

Review Article

Evaluating the Role of Christian Women Organizations in the Fight Against Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Dr. Victor Ifeanyi Ede¹, Mrs Ozioma Faith Chiaghanam², Dr. Dominic Zuoke Kalu³

^{1,3}School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State Nigeria.

²Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

I N F O

Corresponding Author:

Victor Ifeanyi Ede, School of General Studies,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State Nigeria.

E-mail Id:

victorifede@gmail.com

How to cite this article:

Ede VI, Chiaghanam OF, Kalu DZ. Evaluating the Role of Christian Women Organizations in the Fight Against Human Trafficking in Nigeria. *J Adv Res Humani Social Sci* 2019; 6(1): 24-30.

Date of Submission: 2019-03-19

Date of Acceptance: 2019-04-05

A B S T R A C T

The Nigerian nation is faced with a lot of social, political, economic and religious problems. One of the social problems facing the country today is human trafficking. This paper examined the trend in human trafficking in Nigeria and the role of Christian Women Organizations in general and the Women Religious of the Catholic Church in particular, in combating the ugly trend. The paper insists that the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria cannot be effective if religious bodies are not involved. The paper identified wide spread poverty, unemployment, ignorance, porous borders and quest for quick wealth as the major causes of human trafficking in Nigeria. In order to effectively combat human trafficking, the paper recommends among others; the need for a symbiotic relationship between the government and faith-based organizations and the need to take the campaign against human trafficking to the rural areas. The fight against human trafficking needs the supports of all and sundry.

Keywords: Christian, Human Trafficking, Nigeria, Trafficked Persons, Women Religious

Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world is blessed with both material and human resources. The country has faced and is facing a lot of challenges. Among the challenges faced by Nigeria in recent times is the problem of human trafficking. Trafficking in human beings is a growing and very serious global problem that violates human dignity and human integrity. Trafficking constitutes the present-day version of slavery.

Human trafficking is the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. It is the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them.¹

More comprehensively, human trafficking means:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of 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 includes, at a minimum, prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.²

Therefore, human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons through the use of threat, force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud and deception. Trafficked persons usually

end up being exploited sexually, forced into exploitative labour or slavery. Like other organized crimes, human trafficking has grown to the extent that it needs an urgent attention by all stake-holders. According to Olujuwon T "human trafficking is the third largest criminal activity in the world after arms and drug trafficking".³ The phenomenon has considerably increased throughout the world in recent time. Victims of this modern-day slave trade are mostly women and children who usually end up as sex slaves in Europe, particularly Italy. It is estimated that over ten thousand Nigerians who are victims of human trafficking and illegal migration are forced into prostitution yearly in Italy.⁴

In most countries of the world, including Nigeria, governments have been making efforts to end human trafficking. The Nigerian government has evolved different strategies over the years to combat the rising trend in human trafficking. The government has done this by embarking on legislations, as well as aligning with international protocols. These measures are hoped to serve as both preventive and deterrent measures. In 2001, Nigeria ratified the United Nations Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children. In 2003, the government passed a national law known as Trafficking in persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and administration Acts 2003. Through this act, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was established. NAPTIP was charged with the following responsibilities among others:

- The enforcement and the due administration of the Trafficking in persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003.
- The co-ordination of all laws on Trafficking in persons and related offences and the enforcement of those laws.
- Adoption of measures to increase the effectiveness of eradication of trafficking in persons;
- The facilitation or encouragement of the pressure or availability of persons, including persons in custody, who consent to assist in investigations or participation in proceedings relating to traffic in persons and related offences;
- Enhancing the effectiveness of Law Enforcement Agents to suppress trafficking in persons (NAPTIP, 2003).

Non-governmental organizations like Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) have also been involved in the prosecution of traffickers, protection of victims, rehabilitation, retraining and counseling of repatriated trafficked people and their activities have received world wide support as well as local recognition for their contribution towards curbing the menace.⁶

Despite the activities of the agencies of government and

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), human trafficking has been on the increase such that it has been described as the world's third largest crime after arms and drug trafficking.⁷ Hence the need for religious bodies in general and the church in particular to be at the forefront of the effort to stem this ugly trend. This article examines the trend in human trafficking and the role of Christian women organizations in combating this inhuman practice, with particular reference to the women religious of the Catholic Church.

Types of Human Trafficking

There are two main kinds of human trafficking, namely; Internal and External or Cross-border trafficking.

Internal Trafficking

This involves the trafficking of persons within the country. In this case, victims are moved from one part of the country (mostly rural areas) to other parts of the country (mostly urban cities). This can be through a job placement network or through family relation. Internal movement of children for trafficking usually occurs during festive periods and other cultural activities.⁸ Internal Trafficking of women and children is not a new phenomenon. According to Dave-Odigie CP it has been going on with the trafficking of people from rural communities to major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar, Warri and Port-Harcourt.⁹

The victims of trafficking serve as maids, cleaners, beggars, street vendors, farm workers, prostitutes. However, they may be hired for other purposes in the country. Trafficking for organized begging takes place mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria where physically challenged or disabled persons are lured into begging business in major cities such as Kano and Kaduna. Olujuwon T noted that Koranic Schools are the source of supply of street children engaged in begging and are often used as human shields during religious conflicts or as agents to provoke social unrest.³ Furthermore, experienced adult beggars traffic children under their custody. These children are forced to lead the handicapped into organized begging. These trafficked children are denied access to formal education and proper social upbringing.¹⁰

Dave-Odigie CP identified baby harvesting as another type of human trafficking in Nigeria.⁹ In states like Ebonyi, Abia and Lagos there are cases of hospitals, clinics, orphanages, doctors and nurses who keep teenage and single mothers who do not want to keep their babies after birth to provide them shelter and care while they are pregnant. They sell off their babies for a premium to couples that need them. They are made to sign papers renouncing their rights to the babies as well as swear to oaths of secrecy. The good shepherd orphanage in Lagos was reported to be engaged in illegal adoption of babies as well as sheltering young

pregnant girls and selling off their babies at birth. Many of these babies sold cannot be traced and one cannot determine what became of them.¹⁰

External Trafficking

Human trafficking is not only a local phenomenon; it has a significant regional and international dimension too. According to UNICEF "Criminal rings are involved in the smuggling of children and women across international frontiers, mainly for menial work, in the heavily migration-dependent economy of Gabon, Plantation work in Cameroun and Commercial sex work in Europe".¹¹ Nigeria has become a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking and African countries like Coted'voire, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Cameroun, Gabon, Benin Republic, Libya, Algeria and Morocco are some of the destination points for trafficked Nigerians. Countries like Belgium, Spain, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom are the destination points in Europe. Nigerian women and girls trafficked end up as domestic servants or prostitutes. In the Middle East most persons trafficked from Nigeria are taken to Saudi Arabia. "Most of the trafficked persons are deceived into believing that their destination would be Europe but most of them end up in some African countries like Benin Republic or other countries other than Europe".¹⁰

External trafficking is done through air, sea and land routes as shown below:-

- Nigeria-Cotonou-Togo-Morocco (by road)-Europe (by air).
- Nigeria-Ghana Morocco-Libya-Spain (by road).
- Akwa Ibom-Cameroun-Gabon (by road and by sea).
- Lagos-Spain-Germany (by air).
- Lagos-Liberia (by air).
- Lagos-Cote D'Ivoire (by air).
- Shaki (Oyo)-Guinea-Mali-Cote D'Ivoire (by road).
- Edo-Italy (by air).
- Kano-Niger (by road).

Source: Olujuwon (2008).

Trends in Human Trafficking in Nigeria

As already stated, Nigeria is both a transit and destination centre for trafficking and she experiences internal and external trafficking of women and children. It is estimated that there are 15 million children engaged in child labour in Nigeria with 40% of them at the risk of being trafficked both internally and externally for domestic and forced labour, prostitution, entertainment, pornography, armed conflict and sometimes ritual killings.⁸ Between March 1994 and January 1997, at least 400 children were rescued in Akwa Ibom State, which is one of the main departure points for Gabon.

In the last decades, there has been large scale trafficking of

adolescent girls and young women, to Europe, particularly Italy, for work in the sex industry. These women are lured abroad by traffickers who promise them legitimate and lucrative work, but on arrival they are handed over to prostitution rackets. They are forced to engage in sex work to pay off large debts, supposedly accumulated to pay for their travel documents, tickets and accommodation. To avoid non-compliance, they are threatened with exposure to the authorities and possible imprisonment or deportation. In effect, these women are held under duress in a form of debt bondage.¹¹ Some young women who have succeeded in escaping or who have been deported have described how the system works. In a particular case, a young woman said that as a commercial sex worker in Moscow, she slept with no fewer than 30 men daily, to enable her offset the 64,000 US dollars (about N2.24m) payment to the 'madam' who sponsored her trip.¹² Another escapee narrated her ordeal in the trafficking den. According to the twentyyear- old victim, a senior secondary school student in Edo State, she escaped from Burkina Faso after one month of prostitution. She stated that her male trafficker who resided in Benin City, Edo State, made her to believe that she would be taken to Europe. However, she ended up in Burkina Faso. She mentioned that the trafficking ring used the Shaki routine in Oyo State to cross girls into Burkina Faso and Mali. She also revealed that girls, most of them below fourteen years are beaten and starved to subdue them into doing the bidding of their madams. She alleged that the illicit trade thrived with the connivance of some security agents.¹³

The Northern part of Nigeria has not attracted enough attention as the South leading to the erroneous assumption that human trafficking is more prevalent in Southern Nigeria. However, from March 2002 to April 2004 alone, the Saudi Arabia authorities deported nine thousand, nine hundred and fifty women; and one thousand two hundred and thirtyone underage and unaccompanied children. Investigation revealed that the majority of the women deported from Saudi Arabia were from Kano, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Niger, Kebbi, Kwara, Sokoto, Zamfara, Jigawa, Gombe, Bauchi and Taraba states.¹⁰ This shows that human trafficking for prostitution is also prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Factors Responsible for Human Trafficking

A lot of factors are responsible for the high rate of human trafficking in Nigeria. They include: widespread poverty, unemployment, ignorance, porous borders and quest for quick wealth. There is a widespread poverty in Nigeria even in the midst of abundant resources. Thus, poverty has been identified as the principal driving force behind this trade and the most visible cause of the vulnerability of women and children to trafficking in Nigeria.⁹ Most of the children who are trafficked are from poor and deplorable

backgrounds and because of lack of opportunity at home they are trafficked with or without the parents' consent.

Many educated young people are unemployed in the country. Due to the conception that things are easier in Europe many people desire to go out in search of greener pastures. This has provided a favourable ground for traffickers. Therefore, unemployment is another cause of human trafficking.

NAPTIP identified ignorance of what victims' face when they are trafficked as a cause of the outrageous rate of human trafficking in Nigeria.⁵ Many of the women and children trafficked do not know exactly what they were going to do overseas. Usually, they would be meant to believe that they will be offered job in Europe. However, they end up doing menial jobs or sex work. Also, the porous nature of Nigerian borders has aided the rise in human trafficking. Dave-Odigie CP noted that the road and sea links or boundaries of Nigeria with her neighboring countries are extensive and therefore very difficult and expensive to patrol effectively.⁹ UNICEF noted that traffickers "have been able to corrupt and subvert weak law enforcement and immigration authorities, while also taking advantage of Nigeria's long and porous borders".¹¹

The increasing quest for quick wealth among many Nigerians is another factor responsible for high rate of human trafficking in Nigeria. Some have seen human trafficking as a quick way of making money. Due to the high and rising demand for women in the international sex industry, traffickers are motivated by large profits accrued to the business. Traffickers display their unexplained wealth and use it to prey on victims' ignorance and misery.

However, Oluseyi (2002) attributed the high rate of human trafficking in the country to the following factors:

Heavily devalued naira, illiteracy, lack of right, attitude to women in African traditional social relation and denial by Government of effective citizenship for women children in the fall of legal and constituent guarantees, the traditional culture which treats women as second class citizens, lapse such as inadequate political commitment, infrastructure, vocational and economic opportunities and the demand for cheap labour at the informal sector among many others.

There is no doubt that the political and economic situations in Nigeria contribute to making Nigerians vulnerable to traffickers.

Effects of Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Organized criminal groups which traffic women in Nigeria use female recruiters who conclude contacts with girls. They force compliance through psychological as well as physical pressure. The physical pressure also manifests in various significant human rights violations as children are

abandoned in recipient countries (in case of trans-border trafficking) and women pressured to work in the most physically dangerous conditions at the lowest end of the prostitution markets, with physical violence against them being common. They are also exposed to the threat of HIV/AIDS which is also a major security threat. Upon arrival at their destinations, victims are placed in conditions controlled by traffickers while they are exploited to earn illicit revenues. They also prey on victim's fears that authorities in the foreign country will prosecute or deport them if they ask for help.¹⁵ Human trafficking deprives the country of its human resources. Though majority of those trafficked are semiliterate or illiterate, some literate and talented people are also trafficked out. Thus, talents and human resources are pushed out of Nigeria. The underdevelopment feed crime and violence that in turn lead to even greater poverty.

Olujuwon (2008) identified the following effects of human trafficking:

- Trafficked people suffer physical assault and threats of violence on self and family and also psychological abuses.
- Illness and death-many trafficked persons die on the way as a result of dangerous track conditions and some become ill as a result of dangerous working conditions.
- There is constant rape and harassment by police so that the officers could turn a blind eye to this act.
- There is threat of harm to the trafficked persons, friends and family if "debts" owed are not paid or report will be made to authorities if the trafficked escaped or refused to work.

All the above violate the right to freedom, liberty, human dignity, adequate rest and leisure, nutrition, right to freedom of expression, movement, nationality and identity, right to parental care and protection (particularly) affecting children and development. The consequences of trafficking to the trafficked are too grievous and should therefore be properly addressed.

Efforts of Women Religious in Fighting Human Trafficking in Nigeria

Various groups in Nigeria have made efforts in combating human trafficking in the country. However, churches in general and Christian women organizations in particular have been at the forefront in the fight against the menace in the country. One of the Christian women organizations in Nigeria involved in the fight against human trafficking is the Women Religious of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Women Religious is made up of Catholic Reverend Sisters. The Nigeria Conference of Women Religious was touched by the exploitation of Nigerian women and children involved in human trafficking into different parts of the world and the home country. The conference thereby

felt the need to put up a fight to liberate the women and children from the shackles of their slave masters. This strong urge to liberate the women and children led to the establishment of the Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women (COSUDOW) in April 1999 in Benin City. According to Bonetti E, the establishment of the Committee was aimed at:¹⁶

- Executing a significant and constant awareness campaign;
- Tracing and protecting the families of the victims against retaliation from traffickers;
- Cooperating with local law enforcement, including NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons), on this and other related matters;
- Welcoming and assisting victims with social protection and reintegration through financed projects for those who choose to return home or are forcibly repatriated because they were found in Italy without proper documents;
- Strategic information-sharing to monitor trafficking and traffickers.

Since its establishment, the Committee has been in the forefront of fighting this new form of slavery. It has rehabilitated a lot of victims of human trafficking, especially women, since its inception. Hence, Bonetti E observed that the most effective action in the fight against human trafficking by the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious was the establishment of the Committee.¹⁶ Also, through the activities and influence of the Women Religious, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria came up with its Pastoral Letter entitled: Restoring the Dignity of the Nigerian Woman. The letter condemned human trafficking in all its ramifications and other acts of injustice meted out on women.

Women religious has centers for the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of human trafficking in Benin City, Edo State and Bakhita Villa, Lagos state. Rehabilitation takes place in the centers and consists of counseling, spiritual direction and taking care of the needs of the victims. Most of the victims of human trafficking return in battered and shattered psychological state of mind. The traumatic nature of their experience requires great care, hence the need for counselling and spiritual direction.^{17,18} According to Madueke E since the establishment of the Committee for the Support of Dignity of Women (COSUDOW) in 1999, the sisters have continued to raise the consciousness of many Nigerians to the danger of allowing young women to travel overseas in search of greener pastures.¹⁸ The sisters have traced victims' families, reuniting victims of international trafficking with their families and communities and provided victims with both spiritual and emotional healing.

The activities of the women religious also involves the

training of trafficked victims in skill acquisition programmes. This is to ensure proper reintegration into the society. To this end, those who already have skills are encouraged to perfect and update their skills and those who have none are encouraged to learn and acquire skills according to their interest and ability. Madueke E noted that through training, the victims have been equipped with marketable skills, reintegrating them socially and economically.¹⁸ The rehabilitation programme also involves the provision of resources through which the trainees are empowered and equipped with materials to enable them run and operate their own businesses.

Realizing the fact that Prevention is key to putting an end to trafficking in persons, the women religious came up with a Handbook for Schools on 'Stop Trafficking in Women & Children: It is a Crime against Humanity'. This book is being used extensively in schools, churches, among women groups and youth centers to educate all especially the vulnerable and potential victims on the dangers of trafficking in persons.¹⁷

Anti-trafficking Strategies of Christian Women Organizations in Nigeria

The anti-trafficking strategies of the Christian women organizations are based on the following activities:

Prevention and Awareness Raising

Supporting and undertaking prevention activities, predominantly through awareness raising.

Assistance to Trafficked Persons

Providing secure shelter for trafficked persons in the countries of destination, transit and origin (for repatriated trafficked persons); providing individual social, medical, psychological and legal assistance, as well as vocational training, to empower trafficked persons professionally. Assistance is also given to the trafficked persons in the areas of spiritual and mental rehabilitation. This enables them to deal with the life long suffering that is invariably caused by trafficking.

Advocacy

Political advocacy is as important as the assistance for the trafficked persons and should particularly address the root causes of trafficking, with a focus on advocating for alternatives for vulnerable groups. Advocacy in countries of destination and towards international institutions specifically aims at ensuring that appropriate legislation is in place and is being properly enforced at national and international levels to protect trafficked persons is also carried out by Christian organizations.

Networking

This involves cooperation with agencies of government,

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations. Networking is a tool for joint advocacy work in seeking the improvement of legislation at international and national levels and their enforcement.

Recommendation

The following recommendations are necessary:

- There should be a symbiotic relationship between the government and faith-based organizations in the fight against human trafficking.
- There is also the need to take the campaign against human trafficking to the rural areas to ensure the dissemination of information to the grassroots.
- The Nigerian women religious and other religious group should persuade the government to adopt and implement protective policies that will ensure the dignity of every Nigerian, especially women and children.
- Since so many Nigerian women are trafficked to Rome, the Nigerian Christian pilgrim Welfare Board at the Federal and State levels should sensitize pilgrims on the dangers of human trafficking.
- The Christian pilgrim Welfare Board should also ensure that pilgrims are well screened to avoid trafficking in the process.
- Christian women organizations should establish micro enterprises and projects so as to engage the youths in meaningful ventures.
- Women organizations in churches should sensitize their members on the danger of human trafficking.
- The children department in churches should be involved in the sensitization on human trafficking. Children should be educated to know more about human trafficking.
- Churches should advocate for good governance, equal opportunities, justice and provision of facilities, as these will minimize the urge to migrate.
- Churches should organize seminars and conferences in order to educate members on the issue of human trafficking.
- Churches in Nigeria should collaborate with other foreign Christian bodies working on human trafficking.

Conclusion

Human trafficking is modern day slavery. It denies victims their fundamental human rights and should therefore be tackled headlong. The fight against human trafficking requires the efforts of all and sundry. The efforts of the civil societies, mass media agencies, Embassies and Government at State and Federal levels in creating awareness on this issue are commendable and should be sustained. Churches in Nigeria in general and women organizations in the churches have the role of collaborating with the government in order

to stem the ugly trend. Every effort aimed at stamping out human trafficking should be intensified by all institutions and organizations in the country.

References

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) UNODC on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Available from: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/>
2. United Nations. Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. 2000. Available from: <http://www.iast.net>
3. Olujuwon T. Combating trafficking in person: a case study of Nigeria. *European Journal of Scientific Research* 2008; 24(1): 23-32.
4. Onojeghen T. 10,000 Nigerians forced into prostitution yearly in Italy -NAPTIP DG. 2018. Available from <https://punchng.com/10000-nigerians-forced-into-prostitution-yearly-in-italy-naptip-dg/>
5. NAPTIP. Human trafficking, a view from Edo State. 2003. Available from: www.gunet.com/humantrafficking/Nigeria
6. WOTCLEF. Women trafficking and child labour eradication foundation. 1999. Available from: www.commit.com/en/node.
7. Keefer SL. Human trafficking and the impact on national security for the United States. U.S. Army War College Strategy Research Paper. Pennsylvania: Carlisle Barracks. 2006.
8. UNICEF Nigeria. Information Sheet: Child Trafficking. 2007. Available from: https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/WCARO_Nigeria_Factsheets_ChildTrafficking.pdf.
9. Dave-Odigie CP. Human trafficking trends in Nigeria and strategies for combating the crime. *Peace Studies Journal* 2008; 1(1): 63-75.
10. UNESCO. Human Trafficking in Nigeria: root causes and recommendations. 2006. Available from: www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147844e.pdf.
11. UNICEF. Children's and women's rights in Nigeria: a wake-up call-situation assessment and analysis. UNICEF Nigeria, Lagos. 2001.
12. News agency of Nigeria. Prostitution: returnee from Russia narrates ordeal. 2018. Available from: <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2018/05/31/prostitutionreturnee-from-russia-narrates-ordeal/>
13. The Guardian. Trafficking of Nigerian women into prostitution in Europe 'at crisis level. 2016. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2016/aug/08/trafficking-of-nigerianwomen-into-prostitution-in-europe-at-crisis-level>.
14. Oluseyi B. Phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria: the cost and implication to the country's development. Conference: An Assessment of Nigeria's Democratic

- Journey So Far. Organized by Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS), Chelsea Hotel, Abuja. 2002.
15. United States Department of State. 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report-Nigeria. 2018. available from: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0ab6a.html>.
 16. Bonetti E. Combating human trafficking: facilitating resettlement in host or country of origin through catholic networks and NGOs. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Palazzo San Callisto, Vatican.
 17. Ebegbulem P. The fight to end human trafficking: Nigerian women religious' perspective. 2017. Available from: <https://blogs.fco.gov.uk/sallyaxworthy/2017/12/06/the-fight-to-end-human-trafficking-nigerian-womenreligious-perspective/>.
 18. Madueke E. Human trafficking in Nigeria: sisters provide services, seek greater justice for all. 2015. Available from: <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/column/justice-matters/trafficking/human-trafficking-nigeriasisters-provide-services-seek-greater>.