

## **Household Poverty and its Effect on Child Labour Use among Palm oil Processors in Abia State, Nigeria**

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The study was carried out to assess the effect of household poverty on child participation in Palm oil processing in Abia state Nigeria using primary data from a well structured questionnaire from fifty household heads and a hundred children within the ages of 7-15years in the study area. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Foster- Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) poverty index. The result of the study revealed that bunch harvesting was the most important child labour activity in the area while the major reason for participating in the child labour work was to supplement parent income and to take care of younger siblings. The result of the FGT poverty analysis also revealed that children from poor households engage more in child labour activities when compared with children from non poor households. Fall from trees was the major hazard faced by children in the study area. The study recommended government to educate parents and caregivers on activities that are truly hazardous to children for this will empower them to make informed choices.

Keywords: household; poverty; child; labour use; palm oil processors

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria and in most developing countries, the vast majority of working children are engaged in agricultural work and this is predominantly on farms owned or operated by their families (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1996). Since land is the most important store of wealth in agrarian societies and a substantial fraction of households do not own land, this casts doubt on the commonly held presumption that child labour emerges from the poorest households (e.g., US Department of Labor (2000), Basu and Van (1998). The ILO defines child labor in Convention No. 138 as economic activity performed by a person of less than fifteen years of age, excluding some part-time work performed by children more than twelve years old. Taking into account this unpaid work, as well as part-time work, and work in the informal sector, the number of working children was a staggering 211 million in 2000 (ILO,2002). Poverty and child labor are inexorably linked; however, poverty can exist even when child labour does not. Different groups can frame poverty in different terms, focusing on, for example: income or consumption poverty, human development and underdevelopment, social exclusion, overall well being, vulnerability or an inability to meet certain basic needs.

Child labour is strongly associated with income poverty and often reflects the fragility of a country's struggle toward greater economic prosperity (Castle and Diarra 2004). In low-income countries, child labor historically declines when gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increases (UNESCO, 2007). However, child labor is not only a symptom of poverty, it is a contributing factor. Children are usually aware of the dangers they face, such as cuts, insect and snake bites, and skin irritation from applying pesticides — dangers they can also face while working on family farming plots — but there is little they can do. Plantation work is often seasonal; families migrate with the changes in season and crop cycle. As a result, children often miss large parts of the school year, or start school late. It is not uncommon for children enrolled in school to be sent to the fields to work during school hours (Psacharopoulos, 1999). Alternative income generating activities (IGA) for vulnerable families have the potential to increase or decrease child labor. Rising family incomes may make families less dependent on the child's economic contribution or better able to afford schooling expenses. Rising income may help families avoid sending a child away or the circumstances that lead to child migration or child trafficking. However, they may also be associated with changing employment opportunities to children. Activities in which children can participate may generate increases in the number of working children (Edmonds, 2006).

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To understand the household labour supply decisions, which is critical in designing programmes in order to achieve the MDGs (Grimsrud,2003). This research on child labour represent a large untapped resource of knowledge for policymakers in the fields of agriculture, education programmes and poverty reduction programmes. This work is set to:

- examine various labour activities engage in by children
- assess the poverty profile of the households that have high rate of child labour
- analyze the reason for child labour participation in the processing of palm oil
- analyze the hazards encountered by the children

### Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Abia State because of the high rate of commercial and economic activities in the state. Multistage sampling technique was used to select respondents for this study. First, purposive sampling of three locations where palm oil marketing is carried out in large quantities namely Umuahia central, Ikwuano and Bende Local Government Areas. One town was randomly selected from each local government area namely, Umuahia, Ndioru and Bende. Twenty households that processed palm oil were randomly selected from each town giving a total of sixty households for the study.

The primary data used were collected with the aid of a well structured questionnaire which was administered to the household heads and two children between the ages of 7-15 years who participated in the processing were answered some questions. Ten (10) questionnaires were invalid so fifty (50) households and a hundred (100) children were used for the study with approval from the household heads to interview the children. Samples of two questionnaires were pretested for each town, based on valid responses the questionnaires were administered to a larger population. The various analysis carried out include the use of frequency counts and inferential statistics like FGT model.

#### Model specification

The poverty index was applied to assess the poverty profile of households. This is given as

$$P_x = q/n \sum_{i=1}^n \left( z - y_i/z \right) \alpha \quad i = 0,1,2$$

Where

Z = Poverty line

q = number of individuals in the household

y = per capita expenditure of the household in which an individual lives.

$\alpha$  = FGT index, which takes the values of 0,1,2

Where, z= poverty threshold, n=number of individuals in the reference household, y=per capital income of household in which an individual lives,  $\alpha$ = FGT index which takes values 0, 1, 2, q = number of households below the poverty threshold.

### Results and Discussion

The result in Table 1 shows that larger percentage (21.83%) of the children are involved in bunch harvesting, 14.08% of them were involved in transporting palm fruit to the mill while others were engage in transporting palm oil to the market (13.38%), threshing of the bunches and sterilization of the fruit (12.68%). Children participated less in activities like digestion of fruits (5.63%) and oil extraction (7.75%).

Table 1- Distribution of respondents by various child labour activities

| Activities                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Harvesting of bunches           | 31        | 21.83      |
| Threshing                       | 18        | 12.68      |
| Nut Fibre Separation            | 17        | 11.98      |
| Transportation of fruit to mill | 20        | 14.08      |
| Transportation of oil to market | 19        | 13.38      |
| Sterilization                   | 18        | 12.68      |
| Digestion                       | 8         | 12.68      |
| Oil Extraction                  | 11        | 7.75       |

\*Multiple Responses were recorded

Reasons for child participation in palm oil processing: the result in table 2 shows that the major reasons for child participation in palm oil processing was to supplement parent income (52%) and to take care of younger siblings (23%) . this implies that children income is a vital component of the household survival. This conforms to the findings of Lawal and Akintola who posited that 77% of children who ventured into vegetable production did so to generate income for family sustenance.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by reasons for participating in palm oil processing

| Reasons                         | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Sponsor my schooling            | 5         | 5          |
| Take care of my needs           | 10        | 10         |
| Peer Influence                  | 5         | 5          |
| Economic gain                   | 5         | 5          |
| Supplement income               | 52        | 52         |
| To take care of my younger ones | 23        | 23         |
| Total                           | 100       | 100        |

The FGT model was used to examine the poverty profile of the households in the study area. In order to achieve this, a poverty threshold was established

using two-third of per capital income (a relative poverty threshold) and this was estimated to be ₦ 8,998. Table 3 shows that households whose children engaged in child labour activities were poorer when compared with other households whose children did not engage in child labour activities, this is by all three variants of FGT poverty measure. Within the group of households whose children engage in child labour activities, less than 28% are living below poverty threshold compared to about 18% and 22% for households whose children do not engage in child labour activities and all households respectively. The poverty gap was also larger for households that engage in child labour activities, the average poor household's income fall by 20% compared to 9% and 13% respectively for households without child labour activity and all household. Finally poverty is more severe for households whose children engage in child labour activities because the opportunity cost for education is work which in no way contribute to human capital development as shown in table 3.

Table-3 Poverty profile of households

| Categories  | P0     | P1     | P2     |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| All households  | 0.2230 | 0.1431 | 0.0867 |
| Households who engage in child labour activities                | 0.2743 | 0.1992 | 0.1238 |
| Households whose children do not engage child labour activities | 0.1750 | 0.075  | 0.0436 |

Children from the poor households that engaged in child labour activities faced some hazards which could affect their social, mental and physical development as shown in table 4. Socially, children have been found to experience negative consequences to their educational development and performance (Togunde & Arielle, 2008). When children attend school, about half of the children are sometimes or always late to school due to child use for marketing activities on the street or makeshift platforms.

Table -4 Distribution of hazards encountered by the child workers

| Hazard                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Fall from trees             | 31        | 23.31      |
| Aches and pains             | 2         | 1.50       |
| Snake bite                  | 26        | 19.55      |
| Poore performance in school | 26        | 19.55      |
| Lateness to school          | 6         | 4.51       |
| Fire bum                    | 20        | 15.03      |
| Absence from school         | 22        | 16.54      |

\*Multiple responses were recorded.

Among the hazards, fall from trees (23.31%), burns from fire (15.03%), snake bite (19.55%), absence

from school (16.54%) and poor performance in school (19.55%) were the most severe hazards while the minors were aches and pains(1.50%) and lateness to school(4.51%). This finding corroborates Lawal and Akintola, 2007 who posited that 80% and 70% of children are exposed to educational hazards in form of lateness to school and not even going to school always (truancy).

**Conclusion and Implications**

This study revealed that the activity children participated most in the area is bunch harvesting which require them to climb tall trees. The reason for participation was to supplement parent income and take care of younger siblings. Households whose children engage in child labour activities lived below the poverty threshold than households whose children did not participate in child labour activities. This explains the reason why such households remain in the poverty web. The hazards faced by children who participate in child labour activities were fall from trees, burns from fire, snake bite, absence from school and poor performance in school.

The findings of this work implies that as the country struggle to gain greater economic prosperity through the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring education to all by the year 2015, child labour on every sector of the economy needs to be eradicated else achievement of this Millennium Development Goal will be far-fetched and the poverty status of the country remains. This study, therefore, recommends that government should draw programmes to educate parents and caregivers on activities that are truly hazardous to children for this will empower them to make informed choices of either sending the children to school or work in farms.

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