



Challenges and Prospects of Child Labor in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Child labor remains a persistent challenge in Ghana, posing significant threats to the well-being and development of children. Despite efforts to combat this issue, various socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors continue to perpetuate child labor practices across the country. This paper examines the challenges and prospects of child labor in Ghana, highlighting the root causes, prevalence, and consequences of this phenomenon. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical evidence, the paper identifies key areas for intervention and proposes strategies to address the complex dynamics of child labor. By exploring the multifaceted nature of the problem and outlining targeted solutions, this paper aims to inform policy discussions and initiatives aimed at eradicating child labor and safeguarding the rights and welfare of children in Ghana.

Keywords: Child Labor, Ghana, Socio-economic Factors, Institutional Factors, Policy Interventions

INTRODUCTION

Child labor represents a significant obstacle to the realization of children's rights and the achievement of sustainable development goals in Ghana. Despite legislative frameworks and international conventions aimed at eliminating child labor, the practice persists, affecting children's education, health, and overall well-being [1, 2]. The prevalence of child labor in Ghana is influenced by various factors, including poverty, lack of access to quality education, cultural norms, and weak enforcement of labor laws. This paper provides an overview of the challenges and prospects of child labor in Ghana, with a focus on understanding the root causes, examining the socio-economic implications, and identifying strategies for prevention and intervention [3, 4]. Child labor remains a prevalent issue in Ghana, with a significant number of children engaged in hazardous and exploitative work. Many children are deprived of their right to education and are subjected to various forms of exploitation, including forced labor, trafficking, and involvement in hazardous industries such as agriculture, mining, and fishing. Despite efforts to address this issue, challenges such as poverty, lack of access to education, cultural attitudes, and weak enforcement of labor laws continue to perpetuate child labor practices. The prevalence of child labor undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development goals, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and violates the rights and dignity of children [5, 6]. Thus, this paper aims to assess the prevalence and characteristics of child labor in Ghana, including the sectors and industries where it is most prevalent. It will further examine the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to child labor in Ghana, as well as the impact of child labor on the well-being, and development of children. Lastly, it will evaluate existing policies, programs, and interventions aimed at addressing child labor, and propose recommendations for policy reforms, to prevent and eliminate child labor in Ghana.

Prevalence and Characteristics of Child Labor in Ghana

According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 7 (GLSS 7), conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service in 2019, approximately 21.8% of children aged 5 to 17 were engaged in child labor activities [7]. This represents a significant proportion of the child population in Ghana affected by labor exploitation. Child labor prevalence varies across regions in Ghana, with higher rates often observed in rural and impoverished areas. For example, the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions have historically reported higher rates of child labor compared to the more urbanized regions such as Greater Accra [7]. Child labor in Ghana encompasses a wide range of activities, including but not limited to areas such as Agriculture. Agriculture remains the largest sector employing child labor in Ghana, with children often engaged in family farming or working on commercial farms producing cocoa, rice, vegetables, and other crops [8]. In regions with mining activities, such as the Ashanti and Western regions, child labor is prevalent in small-scale mining operations, commonly known as galamsey. Children, particularly boys, are involved in various stages of the mining process, including digging, washing ore, and transporting materials [8]. Child labor is also common in Ghana's fishing industry, particularly in communities along the coast and inland water

bodies. Children work on fishing boats, processing fish, repairing nets, and other tasks related to artisanal fishing operations [8]. In the informal sector, Child labor is also prevalent, including street vending, petty trading, and artisanal activities. Children may work in urban areas, markets, and informal settlements, often in hazardous conditions and without access to education or social protection [8]. Thus, child labor remains a significant issue in Ghana, with a substantial proportion of children engaged in exploitative work across various sectors and industries.

Socio-economic, Cultural, and Institutional Factors contributing to Child Labor

The numerous factors contributing to the perpetuation of child labor in Ghana reveal a complex interplay of multiple influences. Socio-economic factors such as poverty are one of the primary drivers of child labor in Ghana. Families living in poverty often rely on the income generated by children to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare [9]. Economic deprivation compels parents to send their children to work instead of school, perpetuating the cycle of poverty across generations. Secondly, inadequate access to quality education exacerbates the problem of child labor in Ghana. High costs of schooling, lack of nearby schools, and poor infrastructure contribute to low enrollment rates and high dropout rates, especially in rural areas [7]. Children from marginalized communities are particularly affected, as they face barriers to accessing education and are more likely to engage in labor to support their families. Also, cultural norms and traditions in Ghana sometimes condone or normalize child labor practices. For example, in certain communities, it may be customary for children to assist their families in agricultural activities or household chores from a young age [10]. Such practices perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of child labor and hinder efforts to change attitudes and behaviors. Gender norms also play a role in shaping child labor patterns in Ghana. Girls are often assigned domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities within the household, limiting their opportunities for education and exposing them to exploitation as domestic workers [11]. Boys, on the other hand, maybe more likely to engage in activities such as agriculture, mining, and street vending. Despite legislative efforts to address child labor, weak enforcement of existing laws and regulations undermines their effectiveness. Limited resources, inadequate monitoring mechanisms, and corruption within law enforcement agencies contribute to impunity for perpetrators of child labor [8]. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive social protection systems exacerbates vulnerabilities among children and their families. Limited access to healthcare, housing, and social assistance leaves families without a safety net, forcing them to rely on child labor as a coping mechanism [7]. The prevalence of informal economic activities in Ghana creates opportunities for child labor exploitation. Children are often employed in informal sectors such as street vending, petty trading, and artisanal work, where labor regulations are poorly enforced, and working conditions are substandard [8]. Consequently, the perpetuation of child labor in Ghana is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Addressing this issue requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses the root causes of child labor, strengthens legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, promotes access to education and social protection, and fosters changes in cultural norms and attitudes toward child labor [12].

Impact of Child Labor on the Well-Being and Development of Children

Child labor exposes children to hazardous working conditions, physical exertion, and environmental pollutants, leading to increased risks of injuries, accidents, and occupational diseases [8]. Children engaged in activities such as agriculture, mining, and domestic work may suffer from respiratory problems, musculoskeletal disorders, and other health issues due to long hours of work and exposure to harmful substances. Child labor can also have detrimental effects on children's mental health and well-being. Forced labor, exploitation, and abuse can lead to psychological trauma, stress, anxiety, and depression [13]. Children may experience feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and social isolation, impacting their overall psychological development and resilience. Child labor equally deprives children of their right to education, limiting their opportunities for personal and intellectual growth. Many child laborers are unable to attend school or complete their education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hindering their prospects [8]. Lack of education reduces children's ability to escape poverty and breaks the intergenerational cycle of child labor. Regrettably, families relying on child labor for income may become economically dependent on children's earnings, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and preventing investments in children's education and well-being [14]. In this case, Child labor becomes a coping mechanism for families facing financial hardships, but it ultimately exacerbates socio-economic inequalities and traps families in poverty. Families of child laborers face social stigma and discrimination within their communities. Child labor is often associated with poverty, neglect, and parental failure, leading to social exclusion and marginalization [14]. Stigmatization can further isolate families and hinder their access to support services and opportunities for social mobility. The impact on the community indicates that Child labor deprives communities of their most valuable asset: their children's potential. The loss of human capital due to child labor undermines community development and economic growth, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality [8]. Child labor can disrupt social cohesion and community solidarity by perpetuating divisions and inequalities. Communities with high rates of child labor may experience social tensions, conflicts, and disparities in access to resources and opportunities [13]. Addressing child labor requires community-wide efforts to promote child rights, education, and sustainable livelihoods. Accordingly, child labor has far-reaching and detrimental impacts on the well-being, health, and development of children, families, and

communities. Addressing the root causes of child labor, promoting access to education and social protection, and fostering community empowerment is essential for protecting children's rights and promoting sustainable development [15].

Existing Policies and Interventions aimed at addressing Child Labor in Ghana

Ghana has enacted various laws and regulations aimed at combating child labor, including the Children's Act (1998), the Human Trafficking Act (2005), and the Labour Act (2003). These laws provide a legal framework for the protection of children's rights and prohibit hazardous and exploitative forms of child labor [16-18]. Ghana has also developed a National Plan of Action (NPA) for the Elimination of Child Labour, which outlines strategies and priorities for addressing child labor in the country. The NPA includes measures to strengthen legislative frameworks, improve access to education and social services, and enhance enforcement mechanisms [19]. The Government of Ghana has equally implemented social protection programs aimed at addressing the root causes of child labor and supporting vulnerable families. Initiatives such as the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) program provide cash transfers to poor households, including those with children engaged in child labor, to improve their socio-economic conditions [20].

Challenges in Implementation

Despite the existence of laws and regulations, enforcement mechanisms for combating child labor in Ghana are often weak and ineffective. Limited resources, inadequate training of law enforcement officials, and corruption undermine efforts to prosecute perpetrators and protect child laborers [8]. Secondly, challenges in access to education, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and high costs, hinder efforts to address child labor in Ghana. Many children, particularly those from marginalized communities, lack access to quality education and are therefore more vulnerable to exploitation [7]. Thirdly, the prevalence of child labor in the informal economy presents challenges for regulation and enforcement. Children working in informal sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and street vending often operate outside the formal labor market, making it difficult to monitor and regulate their working conditions [8]. Also, deeply entrenched cultural norms and attitudes towards child labor present barriers to change. In some communities, child labor is normalized and perceived as necessary for children's development or family survival [10]. Changing attitudes and behaviors requires sustained efforts in community mobilization and awareness-raising. Fragmentation and lack of coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders hinder efforts to address child labor effectively. Thus, strengthening inter-agency collaboration and coordination is essential for leveraging resources, sharing information, and implementing comprehensive strategies [13]. Finally, engaging communities, including traditional leaders, religious institutions, and local NGOs, is critical for addressing child labor at the grassroots level. Community-based interventions that empower families, raise awareness about children's rights, and provide support services can complement national policies and programs [13]. Consequently, while Ghana has made progress in addressing child labor through legislative reforms, national action plans, and social protection programs, significant challenges remain in implementation. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, improving access to education and social services, addressing cultural norms, and promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration are essential for achieving sustainable solutions to child labor in Ghana.

Recommendation

Proposing recommendations for preventing and eliminating child labor in Ghana requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes, strengthens institutional capacities, and engages communities in sustainable solutions. This paper posits some recommendations for policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and community-based interventions accordingly:

- a. **Strengthen Legislative Frameworks:** The government should review and update existing laws and regulations related to child labor to align with international standards and best practices and ensure that legislation explicitly prohibits all forms of child labor, including hazardous and exploitative work, and establish clear mechanisms for enforcement and prosecution of offenders.
- b. **Invest in Education:** The government should prioritize education as a fundamental right and a key strategy for preventing child labor, and implement policies and programs to improve access to quality education, including the provision of free and compulsory schooling, scholarships, and incentives for vulnerable children.
- c. **Promote Social Protection:** The government should expand social protection programs to support vulnerable families and provide targeted cash transfers, food assistance, and healthcare subsidies to families at risk of resorting to child labor. They should ensure that social protection schemes are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of children and families.
- d. **Enhance Institutional Capacity:** The government should strengthen the capacity of its agencies, law enforcement authorities, and judicial institutions to enforce child labor laws effectively. They should provide training and resources to relevant stakeholders on identifying, investigating, and prosecuting cases of child labor and trafficking.

- e. **Build Awareness and Sensitization:** The government should conduct awareness-raising campaigns and community sensitization programs to educate the public about the harms of child labor and the importance of protecting children's rights. They should target key stakeholders such as parents, employers, teachers, religious leaders, and community members to change attitudes and behaviors toward child labor by using culturally appropriate communication strategies and channels to reach diverse audiences.
- f. **Provide Alternatives to Child Labor:** The government should create opportunities for children and families to pursue sustainable livelihoods and income-generating activities that do not rely on child labor. Vocational training programs, entrepreneurship initiatives, and microfinance schemes to empower parents and caregivers to generate income and support their families should be exploited. The government should promote investments in agriculture, small-scale industries, and community development projects to create jobs and economic opportunities for marginalized communities. They should engage children and youth as active participants in efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor, create platforms for children to voice their concerns, express their aspirations, and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

CONCLUSION

Addressing child labor in Ghana requires a comprehensive approach that combines policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and community-based interventions. By strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing institutional capacities, and engaging communities in collaborative efforts, Ghana can make significant strides towards preventing and eliminating child labor and ensuring the well-being and rights of all children.

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