

Statistics reveal that Kenya has the worst forms of Child labour with over 1.9 million children in Nairobi alone living on the street, with a considerable proportion engaged in child labour

Is there hope for child labourers?

Ohaga Paul

Rose, 15, was orphaned at four, and became a mother at 14 on a street in Kisumu city that she had grown to know as her only home.

One day however, hope appeared on the horizon when a stranger offered to help her. But it turned out that the good gesture turned her into a housemaid.

Hard work allocated to her daily was not good enough as the stranger often subjected her to sexual abuse at her tender age, forcing her to quit.

With nowhere to go, she hit back to her 'home'—the streets.

Not long after, she met other street children some of who assaulted her sexually leading her to conceiving.

Such has been Rose's rough life that even when the Narc government offered to send her to a rehabilitation centre, Rose, who has grown to be suspicious of strangers who appear with promises of good things, turned down an offer a social worker provided for her to relocate to a rehabilitation centre.

Rose has grown without love and when I ask about her parents and why she opted to be on the street, a pensive mood quickly registers on her face. She looks at me shyly with her small deep-set eyes and seconds later the eyes turn puffy as tears roll down her cheeks.

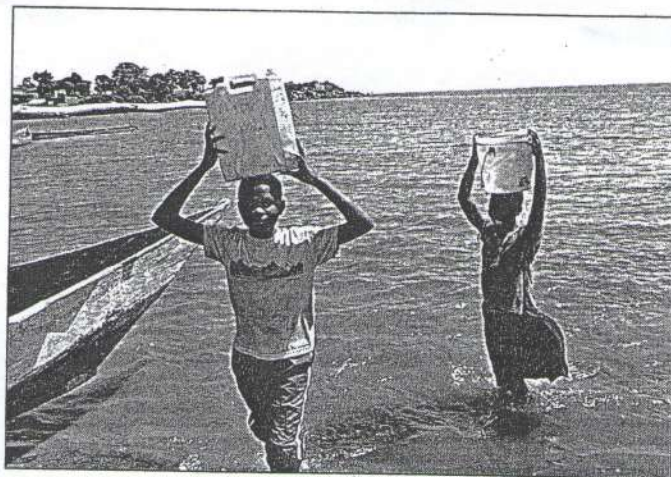
But she still gathers the courage to talk about them. Rose's parents passed away leaving her in the hands of her only brother. She says her brother's wife turned violent on her. "I was always ordered to do heavy work all day long".

On turning to her brother, her sister-in-law threatened to walk out on the marriage.

How about life on the street? I ask her.

Rose's day begins at about five in the morning, when she begins to scavenge for food. At six she moves to a make shift restaurant run by one woman who prepares food for Jua Kali traders. She fetches water, helps in preparing food and takes orders around the whole Jua Kali area in Kisumu.

She tirelessly does this daily save for Sundays and in the company of her baby. Her only rest comes at seven in the evening and supposing nothing comes by to



Mary Awino and Julian Atieno at Osieko Beach in Usenge, Bondo, deliver water to kiosks for a fee.

prostitution, drug trafficking or in the production of pornography.

Others are involved in domestic services in both rural and/or urban areas where they suffer among other things, sexual exploitation leading to early pregnancy, maternal mortality, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, trauma, emotional and psychological problems.

They also suffer physical violence.

Child labour is often considered to be an inevitable part of the life of the poor and perceived as a necessary survival and coping mechanism for families in poverty."

Child labor cases are experienced across the country for instance in Uasin Gishu District particularly Timbora and Burnt Forest areas, where some children leave school and engage in hawking of farm produce like carrots, cabbages and potatoes along highways. But there is hope. In Western

sustain her, she will have to park along side other prostitutes in the streets, leaving the baby all alone.

But Rose is only one of the 1.9 million children in various urban centers in Nairobi who not only live on the streets but also find themselves engrossed in child labor. Rose, still a child by legal definitions, says she has to do this "for the sake of her child".

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), child labor is often considered to be an inevitable part of the life of the poor and perceived as a necessary survival and coping mechanism for families in poverty.

IPEC defines child labor as both paid and unpaid work and activities engaged in by children that are mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to them such as work that deprives them of opportunities for schooling or that requires them to assume the multiple burdens of schooling and work at home and in other workplaces; and work that enslaves them and separates them from their family.

Statistics from IPEC reveal that at least 250 million children aged between 5-14 years in developing countries alone, are engaged in child labor with almost half of them working full time.

Kenya is in fact considered to have the worst forms of child labor. According to research carried out by the IPEC, children are engaged in

Kenya, one Child Labor Organization working under COTU (K) in collaboration with ILO/IPEC has done a commendable job towards elimination of child labor. The Community Child Labor Self Help Group COTU (K) that is an extension arm of COTU (K) went ahead to find children found working in quarry fishing and commercial areas.

Mr Joseph Modi, the director that the Community Self Group sponsored 86 boys and girls to go to schools.

Similarly the organization has managed to sponsor at least 86 boys and 76 girls in secondary schools with others in vocational training.

However, the organization has experienced a relatively difficult time sensitizing the public and has discovered that many people even educated do not know what exactly entails child labor.

There is also no cooperation from the local authorities like the chief their assistants. Neither does the funds for the coordination of the help matters.

The demand for child labor still remains high. It costs little and sometimes even nothing at all.

Since 1919, the ILO has sought to put an end to child labor by adopting international labor standards to set minimum ages for different types of work children and to regulate the nature and distinction of work.

Even so, unless child labor is addressed expansively, the prevalent will continually be on the rise spelling dark future for Africa.



Young William Otieno labours the great River Oropa in Masai in Nyando district as a sand harvester.