

**FAILING RIGHTS OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD: THE RAILROADING EFFECTS OF POVERTY\*****Abstract**

*Children are the most vulnerable in the society and are such mostly affected by the incidence of poverty, especially those whose ages range from 0 to 15 years. Children are not only more likely to be living in extreme poverty because they are so vulnerable and that is why the effects of poverty are most damaging to them. The youngest children are the worst of all, because the deprivations they suffer affect the development of their bodies and minds including their social wellbeing. Children in Nigeria often face many problems such as poor health, lack of access to quality education, food and social insecurity and lack of care. In Nigeria, child poverty is typical both in urban and rural areas. Mostly they have access to rivers and other surface water only, no access to modern toilets, limited access to immunizations, and medical advice, living in a small crowded room, no good food to eat, no school attendance, no access to technology, information and other social media. This paper examines the devastating effects of child poverty on the rights of the Nigerian child with the conclusion that, a slowdown of the economic growth, the increasing widespread poverty, insecurity and the rising unemployment rate has amplified to a great extent, the violations on the rights of children. This paper recommended amongst others; job creation to enable parents fend for their children rather than wait for monthly welfare stipends from government, by ensuring that every agency, institution and organization must have a specific plan that corresponds with the Sustainable Development Goals target and such plan must be rooted in the budget of the given year.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian Child, Rights, Poverty, Failing, Effects

**1. Introduction**

A child is a person that has not attained the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>In recent times, the lot of the Nigerian child has become a matter of serious concern even as it now more obvious that children, being part of the family, play very important roles in the family and within the society. Generally, children are the future generation of any society; the leaders of the next generation; and the potential opinion and policy molders of any nation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, for any society to grow this stock of generations, there are certain inherently fundamental rights that not only need to be made sacred and protected but methodically inculcated into the upbringing of the child to prepare them for this all-important role. These legal rights of the Nigerian child can be found contained in various indigenous laws, international Conventions and Protocols. Interestingly however, rather than allow these copious provisions of these bodies of laws and regulations to ensure their objectives, these laws are observed more in breach.

**2. Child Poverty and its Effects on the Rights of a Child**

Poverty is the severe lack of certain possessions which significantly reduces the quality of a person's life. Despite being the giant of Africa, Nigeria is home to nearly 83 million people living in poverty. Nigerian Child is often faced with numerous problems ranging from poor health, lack of access to quality education, food and social insecurity, lack of clean water and sanitation; and lack of proper care. According to data, Nigeria is a country of the young with almost half the entire 180 million strong population, 46%, currently under the age of 15. The current total number of children under the age of 5 stands at nearly 31 million while each year at least 7 million babies are born. While a little over one in three of Nigeria's whole population lives below the poverty line, among children this proportion surges to 75 percent.<sup>3</sup> Generally, Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It also means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments without access to clean water or sanitation.<sup>4</sup> In January 2007, the United Nations General Assembly reacted to child poverty thus:

Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts

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<sup>1</sup>.Section 277 of the Child's Rights Act, 2003. Hereafter, 'CRA'.

<sup>2</sup>Mfonobong, E.U., 'Child Abuse and its Implications for the Educational Sector in Nigeria', <https://www.Agol.Info>Article>Viewfile>. Accessed on 1/10/20.

<sup>3</sup>.UNICEF, *Situation of Women and Children in Nigeria, Challenges Faced by Women and Children in Nigeria*.[www.unicef.org/nigeria/situation](http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/situation). Accessed on 14/7/22.

<sup>4</sup>. United Nations 1998, <http://www.helium.com/items/1587576-poor-service-delivery>. Accessed on 18/6/22.

every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potentials and to participate as full members of the society.<sup>5</sup>

According to UNICEF,<sup>6</sup> child poverty means children, who experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential, or participate as full and equal member of the society. By its global study on child poverty and its disparities, United Nations Children's Emergency Fund considered absolute poverty to mean a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs. There are threshold levels identified for each of seven basic human needs, which include: food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information.<sup>7</sup> All children should enjoy a maximum of quality housing, regardless of where they live, if their dwellings do not meet hygienic and privacy requirements, the children should be considered deprived.

By the World Development Report, a person is considered poor when he is poor in any one or more of these dimensions of deprivation, that is; material deprivation, which is measurable by income or consumption; low achievements in education and health; vulnerability and exposure to risk; voicelessness and powerlessness.<sup>8</sup> It is assumed that a child is living in absolute poverty when he or she suffers from multiple deprivations- two or more severe deprivations of basic human needs.<sup>9</sup> Multidimensional Child Poverty Analysis using Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis Approach reveals that approximately 54% of children in Nigeria are multidimensionally poor by facing at least three deprivations across the seven dimensions of child rights.<sup>10</sup> Poverty is a dominant factor that necessitates child labour; and poverty usually rises during recession. The case of Nigeria is typical, rising out of a recession to become the poverty capital of the world. Poverty in Nigeria is caused by several factors: social and political instability, greed, corruption, illiteracy, insecurity *et cetera*. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen to a point of almost completely obliterating the middle class. The nation's resources are shared by very few hands, and the rest are left to work their fingers to bone, leaving many families impoverished<sup>11</sup> and the children become victims of child poverty.

The Nigerian child is the direct victim of the poverty level of the family. In poor families, children are compelled by circumstances beyond their control and daily needs to contribute to the family income, and the only way out is to engage in child labour, even when it is detrimental to their education, health, mental/emotional wellbeing and general personal development. Sometimes, families force their children out of school, to be employed in any job that would help support the family income, without considering its effects on the health of the children. Sometimes also, children out of their own volition engage themselves in child labour to survive. For instance, in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, children from poor families earn their school fees through child labour. They may skip classes in order to work while some also work in the morning and attend afternoon/evening school or *vice versa*.<sup>12</sup> This accounts for why government afternoon schools are mostly dominated by house helps, domestic staff, labourers, artisans and children from poor homes. This sort of labour include hawking wares, begging for alms, farm work, domestic services, loading, off-loading and trans-loading of loads, *etcetera*. Child labour infringes on the rights of the Nigerian child; *section 28(1)* states thus;

- (1) Subject to this Act, no child shall be-:
  - (a) Subject to any forced or exploitative labour; or
  - (b) employed to work in any capacity except where he is employed by a member of his family on light work of an agricultural, horticultural or domestic character; or
  - (c) required in any case, to lift, carry or move anything so heavy as to be likely to adversely affect his physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development;
  - (d) employed as a domestic help outside his own home or family environment.<sup>13</sup>

5. Gordon, D., *et al*, 'UNICEF Global Study of Child Poverty and Disparities: Child Poverty Table and Statistics', 2008, in Save the Children, 'State of Nigeria Children 2015: Children Left Behind in Nigeria', 2015, 2. <https://nigeria.savethechildren.net/library>. Accessed on 6/6/22.

6. UNICEF, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). Accessed on 10/1/23.

7. *Ibid*.

8. World Development Report, 2001, in Save the Nigerian Child; 'State of Nigeria Children 2015: Children Left Behind in Nigeria', 2015, 2. <https://nigeria.savethechildren.net/library>. Accessed on 6/6/20.

9. *Ibid*.

10. UNICEF, New Evidence on the Situation of Child Deprivation in Nigeria; Approximately 54% of Children in Nigeria are Multidimensionally Poor; 2022, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). Accessed on 11/1/23.

11. Agbo, M.C., 'The Health and Educational Consequences of Child Labour in Nigeria', (2017), *Health Science Journal*, [www.hsj.gr/medicine/the\\_health\\_and\\_educational](http://www.hsj.gr/medicine/the_health_and_educational). Accessed on 8/3/20.

12. Aliyu, A.A., 'Street Begging: Exposing the Bankruptcy of Blatant Paying of Lip Services', in Agbo, M.C., *Ibid*.

13. *Part II- Section 28 of Child's Rights Act, 2003*.

Considering that more than 30,000 of children die through poverty-related causes every day; at least a child dies through poverty causes in every 3 seconds; and violations of children's rights continue to soar as a result of the effects of poverty, it can validly be said that children are the primary victims of poverty.<sup>14</sup>

Poverty is a strong enabler of the sex trafficking vice; it necessitates victims' vulnerability to it, coupled with, in most cases, lack of formal education as well as better job opportunities. In Nigeria, the economic situation enables sex trafficking, and ignorant but poor children become victims. In most cases, both the parents and the girls trafficked eventually become aware of what they are entering into, even from the onset, but because of the unemployment rate, low standard of living and the lack of basic social amenities, they care less. A good number also venture into it these vices willingly, even before they even come near to experiencing any of the harsh existential conditions.<sup>15</sup> Some of the victims of internal trafficking are either directly forced into prostitution or end up in prostitution while escaping the hardship and abuses received in other forms of labours they have been forced into. Nigerian children are also trafficked to European countries and the Middle East for prostitution and sexual exploitation.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, by the provisions of *Chapter II* and *IV* of the Nigerian Constitution<sup>17</sup> and *Part I* and *II* of the Child Rights Act and other international provisions on child protection, this is an infringement on the fundamental rights of the child. *Section 17(3)(f)* of the Constitution state thus: 'The state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that; (f) Children, young persons and the age are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect;<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Part 1 of the Child's Rights Act provides thus: '1. The best interest of a child to be paramount consideration in all actions; In every action concerning a child, whether undertaken by an individual, public or private body, institutions or service, court of law, or administrative or legislative authority, the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration'.<sup>19</sup> Sex trafficking<sup>20</sup> deprives the girls of their human rights, self worth, dignity and freedoms, contrarily to the provisions of *Chapter IV* of the Constitution.<sup>21</sup> It is a global health risk, and it also fuels organized crime rings. Victims of trafficking are forced or coerced into labour or sexual exploitation contrary to the provisions of the Child Rights Act.<sup>22</sup> Labour trafficking range from domestic servitude and small-scale labour operations to large scale operations such as working in farms, sweetshops and major multinational corporations.<sup>23</sup>

Poverty continues to contribute largely to the practice of child marriage. This is because, early marriage of young girls in such families leave fewer children to compete with the remaining available care and resources in the family. This may also attract higher bride price from suitors or conversely, a younger bride could attract a smaller dowry depending on where one stands on the divide.<sup>24</sup> Out of the 10million mentioned; 60% of those without access to education are girls. This unfortunately, frequently subjects our young girls to child marriage, poverty and gendered roles that limit their potentials as citizens.<sup>25</sup> By the Child Rights Act, child marriage is unacceptable as it puts the minimum age for marriage at 18 years of age; and also provides that where a person marries a child under the age of 18 years, the offender shall be liable to a term of 5 years imprisonment and a fine of five hundred thousand naira (₦500,000.00). Child marriage is obviously a violation of the fundamental human rights of the girl child as many girls are forced into marriage against their freewill and consent (contrary

14. *Ibid.*

15. Nnadi, I., 'Sex Trafficking and Women - The Nigerian Experience,' (2013), vol. 6. No. 3, *Journal of Politics and Law*, 179.[www.ccsenet.org/jpl>article>view](http://www.ccsenet.org/jpl/article/view). Accessed on 19/11/20.

16. Women Consortium of Nigeria, *Trafficking in Nigeria*, [www.womenconsortiumofnigeria.org](http://www.womenconsortiumofnigeria.org). Accessed on 29/6/21.

17. *Sections 17, 33, 34 and 37* Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) 1999, *Article 8*, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.

18. *Section 17(3)(f)* of the Constitution.

19. *Part 1*, Child's Rights Act, 2003.

20. *Article 34, 35 & 36* United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. Hereafter, 'CRC'; *Article XXIX* African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990. Hereafter, 'ACRWC'; *Article 1-5*, Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Trafficking, Armed Conflict, 2000.

21. *Section 34* of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) 1999, Hereafter, 'the Constitution', *Part II, section 11* of the CRA; *Article 5*, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. Hereafter, 'UDHR', *Article 7* CRC, *Article 6*, ICCPR, *Article 37* CRC.

22. *Section 28 & 32*, CRA.

23. *Ibid.*180.

24. Nnadi, I., 'Early Marriage: A Gender-Based Violence and a Violation of Women's Human Rights in Nigeria,' (2014), vol. 7. No. 3, *Journal of Politics and Law*, 36. [http://heinonline.org>get\\_pdf>jp](http://heinonline.org/get_pdf.jsp). Accessed on 19/11/20.

25. Malala Fund, *Today, Malala Fund Supports 10 Education Champions in Nigeria*.[Malala.org>countries>Nigeria](http://Malala.org/countries>Nigeria). Accessed on 14/7/21.

to the provisions of both our municipal laws and international conventions).<sup>26</sup> Marriage at any age below 18 years as stipulated by the laws could well see to their dream of getting a formal education become an illusion.<sup>27</sup> Beyond the negative effects poverty foists on any individual's general wellbeing, it hugely affects various fundamental rights of people; it erodes any individual's dignity and self-worth<sup>28</sup>; it impedes the exercise of individual liberties;<sup>29</sup> it threatens the security of one's existence and undermines personal development across board. In effect, children who face poverty are deprived of their fundamental rights and future prospects. Poverty hampers a child's ability to survive; it impedes all aspects of his or her development - physical, mental, emotional, cultural, social, familial, spiritual *etcetera*.

The impact of poverty on children is so huge that it can rightly be said that great volume of children's rights violations stem from predisposition of children to poverty. Poverty recreates itself and continues in a vicious circle. A child lives in poverty because his family and/or his country experiences poverty<sup>30</sup> and this sort of vicious circle could continue from one generation to another, through ages. The consequences of poverty on children are so devastating today, in the sense that it deprives children of their fundamental right to life<sup>31</sup>, educational opportunities and prevents them from gaining access to medical care<sup>32</sup>, clean water, food, shelter, security and protection and information.<sup>33</sup> These consequences of poverty can be a reason why the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals would remain a mirage and sheer disrespect to the commitments of several state parties in implementing the fundamental rights enunciated in the Conventions. Sustainable Development Goals are bold commitments to end poverty in all forms and dimensions by 2030, and involves targeting the most vulnerable, increasing basic resources and services and supporting communities affected by conflict and climate related disasters.

Goal 1. *No poverty; End poverty in all its forms everywhere*; some of the goal targets include but not limited to the following;

- By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
- By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.<sup>34</sup>

In Nigeria, according to the UNICEF report, 24.56% of children face extreme poverty by living in households that spend less than \$11.90 a day. The report further indicates that child poverty rate is highest among children aged 16-17 years and least among children aged 0-5 years. It is noted that children are most affected by poverty because they are vulnerable, and that poverty has long term impacts on the wellbeing of children, even into adulthood.<sup>35</sup>

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund also reports that the Nigerian child is educationally disadvantaged. Nigeria accounts for the highest number of out-of-school children worldwide - about 10.5 million children roaming the streets.<sup>36</sup> Children who got into labour may contract Human Immune Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, through rape or sexual exploitations; they may be kidnapped or suffer injuries from violent persons or death through ritual killing. Child hawkers, who work as sales girls or boys, are usually exploited in their wages or may never be paid in cash; some are denied meals while many are physically abused and chased out of the house in the night as punishment for lost items.

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<sup>26.</sup> Article 12 & 37 CRC; Part III, Sections 21-40 CRA; Article 8 & 23, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, Hereafter 'ICCPR',.

<sup>27.</sup> Part II- Section 15 of the CRA; Article 23 CRC; Section 17 of the Nigerian Constitution; Article 13(1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, Hereafter 'ICESCR'.

<sup>28.</sup> Section 34 of the Constitution, Article 5, UDHR, Article 7 CRC, Article 6 ICCPR, Article 37 CRC.

<sup>29.</sup> Section 35 of the Constitution, Article 3 UDHR, Article 9 ICCPR, Article 37 CRC.

<sup>30.</sup> Humanium 'Poor Children', <https://www.humanium.org/en/poor-children/>. Accessed on 4/9/19.

<sup>31.</sup> Section 33, the Constitution; Part II-Section 4 & 17, CRA, Article 6, CRC; Article 6, ICCPR; Article V, ACRWC; and Article 12, ICESCR.

<sup>32.</sup> Section 13, CRA.

<sup>33.</sup> Section 2, CRA; Section 17, the Constitution.

<sup>34.</sup> UNDP, What are the Sustainable Development Goals. [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org). Accessed on the 29/6/22.

<sup>35.</sup> UNICEF, Reports on Child Poverty in Nigeria, Situation of Children in Nigeria; Monetary Child Poverty for Nigeria and Multidimensional Child Poverty in Nigeria, 2022, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). Accessed on 15/1/23.

<sup>36.</sup> Olupohunda, B., 'Poverty, Child Abuse and the Nigerian Child', PUNCH, July 26, 2016. <https://punchng.com/poverty-childrenabuse>>. Accessed on 10/6/21.

All these expose children to emotional health problems, sexual molestation with its attendant sexually transmitted infections, kidnapping, trafficking, injuries, malnutrition and perhaps body pains. By these exposures, they could become rude, unruly or ill mannered, societal miscreants or even gangsters because of bad influence, which may eventually graduate them into forming syndicates for arm robbery, kidnapping *et cetera*. According to reports by Children's Investment Fund Foundation, 17.3 million children worldwide suffer from severe acute malnutrition, also known as wasting. This occurs when a child becomes so under-nourished to a point the risk of dying is highly probable. In fact, children in this category are nine times more likely to die than a child who has been well fed and cared for.<sup>37</sup> According to the report of Children's Investment Fund Foundation, most severely malnourished children live in Asia and Africa, and they are mostly victims of famine and conflict. Nigeria ranks one of the world's highest in severe wasting population, having an estimated 1.9 million children in that category each year. Put in another way, it means that 1 out of 10 of the world's severely wasted children live in Nigeria.<sup>38</sup>

Boko Haram, the militant group in Northern Nigeria that has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced nearly 3 million; for years, the group has terrorized schools in and around Maduguri and other Northern states. Teachers have been murdered, students have been kidnapped, and schools have been forced to close their doors.<sup>39</sup> Amongst so many attacks, in 2016, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund issued a report on the state of the Nigerian child in the North-East, where Boko Haram had carried out attacks on schools, abducted children for ransom and turned them to child soldiers. It revealed that a quarter of a million children in Borno State, where the jihadist insurgency has disrupted trade and health care; suffer from life threatening malnourishment. The Report made it clear that out of the 244,000 children suffering from acute malnutrition in Borno State in 2016, one in five would die if they do not receive treatment. By the said report, there had been a tremendous increase in children suffering from this condition in Borno State, from 35,000 in 2013 to 57,500 in 2014. This picture represents the scourge of abuse and neglect faced by the Nigerian child today.<sup>40</sup> In 2019, it was also reported that at a funeral in the Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram insurgents struck and killed at least 65 people, including school girls.<sup>41</sup> In 2020, UNICEF estimated that 2 million children in Nigeria suffer from severe acute malnutrition, making 32% of children under 5 stunted or severely impaired. Currently, only about two out of every 10 malnourished children receive medical treatment. Amnesty International report shows that children in Nigeria have become the major target of bandits' attacks. It is further reported that in 2021, 780 children have so far been abducted for ransom, 10 school children killed and 61 still in custody.<sup>42</sup> These numerous attacks on schools has disrupted the education of thousands of children in the Northern part of Nigeria, as these schools have remained indefinitely closed; while the children in captivity go through horrific and degrading treatment in the hands of their abductors. It is also reported that in November 2, 2022, in Northern Katsina State, dozens of children were abducted by gunmen from a farm while harvesting crops and the kidnappers were said to have demanded for ransom for their release.<sup>43</sup>

With the COVID-19 pandemic devastating developing countries such as Nigeria, the child poverty rates are alarmingly escalating. The pandemic has deepened acute food insecurity in countries already under strain like Nigeria. In times of crisis, children suffer the most and COVID-19 is no different. The impact of COVID-19 will be felt in years to come, but it is already clear that COVID-19 has exacerbated poverty and the result is more families without shelter, unable to meet even their basic needs of food water and more children facing the prospect of becoming severely malnourished.<sup>44</sup> Although Nigeria has the largest economy in West Africa by United Nations Children's Emergency Fund's report, over 64% of the population live below the poverty line and three out of four children are affected by multi - dimensional poverty. One in eight young children do not survive to their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday; and 19.5 million children below five years, or over 60%, have no birth registration. One out of three children under five years of age, or 10.5 million, are stunted; and 2.5 million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition, with 90% of that population in the north; around 10.5 million children are not in school, which translates to one-fifth of the global population of out-of-school children; over

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37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. Allie, T., Children Displaced in the Boko Haram Conflict are on a Path to Success, Thanks to a School Prioritizing Peace, *amp.cnn.com*. Accessed on 29/6/21.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Voice of America News, 'Nigerian: 65 Killed in Attack by Boko Haram Militants' 28th July 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/>. Accessed on 30/8/19.

42. Adewole, L; 'Bandits' Attacks: 10 Students killed, 780 Abducted, 61 in Captivity – Amnesty International', Nigerian Tribune, December 3, 2021, *tribuneonline.com*. Accessed on 16/1/23.

43. Hamza, I; 'Gunmen Kidnap Dozens of Children from Nigerian Farm', Reuters, November 3, 2022 *www.reuters.com*. Accessed on 16/1/23.

44. UNICEF. *Covid-19 and Conflict: A Deadly Combination*, *www.unicef.org*. Accessed on 19/3/21.

380,000 children living with Human Immune Virus; and quite a good number die of pneumonia. Nigeria has the second largest number of Human Immune Virus positive pregnant women; even with adolescent girl child marriage, only second to India. This is a key indicator for increased gender inequality. It is also the case, that 6 out of 10 children suffer more than one form of violence; Physical, sexual or emotional, with only 5% reporting to have received some form of help. Some 1.8million people remain internally displaced across the three North-East states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, 85% of whom are found in Borno alone.<sup>45</sup> On a detailed appraisal of the Report above stated, it is noteworthy that economic crisis/recession in Nigeria rose to a peak within 2016/2017 and this aggravated child poverty in no small way.

### 3. Conclusion

The Nigerian child is always a direct victim and this usually results in increased child poverty. Poverty in a family is a dominant cause in the creation of child labour, even its eventual summit. During any period of economic crises, child poverty usually rises to a peak; and because of the economic hardships it metes out and the eventual struggle for survival, child rights are easily violated or threatened in no small measure. Therefore, any critical strategies designed for poverty reduction must incorporate a focused attempt at breaking this intergenerational cycle of poverty. In most countries children make up a third to almost half of the population. Unless child poverty is specifically monitored, policy makers may have the misconception that progress is being made to reduce poverty, when in reality, a large proportion of the population could be stagnating or worse off. This could be the case if improvements in access to health care and literacy rates are observed at the aggregate, national level while children are not taken to clinics or health centers for good medications and children are either out of school or not going to school at all contrary to the provisions of *Chapter 17* of the Constitution.<sup>46</sup> The rights of a child are universal; it therefore means that all children should enjoy the same rights independently of the country in which they were born.

What is tragic for an individual child becomes an important social and economic problem when it affects a generation of children. New forms of age and class-based social cleavage may emerge, as the children of the privileged classes mostly in urban areas, ride out the storm while the worst affected children, usually in the rural areas, see their education disrupted the most during the crisis; and they see their life chances eroded as a result. Abuse of children's rights or underinvestment in children today leads ultimately to a reduction in their capabilities and capacities for the future; and for a variety of reasons, children are vulnerable to varying degrees of harm resulting from the effects of these aggregate shocks. Every effort must be geared towards ensuring that Nigeria is not left behind in achieving the sustainable development goals, since the beneficiaries of these would be children and the entire citizenry. The measure of our success in implementing the sustainable development goals in Nigeria would be the attainment of the respective components of the 17 goals by 2030. It can be done, provided the key factors important for successful implementation of the sustainable development goals - high level of political support; institutional and human capacity development, inclusive of development process, mutual accountability and policy reform, are established and sustained. There is need for Nigeria to adopt a social protection strategy, which may take the form of protection against poverty, or inequality, in line with the sustainable development goals; and to fight against child's rights abuse. If all the respective partners involved in the implementation of the sustainable development goals - the federal government and its agencies, state government and its agencies, local governments, private sector, academia, and the civil society organizations, would keep their steady and focused efforts at achieving these goals, violation of child's rights would be reduced to the barest minimal, even during economic crisis. This is true because the implementation of these goals would ensure that all the citizens, including children, enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives which lead to progress. On this foundation of harmony, a peaceful, just and inclusive society, free from fear and violence would no doubt guarantee the future of the human race.

Hence, it is recommended for an expansion of the quantity and quality of public services to citizens, especially for those in rural and poor areas. This would cushion the poorest families from the adverse effects of any economic or financial strains experienced by poor homes. This can be achieved and sustained by generating targeted efforts in areas such as education, nutrition, health, child protection and access to basic amenities, to bridge the gap between states where children are left behind and those doing very well on matters relating to children. These interventions may require conditional grants from the federal government and other stakeholders such as international development partners to those affected states. Secondly, empowering the government by fresh laws or law reforms that would ensure the implementation of the school fees exemption or free education policy, full or partial scholarships, education grants to cater for clothes, books or transportation for pupil and children in primary, secondary and tertiary education; and ensure that these operate optimally and across board,

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<sup>45</sup>. Save the Children, op. cit, 55.

<sup>46</sup>. UNICEF DATA, Child Poverty, 2019, [data.unicef.org](http://data.unicef.org). Accessed on 21/1/20.

especially for children from poor homes, who are usually vulnerable to being out of school. Furthermore, the provision of free and quality public healthcare and access to same for all children and poor persons should be considered an utmost priority of government.

Thirdly, putting children at the centre of sustainable and equitable progress will help Nigeria to achieve the overarching Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Nigeria only stands good chance at achieving these goals if everyone takes a part in the implementation - national, state, local governments, the private sector, the academia, civil society organizations, as well as average everyday citizens. Everyone has a stake at achieving agenda 2030. Fourthly, by ensuring that every agency, institution and organization must have a specific plan that corresponds with the Sustainable Development Goals target and such plan must be rooted in the budget of the given year. If there is a failure at putting up this plan, by 2030, there may be little or no achievement on the goals. It is further recommended that Government should encourage the diversification of agricultural production; keep food prices adequately low; and ensure its accessibility by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged population. These are strategies necessary in combating child undernourishment, which is a product of food insecurity within any system. Alternatively, jobs should be created to enable parents fend for their children rather than wait for monthly welfare stipends from government. Finally, the federal and state governments should tighten all loosed ends by urgently beefing up security across Nigeria. This will put end to the infringement of the rights of a child to compulsory education and healthcare facilities.