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Child Rights Campaign and the Nigerian Family: Implications for Effective Child Development System in Africa

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Abstract

Africa from primordial to the colonial encounter had her own ways of doing things including systems of governance, organization of economic activities, worship and systems of training and bringing up the child. Even though African child development system gave parents advantage over the child; in their vantage positions, parents especially in Nigeria are always conscious of the symbiotic exhibition of sentiments between parents and children. This cannot be ignored by child developers and proponents of theories of child development because child development tops project prioritization list of most African parents. Unfortunately, socio-economic change and child rights campaign have affected the African child development system, traditional definition; status and mentality of the child, as well as parental attitude to child development. Therefore, the aim of this study is to look inwards using Nigeria as a paradigm and suggest a suitable child development system for the African child. These

issues and their consequences on child development system in Africa are explored in Bassey Ubong's *Free World Square* and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajuh's *The Night of a Thousand Truths* selected for study. The Piagetian theory of child development was adopted as theoretical framework. Content analysis and personal observation approaches of the qualitative research method were used to achieve research objectives. The study revealed that the cold relationship between some parents and their children, insubordination among children and increase in "lumpen" children: (Almanjeris, Area boys and Militants) in Africa may stem from failed child development system. The research showed that change, the degree of elasticity in the changing Nigerian family and child rights campaign can guarantee or thwart acceptable, positive and stable development process of the African child. Hence, there is need for an effective and positive African child development system.

Introduction

The family is one of the most important social institutions that functions as organizer and stabilizer of social values of a given society. The universality of the family therefore makes it the primary social institution common in most communal enclaves across the globe. Thus, the family, according to Mezieobi (1992), is "a social group in which there is sexually cohabiting men and women with possibly off-springs or children resulting from the cohabitation." This definition obviously revealed three different members of the family - The men, women and the children. The men and women are independent adults capable of fending for themselves. Contrarily, the child is a minor, helpless and as the weakest member of the family dependent on the parents for support and development. Generally speaking, development connotes growth and change through which beings and living objects acquires physical and mental maturity to grapple with emotional and social problems. Applying this to the child, Menya (1995); said "child development refers to the unfolding of behaviours from immature, simple to more complex, and from dependent to independent," stage. For this development to take place in the child; the place of children in the family entitles the child to social welfare, participation, protection and survival rights. The rights of the child therefore subsume the entitlements, privileges and obligations of the child as stated by traditions and culture, natural justice and fair play. In the recent past, social change has stimulated in the global society keen interest in the child and presently, there is almost a globally unified view and international laws on the rights of the child despite cultural divergences.

These developments notwithstanding, this paper is of the view that social change and its, consequent transformation of the Nigerian family and its views on the rights of the child must balance the enforcement, realization and enjoyment of these rights by the Nigerian child with proper and realistic African child development system. Ayisi (1980), in his postulation on social change posited that:

The term social change, by general agreement among sociologists, refers to the changes which occur in the social structure of societies. It presupposes an evolutionary process, a change from a simple stage to a complex and better stage; an upward movement process.

He argued further that, "a change may either be an improvement of a *status quo*, or a retrogression to the *ante status quo*. (1980). However, for the society, its institutions

and the citizenry ‘to benefit from such social change; it must’ be progressive, open ended and visionary in nature. Hence, Ayisi (1980), quoting Comte advocated for “a new social order with increasing liberalization of human sentiment and the prevalence of a new ethic...”

Certainly, this is the type of change to be embraced by the changing Nigerian family so as to accommodate the rights and attitudinal change of the millennium children and retain a suitable child development system for Africa. Though child right campaign appears to be a new phenomenon in Africa, it has been embraced as a move in the right direction. The deplorable state of most families in Africa notwithstanding, government and non-governmental organizations in Africa appear to be responding to the global call to better the conditions of the child. The United Nations report on *The State of the World's Children* (1991) lent credence to this clarion call when it “calls on the international community to undertake the urgent actions that are necessary to realize the rights of every child, everywhere – without exception.” Influenced by the above view, Hodges (2000) confirmed that: “Child right movement gained recognition only in the 90s but it advocates the autonomy of children and constructs them as free agents capable of making important decisions regarding their own lives.”

Child right campaign has recorded progress all over the world since it gained prominence in 1990s. United Nations declaration on the rights of the child is a landmark achievement for the survival of the child. To boost this campaign, UNICEF reveals in *The State of the World's Children* (1990) that, “the UN published the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)” as a way forward towards realizing the rights of the child. The UNICEF *ABC of Children's Rights* (1991) affirmed the importance of the treaty and said;

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (short: CRC or Convention) guarantees the rights of children, that is of all persons under the age of 18. For the first time, children are recognized as independent legal subjects in an international human rights treaty. Children are the holders of rights which they exercise autonomously.

As a follow up, the Nigerian Ministry of Women affairs and Social development in their adoption of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child highlighted essential areas of child rights as; “children's rights to survival, development and participation.” The document further elaborates that:

- Every child has the right to life. and be allowed to survive and develop
- Every child is entitled to a name, family and nationality.
- Every child is free to belong to any association or assembly according, to law.
- Every child has the right, to express opinions and freely communicate them on any issue or subject without restriction under the law. (*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989).

Given these provisions, does it mean that child right campaign is an aspect of socio-economic change? If yes, how does it affect child development in Africa? Is it on the side of the parents or the child or an impediment: a cog on the wheel of Africa’s child development system? There is no doubt that the Western nations championed child right campaign has given to both the Western and African child more privileges; but

how have parents and children managed these newly bestowed privileges on the child in Africa.

The society and the family are without doubt undergoing transformations, so as to respond to these global legal, socio-economic and political demands of our time. It is also important to note that these changes create new roles for social institutions, individuals, social groups and agents of socialization because the umbilical cord linking interactional activities between the family and the society reveals a bilateral relationship. Hence socio-economic change in a given society results to changes in social relationships, privileges, social rights, responsibilities, social roles and positions people occupy in the family, other social institutions and the society at large. Hence, the family, while responding to socio-economic changes should accommodate the survival, rights, and new social roles, which the wind of change bestows on the child. Therefore, Bellamy posited that:

the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

The Nigerian family has passed through changes- as the nation passes through socio – economic, political and cultural development. Patterns of these changes reveal a gradual but consistent transformation motivated by changing values and prevalent economic conditions. Analyses of the changing trend reflect obvious implications for the development of the child in Africa. For instance, because of economic pressure on most parents; there is a continual decline in the function and responsibility of the family for the child. The family used to be the provider of informal education and primary educator of the child unfortunately, the emergence of Western education now undermines the informal education system, while work schedule keep parents in the office all through the day. Therefore, the role of the family as the primary educator of the child that prepared the child to become a useful member of the society even before the encounter with teachers has dwindled.

Unfortunately, the role of the family as agent of socialization during the pre-colonial Nigerian society has declined; then the family had the primary role of educating and socializing the child. Contrarily, in the contemporary society emergence of new agents of socialization like: day-care centres, schools, peer groups, video bars, recreational parks and new social media have taken over this role. The outcome is that the family has exposed the child to all sorts of danger and immorality.

Worst still material wealth acquisition and the desire to earn more income have also affected the commitment of parents to the proper upbringing of the child. The man is busy looking for money while the welfare of his children suffers. Even the care and commitment of the woman has further declined with urbanization and industrialization. According to Dressler (1996), “married women are now in the labour market.... They have become increasingly important in the economy of their house holds contributing significantly to the family budget.” The pattern of change also provides strong indicators that the Nigerian family is moving from the large extended family to the isolated nuclear family; consequently, there is reduction in the size of the modern Nigerian family. This trend has encouraged better standard of living and improved

education for the Nigerian child. Therefore, the child is becoming more conscious of, and alert to his or her environment; the child can now quiz the parents, argue with them, make demands or leave the house at will without the permission of the parents. This newly acquired status of the child appears to be contradicting the traditional position of the child where he was only to be seen and not to be heard. This socio-centric pull has created a gulf between parents and their children and has also impacted greatly on child development system in Africa. The family and the society should therefore face these realities of life produced by the phenomenon of change and evolve ways and means of checkmating their impact on African child development system. The family must be aware that the child as the weakest member of the family needs care and protection. Hence the child must be granted some rights and privileges to ensure his or her survival in a changing society but with caution so that genuine intentions will not be traversed.

Traditionally, the child was not allowed to associate freely with adults or even his or her peers because the child's rights of movement, association and expression were strongly influenced by the parents. The contemporary Nigerian legal system is yet to provide sanctions against depriving a child of his or her rights. The society has left children helpless, exposing them to all forms of abuse, exploitation and child trafficking. *State Report: Second Periodic Report, CRC (2005)* confirmed that, "Child Trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and minors are on the increase..."

There is need therefore for parents to change their views and conception of the child as a minor. Even though, it is commonly recognized in most cultures that the child is of subordinate status to parents and therefore is meant to be seen and not to be heard. Even when children are heard, the views expressed by the child may not carry much weight when held against views expressed by men. This subordinate status of the child, does not entitle children to be consulted or called up to express their views on matters concerning their future, the family and issues of state generally. This traditional and conservative conception of the child contradicts the contemporary ideological conception about the child and is therefore antipodal with the millennium development goals of the African child. However, in as much as we expect Africa to open up, it is important that government in their policies on child development should tread with caution because behavioural patterns of children, goals and purposes of education differ from culture to culture.

Thus, this diversity and the predicament of children across different parts of the globe has gingered government and international political organizations to embark on programmes and legislation processes aimed at protecting the rights of the child as a member of the family and the society. Measures undertaken to develop effective child development system that will at the same time give special rights and protection to the child includes The United Nation's Charter- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CRC emphasizes the need to give the child special rights and protection under the law and calls on various countries of the world to ratify the charter and implement the convention.

The Federal government of Nigeria in compliance with the UN's CRC Charter has inaugurated Child Rights Implementation Committee (CRIC). The Federal government has also created and inaugurated children's assembly to enhance the participation of the Nigerian child in the political process of the nation. Taking a cue from the federal

government, the states have also inaugurated the State Child Right Implementation Committee (SCRIC) whose functions among others, are to sensitize the people and ensure the implementation of the convention. Government institutions which have been used to promote and protect the rights of the child in Nigeria include: social welfare Departments, Ministries of Youths and Sports and Ministries of Women Affairs. Voluntary Organizations such as Girls Guides, Boys Scout and Boys Brigade, international organizations in Africa include The African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN). In an International Workshop at Enugu, ANPPCAN states that its action plan for 2004-2006 includes mobilizing every member of the society and increasing awareness of child rights.

Evidently, much has been done to develop and give the child better protection. At the same time, the impact of these projects on the child is another dimension to the problem. Can one readily say that these projects have positively improved the behaviour of the child? Are there indices to show that there is progressive change in the behavioral pattern of children since the government, organizations and individuals embarked on these child development programmes. Has the quality of children produced by the society improved? There are little evidences that the child is now better behaved. Rather greater challenges are facing present day parents regarding the development of their children. More children have taken to the streets; juvenile crimes: drug trafficking, addiction and rape are on the increase while new forms of clandestine youth groups are emerging daily. Africa especially Nigeria is battling with cultism in tertiary and secondary schools. Drug addiction among students, sexual harassment and militant youth groups provide strong indicators that call Africa's child development system in the recent past to question. Almanjeris, Alaye boys or area boys are different groups of failed children in Nigeria. Beyond Nigeria, Karl Marx's lumpen children are also groups of failed children. Does it mean that government efforts to ensure proper development of the child have failed? Part of the failure of government programmes on child development stems from their one-dimensional nature. Effort is concentrated on the child while parents are oblivious of what it takes to succeed in child development projects. Moreover, most of the legislations made are not adequately enforced, while some of the old laws are no longer compatible with what is obtained in the contemporary society. Therefore, the status and rights of the child in the changing Nigerian family need a re-appraisal. According to Ididapo-Obe (1990),

The- dynamisms of social change must necessarily involve all segments of any given society. Consequently, the evolution of the Nigerian society from the narrow confines of cultural parallelism and traditional ethos has involved largely the carving out of new roles for her desperate groups, particularly the Nigerian child.

Analytic study of socio-economic change show trends in the sequence of change over time. Patterns of socio-economic change in the study area are characterized by an upward, downward or level direction transformation across eras of the nation's history. The researchers adopted a simple periodization method in the area of study that is Eastern Nigeria, especially the Igbo and Ibibio areas in order to situate the study. The method enabled the researchers to look at the prevalent background forces that conditioned the convention of thought of the people in the region of study during each period in the peoples' stages of development. This method will further help the

researchers determine how these forces and convention of thought of the period impacted on child development systems.

Socio-economic Change, Child Rights Campaign and the Search for Efficient African Child Development System

The two plays chosen for study are situated within the Igbo and Ibibio society. Igbo land is an archetypal microcosmic living society within the macrocosmic Eastern Nigerian environment which was part of the heartland of the defunct Republic of Biafra. It is the homeland of Ndi-Igbo, according to Ofomata, Igbo land “covers a total surface area of approximately 41,00sq kilometers.” Anambra State, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states are major states located in Igbo land including part of Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States.

Ibibio land is situated in south east Nigeria. Akwa Ibom and Cross river states are located in Ibibio land. The two states are rich in oil and other mineral resources. Like the Igbo, kingship and chieftaincy are modern creations in these highly egalitarian areas.

The two geographical locations show similar patterns in social economic change, hence are referred to as the study area in this paper. Three major periods in the development process of the study area are used in the researchers’ evaluation: The pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

The pre-colonial period in Africa was mainly characterized by large, extended, polygamous and few nuclear families. The region under study was during this period an Agrarian society and the people’s sense of value during this period revolved around the basic needs of life: food, shelter, and security. The child depended on his/her parents until the beginning of marriage life. To the child then, the parents was Mr. “know all” an unquestionable authority, the acclaimed informal and formal educator and supervisor of the child. Based on this type of relationship between parents and children, this era produced a very restrictive and one-dimensional child development system that did not recognize the rights of the child.

Colonialism came with formal and Western education around the 19th century and the responsibility of child development became a shared responsibility between parents and teachers. Colonialism also introduced cash economy, white collar and blue-collar jobs that ushered in socio-economic changes that brought pressure to bear upon process of child development. For instance, men were initially those who spend more hours outside their homes because the demands of their jobs. The needs of the child became more diversified, peer influence heightened. The behavioral pattern of children during this period indicated that they were to be seen and not to be heard. Parents’ impression about children then was that they are assets worth any type of trouble so parents stretched and over stretched themselves to give their children formal education in line with the prevalent sense of value. Some parents even went as far as choosing courses for their children and in some cases, determine who will be the spouses of their daughters. This trend declined with the impact of socio-economic change ushered in by the nation’s attainment to independence. Even though this period introduced the formal education that helped educators to contribute to the development of the child, it did nothing to liberalize the traditional child development system.

Post colonialism ushered in another era around the early 1960s when Africans took over leadership positions from the colonial masters and many joined the executive and administrative cadre in the civil service. Consequently, many families moved to the government reserved areas (GRA) where good kindergarten (nursery) and primary schools were built by the colonial masters. Given their new status and sudden recognition of the power and importance of education, these Africans who now form the cream of the society enrolled their children into the emergent kindergarten schools as early as the age of four.

Gradually acceptance of girl child education eventually produced educated and working-class house wives and mothers who like their husbands became part of the nation's labour force. Abandonment of children in day-care centres, nursery schools and boarding schools became emergent cultures that intertwined with the predicament of the postcolonial child. Hence, the child learnt new ways of doing things, made new friends, saw new role models even without the knowledge of these busy parents.

Unfortunately, the post-colonial parents were taken unawares. Deep in the struggle to maintain and sustain their new status and blinded by the euphoria of 'parents are in charge philosophy' of the traditional and colonial period, the post-colonial parents saw the child demanding to be accorded some respect, privileges and rights.

The oil boom that followed the post-colonial period in Nigeria was a panacea to the postcolonial parents/ child relationship especially in the Igbo and Ibibio areas. Many parents in these regions became oil workers, earned more money and built better houses that replaced the small mud houses or small size block houses. Some homes now have children's rooms, libraries, recreational facilities, improved diet and conveniences.

Change presupposes an evolutionary process; it may be transformation from simple to complex stages or vice versa. Upward movement in social change does not determine positive changes in a nation's socio-economic structure. According to Bradly and Corwyn (2002),

A variety of mechanisms linking SES (Socio-economic status) to child well-being have been proposed, with most involving differences in access to material and social resources or reactions to stress-inducing conditions by both the children themselves and their parents. For children, SES impacts well-being at multiple levels, including both family and neighbourhood. Its effects are moderated by children's own characteristics, family characteristics and external support systems.

The boom in electronic culture that led to establishment of more radio and television stations, satellite televisions, cable networks, computers, electronic games, home video and so on, also made the child grow rapidly and learns faster than his age. These cultural, political and socio-economic changes affected the average Igbo and Ibibio family, diversified the needs of the child and interplayed with child rights campaign to produce a permissive child development system that may not augur well for the overall interest of the African child and parents.

The Igbo-Ibibio family has experienced changes that affected its child development programmes as the Nigerian Nation passed through socio-economic, political and

cultural developments. Within the Igbo cosmology, it is believed that the essence of marriage is children.

Therefore, this study is hinged on theoretical premises of Piaget and Child Right Act. The child as a member of the family occupies an important position in the family, to the extent that some marriages are seriously threatened or even in most cases hit the rocks when children are not forthcoming. The period of child development is a very sensitive period in the life of the child when the child's character is moulded and the child made to become what the parents wants him to become. According to Jean Piaget, there are four stages of cognitive development:

1. sensorimotor intelligence (0 to 2 years) manipulation of physical environment
2. preoperational thought (2 to 7 years) begins to think conceptual can solve physical problems.
3. concrete operations (7 to 11 years) can think logically in dealing with physical problems.
4. formal operations (11 to 15 years) can think abstractly can develop and test mental hypotheses can reason and think logically.

A suitable child development system must recognize that parental influence and control is very important during the first three stages for fashioning out the behavioural pattern of the child. But the permissive Western child development systems do not give in to this, rather they liberalize and liberate the child too early. The implication is that the child becomes an adult before adulthood. The restrictive African child development system makes it easier for children to accept parental influence from Piaget's stage 1-3, but in some families, parents may find it difficult to influence their children even at the early stages of development because of child right campaign and socio-economic changes. Stage 4 is the most difficult stage because at this stage the child is beginning to assert his independence in the contemporary society this stage is even made more difficult by these social changes mentioned above. The amenability of the child to parental control may depend on many variables. Some children yield to parental control not because they want to, but because they are minors, helpless and dependent on their parents. A child may reject such overriding influence from parents because of a show of some degree of independence and entitlement to certain rights. Some even wonder what bestows such authority and prerogative on parents. On the other hand, parents, think that it is their duty to protect, decide, control and determine the fate of the child. Some parents guided by the principles of the traditional and colonial society, overstep their bounds and fail to realize that there are limits to which they can act for the child. This side of the argument leads us to the controversy of who is a child? Within the Igbo traditional society, once somebody is born, he or she is a child until the person becomes married. This belief was even captured by early Igbo writers like Chinua Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* and Elechi Amadi in *The Concubine*

The age bracket of the child changed with the emergence of child right act, which eventually put the age of the child from (0-15) zero to fifteen years. The emergence of child right campaign, broadened peoples' understanding of the child and attendant privileges that make the child a recognized member of the family and the society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified by 192-

member countries including Nigeria. This convention is doing a lot to guarantee the protection, survival, participation rights and social welfare of the child within the changing socio-economic environment. According to CRC a child is a “human being below the age of 18 years...” The definition and understanding of the meaning and status of a child is important in determining the human rights of children. According to Ngozi Ezeilo in *Child Abuse and Neglect* a child is, ‘a person who has not attained the age of 14 years...’ in as much as the understanding of the child gives insight on the fundamental human rights of children, it is also a truism that these rights are relative, dynamic and dependent on patterns of socio-economic change. There is no gainsaying that an acceptable child development system must take cognizance of these important rights of the child. By and large the task of child development becomes arduous with the ever-changing nature of these rights in Africa where transformational tendencies are very epileptic.

The phenomenon of change is a major attribute of any society; however, the stability in the developed countries appears to check the geometric progression of the phenomenon of change. Even though change is naturally inbuilt in the developmental process of man and his environment, socio-economic change and its consequent transformation of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular should guarantee the evolution of an effective and widely accepted child development system that will be child friendly and guarantee proper upbringing of the child.

Understandably, change like development is transformation from one state of being to another, there is no doubt that both may motivate positive and negative consequences on the developing being or the environment. However, one major variable of change which the society must contend with is the degree of responsiveness to change. The African’s response, attitude to and reception of changes in her child development system, goes a long way to determine the positive and negative outcome of these changes. Evolutionary trend and developmental process of child development systems in Nigeria reveals obvious indices that parents, children and emergent socio-political institutions have continued to respond to the dynamisms of socio-economic change motivated by prevalent factors within each geographical area selected for study. The degree of resistance/responsiveness between the child and adult differ. “Piaget clearly demonstrated that the thought of the young child is different not only *in degree* from that of the adult, but also *in kind*, and he concluded that each child goes through an invariant series of cognitive stages, with each stage requiring a major overhaul of the preceding one”. At every stage of child development, patterns of socio-economic change interplay with parental influence to condition the behavioural attitude of the child. During the third stage of development when the child starts thinking logically, he begins to deal with physical problems invariably the child wrestles with socio-economic changes as they confront him or her.

Socio-economic change is the sum totals of these transformations that impact on child development and other sectors in a nation. These transformations impact directly or indirectly on child development systems because the child is a member of the family, while the family is part of the socio-economic formations that respond to socio-economic dynamisms. Put differently, socio-economic change is a broad term; connoting social, economic and political changes that motivated child rights campaign. Hence, these variables raise multidisciplinary issues that place child development

centrally in the discourses of scholars from Sociology, Psychology, Education and Theatre Arts. For instance, child development has been identified as one of the major concerns of dramatists from the two areas chosen for study. Hence, from traditional, through colonial to the modern Nigerian society, it remains a major area of exploration by the Artist. This is exemplified in the thematic fixations of the two plays chosen for study: Bassey Ubong and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Free World Square* and *The Night of a Thousand Truths* respectively.

Child Rights Campaign and Child Development in Bassy Ubong's *Free World Square* and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *The Night of a Thousand Truths*

Child Right Campaign and child development are of interest to dramatists from the two areas chosen for study and has even served as thematic fixation to playwrights like Bassey Ubong and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh in their plays *Free World Square* and *The Night of a Thousand Truths* respectively.

Bassey Ubong raises serious issues bothering on child development in his play, *Free World Square* where Tete, a poor teacher and head of an average Nigerian family musters all his energy and financial resources to give his two daughters qualitative education as means of developing them as useful members of the society. Inadvertently Tete exposes them to the phenomenon of change and modernistic tendencies because of the child development system he adopted. The playwright calls to question, the child development system at work in the world of the play and how Child Rights Campaign has affected the upbringing of the Nigerian child. The playwright shows in his treatment of these issues that child Right Campaign can threaten or guarantee a suitable child development system, within the context of its changing process. While doing this the playwrights affirm that the child is the most essential ingredient that ensures the continuance of the family and the society, hence the importance of child development to the African family.

The playwright attempts an examination of how agents of change, like kindergarten schools, peer groups, parental influence and social gatherings can impact on the development of the child. The play also raises questions on the response of the family and its members to the socio-economic, cultural, and political changes threatening child development, peaceful and harmonious co-existence of individual members of the family. The play provides strong indicators that the contemporary Nigerian family has changed from what it used to be, metamorphosing from a conglomeration of families to nuclear families. Hence, a drastic reduction in family sizes is obvious. There are also better care and attention from the family head to the family members. Tete acknowledges this transformation in Bassey Ubong's *Free World Square* and says:

My father had six wives and twenty-seven children. His business was to be sure that six plates of food were before him; at least twice daily where the food came from was not his business (p. 57).

The demand and responsibilities, which the modern society bestows on both parents, have contributed to the changing pattern of child development systems. Gone are the days when the basic needs of the child were food (garri) and shelter. The needs of the child in the contemporary society have definitely gone beyond food and shelter. Now both parents overwork themselves and make sacrifices to provide their children with qualitative education, good clothes and decent accommodation requisite for making

children within the present nuclear family comfortable. This is what child development entails in the contemporary society. Unfortunately for the average Nigerian family these conditions are difficult to meet. Good meals, private schools and comfortable accommodations are expensive and perhaps out of the reach of a senior civil servant in the Nigerian Civil Service. Therefore, it beats Biti's imagination how Tete and Eka, and his wife have been managing to sustain their children in expensive private schools and she queries Eka:

Don't be angry my friend. Just out of curiosity, I would like to ask you how your husband manages to pay school fees for all these children. He is only an Executive Officer in the Civil Service (p. 14).

Though Tete is, not very rich he is determined to give his children the best education in the country because of the importance parents attach to children within the Igbo Ibibio area. He would not want them to be half educated people like him because by and large they are part of his retirement benefits. Moreover, he is proud and always boasts of sending his children to the most expensive private schools in town even if it means starving. Hence, Eka replies: "The truth is that my husband denies himself a lot of comfort just for his children. He insists that his children are his only investment" (p. 15). Eka further informs Biti that apart from his civil service job, her husband does other part-time works, while she also trades to complement her husband's efforts to make sure they see their children through. Explaining to Biti, Eka says: 'He is involved in part-time teaching in the evening schools. He also teaches children of rich people after office hours. I trade on groceries as you know, to supplement the feeding allowance given to me" (p.15).

Increased financial responsibility on parents; to ensure the survival and development of the child within the new socio-economic arrangement and child development system, have obviously reduced parental care for the child. Parents spend little or no time at all with their children at home. Consequently, the family as the basic social unit and as a provider of informal education has failed to meet up even with the basic developmental needs of the child at home. Thus, schools, churches, peer groups and the media have taken over from the family as agents of socialization. To complicate matters these new agents of socialization have raised the child's sense of reasoning dramatically. The child is now older than his or her age and overwhelmingly sensitive to his or her environment. Thus, 'millennium children' reason like adults and even take offence when their rights are infringed upon by parents. Eka laments over the increasing awareness sensitivity and role of the child in the family and queries:

Is it not this nursery school something? That is the only good thing my husband has done or I should say the only reasonable thing. It is not good because these schools seem to teach children to ask too many questions and to be bold and insult their parents. 'Eh mummy why is it that you always cry softly at night? Does daddy beat you? Who is that man that gave you a dress the other day? 'Have you heard that Mrs. X is now a commissioner (p. 13).

Evidently, schools, the media, institutions and other agents of child development and socializations have succeeded in providing better environment for the survival and development of the child. However, the issue is the response of parents to the new system of child development. Does the new system bring out the best in the child for

the benefit of the parents and the community? Though, the child is better equipped to respond to family matters and issues of state concern now; the new child development system has made it possible for the child to challenge dictatorial tendencies of parents, authorities and institutions of the society. The playwright brings this to us in Eka-mma's criticism of her father's attitude, Eka-mma engages her father (Tete) in a serious argument, challenging her father's authority as family head. Rhetorically, she queries the authority of the teacher, the child leader and shows her disapproval for the military and their dictatorial tendencies. She paints a good picture of the Millennium child's boldness saying:

... a teacher tyrannizes a whole class, particularly the female students. The sovereign on the throne sits, majestic, doling out biased judgment to quarrelsome pupils and getting all their wealth in return. The army commander sits in a cosy office shouting orders to the suicide squad. Even in the child gang, the kid leader controls and commands the attention, time, energy and wealth of all others. Here it shall not happen (p. 62).

Tete is dumbfounded at his daughter's intelligence and boldness. He further feels intimidated when his two daughters start confronting him and his wife over acts of immorality, negligence and violation of their rights. As Eka-mma and Nne-ete quiz their parents, it becomes obvious that their carelessness must have influenced their children's way of life. It is not out of place to conclude that Tete's immoral behaviour also influences his wife's attitude and eventual promiscuous life of his daughters. The meeting of father and daughter (Tete and Eka-mma) in the Free world square is only but a revelation of height of irresponsibility among parents and the alarming rate of immorality and corruption among millennium children. That notwithstanding, the rate at which Eka-mma and Nne-ete quiz and challenge their parents; awaken in both father and mother, sudden consciousness that call to question the new child development system. Nne-ete asserts her freedom of movement and association as she challenges her mother and her mother's friend Biti. Nne-ete brings to us that her mother and Biti are infringing on her rights when they quiz her over being out with the boys. Nne-ete shows her dissatisfaction in the following dialogue:

BITI: welcome Nne-ete

EKA: Where were you?

NNE-ETE: Out with the boys (Biti and Eka exchange glances)

EKA; With the what?

NNE-ETE: (Carelessly). The boys I said, why, you two look surprised. What is strange about that (p. 8).

Even though Eka and her friend Biti feel highly embarrassed; Nne-ete is not moved because she wants to emphasize her right to freedom of movement and association. Thus, she affirms that the new child development system has bestowed on the child the right to move out at any time and associate with people of her choice. And "on returning home even though she has been out all day with the boys, she turns to her mother and says; "mummy I am hungry" (p.12). Indicating that as a child, she must be provided for by her parents. She does not stop at that, she goes further to challenge her mother: "By the way Mummy, why did you have to shout so much this morning" (p.10), and

her mother retorts: “Shut Up! How is that of concern to you? Children should be sleeping or minding their business when elders are doing their thing.” (p.10) But Nne-ete reminds her mother that children should have their protection rights and therefore should not be disturbed by their parents she informs her mother saying: “Not when their actions disturb the children.” (p. 10). Determined to prove her case, Nne-ete goes on to lash her mother without mincing words: “I didn't mean to hurt you, mummy. Only That I wonder the sort of example you are showing to us by fighting daily and destroying the little we have. We children are never happy about it.” (p. 12)

Having condemned her mother's behaviours, Nne-ete also points out in her statement above that her mother's attitude may bring negative influence to bear on the children. Nevertheless; she diplomatically continues her move to convince her mother that children have participation rights in the family. Children are entitled to take part in household chores as their own contribution to the welfare of the family. Nne-ete reminds her mother of this as she insists to help in preparing food for the family even though her mother objects. Boldly she tells her mother, “I want to prepare the food” (p.12). Unfortunately, time appears to have left most Nigerian families behind. They are yet to be awakened to the realities of this social transformation as can be seen in the way Eka reacts to Nne-ete's request. Rather than oblige the child to come and help, she ends up with a curse saying: “Let my dead mother shatter your stubborn skull, get out” (p.12). Obviously, Eka is highly temperamental and oblivious of the changes in child development system. Her naggings, curses and constant abuse of the child is an indication that she is still clinging to the old child development system that portrays a child as a thing to be seen. Consequently, her attitude has negative influence on the overall development of her children. Nne-ete brings this to the notice of Eka and says, “I cannot concentrate (on my home work) when you are talking” (p. 17). Nne-ete even goes further to query her mother over why she should disturb her children even at night. Her father, Tete is embarrassed and tries to stop her, but Nne-ete quickly confronts her father asking: “But Dad, how can I stop myself from hearing? Your room is next to ours the rooms, have no ceilings and the doors are cracked” (p.20).

Nne-ete brings to us through the above dialogue, the poor living conditions of most Nigerian families. Though the family is undergoing transformation, but the same system that motivated these changes is yet to make adequate provisions for the average Nigerian family to contain these changes. Most families still live in single room apartments. Nne-ete reveals the disadvantages; indicating that there is no privacy and comfort that will support the encroaching Western child development system. The child within the changing Nigerian family is entitled to comfortable accommodation, not shelter. Children must have their separate rooms so that the adults will not complain that children pry into their affairs. Tete laments over the situation and shouts:

Heaven deliver us from the imps of this generation. And because of poverty, we are still living in single rooms and building one-bedroom flats for the poor How can elders do their thing whichever way they want when there is no privacy (p.21).

The generational gap which Tete refers to here is caused by new agents of child development especially the kindergarten schools. There is no gainsaying that the preoccupation of the playwright is to sensitize the changing Nigerian family to the new sensibilities of the child in the contemporary society and the challenges facing it

concerning the development of the child in a changed society where old ways of life are giving way to new practices. For instance, Tete refuses to accept that caning the child is no longer globally acceptable as a way of correcting the child. Tete finds it difficult to believe that caning the child is now child abuse and is therefore a violation of the child's survival rights, he argues: "Chase away caning, chase away discipline..." (p.32). Tete and his wife Eka fail to understand that the changing Nigerian family requires more than caning to guarantee the development of the child. Hence, they end up harassing, intimidating and violating the rights of their children. Nne-ete one of their daughters who remains the moral voice in the play, acknowledges the intimidating attitude of her parents and asks her mother. "Mum, am I a devil or a pest? I thought I had the right to enter this house whenever I so wished" (p.37). Consequently, the situation has not helped harmonious understanding and peaceful co-existence of the designated members of the family. There is friction because the family head and his wife fail to recognize that times are no longer the same. Eka mma rightly apportions blame to her parents for her weaknesses saying: "The problem with our elders is that they are unable to see and appreciate that times have changed, 'in our days', they keep saying but 'of course, today can never be yesterday, just as tomorrow will never be today'" (p.29).

Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh (1999); a female playwright of Igbo extraction like Ubong; treats parental influence and issues of child development in her play; *The Night of a Thousand Truths*. However, unlike Ubong, Utoh-Ezeajugh takes the consequences of a failed childhood to a catastrophic end. The playwright evaluates weaknesses of parents and the failure of most parents to stand on the side of the truth in matters affecting their children as factors militating against an effective child development system in Africa. She presents unnecessary weeping of sentiments in child development matters as the bane of African child development system and consequent contemporary societal maladies in Nigeria. The play is a social metaphor that dwells on the hypocrisy of a father and his wife— simply represented by the playwright as Mummy and Daddy. This family head and his wife are soaked in immorality and corruption rather than live exemplary life that will influence their children positively. Husband and wife pay dearly for their nefarious activities and flirtations with all manner of people. The family is almost doomed before their repentant daughter - Candy intervenes.

The playwright brings to us how prevalent socio-economic changes have interplayed with corrupt practices to impair child development system in Africa. Unfortunately, this trend influences Daddy and Mummy who hide under this band wagon effect to ruin their children, below Daddy hints us about the state of the society and their reasons for playing along;

...the fabrics of society have been eroded by corruption and indiscipline. Those in positions of authority, abuse the very laws they are supposed to implement, should we function differently? Dare to be different? Are we not part of the system? Our children attended the same schools. The same interviews. Pursue the same goals as the rest of society (p.92).

The precarious situation above blinds Daddy and Mummy. They are carried away by the bandwagon effect which eventually impacts negatively on the development of their children. The children are given false impression of life, false hope and the impression that success and failure in life are determined by material wealth, guided by this

philosophy, Daddy and Mummy in their determination to succeed established conglomeration of Business Empire built on adulterous life and dishonesty at the expense of adequate attention and care that will foster ethical ideals in the developmental process of their children. Mummy informs us below that Daddy is much more interested in his business activities and social engagements that lead to total abandonment of his children and wife for material wealth. Thus, abandoned to their fate the children derail, scatter every person to his or her own ways. The outcome is public execution of Tony Daddy's son, a dangerous abortion that almost claimed Candy's life and total devastation of the family. Rather than pick piece and pieces of their ruin, Daddy and Mummy engages in shifting of blames and taunting of each other as they refuse to own up. Mummy taunts Daddy below and says: "Your son is dead! When he needed you as a father where were you! Did you perform your duties as a loving father?" (p. 81) Daddy responds with counter accusation and blames his wife for the failure of his children, he laments!

Yes you! You are the cause of all this, instead of you to sit down at home and train your children, you are running all over the place. Jumping from one man to the other. You think I do not have eyes (p.106).

Apart from neglecting their children, Daddy and Mummy set bad examples that cause undue influence over their children. Though, they may be thinking that their children do not understand what they are doing, they fail to understand that the age of reasoning for the millennium child has come as low as between four and five years. They are products of the kindergarten schools that adopted and champion Western child development system which makes the child grow rapidly and learn faster than his or her age. As Tony and Candy watch their parents' ways of life, they copy it and improve on it according to the demands of their own generation. Candy, Tony's sister in these rhetoric questions throw more light on the contributions of parental influence on her brother's (Tony's) notoriety and consequent failure of his childhood. Addressing her mother, she says:

How many times did you and Daddy bribe to get Tony out of police net after being implicated in various crimes? How many times did you bribe to get him reinstated after being rusticated from school because of his involvement in cult activities? How many times was he caught peddling and taking drug? What did you do about it? Answer me Mummy. When Tony bought a Mercedes Benz car at the age of eighteen, when he was still in secondary school, what did you do? When our family friend told you that Tony was running an extortion racket at the age of nineteen, what did you do?... what did you do when I discovered a gun in Tony's bag last year and showed it to you, what did you do? (pp. 88-89).

The truth is that Mummy does not chastise Tony for these wrong doings, rather she covers up for him, pampers him and make excuses for him. Consequently, Tony, the student, cultist, rapist, extortionist, gradually hardens into an armed robber. Tony could have turned out a better child if Mummy and Daddy are able to consider important variables of child development. This cannot be because, Daddy and Mummy are themselves corrupt hence, cannot give what they do not have. Parents are models for their children and their ideology of life brings enormous influence to bear on the character and development of the child. Children need adequate moral orientation from

their parents. It is only when they are armed with these ethical values that they can stand up to the challenges of their society. In the case of Daddy and Mummy, the reverse is the case. As early as fourteen years of age, Mummy has started encouraging her daughter Candy to accept gifts from men and be nice to them. Thank God, the repentant Candy now brings to us the consequences of her mother's debased character on her upbringing and development, regrettably she says:

...when I was fourteen years old ... Mummy encouraged me to be nice to a man who bought presents for her ... Wasn't that for my own good? When I was pregnant at the age of fifteen and Mummy took me for an abortion wasn't that for my own good too? (pp. 89)

Child development requires a combination of the stick and the carrot. To be over protective of children is not the best for them. Sometimes parents do it out of emotions and display of the usual sentiments between parents and children or out of genuine interest to make their children succeed. It does not work always. It may traverse and boomerang into unprecedented failure. Eventually, like Tony and Candy, children who are beneficiaries of such parental over pampering may turn out to be miscreants, militants, suicide bombers Lumpen children and Almanjeris. The playwright presents Tony and Candy as archetypes, typical examples of such children who are products of a deficient and faulty child development system and therefore, calls to question, the prevalent African and hastily adopted Western child development systems. Unfortunately, it is not only the family that bears the consequences of the failure of the child, the society also suffers the consequences. The activities of Tony like the activities of militants and suicide bombers and terrorists have devastating effects on the political and socio-economic wellbeing of the state. The consequences of terrorism on the Nigerian nation and the age bracket of "foot soldiers" of terrorism call for drastic review of our child development system and the type of values it inculcates in the child.

The cumulative effect of a failed childhood is disastrous, and in most cases shared by the individual, the family and the society. For instance, Tony pays with his life because he is caught and executed publicly as a condemned armed robber. The family is highly tortured and traumatized after public execution of Tony. Thank God for Candy who repents and changes from a social misfit, professional student prostitute and "abortionist" to the moral voice of the play. Candy openly rejects her family's life style and decides to leave the family house but her Daddy wouldn't let her go. Daddy threatens her and says:

you will not. I forbid you! You are my daughter and you are still under my authority. You will do what I say. Take these things back into the room (p. 85).

Daddy and Mummy's failure to respond to patterns of socio-economic change that first of all; transmuted the pre-colonial and colonial understanding of the child and subsequently enhanced the hasty adoption of Western child development system that lead to enjoyment of survival and participation rights as well as the social privileges by the child remains the bane of most millennium families. Parents take the rapid development of children in the contemporary society for granted and carryout all manner of acts before the child; thinking that the child does not take note of what is going on. Some parents would want to Lord everything over the child, suffocating him/her with authority, order, instructions and love. Hence, the child is denied personal

initiatives and a times ordinary suggestions in family affairs. When the environment becomes too restrictive and unfriendly, the child may take to the streets, resort to violence and crime as means of showing resentment for such restrictive child development system. Invariably other factors like peer group and government policy may combine to make things difficult for some parents who may be determined to develop and bring up their children as responsible citizens. Though one is aware of these other impact factors, it is still parents who are solely responsible for the success and failure of their child. Parents should against all odds, evolve an ideology, a strategy and method for creating rapport with their children and ensuring proper development of the child. Below, Candy reminds Daddy and Mummy:

You are our parents. Surely you have visions. So, what vision do you have for the future generation? Address that question. Then think of the past. The day you ask yourselves what you can do, so that another of your children does not end up as a social outcast, that day will mark the beginning of a new era, a new dawn, a new awareness, a new hope for the generations yet unborn (p. 92).

Conclusion

The study reveals through content analysis of the two plays chosen for study how committed the playwrights are to the course of the Nigerian child. The playwrights succeeded in highlighting patterns of socio-economic change, the rights of the child within the context of the realities of change and consequences of bad child development systems in the changing Nigerian family.

Obviously, the pattern of change reveals that socio-economic, political and cultural factors are responsible for the transformation in child development systems. It is also paramount that this transformation has created new roles as well as challenges for the component units of the family. According to the study, the family appears unprepared to accommodate the new status of the child, hence the need to correct the anomaly because the child as highlighted in the plays is resolute in his/her struggle to be recognized.

Therefore, child development cannot be carried out in isolation of other variables affecting it. It is part and parcel of societal activities that are prone to impact factors arising from socio-economic and cultural changes. Therefore, parents as participants in child development projects should be responsive to changes in their environments; especially as it concerns their dealings with the child.

It is therefore recommended that the present Nigerian family must face the realities of our time. Parents must plan their family and make adequate provisions for the proper development, survival and welfare of the child. The efforts being made by international political organizations to protect the child are highly commended because child development is a complex and dicey project which could go either way (succeed or fail.) It is complex in the sense that the child during development process is very sensitive, responsive helpless and sometimes emotional.

The study makes it clear that the attitudes of the child are in constant change in response to socio-economic and cultural changes. Hence, there is need for constant restructuring of the system from below (the family) through the middle (the society) to the top (government).

The research also established that parents among Igbo and Ibibio families still rely on the traditional child development system which makes their development strategies too restrictive and overbearing on the child. Thus, it is recommended that their traditional child development system be modified according to the demands of the present socio-economic realities.

Researchers' analyses provide indicators that the African child development system engenders between parents and children certain uncanny dependency that does not augur well for both parents and children. It weakens the initiatives of the child and the child's ability to confront the vicissitudes of eventual adulthood and survive on its own. On the side of the parents, the system tends to make parents place so much hope on the child which may not at the long run materialize. Though the study focused on Africa and Eastern Nigeria particularly, it was able to look briefly at the Western child development system which it described as too liberal and permissive because of the magnitude of freedom it bestows on the child. So, looking at the African and Western child development systems, the researchers recommend a change that will fall between too restrictive and too permissive (Not too dependent, not excessively free); a radical middle course between the two.

Hence, African theatre Artists should explore the recommended radical middle course child development system in their works to sensitize the people on the consequences of a faulty child development system as well as the gains of a suitable child development system for Africa.

Despite, the recommended "bottom to top" re-engineering and reformative process, which will help evolution and acceptance of an effective child development system, the researchers finally posits that there is the need for the government to come up with free education programmes, skill acquisition schemes and low-cost housing projects for lower class families, Almanjeris, Lumpen and street children. Some of these programmes are ongoing, but because the family has finally collapsed as the primary molder of the child's character; it becomes an uphill task to hit the iron when it is already cold. Africa should adopt a modification of the permissive/restrictive child development systems and adopt a radical middle so as to reduce increase in failed children.

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