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Conclusion

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The contents of this volume on children and youth in the labour process in Africa clearly indicate that though children have engaged in work activities in Africa within their communities for centuries, the mode, nature and scope of this engagement in the twenty-first century has become of great concern to many, including governments and civil society. Though the centrality of labour in life cannot be overstated and one participates in his or her society through work, the current trend in which children and youth are exploited in the labour process in Africa gives great cause for concern. The experiences from Tanzania, Kenya, Congo DRC, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Morocco and other countries in Africa paint a picture of the fact that children are under pressure to work and not living out their role as children. Many children in Africa are increasingly engaged in hazardous or what the ILO defines as Worst Forms of Child Labour, and this situation could get worse unless the economic conditions and social arrangements encouraging this situation are comprehensively addressed. Worse still is the type of future that awaits children and youth!

Right from the beginning of this compendium, the authors have tried to present and expose the various facets and dimensions of child labour in Africa, especially in the present century. There is very little doubt that the nature and character of the current phase of globalization has worsened rather than constrained the transmutation from child work to child labour. The complexity of today's world, including the advancement in communications technology and travel time, means that the rate at which nefarious individuals and cartels that indulge in child labour, for instance, operate, is much widened and deepened. The present triumph of capitalism as a mode of production and the strangulation of communalism and social welfarism as organizing concepts of the collective good have served to jeopardize the situation of children and youth in Africa. Against this background, we need to re-examine the kind of education and schooling that we have today in Africa. Is it better than what we had before in terms of the collective betterment of our societies? Are we being

educated to serve our societies or to serve globalization and capitalism? How does this development impact on the lives of children?

Based on the experiences and lessons from the trafficking of children, and their utilization as cheap sources of labour, several interventions have been proposed, and many are presently under implementation. For instance, there are efforts to stop the trafficking of children both within and across countries, and to improve access to basic services for children and youth, including access to health, nutrition, education and income-generating activities. These are being pursued through advocacy, partnerships with NGOs, sensitization of the public, capacity-building initiatives for field officers involved in helping these children, as well as the review of data and information about child labour, of which this book could be a good source.

In many of the cases of child exploitation in the labour process examined here, the most practical recommendation, at least in the long run, is the necessity for a strategy that will economically address the structural basis that creates the environment for child exploitation in relation to labour. This is as against recommendations that proffer legislative measures alone, and fall short in examining the underlying factors that have contributed to the problem. Beginning from the 1990s, child trafficking, for instance, was virtually treated as a new phenomenon with various legislative measures enacted. However, it was not long before it was realized that legislative measures alone, and even addressing poverty at its face value, were not enough to tackle the menace of child trafficking. Indeed, it was also realized that the causes of child labour are more complex than just poverty. While it is important to understand the economic structure and the political economy of a particular society in seeking solutions, with emphasis on production relations one should also not overlook the socio-cultural and psychological factors, some of which have proven to be obstacles to addressing the problem.

A major observation from the studies encapsulated in this book is that governments in Africa are yet to pay the kind of attention that is required in addressing the problem of child labour. These governments are yet to address the contemporary issues and conditions that affect the welfare of children and the youth. The problem is even more compounded in situations of conflict, as in Angola, Congo DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone. From the experiences of the children, they literally became commodities to be bought and sold for diverse purposes, ranging from cheap labour to sexual toys and even providers of human spare parts. And the height of this exploitation is the fact that the transactions were not for their benefit, but to the benefit of their adult exploiters. We do indeed have a very serious problem in our hands – a development that requires a complex of innovative and practical measures to be addressed. Economic, political, socio-cultural and historical factors may all need to be invoked, depending on the geographical location and character of the child exploitation. This implies a multiplicity of actors, including governments, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) as well as private individuals.

Child labour is about child rights and the rights of human beings engaged in a relationship in which they have little bargaining power. The dominant mode of

production and reproduction – capitalism in its present manifestation – has stripped the child in disadvantaged parts of the world of his or her childhood. There is hence the need for legal and social protection for children and youth. There is also a need to pay greater attention to the legislation on children and their protection and how the laws could be better domesticated. African governments are enjoined to take more seriously the implementation of these laws. In Africa, efforts at addressing poverty and the push and pull factors fuelling child labour should be at the core of government's interests. Civil society, which has been much engaged around the continent, should also strive to understand the conceptual foundations and manifestations of child labour and distill appropriate strategies to address the problem in context.

Our hope is that this book would have served its purpose if it contributes to exposing the dimensions and adding to our understanding of the experiences of children and youth in the labour process in Africa. Often taken for granted or simply absent from the consciousness of Africa's leaders and civil society, the problem of child labour also indicates the extent of the development crises in Africa, and should be addressed in tandem with other major issues bedevilling the continent. The onus lies with all and sundry, especially governments that wield the instruments of legislation, the international community, international and local civil society groups, and rural communities of Africa to embark on concrete measures singly and collectively that will address the problem of children being engaged in hazardous work, and also protecting those that are already involved, whatever the reason.