

The Prevalence Of Human Trafficking In Nigeria And Strategies For Tackling The Menace

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Abstract

For an extensive period spanning well over three decades, the issue of human trafficking in Nigeria has evolved into a serious concern, garnering the attention of community leaders, national figures, and the government alike. Its perilous implications for national integration and development have become increasingly evident. The gravity of this problem is underscored by Nigeria's classification as a nation serving as a source, transit point, and destination for women and children subjected to various forms of trafficking, including forced labour and prostitution. The unabated persistence of trafficking prompted action from the United States Department's Office responsible for monitoring and combating trafficking in persons, placing Nigeria on the Tier 2 watch list in 2017. This article, therefore, delves into the profound magnitude of human trafficking in Nigeria, dissecting its root causes which encompass poverty, ignorance, deceit, intimidation, and deeply entrenched cultural factors. Furthermore, this study scrutinizes the far-reaching consequences of human trafficking, shedding light on the multifaceted harms it inflicts upon individuals and society at large. In response to this pressing issue, the article proposes a spectrum of strategies to confront this menace head-on. These strategies are aimed at providing a comprehensive approach to tackling human trafficking, encompassing prevention, prosecution, protection and the establishment of strategic partnerships.

Keywords: *Human Trafficking, Prevalence, Strategies, Tackling, Menace*

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is no longer child's play to state that there is the prevalence of modern-day slavery, better known as human trafficking in Nigeria. Human Trafficking is a global crime that trades in people and exploits them for profit. Every year, thousands of men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims (UNODC, 2023). Nigeria has acquired a reputation for being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking. Trafficking of persons is the third largest crime after economic fraud and the drug trade in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2006). While it may not be possible to state precisely when it started, it began to gain attention in the 1980s following the country's economic meltdown which led to the closure of many companies and factories, resulting in the sack of several workers. It therefore, became inevitable for this category of people, most of whom came from remote communities of the interior, to look for other means of survival.

Unfortunately, human trafficking, not so popular then, easily became a ready alternative to both human traffickers and job seekers who were promised better and more steady employment outside the country. According to Shelley (2010), human trafficking is thought to be one of the fastest-growing activities of transnational criminal organisations. As observed by Mosimababale and Omoregbe (2020), human trafficking 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). The writers opine that two-thirds of this figure comes, according to Pathfinders Justice Initiative (2016), from commercial sexual exploitation, while another 851 billion results from forced economic exploitation, including domestic work, agriculture and economic activities.

Mosimababale and Omoregbe (2020), opine further that another estimate released by the Global Slavery Index in July 2018 indicates that there are 40.3 million victims of modern slavery worldwide, 71.9% of whom are women/girls and 25% of whom are children. Furthermore, United Nations Development Cooperation (UNDC) as of the January 2019 Report, 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 out of five being children (International Labour Organization, 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 Nigeria has the highest number of victims in Africa.

II. CONCEPT OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking encompasses the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or reception of individuals through force, fraud, or deception, all for the purpose of exploitation for financial gain. This crime knows no boundaries, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds, including men, women, and children, and it prevails in every corner of the globe. Traffickers frequently employ tactics such as violence, fraudulent employment agencies, and deceptive pledges of education and employment prospects to ensnare and manipulate their victims (United Nations, 2023). According to National Human Trafficking (2023), trafficking involves the unethical pursuit of financial gain by depriving individuals of their freedom. In certain instances, traffickers employ deception, fraud, or physical coercion to compel victims into engaging in commercial sex. In other cases, victims are subjected to falsehoods, assaults, threats, or manipulation, coercing them into labouring under inhumane, unlawful, or otherwise intolerable circumstances. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling represent widespread global crimes that exploit men, women, and children for financial gain. These well-organized networks or individuals engaged in these lucrative enterprises prey upon individuals who find themselves in vulnerable situations, experiencing desperation, or simply seeking to improve their lives (United Nations, 2023).

III. HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVES.

Human trafficking, also known as Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labour or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts. The coercion can be subtle, physical or psychological. In Nigeria, human trafficking competes highly and daily with drug trafficking, another life-threatening crime which sometimes goes hand-in-hand. However, in the case of human trafficking, women and girls victims of trafficking, are essentially recruited for domestic servitude and sex trafficking while young boys are generally compelled to work on plantations in commercial farming, construction, quarries and mines or engage in trading, begging, petty crimes and drug trade. Mosimababale and Omoregbe (2020), noted that such victims are taken to other West and Central African countries, particularly Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon and Guinea, as well to South Africa. They are also transported to North Africa (Libya, Algeria, Morocco), the Middle East (Saudi Arabia) and Central Asia, (International Labour Organization, 2016).

Mosimababale and Omoregbe (2020) aligned with Olujuwon (2008) that women and girls, essentially from Edo and Delta States, subjected to forced prostitution are trafficked mostly to Italy. They are as well taken to Spain, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, France, Sweden Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Slovakia, Greece and Russia. Thus, the trafficking of young women and girls from Nigeria to Europe for the purpose of sexual exploitation is one of the most persistent trafficking flows as it is well organized and difficult to detect (UN Global Report, 2014). The NAPITIP statistics from 2019 to 2022, revealed that 61% of human trafficking in Nigeria happens internally while 39% is generated from cross-border trafficking. (Pathfinders Justice Initiative, 2020). According to the 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, the government identified 1,634 trafficking victims including 841 sex trafficking victims, 543 labour trafficking victims and 250 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking; compared with 935 victims in the previous reporting period. Of the 841 sex trafficking victims, 183 were men, 290 were women, 17 were boys and 53 were girls. Of the 250 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, all were children, including 65 boys and 185 girls.

An important feature of the Nigerian human trafficking system is the use of charms by the traffickers or the threat of charms, a series of curses to have a firm hold on victims and force them into complete surrender to prostitution. Having completed all arrangements to traffic their victims abroad, traffickers embark on the final deal by taking victims to shrines of Voodoo priests for oath-taking. There, the victims' sensitive body parts like fingernails, head, hair, pubic hairs, armpit hairs and blood, (by incisions) are collected and used to prepare concoctions which the victims drink and swear an oath to repay the cost of trafficking them, and never to report the situation to security forces or reveal the identity of their traffickers. Fear of the consequences of breaking the covenant oath is so strong that it creates a powerful hold on the victims and impedes them from seeking help. According to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), this category of young women and girls, most times, are those who willingly wish to go into prostitution abroad or are lured by the promise of good life.

The evils associated with human trafficking in Nigeria are vividly captured in a popular television serial, SUPER STORY on WAP TV and aired on some national, state and private television stations a few years back. The story titled COHAN a call to action, presents the life and experience of a young lady called ITOHAN: anxious to play football abroad with a view to earning foreign currency with which to cater for herself and her poor parents and siblings. In her quest for a foreign football club, she fell into the hands of a supposed football agent who lured her into accepting to be linked to a football club abroad.

The lady, **Itohan** was subsequently trapped and trafficked, alongside other ladies, through horrible, frightening and life-threatening routes to Europe. They were initially left in the cold before being surreptitiously handed over to a stern-looking “madam” Sophie who did not waste time telling them that they were in Europe purely for commercial sex (prostitution) and they had to work hard to repay the much she had expended to bring them to Europe. There ended the dreams of the seemingly innocent ladies as they were soon dressed in skimpy clothes and sent out to make money for “Madam” through prostitution. **Itohan** protested against being used for prostitution, but what she got in return was severe beating, and she eventually succumbed. At the end of it all, she never realized her ambition, she became a prostitute and drug addict and contracted a disease that eventually took her life. Dramas such as this are meant to draw the attention of government and relevant government agencies to the need to rise to the challenges posed by human trafficking. It is also meant to educate girls and women, especially those with poor, to understand the activities of certain criminal-minded Nigerians who are out to prey on innocent women and girls with promises of a job in Europe, thus deceiving and trafficking them out of the country.

IV. CAUSES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

It is an established fact that human trafficking in Nigeria has assumed a dangerous trend with the incidence being reported every now and then and with the traffickers appearing to be making progress. The question then arises: What is responsible for this unfortunate incident dragging, Nigeria’s name in the mud among the comity of nations? Quite a number of reasons can be advanced to explain this, but as noted in Trafficking in Persons Training Manual (2019), some of the factors are Push factors while others are Pull factors. Push factors imply the reasons why victims are compelled to leave their environments while pull factors are the reasons that attract them to certain destinations. The diagram below illustrates the factors better:

Push Factors	Pull Factors
- Poverty / Ignorance	- Perceived opportunities elsewhere
- Lack of Education	- Lack of workers
- Demand for cheap labour/sex	- Good social measures
- Lack of Positive economic	- Positive economic situation, opportunities in home communities
- Political and social stability	Cultural factors.
- Deception and Intimidation	
-	Profit

Source: NAPTIP Training Manual, 2019

In the explanations that follow, emphasis is placed on the push factors.

Poverty / Ignorance

According to UNESCO (2006), poverty is the most visible cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria. Nothing can be more frustrating and devastating in the lives of people than poverty, especially extreme poverty. Poverty becomes complicated where there is a high level of Ignorance and large family size. Ignorance and poverty make more people gullible such that they can be easily led into believing the pictures of good lives painted by their would-be traffickers. This is not helped by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019 to 2021 which aggravated unemployment and underemployment and which prompted people to seek better opportunities in other countries. Furthermore, poverty and ignorance are more traumatic in rural communities with a large concentration of polygamous families for the purpose of egalitarian settlements. This is common in the villages and slums where the means of livelihood are unpredictable. Consequently, the adolescents struggle to find solace outside the home. It, therefore, becomes inevitable for quite a number of them to become victims of traffickers.

Lack of Education

A foremost Nigerian educationist and social critic, the Late Dr. Tai Solarin, once stated that he who has no education is a slave” and it can be added that such a person is finished as well, this is because education is a major weapon which a person can rise above the shame of poverty, Ignorance and gullibility. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly lists education as a human right and states that everyone has a right to it. It further stipulates that education should be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages, while technical and professional education should be made generally available. Higher education, in line with Article 26, should be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. It stands to reason, therefore, that income potential is the reason for this. When people lack good education it invariably impacts their lives, their families, and unfortunately their children. In this instance, it is much harder to escape poverty and ignorance without education. Incidentally, jobs without academic education, especially labourer work; mining, agricultural work, fishing, construction work and domestic services, have a higher tendency of trafficking. Good education helps people get better work and avoid conditions that may lead to exploitation, such as trafficking.

Demands for Cheap Labour/Sex

Following Nigeria’s unfavourable economic conditions that resulted in unemployment and underemployment, Nigerians are eager to seek alternative opportunities, not minding the quality of jobs, outside the country, only industries like agriculture, mining, fishing, domestic service and the likes are available. Commercial sex is equally in high demand, encouraging traffickers to supply more people, particularly women and girls. Children are especially vulnerable to trafficking into forced labour, forced marriage, begging, trading and commercial sex as they are easier to manipulate and abuse. According to 2020 UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) data, women and girls make up 65% of trafficking victims. 90% of them are trafficked for commercial sex (Human Rights Careers).

Lack of Economic Activities in Home Communities

Ordinarily, no one will want to be trafficked or exploited. However, the devastation of Nigeria’s interior communities, resulting from oil exploration and exploitation, flood and erosion and deforestation has pushed quite a number of Nigerians out of legitimate means of livelihood (such as farming, fishing, hunting); driving them into desperate situations and making them willing to take risks where there are no better options, unlike stabilized economies and improved economic development which give room for legitimate economic activities, such that people are not into desperate situations.

Cultural Factors

Human rights careers mentioned cultural factors as one of the primary causes of human trafficking. Cultural beliefs and practices are crucial to the prevalence of human trafficking in Nigeria. Hawking by women and children (especially girls) and begging, even for twins, are commonly accepted practices all over the country. It makes trafficking children in particular a common thing even in the open without people paying attention to it. Relegating the personality of women and girls is a persistent cultural factor linked to human trafficking. When women and girls are relegated and not considered as human beings deserving rights and respect, they become the first group to be targeted by traffickers.

Deception and Intimidation

To succeed in their nefarious activities, traffickers often use various tactics to manipulate and intimidate their victims. Deception is the major factor. According to the UNODC, some trafficking groups, for instance, pretend to be legitimate recruitment agencies, lying about fees, documents, transport, quick, safe routes, accommodation and readily available jobs. Such agencies also lie about the nature of the jobs, especially to women. Thus, with an assurance of domestic work like housekeeping or child care, women and girls can end up being forced into commercial sex. Apart from deception, traffickers make use of intimidation tactics like physical assault, lock-up, sexual abuse, harassment and psychological abuse to keep victims permanently trapped.

Profit

Traffickers and trafficking networks are in it basically for the money that comes with it. This view is found in ‘Strengthened in Giddens’ Sociology (2001) by Beccaria, a Classical Criminologist and leading protagonist of the Classical School of Thought, on why people commit crime. According to Beccaria, people could choose between good and evil and are thus completely responsible for their actions. Criminals (traffickers), he said, are thus motivated by hedonist rationality in which they weigh the potential pleasure (gain, profit) of their actions (human trafficking) against the possible pain (arrest, prosecution, imprisonment) associated with it. For this reason, human traffickers indulge in the illegal act because they rationally calculate that the crime will give them more profit than punishment.

Weak Legal System and Bad leadership/Corruption

It may not be out of place to add that Nigeria's weak legal system and level of bad leadership and corruption in high places contribute as much to human trafficking. As noted by Mosimababale and Omoregbe (2020), porous borders, corrupt government officials, involvement of internationally organized criminal groups or networks, absence of commitment by immigration and law enforcement officers to control borders as well and inadequate legislation or mandates facilitate trafficking in persons. Over the years too, insensitivity of leadership and corruption have helped to heighten several criminal activities in Nigeria, of which human trafficking is one. The economy has been so mismanaged that unemployment became the fate of several people, men and women in the prime of their productive lives, that they voluntarily or involuntarily chose to migrate for labour or sex work in the realization that Europe and Western nations have a valued currency. By implication, therefore, people chose to move to and work in richer countries in order to improve their economic status back home in Nigeria where the economy does not support good living conditions. The dual explanation here is that while job opportunities, irrespective of how dirty it is, abound for male migrants in Europe and other Western countries, women migrants without access to jobs often take to prostitution as an option.

EFFECTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

Human trafficking can have physical, emotional and psychological effects on anyone involved. It has the power to impact someone's life forever (Hartmann, 2021). There is no doubt that victims of human trafficking suffer terrible humiliation for as long as they are trapped in the traffickers' net. Notable among the effects of human trafficking in Nigeria, therefore, are mental trauma, physical trauma, ostracism, lack of independent living skills, loss of human resources, unwanted pregnancy, vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, depression, crime, death, and many more.

Mental Trauma

The US Department of State explains that because traffickers dehumanise and objectify their victims, victims' innate sense of power, visibility and dignity often become blurred. Victims of human trafficking can as well experience devastating psychological effects during and after these trafficking experiences. They may end up with post-traumatic stress, difficulty in relationships, depression memory loss, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame and other terrible forms of mental trauma.

Physical Trauma

Many of the victims of human trafficking in Nigeria also experience physical injuries, having been sexually exploited by their traffickers and customers. There could be marks on the body or loss of parts of the body, burns, bruises, wounds, cuts, dislocations etc. which are usually inflicted through physical abuse and maltreatment. There is also a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, infections, diabetes, cancer and other illnesses. Lack of proper medical care causes these conditions to spread and worsen, often affecting their health permanently. Also, victims of forced labour may work in dangerous conditions for long hours doing repetitive tasks. This may expose them to dangerous contaminants or work with heavy equipment. Consequently, they are subjected to serious infections, respiratory problems, injuries, impairment and exhaustion.

Ostracism

In Nigeria, because of socio-cultural beliefs and practices, which are held in high esteem, victims of human trafficking quickly become isolated from friends, family and other social circles. This may be due to their personal feelings of guilt and shame or because they have been moved away and now live far away from their communities. Also, some victims who escape or survive a trafficking situation and return home may on their own feel withdrawn, or even be excluded from social groups due to the stigma they now carry. They may be shunned by families and friends and thus feel unloved and unwanted. With all these, they are denied the mutual love that is supposed to exist among family members. Unfortunately, it can make such victims become hostile in the near future. (Hartmann, 2021)

Lack of Independent Living Skills

Several victims of human trafficking in Nigeria forced into child labour are usually denied their right to education and the resources needed to live independently and become useful to themselves in the future. They may not understand the laws of the country to which they are trafficked or able to speak the language. Having been trafficked at a young age and unable to attend school, they are confined to the same job for a long period of time. Not allowed to learn new skills, the victims become dependent and frustrated. In the long run, they unwillingly accept their fate and have a hard time living on their own.

Loss of Human Resources

The loss of children, youths and women, who are in their prime, will have an effect on the manpower of the nation which will further affect its socio-economic development.

Unwanted pregnancy

Victims of human trafficking in Nigeria, a number of whom are young girls are often faced with continuous unprotected sex which could result in unwanted pregnancies. Some of the girls, who are not prepared for pregnancy and childbirth, when they give birth will throw the child away or abandon the child with their parents without adequate care. (Stop Learn, 2023)

Vulnerability to Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Trafficked girls who are pushed into prostitution are prone to being infected with sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhoea and HIV/AIDS. These diseases are capable of cutting their lives short and can reduce their productive contributions to society as well as lead to increased medical expenses.

Crime

Crime comes as a social consequence of human trafficking in the country. The victims, due to lack of proper upbringing, and having lost all hope of being integrated into the society may resort to criminal acts. It may begin with petty theft within the community, graduating to burglary, armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, unruly behaviour etc, thereby causing social problems in society.

Depression and Death

Depression is a common mental health problem that involves a low mood and a loss of interest in activities. It has a psychological effect on victims of human trafficking and, leads to feeling unworthy, lacking motivation, isolation from loved ones, substance abuse and having abnormal/suicidal thoughts. Death comes as the most fatal consequence of human trafficking. Some children who are used as house help are often violently treated and beaten to death, while some die of ill health because they are not properly taken care of. Also, most victims who have experienced sexual abuse and rape and have been exposed to health hazards may end up dying. Some victims may not be able to cope and may end up committing suicide. (Kofa Study).

GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS AT CHECKING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA

It is uncertain how many innocent and consented Nigerians have been trafficked around the world, but it cannot be doubted that there are thousands of such, with victims being women, girls and minors. of course, there are also boys and young men.

The Nigerian government has not been silent in addressing the threat posed by the devilish act of human trafficking. It has taken decisive measures where necessary, including collaborating with relevant national and international bodies, for instance, on June 28, 2001, Nigeria signed and ratified The United Nations Trans-National Organized Crime (TOC) Convention and the Protocol to suppress and punish trafficking in persons, known as Palermo Protocol.

Creation of NAPTIP

Following the deportation from Italy of Nigerian girls who were trafficked for commercial sex, Civil Societies, Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organization, Religious Organizations and Traditional Organizations started mounting pressure against the seemingly modern form of slavery that stared the nation right in the eye. Most active among the activities of NGOs was that of the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), established by Mrs. Titi Atiku-Abubakar, wife of former Vice President, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku. WOTCLEF did not waste time in confronting the challenges posed by human trafficking in the country by forwarding a private member bill to the National Assembly for passage into law. The bill was passed on 7th July 2003 and the Nigerian President asserted to it on 14th July 2003. It was this law, which took effect immediately that gave birth to the National Agency for the Prohibition of in of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and other related matters. Its creation was the Federal Government's response to addressing the scourge of human trafficking in Nigeria and its attendant human abuses in its entire ramifications. It was equally a fulfillment of her international obligation under the Trafficking in Persons Protocol supplementing the United Nation's Transnational Organized Crime (TOC).

NAPTIP is fully committed to the prevention of all forms of human degradation and exploitation through the coordinated use of the nation's crime prevention and law enforcement resources; to stamp out human trafficking and to liberate and uplift the vulnerable, especially women and children from dehumanizing and exploitative employment and usage; and to ensure their rehabilitation and effective reintegration into society.

NAPTIP is saddled with twenty-six (26) functions. There are twenty-four (24) offences and corresponding punishments listed against human trafficking and other related offences. Few of the functions are to:

- (i) enforce and administer the provision of the Act,
- (ii) adopt effective measures for the prevention and eradication of trafficking in persons and related matters.
- (iii) establish co-ordinated preventive, regulatory and investigatory machinery geared towards the eradication of trafficking in persons;
- (iv) create public enlightenment and awareness through seminars, workshops, publications, radio and television programmes and other means aimed at educating the public on the dangers of trafficking in persons.
- (v) implement all bilateral and multilateral treaties and conventions on trafficking in persons adopted by Nigeria.

NAPTIP has since expanded the scope of its activities and programmes across the country. With headquarters in Abuja and Liaison office in Port-Harcourt, it has zonal Commands in ten (10) state capitals as of December 2015. The agency collaborates with different stakeholders in the areas of:

- * Investigation, arrests and prosecution
- * Repatriation.
- * Rehabilitation and Shelter
- * Data Collection
- * Advocacy and Awareness Raising Campaign
- * Training
- * Resource Mobilization
- * Facilitating Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation. (Trafficking in Persons Training Manual, 2019)

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE COUNTRY

It is a common saying that “a drastic disease requires drastic treatment”, so it is with human trafficking in Nigeria where the number of victims trafficked has risen sharply in recent years, culminating in a number of consequences for victims, their families, their communities and the Nigerian society at large. According to The United States Department of State’s, 2022 TIP Report which ranks countries based on their respective government’s response to human trafficking in the previous year, Nigeria remains a tier 2 country (second to the highest ranking). The 2023 Trafficking in Persons’ report on Nigeria also showed that the Government of Nigeria does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government has demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period considering the impact of COVID-19 and therefore remained on Tier 2. Much as the Federal government, through NAPTIP, has put in place, measures aimed at nipping the menace in the bud, there is a need to look beyond papering and mouthing over the solutions, but come up with bolder, practical strategies. Thus, measures such as the following will immensely douse human trafficking occurrences in the country: Setting up NAPTIP Vanguard, collaborating with traditional rulers, and titled community leaders, legislation, awareness advocacy, education and skills acquisition opportunities.

CREATION OF NAPTIP VANGUARD

One of the practical approaches by which human trafficking can be checked in Nigeria is for NAPTIP, with the backing of the government, to set up the **NAPTIP VANGUARD** made up of young, versatile and agile male and female personnel, drawn from across the country. They should be screened for their credibility and made to undergo para-military training. Thereafter, they should be drafted to porous borders and traffickers’ bush-path: where they can effect the arrest of traffickers and victims trying to avoid arrest by law-enforcement agents (police, customs and immigration). For effective and optimum performance, members of the VANGUARD should be well motivated, financially and materially.

Collaboration with Traditional Rulers and Titled Community Leaders

Traditional rulers and chiefs operate at the grassroots and are therefore closer to the people who believe so much in them and repose so much confidence in their pronouncements. It is thus imperative for NAPTIP to carry them along in efforts to stamp out human trafficking in the country. In this regard, the Oba of Benin, Ewuare II, who is recognized as the spiritual head of Benin Kingdom, Edo State, has invoked curses on those who aid and abet the trafficking of Edo girls and women to Italy and other places. The Oba also broke all the alleged agreements entered into by the trafficked victims with the traffickers and their agents. This action by the Oba of Benin is expected to decrease the volume of human trafficking from Edo State as well as embolden victims to name traffickers and their agents. If other traditional rulers in towns and communities notorious for human trafficking had followed this trend, quite a lot of achievements would have been recorded.

Stiffer Legislation

Apparently, the punishments set out under the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003 and re-enacted in 2015 are not enough to deter hardened human traffickers. Imprisonment of between five and seven years and a fine of between ₦250,000 and ten million naira are a mere slap on the back that could be served and paid respectively without sweat and the prisoner coming back to re-strategise. The imprisonment and fines do not even match the current reality of the problem. This is why life imprisonment and confiscation of all assets and funds traced to traffickers should form part of the stiffer legislation through which the activities can be stopped without sweat and the prisoner coming back to re-strategise. The imprisonment and fines do not even match the current reality of the problem.

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Creation of Anti-human Trafficking Awareness

In a determined effort of the government to stop human trafficking in the country, it needs to make special budgetary allocations that will make sufficient funds available for this purpose. Government, NAPTIP and other relevant agencies will need to work day and night, awakening the people to the evils of human trafficking. This will involve the use of radio and television jingles, distribution of flyers and the use of other mass media like newspapers and magazines. To have maximum effect, enlightenment campaign vans can be taken to the rural interior where the vulnerable illiterates reside. Where there is no electricity, or the supply is epileptic, the campaign vans can be used to show films of the evils associated with human trafficking. Seminars, workshops and training programmes are also necessary for people to understand the gimmicks and deceptive signs so that people will not fall victim.

Advocacy

This calls for sustained activities aimed at speaking in favour of, recommending, arguing for a cause, supporting and defending on behalf of a cause. It thus involves the establishment of organizations and agencies to fight for the eradication of human trafficking as well as provide support for the victims. This explains why Non-Governmental Organizations. (NGOs), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and the Women Trafficking and Children Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTLEF) have enjoyed national and international recognitions. Their functions are to suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

Education

Education is a very powerful weapon through which ignorance, illiteracy and gullibility can be conquered. Access to a well-grounded elementary education can embolden a child to challenge any attempt to take advantage of him/her. Federal, State and Local governments should, therefore, consider the establishment of schools and the provision of educational opportunities to all as a matter of utmost priority. This will enable children of the less privileged, especially in innermost rural communities, to attend schools and not be used as child labourers and domestic servants.

Skills Acquisition Opportunities

Apart from white-collar jobs, skills acquisition opportunities should be made readily available for Nigerian graduates and youth across the length and breadth of the country. Such skills as weaving, knitting, mat making, foot mat making, traditional cloth-making etc., properly mastered, will serve as sources of self-employment for individuals and therefore discourage them from submitting to the whims and caprices of devilish human traffickers. Again, social infrastructural facilities should be developed for the same reason.

V. CONCLUSION

It has been established that human trafficking in Nigeria continues to increase unabated with the traffickers devising means and strategies with which to outsmart and thwart government efforts at eradicating the menace. Consequently, an estimated number of vulnerable Nigerian women, girls, boys and minors have been deceitfully trafficked to Europe and other Western countries, like slaves, to be engaged as domestic servants, child labourers, commercial sex workers, beggars, hawkers, etc. The simple implication of this is that Nigeria continues to lose people in their prime who are supposed to be part of the socio-political and economic development of the country. Therefore, the government, relevant agencies and stakeholders should sustain the efforts to raise awareness of human trafficking in both rural and urban areas by organising workshops, seminars and workshops, and immediately establishing the NAPTIP VANGUARD. They should also continuously distribute manuals, textbooks, pamphlets, flyers etc., printed in different languages and address ways of tackling it.

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