Child Trafficking in Eastern Africa Region
A Regional Effort to Protect the Vulnerable

Presented to

The Senior Officials Meeting on Migration, Mobility and Employment

Brussels, Belgium
15 – 17 September, 2010
Nature and Extent

Child trafficking (CT) is one of the most severe violations of human rights in the world today, involving over a million children worldwide. It is estimated that over 1.2 million children are annually trafficked externally and internally (UNICEF, 2003). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that at any given time, 12 million men, women and children worldwide are deceived or coerced into forced and bonded labour, involuntary servitude and sexual slavery (Misra, 2007). Migration creates social disruption of all age groups (Crush, 2003) and this may be worse for trafficked children.

Many children in Africa are moved between relatives for various reasons ranging from cultural practices of traditional fostering in times of need like not having children or orphan-hood or providing children with opportunities and protecting them from all forms of dangers. However, these traditional fostering practices have sometimes led to abuse of fostered children, who are then trafficked. Further still, when parents are economically challenged, they perceive their children as assets and become gullible to tricksters who take their children for forced labour and sexual exploitation.

According to ANPPCCAN’s study conducted in 2008 in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, child trafficking is widespread and rampant in the four countries. This was expressed by different categories of respondents, both adults and children in all the four study countries. The study exposed key issues surrounding child trafficking in East African region, confirming that the problem is real, although the actual magnitude may not be accurately presented because of the complexity and hidden nature of the vice. Trafficking of children is a dynamic phenomenon, which takes

\[1\] Trafficking in human beings, especially women and children in Africa. UNICEF Innocenti Insight
\[2\] The degradation of work, trafficking in persons from a labor perpective: The Kenyan experience
\[3\] Spaces of vulnerability: migration and HIV/Aids in Southern Africa
\[4\] Towards elimination of child trafficking: an action oriented research in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda
different forms of movement of children, both across and within national borders. In the Eastern Africa region, child trafficking is not only transnational, but internal trafficking is also endemic.

Among the four countries, Kenya was singled out to be more attractive as a destination country for trafficked children. Trafficked children engage in various activities such as commercial sex, domestic work and agriculture, all of which expose them to risks. Children aged between 13 and 17 are the most preferred by traffickers because of their cheap labour potential. Girls are most preferred because they can be used as domestic servants, commercial sex workers and perhaps are more submissive.

Case Studies

Case Study 1:

Agnes Mayoka (not real name) aged 15 years old from Entarara village, Rombo division, got lured by a woman neighbour during the funeral preparations of her mother. Agnes was to escape and be taken to Nairobi where she was to be linked to another woman in Ongata Rongai-Nairobi as a domestic servant. Agnes disappeared immediately after the burial. Agnes’s father reported the case to Anne Mumo a Volunteer Children Officer in Loitokitok who sent the girl’s father to Rombo District Officer for assistance. Coincidentally, after some days, Agnes’s teacher met her at Nyamakima bus stage (Nairobi). Agnes lied to her teacher that she had been sent by her father to her aunt who lives in Ongata Rongai. This was not the case as Agnes was working in Ongata Rongai as a maid by then.

After three weeks had elapsed and the teacher did not see Agnes in school, he decided to pay a visit and inquire why Agnes had taken so long in Nairobi yet school was still in session. Agnes’s father indicated to the teacher that he had no sister in Nairobi and that he had not been aware of the whereabouts of his daughter. The father later on gathered information that his neighbour was responsible for the disappearance of Agnes. He reported the same to Rombo DO who duly summoned the suspect. Eventually, the suspect asked Agnes’s employer in Ongata Rongai to return Agnes.

This is a case of a child trafficked from Tanzania to Kenya for domestic work. The girl was from Rombo near Loitoktok border town, where ANPPCAN had been implementing a pilot project on child trafficking. The project created structures called anti-child trafficking committees of the
border bringing together government departments, and civil society organizations. The aim of these structures was to bring key actors in child trafficking together to improve referrals. This case demonstrates the importance of working together as a team. The children’s officer from Kenya refers the case to the District Officer on the Tanzanian side for assistance. This case is a good example of a situation where the case is concluded without prosecution. Once the child returned home the case was concluded.

**Case Study 2:**

*Cynthia Nabwera (10 years) was trafficked into Githunguri area, Kiambu District, in Kenya at the age of 7 years by her uncle with the assistance of her grandmother with whom she was living with in Mbale District, Eastern Uganda. She was deceived into thinking that she would acquire better education opportunities. Sylvia worked as a domestic servant for a Ugandan family who worked in the coffee plantations in Githunguri area for three years before fleeing due to maltreatment. After fleeing, the girl lived in the market centre for some days until she was rescued by a lady selling clothes in the market.

The lady reported the case to the authorities who in turn asked her to stay with the child and Cynthia was later enrolled into school by this lady. The lady reported this case to a journalist who later reported it to ANPPCAN. In the course of interacting with Sylvia, it emerged that there is a big number of Ugandan children working around the coffee plantations in Githunguri area.

ANPPCAN scheduled meetings with the first secretary of the Uganda High Commission in Nairobi with view to chart a way forward on how best to handle those cases. However, no tangible plan came up because the Ugandan mission in Kenya did not have the resources to cover rescue, repatriation and reintegration of survivors of trafficking.

As a result, ANPPCAN Regional Office and ANPPCAN Uganda Chapter through the Anti Child Trafficking Committees then took up the repatriation and reintegration of the girl. Before the repatriation, ANPPCAN Uganda was able to conduct a home assessment at Sylvia’s home to determine whether she would be safe. She was re-united with her biological parents and has since been enrolled in school.

**Case Study 3:**

*Nadia was in form three in Uganda when she dropped out of school due to the lack of school fees. One of her aunties talked to her stepmother because her mother was dead to let her go to Kenya where she would work for sometime, make money then go back. The girl was enticed to go to Loitoktok town in Kenya. Her travel to Loitoktok was uneventful and she was introduced to her...
host family and the agreement was that she would be paid Kshs. 2000 per month.

Paradoxically, she was engaged in hard labour that included; herding cattle, farm work, domestic chores just to mention a few with no pay. To make matters worse the man of the house made sexual advances but she remained adamant. Her attempts to ask for her money so that she could go back to school were met with death threats from her employer. Finally she sought audience with the area chief who later reported it to the anti child trafficking committee with the help of ANPPCAN. Her employers were arraigned in court and she was repatriated to Uganda where she is being supported by ANPPCAN Uganda Chapter.

From the two cases above, the following have been observed;
Firstly, cooperation by the Anti Trafficking Committees in Kenya and Uganda enabled the children to travel back to their countries with ease. E.g. the children in both cases were undocumented and through the collaboration of immigration officials and department of children services they were able to acquire one way passes to their countries. Secondly, most of the rescues, repatriation and reintegration are done in piecemeal and hence not many children in need can be assisted at a go. These cases demonstrate over dependency on civil society to take action which is not sustainable.

Causes of Child Trafficking

Poverty is central to both push and pull factors. It is a key push factor, complicated by orphanhood which has permeated Africa. As children try to escape from poor living conditions, their quest for better life pulls towards trafficking, when they are presented with promises of work opportunities. On the other hand, the poverty stricken parents and guardians may feel relieved of the burden of care for these children given the difficulty of providing for them. Yet they expect to receive some income or other material benefits if these children are relocated to other areas where they are earning some income. Certainly, social factors which include child/parent relationships, abuse of children, instability of marriages of parents/guardians, also push children towards being trafficked. The
promise of good living conditions and availability of employment opportunities in the countries of destination are major pull factors. The majority of trafficked children are those who have finished primary school and have nothing to do.

**Perpetrators**

Perpetrators of child trafficking are from different walks of life, including businessmen and women, relatives and peers to the children. Brokers of child trafficking often take advantage of the vulnerable situations of children and their families, and present themselves as most helpful persons and appealing to both parents and children by promising better lives.

**Reponses to child trafficking**

Efforts have been made to respond to child trafficking in the Eastern Africa region and specifically in the four countries. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all African countries except Somalia. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has also been ratified by 45 countries in Africa. Other important instruments include the ILO Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour, which was almost universally supported. All the four countries of study have in one way or another recognized some of these important instruments, although at varying levels.

**Status of ratification of various international conventions**

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<th>CONVENTION</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ethiopia</th>
<th>Kenya</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
<th>Uganda</th>
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<td>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress &amp; Punish Trafficking in Persons</td>
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Some of the above instruments have been domesticated into national laws. The ILO Convention on the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour has been ratified by the four countries and issues of child labour have been included in the children’s acts in these countries. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have recently come up with laws on trafficking - drawing from the different instruments that touch on trafficking. In many of the countries, though many of the conventions are ratified, they have not been implemented for a long time. Even Convention 182, which is now being domesticated, took over ten years in some countries for that to happen.

Often, the national laws do not take the whole instrument into account. For example, laws in the different countries dealt with child labour, but not necessarily child trafficking. Generally, lack of and delay in the domestication of the instruments has affected their usefulness. In East Africa region, there is no regional instrument on human trafficking.
As far as national laws are concerned, there have been attempts to come up with laws to address human trafficking, including children. However, very few cases have been prosecuted and convicted.

In most cases when trafficked people are caught in a country they are charged with being in the country illegally. The perpetrators, however, are rarely caught and prosecuted. Rather, it is the victims who are punished.

Furthermore, as the laws are enacted, policies on child trafficking do not exist. However, some policies exist in the four countries that have a bearing on child trafficking. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have constituted anti-trafficking task forces/steering committees composed of government ministries, UN bodies, representatives of civil society organizations including faith based organizations. These task forces have began developing National Plans of Action to address human trafficking, with the implication that there are very few programmes addressing trafficking in the region. The few programmes that exist are actually driven largely by non-governmental organizations. The few programmes that exist hardly address the root causes that drive many children into trafficking.

In 2007 and 2008, ANPPCAN targeted 3 border towns and the surrounding communities of Moyale (Kenya – Ethiopia border), Busia (Kenya – Uganda border) and Loitoktok (Kenya – Tanzania border). In these communities awareness was raised targeting parents, children, teachers and community leaders. Sensitization and advocacy meetings were conducted with children service providers, media groups, the judiciary, the police and immigration officials. Also, the capacities of law enforcement agencies such as the police, magistrates and immigration officers were enhanced. But these efforts were at the 3 border towns, leaving very many border towns unattended. Anti-child trafficking teams were also formed to enhance multi-disciplinary approach to child trafficking. Attempts were made to enhance public dialogue, especially on
policies and legislation through national and regional conferences and workshops. Links were also created with key actors in the four countries.

**Challenges**

In the period that ANPPCAN has addressed child trafficking, the following have emerged as the key challenges:

- Low ratification of important international instruments on migration, and, even where they have been ratified, implementation is poor.
- Policies and laws on child trafficking are few and where they exist enforcement is a challenge.
- Perpetrators of child trafficking are very influential people, religious groups and relatives and have enormous resources. The offence is also sometimes perpetrated with the full knowledge of parents and guardians.
- Lack of ownership of the problem by many governments, with many initiatives to fight the vice being driven by civil society organizations. In many situations, governments address the issue just to satisfy external pressure. This makes state initiatives on human trafficking adhoc and unsustainable.
- Knowledge on child trafficking by communities is low and there is silence.
- Poverty is a big challenge and a push factor. The poverty strategy initiatives at country level have not been able to reach a critical mass. There is a category of people who are not impacted by poverty alleviation strategies. These are the communities that are targeted by perpetrators and are very easily manipulated because they are always in search of better life.
- Access to education and relevant training remains a big challenge to children, especially on completion of primary education.
- Lack of child protection systems in many countries leading to responses that are uncoordinated and unprofessional. This also
leads to parallel systems which are always counteracting each other.

- Lack of bilateral agreements, laws and cooperation between states in dealing with trafficking. This has led to cases of trafficking not being handled properly. The burden is usually left with the country where the victims are caught and the victims are also the ones blamed rather than the perpetrators.

- Inability of professional groups to work together is a challenge. Tackling human trafficking requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Yet many professionals who are already addressing this issue are used to working alone.

**Lessons Learnt**

- Working together in the fight against child trafficking is the preferred approach and yields better results. This needs to be institutionalized by enhancing cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination.

- Victims of child trafficking have the same needs and aspirations as other children. Programmes that target them need to take cognizance of this. Providing vocational training programmes that are not “fashionable” and that take too long do not attract children and therefore should not be provided to poor children.

- Programmes that target short term needs of children who are trafficked are more beneficial e.g. a child will benefit more from a few months training rather than 2 years training because they need to respond to their economic needs.

- Programmes on child trafficking must be grounded on a felt need in the country as their sustainability depends on ownership by states. When states get involved because of external pressure, then the results are not sustainable.
Addressing the root causes of trafficking is critical. Many times players do not go beyond the presenting problem, which leads to ineffective initiatives that give little results.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are being suggested for inclusion in the new draft action plan of EU and AU:

1. The new plan needs to target children and young people
2. More emphasis should be put on prevention
3. Since there are many push factors, it is important to ensure that interventions target communities of origin e.g. improving livelihoods in home countries, thus, solving the problem at the source rather than in countries of destination. This can be done through reducing poverty as well as the levels of inequality, since the two are the major causes of people’s involvement in trafficking.
4. Eliminating human trafficking cannot be achieved by one country alone. It requires combined effort through inter-country legal harmonization to render the national legal systems of the neighbouring countries more effective in dealing with transnational trafficking in terms of prevention, investigation, prosecution as well as victim protection. In the East African region, this could be an area of priority for the East African community.
5. Countries should revisit their cross-border agreements to ensure adults traveling with children as well as children traveling on their own are dealt with more stringently.
6. Cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination should be enhanced. For example, at the border points, anti-trafficking units should be composed of agencies from the two countries. Regional networks should also be encouraged. This would enhance collaboration and improve victim’s assistance.
7. There is need to empower communities with resources and information to enhance prevention.
8. The need for reliable information is key, hence, research on trafficking must be emphasized. For example, research will assist in identifying communities that generate children into trafficking for programme targeting.

9. There is need for states to invest in education and relevant training as doing so reduces the number of children in situations of vulnerability. Moreover, vocational training should be made relevant and in sync with the current aspirations of young people. Investment in education needs to be consistent and long-term.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the European Union and the African Union for coming up with a partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment and the organizers for inviting us to come and share our experience in dealing with vulnerable groups, especially children. At ANPPCAN we look forward to working together to eliminate child trafficking in Africa. It is a severe child rights violation that needs to be addressed in a holistic and collaborative manner.