



## Child Breadwinners and the Question of Social Justice in Southwest Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study's objective was to ascertain the courses of action, their impacts, recommended treatments, and actions implemented to improve academic performance. Between October 2016 and February 2017, data were collected and analyzed using a mixed method analysis (triangulation) technique. The study revealed that a lack of parental support, poverty, absenteeism, individual mental capacity, and school authorities' engagement all have a role in academic performance changes. Boys were found to be absent from external examinations at a higher rate than girls, according to the data. Boys, on the other hand, exceed girls in terms of total academic achievement during a six-year period. According to the study, music students, music teachers, and school management all contribute significantly to boosting the academic level of the school. To ensure academic equity in subsequent years, the music teacher should devise techniques to boost female students' love for the subject. Additionally, parents should provide academic materials and monitor their children's attendance to reduce truancy and absenteeism. This will improve the academic performance of students at Nkonya Senior High School.

**Keywords:** Child breadwinners; Social Justice; Southwest Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Child breadwinners, as against being an important help within the family, are not considered key in the economic process in Yorubaland, constituting the southwest of Nigeria. The southwest, with a growing population of 31,457,691, as at the 2006 census, is located within the tropics between latitude 4° 45' and 9° 10' north of the equator and longitude 2° 40' and 6° 40' east of the Greenwich.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary Nigeria, the Yoruba country, so-called by Atanda,<sup>2</sup> as emerged to include the following states; Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. The different nationalities have a unique bond in terms of culture and the traditional belief system they live by. There is a common belief that they all descended from Oduduwa, a mythical demiurge believed to have had his origin from any other place other than the heavenly places. A consequence of his advent instituted the cosmic and political order as the Yoruba of present-day Nigeria.

The Region like many other regions emerged as an agrarian society, however with defining historical experiences, that is, European incursion, had grown remarkably in industry and commercial interests, expanding economically at a rapid rate. It is this important advantage of the region that has attracted many to the urban centres. Indeed, considering the history of the region from the 1900s, there was a progressive concentration of administrative, commercial and industrial activities in Lagos as well as other prominent cities like Ibadan. According to Fouchard, these factors altogether led to an influx of migrants and with an improved health condition, the population increased dramatically.<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary times the circumstance has not changed much. Many state centres have continued to witness, at an alarming rate, a consistent rise of unskilled children. Many of which have turned out to be child breadwinners even with the increasing advocacy for social justice. This idea of child breadwinner is not a phenomenon that has evolved in isolation. Before a child spoken of as a sole or primary contributor to the income of any household, the idea of child labour comes to mind. There have been perspectives on the idea of child labour considering various backgrounds and cultures of people. Despite this, there is a general and somewhat acceptable notion that argues that child labour is a practice of a child engaging in work to sustain self and/or support the family. From this standpoint, the work which the child is seemingly engaged with makes the child vulnerable, with an endangered development considering the work environment. The International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labor in practical terms conceives the concept as;

work situations where children are compelled to work on a regular basis to earn a living for themselves and their families and as a result are disadvantaged educationally and socially; where children work in conditions that are exploitative and damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development; where children are

<sup>1</sup> *Western Nigerian*, 1957. A Publication by the Western Nigeria Information Service Ibadan. P.1

<sup>2</sup> Atanda, J.A. 1980. *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan; Ibadan University Press. P.1

<sup>3</sup> Laurent Fouchard, 2006. "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria (1920-1960)," *Journal of African History* 46, 115-137

separated from their families, often deprived of educational training opportunities; where children are forced to lead prematurely adult lives<sup>4</sup>

Without any form of gainsaying, child labour deprives the children of fundamental qualities of their childhood thus compromising their dignity and self-worth.<sup>5</sup> It is a work that is damaging to a child's physical, social, mental, psychological or spiritual development because it is performed at too early an age or is otherwise unsuitable for children.<sup>6</sup> With this in mind, it becomes instructive to note that in traditional African societies the notion of child labour is viewed in terms of child work and more importantly a socialization process which ensures that the child is adequately integrated and well prepared for the concomitant challenges within the society.<sup>7</sup> The task of this paper is however to engage the developments that have attended the phenomenon of child breadwinners and the question of social justice. The child in the traditional setting understands well enough his or her place in the society and this involves certain unwritten rights which the society accords to the child.

Prevailing contemporary perspectives have submitted that "social justice within a society suggest that in which justice is achieved in every aspect of the society, rather than merely the administration of law." To this effect, individuals and groups in a society are treated fairly without any form of impartiality in the distribution of advantages and goods. Indeed, people are "not to be discriminated against, nor their welfare or well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socioeconomic circumstances, or other characteristics of background or group membership." With regards to children, social justice implies that they enjoy equal opportunities, participate in decision making processes, and that they enjoy basic essentials required to thrive as members of the society. But to what extent is this the reality of contemporary periods, it is perhaps a sharp contrast.

### **Traditional and Colonial Development**

The premium placed on the child in every traditional African is worth a note here. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child recognized the importance of the child in the African society and thus states in its fifth preamble of the regional;

Recognizing that the child occupies a unique and privileged position in the African society and that for the full and harmonious development of his personality, the child should grow in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, dignity and security.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the child perpetuating the lineage and even the community, a child is a form of insurance and a guarantee for sustenance. In other words, the child is engaged in every form of activity that would necessitate this.<sup>9</sup> For instance, considering the agrarian environment of the region and accounts illustrating the hardworking and industrial nature of the people, they traditionally relies largely on a well-organized and consciously planned effective human resource over a period to be used as labour. Professor A. G. Hopkins argues that they were two important factors of production for a successful agricultural enterprise namely are land and labour. While the land was in abundant supply, labour supply was scarce and, therefore, not always readily available.<sup>10</sup> First, the household serves as the bedrock of this labour drive and key in its operations and functions are children from within the household. Falola and O'Hear observe that "the family constituted the primary unit of the labor force. A family was an operative economic entity, which produced goods in cooperation, and shared the fruits of its labour"<sup>11</sup> And as such the man- who is the head of the household- could decide to have his family either big or small based on work capacity. Which means that the occupation of the man determines to a great extent how large his family would be. According to Ogunremi,<sup>12</sup> a farming society needed larger household labour than a weaving one. For the head of the household to expand his labour force it would mean having more wives. That is polygamy which would portend more children for the household and thus accomplishing more tasks and production outputs.<sup>13</sup> There was

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<sup>4</sup> ILO (1999) Convention No. 182; Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

<sup>5</sup> A. Admassie, "Explaining the High Incidence of Child Labor in Sub-Saharan Africa", *African Development Review* 14, no 2, 251-275, and F. Hegemann, Y. Diallo, A. Etienne, and F. Mehran, "Global Child Labor Trends, 2000-2004", *International Labor Organization* May 14, 2008; M. J. Levine, *Children for Hire: The Perils of Child Labor in the United States*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003

<sup>6</sup> See the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

<sup>7</sup> Oloko, S.B.A.2003. *Child Work and Child Labour in Nigeria: Continuities and Transformation*. Inaugural Lecture Series. Lagos; University of Lagos press

<sup>8</sup> OAU DOC CAB/LEG/24.9/49. 1990

<sup>9</sup> Fadipe, N.A. 1970. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, Ibadan, University Press Ltd.

<sup>10</sup> A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman 1973), 8-77

<sup>11</sup> Toyin Falola and Ann O'Hear, "The Nigerian Economy in the Nineteenth century: An Overview," in Toyin

Falola and Ann O'Hear, *Studies in the Nineteenth century Economic History of Nigeria* (Madison: African Studies Program, 1998), 2

<sup>12</sup> Ogunremi, G.O. 1996. 'Traditional Factors Production in Pre-Colonial Economy' in Ogunremi, G.O. and Faluyi, E.K. *Economic History of West Africa*. Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication. P. 34

<sup>13</sup> Ogunremi, G.O. 1996. 'Traditional Factors Production in Pre-Colonial Economy'

also the pawnship tradition whereby creditor gets returns for money by engaging the services of his debtor's children on his plantation or business.<sup>14</sup> Put differently, it is a cultural practice of using human beings as collateral for loans.

From the above, therefore, the child is conditioned by a setting provided by both the immediate family and the community at large to develop an equipped and functioning adult for the progress of the society. Lev Vygotsky describes this as the “zone of proximal development.”<sup>15</sup> In this way children became particularly useful in the production process like planting and harvesting. Households that are not involved in such aspects of production engage their children in other forms of trade or craft making like weaving. In which case the child serves under the master craftsman who apparently would be the head of the household until about the time the child is equally old enough to carry out the same task independently or alongside the head of the household. In some cases, the child works out of his/her immediate household as an apprentice. Such experiences would last for as long as their agreement is binding. The experiences have also been captured thus;

To learn an indigenous occupation, boys apprenticed either under their fathers or other male specialists from a very early age. This apprenticeship was known as ikose. Little boys from about the age of six that trained as blacksmiths were first given the monotonous and least dangerous task of alternately lifting and depressing the machinery before they were taught more specialized smelting skills. Like boys, girls were initially given light tasks and slowly progressed to harder work as they learned from assisting and imitating older women in their domestic and economic duties. Girls who learned to trade first accompanied their mothers to the market to observe and assist, and later became responsible for trading in their mother's absence..<sup>16</sup>

Hence, children play very crucial roles at this level but were not saddled with so much burden than they can bear. Sources of labour are by no means limited to children alone but their experience during the time is viewed as a training ground.

Just as it is operated at the family level, the child equally has important roles to play in the community. Societal expectations at this stage determine many times the standards set at the family level as a microcosm of the society. Hence, while there were social expectations, in terms of work reserved for children of various age groups at the community level, families also allocated responsibilities to their children on what was considered appropriate for their age. The idea is to inculcate in the child through participation in work the sense of perseverance, a responsibility to himself and others, and imbibe moral values. It becomes a social instrument to prepare the child for adult life.<sup>17</sup>

The contemporary notion of using the child to make money or in any other exploitative means could be found during the colonial period of the country's history,<sup>18</sup> as against development during the precolonial period. The exploitive economic policies of the colonial government set into motion the conception that has now become the parameters by which a child is dealt with. First, at the advent of European missionaries, western education was promoted and encouraged among the people. But this effort did not receive an overwhelming welcome planned because it portends a grave danger to the economic survival of the families.

The advent of the missionaries in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also brought a new dimension to the work pattern in Yorubaland contrary to what existed in the pre-colonial period. At the period, there emerged a gendered regime where boys and girls were separated in the classes. The separation was not merely restricted to their gender alone but determine what they learn. In other words, they are learning somewhat different things- there was gender-specific work-under the same conditions. These efforts by the missionaries brought about new engagements for children being groomed for adulthood and it conflicted sharply with traditional roles. A consequence of this was observed in Abeokuta where; women traditionally spun cotton while men tailored clothes because, at that time, only men's clothes required extensive tailoring. In contrast, at the mission schools, girls were taught sewing and embroidery while boys were excluded from these classes because missionaries regarded dressmaking as women's work. The resulting tension led to women being banned from tailoring by the indigenous government in 1853.<sup>19</sup>

The argument was that girls have a role within the family which largely cannot and should not be neglected in favour of the opportunities obtainable from the experience within the formal setting. Parents, therefore, supported the girls to engage actively in building themselves into their traditional roles within the family. While boys were seen as those who would most likely succeed in the western educational environment.

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<sup>14</sup> Toyin Falola, “Pawnship in Colonial Southwetsrn Nigeria,” in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 247.

<sup>15</sup> Lev Vygotsky, 1929. *The Problem of the Cultural Development of the Child*

<sup>16</sup> Alanamu, T. 2016. Yoruba Childhood. *Transition*, No. 121, *Childhood* (2016), pp. 92-106

<sup>17</sup> Toyin Falola and Ann O'Hear, “The Nigerian Economy in the Nineteenth century: An Overview,” in Toyin Falola and Ann O'Hear, *Studies in the Nineteenth Century Economic History of Nigeria* (Madison: African Studies Program, 1998),

<sup>18</sup> Adelaja Odutola Odukoya, “Child Labor in Nigeria: Historical Perspective”, *Sub-Saharan Africa: Western Africa*, 2011, 234

<sup>19</sup> Alanamu, T. 2016. Yoruba Childhood. *Transition*, No. 121, *Childhood* (2016), pp. 92-106

With the incursion of traders and missionaries seeking the protection of the interest of their home country, the territory came ultimately under the British colonial administration. During the early period of the British encroachment into the territory that later became known as Nigeria, policies such as; taxation, the Native House Rule Ordinance of 1901 and the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903,<sup>20</sup> were put in place. At the core of these policies was the measure to enforce labour for all the adult, including males and females, to serve in public places. The policy stipulated an age bracket; for males between the ages of fifteen and fifty, and the females between the ages of fifteen and forty-five. With the operation of the indirect rule system, the Native House Rule Ordinance reposed the powers to recruit by any means mostly forced labour for public works. Ofonagoro, pointed out that the laws were well designed to empower the chiefs to employ the services of the local police to apprehend anyone fleeing from their service. He contends that the laws more or less served as an instrument of re-imposing slavery upon the people.<sup>21</sup> Percy Anderson, a British colonial official noted: "how is the administration to be carried out if we cannot go to the Head of a House and demand carriers and paddlers? How is the work of sanitation, roadmaking and clearing to be carried on if we cannot hold the Head of the house responsible for furnishing the necessary labour?"<sup>22</sup>

The colonial administration, it should be emphasized, ensured that colonies were self-financing and for this reason taxes were levied on the people through their rulers so that they maximize their seemingly exploitative interest. The taxes measured a lot higher compared to what the people had been used to. This economic policy brought about a whole new harsh and unfavourable economic reality. The reality introduced largely more communal responsibilities and even individual expectations and goals placed on the people the demand to engage every means necessary to measure up within the new economic reality. This led to a renewed effort to monetize child labour. This became an effort that encouraged the introduction of the pawnship system under the colonial administration. Quoting Denton, a colonial officer in Nigeria, Falola observes: "the imposition of the colonial rule provided the opportunity for pawnship to spread. Pawnship became common among the Ijebu following the British conquest."

Following from the above, the increasing demand for high taxation necessitated or ignited the peoples already fading interest in pawnship. To say the least, it became commercialized during the period and as Falola argued "the colonial state, despite occasional attacks on the institution, encouraged its continuity. In the first place, the demand for cash crops required farm labour and workers in the distributive network. Social and political changes affected access to labour and thereby made pawnship to thrive."<sup>23</sup> The implication of this for the society was indeed grave. The poverty level within the society increased remarkably and this was because the colonial administration desired more than any other thing to maximize their profit regardless of the conditions under which the people operated. The people equally had no choice but to keep up with the new standard and pay the required dues to continue their livelihood in society. As the pressure increased for struggling families, parents and the older members of families and households began to look up to children as contributors to family income and burden bearers as well.

The entire region experienced remarkable growth in industries and commercial interest. Far more than the previous time's attention was drawn to the region as one of the most conducive regions in which an individual could attain economic prosperity. The perception derived from the better living conditions that could be observed in selected cities. Some of these towns and cities helped to facilitate foreign trade which invariably advanced the revenues of the central government from about \$2.7 million in 1900 to \$13.2 million in 1945.<sup>24</sup> The prevailing factors invariably led to the influx of migrants from the rural areas to the prominent cities of Lagos and Ibadan at the time. A detail consideration of the moving population accounts for children and young persons as the highest in the composition.<sup>25</sup> With the combination of poverty and the declining values at the family setting, most of the children and young people had no formal skills to fit into the urban climate. Hence, they were mostly condemned to survive on whatever comes or is available to them. In this condition, hardly could the ideals of social justice be given any consideration.

### **Interrogating Postcolonial Development**

Beyond the colonial period, Nigeria staggered through the first ten years of independence, namely 1960-1970, battling for its political survival in the face of daunting nation-building problems. During this period the country had set in motion its economic plans, the first of which commenced in 1962 to the year 1968. It must be noted that this was the first in a series of systematic economic planning that was set in motion at the end of the Second World War. It came under the directive of the Secretary of State for the Colonies calling on the government under the British colonies to design a 10-year

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, "An Aspect of British Colonial Policy in Southern Nigeria: The Problems of Forced labor and Slavery, 1895-1928," in Boniface Obichere (ed.), *Studies in Southern Nigerian History* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 222.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Ibekwe Ofonagoro, "An Aspect of British Colonial Policy in Southern Nigeria..."

<sup>22</sup> CO/520/107, "Native House Rule Ordinance," minutes by Percy Anderson, 18/12/1911.

<sup>23</sup> Toyin Falola, "Pawnship in Colonial Southwestern Nigeria," in Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, *Pawnship in Africa*, 246.

<sup>24</sup> Lawal, A. 1979. *A History of Financial Administration of Nigeria, 1900-1945*. Ph.D Thesis, University of Lagos, 1-15

<sup>25</sup> Laurent Fourchard, 2006. "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria (1920-1960)," *Journal of African History* 46, 115-137

economic and social development plan of their different territories. Nigeria as a nation, therefore, executed four National Development Plans namely; 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980, with the last coming between 1981-1985.

The first of the plan, 1962-1968, incorporated the development of agriculture, trade and industry, power and electricity, transport and communication, water, education, health and social welfare. At the beginning the plan had ample resources to service its prosecution and thus across the country the effort by the plan led to the successful completion of projects like the; Port Harcourt Oil Refinery, the Nigerian Security and Minting Plant, etc.<sup>26</sup> Economist has adjudged the performance of this Plan to be an impressive one being the first effort carried out by Nigerians for Nigerians. By the effort, the Gross Domestic Product had an outstanding growth as the economy recorded an increase of 5 per cent per annum through the period. This plan faced a lot of setbacks ranging from inadequate infrastructure to poor saving and capital inflow, coupled with regional rivalry and political turmoil, however, the most devastating constraint of the Plan was the outbreak of the civil war which spanned from 1967 to 1970.<sup>27</sup>

Following the end of the civil war in 1970, the Second Development Plan was set in motion. The plan was to span a period of four years, that is, 1970 to 1974. Its main goal was to restructure an already war crumbled economy and as much as possible reignite a new stream of economic and social development in the country at large. More specifically, therefore, the plan stressed the importance of speeding up the growth of the nation and working out a more progressive means of eliminating the overbearing dominance of foreigner on the economy. In order to execute these, the states were assuming a more effective hold on the economy and equally fostered a sense of a direct form of participation in the economy to stimulate an encompassing national economic growth. Besides, the effort by the state was also geared towards fostering self-reliance, social justice and equitable distribution of resources. However, there was a noticeable challenge to achieve the distribution of resources among the people. Needless to say but this had its impact upon the teeming population of young people and children particularly in the southwest region.<sup>28</sup>

The Third National Development Plan between the period 1975 to 1980, was at the wake of the oil boom. Designed to be a massive expenditure programme compared to the previous plan. In a way, the plan reaffirmed the national objectives articulated in the Second Plan. But this time around with more money to spend, the Plan pursued vigorously a more even distribution of income, cutting down the rate of unemployment, manpower development, balanced development, more effective indigenization effort and economic diversification. At this point, crude oil has taken the advantage over agricultural production at a magnitude and scale that the economy largely relied on it. It was the strategy of the administration to bankroll the Plan with the proceed accruing from the sale of crude oil.

Beginning from the 1970s the country witnessed the oil boom which within a short time turned around for good the prosperity of the country. The boom created the impression that the country had so much to spend with little or no concern by successive administration, both military and civil rule, to strategically plan on effective means of sustainability. According to Muritala Monsuru,<sup>29</sup> it was expected that the nation would have gained remarkably from the fact that the country's economy was doing well with a record high in terms of production. This became observable in the rapid industrialization drive, effort at income distribution, significant measure at diversification of the economy, renewed effort at alleviating poverty, along with high foreign exchange earnings and reserve. On the contrary, therefore, Nigeria as a whole topped the list of countries of the world with an unfortunate level of poverty, poor health care systems, a high maternal mortality rate, with a low life expectancy, production and manufacturing at a low level, with a largely poor standard of living that hardly could be reckoned with. Progressively, the country witnessed a rapid upsurge in rural-urban migration. As more people began to move into the urban areas, they became enlarged and in some other situations, new settlements emerged.<sup>30</sup>

By the period 1981 to 1985, the Fourth National Development Plan has been initiated. The Plan was formulated to serve as a continuation of effort already in place in the previous plan, however, its features were to be executed at a more grander scale. The focus here was on sectors like; the agriculture, transport and communication, trade and industry, along with town and country planning. For whatever the reason, the plan lacked careful strategy and systematic implementation. These were so because projects as the steel mills and the River Basin Authority received close attention while projects like the Third Mainland Bridge, development of the new Capital Territory at Abuja and the Universal Primary Education Programme, unfortunately, became abandoned during the time. Most relevant to the study right here is the neglect that the Universal Primary Education received. This neglect it could be argued had its implication on the growing population of

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<sup>26</sup> Edward J.A. 1988. *Development Planning in Nigeria*, Ibadan; University Press Limited. P.7

<sup>27</sup> Okigbo, Pius. 1993. *Change and Crisis in the Management of the Nigerian Economy*. In *Essays in the Public Philosophy of Development*. Enugu; Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Limited. P. 26

<sup>28</sup> Ukuw, I.U. 1995. *Government and Public Policy*. In Asiwaju, G. and Areola, O. *Nigeria: The First 25 Years*. Ibadan; Ibadan University Press. P. 79

<sup>29</sup> Muritala, M. 2017. *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Exploration*. In Adesina O.C. *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century: History, Governance and Society*. Ibadan; Connel Publications. P.44

<sup>30</sup> Opoko et al 2014. 'Trends in Urbanization: Implication for Planning and Low-Income Housing Delivery in Lagos' *Architecture Research* 2014, 4(1A): 15-26.

young people and children. Of course, without the hope of education in an economy that appeared to have been violated, as it would be pointed out, meant they would have to consider other options. At this point, the country's economy had begun to nose dive, with average families already bearing the unpleasant experiences that came with it.<sup>31</sup>

By the middle of the 1980s, measures were put in place to assuage the already deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country under the military leadership of General Ibrahim Babangida. Fundamentally, there was the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the World Bank. Precisely in 1986, the programme, in a sense halted the growth of the public sector with many public enterprises privatized and others became commercialized. By 1994 a record total of 55 public enterprises had been privatized by public offers on the Nigerian Stock Exchange market. With a good working environment, a good number of the privatized firms on the list of the stock exchange thrived with great profits and impacted the economy of the country at large by contributing goods and services without depleting the nation's treasury.<sup>32</sup> However, the conditions attached to the measure became counterproductive to the point that it aggravated the economic crisis in the land with devastating consequences. In clear terms, the measure brought about untold devaluation and inflation on the economy.<sup>33</sup>

A combination of other factors has also played out making the situation more complex. It is apt to note the decline of the extended family structure within the urban context equally put children into conditions that made the practice of social justice difficult. Contrary to the objectives of social justice, the situation has merely brought about impoverishment, marginalization and great fragmentation of the nuclear family under harsh economic realities and hardly could anyone be held accountable.

### Contemporary Development

The reality within the Nigeria polity has in a way taken the worst turn through time. Of course, since October 1 1960, when Nigerians were saddled with the responsibility of stirring the reins of power of the country, they had control of both human and natural resources. There were from the start great expectations for the new period that the people hoped would bring prosperity and abundance in every sphere. As noted in the previous section the possibility of these expectations was further given a boost by the discovery of crude oil with so much prospect. The political leaders however wasted away the advantages that accrue from the sale through lack of planning, fraudulent appropriation of finances and unbridled corruption.

For the average family overtime, the struggle to devise survival strategies and coping mechanism to weather through their condition and equally hanging on vague promises by the different administrations. To cope, a viable option for this category of persons is to send the young out to work. As much as conditions like this still exist, a more pathetic case could be observed beginning from the early periods of the twenty-first century were children between the age of 6-15 fend for themselves on the street. Thus jeopardizing the principles of social justice. The phenomenon which this study has tagged "child breadwinners" is rapidly growing with attendant social consequences for society. In a historical and regional survey on child labour this was noted;

Roughly 30 per cent of children age five to fourteen are engaged in economic activities, but most of them work in combination with schooling. Only 4 per cent of boys, and 3 per cent of girls, engage in economic activities without attending school. More than 90 per cent of Nigerian children are in school, and the proportions of boys and girls are roughly equal. Overall, 4 per cent of children are "idle," neither in school nor engaged in economic activity, but this is confined to very young children. By age ten, nearly all children are in school or working, or both. About 14 per cent of children are already economically active by age five. Economic activity rates increase steadily by age until, by age fourteen, 35 per cent are working.<sup>34</sup>

Following from the above, an impression is created about the frequency of child economic activities across the nation at large. However, a closer look is considered by the Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala Polls. This is a country-specific polling service within the West Africa sub-region with a technical partnership with Gallup (USA). In their 2013 survey on the percentage of children involved in economic activities, they noted that the Northwest of the country had the highest percentage compared to other regions. The survey shows that they have an 83 per cent figure of children involved in one form of economic activities or the other. The southeast had 81 per cent, with the Northcentral having 19 per cent. The survey indicates that the Southwest comes second with 81 per cent. The survey further suggested that the most common type of work children engaged in were street hawking with about 68 per cent of the children considered for the survey. The

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<sup>31</sup> Mbanefoh, G.F. 1995. The Economy. In Asiwaju, G. and Areola, O. *Nigeria: The First 25 Years*. Ibadan; Ibadan University Press. P. 38

<sup>32</sup> Daisi, K. 1999. The Emerging private sector Leadership Role in the Economic Development of Nigeria, in Eperokun, O. et al. (eds), *Nigerias Bumpy Ride into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: In-Depth Analysis By Experts*. Ibadan; House of Lords. P. 107

<sup>33</sup> Mkandawire, P. T. and Olukoshi, A. eds. 1995. *Between Liberalization and Oppression: The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA

<sup>34</sup> Risto F. Harma. 2009. Child Labour in Nigeria. In Hugh D. Hindman (ed) *The World of Child Labour: An Historical and Regional Survey*. London; Routledge P. 225-228

other is begging which account for about 31 per cent. Children economic activities are however not limited to hawking and begging alone, they are just the most common in many urban centres in the region.

A breadwinning child here is conceived as that individual who does not qualifies as an adult yet has a responsibility to contributes sufficiently to the well-being of his family of orientation or even the street group he/she belongs to. In their effort to meet their supposed goals of survival they engage in various works, for instance, street or traffic hawking, some others might engage in the buying and selling of common goods, equally a good number offer their services in one form of menial job or another. Descriptions just given, could be considered legitimate.<sup>35</sup> In some other cases, many of these child breadwinners are engaged in anti-social vices, extortion and the likes to earn a living.

According to UNICEF children work in the informal sector throughout the country, because they are limited in skills. They categorized children economic engagement into three broad categories namely; work in public places such as market and major streets, work in cottage industries and mechanical workshops and domestic service in a private household. Those who are engaged in the public settings would include street vendors, shop and markets stall minders, beggars, shoe-shine boys, car washers and watchers, scavengers and head loaders in the market.

This categorization as explained above would in way capture children at a broad scale. But it must be noted that there are some children with roofs over their head and probably still under their parents while there are those who do not live with their parents or even guardians but on the streets. This brings us to another categorization which describes essentially street children. These are mainly those who live and work on the street and those who merely work on the streets full or part-time but who retire daily to their homes at night. Street children have populated major urban and rural areas nationwide. They are located at strategic points to facilitate their economic activities. In the Southwest particularly in Lagos, Ibadan and other sprawling urban centres, children work as vendors or hawkers, beggars, scavengers, street traders and bus conductors and so on. The majority are boys while there are a few girls.<sup>36</sup> The phenomenon of street families, a variant of street living, is also becoming prominent, with serious implications for the survival of children. Destitute families including children living under bridges, public buildings, uncompleted buildings, markets and major streets and alleys are no longer a rarity especially bearing in mind the phenomenon of rural-urban migration and displacements.

To put this in perspective, from the 1990s there was a surge in the trend of having children and youngsters render some form services or menial task for pay. Most of the children who are engaged here are links in a structural economic chain. These children would have those who supply or make available to them the goods they would have to hawk. And their remuneration is also determined by the supplier based on conditions which the child has the opportunity to negotiate. Experiences with some of the children indicates that their goods are either provided by their parents or an external supplier. The external suppliers could be a commercial firm or even an independent private individual who wants the children to take their goods beyond the shelves in the market to high traffic point and other business districts. At the end of business activities for the day such children get to receive some form of commission on whatever goods sold. On the contrary, if they are receiving suppliers of their goods from family, mostly their mothers or aunties or guardians, their incomes become a contribution to the family purse. In this case, they hawk edibles such sachet water, boiled eggs, snacks etc. Though it is not limited to these because at some other times they are found with household articles. An illustration of this is the case of Kazeem, who described his effort thus, "...I am not bothered, since this assists me in contributing my own quota to the upliftment of the family. My mother always makes me understand that we have no helper but God. My father is down with a strange ailment, I and my mother sell yams to keep the family."<sup>37</sup>

For the second categorization, that is, those who work in cottage industries and mechanical workshop, they are most times apprentices in mechanic and vulcanizers workshops, metal workshop, carpenters workshop, tailors, weavers, barbers, restaurant and other forms of catering works, bus conductors and so on. In these experiences, the children here are not as much as the first categorization but they are equally substantial. The children in this category are taken as apprentices under a master or a madam in charge of the business. Just as it had been observed in the precolonial and colonial period there is gender categorization in respect of the work expected for both girls and boys. It is commonplace to find largely boys in craft business like wood, iron and metal works, barbing, to mention a few. While girls would be found to predominate in trade engagements like hairdressing and catering services.

As low as their income may be, returns are made to either parents or guardians, if available as their contribution to the family. With no immediate family available, they are left by themselves to determine how their income is spent. Without a doubt, a lot of children who grew up in this condition very much imbibe the values and skills which ultimately

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<sup>35</sup> Oloko, B. A. 1994. Children's Street Trading in Urban Nigeria: Dilemma of Modernisation of Tradition, Patricia Greenfield and Rodney Cocking (eds) in *Cross Cultural Roots of Minor Child Development*, Northvale, New Jersey, pp. 197-224

<sup>36</sup> Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria: A Wake Up Call (Situation Assessment and Analysis 2001) pub. UNICEF/FGN, 2001

<sup>37</sup> 'Nigerian Children under the Yoke of Abuse' Sunday Tribune 10 April, 2005. P. 10

forms their means of survival. It is even all the more emphasized to children in the urban by low-income earners that to survive in that environment would mean to carry out such task. But as much as this effort of socialization is valid an underlying interest remains social justice or better still economic well-being. Arguably, “the money earned by child workers has become a significant part of the family income...”<sup>38</sup> Hence, a relatively high number of poor families engage their children in one economic activity or another, consequently leading to many children becoming breadwinners for the family.

The third categorization of child economic activity is that which relates to domestic workers in the households of above-average families or simply more prosperous urban homes. In this case, parents release their children to either friends and relatives and at other times to total strangers. There are usually middlemen whose job it is to facilitate such a transaction. Parents are mostly forced into this by their prevailing circumstance informed by poverty. Since most children in this category work from the house, they are mostly less observable compared to the previous categories. In this case, hundreds of thousands of young people are engaged as domestic staff or better known as house-helpers across the states in the southwest. Their responsibilities do not have many boundaries as it comes in an open-ended form where they could be engaged in whatever task as may be instructed by their employer. In this category, one would expect that children who are living in an environment of a seemingly well to do family would equally enjoy certain privileges. On the least, the desire for social justice should be met. It is mostly not the case as the children are subjected to very harsh treatment with meals that are far less nutritious to their employers. Their money may not be paid directly to them as they would want to keep them in a close check. Money, therefore, goes directly to the family or their guardian.

Despite the unfriendly environment they do not give up but rather brace up for the challenges. Knowing fully well that they must survive. They must be able to meet or provide, as it were, a basic ration for themselves as well as their home. But with the abject poverty in the land with no sustainable agenda by politicians, the chains of poverty are hardly broken. According to Hope<sup>39</sup> poverty in Africa has been described historically as a vicious cycle. Low-income families in this class strive with endless effort to produce and train their children within the conditions they have equally emerged. In other words, poverty becomes a generational trend with great consequences on the health, well-being and productivity of the families and of course the society at large.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to historicize developments as regards child breadwinners and the question of social justice in southwest Nigeria. And the argument is that social justice is key for the development of any society, but with the unabated rise of child breadwinners across the region, resulting from the dismal failure of leadership, the quest by a group of breadwinners is just an effort in futility. Beginning from the precolonial period, where the concept of child breadwinner had no place, though a shadow of it existed but not in principle, to the colonial period where it seemingly became entrenched by law and practice. The study continued through the post-colonial period interrogating successive agenda at development. Contemporary development was then considered because of the issues relating to the phenomenon of child breadwinners and the quest for social justice in the region.

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<sup>38</sup> Child Labor: A Threat to Future, *This Day* Newspaper, August 3, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Hope, K. R. 2002. *From Crisis to Renewal: Development Policy and Management in Africa*. Leiden: Brill Publishers.

<sup>40</sup> Marshall, J. 2003. *Children and Poverty: Some Questions Answered*. London: Chronic Poverty Research Center, Save the Children