

Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria: An Evaluation of State Policies and Programmes

Emmanuel Joseph Chukwuma Duru

*Department of Political Science
University of Calabar, Calabar – Nigeria
Email: duruejc@yahoo.com, +234(0)8037239727*

Ogbonnaya, Ufiem Maurice

*Department of Political Science & Public Administration
University of Uyo, Uyo – Nigeria
Email: godscourt24@yahoo.com, +234(0)8063407042*

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Abstract *This paper examines the social problem of trafficking in human beings in Nigeria. It considers the root causes of the problem, the socio-economic implication of human trafficking, its recent global dimension and the policies and programmes of the Nigerian state in combating this ugly phenomenon. The paper made predominant use of secondary sources of data. Findings reveal that though the state has certain policies and programs aimed at combating human trafficking, the problem persists because the institutions saddled with these responsibilities are fundamentally weak. The paper, therefore, recommends certain measures to help in tackling the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Nigeria, humah trafficking, state policies*

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is not a recent phenomenon. It is as old as humanity itself and has manifested in different forms and dimensions. According to UNESCO (2006), the current form of globalization has occasioned an upsurge in human trafficking, resulting in a “complex, multi-faceted phenomenon involving multiple stakeholders at the institutional and commercial level”. It is a demand-driven global business with a huge market for cheap labour and commercial sex confronting often insufficient or unexercised policy frameworks or trained personnel to prevent it.

Contextually, the UN (2000) defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. The import of this definition is that human trafficking is a crime against humanity, marked by the intent to deceive and exploit.

On the other hand, Agbu (2003) submits that though the fact of human trafficking is not difficult to understand on its own, its dimensions and categorization continue to multiply by the day. Thus, broadly conceptualized, Agbu (2003: 2) submits that human trafficking include forced and child prostitution, domestic servitude, illegal and bonded labour, servile marriage, false adoption, sex tourism and entertainment, pornography, organized begging, organ harvesting, and other criminal activities.

Though Nigeria is not the only country where human trafficking activities take place, nor is it the only country suffering from its effects, yet it has acquired a reputation for being one of the leading African countries in human trafficking with cross-border and internal trafficking.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine state policies and programmes aimed at combating this ugly phenomenon. This re-examination is premised upon the fact that despite these programmes and policies, human trafficking still persists in Nigeria assuming both internal and global dimension.

2. Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Facts and Figures

It is estimated that one to two million people are trafficked around the world every year – mostly women and children, but increasingly, men and boys as well – generally for forced labour, agricultural bondage, prostitution, or other forms of

indentured servitude (Lyday, 2001; Agbu, 2003).

Globally, Agbu (2003) and UN (2006) have carefully provided staggering statistics on human trafficking. According to the U.S State Department (2005), six hundred thousand to eight hundred thousand women and children are trafficked annually across international borders. Approximately, 80 per cent are women and up to 50 per cent are minors, while the vast majority of those trafficked under 18 years of age are girls. In his account, Abu (2003) estimates that in the year 2000, a conservative count of people trafficked to all part of the globe, especially the United States, Western Europe, the Middle East, Japan, North America and Australia, included 250,000 persons from Southeast Asia; 150,000 from South Asia; 100,000 each from the defunct Soviet Union and Latin America; 75,000 from Eastern Europe, and another 50,000 from Africa.

In Nigeria, figures and statistics on the number of Nigerians involved have been most inconsistent. This however, does not negate the fact that human trafficking is in the increase in Nigeria. For instance, it was reported by the Nigerian Police Force and the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) that between March 1999 and April 2000, about 1,126 women trafficked out of the country were deported from various countries. Further statistics released by WOTCLEF, put the figure of trafficked Nigerian women deported as at December 2001 at about 5000 (Agbu, 2003; Daily Times, 14 June 2001: 4).

An ILO/IPEC report found that 40 per cent of Nigerian street children and hawkers are trafficked person (ILO/IPEC, 2000). In March, 2002, WOTCLEF in a seminar organized by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), reported that there are about 20,000 Nigerian women involved in the sex industry in Italy. The Daily Champion of July, 2002 reported that 80 per cent of foreign prostitutes in Italy were Nigerian women. According to Agbu (2003), most of the trafficked women were from Edo, Delta and Lagos States with an average age range of between 15 and 35 years. Also, Uzor (2001: 28) reveals that in one instance, 12 prominent businessmen suspected of trafficking 13 Nigerian women for prostitution abroad were intercepted at the Nigeria's same border with Benin Republic.

Human trafficking in Nigeria are of two dimensions; internal and international. By internal trafficking, we mean human trafficking within Nigeria and this is occasioned by the geographical dynamics of the Nigerian state.

According to UNESCO (2006) in the last two decades, there has been an increase in the internal trafficking of women and children. An increased number of people are trafficked from rural communities in Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Imo, Benue, Niger and Kwara States to cities such as Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Port Harcourt. Trafficking to these regions is predominantly for exploitative domestic work, farm labour and prostitution, with incidents of human trafficking and forced labour particularly prevalent in Lagos.

The same source also submits that international trafficked Nigerians come from all parts of Nigeria but some states tend to provide more trafficked persons than others. These states include Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ebonyi, Kano, Ogun, Oyo and Lagos.

With particular reference to international human trafficking, Nigeria has variously been described as "a source country" (UNESCO, 2006); "a transit country" (This Day, 2000); and as a "destination country" (Kathleen, 2003). This is because at various times, Nigeria serves either as a place where trafficked persons are taken from while at other times, it is used as a route by human traffickers.

Within the African continent, investigations reveal that over 500 women of Nigerian origin are practicing prostitution in Bamako, Mali, while more than 500 others are hawking their bodies in Burkina Faso (Agbu, 2003).

Various factors have been identified as being responsible for the upsurge in human trafficking in Nigeria. These factors range from social, cultural and religious practices of the people, weak institutional and legal frameworks, official and institutionalized corruption, unequal access to education; poverty and lack of legitimate and fulfilling employment opportunities; increasing demand for foreign workers; globalization, which has resulted in the growth of the billion-dollar sex and entertainment industry; lack of access to legal redress; devaluation of women and children's human rights; perversion of cultural traditional practices and lack of information (Agbu, 2003; UNESCO, 2006; Ebirim, 2002; Newswatch, August 22, 2011; Newswatch, August, 8, 2011).

From the foregoing, one can reasonably assert that human trafficking in Nigeria is a reality that has so far constituted a potent challenge to and tasked the intellectual capabilities of security operatives and law enforcement agencies.

3. Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Evaluating State Policies and Programmes

Like other countries of the world where human trafficking is experienced the Nigerian state and those who operate on its behalf have made several efforts in combating the social problems. Private individuals have equally been working to ensure a total eradication of human trafficking.

At the state level, legal and institutional framework have been created for the purposes of combating human trafficking in Nigeria. At the international level, Nigeria ratified the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children in 2001 and at the national level, Nigeria passed a national law against trafficking entitled "Trafficking in persons (prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003". Nigeria is also one of the few African countries to pass the Child Rights Act in 2003, which deals comprehensively with the issue of child trafficking.

Apart from these legal frameworks, economic empowerment and reintegration programmes have been tried to address the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria. There have also been several awareness-raising activities.

At the non-governmental level, Nigerian NGOs are involved in efforts to combat human trafficking. Worthy of mention according to Agbu (2003) are National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), FIDA (International Federation of Women Lawyers) and WOTCLEF. The activities of these NGOs have gone a long way in exposing the various dimensions of this trade in Nigeria and bringing relief to many of the victims.

Despite these initiatives, human trafficking remains a critical problem in Nigeria. Many reasons have been adduced for this. According to Agbu (2003), tackling human trafficking in Nigeria by the government means engaging corruption directly. However, it seems Nigeria's laws cannot effectively control corruption for the simple reasons that they were not designed for the kind of society existing now. Secondly, there are problems with the adversarial criminal justice system not the least of which are its technicalities and inadequate enforcement agencies. The point being made above is that the legal frameworks put in place are too weak to confront the dangers occasioned by corruption to wit; human trafficking.

The consequence of this weak legal and institutional framework is that those saddled with the responsibility of enforcing the law have taken advantage of the weakness of the law to violate the law. In 2001, a former police officer and 50 other Nigerians were arrested in Conakry by Guinean authorities for human trafficking offences (Odunuga, 2001: 3).

Another problem that has weakened the campaign against human trafficking in Nigeria is poor funding by governments or international donor agencies. However, in some cases, funds meant for this campaign have been discovered to have been misdirected by officials of these governmental and non-governmental agencies to other uses. Corruption, therefore fuels human trafficking in Nigeria. And by the same token, human trafficking fuels corruption in Niger.

Furthermore, the anti-human trafficking campaign and activities are only being carried out at the urban and developed centres of the country at the detriment of the rural areas. Yet greater percentages of trafficked persons in Nigeria or human trafficking victims are "sourced" from rural areas (UNESCO, 2006).

Most fundamentally, government policies and programmes have not adequately addressed the problem of mass illiteracy in Nigeria, yet the nexus between illiteracy and lack of access to information against human trafficking had long been established (ILO/IPEC, 2000; UNESCO, 2006).

4. Prognosis for action

From the foregoing analysis, it has become obvious that global interventions, government policies and programmes and the activities of Non-Governmental Organizations and civil societies have not adequately addressed the problem of human trafficking in Nigeria. Thus, to effectively combat human trafficking in Nigeria, we recommend as follows;

- 1 There is the need for a continuous and further ratification and implementation of international legislation along with the use of national legal tools currently available to fight against trafficking in human beings.
- 2 Secondly, combating human trafficking and its attendant damaging effects throughout the Nigerian society will require the energy, talents and resources of government, international organizations, NGOs and the civil society. This simply calls for synchronization of ideas, policies and efforts at the international and national levels.
- 3 Obviously, human trafficking amounts to human rights violation. Thus, there is the need to incorporate human rights and development perspectives into the campaign against human trafficking.
- 4 Governments needs to enact a comprehensive law that will cover most aspects of human trafficking, specify severe punishment for traffickers, rehabilitate victims, and give law enforcement officers adequate investigative tools while legal institutions and frameworks must be strengthened (Agbu, 2003).
- 5 There is the need to discourage excessive materialism and the culture of "get rich quick" (TI, 2001).
- 6 While proper and adequate education and gainful employment for the youths is encouraged, government must ensure a proper coordination of efforts between the police and other state security services.

- 7 Public enlightenment through regular workshops, conferences, and through print and electronic media must be evolved. On the other hand, schools, religious bodies, traditional institutions, and the family should be sensitized on the evils of this abominable trade.
- 8 Finally, security especially at national frontiers and entry points must be strengthened to check the schemes of the traffickers.

5. Conclusion

Obviously, human trafficking results in irretrievable depletion of human resources that weakens the productive base and economy of any society, it undermines public health and government authority, breakdown social and moral conducts resulting in upsurge in crime, results in human rights violations and other evil activities.

Given the negative effect of human trafficking, there is the need for a total re-examination of government policies, programmes and institutions that are established to combat this evil trade. This re-examination will help in identifying loopholes and weak-points which will ultimately result in policy changes and a society devoid of such social crimes and monsters as human trafficking.

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