



War against the Heinous Crime of Human Trafficking in Nigeria: An Assessment

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 19 April 2016;

Received in revised form:

23 May 2016;

Accepted: 28 May 2016;

Keywords

Human trafficking,

Heinous crime,

Prostitution,

Illicit trade.

ABSTRACT

The paper makes an assessment of the war against the heinous crime of human trafficking in Nigeria. The discourse considers human trafficking in the global perspective where it reveals that some countries in Africa, Asia, Europe & Americas are all involved in the illicit trade. Several reasons have been presented as causes of child or human trafficking which include poverty, unemployment, zeal to travel to Europe or America, parents' persuasion, quest for materialism, naivety or ignorance, abuse of traditional method of fostering children etc. The effects of this unwholesome trade are so devastating on not only the victims but also on the society at large. Some of the effects include the deprivation of young women and children from acquiring skills needed for national development; it mares the image of the country; it enhances the orgy of ritual killings, contracting of killer diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and fatal accidents. The extent of the war against human trafficking has been discussed extensively. It includes the establishment of the Child Rights Act of 2003 amended 2005; the establishment of NAPTIP charged with the responsibility of enforcing laws against human trafficking; prescription of 10 years jail term for convicted traffickers, enlightenment programmes of NAPTIP, and the partnering with other countries as bilateral agreements to repatriate victims and support the fight. The police and law enforcement agents are also playing their part in the fight. Consequently, recommendations were made such as embarking on enlightenment programmes by government at all levels; enactment of more laws; job creation by establishing new industries and reactivating old ones; need to involve other agencies such Nigerian Immigration Services; stop such cultural practices that enhance child trafficking; and include human trafficking in the school curriculum.

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Introduction

Human trafficking has gradually become a popular issue among peoples of the globe especially Nigerians. While human trafficking is a generic term for the unwholesome practice, it is more heart-breaking when it is discussed on the specifics-child or young women trafficking. This inhumane treatment of fellow human beings has remained incredible until recently when discoveries and publications were made about it. The assertion is exemplified by Akpomera (2011:242) as he stated thus.

The discovery in October 2010 of over 40,000 Nigerian young girls trafficked into various cities in land-locked Mali, the gateway for risky desert land journey of desperate illegal immigrants from the West African sub-region, has re-defined the structure of human trafficking in the ECOWAS jurisdiction.

More-so, it has been estimated that at any given time, over 800 persons, especially young women and children are recruited, entrapped, transported, exploited and trafficked across national borders across the world (Ezeilo 2009). Human trafficking is a heinous crime in all ramifications. It has to do with deception of people and moving such persons to a different region or country where the victims are coerced into various forms of unpleasant responsibilities or duties at the

advantage of traffickers. Explaining further on the meaning of human trafficking, the United Nations in 1999 as cited in Njoku (2004:185) states thus:

The illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders, largely from developing countries in transition with the end goal of forcing women, children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers, crime syndicates as well as all other illegal activities related to trafficking such as forced domestic labour.

The excerpt above shows that human trafficking has a wider connotation than what a layman in the street regards it. In order to have a much more understanding of the concept of human trafficking, it is imperative to present this definition which wears an international look. Thus, the United Nations Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children; the Palermo Convention and Protocol (2003) views human trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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 prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

With the excerpt above, it is understandable that human trafficking does not only exist but has reached the awareness of the global community and the United Nations has given a definition on the concept. This paper is therefore poised to discuss human trafficking in the global perspective; the causes or reasons for human trafficking; the effects of human trafficking, and the extent to which a war could be waged against human trafficking.

Global Perspective of Human Trafficking

China has been known as one of the countries where human trafficking is perpetrated over the years. This had existed long ago during the ancient trade and had continued till date. The contemporary practice is ignited by the Chinese strict law of birth control where each family is allowed to bear or have only one child. Following this law, couples that are in dire need of baby boys secretly sell out their baby girls as soon as she is born (before birth registration). This is to enable them have or bear another baby which could be a male. The sale of this baby girl to other down trodden farmers is to serve as future bride to their sons.

The baby girl will therefore be nursed and nurtured in the family and be conversant with the dos and don'ts of her future home of matrimony. This assertion may also be true as it is said that in China, several poor villages dominated by boys exist. Unfortunately, those boys do not have adequate opportunities to find wives. Besides that the resources to marry is lacking hence the buying or sale of baby girls is being perpetrated (Njoku 2004:186). Apart from the above, 52 people were convicted for baby trafficking by a court in South-West China in the year 2004.

The issue of human trafficking is a phenomenon practiced in not only the Asian China but also in the African continent. Mali is one of the countries where trafficked persons are transported to Europe. Mali plays the role or stands as a gate way to Europe especially for the traffickers. For clearer understanding of the forgoing, NAPTIP cited in Akpomera (2011) states thus:

Mali is a source, transit and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of exploitation and forced labour and currently placed on the Tier 2 watch list by the U.S State Department owing to the Malian Government's non-compliance with minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking.

From the above excerpt, one would always ask where the trafficked persons are drawn from before assembling in Mali for onward movement to Europe. It is said that human trafficking is prevalent in 53 countries, and that 89% of the 53 countries involved had been indulging in the act to and from neighbouring countries, but an appreciable volume of the traffic flows to Europe Akaigwe (cited in Njoku, 2004).

In Nigeria, human trafficking is also prominent. Human trafficking is shrouded with complexity as several people are involved at family and community levels as well as at international level. Child trafficking is common in South-West as children are used for cheap labour in domestic work and agricultural production such as cashew, rubber and cocoa farms. In fact, it is alleged that human trafficking involving women and children has been on in several locations and

communities in Nigeria. Buttressing on this, Njoku (2004:187) was apt to state thus:

South-East, South-South and South-West Nigeria are noted for active involvement in human trafficking. Several thousands of children are known to have trafficked from Igboland and Cross Rivers State to Benin Republic, Togo and Gabon for the purpose of engaging them in child labour, which is akin to child slavery.

Reasons for Human Trafficking

Several reasons have been advanced for both women and children trafficking. Meanwhile, for the purpose of explicitness, reasons for women trafficking would be presented separately from that of children.

Reasons for Women Trafficking

- Young girls involved in human trafficking do so mainly for the purpose of prostitution. The term prostitution is defined as an act whereby an individual engages in sexual activity with strangers or other persons with whom the individual has no affectional relationship but in exchange for money or other valuable material that are given at or near the time of the act (Paul cited in National Teachers Institute, 1990:28). The Director of United Nations Inter-Regional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), Mr. Alberto Bradonini noted that traffickers earn much money per month by exploiting the women in the sex industry.

He explained that in many cases, such a woman is forcibly made indebted to the traffickers up to the tune of N30,000 or 60,000 Euros. This amount of money according to him, covers the cost of her transportation to Italy or Amsterdam and accommodation till she is able to free herself from such indebtedness. Of course, it is not always easy to pay up this debt within six months hence the young women toils for months and sometimes up to two or three years as sex slaves before they could secure their freedom (Njoju 2004:192).

In the same vein, it is estimated that about 100,000 young women of Nigerian origin have been sold into sex slavery as prostitutes, servicing top 'guns' and big boys in Europe's flourishing underground sex industry. National Agency for the Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) (cited Njoku 2004:193).

- **Poverty Level in Nigeria:** No person anywhere would want to remain poor because of its attendant hunger, unpleasant condition etc. It is on this basis that most of the women who were taken abroad for illicit sex trade by traffickers accepted the offer as a means of improving their living condition or as a means of survival. Young women and children were vulnerable to trafficking because they feel that in Europe, they are bound to have better prospects than in Nigeria. In other words, quest for greener pastures is one of the reasons for human trafficking and slavery across national borders.

- **Quest for Material Wealth:** Materialism is certainly one of the driving forces that lure people into the illicit sex trade. It is seen to be lucrative by both the trafficked (victims) and traffickers. An official of NAPTIP: Alhaji Mohammed Babandede is of the view that traffickers usually invest about N250,000 on each individual girl and the girl is made to sign agreement to pay a whopping 40,000 Euros which is about N10 million (Njoku 2004:194). It is further believed that apart from arms and drugs, human trafficking is the next profit making venture for organized crime. The perpetrators have their consciences mortgaged.

- **Unemployment:** Unemployment is an issue that has not been checked especially in developing countries like Nigeria over the years. This ugly trend is due largely to lack of infrastructure and structures to generate employment. In line

with lack of industrial capacity, Wallerstein (1984) stated that “without an industrial base, poor societies face a double bind: they count on selling expensive raw material to rich nations, from whom they buy whatever expensive manufactured goods they can afford”. It is therefore the lack of industrial capacity vis-à-vis unemployment that encourages the incidence of human trafficking in Nigeria.

▪ **Parents’ Persuasion on Young Children:** Most parents persuade their young girls to travel abroad for prostitution. This they do by raising fund through sale of their landed property etc. Since such families do not reflect on the moral implication of their actions, the business continues to thrive.

▪ **Naivety:** Most of those who were carried to foreign countries were deceived into believing that they would be given legitimate employments, adequate remuneration and good condition of service. Obviously, it is ignorance and excessive zeal to travel overseas especially to Europe and America that is sustaining this illicit business.

Reasons for Children Trafficking

▪ Children are seen as a source of cheap labour. Children became involved in human trafficking because they are identified as major source of labour in developing countries. Child labour obtained through agency of traffickers is usually very exploitative, dehumanizing and slavish in nature (Njoku 2004).

▪ **For Domestic Services:** Children working under this condition are often denied opportunity for education and work long hours under hazardous and inhuman conditions.

▪ **For Ritual and Cult Requirements:** The rate of ritual killings and human sacrifices is on the increase. Many of the victims of human trafficking are for such purposes.

▪ **Children are Easy to Exploit:** It is said that children are cheap to hire and considered to be docile with little power to resist hazardous work and bad treatment hence about 24 million children are engaged in child labour in Africa (Azuatalam 1990).

▪ **For Child Prostitution:** Traffickers who are beneficiaries of illicit sex trade often induce young girls below 15 years of age. Arinze noted that the sex trade is more harmful in the third world countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. He further noted that the victims litter all the sex parlours of Europe and engage in all forms of sexual immorality, not as a result of choice but most times, because the principal “is the vampire sucking the blood”. Also, it is said that in Belgium and Netherlands, for instance, it is common to see young girls from ages 14 downwards in steaming sex. The girls confess that they were paid 10 dollars for fifteen minutes for the assignment, Onyemaobi (cited in Njoku 2004: 1999).

▪ **Abuse of Traditional Method of Fostering Children:** The practice of fostering children has changed in dimension or approach as fostered children are being made to serve as domestic servants. When children are sent to relatives or friends to live with, they are often subjected to inhuman conditions.

▪ **High Rate of Moral Decadence:** Moral soundness which used to be the watchword of human race is gradually getting eroded and the reverse is now the case. Prostitution is now in vogue just for materialism or the sake of material wealth.

Effects of Human Trafficking on the Society

▪ Human Trafficking Worsens the problem of child labour. Child labour is hazardous and negatively affects the child’s mental, spiritual, social and moral development.

▪ Child trafficking deprives young women and children the opportunity of acquiring knowledge and skills needed for national development.

▪ Human trafficking also mares the image of a country if such country has a high number of her citizens engaging in the illicit business of prostitution.

▪ Human trafficking enhances the orgy of ritual killings. This is factual because some victims of trafficking are used for rituals or human sacrifices.

▪ The spread of HIV/AIDS in the international dimension could be traceable to human trafficking especially as most of the young women are deceived into prostitution.

▪ **The Extent to which War has been Waged against Human Trafficking**

▪ The federal government of Nigeria has established the Child Rights Act of 2003 amended in 2005 which provides that it is an offence for any person to engage in trafficking in persons. It further provides that the assets of any trafficker would be forfeited and seized.

▪ National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has been established by the trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law and Administration Act 2003. The Agency is charged with the responsibility of enforcing laws against trafficking, investigate and prosecute persons suspected; to take charge and coordinate the rehabilitation and counseling of victims of trafficking. For effective functioning of the NAPTIP, a trust fund is created which would be partly provided by the government and also sourced from the auctioning of seized and forfeited assets of traffickers. Also, an anti-child trafficking network has been established in eleven states of the federation to further the tracking of child traffickers through the collaboration of UNICEF and the Nigerian Government (Onyido 2009:177).

▪ Another tactful fight against human trafficking is the decision of the National Assembly to prescribe a minimum of 10 years imprisonment for persons convicted of human trafficking. The jail term recommended by the National Assembly is in addition to payment of fines as may be deemed by the court. This is based on the understanding that the payment of fines by traffickers is not enough to deter the perpetrators. (Daily Sun Comment 2013:19).

▪ The fight against human trafficking is also fought at the international level. During an international Tourism Fair in Berlin, it featured not only introduced innovations to travels and tours but also for developing campaign against human trafficking through tourism. According to Onochie (2014:29), “the campaign provided guidance to recognize possible situations of trafficking in persons, wildlife, artifacts, illicit drugs and counterfeit goods and invited travellers to take action through responsible consumer choices”.

▪ Other ways by which the war against human trafficking is fought is the activities of NAPTIP as they engage in broadcasting anti-trafficking television spots and awareness programmes in markets, cinema halls, schools, motor parks etc. NAPTIP equally organizes or hosts meetings of stakeholders to discuss anti-trafficking issues. The stakeholders in this regards include international organizations, government officials, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGOS).

▪ The Nigerian government is also partnering with other countries in form of bilateral agreement to combat the human trafficking business. Thus, Nigerian Government had such agreement with Italian Government. Also Nigerian

government had collaborated with Ghanaian authorities as well as the Beninese to repatriate trafficked persons. It is also worthy of note that the United States of America has created an office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (CMTP) which publishes the report of its work yearly.

- Within Nigerian territory, the war against child trafficking is not being relaxed at all. In an interview conducted by Bankong-Obi on the Imo State Commissioner of Police, Mohammed Musa Katsina, it was revealed that baby factories exist as those who are behind the heinous crime against humanity are identified. According to the Police Commissioner, "we have gone ahead to dislodge, disarm and prosecute them. Most of these cases are in court". The police commissioner revealed other things as he stated thus;

- If you are talking of child trafficking, it is not only in Imo State, you are also aware that I was able to bust some in Rivers, Abia. We even went as far as Illorin in Kwara State to rescue children. In the baby factories, the teenagers were kept in very indecent apartments and they were never allowed to go out. Even after their delivery, they were never allowed to go out. They were kept there just to recycle and recycle and recycle. There, what we saw was something that could definitely shatter your heart.

- There are several other revelations made with regards to child trafficking but suffice it to be limited to the above.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is an illicit trade which is not only inimical to the victims but also to the society at large. The government has made bold steps in eradicating the unwholesome trade which has made the lives of millions of the victims miserable. A lot of them are suffering psychiatric cases because of the trauma experienced in the ordeal while some have been rendered hopeless as they can neither go to school nor trace their homes again or join their families. The worst situation is that most of them lose their lives either on transit or as a result of the harsh and hazardous conditions of their jobs such as steam sex, contracting such sickness as HIV/AIDS etc. while it is commendable that the government is trying to fight trafficking, it is also imperative to state that further steps be taken.

Recommendations

- The government at all levels – Federal, State and Local Governments should as a matter of urgency embark on enlightenment campaigns to bring awareness on the disadvantages associated with human trafficking in our society.

- It is necessary to enact more laws or amend the existing ones by making it stiffer or tougher for the perpetrators of human trafficking. If capital punishment is considered too harsh, then the duration of imprisonment should not be less than 30 years with hard labour. This would help to deter traffickers.

- Employment should be created by establishing new industries and reactivating old ones. The youths should always find what to engage in to earn a living. It is said that an idle man is the devil's workshop, so if jobs are not created, even young school leavers may be deceived and eventually become victims of human trafficking.

- The agency, NAPTIP should be empowered adequately to effectively function within its terms of reference. If need be, their scope should be expanded to achieve the desired result.

- Other agencies whose role is similar to NAPTIP such as Nigerian Immigration Services, the Police, the Navy as well as Nigeria Customs Services should collaborate to fight the hydra-headed monster of human trafficking.

- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be given adequate encouragement to enhance their fight against trafficking in persons.

- The government should find out cultural practices that encourage or make our young ones vulnerable to trafficking. Such cultural practices should be modified for purpose of achieving human-trafficking free society.

- Education should be made free totally or affordable to all. This would engage the children while they are yet ignorant about the packages of life especially the deceit that syndicates of human trafficking present to young girls and boys.

- Human trafficking, security and other related concepts should be integrated into the school curriculum as it would help to sensitize people on what those devils incarnate are doing in the society.

- Rehabilitation of victims should be taken seriously.

- The Nigerian government should continue to make bilateral agreements to get assistance from other countries where our citizens are carried to.

- It is important for victims of human trafficking to be given fair treatment and be assured of safety and protection. This would enable them open up and reveal the traffickers identity as well as their hide outs and of course any other syndicate of the heinous crime.

- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) court should be used to address or strengthen the machineries that could fight this crime of cross-border human trafficking.

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