

CHAMPIONING THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD ABUSE IN NIGERIA: A CALL TO SAVE THE NEEDY

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Abstract

The child is the bedrock of any society and as such needs to be trained, adequately handled and protected in their rights in this 21st century. Championing the crusade against child abuse in Nigeria persistently depend on the amicable environment of the state and the society they found themselves. The study adopted Horton & Turnage (1976) information processing theory and descriptive method in handling the variables of the study. It is the call of the paper that fashioning out ways is highly needed mostly because the peace, economic, social and cultural configuration of the society and the state cannot achieved if the child is not given a delightful place in the future. Today, it is a call of collective responsibility to curb the ugly situation of the child abuse in the country and save the needy. It is recommended in this paper that passing of child right act in various states and nation is a sine-qua-non in achieving temperate future for this generation.

1 Introduction

Nigeria is the largest black African country, according to a recent census, a population of over 160 million people. NPC, (2006). There are numerous ethnic groups, but three major tribes comprise the majority of the people; the Igbo in the East, the Yoruba in the West and the Hausa in the North. The Nigerian nation is endowed with rich natural resources and extensive human resources; Nigeria has not developed the necessary technology, industrial, managerial and political know-how to pull its resources together in a stable economy to take care of the basic needs of its population, Ebigbo (2003). Thus, poverty and unfavourable living condition seems to be prevalent affecting children. Therefore, the country is characterized with cultural conflict, religious crisis, economic and social factors, family disintegration, environmental threats, and political challenges facing the country.

Consequently, Nigerian children are highly vulnerable to income gap or poverty, cultural values, religious incidence and unacceptable economic and social factor. These include urbanization and migration; health challenges; environmental intimidation; domestic violence and family disintegration; social exclusion and discrimination; harmful traditional practices based on cultural values, Nicola *et al* (2012). It is assumed that poverty is the single largest factor behind child abuse, on the religious and socio-cultural values and unequal gender relations are also important determinants. In Nigeria, mostly, girls are trafficked primarily into domestic service, street hawking and commercial sexual exploitation. While boys tend to be trafficked into street vending, agriculture, mining, petty crime and the drug trade, Nicola *et al* (2012). Thus, to a reasonable extent, the economic and divide has placed the Nigerian child in fosterage, with its associated risks and abuse.

The situation as it may according to Nicola *et al* (2012), reveals that approximated 15 million Nigerian children are working in Nigeria, in different hubs of the economy, informal or semi-formal sectors. Thus the economic necessity significantly seems to be the driven much of the children who are often forced into long hours and dangerous situation that are harmful, because physiological, psychological and growth are not appropriate. The effort to survive has exposed them to accidents, violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking HIV infection.

Related to above, is the issue of religious practice that permits girl marriage, it is observed that across Nigeria and West Africa, (UN, 2005). Thus, girl marriage, mostly favour children under the climax of poverty, while such practice is obtainable in the west world the scourge only reveal environmental indifferences and economic/socio-factor, to a reasonable extent not religious practice as the case may in developing nation like Nigeria. It is the assumption that parents view the process as a possible way out of poverty for the child and the rest of the family. This is possible because of non-awareness of children's rights and other factors such as cultural and religious traditions also play a part. It is disheartening, that the practice is widely seen in rural areas and the Islamic Northern states, Eze-Anaba, (2006); Sossou and Yogtiba, (2009). It is assumed that a quarter of all girls in Nigeria are married as adolescents, with negative implications for their human capital development as well as their intra-household bargaining power and access to resources (Aronowitz, 2006; Dottridge, 2002; National Population Council, 2009; Okojie, 2003). Similarly, the practice of Almajiri in the Northern part of the country is prevalent because the religion allows the disadvantaged children to move from streets to streets begging with the view to feed and in some case remit the proceeds to the master. The highlighted religious practice has exposed children to accident, kidnapping and other socio-economic or political turmoil in the system.

The environmental factor has a significantly role to play in championing the campaign against child abuse Nigeria. The Child Act (2003), out of 36 states of the federation only 24 has passed the child act in their various states, Nicola *et al* (2012). In African a child is been treated as your property unlike in the western part of the world, thus to a reasonable extent a challenge to pass the Act with easy and enforce judiciously in the system. Though customary laws that fail to protect the rights of child, women and girls, and cultural practices such as fosterage, Nigeria's girls are particularly vulnerable to child protection deficits, (Aronowitz, 2006; Dottridge, 2002; Okojie, 2003), cited in Nicola *et al* (2012). Arguing the deficit in the case of Nigerian environment, it is an ideal time for scholars, professionals and practitioners to come together with common environment that will go a long way to settle the scourge.

In keeping with the cultural values of the Nigerian family, girl marriage is almost accepted in the parts of the country as a result of economic, political and child bearing with its antecedent positive and negative phenomenon. In the northern part of the country, it is assumed that before a girl second menstruation cycle, it is expected the girl is married to a man. While this cultural practice is associated with VVF in some cases and maternal death during and after child delivery and unprofessional attitude which like is as a result of the economic deficit that exposed girl outside the modern medical facilities that would have looked after girl-mother.

Child abuse in Nigerian and other parts of the world are cancerous because the environments, socio-political and economic developments of children are jeopardized at the altar of neglect. The Nigerian child and like every other child in world has equal right to live and such protect them from trampling on their right. It is noteworthy, that almost parts of the country are involved in child abuse. Children in Nigeria are exposed vulnerably to engage in street/highway hawking, exploitative labour and domestic help, street begging and girl-child marriage, illiteracy and female genital mutilation. However, championing the campaign against child abuse in Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria enacts Child Right Act 2003 with the view to curtail the menace

of child abuses in Nigeria and to join hands in the campaign of giving the child a place in the country as the future hope of a nation. Thus, it is worrisome that irrespective of the child Act and the role NGO's has play to save the needy (Nigerian Child) have not yielded convincing outcome to salvage the campaign. The persistence of child abuse in Nigeria continue to change shape and form everyday thereby exposing the lives of the innocent children to kidnappers, knocked to death by drivers, ritualists and wretched seen at the street crying for help without seeing one.

Therefore, the hope of a Nigerian child seems to reveal that the acceleration to socio-political and economic development is either perverted, or insipid. The past period of independence-struggle in Nigeria certainly was a time when the child was alive to its political responsibilities but this sense of devotion was short-lived. Nigerian Child seems to have degenerated to the point of almost becoming liability instead of an asset, in varying degrees throughout independent of the country, the situation in Northern Nigerian, the practice of almajirai (street begging) as part of living, is against the background of human existence, Kisekkaa (1985)

In almost parts of Nigeria today, children are crying for freedom; freedom from oppression and suppression; freedom to go to school; freedom to make decision that affect their life; they wants their rights as a human. They may be black, poor and illiterate, beggars, hawking, deprived their right but needs respect and can be respected. The whole continent of the world children must be free from the clog of abuse of any sort. The thrust of the paper is to examine the challenges of championing the campaign against the child abuse in the world with special reference to Nigeria and possible proffer way forward to curtail the scourge.

2. Information Processing Theory

The present study is anchored on Horton & Turnage (1976) information processing theory. The assumption of the theory is on stimulus and the response of the human being. They identify the basic processes and describe precisely how these processes function and variables that affects the human mind and thought.

The cognitive psychologists assumption on information mental process, such as perception, attention and memory. They used computer as a model to compare the brain of human being. The computer is divided into two parts the hardware and software-the machine itself and –software the information tool that instructs its operation.

To them computer like the human being process input perform certain operations on the information stored it and generate output. The mind too, must selectively attend and perceive, the associate, computes or otherwise operate on the information. Similarly, when the child is abused, the information perception, action reaction, emotion are greatly affected negatively. This may be attributed as a result of alienation of attachment from the parents.

To them information processing theorists see development over the life span as gradual and cumulative that may directly or indirect affect socio-economic development of any nation around the globe. The unguided input and output of abused child may grossly disfigure the environment in terms of development and wellbeing of a common man.

To support the above argument, imitation and modeling has it that people learn, directly from experiencing the consequences of their own behaviour they also learn by watching another person's behaviour and its consequences, (Bandura, 1969; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Significant percentage of human being not only children learn wide variety of behaviours from observing career appropriate attitudes and values, social-class and ethnic attitudes and cultural values.

Children that were not abused observe behaviour modification – a method that uses conditioning procedures such as reinforcement, reward, and shaping, to change behaviour (Graig 1989). While this behaviour modification is necessary for sustainability of children and upbringing

which necessary is lacking in abused children, which in turn may be members of boko-haram, and aggressive children and keen to other social-vice in the country. The extent child information, imitation and modeling positively depend on shared values, attitudes and moral values can configure the entire human race and boast almost the sector of the economy of any nation.

The Mimetic theory suggest that exposure to trauma can generate aggression and increases the opportunity of modeled abuse behaviour. The Mimetic theory describes individuals who view a perpetrator of abuse a powerful or admirable and therefore learn to act violent in order to imitate, or mimic, acts of violence (Craig & Sprang, 2007). The essence of theory to this study is based on the way the cognitive psychologists conceptualized the basic processes and describe precisely how these processes function and variables that affect the human as a springboard were the study rests.

3. The Concept of Child Abuse in Nigeria

The economic divide, religious divide, environmental divide, and cultural divide is child abuse. Though, Nigeria has one of Africa's largest economies, poverty and inequality are widespread and increasing, in both rural and urban areas. Nearly two-thirds of the population lives on less than \$1.25 per day (purchasing power parity 2008) and the country has a Gini coefficient value of 0.49 (UNDP, 2009) cited in Nicola *et al* (2012). Similarly, the poverty has grievous potentials on children's survival and impacts on protection needs, NPC, (2009). The under-five mortality rate is 171 per 1,000, ranging from 87 per 1,000 for the wealthiest families to 219 for the poorest (NPC, 2009). Malnutrition is a significant concern: 27% of Nigerian under fives (between 2003 and 2008) are considered moderately/severely underweight, 14% to be suffering from moderate/severe wasting and 41% to be suffering from moderate/severe stunting (UNICEF, 2010a) cited in Nicola *et al* (2012).

The poverty high level has forced many children into the labour market: 15 million Nigerian children under 14 are working to support their families and pay their school fees (UNICEF Nigeria, 2006). The highlighted work is in most cases in the informal labour market, hawking goods on the streets or highway or harvesting crops for approximately 20 hours each week (Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2006) cited in Nicola *et al* (2012). It is unacceptable that majority of these children revealed that long hours cause them to miss at least one day of school each week and this may cause low performance in academic achievement in the school. The net attendance ratio for primary school in Nigeria is quite low, at 62.1 (NPC, 2009), for secondary school, it is even lower, at only 49.1. There is significant variation across the country. In urban areas 74.1; while in rural areas it is 57. The south east has the nation's best primary school enrolment ratio, at 82.8; the north-west, on the other hand has only 43.7 cited in Nicola *et al* (2012).

Presently, Nigerian nation is under investigation and concerned on mission to rescue over 200 girls from the Chibok School who were kidnapped by the Boko-Haram terrorist group on April, 2014, has revealed Nigerian child abuse in the nation. This experience, on girl-child is a sin against humanity and nation at large; the way and manner children are abuse in Nigeria is at the climax, reasons may be economic and social factor, religious, cultural and political reasons. It is worrisome that this flood-child abuse is taken different dimension every day in different part of the world presently, Israel had their portion under discussion, the question is what the nation does to avert this ugly scenario in future and protect the child. In an attempt to give a child a place in Nigeria relevant or notable NGO's launched a campaign on child protection system fit for the 21st century in Nigeria with special concern in conflict areas. On the contrary the effort of NGO's have not produced the desired output to champion the campaign against child abuse in Nigerian nation and to a reasonable extent a threat to other parts of the world because of the globalization, TELL, (2014). Cultural differentiation among nations in the world possible is child abuse. The cultural divide,

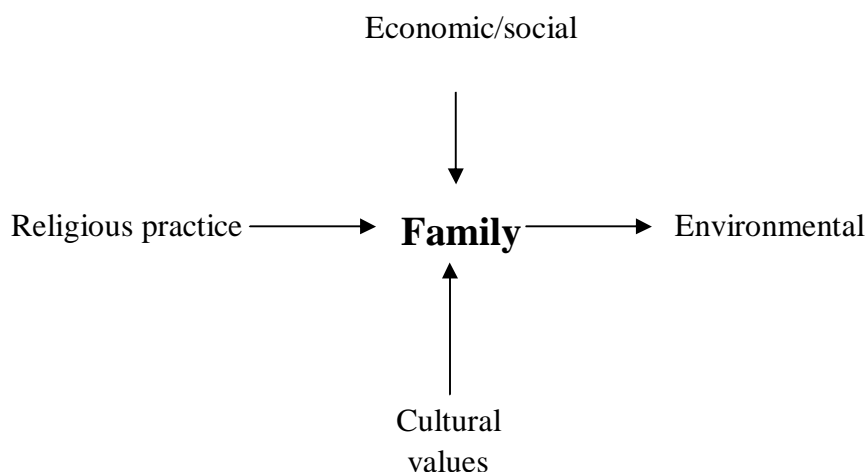
environmental divide, family tier, economic and socio-factor divide may be closed through awareness and common dialogue, brainstorming the highlighted may go a long way in providing a lasting solution in champion the campaign against child abuse in Nigeria.

Child abuses in Nigeria are seen in various forms and degrees from sex and possessions of property. Female child are not allowed to possess land or landed property mostly in South Eastern Nigeria. This is because male counterparts are superior to female counterparts. Therefore, female are seen as not part of the family immediately after marriage and they are not trained in school like the male counterpart, the assumption is that the girl child education ends in the kitchen. Any money invested in training a woman is considered as a waste of resources.

Similarly, the South Eastern Nigerian victimizes children from going to school but encourage their children to learn trade in the urban cities of the country where a child will be under exploitative labour and signed to stay up 5 to 10 years at sometime the child would be alleged to have stolen some money and other related offences leaving the child to suffer social and psychological problems in future. Domestic help seen mostly, in our various cities today, are from poor parents who wish that their children would be catered for in doing small jobs in various home, but these children are exposed to rape, kidnapping, ritual and at different time send to street hawking/highway to assist the family that bring them to town.

WHO (2010) contends that neglect and abuse often causes stress that is associated with disruptions in early brain development. Severe stress can lead to physical consequence such as impairment in the nervous system and immune system. Because of the physically damaging stress victims of abuse experience, they are at a greater risk for future problems such as obesity, smoking, and alcohol and misuse (WHO, 2010).

Scholars like Currie & Spatz Wisdom (2010) cited in Friedman, (2010) has it that adults who were abused as children might experience the long-term consequence of low economic wellbeing, in adulthood. It is evident that truancy, suspensions, discrimination, and shared depression of mind has a negative influence on the child. In order to correct the ugly scenario the number of victims and the high increase of wide consequences, more needs to be done from the angle of abuse and prevention.



Source: Researchers Model Conceptualization, 2014.

From the model above, child abuse in Nigeria and other parts of the world significantly starts from the nucleus of the society which is the family. The abuse ranging from various forms and degrees mostly are seen in the family, mostly, rooted in cultural values and gender discriminations, religious practices, political and legal environment respectively and similarly, urbanization and population growth, Aderinto (2010). The effect of highlighted variables in the model has created a gap between the rich parents and poor parents and continent included, when harvested are seen directly and indirectly affecting the larger society therefore called child abuse.

Supporting the argument, the attachment theory has it that parents are sanctuary of safety through all of early childhood. It is convincing that secure attachments cause children to develop an internal model of self – competence and a model of dependability for others. On the contrary, insecure attachments, however promote feelings of threat, rejection and personal unworthiness, (Tarabulsky, Pascuzzo, Pross, St-Larent, Benier & Cyr, (2008). Thus, what mostly, observed in Nigerian nation are significant percentage of insecure attachments which pave way for child abuse; the information process theory that exposes the mind and thought would assist in up bring of the child depending on positivity/negativity environment.

3 Various Forms of Child Abuse in Nigeria

Children in urban areas are quickly caught up in the daily struggle for survival and material gain (Ebigbo 2003). Thus, analysis of child abuse and neglect in Nigerian nation, may found that child abandonment, sexual abuse, child neglect, vagrancy, kidnapping and hawking were the most seen forms of child abuse Ebigbo (2003). It is worrisome, that young girls and boys are sent from rural areas to families in the cities to serve as house-maids and house-boys. This to a reasonable extent has broken the traditional culture which erodes children's opportunity for personal growth. Children who work as house-helps may also be required either by their parents or by the families they serve to sell items for food, clothing and general merchandise on the streets. In most cases they are part-time street traders and subject to many of the damaging facets of street life.

In the eastern part and western parts of Nigeria children may attend morning or afternoon school and hawk goods out of school hours, though there are some children who trade on the streets the whole day. The children income helps their families or house-madams financially or pay for school fees at times of their children against the social contract they had with the parent from village to train the child. Although most Nigerian children return home at the end of the day, a growing number, including girls, manage to survive and exist on the streets, contrary to the training assumed to offer, researchers like Oloko (1989) Ebigbo and Izuora (1985) Kisekka,(1981) supported the argument.

It is on record that 64 million girls worldwide are child brides with 46% of these in south Asia and 41% percent in West and Central Africa. Evidently they marry before the age of 18, (TELL 2014). The girl-child marriage poses life threatening risks like VVF, and associated pregnancy related complications which may cause life extinction. Consequently, about 140 million girl-children in the world have suffered female genital mutilations, TELL (2014). The traditional cultural shared belief, that it will help balance the family relationship.

It is disheartening to observe that in the Northern Nigerian Muslim Communities are practicing girl-marriage, the case is more seen among the Northerners with minimal practice in western and south-south and south eastern Nigeria and in some parts of the western world. In South Eastern part of Nigeria for instance, such cases of getting married to girl-child marriage still exist, especially among the illiterate rural dwellers. The girl-mother is prone to suffer the medical complication at times which is referred as the *vesico vaginal fistula*. To tackle the menace, Government established a medical outfit the *Vesico Vaginal fistula centre*, to repair females with

the medical complications of vesico vaginal fistula. The centre serves the females in the country, Ajanwachukwu, (2012), accordingly, the Muslim religion prohibits girls from becoming pregnant before marriage encourages early marriage, assumed that a girl should take a husband before her second menstruation. The tradition of early marriage is very difficult to change and has led to abusive practices which are condoned by parents. The question is what needed to be done to provide adequate health care facilities to help curb the visco vaginal fistula and other related medical complication among the teenagers. The reason is the economic inequalities has made the rural dwellers to patronize the local birth attendant that will reduce cost and give them lasting injuries in the cause of delivery. The practice has made girl-child to engage in street hawking to assist the mother to buy household goods for them when they marry, Oloko (1989) and UN (2005).

It is interestingly to note that the child whose rights are violated or abused may not even be show concern since she takes it as a normal way of living or what may be called the culture of his people. In some other cases you may see a girl-child betrothed to a man who is of the age of his father because of his parents' inability to pay their debt they use the girl-child to settle their debt without minding the sociological and psychological implication of such child. Another worrisome situation in child abuse is female genital mutilation which is more seen in South Eastern Nigerian though exist in other parts at minimal level when compare with counterpart. It is cultural practice that before a girl-child is given out for marriage she must undergo female genital mutilation which is followed by celebration at the end of process before handing her over to her proposed husband. However, it is assumed that such practice controls sexual excess of a girl-child.

This is so in view of a great campaign against child abuse in Nigeria, as a traditional harmful practice. Government and NGO's are working hard in the campaign championing the ugly scenario of child abuse with special reference to female genital mutilation and other related child abuse. This traditional condemnable method has kept some girl-child at the various risks of life and psychological and clinical negative consequences. The enlightenment campaign of NGO's in the fight against child abuse in Nigeria has not yielded desired outcome or result. The condemnable act was omitted in child right Act (2003) it needed to have included in the not to have girl-child organ mutilated. This right of a girl-child not to have her genital mutilated was omitted in the Act. This is indeed a great omission. The omission is amplified by Igwenyi (2001), As asserted by Ben O. Igwenyi (2001) Stated as follows:

“...the Child Rights Act, 2003 is a very ambitious legislation which seeks to cover practically all issues of civil and criminal law relating to the child... That notwithstanding, the Act is far less than perfect. For instance, the failure to deal with the obnoxious female genital mutilation is a major defect” cited in Ajanwachukwu (2012).

It is worrisome although there is a restriction, some Nigerian children hawk at the places expressly prohibited by the Act. This is so because in terms of practicality, it is not possible to prohibit street hawking. The harsh economic realities of Nigeria have made that prohibition unattainable and the prohibition right can therefore not be guaranteed. In order to make both ends meet. Nigerian children hawk goods or services on main city streets, highways. The Act cannot stop it. It is assumed that robust economy that would discourage it, it cannot be stopped, not even as the statute has so provided. It is endemic in the polity.

It is a fact of common knowledge that at the public highways leading into and out of the major cities of Nigeria, especially the highways leading into and out of the former and present federal capital territories, children are actively involved in hawking to the extent of even obstructing traffic and constituting a clog to the free flow of same. It is the same Nigerian child that hawk at

ministries, social welfare departments, police stations and even the court premises and nobody seems, to show concern. It quite convincing that no child desired to be involved in exploitative labour, But where as in our economy, there is depression and hardship, a child would voluntarily accept a job that is labour intensive and exploitative just to source money for his school fees, future trade or assist the poor parents.

Exploitative labour cannot come to an end by the making of an enactment prohibiting it but would naturally and on its own (without prohibit legislation) end if the economy is robust and parents are rich and would not need their children to do some work to raise some money to assist in the payment of fees, or for upkeep and feeding of the family. Nigerian children would not undertake jobs that exploit them if they are job opportunities and where the available jobs are not exploitative. Children get into exploitative labour not because any law has allowed it. Conversely, they cannot cease to get into exploitative labour because the Act has prohibited it and given them the right not to be so engaged. The actualization of the right of a child not to be involved in exploitative labour is not by so legislating or providing that it is the right of the child, but by making available, jobs that would be undertaken by the children and they would not be exploited. Let there be a well planned economy and job opportunities, for without these, a jobless Nigerian child who is in need would voluntarily and indeed insist on jobs of exploitative labour instead of being or remaining jobless and wallowing in want. In Nigerian demand for jobs outstrips the supply of same, with the resultant effect that job seekers are ready to lower the standard of the jobs they would accept and lower

Street begging is a welcome development in Northern Nigeria Communities its prohibition is not convincing since that is their normal way of life. For Northern Nigerian Muslim the Almajirai cannot be dispensed with. Again the children whose integrity is being protected by placing a ban on street begging may not appreciate why a religious practice should be banned. This right as in the case of child marriage, although provided for, is not likely to be enjoyed even though provision is made for it. The religious and cultural imperatives undercut the existence for this right.

Some of these children die in the process, while those that are not dead sometimes do not meet their parents and relatives anymore. Some of these children live the homes at such tender ages that they do not know their surnames. By the time they grow, not having known their surnames, they adopt as their surnames, the first of surname of their Koranic teacher or adopt as their surname, the city where they grew up in. It is a child abuse punishable by law for 10 years 27.

Child Illiteracy

Section 15(1) of the Act. It states:

- 1) Every child has the right to free compulsory and Universal basic education and it shall be the duty of the Government in Nigeria to provide such education
- 2) Every parent or guardian shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his:-
 - a) Primary school education; and
 - b) Junior secondary education

4. **Consequence of Child Abuse in Nigeria**

First and foremost, the children who do some jobs come from the poor segments of the population. Due to poverty, they suffer malnutrition and have calorie levels that are lower than what they should have. With these poor states of health, they are weak and therefore easily and readily adversely affected health wise, when they do some jobs

Secondly, it is noted that the army of almajiri produce by the northerners has made it possible for the Boko-Haram members to recruit, and indoctrinate them conveniently thereby

threatening the pole of unity and diversity of Nigerian Nation. This, to a reasonable extent may not be different from other violence members or sets around the globe.

Thirdly, challenges in neurological development of the child with higher degree of poor academic achievement in school and other negative attitudes like aggression and unpredicted social exclusion.

Fourthly, psychological and physiological consequences, a child is psychologically and socially balanced if, as a child, he is loved, adored, cared for and given the opportunity of play and leisure, exploring the world, interacting fully with peers and bonding with the family. These consequences can place pressure on the traditional larger interdependent family unit and cause it to break down, because the aggressive nature of the parents as a result of their inability to contribute to household expenses. The relationship between the child and parents are based on fear and psychological distress may be associated.

5. **Ways to Save the Needy Child**

- 1 Provision of social assistance to extremely poor individuals and household. This may entail payment of school fees and approved institutions from governments and non-governmental agencies to individuals or households, with the view of reducing the inequality and increase access to basic services and promote child protection.
- 2 Social welfare service is highly needed to protect children against abuse and consequences of livelihood, health and social insurance to help secure services in times of need, which maybe subsidized, with potential contribution payment exemption for the poor.
3. Capacity development for teachers, health personnel and social workers, the police and judges through investing in awareness and campaign on preventative services to address child abuse in partnership with NGO's the enabling environmental system, relevant professionals and practitioners alike (including economic policy makers, traditional culture and religious custodians) and three tiers of government.
- 4 Provision of social equity measures to protect people against social risk such as discrimination or abuse. These may also be legislation against discrimination either physically challenged, equal access to property, and other services that may arise over time.
- 5 Proactive call for Child Right Amendment is highly solicited to address the omitted areas of the Act, this enable the Act to stand the demand of the globalized world.

6. **Conclusion**

The paper conclude that irrespective of the effort of government and NGO's in championing the campaign against child abuse in Nigeria, more are still needed to be done. The amendment of the section of the child Act is solicited in an attempt to hasten to the call of saving the child in needy and give Nigerian child a better place in the society. All professionals, practitioners and citizens collectively need to advocate ways of preventing child abuse and proper interventions that will give room for lasting solution.

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