

Innovations

Challenges of Leadership in the Implementation of the National Children's Policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research was to identify the major challenges of Leadership in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia, at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. To identify the major challenges of leadership in the implementation of the policy, constructivist research paradigm, qualitative research approach and phenomenological research design was employed. Interviews and focus group discussions were the basic tools of data collection. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used. Purposive sampling technique and thematic data analysis are employed. The challenges of leadership in the implementation of the national children's policy in the study area are multi-faceted. But according to the findings of this study, they are grouped into four themes. These are: economic challenges, socio-cultural challenges, lack of awareness and political and legal problems. To overcome the challenges of leadership in the implementation of the policy, the following recommendations were given. These were: providing education and health facilities for children, providing school feeding for children, creating awareness about the rights of children for all stakeholders, increasing the economic level of families, building recreational centers for children, allocating enough financial and human resources for children affairs, increasing children role and participation in decision making processes affecting them, giving due*

attention for the rights of children by the government and providing effective justice system for children.

Key Words: *Challenges, Children, Implementation, Leadership, Policy.*

1. Introduction and Background Information

Many children of Ethiopia are deprived of their rights; children are living in hardships. According to the 2015 Ethiopian statistical data, by UNICEF, only 7% of children registered when they are born and 27% of the labor forces are children which are being exploited in Ethiopia. Sixteen percent of children got married by the age of 15 and 41% of children got married by age of 18. Besides this, children also face female genital mutilation. It accounts for 74% women and 24% girls in Ethiopia.

The national children's policy of Ethiopia was adopted in 2017 to protect the rights of children. The National Children's Policy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia contains six sections. These are: General situations of Ethiopian children and significance of the policy; Vision, objective, and principles; Major policy issues; Implementation strategies of the policy; Roles and responsibilities, and Monitoring and evaluation strategies. The policy has three fundamental pillars. These are: Children's development and growth; Prevention and protection of children from social, economic and political hardships; and providing rehabilitation, care and support for children in difficult circumstances (FDRE, 2017).

Protection of children from social, economic and political hardships is the main objective of the national children's policy of Ethiopia. The policy aims to protect children from harmful traditional practices such as social evils, abuse, trafficking and child abuse (Ibid).

But children's of Ethiopia are still deprived of their rights because of the gap to implement the national children's policy. According to Nahom (2018), child labor abuse, child sexual abuse and child trafficking are the common challenges facing children of Ethiopia despite the introduction of the 2017 national children's policy.

There is also a gap in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia in the Amhara National Regional State. Children sufferings in Ethiopia in general and in Amhara National Regional State are very high. According to the study made by SOS Children's Village Ethiopia, the sufferings of children at Bahir Dar and its surroundings are also highly prevalent. Early marriage, abduction, female circumcision, high infant mortality rate, malnutrition, stunting and wasting and

school drop outs are the major problems challenging children (SOS Children's Village, 2019).

Different researches were conducted on the rights of children. Nahom (2018) conducted a study on briefing the national children's policy of Ethiopia during emergency situations but he did not explore the challenges of the implementation of the national children's policy. He simply described problems associated with the rights of children such as child trafficking, Sexual abuse and labor abuse. Secondly, Birhan (2015) made her MA thesis on the comparative analysis of child rights protection between Ethiopia and Kenya. This research made a comparative analysis on the contents and procedures of the child protection policy making process of the two countries. Ayalew (2020), made a study on the challenges of children with children. But his study was limited only on female children that got early marriage and sexual abuse and as a result got a child. By this study Ayalew showed the challenges of female children who got child because of early marriage or by sexual abuse and their coping mechanisms. There are no sufficient studies conducted on the challenges of leadership in the implementation of the children's policy of Ethiopia at the national level and at the local levels. Therefore, this research would try to identify the major challenges of leadership in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. The Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a shared world view that represents the beliefs and values in a discipline and that guides how problems are solved (Schwandt, 2001). Constructivism research paradigm was applied in this research. Constructivists believed that there is no one reality. The reality depends on the experiences of individuals, circumstances and conditions. According to constructivist, truth can be constructed by collecting and interpreting people's views and there is no universally agreed truth (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study also tried to reconstruct truth from the different personal views and experiences of interview informants and focus group discussants.

2.2. Research Approach

Qualitative research approach was employed in this research. Qualitative research approach is preferred in order to have a deep investigation of the challenges of leadership in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department.

Qualitative inquiry is vital in the presence of multiple truths that are socially constructed. This approach is the description of the interactions among participants and the researchers in naturalistic settings with no strong boundaries, resulting in a flexible and open research process. These unique interactions imply that different results could be obtained from the same participant depending on who the researcher is. The results in qualitative research are created by a strong interaction between the participants of a research and the researcher in a given situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.3. Research Design

This research used the phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design helps to study the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants of the research. According to Creswell (2007), in a phenomenological design, the researcher can deeply understand the experiences that several individuals have had on a certain phenomenon. In this study the main data sources were interview informants. The researcher tried to deeply understand the perceptions and the lived experiences of oral informants by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

2.4. Sources and Instruments of Data Collection

This research utilized primary sources of data. Interview informants and focus group discussants were the two major primary sources of data for this study. The researcher used in-depth interviews to collect data from the leaders and experts of Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. FGD (Focus Group Discussion) was employed to collect data from the different experts of Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. Therefore, in-depth interviews and FGD were the two data collection instruments. The leaders and experts of Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department were the sources of data.

2.5. Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Since the study is geographically limited at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department, the population of this study was also limited at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. The populations of this research were the leaders and experts of Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department which are twenty three numerically. The researcher applied purposive sampling technique. Even though the sample size of a study during purposive sampling can be flexible, in this research data were collected from: the head of women, children and social affairs department; the vice head of women, children and social affairs department; the two experts of child protection and security, two experts of women protection and security; and from one social affairs expert of Bahir Dar City Administration Women,

Children and Social Affairs Department by the help of in-depth interviews. The researcher also collected data through FGD from six members of Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. Therefore, the sample size of this study was thirteen numerically. The following tables show demographic characteristics of the research participants

Table-1 Demographic characteristics of FGD Discussants

Code of the Discussants	Sex	Age	Responsibility in the department	Educational level	Job experience
D1	F	45	Women protection expert	Degree	18
D2	F	43	children security expert	Degree	20
D3	M	25	children protection expert	Degree	3
D4	F	39	Women security expert	Degree	15
D5	M	40	Social affairs expert	Degree	17
D6	M	32	children protection expert	Degree	10

Table-2 Demographic characteristics of interview informants

Code of the participants	Sex	Age	Responsibility in the department	Educational level	Exper - lence
P1	F	30	Women protection expert	Degree	10
P2	F	43	children security expert	Degree	23
P3	M	38	children protection expert	Degree	18
P4	M	42	Department head	Degree	20
P5	M	54	Vice-Department head	Degree	29
P6	F	36	Women security expert	Diploma	9

P7	M	32	Social affairs expert	MA	13
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2.6. Data Analysis

The research used thematic method of data analysis. In qualitative research approach there are at least six methods of data analysis methods. From these methods thematic method of data analysis is the best method of data analysis. Thematic analysis method is a good approach to researches when someone is trying to find out something about people’s views, opinions, knowledge, experiences or values from a set of qualitative data. In analyzing the data first the raw data were transcribed that were collected by the data collecting instruments. After transcribing the data the researcher became familiar with the data and gave codes for each data. Then the data were categorized by themes for interpretation.

2.7. The Issue of Validity and Reliability

In qualitative researches the concept of internal validity of a research indicates the credibility of the research. The credibility of a research refers the accuracy or truthfulness of a research. The reliability of a qualitative research is known as dependability of a research. Dependability of a research indicates the consistency of findings of a research if the research is replicated. In qualitative studies variations may not become zero but can be minimized.

To increase the credibility and dependability of this research, the researcher has conducted the following activities. The first means that was employed to increase the credibility and dependability of this research is data triangulation. Different data sources were triangulated one another. For example, the data collected through interview method was triangulated with the data collected from FGD. Data collected from interview informants were also triangulated one another and the data collected by FGD were also triangulated one another. Generally the data triangulation methods were made both across the different methods of data collection instruments and within the same method of data collection technique.

The second way that was employed to increase the credibility and dependability of this research is participant feedback. After analyzing and interpreting the data collected from interview informants, the participants (respondents) of the research were asked to evaluate whether the interpretation of their response is properly written or not. Extended field works, interdisciplinary triangulation and control of bias were the other mechanisms to increase the credibility and dependability of this research.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

Any research work needs ethical standards in the process of conducting the study. This research work had also its own ethical standards. All the participants of the study were involved voluntarily. The researcher also gave due respect for the privacy of participants of the study. In order to respect the privacy of respondents the researcher gave codes for the participants of the study as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and D1, D2, D3,D4, D5, D6. The findings of the study were depended on the actual data collected from the sources of data. Finally the researcher tried to avoid bias and acknowledge all sources used in the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The challenges of leadership in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department are multifaceted. But for the purpose of discussion of the finds of this study, it is better to group the challenges of leadership in the implementation of the policy into four basic themes. These are: economic challenges, socio-cultural challenges, lack of awareness and political and legal challenges.

3.1. Economic Challenges

According to interview informants from P3 and P4 economic problems are the basic challenges in the school for children. Students' drop out in the schools is mainly associated with the economic problems. Students from poor families mainly come without having their breakfasts. The students also come to schools without having basic educational equipments such as exercise books, pens, uniforms and etc. Finally when they are unable to afford the school equipments they drop out from schooling. Some students also drop out their schooling in order to support themselves and their families. Some students also do not totally attend their schooling because of economic problems. Those students who tried to survive these problems and attend schooling are not successful at the end.

Some families also married their female children to support their family. There are also students who came from the rural areas and learn working with a nearby relative or with other family members without parental care. Interview informant P3 explained the economic challenges on children education as follows:

Because of economic problems or poverty, children come from the rural areas to attend their schooling with their nearby relatives or family relatives. But after they come to the city children would be forced to attend schooling by working. These children would get labor abuse and do not properly attend schooling. Finally, they will be forced to drop out from schooling and began to lead their life. Some of them

also involved in forced commercial sex. Others would become victims of child trafficking and drug addiction. Some of them began to live in the streets.

FGD made with the participants of this study also assured the above idea. Because of the economic problems children also faced malnutrition. Stunting and wasting are the effects of malnutrition. The poor living conditions, with poor infrastructures and uncomfortable living areas near commercial sexual centers, gambling areas, *chat* (Amharic version of a narcotic plant in Ethiopia) vendor and chewing areas are also the results of economic problems according to the data sources from interview informants P1 and P2 and FGD discussants.

Different studies conducted by different individuals and organizations also assured that the economic problem (poverty) is the major challenge in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopian. The works of Daniel (2021), Gutema (2020) and Save the Children (2010) agreed as economic problem (poverty) as the main challenge in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia.

3.2. Socio-Cultural Challenges

According to interview informants P1 and P2 and FGD discussants, harmful cultural practices such as tonsillectomy, child abuse and child (early) marriage are highly prevalent at Bahir Dar City. Tonsillectomy is very prevalent in the City but the action is made secretly and it became difficult to control the habit. It is the habit of cutting the tonsil of a child by traditional or cultural tonsil cutters. Child abuses both physical and psychological are also common in the city. Interview informant P1 informed these problems as follows:

Tonsillectomy is conducted mainly secretly by the community and it is very difficult to prevent it. Parents conducted tonsillectomy because of lack awareness about the side effects of the action. They conducted tonsillectomy just to prevent children from diseases and considered the action useful for children. Before a year we heard about the actions of a traditional tonsil cutter in the City. When the tonsil cutter heard as we were searching for him, he changed his address and we couldn't find him. The community considered tonsillectomy as useful cultural practice not as a harmful cultural practice. Because of this, the society does not cooperate with us to stop the action. Child abuse is made at homes and in schools. Families abused their children both physically and psychologically. Labor abuse and corporal punishments are took place at homes. Children also got corporal punishments at schools by teachers. Parents, teachers and PTA members encouraged corporal punishments to correct students discipline in the school.

Daniel (2021), Gutema (2020) and Demelash et al (2019) also shared the socio-cultural problems as the major challenges in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia. According to Daniel negative social construct of children and culturally embedded decisions and practices are the major challenges. For Gutema harmful cultural practices such as corporal punishments and female genital mutilation are the major challenges in protecting children's rights. Even though corporal punishments are the major challenges in the study area, female genital mutilation is not a threat for children according to interview informants of the study. The findings of Demelash et al (2019) suited with this research work. Demelash et al identified acceptance of corporal punishment culturally as a proper way of correcting children in primary schools by the parents, teachers and PTA (Parent and Teacher Association) members.

Socially, divorce is a major challenge to protect children's rights. According to interview informant P5, when parents made divorce children lost love and economic support either from their father or mother or both. This will lead children to lose their basic rights.

3.3. Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness is another challenge in implementing the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. According to interview informants P1 and P6, some parents, specially uneducated parents do not properly understand their duties and responsibilities in protecting the rights of children. Most children also do not properly understand their basic rights. Because of this, when violence against the rights of children happen children do not report the action for the concerned bodies as soon as possible. Interview informant P1, assured this by the following statements.

Even though there is some improvements in the awareness of children's rights both by parents and children, there is still lack of awareness by parents, the community and children about the rights of children. When violence against children happened, all the parents, the community and children tried to hide the action instead of exposing the action. This created difficulty to protect the rights of children properly.

Lack of awareness about the rights of children is also taken as a major challenge in the implementation of children's rights in the Ethiopian primary schools according to Demelash et al (2019).

Lack of awareness about the national children's policy by women, children and social affairs experts in the City is also another problem. The researcher began his interview by asking whether the women, children and social affairs experts know

anything about the national children's policy or not. But they responded that they do not know anything about the policy and they conduct different activities to protect the rights of children by the common sense of the rights of children under article 36 of the FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) constitution.

3.4. Political and Legal Challenges

Politically the government does not give proper attention for children's affairs at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department. Shortage of financial budgets and experts are the major challenges. There is shortage of financial budget to implement the rights of children. There is also shortage of enough man power and structural problems in women, children and social affairs department of the city. Women, children and social affairs are merged as one department. Women affair has divided in to two procedural processes. The social affair has one procedural process but children's affairs are organized under one case team. Children's affairs case team has only two experts; one children protection expert and one children security expert. According to interview informant P1, at least four experts are needed to run children's affairs in a better way in the department.

Lack of inclusive education for the disabled children, lack of recreational and sporting centers for children and low level of children associations and participation are emanated from lack of attention by the government according to interview informants and FGD participants. Gutema (2020) also identified lack of political commitment and attention for the rights of children as a major challenge in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia.

The legal procedures also lack due attention for children's rights. According to interview informants P7 and P4, when violence against children reported to the courts, there are delaying and give unjust resolutions to the crime against children. The resolutions and punishments by the courts against child abusers therefore are not teachable for the community.

Getachew (ND) also listed the following challenges in the implementation process of the national children's policy of Ethiopia associated with the procedures of the justice system at Arada Sub-City in Addis Ababa. These are: lack of rest room at police station for children, loosely execution of child protection laws, delay in reporting child abuse cases, absence of valid evidences of child abuse, escape of criminals in child abuse, delaying of the court procedures and lack awareness about the court procedures to protect children's rights.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

The study showed that the formulation of the national children's policy by itself doesn't guaranty the rights of children if there is a gap in the implementation process of the policy. Likewise, the study identified the major challenges of leadership in implementing the national children's policy. Even though the challenges of leadership to implement the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department are multi-faceted, there are four major challenges of leadership in the implementation of the national policy at the City according to this study. These are: economic challenges, socio-cultural challenges, lack of awareness and political and legal problems.

Because of economic problems, children got: malnutrition, lack of school materials, school absenteeism and drop out, early marriage, labor abuse, lack of sufficient health services and involvement in commercial sex.

Tonsillectomy, child abuse, corporal punishments, child (early) marriage and child dislocation as a result of divorce are the major socio-cultural challenges in the City. Lack of awareness by the community, parents, children, and by women, children and social affairs experts is still another challenge to implement the national children's policy at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department.

Political and legal problems are the last challenges of leadership to implement the national children's policy. The government gives little attention for children. Absence of recreational and sporting centers for children, lack of inclusive education for children, shortage of financial budget and experts, lack of attention for children's affairs, lack of effective legal and justice procedures for children and low level of children participation are the problems associated with the political and legal challenges.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher gave the following recommendations to overcome the challenges in the implementation of the national children's policy of Ethiopia at Bahir Dar City Administration Women, Children and Social Affairs Department:

- To solve economic challenges all stakeholders should work together. The government and NGOs should provide health and school facilities for children who are in need.
- Awareness creation for the community, parents, children and women, children and social affairs experts in the City is very essential to increase awareness about the rights of children.
- Increasing the economic level of families is also important.
- Avoiding (reducing) divorce between parents is crucial in protecting the rights of children.
- The government should give due attention for children's affairs by: building recreational and sporting centers for children, providing inclusive education for children, allocating appropriate financial budget and man power for children's affairs in the City, increasing children's role and participation on their own affairs by the help of children associations and provide effective legal and justice systems and procedures for children that are in need.

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