, have shoes on their foot, do no longer sleep under the bridge, no longer hawk on the road and are given their basic education.

## SUCSESSES

Great concern has been expressed by professional, NGO's and Federal Govt. of Nigeria of the magnitude of the problem posed by child trafficking in Africa and Nigeria in particular. A lot of workshops, conferences, media briefings to discuss issues such as child trafficking, child labour, policy responses to child trafficking, HIV/AIDS, poverty, political/socio-cultural challenges, lack of vocational and economic opportunities for youth, with a view to finding a lasting solution. The most recent being the 4<sup>th</sup> African regional conference on Child Abuse and Neglect with theme "Child Trafficking: A challenges to Child Protection in Africa."

The contribution of UNICEF, Global March and other international donor agencies in ensuring that the millennium development goals for children are met and sustained cannot be overemphasized. These international agencies are seriously working with Federal Government of Nigeria and other partners to address various child related issues peculiar to our country. The issues include male female disparity in education as well as north south educational disparity; boys school dropout; child labour; child prostitution; HIV/AIDS orphans, mother to child transmission of HIV and child trafficking. The last five years have witnessed a considerable improvement. Unlike before, the environment for mounting a national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is now more positive. At first the response was entirely donor-driven and donor-funded but now multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and country-driven with the involvement of Government and Civil Society, as well as the donor community.

Presently there is a coalition of NGOs called NACCARAN, which works through various means to monitor the legislation, policies, and development of services for the Nigerian child. Politicians at community, local, state and federal levels are being lobbied to alter, develop or change laws and regulations concerning services and quality of life for the Nigerian child.

The society places great emphasis on age and status. There is generally a hierarchical social order with the eldest at the top and children at the bottom. The famous adage that a child should be seen and not heard sums up how many Nigerians regard the idea of children's participation. The African child is reared so as not to question the wisdom of parents, but to maintain a lifelong obedience to the authority that age confers. Now, things are taking a new shape. Children are now gradually being involved in various activities both at local and state levels as well as at the national level. The establishment and inauguration of children parliament in Nigeria both at state and national level has further enhanced the participatory rights of children. The children parliament played active role in advocacy for the passage of the child's rights bill into law. They are currently at the centre stage of ensuring that the bill is passed into law at the state level.

At last the child's rights bill has been passed into law by the National Assembly. It was initiated during the military era, the bill suffered two major set backs before its final destination. The first one during General Abdulsalami's regime, and the second in 2003 during the lifetime of the immediate past National Assembly. Due to a number of absurd reasons the National Assembly threw away the child's rights bill but following the concerted efforts of NGOs, Government and Civil society with significant role played by ANPPCAN the bill was reintroduced into the House and it was eventually passed into law.

ANPPCAN Child Rights Monitoring Center