

CHILD’S RIGHT: THE NEED FOR MEETING THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUNG ONES

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Abstract

This paper examined the child’s right and the need for meeting the learning and development of our young ones. It also stresses government policy on the ways adult abuse and exploits children. The paper further highlights what government says about child’s right to education. It was recommended that there should be state and grass root conferences on the rights of child.

Introduction

Children are the greatest asset, highest legacy any parent could have and the future of every nation. Therefore, they need to be nurtured and helped to develop into responsible and productive adults who will take over the affairs of the society. Since children are mentally, physically and emotionally immature, they therefore need special protection and care both before and after birth in order to enable them develop a full and balanced personality. Children also need to live within the family, an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding in conditions of freedom, dignity and security. Based upon this, child’s right should not be neglected but put into consideration for the learning and development of our younger ones. Hence, the need for the child’s right acts of 2003.

This paper therefore focuses on the following:

- i. Child’s right and the need for meeting learning and development of our young ones.
- ii. Ways adult abuse and exploits children.
- iii. What government says about child’s right to education.

Child’s right and the need for meeting the learning and development of our younger ones

A child according to United Nation Convention (1989) is any human being below the age of eighteen (18) years. Oxford advanced Learners dictionary (2006) defines a child as a young human being who is not yet an adult. Cornell University sees a child as a person not a sub person and the parent has absolute interest and possession of the child. In formal education terms therefore, a child is someone whose age falls within the pre-school, primary and secondary level of education and pre-primary school children are children whose age fall from 0-5 years.

Children's rights are the perceived human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to the young including their right to association with both biological parents, human identity as well as the basic need for food, universal basic education and health care. There are people who claim that children are disqualified by virtue of their inability to have rights and Nigeria is actively promoting and advocating the rights of the Child's Right Act which came into force on 31st July, 2003. The act demanded that in all actions, welfare and well being, children must be of paramount consideration. The child is conferred with the rights to the following:-

- i. Life, survival and balanced development.
- ii. A name and registration at birth.
- iii. Dignity and respect.
- iv. Privacy, family life and parental care, protection and maintenance.
- v. Education- free and compulsory primary and encouragement of secondary and tertiary education
- vi. Health service, leisure, recreation and cultural activities.
- vii. Freedom of association and peaceful assembly and thought, conscience and religion with the necessary guidance and directions of his or her parents.
- viii. From all forms of discrimination
- ix. Enter into contract for necessities of life.
- x. Protection of the unborn child against harm
- xi. Protection of the born child against child marriage and betrothal.
- xii. Tattoos and skin mark.
- xiii. Exploitative labour, except non-harmful labour within the family.
- xiv. Sale, hire or use for the purpose of hawking, begging for alms, prostitution.
- xv. Sexual abuse and exploitations.
- xvi. Economic and other forms of exploitation.
- xvii. Exposure to use, production and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances
- xviii. Use in other criminal activities
- xix. Abduction, removal and transfer from lawful custody
- xx. Recruitment into the armed forces.
- xxi. Harmful publications

According to United Nations Convention, children's rights are fundamental freedoms and the inherent rights of all human beings below the age of 18. These rights apply to every child irrespective of the child's parent/legal guardian's race, colour, sex, creed or other status. The essential message is equality of opportunity. Girls should be given the same opportunity as boys. All children should have the same rights and should be given the same opportunity to enjoy an adequate standard of living.

Children are innocent, trusting and full of hope. Their childhood should be happy and loving. Their lives should mature gradually as they gain experiences but for many children the reality of childhood is altogether different. Many babies will die before they celebrate their first birthday. More girl children will be killed at birth, some children aged 6-14years will not be in school, some in work.

All children are born with fundamental freedoms and all human beings have some inherent rights. The four basic rights of children are:-

- i. The right to survival-to life, health, nutrition, name and nationality.
- ii. The right to development-to education, care, leisure and recreation.
- iii. The right to protection- from exploitation, abuse, neglect.
- iv. The right to participation- to expression, information, thought and religion.

These rights of children help in one way or the other to promote their learning and development.

Government Policy on the Ways Adult Abuse and Exploit Children

Child abuse is the physical, sexual, emotional mistreatment or neglect of a child. According to the Journal of child Abuse and neglect, child abuse is any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

Some parents, adults, care givers take the advantage of the fact that some children are innocent, helpless and harmless abuse and exploit them. Some adults engage in child trafficking. Children suffer from hunger and homelessness; work in harmful conditions, high infant mortality, deficient care and limited opportunities for basic education. A child need not to live such a life therefore child's right act which was passed into law in 2003 served as cure for the sufferings of Nigerian children. Part 111 section 21-40 of the child rights act provides for the protection of the rights of the child through the prohibition of child betrothal, trafficking, child marriage, infliction of tattoos and skin marks. The law provides that no child shall be subjected to forced or exploitative labour or employed to work in any capacity except by a member of his/her family in light work or required to lift, carry or move any heavy objects or employed as a house help outside his family environment. Any person who contravenes this section shall be liable to a fine of N50, 000 or five years imprisonment or both. The law also provides that no person has right to buy, sell, hire or dispose of or deal in a child. A child should not be used for the purpose of begging for alms, guiding beggars, prostitution, domestic or sexual labour. No person shall have sexual intercourse with a child. A person who contravenes this section commits an offence of rape and shall be liable to life imprisonment.

In Canada, child abuse and exploitation are prohibited by the criminal code. For example offenders may be charged under the criminal code for assaulting children. At the provincial territorial level, child protection legislation permits intervention to ensure children's safety and welfare.

Despite all these efforts by the government to provide cure for child abuse and exploitation, child trafficking is still going on unabated with its negative influence on children.

What Government Says About Child's Right to Education

The right of every child is to have equal access to education irrespective of their colour, creed, nationality, ethnicity or social and financial status. The Nigerian government is committed to the provision of the child's right to education by way of formulating policies and arranging for their implementation. It must be pointed out that since our constitution puts education on the concurrent list, the federal, state and local government has a share in making policies.

The Nigerian government signed and adopted the UN convention on the rights of child, the OAU charter on the rights and welfare of the child and Jomtien declaration and platform for international documents were making education available for all, eradication of illiteracy. According to United Nations Human Rights, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and a conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. The declaration on the rights of the child:-

- i. Every child that is hungry must be fed. The child that is sick must be nursed; children with special needs must be helped.
- ii. Every child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
- iii. Every child must be put in a position that will lead him to earn a livelihood and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
- iv. Every child must be brought up with the idea that its talents are best employed when devoted to the service of its fellow men.

Knowledge now forms a major component of all human activity.-economic, social and cultural and has become a major creative force of all developed societies, hence creating new knowledge. Knowledge is gained from access to education hence an essential element for the development of all children. Human resource development has become the most important capital in the present age and the success of any society lies in harnessing it. All government and individual who truly believe in human and child's right and the equality of all must surely believe in providing equal access to all information and tools required for children's education irrespective of a child's colour, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age or financial status.

According to the International Convention on Economic, social and Cultural Rights, the right to education includes the right to free, compulsory primary education for all. Hence, the tools and information required for a child's education should not be withheld for the monetary gain of a few.

Conclusion

Child's right restores the confidence and self esteem in children and improves their status. It also enables children with disabilities to enjoy their rights fully as it provides special measures for their care and protection. All sectors of the society including private/government and the people will benefit from the production of well rounded and self confident future leaders.

Therefore, government should be serious and be ready to take action against any person that will violate this child's right act.

Recommendation

- ◆ This topic can be further studied empirically to find out what strategies could be used to make sure that children's right are protected.
- ◆ There should be enlightenment programs in the mass media on the need for child's right.
- ◆ There should be state and grassroots conference on the rights of the child.
- ◆ Child's right unit should be established in the federal and state ministry of education.
- ◆ Government should endeavor to see that child's right act is protected and carried out.

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