

Media's role in curbing contemporary slavery in Africa: Analysis of child trafficking trends in Nigeria

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Abstract

Slavery has been a universal phenomenon and Africa is not an exception as this had existed long before the arrival of the Europeans. It is pertinent to note that all types of slavery are characterized by the violation of all forms of Human Rights. In most cases, the slaves are hired for economic reasons as a result of which severe inhuman treatments are meted out to them. For these reasons, the international communities and concerned Africans frowned at this violation of Human Rights; hence the law to abolish slave trade was promulgated. Frantic efforts were made by all those that were concerned until slave trade was finally abolished in Africa in 1882. With the abolition of this trade, nations, states, and international institutions started protecting Fundamental Human Rights in the hope that there would not be a resurgence of slavery in any form. Unfortunately, contemporary slavery which has the same indices and characteristics with the Trans-Atlantic slavery and other forms of slavery in the past has emerged in modern day Africa. Contemporary slavery includes trafficking of vulnerable groups such as women and children. This paper looked at the contemporary trends of child trafficking in Nigeria and the media's role in curbing this menace. This is a theoretical paper whereby related literature was reviewed. The work was anchored on Social Responsibility Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory. The study revealed that the trend of child trafficking is on the increase and the media have not created adequate awareness. Five recommendations were made one of which is that the media should use all the tools at their disposal in creating adequate awareness while the government should implement the already existing child trafficking laws.

Keywords: Media, Contemporary Slavery, Child Trafficking, Africa, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The history of slave trade in Africa was formally initiated by European merchants as small commercial system based on the exchange of African materials or human capital, such as gold and slaves with a few European materials and goods. By the fall of 16th century, this trade blossomed and became a large market that promoted the barbaric capture and transportation of millions of Africans to various European states. The commerce started in 1441 as reported by Johannes, (2013), when ten Africans were taken from the Mauritanian Coast and shipped to Lisbon.

Prior to Europeans' engagement in slave trade, Behrendt, (1999) reports that human trade had existed in Africa. He further affirms that the Europeans did not start the Trans-Atlantic slave trade but they simply tapped into a human trade that already existed in Africa. The domestic forms of slavery and the trans-Saharan slave trade of Europeans in the 1400s had a lesser impact on the continent than the Atlantic slave trade brought to us by the Europeans. So, slavery in Africa is a very old institution with diverse origin, forms and ramifications. It is therefore subject to different perceptions and definitions by different ex-slaving societies in the continent (Fomin,1999).

The history of slavery cuts across many cultures, nationalities, and religions from ancient times to the present. However, the social, economic, and legal positions of slaves were vastly different in different systems of slavery in different times and places. (Herbert and Vinson, 2007).

Slavery is the subjugation of individuals to temporary or permanent involuntary servitude, including using such persons as chattels, sex slaves and in rituals. It was a part of the economic structure of African societies for many centuries though the extent varied (Lovejoy, 2012). The trans-Atlantic, trans Red sea/Indian ocean, and trans-Saharan slave trade appeared to be largely responsible for introducing slavery in Africa (Fomin, 1999).

Modern day slavery which involves trafficking can best be described as an excruciating experience whereby a victim who survives such needs to go through a lot of psychological healing and also encouraged to speak out. Basically, trafficked victims are usually made to go through some forms of rituals whereby they are bound to an oath not to reveal the identity of their traffickers or 'madam.' A madam in this context refers to the mystery figurehead who pays for the victims and disperses them to various places. For instance, an undercover reporter once shared an experience of how she allowed herself to be trafficked. They were taken to a native doctor who made them swear to an oath. She explained that one of the reasons why most trafficked victims do not make any effort to escape or talk about their experiences is because they believe they will die after doing so, since death is often the penalty for breaking the oath. Although, the reporter underwent series of counselling and therapies when she returned, she did not die after telling her story (Anon). Hence, there is need for the mass media to encourage victims to speak out and expose the identities of those involved in trafficking them, as nothing will happen to them.

Objectives

- i. To determine why child trafficking is a critical issue in Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the extent of awareness created by the media in curbing child trafficking in Nigeria.

Method

This is a position paper which x-rayed many scholarly works on child trafficking in Nigeria

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on two theories namely: Social Responsibility theory and Agenda setting theory.

Social Responsibility Theory: This theory posits that the press should operate in recognition of societal needs and aspirations (Nwabueze, 2014). The justification of this theory is that the media are accountable to the society and as such should expose the ills of child trafficking in Nigeria and of course postulating the way forward. The media can do this by sensitizing both the government and non-governmental agencies and the general public to fight against child trafficking in all ramifications.

Also, the study adopted the agenda setting theory. Going by the words of Baran (2007), this theory posits that the things people discuss, think and worry about in the society are powerfully shaped and packaged by the media in form of news. In line with this theory, the media do not tell you what to think but what to think about. The theory is appropriate to the study because if the news media give adequate attention to covering issues concerning children, particularly the right of the child in the society, definitely, child trafficking will be reduced. In other words, if the news media frequently cover issues on child trafficking, it will be an important item on the audience agenda.

Types of Child Trafficking

There are six basic types of child trafficking in both Central and West Africa. These include: abduction of children, payment of sums of money to poor parents to release their children, bonded placement of children as reimbursement for debt, placement for a token sum for specified duration or for gift items, and enrolment for a fee by an agent for domestic work at the request of the children's parent (Veil, 1999). As Adepoju notes, parents of the domestic workers are deceived into enlisting their children under the guise that they would be enrolled in school, trade or training (Adepoju, 2005).

The main suppliers of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa include Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Togo for domestic work in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea,

Cote d' Ivoire, Congo, and Nigeria. Togolese girls are being trafficked into domestic and labour market in Gabon, Benin, Nigeria and Niger, and locally within the country while boys are trafficked into agricultural work in Cote d' Ivoire, Nigeria and Benin. Most of these children are recruited through the network of agents to work as domestic servants in informal sectors or on plantations (UNICEF, 1998, 2000) in Adepoju, (2005).

Poverty, poor economic disposition and ignorance often force parents to enlist their children, hoping to benefit from their wages and sustain their deteriorating family economic situation. In many circumstances as opines by Adepoju, some of these children are ventured into 'slave' labour as in Sudan and Mauritania, and are exploited and paid pittance below living wages (Adepoju, 2005)

Causes of Child Trafficking

Some of the causes of child trafficking include a quest for cheap prostitutes, decay in public institutions, rural –urban migration, poor governance, endemic corruption, change in family size and low level of education as well as the poor economic status of families. Others are old traditional norms that create inequality among children, the porosity of our borders, lack of alternative economic opportunities, devaluation of naira, and change in the trend of household, responsibilities to women in some cultures. Furthermore, Hassan (2012) and Carling (2006) added some causes of child trafficking which include: lack of job opportunities, change in conditions at which people live, criminal activities and loss of hope. In a related article (Makinde, 2015) believes that the rate of infertility in our society and the profit gains of international and local adoption of babies promote child trafficking. Again, the following were outlined by some scholars as the causes of child trafficking in Nigeria. They include: poverty, conflicts, weak legal system, lack of adequate legislation and political will (Dauda, 2016). Some of these causes are further highlighted below:

- i. **Poverty:** As pointed out by Okeshola and Adenuga (2018), poverty is the principal driving force behind this trend. Poverty is widespread in Nigeria. International Labour Organization (ILO)/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) report shows that 8 million Nigerian children engaged in exploitative labour and 40 % of Nigerian street children and hawkers are trafficked children due to poverty.
- ii. **Conflicts:** Conflict is a major factor for trafficking. In Northern Nigeria where the activities of the much dreaded Boko Haram thrives, trafficked children are used as soldiers and militias. Reports in several Nigerian Newspapers and media houses indicate that kidnapped young girls are sold into slavery and forcefully married by them. Boko Haram is recruiting and using child soldiers as young as 12 years old as well as abducted women and girls in the northern region of Nigeria to perpetuate their dastardly act. Some abducted women and children were subjected to domestic servitude, forced labour and sex slavery through forced marriages to its militants (Adepelumi, 2015) in Okeshola and Adenuga (2018).

- iii. **Weak Legal System:** This could be in form of porous borders, corrupt government officials, the involvement of international organized criminal groups or networks and limited capacity of commitment towards border control by immigration and law enforcement officers.
- iv. **Lack of Adequate Legislation and Political Will:** The 2003 Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act amended in 2005 to increase the penalties for trafficking offenders prohibits all forms of human trafficking. The law prescribes penalties of five years imprisonment, or a fine not exceeding the equivalent of approximately \$645 or both for labour trafficking offenses. These are not sufficiently stringent because the law allows convicted offenders to pay fine in lieu of prison term for labour trafficking offenses. The law prescribes penalties of 10 to 15 years imprisonment for sex trafficking offenses or a fine of the equivalent of approximately \$1,250 or both.
- v. **Lack of sufficient awareness:** Sufficient awareness by members of the public of trafficking in humans in all its aspects, the extent to which organized criminal groups are involved in trafficking in humans and the fate of the victims.

Characteristics of all Forms of Slavery

Many scholars summarized all forms of slavery as the denial of virtually all we refer to today as fundamental human rights: right to life, right to freedom of association, of religion, of conscience, right to pursuit of a vocation, right to pursuit of happiness, etc. The slave was denied his humanity. He was the property of his owner who had absolute authority over him, and whatever belonged to him, including his life.

Child Trafficking Trends in Nigeria

Who is a Child?

The convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child “as every human below the age of eighteen years,” CRC sets standard that all children have the inalienable right to a core minimum level of wellbeing, including the right to nutrition, basic education, survival, protection, and the right to grow up in a family. Deprivation or curtailment of such right is considered as poverty (see Convention of the Rights of the Child Report, 2015).

Biologically, a child is a human between birth and puberty (Child, the Free Dictionary .com (retrieved 5 January, 2013). The legal definition of child generally refers to a minor, otherwise known as a person younger than the age of majority. Definition of a child varies in most lands but the generally accepted definition of a child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.

Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (2003) defines trafficking as all acts and attempted acts involved in the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigeria borders, purchases, sales, transfer, receipts or harbouring of a person involving the use of deception, coercion, or debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the persons whether for or not for involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in forced or bonded labour, or in slavery-like conditions.

Similarly, human trafficking according to article 3(a) of the United Nations Palermo Protocol is defined as "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipts of persons , by means of threat or use of force, other forms of coercion, of abduction of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation" Okeshola and Adenuga (2018).

Child trafficking which is the focus of this paper is child's slavery which is the sale of any person under the age of 18 for monetary gains by traffickers, violates the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Chapter 4, section 38 which states that: every Nigerian child has the right to life, right to freedom and access to education, (Okeshola & Adenuga, 2018).

Though statistics regarding the magnitude of child trafficking are difficult to obtain, the International Labour Organisation estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked each year (ILO-IPEC, 2010). In 2012, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that the percentage of child victims had risen in a 3-year span from 20 percent to 27 percent (see "What are the statistics on human trafficking of children?" Ark of Hope for Children, 2018). Every year, 300,000 children are taken all around the world and sold by human traffickers as slaves., 17,000 of those children are brought to the United States, so it is 46 children per day. (<https://www.erasechildtrafficking.org/statistics-of-human-trafficking>)

Trafficking is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria but today, it is assuming a dangerous dimension in the name of baby factory. This is a situation where young girls are nurtured to give birth to children, without husbands, for sale in black markets. This factory promotes trafficking in Nigeria (Makinde, 2015, in Dauda, 2016). Baby factory was described in literature first in 2006 (Makinde, 2015; Omeire et.al, 2015).

Trafficking occurs either locally within the country or internationally through various routes, across all the geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Trafficked Nigerian women and children are recruited from rural areas within the country's borders. Women and girls are subjected to involuntary domestic servitude and sexual exploitation while boys are subjected to forced labour in street vending, domestic servitude in mining, and begging (Nigeria: Trafficking in Persons Report, 2010).

Carling (2006) notes that, children are recruited from different parts of the country. Most of the trafficking according to him are from the rural to urban areas and mostly from "Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Imo, Benue, Niger and Kwara

states” to big cities such as Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Port-Harcourt. Child trafficking trends in Nigeria have become so bad that on Friday, May 2, 2008, Daily Sun reported that the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) Panti, Lagos, arrested a couple who sold their twins to a syndicate who specializes in selling kids in London (Nkememena, 2009).

The actual destinations for trafficked Nigerian child vary depending on the purpose of their exploitation. However, for most of the female victims, Italy is the most fertile place for them. And those who are not able to reach Europe end up in North Africa (Carling, 2006). To buttress this point, Okejuwon (2008), avers that the Italian authorities estimate that about 10,000 Nigerian prostitutes live in Italy.

Majority of children serving as house helps is a serious indication of continued child trafficking. On a sad note, most streets in both small and big cities in Nigeria are littered with children hawking in the streets despite all warnings, thereby making child trafficking easier for perpetrators (Nkememena, 2009).

In the largely Muslim northern states, traffickers move children to locations where they could be used as beggars under the guise of religious mentoring. Unfortunately such children are trafficked to Saudi Arabia. In the south, children are constantly moved around by traffickers as domestic help under very inhuman arrangement (2003 Federal Office of Statistics - FOS) and International Labour Organization (ILO). Odocha (2004) in his review on child trafficking found that between 2004 and 2006, NAPTIP repatriated 757 child victims. In 2007 and 2008, 2,475 children, 80 percent of who were girls were rescued according to UNICEF annual report. On their own part, Bale and Soodata (2009) are of the opinion that the total number of trafficked victims is two times of olden day’s slavery.

Dangers of Child Trafficking

Many scholars have postulated that possible risk factors associated with child trafficking include the following: lack of personal safety, isolation, emotional distress, homelessness, poverty, family dysfunction, substance abuse, mental illness, among others, Dauda (2016). This is described as a public health challenge affecting the world (Dovydaitis, 2010) with only a few programmes to address it (Fong & Cordoso, 2010).

Child Trafficking: A Critical Issue

In response to the rising cases of trafficking of Nigeria, the Federal Government created the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) on 14th of July 2003, by the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2003. The Trafficking in Persons Act 2003 was an outcome of a private member bill sponsored by a non-governmental organization; the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), founded by Mrs. Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar, the wife of a former

Vice-President of Nigeria. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003, however went through an amendment in 2005 and in 2015. Owing to the new trends in the crime of trafficking in persons, the Act was repealed and the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015 was enacted. According to Human Trafficking Factsheet (2020), the latest Global Slavery Index (2018) Report indicates that Nigeria ranks 32/167 of the countries with the highest number of slaves (1,386,000). Similarly, a 2016 report by NAPTIP also shows that, 75% of those who are trafficked within the country are trafficked across states, while 23% are trafficked within states. Only 2% of those who are trafficked are trafficked outside the country, according to NAPTIP (2016) (Nigeria: Human Trafficking Factsheet, 2020). Trafficking is an issue of serious concern because of the following consequences: future of Nigeria, developmental stage of the children, right of the child and awareness level. Kazeem (2009) summarizes the consequences of child trafficking to include: domestic servitude, sexual abuse, organized begging, commercial labour, enslavement, pornography and prostitution.

A survey conducted by the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) indicates that half of African countries recognized trafficking as a problem and that child trafficking is usually perceived as more severe than trafficking in women (UNICEF, 2003) in (Adepoju, 2005).

Child's Trafficking Versus Child's Right

Since the 1990s, there have been numerous significant developments both under international law and national law, a clearly established three-pronged mandate to address human trafficking, whereby governments must criminalize and prosecute acts of trafficking and related offences, provide protection and assistance to victims and survivors, and implement prevention programmes (Todres, 2014).

Protocol I of the Fourth Geneva Convention states in Article 77 that “children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indirect assault.”

Protocol II makes a similar provision in Article 4 in which it states that “children shall be provided with the care and aid they require” during conflicts. It must be stated that children's right, are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “any human below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majorly is attained earlier.”

In Nigeria, there is a Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, which is a domestication of the convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) listed the states that are yet to domesticate the CRA as Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Enugu, Gombe, Kaduna, Kano, Kastina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states. Ironically, most of these states are where the Nigerian child is exposed to the activities of terrorists like Boko Haram and other marauders who maim and kill children at will.

United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on November 20, 1989. Shortly after the convention, precisely in July 1990, the African Union Assembly of Heads of States and Government adopted the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC). Nigeria signed both international instruments and ratified them in 1991 and 2000 respectively. Both instruments contain a universal set of standards for the survival, development and protection of children and as well recognize children as humans and subject of rights.

The Child Right Acts was created to serve as a legal instrument for the protection of children's rights and responsibilities in Nigeria. The law has, among other purposes, to act as legislation against human trafficking since it forbids children from being "separated from parents against their will, except where it is in the best interests of the child."

The CRA has been passed at the federal level, but it can only be effective if state Assemblies also follow the federal government's example as failure to do so would continuously expose children to untold hardships such as abuses, trafficking, poor or lack of education, child labour and many other ignoble treatments against children that cannot be ignored by well meaning individuals and responsible governments.

It is pertinent therefore, to point out that Nigeria will be failing in her duty to lead Africa by example if she continues to play down on the right of the child as exemplified by the spate of trafficking in the country. Furthermore is a renewed call on the states that have not ratified the CRA to see the urgent need to do so and ensure that the right to the Nigerian child is protected against abuses and abusers, and in particular, trafficking (see Agency Report, 2018; States and the Child Rights Act. Leadership Newspaper, Editorial, September 22, 2018).

Dunu (2007, in Nkememena, 2009) emphasises that in view of the enormous importance of child's right and continued child trafficking, there is need to move from merely recognizing children's rights to translating it to concrete actions. The promotion of and respect for children's rights is a fight the whole society needs to engage in, but especially which the press can champion to reduce child trafficking s in Nigeria. The press needs to raise awareness, to sensitize and mobilize civil society into the fight against child trafficking. Failure to do this will lead to disaster as UNICEF (2003) warns:

If children's well being and rights are not addressed and if millennium development goals (MGDs) are not met, child trafficking will surely persist because of poverty and democracy withers.

Media's Role in Curbing Child Trafficking Trends in Nigeria

The press has a crucial role to play in reporting child trafficking, as the Fourth Estate of the Realm. The media in carrying out their watch dogging role should undertake reports

concerning child trafficking in their articles, opinions, features, editorials, discussions, phone-in programmes, and interviews, to blow their trumpets.

Nwocha (1999, in Nkememena, 2009) states that the press uses mass media which are the channels that professional communicators use in disseminating messages widely, rapidly and continuously to create awareness on the dangers in trafficking vulnerable children; they are the channels through which mass, but diversified population is reached simultaneously. Mass media, especially newspapers, are powerful tools for opinion moulding, agenda setting, public debate, integration, etc. In the words of Okunna (2002), it wields a lot of power. Baran (2004, in Nkememena, 2009) states that the newspaper attempts to attract readers with a variety of tactics. It has the responsibility to prepare its readers for social change. Thus, the media play increasingly valuable role in explaining, interpreting and commenting upon event in the society (Nkememena, 2009).

Sanders and Godoy (2002) opine that to curtail child trafficking, there is need to increase societal awareness of issues that may affect children. They further posit that prevention of child trafficking involves changing those individual and community attitudes, beliefs and circumstances which allow trafficking to occur. All these can be achieved by the media by embarking on community education and prevention of child trafficking and neglect.

Lindsay (1994) avers that understanding media influence and how to use mass media channels constructively may be an essential tool for fighting social problems like child trafficking. On their part, Wellings and Macdowell (2000) affirmed that the power of the media lies in helping to put issues on the public, in reinforcing local efforts in raising consciousness about issues and in conveying information.

Speaking of the role of the media in addressing human trafficking in Canada and globally, Macharia (2017) notes that, “the mass media are key drivers for the spread of information, or misinformation about human trafficking. What is reported and how it is reported, goes same way in shaping the policy and state action agenda, and has implications for traffickers and the trafficked.”

Summary

Nkememena (2009), in her study, revealed that the press did not live up to expectations in the discharge of their duties as agenda setters in the society. According to her, out of 118 editions of the two selected newspapers (Daily Sun and Vanguard), 82 editions did not cover anything on child trafficking. Her work also revealed that in twelve months, it was only two times that stories on human trafficking appeared on the front page, one on the back page and others in the inside pages.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Government has contributed in the fight against child trafficking by enacting the Anti-Trafficking in Persons law in 2003 and setting up a special law enforcement agency known as

National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other related matters (NAPTIP). However, the implementation is weak.

This paper therefore concludes that child trafficking in Nigeria has continued to grow despite efforts made by the government, law makers, and concerned individuals. However, the media have not created adequate awareness as regards the ills of child trafficking and practical solutions, hence, the following recommendations:

- i. The media need to create more awareness by ensuring that stories on child-trafficking are made prominent in newspapers, magazines, radio, television and quite recently, the internet. There should be commentary, phone-in programmes, interviews, discussions, among others on the radio and television on child trafficking and the way forward. The media should also scale up the fight against trafficking by including in their programmes, a section where trafficked victims can share their experiences. This will help to dissuade those who are considering the prospects of leaving the shores of the country while those already in the net of the so called “madams” will know that the threats against them are not real. Available statistics indicate that ignorance constitutes one of the major reasons why trafficking business still thrives. This awareness creation should be able to expose possible means used by the traffickers to lure their victims.
- ii. Government should make life more comfortable in order to reduce poverty. The government should also enforce the penalty of child trafficking, no matter who is involved. The media can as well double their efforts in giving wide coverage to the various empowerment programmes rolled out by the government including entrepreneurial ideas which the people can utilize; this way, the level of poverty in the country can be reduced.
- iii. Security agents should live up to their responsibilities by guarding the borders effectively and should avoid bribery no matter the amount of money offered as bribe. Also, the media must increase their campaigns against the increasing number of porous borders in Nigeria and equally harp on the need for strengthening security around such areas as often times, corrupt immigration officers allow traffickers a safe passage without being apprehended.
- iv. The media and the general public should embark on a sensitization campaign on the importance of the good family name and materialism should be totally condemned. The basic right of the child should be respected. We all are involved, so we should be active citizens in order to raise public awareness on child trafficking which, in turn, should form media agenda.

- v. Finally, the press is the Fourth Estate of the Realm which implies that the media alone cannot win the fight against child trafficking in Nigeria. So, they should carry out their watchdog role effectively by devoting their time and energy in covering and creating awareness on issues concerning children. The other estates of the realm as well as individuals, should play their roles effectively to curb the menace of child trafficking. By so doing, our country will be blessed because children are leaders of tomorrow.

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