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HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA: CAUSES, EFFORTS  
BY NIGERIA GOVERNMENT AND THE WAY FORWARD

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**Abstract**

There is a high prevalence of modern day slavery known as trafficking in persons (TIP) in Nigeria. The menace of TIP came to limelight in Nigeria in the 1980s and assumed a centre stage in national and international discourse in the late 1990s. Today its high occurrence in the country has made Nigeria to be classified as a source transit and destination country in TIP. This paper therefore highlights poverty, bad leadership, corruption and cultural practices as some of the causes of TIP; and identified the consequences of the menace as poor economic and human advancement and low life esteem. While government efforts in preventing this crime like setting up agencies to investigate, prosecute offenders and rehabilitate victim seemed unproductive. The paper therefore suggested that enlightenment campaigns must be intensified and collaborations among state actors are very germane to the eradication of TIP.

**Keywords:** Human Trafficking, Law Enforcement Agents, Nigeria, Trafficked Persons

## Introduction

Human trafficking as a form of modern-day slavery involves the illegal trade of people for exploitation or commercial gain and is purported to be a \$150 billion global industry (Anti-trafficking Alliance 2017). Two third of this figure (\$99 billion) is generated according to Pathfinders Justice Initiative (2016) from commercial sexual exploitation, while another \$51 billion results from forced economic exploitation including domestic work, agriculture and economic activities. Similarly, new estimates released by the Global Slavery Index in July 2018 indicates that there are 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide, 71% of whom are women/girls and 25% of which are children. In addition, United Nation Development Cooperation (UNDC) as at January 7, 2019 Report now estimates the number of children in slavery at almost 1/3 of all global victims. 99% of the 4.8 million victims of commercial sexual exploitation in 2016 were women and girls, with one in five being children, International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017). Women and girls represented 84% of the 15.4 million people in forced marriages, and 59% of those in private forced labour (Anti-trafficking Alliance 2017 Report). The Index maintains that modern day slavery is most prevalent in Africa and Nigeria having the highest victims in Africa.

Human trafficking is a relatively recent term and is used to describe the act of the acquisition or transportation of a person away from the community in which they live through the use of violence, coercion or deception for the purpose of exploiting them. In the case of children, their vulnerability is a factor, thus coercion does not have to be present. United Nations (2013) defines human trafficking as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability, or of 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 the exploitation of the prostitution of others

or other forms of sexual exploitation forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the renewal of organs”.

From the above definition trafficking has three elements: the act of acquisition or movement (international or internal) the means (coercion, whether by force, the abuse of power, or deception) and the purpose (exploitation). Trafficking is often understood primarily in relation to sex work but can also occur for a range of exploitative activities including domestic servitude, forced labour, forced begging, or criminal activities such as pick-pocketing and the exploitation of children for benefit or fraud (Akor, 2011). Many have been sent to untimely death in the course of crossing trans-borders, compulsory and de-humanizing labour or forced sex in the trafficking journey. Human trafficking has become a canker worm in the third world countries of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Many youths comprising of girls, women and young men are used as commercial sex hawkers, domestic servants and mining labourers in the case of young men for little or no pay and against their will in most cases.

**Human Trafficking:** This involves the act and attempted act of recruitment and transportation of persons (both male and female) within or across borders. This happens in form of coercion, manipulation, use of enticements, to lure victims into trafficking.

**Women Trafficking:** This refers to the recruitment and transportation of women across national or international borders either voluntarily or involuntarily, for sexual or domestic purposes. It also includes the purchase, sale, transfer, receipt or harbouring of young girls and women through deception for the purpose of subjecting the women and girls to voluntary servitude. The victims in most cases are compelled against their wish to partake in sexual activities for the benefit of their captors or partly for the benefits of the victims.

**Trafficked Persons:** These are persons, male or female recruited and transported within or across national borders for the purpose

of sexual or domestic services, e.g. across Europe, America and other neighbouring countries. Sometimes it may be within national borders.

**Internal Trafficking:** This refers to a domestic trafficking. It involves the recruitment and transportation of persons within the borders of a country, either from rural or urban areas or from one state to another, for purposes of sex work, child labour or domestic services, such as within one state or inter-states, e.g. Kogi State to Lagos State, etc.

**External Trafficking (Cross-border trafficking):** This refers to the movement of people across national, continental and international borders for the purpose of sex child labour and domestic service in exchange for monetary reward. Victims are transported through trans-national border for the purpose of compulsory labour, sexual or domestic purposes. This paper is therefore concern about the causes, consequences and efforts by the government to stop these menaces.

### Causes of Human Trafficking

No one can say with exactitude when the human trafficking began, but the phenomenon can be said to have gained prominence in the early 1990s when drug trafficking and advanced fee fraud (419) became common place. Muhammed (2004) opined that human trafficking particularly women, began as a simple strategy adopted by families desperate for a reprieve from biting economic hardships after the oil glut that was misused by Nigerian leaders between the 80s and 90s. Many factors such as poverty, level of ignorance and family size among other things account for why human trafficking became prevalent, particularly as Mohammed (2004) citing World Bank (1995) reported that over 45 percent of the country's population lives below the poverty line; the situation have become worse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This makes most family vulnerable to human trafficking.

Apart from poverty, many of the victims of human trafficking abroad particularly women and girls are ignorance of the fate that await them in their country of destination. The situation is such

that many of the women and girls had little or no education hence they are easily carried away by the picture of good lives painted by their sponsors. Some scholars have also blamed trafficking on family size. Particularly African and Nigerians with a large concentration of polygamous family for the purpose of egalitarian settlements in the villages and slums where means of livelihood became cumbersome, hence adolescents strive to find solace outside the home, thereby making them vulnerable to the tactics of traffickers (Rotimi, 2001).

Another most important cause of human trafficking is the level of bad leadership and corruption that have led to increase in unemployment rate in Nigeria. To the extent that men and women chose to migrate for labour or sex work because of the realization that Europe and Western nations have a valued currency hence labour and sex will be profitable. The implication is that people choose to work in richer countries in order to improve their economic standing back in Nigeria with a hopeless economic situation. The double explanation was that while job opportunities abound for male migrants in Europe and North America, women migrants who had no access to jobs often take to prostitution as an option.

Also, conflicts are other causes of human trafficking. World Bank's Report showed that more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by violent. Conflict is a push factor for trafficking, migration and poverty. In Nigeria prone conflict zone, Boko Haram trafficked children and used them as soldiers and militias. They kidnapped young girls, sell them into slavery and forcefully married them (Anti-trafficking Alliance 2017).

In addition to the above, our weak legal system also contributes to the cases of human trafficking. Porous borders, corrupt government officials, the involvement of international organized criminal groups or networks, capacity of or commitment by Immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders; and because of adequate legislation and a political will and commitment to enforce existing legislation or mandates are other factors that facilitate trafficking in persons. Although there are

several constitutional provisions but the implementations are very weak (Mohammed 2004, Osumah & Enbunanae 2012).

It is important to note that the widespread practice of entrusting children to more affluent friends or relative may create not only vulnerability in Nigeria but one of the causes of human trafficking. This practice consists in “giving” children away, often in exchange of money, the motivation to give more opportunities to children to escape a situation in chronic poverty and access a better life. When misused, these customs can be a significant windfall for traffickers (Osumah & Enbunane 2012, Osuigwe 2017).

### Nigeria Experiences in Human Trafficking

Nigerian women and girl victims of trafficking are mainly recruited for domestic servitude and sex trafficking while boys are generally forced to work on plantations in commercial farming, construction, quarries and mines or engage in petty crimes and the drug trade. Nigerian victims are taken to other West and Central Africa countries (Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroun, Gabon and Guinea) as well as to South Africa. Women and girls – primarily from Edo and Delta State – subjected to forced prostitution are trafficked mostly in Italy (Olujuwon, 2008), but as well in Spain, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Ireland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Greece and Russia. Trafficking of young women from Nigeria to Europe for the purpose of sexual exploitation is one of the most persistent trafficking flows as it is very well organized and difficult to detect (UN Global Report, 2014). Victims of sex trade and forced labour are also transported to North Africa (Libya, Algeria and Morocco), the Middle East (Saudi Arabia) and Central Asia (ILO 2006).

An important characteristic of the Nigerian trafficking system is the use of charms by the traffickers or threats of voodoo (charms) curses to control Nigerian victims and force them into situations of prostitutions (Siddhert, 2015). In completing the deal once arrangements for victims' trips abroad are ready, traffickers seal the deal by taking the victims to shrines of voodoo priests, for oath taking. During the ritual, in which body parts such as fingernails,

blood and or pubic hairs are collected, and the victim is made to swear an oath to repay the debt, never to report the situation to the security forces or reveal the identities of the traffickers. Fear of breaking the pact of covenant is so strong that it creates a powerful hold over the victims and impedes them to seek help. According to the Nigerian National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons about 90 percent of girls that are been trafficked to Europe are taken to shrines to take “oaths of secrecy” (Wilmot, 2012). In other words, these categories of young women most time willingly wish to go into prostitution abroad or are lured by the promise of good life.

Nigeria also remains a destination point for victims of human trafficking from other neighbouring African countries such as Togo, Chad, Cameroun, Niger, Benin, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana (Akpmera, 2009). Boys are mainly forced to work in Nigeria’s granite mines and women and young girls are forced to prostitution or exploitative domestic work. As a transit country, Nigeria is the centre for distribution of trafficked persons to West Africa and to Gabon and Cameroon. Nigeria also serves as a point of transit for trafficked persons from Republic of Benin, Togo to Europe and the Middle East.

It is also interesting to note that in the last two decades, there has been growth in the internal trafficking of Nigerian women and children within the country (UNESCO, 2006). An increased number of people are trafficked from rural communities to cities such as Lagos, Abeokuta, Abuja, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Port Harcourt. Trafficking to these regions is predominantly for exploitative domestic with farm labour, prostitution or ritual purposes (International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination Racism, 2015 (United Nations 2017).

### Efforts by Nigeria Government

Nigeria is among the countries with the highest number of human trafficking nations. Millions of Nigerian young women and girls are at risk of human trafficking, due to gender imbalance, poverty, high rate of unemployment, gender induced cultural bias, human deprivation and other factors. Globally, over \$32 billion is generated

from the exploitation of 27 million victims, of which more than 70% are women and girls. The 2016 Global Slavery Index Report shows there are over 875,500 Nigerian victims. On a personal point of view, the statistics is low, and there is need for government and independent bodies to work towards gathering data on this crime (United Nations 2017).

Human trafficking remains a great threat to our economic development, advancement and human capital. It saps the very potential of our nation by frustrating the aspiration of our young people. The future of so many young people, especially women has been frustrated, their dreams shattered, destinies delayed, and potentials caged because of the triumph of human trafficking which often thrives in the shadow and silence of many and grow due to passive participation of the three arms of government.

Nigeria is party to the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (Trafficking Protocol) supplementing the United Nations convention against transnational organized crime, as well as to a number of international human rights instruments, including the United Nations Slavery Convention (1927), the Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949), the ILO Forced Labour Convention (1930, N. 29), the ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957, No. 105), the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999, No. 182). Nigeria also ratified other international instruments which have provisions that can apply by extension to the protection of the human rights of trafficking persons, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Optimal Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography(2000), the Convention in the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their families (1990) among others (United State Department of State 2015, IPPIR 2013).

In Nigeria, Section 34 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) guarantees the right to the dignity of the human person thus prohibiting the subjection of any person to



slavery and servitude. It prohibits the subjection of any person to slavery or servitude. Others include the rights to movement (Section 41), personal liberty (Section 35), and those that prohibit torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, slavery, servitude and forced labour (Section 34(1) (a) (b) and (c) respectively). (ILO, 2006). Nigeria has two codes of criminal law, the criminal code covering the Southern States of Nigeria and the Penal code applying to the North. Both codes do not define what constitutes trafficking nor does it deal with the various forms of trafficking directly. However, both codes deal with offences which may constitute trafficking for prostitution and slavery. There are also laws in the constitution that are punishable when one is compelled out of their will to do task but there is lack of adequate promotion regarding trafficking in Nigeria's criminal laws. This led the Federal government to enact an anti-trafficking legislation with the trafficking in persons (Prohibition), Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003 (NAPTIP, 2005). In March 2015, the Enforcement and Administration act was passed into law. The law now includes other development in trafficking that were not included under the previous act.

To address the issue of trafficking, the National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) was established since that 2003. The Agency was mandated to have specialized agency, such as Investigation, Counselling and Rehabilitation, Public Enlightenment, and Legal and Prosecution. NAPTIP has 4Ps strategies which include (1) Prevention – using strategic tools such as conferences, workshops and mass media campaigns to promote awareness within Nigeria; (2) Protection – These activities involve rehabilitation and reintegration victims into the society through a National Referral mechanism for protection and Assistance that was developed in 2013; (3) Prosecution – This involved the investigation of human trafficking cases, monitors cross-border movements and prosecutes trafficking cases in law courts; (4) Partnership – NAPTIP works in collaboration with other regional and international agencies or bodies that may ensure elimination and prevention of the root causes of the problem of traffic in any persons in Nigeria and in the boarding countries (NAPTIP 2018, IPPIR 2013).

On conflicts related human trafficking in Nigeria, the military and the government are making efforts during military joint action and registration to combat child and women trafficking and hostages.

### Conclusion

The prevention of trafficking and protection of its victims should be the ultimate aim of a country's trafficking strategy. While the government has made some progress in addressing the problem, it can still do more to prevent trafficking and protect victims. In order to address trafficking, we need to build towards a nurtured and shared understanding of what the problem is that we are trying to address through trafficking policy, both in concept and in scale. Trafficking is a diverse phenomenon; it involves men, women and children as well as adults. Internal and international movement and as well as labour and sexual exploitation, Trafficking from Nigeria can be distinct from other forms of trafficking; the prevalence of domestic servitude and the use of juju, social obligation and other methods of retention and coercion require a tailored response.

In addition, international enforcement bodies have a role to play, however they are not only the important actors. Nigeria government has to implement formal procedures for the return and reintegration of Nigerian victims to ensure that international agencies do not maltreat, kills victims and victims are afforded adequate care when they return.

Concerning the situation and problem of Boko Haram, more has to be done. Government must try within his capacity and international community to put a stop to Boko Haram and those involved in women hostages, and child soldiers and militias are held accountable. The importance of international collaborations cannot be over-emphasized. There is the need to refocus on building platforms of collaborations between key internal agencies and international agencies.

### Way Forward

In order to plot a way forward, it is important that NAPTIP should regain its collaborative mandate with international communities and internal communities. Early and quick response should be a priority. A holistic approach built on collaboration (between agencies, countries and regions) is very essential.

Nigerian government must ensure that the activities of the NAPTIP receive sufficient funding, particularly for prosecuting trafficking offenders and providing adequate care for victims, implement programs for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former child combatants that take into account the specific needs of child combatants.

People involved in the act of trafficking are more experienced in the possible solution and may be most able to tackle the issue. Formally trafficked people are an important source of information on how trafficking happens as well as the information and programme that will help those in a situation similar to themselves to avoid being trafficked. They can be undercover agents for NAPTIP.

A well packaged awareness programme, use of videos, films, drama, role both in the local community, parent teachers' associations (PTA), schools and community leaders can be given regular constant awareness programme especially stopping cultural practices of "given" our children out to relatives and selling of children. The churches, the mosques, the hairdressers and occupations vulnerable to trafficking can have outreach cruse awareness programme. Regular training for Police and Immigration officials to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable population, such as women in prostitution and young females travelling with non-family members.

Finally, Nigerian government should at national level be charged with coordination of matters relating to human trafficking. National institution and actors should be encouraged so as to support and facilitate anti-trafficking work by local frontline agencies but also innovative work by grassroots NGOs and more importantly provision of job opportunities, empowerment programme for youth, and good quality education for the teeming

population will go a long way to minimized trafficking menace if not a total stoppage.

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