

Human Trafficking Trends in Nigeria and Strategies for Combating the Crime

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria and reasons for victims' vulnerability to it. It discussed the motivations for human trafficking and identified poverty as a major cause for victim vulnerability to it. It also discussed its trends and effects. For lasting solution to the problem, I recommended a carrot and stick approach with emphasized on poverty alleviation, good governance, law enforcement, prosecution of perpetrators of the crime and a co-ordination of efforts between security services and all stakeholders. My thesis draws on information from secondary sources such as newspapers, journals and published works on the World Wide Web in examining the relevant issues and arriving at the conclusion.

Introduction

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that is currently generating a lot of concern globally, especially in countries like Nigeria, where it is highly prevalent. The generally acceptable definition of human trafficking is that of the United Nations which defines it as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat or the use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction or fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include at a minimum, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practice similar to slavery, servitude or the

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removal of organs. (Palermo Protocol, 2000) Thus, three main elements are at the core of this definition and they include: the actual act of trafficking including the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, associated acts such as the threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of weakness or vulnerability and exploitation including at a minimum the exploitation for prostitution (or other forms of sexual exploitation) forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The vulnerability of prospective victims are exploited in many respects; the victims most of whom are pre-teens, teenagers and mostly female are taken far away from their homelands to cities within their country or across national boundaries and exploited for optimum economic benefits. Many of them are engaged in cheap labor such as domestic servants, hawkers, beggars, prostitutes or put into other forms of servitude akin to slavery. Expectedly, the global outcry generated against this phenomenon is informed by the obvious human degradation which accompanies this racketeering. A number of global initiatives, many to which Nigeria is a signatory, have been put in place as a way of addressing this challenge.

The paper has tried to examine the trend in human trafficking in Nigeria and its purpose is to uncover what makes victims vulnerable and how to overcome the challenge. The paper is therefore divided into the following seven sections: Introduction, human trafficking trends in Nigeria, motivation and effects of human trafficking in Nigeria, strategies for combating the crime, conclusion and recommendation.

Human Trafficking Trends in Nigeria

Human trafficking is ranked the world's third largest crime (Keefer, 2006). Perhaps the nefarious activities of human traffickers in Nigeria would have remained hidden and uninhibited despite general concern but for the intervention of the office of the wife of the Vice-President of Nigeria with the collaboration of the wife of the Edo state (of Nigeria)

governor in 1999. The suffering and indignity meted out to trafficked victims in the process of transporting them and at the various destinations, especially those abroad, had become a huge source of embarrassment to Nigeria's integrity as a nation with responsibility to safeguard the interest of its nationals. The various forms of manifestation of these indignities are - prostitution, child labor and under aged domestic services.

Human trafficking is a global demand driven business with a huge market for cheap labor and commercial sex. It involves exploiting vulnerable people like needy women, children and young men with offers or promises of employment and better life abroad.

Internal Dynamics

Internal trafficking of women and children is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on with the trafficking of people from rural communities to major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar, Warri and Port-Harcourt, predominantly for exploitative domestic work, scavenging, begging and prostitution. The incidence is a little more precarious in Lagos, (www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014) the commercial nerve center of Nigeria with a surging population of about 9.1 million. (www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp) The busy schedules of families who are mainly working class, makes high demand for domestic servants imperative.

Trafficking for organized begging takes place mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria where physically challenged or disabled persons are lured into begging business in major cities such as Kano and Kaduna. Furthermore, experienced adult beggars traffic children under their custody. These children are then compelled to lead the handicapped into organized begging, they are forced to do this for practically nothing or without any reward other than the daily meals that may be handed out to them along the streets. These trafficked children are denied access to formal education and proper social upbringing.

(www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/

0014)

Baby harvesting is another type of human trafficking in Nigeria. In states like Ebonyi, Abia and Lagos, there are cases of hospitals, clinics, orphanages, doctors and nurses who keep teenage and single mothers who do not want to keep their babies after birth to provide them shelter and care while they are pregnant and sell off their babies for a premium to couples that need them. They are made to sign papers renouncing their rights to the babies as well as swear to oaths of secrecy. The Good Shepherd Orphanage in Lagos was reported to be engaged in illegal adoption of babies as well as sheltering young pregnant girls and selling off their babies at birth. Many of these babies sold cannot be traced and one cannot determine what became of them. (www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014)

Cross-border trafficking

Nigeria has been described as a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking and African countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Cameroon, Gabon, Benin Republic, Libya, Algeria and Morocco are some of the destination points for trafficked Nigerians; while countries like Belgium, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom are the destination points in Europe. The trend for Nigerian women and girls trafficked to Europe is to be used as domestic servants, whereas in Italy, prostitution is the main work that they usually end up doing. Venezuela in South America is a recent addition to the destination points while Saudi Arabia is the destination point in the Middle East. Nigeria has road links with Niger republic and it provides the route to North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Most of the trafficked persons are deceived into believing that their destination would be Europe but most of them end up in some African countries like Benin Republic or other countries other than Europe. (www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014)

An escapee narrated her ordeal in the traffickers den. According to her story, the twenty year old victim, a senior secondary school student in Edo state before she was trafficked said she escaped from Burkina Faso with the help of a Burkinabe after one month of prostitution. She also stated that her male trafficker resided in Benin City Edo state. She

had been made to believe that she would be taken to Europe but she ended up in Burkina Faso. She was deceived by a friend's brother's promise of a job in Europe. She mentioned that the trafficking ring use the Saki Route in Oyo state to cross girls into Burkina Faso and Mali. She also revealed that girls most of them below fourteen years are beaten and starved to subdue them into doing the biddings of their madams. She also alleged that the illicit trade thrived with the connivance of some security agents. (News agency of Nigeria, 2007)

The Northern part of Nigeria has not attracted enough attention as Edo, Cross Rivers, Delta, Ebonyi and other states from the South leading to the erroneous assumption that human trafficking is more prevalent in the south of Nigeria. However from March 2002 to April 2004 alone, the Saudi Arabia authorities deported nine thousand, nine hundred and fifty women and one thousand, two hundred and thirty one underage and unaccompanied children. (www.unesdoc.unesco.org)

Investigations revealed that the majority of the women deported from Saudi Arabia are from Kano, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Nassarawa, Plateau, Niger, Kebbi, Kwara, Sokoto, Zamfara, Jigawa, Gombe, Bauchi and Taraba states. These records debunk the erroneous impression that human trafficking for prostitution does not occur in the Northern part of Nigeria. (www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014)

Motivations for Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Although Nigeria has enormous natural and human resources, corruption takes a serious toll on the country's economy. Nigeria has been rated one of the poorest countries in the world and so widespread poverty abounds even in the midst of abundant resources. Thus, poverty has been identified as the principal driving force behind this trade and the most visible cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria. An ILO/IPEC report found out that forty per cent of Nigeria's Street children and hawkers are trafficked persons (ILO Doc., 2000) These are children who are from poor and deplorable backgrounds and so due to lack of opportunity at home and with or without their consent are trafficked. Again in

some communities in Nigeria, the wealthy are accorded honor and respect without bothering to find out the source of their wealth. This at times makes people engage in all sorts of vices to acquire wealth. The society stratifies people into groups of the 'haves' and the 'have – not' and some people out of the desperation to belong to a better social class or at least pull through the poverty line fall into the racketeering bait.

In Edo state from where the contemporary trend in human trafficking started, it is alleged that business transactions existed between the natives and Italians when the Nigerian economy was more robust. These Nigerians visited Italy to buy shoes, gold and clothing to sell in Nigeria. However when sex business became more lucrative in Italy, coupled with worsening economic situations in Nigeria, the women shifted to sex business and involved their relations in it, and with time involved more people as the business began to boom. This explains why until date, over eighty per cent of trafficked persons for prostitution to Europe especially Italy come from Edo state. (www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014) However, poverty alone cannot explain the trend in Nigeria because it is not the poorest country in West Africa and indeed in Africa as a whole, so why then is human trafficking on the increase particularly in Nigeria?

Obviously, there are close linkages between poverty and widespread illiteracy as well as unsafe and uninformed migration. Due to the high rate of poverty, many Nigerians of school age are not in school because they cannot afford it, thus those with minimal education and who lack the skills required to secure good jobs often fall easy prey to traffickers who deceive them with tales of good jobs in the cities in case of internal trafficking and greener pastures abroad for trafficking across borders.

Even when many of these young people have some education but are not able to get jobs, they feel that they could find jobs elsewhere and of course and this makes them very vulnerable to the manipulation of the traffickers who bank heavily on their misery. Thus, unemployment has been identified as another causative factor for human trafficking. The rate

of unemployment is high in Nigeria leading to desperation for a lot of people. Most of the trafficked victims are people who want to go abroad to seek better employment opportunities. NAPTIP identified ignorance with of what victims face when they are trafficked and desperation due to the unemployment as other causes for the outrageous rate of human trafficking in the country (www.gvnet.com/humantrafficking/nigeria).

The issues of poverty and unemployment was not felt much in the traditional, communal and extended family setting in Nigeria because people watched out for one another and it was common to see a wealthy person take on the responsibility of catering for some members of the extended family at least to meet their basic needs. However with social change as a result of rapid urbanization, education, globalization and harsh economic conditions there has been a decline in traditional and cultural values. It is now common for people to want to solve the problems of their immediate or nuclear families without consideration for the larger family. Thus, rapid urbanization led to an alteration of the extended family and community forms of solidarity.

Furthermore, there is a collapse of the protective environment as a result of the laxity of security agents in discharging their duties. Negligence on their part accounts for why most of the trafficked victims pass through immigration with fake visas which are undetected at the point they are checked. Negligence of duty may be attributed to poor salary for the security agents or to corruption as some victims claimed that some security agents connived with the traffickers who let them pass security checkpoints at the airports or land borders unchecked. (NAN Report, 2007)

Again, the road and sea links or boundaries of Nigeria with her neighboring countries are extensive and are difficult and expensive to patrol effectively. As a result, citizens from other African countries who have intra-state conflicts in their countries of origin use this porosity to flee across international borders to enter into the country as refugees and some of them end up doing menial jobs in Nigeria or fall prey to the traffickers. No doubt the political

and economic situations in various African countries contribute to rendering African people vulnerable to human traffickers. (Agbu, 2003)

The motivation for human trafficking in Nigeria is multifaceted, poverty though identified as the major cause cannot fully explain it. As said earlier, unemployment, ignorance, illiteracy, collapse of the protective environment and the decline in cultural and traditional values are contributory factors. However, the worst form of motivation for human trafficking is greed and quest for quick wealth on the part of the traffickers who go to any extent to deceive the victims. They are the ones who flaunt their life styles of unexplained wealth and use it to prey on victims' ignorance and misery.

Effects of Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Significant financial resources are gained from it as there has been a tremendous rise in trafficking from Nigeria to Europe since the late 1990s. Much of the profits flow to other illicit activities and are laundered and the trade thrives not only because of prevalence of poverty but also because of highly paid facilitators in the west. (EU Report, 2005)

Organized criminal groups which traffic women in Nigeria have multifaceted crime portfolios of which the trade in women is one part of their criminal profile. Using female recruiters who conclude contracts with girls and manipulating voodoo traditions, they are able to force compliance through psychological as well as physical pressure. The physical pressure also manifests in various significant human rights violations as children are abandoned in recipient countries (in the case of trans border trafficking) and women pressured to work in the most physically dangerous conditions at the lowest end of the prostitution markets usually as streetwalkers - exposed to the elements with physical violence against them being common. They are also exposed to the threat of HIV/Aids which is also a major security threat. Upon arrival at their destinations, victims are placed in conditions controlled by traffickers while they are exploited to earn illicit revenues. They also prey on

victim's fears that authorities in the foreign country will prosecute or deport them if they ask for help (ILO Doc.1996).

Human trafficking deprives the country of its human resources. Though majority of the people trafficked are semi-literate or illiterate, some literate and talented people are also trafficked out. Putting it plainly, talent and human resources are pushed out of Africa mostly by domestic conditions. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle in which mass poverty and underdevelopment feeds crime and violence that in turn leads to even greater poverty.

Strategies for Combating Human Trafficking

To stem the rising tide in human trafficking in Nigeria, the government has set up machineries and embarked on legislations while aligning with international protocols as both preventive and deterrent measures. In 2001, it ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children as well as passed a national law in 2003 –Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003. Through this act, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was established.

However, much still needs to be done as the problem still persists because it is a covert activity and thus the extent to which it occurs remains unknown. Non-governmental organizations like Women trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) has also been involved in the prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims, rehabilitation, retraining and counseling of repatriated trafficked people and their activities have received worldwide support as well as local recognition for their contribution towards curbing the menace (www.comminit.com/en/node).

Conclusion

In Nigeria, human trafficking especially the cross-border trafficking is a fast growing international organized crime. It is motivated and continues to thrive because of poverty, ignorance, selfishness, greed and a lack of state capacity to translate policy into action. The

result of the harsh economic realities in Nigeria such as lack of job opportunities for both its skilled and unskilled labor, lack of welfare package to cater for the needs of the unemployed and ignorance have contributed to its sustenance. Nigeria is part of the global system and thus must respond and be seen to be responding responsibly to trends of any form. Failure to do so will in effect expose the entire population to greater ridicule than has been experienced.

The country might be confronted with graver challenges like the prevalence and the depriving of the country of its human resources and HIV/Aids. It is social vice that needs to be curbed by addressing the issues holistically through policy, action and co-operation of stakeholders. Such co-operation will help tackle the issue of demand as well.

Recommendations

First, it cannot be overemphasized that traffickers should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. More effective strategies that will combine and balance punitive measures with protection of human rights in order to make human trafficking non-profitable and less interesting to criminal organizations on one hand and on the other to provide maximum protection and respect to the personalities of each and every victim should be introduced.

The Police on whom the primary responsibility for crime detection, prevention and control rests on as well as the Immigration and Custom Service need to be properly equipped and professionalized as demoralized police and immigration personnel would be incapable of providing efficient service. Their operations need to be modernized and adequately computerized as well as surveillance equipment bought for them. They also need regular trainings as capacity building measures to keep abreast of new trends in human trafficking and related crimes. The government should also work towards the general application of biometric technology to reduce visa fraud as well as the use of heat-sensitive scanners at the most used access points and key transport routes.

Because of evolving trends in human trafficking, there should be ongoing research into it. Such research will lead to synergies between the government, NAPTIP, security

agencies, EFCC, research institutes, non-governmental organizations, (NGOs) and various stakeholders to co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts towards finding lasting solutions to the problem. An outcome of such research will be to create a nationwide database whereby information about victims of human trafficking is stored and made retrievable for police forces. This database should contain information on found people, missing people and traffickers.

Public opinion should be critically mobilized behind a concerted campaign to put a stop to the inhuman trade and this can be done by conducting public enlightenment programs like organizing workshops and conferences for stakeholders, documentaries to inform the people on the pernicious impact of human trafficking. This is important in the quest for peace, protection of human rights and national development. Opening up access to information through these public enlightenment programs and documentaries will be most critical in helping to defend our human dignity. These campaigns should be structured in such a way that sensitizations are carried out in all the geo-political zones of the country as a way of reaching the grassroots and religious, traditional, community, youth leaders and other stakeholders. The sensitization would involve fact finding missions on some of the rehabilitation and re-integration centers set up by government and non-governmental organizations to assess their impact and ensure that the victims are not re-traumatized or their well being damaged.

More importantly, as long as people are not well provided for and the government not living up to expectations which includes providing for the basic needs of its people, people will continue to seek for their own ways of making ends meet be it legal or illegal. So, good governance is what will bring a lasting solution on the long run and it depends a lot on the government to cater for the welfare of masses. It can achieve these by promoting policies which reduce the level of poverty and ensure equity in the distribution of resources among the citizens. No nation can enjoy relative peace, stability, and development or achieve a

reduction in its crime rate if a vast proportion of its people wallow in abject poverty. If the government ensures sustainable infrastructural development, it will enable the economy to function appropriately.

Since women are more vulnerable to trafficking, a social security policy should be put in place to enhance their access to education by providing scholarships. This will make the millennium development goals of ensuring the girl-rights and child education acts sustainable. The policy should also aim at efforts to remedy the low status of women particularly the economic disadvantages they face and such efforts must be woven into a larger anti-poverty and anti-corruption framework.

Due to the transnational character of human trafficking, countries of origin, transit and destination must work in partnership to prevent it, protect its victims and prosecute those responsible. Therefore, government should strengthen bilateral agreements to garner international co-operation and also enter into new ones towards tackling the problems of human trafficking. This will include the co-ordination of laws, investigation and the seizure of crime proceeds. This is where the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has a role to play by networking with similar commissions abroad to investigate and put strategies in place to repatriate and seize crime proceeds and assets of traffickers often stashed away in foreign accounts and their profits used in the overall development of the nation.

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