



Nigeria

Human Trafficking and Organized Crime: An Epidemic Hidden in Plain Sight

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Introduction

Human trafficking, the practice of illegally transporting people from one country or area to another, typically for the purposes of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation, needs no introduction. The exploitation of human beings, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), is a highly lucrative business for organized criminal groups.¹ It is an illicit market which affects millions of victims worldwide every year with traffickers raking in an estimated \$32 billion annually. Human trafficking is one of the world's most shameful crimes and one which robs people of their dignity and basic rights.

While the best-known form of human trafficking is for the purpose of sexual exploitation, hundreds of thousands of victims are also trafficked for forced labor, domestic servitude, child begging or the removal of their organs. The many different types of human trafficking means that there is no single, typical victim profile. Cases are seen in all parts of the world and victims are targeted irrespective of gender, age or background. Children, for example, might be trafficked from Eastern to Western Europe for the purpose of begging or as pickpockets; while young girls from Africa could be deceived with promises of modelling or au pair jobs only to find themselves trapped in a world of sexual and pornographic exploitation.

Human Trafficking: an epidemic hidden in plain sight

Human trafficking is a growing epidemic.² In addition to the estimated 21.3 million refugees around the world, there are also an estimated 40.3 million people who are currently being trafficked or enslaved. But enslavement is not what we often think it is. Those suffering unthinkable psychological, physical and social trauma are part of a global problem that we see, touch and support every day without knowing it. "The general public does not have a real awareness of the magnitude of the problem," says Barry Koch, a former assistant district attorney in New York County. "Whether it's labor trafficking or sex trafficking, the number of victims is staggering, yet many of them remain hidden in plain sight. After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and is the fastest growing. Raising public awareness is an important element in the fight against human trafficking."

According to Forbes, more than 14 million people are being trafficked for labour; the construction, manufacturing and mining industries compose over half of the labour trafficking industry; 4 million women and girls and 9.5 million men and boys. Refugees are a major target of traffickers. According to the International Labour Organization, forced labour in the private economy generated \$150 billion in illegal profits in 2015. Of those exploited by individuals or enterprises, 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation. Qatar's World Cup in 2022 has led to such a large increase in forced labor that an estimated 4,000 workers will die during preparations.³

As the guardian of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing Convention, UNODC has been at the forefront in tackling human trafficking. UNODC offers practical help to Member States, not only by helping to draft laws and create comprehensive national anti-trafficking strategies but also assisting with resources to implement them. At the national level, countries continue to implement the Protocol and work towards integrating anti-human trafficking legislation into their domestic laws.

Trafficking: the Nigerian experience

Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.⁴ Nigerian trafficking victims are recruited from rural and, to a lesser extent, urban areas: women and girls for domestic servitude and sex trafficking and boys for forced labour in street vending, domestic service, mining, stone quarrying, agriculture, textile manufacturing, and begging. Nigerian women and children are taken from Nigeria to other West and Central African countries, as well as to South Africa, where they

are exploited for the same purposes, as well as subjected to sex trafficking throughout Europe; recruited and transported to destinations in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, where they are held captive in the commercial sex industry or forced labour. Nigeria is also a transit point for children from other countries in West Africa, who are then subjected to forced labour in Cameroon and Gabon. Young children in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps are not exempted as soft targets, victims of labour and sex trafficking.

In North-Eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has continued to forcibly recruit and use child soldiers as young as 12 years old and abduct women and girls in the region, some of whom it subjects to domestic servitude, forced labour, and sex slavery through forced marriages to its militants.

The Government of Nigeria is making significant efforts to curb trafficking in human persons. It has sustained strong anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts by investigating, prosecuting, and convicting numerous traffickers; by collaborating with 11 countries on international investigations; and by providing extensive specialized anti-trafficking training to officials from various government ministries and agencies. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) received a larger operating budget, identifies and provides services to a large number of victims, and continues extensive awareness campaigns throughout the country.

Additionally, the 2015 amendment removed judges' discretion to sentence traffickers to fines in lieu of prison time. The government passed amendments to the 2003 Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, which increased the penalties for trafficking offenders. The law prohibits all forms of trafficking and prescribes a minimum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a minimum fine of one million naira (\$5,470) for sex and labor trafficking offenses; the minimum penalty for sex trafficking increases to seven years' imprisonment if the case involves a child. These penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with other serious crimes, such as rape. Accordingly, NAPTIP has done substantial work in sustaining the prosecution of trafficking.

The government also collaborated with law enforcement agencies from Belgium, Burkina Faso, Finland, France, Germany, Mali, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States on 43 investigations involving Nigerian nationals during the reporting period.

NAPTIP, in collaboration with international partners, provided specialized training to approximately 228 government employees, including judges, prosecutors, and officials from NAPTIP, the Nigerian Police Force, and the Nigerian Immigration Service. These programs offered specialized training on victim identification, investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases, counselling, intelligence collection, and monitoring and evaluation. NAPTIP officials assisted 18 countries with their anti-trafficking efforts through training courses, joint intelligence sharing, and mutual legal assistance.

The government maintained strong efforts to protect trafficking victims. The government identified 943 trafficking victims, including 429 victims of sex trafficking and 514 of labour trafficking, compared with 914 victims identified in the previous reporting period. NAPTIP provided initial screening and assistance for all victims it identified and referred them to government-run care facilities for further medical care, vocational training, education, and shelter. The government has formal written procedures to guide law enforcement, immigration, and social services personnel in proactive identification of trafficking victims among high-risk populations. Additionally, the government's national referral mechanism provides formal guidelines for law enforcement, immigration officials, and service providers to improve protection and assistance to trafficking victims, both within Nigeria and abroad.

NAPTIP operated nine shelters specifically for trafficking victims, with a total capacity of 313 victims. Through these shelters, NAPTIP provided access to legal, medical, and psychological services, as well as vocational training, trade and financial empowerment, and business management skills. Victims who required additional medical and psychological treatment were provided services by hospitals and clinics through existing agreements with NAPTIP. NAPTIP shelters offered short-term care, generally limiting victims' stays to six weeks, although victims were allowed to extend their stays under special circumstances. If victims needed longer-term care, NAPTIP collaborated with two shelters operated by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and NGO-run shelters. Victims in NAPTIP shelters were not allowed to leave unless accompanied by a chaperone. NAPTIP provided funding, in-kind donations, and services to NGOs and other organizations that afforded protective services to trafficking victims. Per provisions of the anti-trafficking law, Nigerian authorities ensured identified trafficking victims were not penalized for unlawful acts committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking. All victims were eligible to receive funds from the victims' trust fund, which is being financed primarily through confiscated assets of convicted traffickers.

NAPTIP continues to conduct extensive national and local programming through radio and print media in all regions to raise awareness about trafficking, including warning about fraudulent recruitment for jobs abroad.

The Ministry of Labour and Productivity continues to implement the national policy and action plan on labour migration and manage the licensing requirement for all private labour recruitment agencies.

Trafficking: the global, trans-border menace

Unfortunately, worldwide, human trafficking, according to The Nation newspaper, is becoming more prevalent and has become the second largest type of criminal activity, after illegal drugs trade.⁵ It is reported that there has been an increase in the occurrence of trafficking in persons in recent years in every part of the world. Trafficking in human persons has become a global trend which no region is immune to. It must, therefore, be tackled aggressively.

Trafficking in human persons is an affront to human dignity which exploits diverse human vulnerabilities for the purpose of servitude, slavery, forced labour, sexual exploitation and other forms by means of fraud, deception, abuse of power, coercion, abduction, and it is gender insensitive. It is unthinkable that such trafficking has further graduated to harvesting of body tissues, cells, organs and extended to the gory exceptional extent of trafficking for the evil purposes of killing and canning as “shredded beef.” The United Nations estimates that human trafficking has victimized 21 million men, women and children around the world, and counting. Between 600,000 and 800,000 victims are trafficked across borders globally each year.

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 79% of human trafficking falls in the category of sexual exploitation, followed by forced labour at 18 per cent. Perpetrators make more than USD20, 000 a year from each victim of commercial sexual exploitation and about USD4, 000 from forced labour exploitation. An International Labour Organization (ILO) report estimates that the Asia-Pacific region leads the world in annual profits of forced labour at USD51.8 billion dollars due to the high number of victims. Traffickers now have become more refined in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for recruiting and exploiting their victims, especially the impoverished, naïve and juvenile. ICT opens up opportunities and also vulnerabilities for both youth and exploiters. Social media, as identified by UNODC, is a platform to prey on children for the purposes of sexual exploitation, drug trafficking and child labour, especially Internet users aged 15 to 24, followed by the 25-34 age group.

UNODC also manages the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking (especially women and children). Officially launched in 2010 by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Trust Fund supports the provision of on-the-ground humanitarian, legal and financial aid to victims of trafficking and provides members of the public an avenue through which they can donate to this important cause.

It's not happening in someone else's neighbourhood. It's happening in yours, perhaps you see it every day but can't identify it. Trafficking happens 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in every zip code. According to the US State Department, “The old way of slavery was that the boss really owned you... But now legal recruiters and employers work in tandem to deceive workers who, vulnerable and isolated in a strange culture, are forced to accept harsh terms. It is in that context that you have endemic forced labour today”. Those trafficked are in all sectors, and represent all races, religions, cultures, ages and genders. Modern day slavery is right in front of us all the time. While labour trafficking takes many forms, it is primarily located in the following industries: agriculture, fisheries/fishing, construction, factory work and domestic service. This often goes unnoticed because those most vulnerable are largely migrant workers isolated from others and in most cases lacking documentation. This further means that those being trafficked have almost no access to healthcare.⁶ Trafficking and exploitation of people costs lives, but earns a lot of money—for individuals, organizations and governments, illicit as it may be.

Conclusion and recommendations

To kill the monster of human trafficking and organized crime as concerns trafficking, cooperation between the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which will play a significant role in addressing the multi-faceted social problem and economic pandemic. While there are no silver bullets to solving the worldwide trafficking problem, a globalizing world, government accountability and new technology⁷ can help curb this menace to society. The government has to shrewdly enforce existing laws and policies to properly and effectively combat the menace of human trafficking. The business sector also has the responsibility to ensure clean supply chains, while NGOs have to promote awareness and provide assistance in protecting, rescuing and reintegrating victims. Not to forget, every citizen has a role to play in the campaign against trafficking.

Governments, both the public and private sectors have to cease provision of financial and in-kind support to groups recruiting and using children; investigate and prosecute all individuals suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers and allegedly perpetrating other trafficking abuses against women and children; continue to vigorously pursue trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and adequate sentences for convicted traffickers; take proactive measures to investigate and prosecute government officials suspected of trafficking-related corruption and complicity in trafficking offenses; ensure the activities of anti-trafficking bodies receive sufficient

funding, particularly for prosecuting traffickers 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 ex-combatants; continue to provide regular training to police and immigration officials to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, such as women in prostitution and young females traveling with non-family members; fully integrate anti-trafficking responsibilities into the work of the police force and the Ministries of Labour; and continue to increase the capacity of various embassies to identify and provide assistance to victims abroad, including through regular and specialized training for diplomatic and consular personnel.

Additionally, some of the steps that the UNODC-led campaign suggests in tackling human trafficking include:

- Being alert: If you see anything that you think might be related to trafficking, tell the police or telephone your local anti-trafficking helpline, if one is available.
- Being involved: Find out what is being done to prevent human trafficking in your community, see what you can do and encourage your friends, family and neighbours to be more aware about human trafficking.
- Being aware: Join the UNODC-led Blue Heart Campaign against human trafficking by visiting www.unodc.org/blueheart. Help spread the word through your social media networks or make a donation to the UN Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking.
- Being responsible: Make sure that your consumer choices and actions are ethical ones, e.g. choose not to purchase goods and services that could be linked directly or indirectly with sexual exploitation, forced labour or other forms of forced subjugation.
- Strict laws: We can make a difference in the fight against labour trafficking and labour exploitation by passing laws (and monitoring for compliance) that regulate supply chains. For instance, the U.K. Modern Slavery Act of 2015 “has been a powerful antidote to end modern slavery”, claims Kate Kennedy. “The Act requires organizations with a turnover of more than £36 million operating in the UK to publish an annual ‘slavery and human trafficking statement’, setting out what they’re doing to address this form of extreme exploitation in their supply chains and business operations”.⁸
- Economic boycott: Consumers can refuse to purchase goods from retailers who use trafficked labour or child labour in their supply chains. Institutional investors can divest their positions in such companies.
- Partnerships: Partnerships are also vitally important in the anti-trafficking space. The Freedom Fund, a philanthropy focused on strategic planning and financing, has supported almost 100 partners around the world doing grassroots work to fight modern slavery. Their mission is to identify and invest in the best efforts that allow local entities to thrive. This is because the best efforts are often by those who know the local culture the best. Further, academic research, capital funding, NGOs and nonprofit efforts and media awareness all have to come together to work collectively and educate the public.
- Anti-Trafficking Policies: Policymakers also have to take greater action – both in understanding the problem and in crafting legislative solutions. “Our collective hope is to increase collaboration and to work in parallel on the crucial areas of legislation, awareness, research and interventions. Our commitment as a school of social work is to be a convener of thought leaders in the anti-trafficking movement to make meaningful collaboration possible.”

In conclusion, there are thousands of people doing work to stop trafficking. But we need that number to be in the millions. We, collectively, need to do better. Millions of lives are at stake. And any child, woman and man could be a victim. It’s our responsibility to end the menace.⁹

I thank you for listening and to the organizer a bigger thank you for making it possible for me to share my thoughts on this subject. We shall continue to emphasize the need for collaborations to wipe out and reduce this menace.

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5. The Nation (Thailand Portal), <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/asean-plus/30352974>, search dated October 29, 2018. This was stated by member of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Yang Berhormat Iswandy bin Ahmad, while delivering a speech as guest of honour at the opening of the 'Combating Trafficking in Persons' conference (CTIP 2018) organised by Youth Against Slavery Brunei (YAS Brunei) at the ICTC2 Galley of the University Brunei Darussalam (UBD)
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8. Kate Kennedy @Freedom_Fund <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolefisher/2017/04/24/human-trafficking-in-plain-sight/>
9. Proverbs 31:8-9 ESV: "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy". Ezekiel 34:16 ESV: "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice".