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IMPEDIMENTS TO THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOR

A critical review of child labor policies and laws of
Liberia

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Abstract

Child labor is a pressing issue in Liberia, as it is in many other developing countries. Poverty is a significant factor that drives child labor in Liberia, as many families rely on the income generated by their children to survive. While the government has developed numerous policy interventions and laws to address the issue, recent reports show that the prevalence of child labor within the ages of 5-17 is still very high. This study aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of governments efforts by critically examining key policies and laws set up by government in relation to established international legal standards to combat the scourge. It relies on Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) policy analysis approach.

The analysis revealed that there are gaps in policy and law that has stalled government's efforts in achieving its resolution to reducing the prevalence of child labor. The minimum age for employment is below international standards, hazardous work is allowed for children aged 16 and above, domestic work is not included in the list of hazardous work, light work is not defined or regulated, and penalties for violating child labor laws are weak. In addition, enforcement of child labor laws is weak, particularly in the informal sector, where most child labor takes place.

These gaps are incompatible with international standards hindering progress towards eliminating child labor in the country. This study argues that effective policies are crucial to child labor elimination in Liberia, without which children will continue to be engaged in exploitative work which puts them at risk and denies them of their fundamental human rights.

Keywords

Child Labor, Child Right, Hazardous, Worst Forms of Labor, Protection, minimum age, work, harm

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Introduction

Child labor (CL) has a negative impact on children's fundamental rights and national development, and this has become a major international concern. This concern stems from the negative effects of hazardous work on children's physical, psychological, and emotional development. Child labor also prevents children from enrolling in or attending school on a regular basis, preventing them from acquiring basic fundamental skills and limiting their future opportunities.

According to the 2020 ILO global estimate, 160 million children are engaged in child labor and one out of every ten children work in what the International Labor Organization (ILO) describe as the "worst form of labor". These children are involved in activities that are extremely detrimental to their health, education, and overall well-being. Despite recording some good progress in eliminating child labor in Asia and the Pacific, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, the 2020 ILO report lamented that the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is deteriorating, with an estimated 86.6 million child laborers (ages 5 to 17) between 2008 and 2020. This surge calls into question whether the international commitment (SDG TARGET 8.7) to eliminate child labor by 2025 can be met.¹

¹ An International Labor Organization Child Labor Report, "Global Estimates 2020, trends and the road forward," https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_800278.pdf

1 Background to study

Liberia, a Sub-Saharan African country whose economy and social development have suffered set-back as a result of a 7-year civil war between 1989 and 1996, as well as an Ebola epidemic in 2014 and 2015², is also facing a child labor challenges which manifests in various forms and cuts across different sectors and regions in Liberia. The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) has designated it as one of four countries in the world that employ children in the rubber industries, which constitute the country's largest export. It is believed that majority of children which amounts to about 41% and under the age of 15 are heavily involved in agricultural and mining activities, where they are subjected to working long hours in hazardous and exploitative conditions.³ There are also records of other children working in household services, engaged in fishing activities, street hawking, and transactional sex (Sex for money, food etc). Furthermore, some children work in the informal sectors as vendors, porters, truck loaders, and construction workers (crushing rocks and digging sands). These treacherous working conditions rob them not only of their dignity, but also of their right to an education, good physical and mental health, and protection.⁴

Haven recognized the hazards and negative impact on children, the government of Liberia introduced specific measures to curb the prevalence of child labor. Some of which includes the introduction of the children law of Liberia in 2011, primarily introduced to protect children against harmful work, the adoption and institutionalization of the 2018-2023 Pro-Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PADP) which builds on the gains of the Agenda for Transformation (2012-2017), and seeking to address factors that provoke child labor, the Liberia National Gender Policy (2009) which aimed at addressing socio-cultural perceptions

² A 2015 world health organization report, "Liberia: a country and its capital are overwhelmed with Ebola cases"

<https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/one-year-into-the-ebola-epidemic/liberia-a-country-and-its-capital-are-overwhelmed-with-ebola-cases>.

³ United States Department of Labor 2017 Report, "Actions to Reduce Child Labor (ARCH) in Areas of Rubber Production in Liberia", <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/actions-reduce-child-labor-arch-areas-rubber-production>

⁴ United States Department of Labor report: 2011, "Findings on the worst forms of Child labor", https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2011/liberia.pdf

and practices that account for child labor vulnerabilities and the decent work act of 2015 which aims to promoting decent work in Liberia.

Despite these interventions, the issue of child labor still lingers and child labor and its consequences continue to eat deep into the country's national fabric. More out-of-school children are being recorded, primary school enrolment is low, and the poverty rate continues to rise.⁵ The failure of all of these plans and initiatives to achieve the intended positive outcome resulted in the establishment of the National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst form of Child Labor 2018. It is believed that the new framework will redirect the focus of relevant stakeholders including the government, development partners, and the general public to intensify the national response on child labor at all levels in order to create a deeper understanding of the risks and consequences of child labor as well and strive to reduce the prevalence by 50% by the year 2030.

1.1 Stament of problem

In order to make a clear statement of what this research problem is, there is need to understand the concept of policies and their importance. A policy is a plan of action that affects how people live their lives on a daily basis.⁶ Policies are also used to direct government action to attain social, political, and economic goals. Policies do more than simply announce a course of action;⁷ they are also established to achieve social transformation.⁸ In any case, depending on whether they are developed to respond to a problem or are intended to prevent one, policies can either be proactive or reactive. They can have a big impact on people's lives and communities, and they are essential for ensuring that government actions are in line with broader goals and objectives.

⁵ National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor: 2018 – 2030, developed by the National Steering Committee on Child Labor, A 2019 publication prepared with the support of the US government

⁶Gedifew Sewenet Yigzaw, "Collaborative Governance: A New Paradigm Shift for the Smart Cities" (2021), Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia, p.18

⁷ Jose Manuel Salum Tome, World Journal of Education (2020), "Public Policy or Government Programs? Are a Contribution to the Inclusion in Chile" Vol. 10, No. 5, Departamento De Educacion, Universidad Catolica De Temuco, Temuco, Chile

⁸ Ibid

Policies can also have significant impacts on individuals and communities in addition to their role in guiding government decisions and achieving outcomes. For example, policies related to child labor, healthcare, education, social welfare, and environmental protection can have far-reaching consequences for people's access to essential services, quality of life, and overall well-being. It is therefore essential that policies are designed and implemented in a way that takes into account the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders, particularly those who are most affected by their outcomes. They play an important role in promoting social justice and equity, address systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices which in the overall can help create a fairer and just society.

Liberia is one of many nations around the world with high incidences of child labor. The prevalence of child labor is a concerning issue that requires sustained efforts and effective policies to address. Despite the implementation several policies and legislation to combat the issue of child labor, the prevalence is still high⁹. In fact, the government's recently implemented National Action Plan alludes to the failure of previous intervention policies like the PADP, the AfT, the NAP 11 and the National Gender Policy which clearly suggest that there are clear gaps in policies. These measures are being questioned in light of their apparent ineffectiveness to address the issues of child labor in the country.

The absence of enforcement or implementation of these policies could be one reason why these policies have been unsuccessful. Although the government may have passed laws and procedures, it will be difficult to accomplish the desired results without sufficient funding and staff to monitor and enforce compliance. The lack of knowledge about the underlying reasons of child labor may also be a factor. Identification of the root factors, such as poverty, a lack of education if not adequately addressed by policy may not yield tangible results as seen in the USDOL report which reveals that there are still 33% (approximately 360,000) of children who are either engaged in forced domestic work, carrying out dangerous tasks in the agriculture sector, most specifically in the production of rubber, sugarcane, the mining of gold and diamonds. Others are also involved in sex trafficking and child prostitution, house hold

⁹ A 2021 article written by daily observer, "Liberia makes strides by tackling child labor"

<https://www.liberianobserver.com/liberia-makes-strides-tackling-child-labor#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Report%2C%20however,are%20working%2C%20the%20report%20says.>

farming, and street vending among others¹⁰. The involvement of children in these forms of work deprives them of their fundamental rights and negatively impacts their physical, emotional, and psychological development. Furthermore, it also affects their education¹¹, which is crucial for national development. It is evident that more needs to be done to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the country.

It is therefore important that policies formulated to solve these child labor problems are critically analyzed to better understand the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to address child labor and to identify areas for improvement. Analyzing child labor policies can help policymakers and stakeholders evaluate the impact of existing policies and programs and determine whether they are meeting their intended goals. It can also help identify gaps and potential unintended consequences. Additionally, a critical analysis of these policies will help provide an evidence-based recommendation for improving the situation of child labor and better protect children engaged in these kinds of child labor activities.

The ultimate goal of analyzing child labor policies is to ensure that all children have access to education, are protected from harmful labor practices, and are able to develop to their full potential. By analyzing child labor policies, decision-makers can work towards achieving this goal and improving the well-being of children and society as a whole.

1.2 Research Objective

Child labor is a pressing issue in Liberia, as it is in many other developing countries. Poverty is a significant factor that drives child labor in Liberia, as many families rely on the income generated by their children to survive. While the government has developed numerous policy

¹⁰ United States Department of Labor Report, 2017 “Actions to Reduce Child Labor (ARCH) in Areas of Rubber Production”, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/actions-reduce-child-labor-arch-areas-rubber-production>

¹¹ Unicef Report “Child labor and Exploitation” Child Labor deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycle of poverty”

<https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/child-labour-exploitation>

interventions and laws such as the National Action Plan on the elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor 2018 - 2030, a policy framework developed by the Government of Liberia to address the issue of child labor with the aim of reducing it by 50% by 2023 which is an effort in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations, the development of the Decent Work Act 2015, which is aimed at promoting decent work for all, including children, prohibiting child labor and sets a minimum age for employment at 18 years. The enactment, passage and implementation of the children Law 2011 which sets the rights of all Liberian children, the implementing the Education Sector Plan 2017-2021, which aims to improve access to education and increase enrollment rates and the ratification of some key international conventions which sets out a framework for combating the worst forms of child labor, these impacts have been limited, and many children continue to work.

Accordingly, this study aims to critically evaluate child labor in Liberia by examining three key policies and laws established by the government in a bid to understanding and identifying the impediments that have slowed down progress in combating child labor.

1.3 Research Questions

The key research questions that seek to achieve the purpose of this study are as follows:

1. How has the Liberian government defined or problematized the issue of child labor?
2. What are the impediments in laws and policies affecting Liberia's progress in eliminating child labor?
3. What are the existing gaps in Liberian labor law specific to child labor that are incompatible with international standards?

1.4 Determination of cases and Delimitation

The motivation for this study emerged during a trip I embarked to Liberia before the start of this thesis course in October 2022. During my time in Liberia, I saw children who had not reached adulthood engage in risky street selling activities and cross busy roads to sell their wares both at night and during the day, when they were supposed to be in school. My curiosity sparked a lengthy conversation with my friends, who then informed me of the intensity of the problem, which is mostly common in the agriculture industry and other

informal sectors. To fully understand why it has been difficult for African countries to eradicate child labor, I immediately considered starting my thesis research in the field of child labor.

Although it is not the primary goal of this study to look into the reasons why child labor persists in Liberia because there has been considerable research done in determining the primary causes of child labor in the country. However, to the best of my knowledge, there seem to be existing gaps in investigating the impediments to the implementation of already existing initiatives, policies and laws aimed at ending child labor for which this study aims to uncover and to provide valuable insights into how to overcome identified pitfalls and make progress towards ending child labor.

1.5 Ethical consideration

Given that the purpose of engaging in any type of research is to "understand real-life phenomena, study effective treatments, investigate behaviors, and improve lives in other ways," Bhandari (2021) contends that it is crucial for all researchers to abide by fundamental research principles. As a result, every research project must take certain factors into account, including safeguarding the rights of research participants, ensuring the research's validity, and maintaining academic or scientific integrity.¹² Accordingly, in the course of this study and in writing this Masters thesis, these principles will guide the researchers actions. Though, majority of the information used in this study are secondary data which already exist and are vastly available in secondary sources.

¹²Bhandari, Pritha, "Ethical Consideration in Reseach Types and Examples," An article published on October 18, 2021

1.6 Research method and theory

This study leans on the works of Bacchi "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) theory which focuses on critically examining how social problems are constructed and framed, and how these constructions shape policy responses and interventions.

Bacchi (2009) argues that policy is not a neutral or objective process but rather a deeply political one. She asserts that policies are not simply responses to preexisting problems, but rather shape and construct those problems through the way they are formulated and discussed.¹³ In other words, policies do not merely reflect social issues; they actively contribute to shaping how those issues are understood and addressed. Policy analysis focuses not only on what policies say they will do but also on how they frame and define the issues they aim to address.

This approach challenges traditional policy analysis methods, which tend to take policy problems as given and focus on technical solutions. Instead, she encourages policymakers and analysts to engage in a more reflexive and critical examination of policy discourses, asking questions such as who defines the problem, what aspects are included or excluded from the policy discussion, and whose interests are being served or marginalized.

Bacchi (2009) approach to public policy analysis, often referred to as the "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach, urges policymakers and analysts to engage in reflexive and critical examination. This involves questioning who defines the problem, what aspects are included or excluded from the policy discussion, and whose voices and interests are being prioritized or marginalized.¹⁴

While Bacchi's views on policy have been influential and well-received within certain academic circles, they have also attracted criticism and alternative perspectives from various scholars. Reductionist critics such as Fischer (2003) in Martin (2009) has raised concerns about the reductionist tendencies of Bacchi's approach. He argues that focusing solely on discourses and power dynamics may overlook other critical aspects of practical aspects of

¹³ Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analyzing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* Pearson Education Australia. pp. 3-47.

¹⁴ Ibid

policy implementation¹⁵. Additionally, Lewis (2008) in Angelique, et al. (2012) has raised concerns about the practicality and scalability of Bacchi's approach arguing that the level of detailed discursive analysis required may be challenging to implement in real-world policy contexts, particularly in terms of time and resource constraints. She argues that Bacchi's approach more theoretical and less practical in terms of offering concrete solutions or guidance for policymakers.

In anycase, It is important to note that these criticisms do not undermine the WPR contributions to policy analysis rather reflect alternative viewpoints and ongoing debates within the field. Policy analysis is a multidisciplinary and evolving field, and different scholars may offer diverse perspectives on theoretical frameworks and approaches. Policy recommendations implicitly embody the problem or issue they are created to solve because they specify what needs to change and it is necessary to describe an issue as a problem that needs to be solved when developing a policy to deal with it. It is possible to identify several discourses about policy problems, how these problems have been represented, and how these problems have been framed by using the WPR approach to critically analyze policy decisions. The "What is the problem represented to be?" approach offers a thorough way of understanding policy decisions as well as problems that have arisen or changed as a result of policy decisions.

Laws and legislation designed to address social concerns should be viewed as tools for identifying the issues they attempt to solve. Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be" demonstrates this view which differs from the presumption that policies should be implemented in order to solve problems. Rather, she argues that the "policies themselves actually reveals the problem and what needs to be changed". This approach seeks to reframe ideas in policy documents by focussing on and dissecting the problematization process itself. In other words, the WPR technique aids in revisiting how the problem is perceived and, consequently, how it is comprehended.

In relation to child labor policies, Bacchi's WPR approach would involve questioning how child labor is defined and represented as a policy problem. For example, is child labor seen as an issue of economic exploitation, a violation of human rights, a cultural practice, or a

¹⁵ Matti, S. (2009). "Exploring Public Policy Legitimacy: A Study of Belief-System Correspondence in Swedish Environmental Policy", Department of Business Administration and Social Sciences, Luleå University of Technology

combination of these factors? Who is seen as responsible for addressing the problem, and what kinds of solutions are proposed? Through this analysis, the WPR approach aims to identify how different actors and interests shape the policy agenda, and how particular policy solutions may reproduce or challenge existing power relations and social norms. This can be particularly relevant in the context of child labor policies, which often involve complex political and economic factors that may affect the lives and well-being of vulnerable children and families.

1.7 Method of analysis

"What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) approach will be used to analyze three key policy documents and laws of Liberia which are the Liberia Children Law of 2011, the Decent Work Act of 2015 and the 2018 to 2030 National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The WPR method focuses on critically examining how the problem of child labor is constructed and framed within these national documents and how these constructions shape policy responses and interventions. It would involve questioning the assumptions and narratives that underpin the problem of child labor.

Bacchi's WPR method proposed a set of six questions that are useful insights for any policy analysis as outlined below:

1. What's the 'problem' ... represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What presuppositions and assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?
Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where is this representation of the 'problem' produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? Bacchi, (2009, p. 2.)

In relation to child labor in Liberia, this study explores questions 1 and 4 out of the six questions which it believes will help address the research questions. The reason for the selecting these two questions is largely because including all six questions would require

extensive research and access to specific information and materials that are not readily available in the context of this thesis. Secondly, practical limitations necessitate narrowing the scope of the analysis to prevent it from becoming overly burdensome and lastly, the selection of these two questions was based on their relevance to the purpose and research question of this study. The other questions not selected were deemed less necessary for the analysis of child labor in Liberia.

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

Asking the question "What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policies?" in Bacchi's WPR approach is highly relevant for child labor policy analysis because it helps to critically examine how child labor is framed and understood within a particular policy context. Child labor is a complex social issue with multifaceted dimensions, including economic, social, cultural, and human rights aspects. Different policy approaches may prioritize certain aspects of the problem while overlooking others. Therefore, understanding how the problem of child labor is represented in specific policies is crucial for a comprehensive analysis.

By exploring the problem representation, this study helps to identify the discourses, narratives, and policy frames that shape the understanding of child labor. This includes identifying the causes, consequences, and proposed solutions that are emphasized or downplayed in the policy discourse. It helps to uncover the dominant narratives and ideologies that influence policy choices and actions.

Analyzing the problem representation in child labor policies allows for a critical examination of how child labor is defined, who is considered a child laborer, and which forms of work are included or excluded from the policy focus. It helps to assess whether the policy problem representation aligns with the lived realities of children engaged in labor and whether it captures the complexity and nuances of the issue.

2. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

Asking the question "What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?" in Bacchi's WPR approach is highly relevant for child labor policy analysis because it helps to uncover what aspects of the issue are excluded or overlooked in the policy discourse and consider alternative perspectives.

Given the dynamism and complexities in addressing child labor issues with interconnected social, economic, cultural, and human rights dimensions. Policies that focus on specific aspects of child labor may inadvertently leave out or silence other important factors. By examining what is left unproblematic and identifying the silences, analysts can identify gaps in the policy discourse and address potential blind spots in the policy response.

This question prompts the exploration of the dimensions of child labor that are not adequately addressed or are marginalized in the policy representation. It encourages a critical assessment of the factors that may be overlooked and challenge dominant narratives and explore different ways of understanding child labor. This opens up possibilities for reframing the problem, shifting the focus, and considering innovative policy solutions. It allows for the exploration of new approaches that consider the rights and well-being of children, address the underlying structural causes of child labor, and promote sustainable and holistic interventions.

1.8 Data gathering

For the purpose of this study. A critical examination of the domestic laws of Liberia relating to child labor will be explored to understand how the problem of child labor is construed and the provisions made to address same. Other pertinent documents will be reviewed to collect meaningful data for this study, including NGO, state, and government reports.

1.9 Organization of study

Chapter one provides the introduction and background of the study, along with the problem statement, aim, statement of the problem, selection of cases, limitations, and delimitations, and a brief explanation of the theory and method used. Chapter two examines previous research on the issue of child labor. Chapter three critically examines the three key laws and policies regarding child labor in Liberia. Chapter four contains the analysis and findings of this study and finally chapter five details the researcher's reflections, conclusion, and recommendations.

1.10 Definition of key terms

Child: Legally defined as any person under the age of 18

Child rights: Child rights refer to the basic human rights to which every child is entitled, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, or any other status. These rights are defined and protected by international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other human rights treaties

Worst Form of Child Labor: The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines the worst forms of child labor as any work that is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children

Child labor: the employment of children in an industry or business, especially when illegal or considered exploitative.

Hazard: According to IPEC, it is anything with the potential to do harm

2 Previous child labor research

Child labor has been linked to a variety of reasons which has led to the development of diverse theories either in favor of child labor or against it. The most compelling argument in favor of child labor is the human capital theory which posits that child labor can have positive effects on children's long-term prospects and on the broader economy. It is argued that children who work are not necessarily being exploited or harmed, but are instead gaining valuable skills and knowledge that will benefit them in the future. This theory suggests that child labor can be seen as an investment in human capital, similar to education or training, and that it can lead to increased productivity and economic growth.¹⁶

However, in what seems like a contrasting view, the "nimble fingers" theorists hold that child labor occurs due to the lack of care by parents. It is believed that the existence of child labor is essentially because parents do not care about the welfare of their children as such will always seize every opportunity to use them to make money for themselves. They opine that children have some sort of competitive advantage in certain forms of production and this explains the reason child labor exists. This view is largely opposed by Brown et al. (2002) who argue that child labor is not essentially driven by any single motive such as poverty or greed as purported by the "nimble fingers" theorist because according to Brown et al., "child labor may decline as incomes rise. Consequently, a policy response that focuses only on one aspect of child labor is unlikely to be efficient or effective."¹⁷

Weiner (1991) in his view believes that child labor will not be significantly reduced until policymakers, implementers, and other stakeholders change their approach and make a concerted effort to eliminate child labor. This conclusion was derived from his comparative work regarding child labor and education policies where he studied the existence of child labor in India. He argued that child labor is as a result of deliberate neglect on the part of the government and other private actors in society in their roles and commitments to ensuring that children are not only mandated to stay off employment by enforcing child labor laws that

¹⁶ Drusilla K Brown, et al, (2002) "The determinant of child labor, theories and evidence," A research seminar in international economics, School of Public Policy, the University of Michigan, discussion paper No. 486
<https://fordschool.umich.edu/rsie/workingpapers/Papers476-500/r486.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid

appear to exist only on paper, but are also required to attend school, as has been enforced in other countries that have gone through similar experiences.

Weiner rejected the argument that child labor can be eliminated only after poverty is addressed, asserting that cultural beliefs within certain societies is a huge determinant for the continued existence of child labor in some societies. His claim is that the Indian society is structured in such a way that the “rural people, led by the elites, work with their hands”. This stance stems from his examination of value and belief systems approaches in other countries such as China, Kenya, Tanzania, and Malaysia, where deliberate attempt is made in improving education and removing children from work.

The key aspect of this claim is that child labor is a cultural practice that is shaped by social norms and values, and that it reflects the cultural, historical, and economic context in which it occurs. According to this theory, child labor is not just an economic issue, but also a social and cultural one. This theory suggests that child labor is often viewed as a normal and acceptable practice in societies where poverty and inequality are widespread

Furthermore, Weiner claims that the government, as well as private individuals and groups such as educators, social activists, religious leaders, and trade unionists, has a huge role to play in eliminating of child labor. Weiner concludes that child labor will not be significantly reduced until policymakers, implementers, and other stakeholders change their approach and make a concerted effort to eliminate child labor.¹⁸

Roy, et al. (2016) in their child labor study in Sierra Leone criticized international conceptions of child labor and donor-supported intervention, describing them as western in nature that is only focused on meeting specific international agendas without necessarily considering the rationale for such engagements from a cultural and historical perspective. They argue that the youth which accounts for a large percentage of the population in some societies willfully engage in labor as their own way of participating in and improving their rural economy, which not only generates household income to address survival needs as such,

¹⁸ Myron Weiner, (1991), “The Child and the State in India: Child Labor and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective,” Princeton University Press, New Jersey, United States, reviewed by George Kent, in the American political science review, vol. 86. No 2 (1992), P. 569 – 570, published by the American Political Science Association

they advocate for a more comprehensive policy mechanisms that reflect the difficult realities of life in impoverished rural areas in order to assist them in navigating the livelihood challenges they face¹⁹

Paloma, et al. (2017) in their study conducted in Brazil which sought to evaluate the effectiveness of government-initiated child labor eradication programs across the country revealed that child labor is largely influenced by a lack of monitoring strategies, which are not in place for effective implementation of these government programs such as the conditional transfer of cash to reduce poverty effect on families. In their view, "children who received conditional cash transfers continued to work because these cash transfers may be insufficient to discourage child labor because the amount given to beneficiary families is far less than the minimum wage"²⁰

In a similar study conducted in the Ghanaian mining industry, Osei-Tutu & Tatek (2018) argued that children's involvement in work is primarily motivated by the need to provide for their families' livelihood. The findings of the study highlight not only the importance of work in the lives of young workers and their families, but also the positive implications for educational pursuits and future livelihood prospects. They contended that the abolitionist framework, which emphasizes children's right to education, fails to recognize that most children can attend school because of the income generated by work. Policies based on global ideologies of work-free childhoods, they conclude, are incompatible with current sociocultural and economic realities²¹.

Another theory of child labor which connects child labor to market failures suggests that child labor is a consequence of market failures in the labor market, where the demand for labor exceeds the supply of available workers or where labor markets are characterized by imperfect information and unequal bargaining power. This theory suggests that child labor can arise when there is a mismatch between the supply and demand for labor, and that it may

¹⁹ Maconachie R, & Hilson, G. (2016). "Re-thinking the child labor "problem" in rural sub-saharan Africa: The case of Sierra Leone's half shovels". *World Development*, P. 78, 136 – 147

²⁰ Paloma Santana Moreira Pais Felipe de Figueiredo Silva Evandro Camargos Teixeira, (2017), "The influence of Bolsa Familia conditional cash transfer program on child labor in Brazil", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 44 Iss 2 pp. 206 - 221

²¹ Osei-Tutu Jonah and Tatek Abebe (2018), "Tensions and controversies regarding child labor in small-scale gold mining in Ghana", *African Geographical Review*, Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

persist even in the absence of cultural or social factors that support it. According to the Market failure theory of child labor, "employers may find it more profitable to hire children instead of adults, particularly in situations where children can be paid lower wages or where they are less likely to unionize or demand better working conditions". This can lead to a situation where children are exploited and forced to work in hazardous or exploitative conditions, and where they are unable to secure their rights and protections in the labor market.²² Furthermore, the Market failure theory of child labor suggests that "market failures can also contribute to poverty and inequality, which in turn can lead to child labor". For example, when families are unable to earn a living wage, they may be forced to send their children to work in order to supplement household income. In these situations, child labor may be seen as a rational economic decision rather than a cultural or social practice.

Overall, the theory of market failure in relation to child labor suggests that child labor exists due to certain market conditions that lead to inefficient outcomes. These conditions can include factors such as poverty, lack of access to education, limited enforcement of labor regulations, and insufficient social protection mechanisms. The Market Failure Theory of child labor highlights the role of economic and market factors in shaping the prevalence and persistence of child labor, and suggests that addressing market failures is key to promoting decent work and ending the exploitation of children in the labor market²³.

As observed from the various studies and theories, we can infer that the cause of child labor varies depending on the context, be it cultural, economic or social. This then goes to show that a universal approach for eliminating child labor may not be explicitly effective given that there are numerous factors contributing to the prevalence of child labor.

²² Eric V. Edmonds and Norbert Schady (2012), "Poverty Alleviation and Child Labor", *An American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, Vol. 4, No.4, pp 100 – 125, published by the American Economic Association

²³ Ibid

3 Critical examination of child labor laws and policies in Liberia

3.1 The Children Law

Liberia has several laws that relate to children, including the Children's Law of 2011, which is the primary legislation that governs the welfare, protection, and rights of children in Liberia in an effort to safeguard and advance the realization of all children's rights and to bring Liberian laws into compliance with international standards and also taking steps to reverse the negative effects of the protracted civil war, which adversely affected the realization of children's rights in the country.²⁴

The Children's Law of 2011 covers a broad range of topics, including child protection, education, healthcare, and social welfare. The law recognizes the rights of every child to a safe and nurturing environment, education, healthcare, and protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The law also establishes the National Children's Authority, which is responsible for the implementation of child protection policies and programs, including child welfare and protection services, child participation, and advocacy. The authority is also responsible for enforcing child labor laws and regulations and preventing child trafficking and exploitation.²⁵

Additionally, the Children's Law of 2011 recognizes the rights of children to participate in decisions that affect their lives and encourages their active participation in family, community, and national affairs²⁶. Overall, the Liberia Children's Law seeks to ensure the well-being and protection of children in Liberia, and promote their rights, dignity, and full participation in society.

²⁴ The Children Law of Liberia (2011)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

Childhood is referred to in the preamble of the Liberian Children Law as a "period requiring special care and assistance." Children, as defined by the law, are those who are younger than 18 years old. According to the preamble, children are the "pillars, cornerstones, and foundation of a future, vibrant, just, peaceful, and prosperous Liberia" and are "entitled to the enjoyment of a dignified life, survival, development, participation, and protection"²⁷ This is in accordance with the CRC and is also required because children in Liberia have historically been subjected to various forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation as a result of their participation in the protracted civil war, in which children were employed as child soldiers²⁸.

The law also states that children should not be at the mercy of the government, their parents, or other people like their legal guardians, as was reiterated in the preamble. The language of the children's law suggests that the government is committed to not only protecting but also supporting every child in Liberia, which is consistent with the CRC's objectives and guiding principles. The phrase "subject to" used in article 3, section 2, however, seems to imply that the realization of children's rights is dependent solely on the availability of human, organizational, and economic resources. This appears to be a departure from article 7 of the CRC, which requires states parties to "ensure" that all children's rights are implemented²⁹. The phrase "ensure" provides no room for interpretation, so the government must assume responsibility and take all necessary steps to safeguard and guarantee the rights of every child. Children are required to attend compulsory school till they attain age 15. This means that children age 15 are not included which leaves them vulnerable to child labor³⁰ because they are not required to attend school and also not permitted to work. In Article 3, section 9, the state's commitment to guaranteeing free primary education as a right for all Liberian children is spelled out in clear terms. The reality on the ground is far from the implementation of this right. In Liberia, many children work not necessarily because they do refuse to attend school but because they are unable to attend school. This is due to a variety of circumstances, including the inaccessibility of free public schools, the requirement to pay other levies that

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Human Rights Watch Report., (Sept 1994), "Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia"
<https://archive.hrw.org/reports/1994/liberia2/>

²⁹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3

³⁰ United States Department of states 2019 findings on the worst forms of child labor,
https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2019/liberia.pdf

they cannot afford, the requirement to buy uniforms, and other educational materials like books. Additionally, because there are not so much of public schools available, the ones that are made available are crowded, and male teachers harass female students in schools³¹. All of these present a barrier to education and keep children from going to school, which increases the likelihood of engaging in child labor activities.

3.2 Decent Work Act

The decent act of Liberia which was passed into law in 2015 due to the severity of child labor being flagged by the ILO of which Liberia is a member outlines the basic rights at work, labor institutions, and administration, and includes clauses, minimum employment requirements, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation, and labor codes including those specific for the Liberian children. Any activity that is hazardous to a child's health, such as the use of dangerous machinery, heavy lifting, exposure to toxins, high temperatures, loud noises, or vibrations, is prohibited under Chapter 2 of the Decent Work Act for all children under the age of 18, it prohibits the trafficking of children. Despite the fact that section 74 of the act completely forbids the employment of children under the age of 16 there are still large number of children under the age of 16 still engaged in child labor and violators are only subjected to a minimal fine of \$1.18 USD.

Section 3 of the act goes on to provide examples of the types of employment that are prohibited by it, such as those that could jeopardize children's welfare, health, or safety because of their nature or the circumstances in which they are carried out. However, the act also permits minors under the age of 15 to engage in some types of "light employment" as a means of participating in the labor market, provided that such activity does not negatively impact or be detrimental to their education, health, safety, and well-being. Section 21(5) of

³¹ Ibid

the law further specifies that "children under the age of 16 are not allowed to work for more than seven hours each day."³²

The ministry of labor is responsible for maintaining record of and responding to any instances of child labor infractions, however this study reveals that there have been few instances of child labor cases being prosecuted. Only three prosecutions were initiated in 2020, according to the USDOL 2021 report, and only those involving child trafficking resulted in convictions. The report also reveals that there are just 55 labor inspectors in the country, and in 2021, they visited 556 work sites, dropping from 1200 in 2020³³. This is not surprising given the ambiguity of the clause used in chapter 8.2(a), which gives the minister for labor the flexibility to determine the number of labor inspectorates. Furthermore, there are no penalties for violations of child labor laws, making prosecution difficult. However, perpetrators can be prosecuted under the Penal Code's child endangerment provision in some cases.³⁴

In summary, the Decent Work Act clearly demonstrates the issue of child labor as a violation of children's safety, health, and rights. The law recognizes that child labor can have serious physical and emotional repercussions for children as well as prevent them from accessing education, and it proposes solutions by establishing minimum age requirements for employment, outlawing dangerous work, and enforcing penalties for violations. The law also promotes the delivery of training and education initiatives to increase public awareness of child labor. However, the lack of clarity surrounding what counts as "light work," is one of the law's problematic representations and can lead to ambiguity and inconsistent application of the law. Furthermore, the legal repercussions for breaking the law might not be strong enough to stop employers from using child labor especially in rural areas where child labor is more prevalent. Additionally, the penalties for child labor violations in Liberia may not be sufficient to deter employers from engaging in these practices. The fines and imprisonment

³² Decent Work Act of Liberia, (2015, p.21-27)

³³ United States Department of states 2021 findings on the worst forms of child labor

https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2021/2021_TDA_Big_Book.pdf

³⁴ refworld.org , " 2013 findings on the worst forms of child labor",

<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5448a62e0.pdf>

terms may not be proportionate to the seriousness of the offense, and there is a need for more stringent penalties to discourage employers from violating the law.

3.3 National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst forms of Child labor

The National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Liberia is a policy document developed by the Liberian government in collaboration with other stakeholders, including international organizations, civil society groups, employers' and workers' organizations. The plan was launched in 2018 and is set to run until 2030, with the aim of reducing the worst forms of child labor in Liberia by 50% by the year 2030.

The plan identifies the worst forms of child labor in Liberia, including hazardous work in mining, agriculture, and domestic service, and child trafficking for forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation. The plan also recognizes that child labor is often linked to poverty, lack of access to education, and cultural norms that value children's contributions to household income. To address these challenges, the National Action Plan set out a number of key objectives and strategies, including:

Strengthening the legal framework: The plan aims to strengthen the legal framework for child labor, including ensuring that national laws are in line with international labor standards, and improving enforcement mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. The government's plan calls for strengthening institutional and legal frameworks, which is unquestionably essential to achieving its goal. This is brought on by a deficiency, substantial gaps, or the brittleness of some of its laws. Despite the government having taken important measures in ratifying certain important international and regional treaties on the issue of child labor and is expected to be entrenched to its national laws, there are still visible gaps. The national legislation prohibiting child rights abuse, including child labor, is insufficient. For instance, neither the Liberian constitution nor the country's children law illustrated in detail or elaborate hazardous work or the worst forms of child labor, it lacks a definition of what constitutes hazardous work, a shortcoming that was partially resolved by the Decent Work Act's passage. Additionally, the vague definitions of the terms used in most sections of the

national laws make it difficult for labor inspectors and other law enforcement officers to adequately enforce the laws against child labor.

According to the law, employers that violate the minimum age requirement of the child labor restrictions face a fine of L\$100 (\$1.12) and incarceration until the fine is paid. Parents or guardians who fail to comply with this age restriction are also subject to jail and a fine of at least L\$15 (\$0.17) but no more than L\$25 (\$0.28).

Raising awareness: The plan recognizes the need to raise awareness about the harms of child labor and the importance of education. It aims to raise awareness among parents, communities, and employers, and to engage the media in promoting messages about child rights. This implies that there is a perception that a sizable portion of Liberians lack proper knowledge and education on child labor. The government claims that many people are unaware of the concepts behind child labor and how it affects individuals, families, communities, and the entire country. It also believes that not enough advocacy need to be done to persuade government to embrace economic and social policies that support decent work, safeguard children's rights, and foster the development of children. It also attributes cases of child work to a lack of effective civil society campaigning to persuade the government to adopt effective laws to end child labor.

Social Protection and Economic Empowerment

The National Action Plan's final strategic goal is to encourage the provision of social safety and employment opportunities to severely low-income households in child labor-endemic areas. One strategy it employs to do this is to mobilize and inspire corporate organizations and private businesses to raise their social corporate obligations to vulnerable groups. For instance, the government sought for the support of Telcos, mining companies, etc. to provide corporate support to those who are victims of child labor.

Each of these strategic aims or objectives includes a number of additional broad goals, outcomes, and outputs. For instance, it is believed that vulnerable households receiving greater social services and protection had a lower likelihood of their children engaging in child work or the worst kind of child labor or the more sensitized people are on child labor issues, they will more likely discourage recruitment of children and also report abuses and lastly the stronger legal frameworks that exist the less likely will anyone recruit child laborers

as arrests and prosecution of child labor crimes will send put a message of deterrent to potential abusers.

Overall, the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Liberia is a comprehensive and ambitious policy document that seeks to tackle the root causes of child labor and provide a framework for coordinated action across different sectors. If implemented effectively, it has the potential to significantly reduce the incidence of child labor in Liberia and to improve the lives of thousands of children.

4 Analysis and summary of findings

As earlier stated, this study examines child labor policies and laws using Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' method to examine the issue of child labor using the three key questions highlighted in the method section. To achieve this, the researcher will apply each of the two questions to the three policy documents; the children law, the decent work act and the national action plan for the elimination of the worst form of child labor

4.1 What's the 'problem' represented to be and what are the silences produced in Liberia policies and laws in relations to child labor?

4.1.1 The Children Law

Beginning with the Children Law of Liberia, we can infer that the "problem" represented in the Children Law of Liberia is the violation of children's rights and the need for their protection and well-being. This then suggest that children in Liberia lack adequate protection and face neglect by either their parents, communities and even the state. The UNCRC provides in Article 19, the need for all "states parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation,

including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian” This problem representation reveals a violation of the rights of the Liberian children, specifically those engaged in child labor activities for which the government should pay attention to. When children are not adequately protected, they are subjected to all forms of exploitation, hazards and abuses, denied access to education and adequate health care.

The problem represented in the Children Law of Liberia is the violation of children's rights and the need for their protection and well-being. The law identifies various issues affecting children, including child labor, exploitation, neglect, child marriage, child abuse, lack of access to education, inadequate healthcare, and the need for child protection.

Furthermore, the Children Law of Liberia predominantly represents children as passive victims in need of protection from abuse and neglect. While protection is important, this narrow representation overlooks other dimensions of children's lives, such as their agency, participation, and diverse needs.

The law also fails to adequately address contextual factors that contribute to the challenges faced by children in Liberia, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources. By not addressing these underlying structural issues, the law overlooks the root causes of problems affecting children's well-being and rights.

The Children's Law of Liberia 2011 provides a legal framework for the protection and welfare of children in Liberia. While it is essential to recognize the positive aspects of the law, it is equally important to identify the areas that may be left unproblematic or silent. Some of the silences or gaps identified in the problem representation are listed below:

Lack of comprehensive measures to address root causes: The act does not adequately address the underlying causes of child labor, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and social inequalities. It did not include provisions for addressing these factors and creating holistic interventions.

Insufficient attention to hazardous and worst forms of child labor: The silence on the identification and prevention of hazardous work suggests a potential gap in recognizing and effectively addressing the unique risks faced by children engaged in dangerous or harmful forms of labor. While the act acknowledges child labor as a problem, it did not explicitly address the specific aspects and hazards related to the worst forms of child labor. Not

identifying the nature and lists of hazardous work in the children law gives room for misinterpretation which endangers the protection mechanisms for children engaged in hazardous work.

Lack of comprehensive measures to address root causes: The silence on addressing the underlying causes of child labor such as eliminating poverty, providing access to quality education and health care, improving the social welfare of families might limit the effectiveness of the legislation in preventing child labor in the long term. Without tackling the root causes, the act may primarily focus on punitive measures rather than holistic prevention.

Implementation and enforcement: The law does not adequately address the challenges related to the implementation and enforcement of its provisions effectively. It is essential to have mechanisms in place to ensure that the law is effectively enforced and that adequate resources are allocated for implementation. For instance, the Children law of 2011 overlooked the importance of addressing the broader structural factors that contribute to children's vulnerability and the need for special protection and care. Additionally, the laws does not provide sufficient guidance on how to effectively implement and enforce the provisions outlined in the act.

Despite having laws and policies in place, the enforcement of these regulations is weak, particularly in the informal sector where most child labor takes place. Coordination among government agencies responsible for implementing child labor laws and policies is weak, resulting in poor monitoring and evaluation. The penalties for violating child labor laws and policies in Liberia are limited, making it less of a deterrent for employers to engage in exploitative practices. Liberia has limited resources to implement and enforce child labor laws and policies. This limits the government's ability to provide alternative opportunities for children and their families.

Other gaps in the Children Law of Liberia's problem representation related to child labor may include:

Lack of specificity: The law does not provide clear definitions or categories of child labor, leaving room for interpretation and potential gaps in the coverage of certain types of child labor.

Limited focus on worst forms of child labor: The child law does not adequately emphasize the worst forms of child labor as defined by international standards. It lacks comprehensive provisions to address hazardous work, forced labor, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation posing significant risks to children.

Inadequate consideration of underlying causes: The law does not sufficiently address the underlying causes of child labor, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and social inequalities. It may primarily focus on addressing the immediate manifestations of child labor without adequately considering the root factors that contribute to its persistence.

Limited attention to vulnerable groups: The law may not give sufficient attention to specific vulnerable groups, such as children engaged in domestic work, agriculture, or informal sectors. It may also overlook gender-specific forms of child labor or fail to address intersectional issues related to poverty, discrimination, and child migration or trafficking. Liberia's child labor laws and policies only cover children under 18 years of age, leaving those above this age vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Insufficient prevention measures: The law may not adequately emphasize preventive measures. It may not sufficiently address the need for poverty reduction, social protection, and access to quality education as essential elements in preventing child labor.

Implementation challenges: While the problem representation in the Children Law is comprehensive, challenges in implementing and enforcing the law effectively may exist. Limited resources, capacity constraints, and lack of awareness can hinder the proper execution of the law's provisions, impacting its effectiveness in addressing child labor.

Addressing these gaps requires critical evaluation and adjustments in the problem representation of the Children Law of Liberia. Enhancing the specificity of definitions, focusing on the worst forms of child labor, considering underlying causes, addressing vulnerabilities, emphasizing prevention measures, and tackling implementation challenges can contribute to a more robust problem representation and effective policy response to child labor in Liberia.

4.1.2 The Decent Work Act (2015)

The Liberia Decent Work Act demonstrates a recognition of the problem of child labor and the importance of addressing it. Child labor is defined in the Act as work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their education, and is physically, mentally, socially, or morally harmful. This problem representation highlights the need for awareness and efforts to combat child labor.

However, the Act has several weaknesses that can be identified through the WPR method. One key weakness is the lack of comprehensive enforcement mechanisms. Although the Act establishes penalties for employers who violate child labor provisions, enforcement remains inadequate. Insufficient resources, capacity, and monitoring systems limit the Act's effectiveness in deterring child labor practices.

Moreover, the Act does not explicitly address the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to child labor. Poverty, lack of access to education, and limited employment opportunities are significant drivers of child labor. The Act should have incorporated comprehensive strategies to address these root causes, such as poverty alleviation programs, improved education, and job creation initiatives. Failing to address these factors undermines the Act's ability to provide a sustainable solution to child labor.

The Act also lacks explicit provisions for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child laborers. While penalties are imposed on employers, comprehensive measures for the education, vocational training, and psychosocial support of rescued child laborers are absent. Effective rehabilitation programs are crucial for breaking the cycle of exploitation and enabling child laborers to reintegrate into society. Domestic work is not included in the list of hazardous work in Liberian labor law, leaving children working in this sector vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and labor law sets the minimum age for employment at 16 years old, which is below the international standard of 18 years old. Liberian labor law also allows children under 16 years old to engage in light work, which is not defined or regulated, making it difficult to ensure that children are not engaged in harmful or exploitative work.

Additionally, the Act does not provide clear guidelines for supply chain transparency and corporate accountability. Given Liberia's export-oriented economy and reliance on global supply chains, regulating businesses to ensure they are free from child labor is important.

Addressing the responsibility of businesses, incentivizing transparency, and ensuring corporate accountability would have been valuable additions to the Act.

In conclusion, while the Liberia Decent Work Act demonstrates a commitment to addressing child labor, it has notable weaknesses. Inadequate enforcement mechanisms, a lack of focus on addressing root causes, insufficient rehabilitation provisions, and the absence of regulations on supply chains and corporate accountability hinder the Act's effectiveness in combatting child labor. Strengthening these areas, along with increased resources and monitoring, is necessary to effectively address child labor in Liberia.

4.1.3 The National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Liberia

The National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Liberia, through its problem representations, acknowledges child labor as a significant issue and emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies, prioritization, and improved enforcement and implementation.

The NAP 2018 to 2030 aims to comprehensively address the issue of child labor and provides a framework for collaborative efforts among various stakeholders to eliminate child labor in the country. It emphasizes key areas, including legislation, enforcement, awareness, education, social protection, and international cooperation. Recognizing the complex nature of child labor, the plan underscores the need for a multi-dimensional approach to eradicate it.

The problem represented is the worst forms of child labor, which typically involve hazardous work conditions, exploitation, and abuse. Child labor is framed as a violation of children's rights and as a hindrance to their development and well-being. The focus is on eliminating the worst forms of child labor rather than all forms of child labor. However the NAP is silent on the root causes of child labor, such as poverty, lack of education, and social inequality.

The plan acknowledges the importance of increasing awareness about the negative impacts of child labor and the significance of education. Its objectives include raising awareness among parents, communities, and employers, as well as engaging the media to promote messages concerning child rights. This indicates that there is a perception that a significant number of

Liberians lack adequate knowledge and education regarding child labor. The government asserts that many people are unaware of the underlying concepts of child labor and its consequences for individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole. Additionally, it believes that insufficient advocacy efforts are being made to encourage governments to adopt economic and social policies that promote decent work, safeguard children's rights, and facilitate children's development. The government also attributes instances of child labor to a lack of effective civil society campaigns that could persuade the government to enact suitable laws to eradicate child labor.

This government initiative suggests that there is a dearth of information about labor laws in the public domain, which may be linked to low levels of literacy, thereby posing a problem. Furthermore, it raises the question of how the government intends to persuade or create awareness among the public about child labor laws when the root causes that drive children into labor, such as poverty and inadequate educational opportunities, are not adequately addressed. Regrettably, the National Action Plan (NAP) fails to adequately outline the government's intended solutions to these underlying problems, which are crucial for the effectiveness of their awareness endeavors.

Another strategic objective of the National Action Plan is to promote social safety nets and employment opportunities for households in child labor-affected areas with severe poverty. One approach it adopts to achieve this is by mobilizing and inspiring corporate organizations and private businesses to fulfill their social corporate responsibilities towards vulnerable groups. For instance, the government sought the support of telecommunications companies, mining firms, and others to extend corporate assistance to individuals impacted by child labor.

This strategic goal of Social Protection and Economic Empowerment, the Liberia National Action Plan aims to encourage the provision of social safety nets and employment opportunities for severely impoverished households in areas where child labor is prevalent. It seeks to achieve this by mobilizing corporate organizations and private businesses to assume greater social corporate responsibilities towards vulnerable groups. While this may appear to be a positive plan, it may not be sufficient since the government cannot rely solely on corporate entities or institutions to address these problems. This indicates that the government lacks the resources and capacity to effectively tackle social issues on its own, and the underlying cause of poverty, which is not adequately addressed in the NAP document. It is the government's sole responsibility to create social protection and economic empowerment,

and a viable approach would involve addressing the issues of unemployment and job creation, which can serve as a solution in itself.

Conclusions

As mentioned in the first chapter, the primary objective of this study is to critically assess the persistent existence of child labor in Liberia by examining the government's policies and laws in a bid to understand the impediment that have hindered progress in combating the problem of child labor in Liberia despite governmental efforts. To achieve its aims, the study utilizes Bacchi's policy analysis method known as "what's the problem represented to be?" to properly address the research questions outlined in the first chapter of this thesis

It is the initial assumption of the researcher that ineffective policies and responses from the government constitute a significant hindrance to the elimination of child labor, particularly in African countries where child labor is prevalent. By analyzing Liberia's children laws, the decent work act, and the National Action Plan for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor, the study demonstrates that prevailing child labor can be traced back to policy-level decisions. It reveals the existence of gaps within the government's policies, limiting their efforts to eliminate child labor specifically in Liberia. This perspective diverges from the normative arguments presented in the second chapter of this thesis, which largely attribute the existence of child labor to economic and sociocultural factors such as poverty, the need for skills development, voluntary engagement in rural economies, and the exploitation of children due to lack of parental care.

This study submits that the Liberian government's policy outlining steps to end child labor are the problem itself. The researcher opines that by not adequately addressing the root causes of child labor within the laws and policies protecting children from engaging child labor activities, the government's commitments to eliminating child labor is questioned. This aligns with Bacchi's assertion that policies reflect the problems they aim to solve. In other words, policy-making is a deeply political process that shapes and constructs problems through formulation and discussion.

This holds true for how child labor policies are framed in Liberia. The problem representations surrounding child labor and the gaps identified in Liberia's child labor policies highlight other underlying structural issues including inadequate educational opportunities, insufficient enforcement of child labor laws, inadequate penalties to deter child labor, limited labor inspectorates, and weak social welfare systems. The laws and policies under consideration do not effectively address these systemic problems. The "what's the problem

represented to be?" approach highlights the need for comprehensive policies that address the underlying causes of child labor and encourage long-lasting change. The method used for this study does not only challenges "problem" representations of the problem of child labor but uncover some of the silences in the child labor laws and policies.

The study highlights significant issues and shortcomings in Liberia's child labor laws and policies. While the laws demonstrate an intention to address child labor, they fail to fully recognize and address the underlying factors that contribute to its persistence, such as poverty, inadequate education, healthcare, protection, and lack of economic opportunities.

The study identifies gaps in enforcement, particularly in the informal sector where child labor is prevalent. It also emphasizes that the existing laws do not adequately address broader structural factors and lack guidance for effective implementation and enforcement. The National Action Plan focuses primarily on the worst forms of child labor, neglecting other harmful forms and downplaying the importance of addressing the contributing structural factors. Furthermore, specific issues within Liberia's labor laws are highlighted, including a minimum employment age below international standards, permission for hazardous work for children aged 16 and above, lack of regulation for domestic work, and weak penalties for violations. These gaps not only diverge from international standards but also impede progress in eradicating child labor.

This study encourages the government of Liberia to envision transformative solutions by developing comprehensive strategies that tackle the issue at its core. This may involve implementing stricter labor regulations, expanding access to quality education, promoting economic empowerment for families, and engaging in international collaborations to address child labor. Through the development and implementation of robust policy interventions, the study guided by Bacchi's approach asserts that the long-term eradication of child labor in Liberia can be achieved.

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