

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

HUMAN TRAFFICKING WITHIN AND FROM AFRICA

Co-organised by **Caritas Internationalis** and the **Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People**

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Forced Labour in Africa

Trafficking for forced labour has been a painful reality for African societies for decades¹. Men, women and children are exploited in domestic servitude, the farming sector (including the cocoa industry), fisheries, and construction sites, among others. As forced labour in Africa is inevitably a result of poverty and traditional forms of servitude (such as employing children as domestic servants), unlike trafficking for sexual exploitation, it is often unrecognized and accepted by society. Yet, Africa has the second highest prevalence rate (number of victims per thousand inhabitants) of forced labour victims in the world, estimated at 4.0 per 1000 inhabitants². The International Labour Organisation estimates that the total number of victims of forced labour in Africa is 3.7 million people – the second largest number after South-East Asia³. However, these are only estimates and, taking into consideration that many victims are exploited in the informal sector, the real number could be even higher.

From the painful past to the uncertain future

Even though the current rapid growth of human trafficking (also trafficking for the purpose of forced labour) has been associated with the end of the Cold War era, the African continent has a longer experience of forced labour and slavery. Colonial states organised and implemented various forms of compulsory or even forced labour on the ruled population that lasted decades⁴. However,

¹¹ See for example US Department Trafficking In Persons Report, 2016 available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2016/>

² See ILO 2012 Global estimate of forced labour, Executive summary, available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/declaration/documents/publication/wcms_181953.pdf

³ Ibid

⁴ Painful memories of colonial injustice are still alive among the descendants of victims. For example, many families keep metallic identification tags as a reminder of the exploitation of their ancestors. See B. J., Berman & J. M. Lonsdale, Crisis of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labour Control System in Kenya, 1919 – 1929. Canadian Journal of African Studies vol 14 (1) (1980), pp. 55-81.

contemporary victims of forced labour in Africa are mostly exploited in the private economy – often within the informal sector. The most commonly reported types of trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation are for those members of African societies trafficked outside the continent: to the Middle East, Europe, Asia and other destinations. There are several documentary films, stories and reports that show Africans trapped in a trafficking for forced labour situation in these destinations⁵. African men and women are exploited in the domestic sector, agriculture and various industries there. The media continuously report about forced labour trafficking victims exploited in various destinations. A good example is UK government reporting stating that, after the Vietnamese, Nigerians comprise the second largest group of trafficking victims in the United Kingdom⁶. African workers are also mentioned as the second group among the victims of trafficking for the purpose of forced labour in the context of preparation for the 2022 Soccer World Cup in Qatar⁷. Sometimes, their exploitation is silently accepted by the relevant authorities, who prefer to tolerate trafficking of foreigners rather than take action against the traffickers (who are typically their own citizens).

Besides people from Africa being trafficked outside for the purpose of forced labour, there are numerous victims of trafficking within Africa. These are the victims of internal trafficking, or trafficking from one African country to another. Both groups comprise people mainly exploited in the domestic sector. Men and women as well as children are often recruited to be domestic servants, such as cooks, cleaners, gardeners and nannies. Besides the domestic exploitation, victims are also abused on farms such as in the tobacco farming industry⁸ or cattle herding⁹. Other sectors known for receiving victims of forced labour are the construction industry, mining, the cocoa industry¹⁰ and begging¹¹.

Forced labour – sexual exploitation nexus

An interesting pattern has been observed when several victims of human trafficking, exploited as forced labourers, admitted that they had also been sexually abused¹². Every third victim of forced

⁵ See for example the ILO report on Trafficking in Persons Overseas for Labour Purposes. The case of Ethiopian domestic workers (2011) available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-addis_ababa/documents/genericdocument/wcms_207325.pdf

⁶ Anti-Slavery International, Thomas Clarkson House. Information available at: http://www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_today/slavery_in_the_uk/default.aspx

⁷ See Human Rights Watch Report summarised online. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/qatar>

⁸ Trafficking for the tobacco industry happens in several countries in Africa, such as Malawi. See country review by the US Government Trafficking in Persons Report 2016 available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258880.pdf>

⁹ Several countries from different regions of Africa experience people trafficking for cattle herding.

¹⁰ Especially in the Ivory Coast. See, for example, the World Vision report available at: <https://www.worldvision.com.au/docs/default-source/buy-ethical-fact-sheets/forced-child-and-trafficked-labour-in-the-cocoa-industry-fact-sheet.pdf>

¹¹ The list of ways people in Africa are exploited is obviously much longer, as are the forms in which the victims are exploited.

¹² Data from the internal statistics of Awareness Against Human Trafficking – HAART – the only organisation in Kenya that focuses only on combating human trafficking. Data was presented at several national conferences during 2015 in Nairobi. More information is available at: www.haartkenya.org

labour admitted that exploitation was of two kinds: forced labour and sexual exploitation. Some of the victims only become aware of their own victimisation once they had been sexually abused. As long as they were in a situation of forced labour, they didn't consider themselves as victims of human trafficking crime.

Child labour

Among the victims of forced labour, special attention should be paid to children. Victims of child labour are trapped as trafficked labourers in the begging industry, farms, mines and sweatshops. Being more vulnerable by nature, their exploitation has more severe consequences. The ILO analysed the impact of child labour on children and youth and concluded that often experience of child labour results in severe consequences. For example, many former child labourers end up working in the informal sector as part of the low paid, unqualified labour force¹³.

Good practices: towards eradication of forced labour in Africa

Prevention

Providing information on labour standards in the destination country.

Organisations such as labour unions¹⁴, but also various FBOs and CSOs from countries of destination, can provide information on workers' rights and duties in destination countries. The information should include at least minimum wage requirements, working hours and holidays, regulations regarding foreign workers' contracts, and contact information for a relevant institution if those rights are violated.

Such information can be distributed in countries of origin.¹⁵

Promoting alternatives to child labour.

In many instances child labour is an outcome of poverty and some local customs. Promoting alternatives, such as additional classes for children who cannot attend normal classes, can reduce the vulnerability of victims. Such programs exist, for example, in Lesotho¹⁶ and Kenya (in the latter this is run by the Catholic Church), where evening programs for young shepherds give illiterate children a chance to acquire basic education that will hopefully reduce their vulnerability.

Protection

Protecting victims of forced labour is an important part of the counter-trafficking effort, since many unassisted victims are often re-trafficked. Besides standard assistance to victims that entails legal, medical, and psychosocial interventions, victims often need additional training that will provide new skills. HAART Kenya has developed a model for forming self-help groups comprising

¹³ ILO World Report on Child Labour 2015: Paving the way to decent work for young people, available at:

<http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=26977>

¹⁴ Such a campaign was organised by Norwegian unions in collaboration with workers from Eastern Europe, who flooded the Norwegian market and were often subjected to abuse and exploitation.

¹⁵ For example Caritas Lebanon developed a brochure that contains basic information for labour migrants

¹⁶ See, for example : <http://www.dw.com/en/a-school-for-child-shepherds-in-lesotho/av-19324365> and <http://africadigna.org/en/project/lchekuti-school-for-child-shepherds/>

victims who support each other in the rehabilitation process. Once initial training on how to run a successful business has been completed, the group members start their own businesses. Survivors attend regular meetings in order to put some money aside as savings for future investments (it works as a sort of microfinance fund), and also discuss their achievements and challenges and support each other.

Prosecution

Although prosecution of traffickers is essential in counter-trafficking work, this set of activities is usually reserved for law enforcement agencies. However, this does not mean that civil society organisations and faith-based organisations have no role to play in prosecution. As most trial procedures are not victim-friendly, in most cases victims need care and assistance before and during the trial. Such assistance might be of a legal nature, or provided by a counsellor whose role would be to prepare the victim for the trial.

Civil suits

In some instances, victims are unwilling or unable to take part in criminal proceedings, but they can seek compensation for what they have been through. Assisting victims to seek redress from traffickers (for example, recruiters and job agents) is another way of compensating victims and obtaining justice. As many victims are unaware of this possibility or lack resources to cover the initial legal fee, or are simply scared of taking part in a trial, various CSOs and FBOs could assist victims in seeking compensation via a civil suit.

Conclusion. Towards eradication: the need for collaboration

As the labour market in Africa is very fragile and nearly 70% of those employed are in a situation of vulnerable employment¹⁷, trafficking for the purpose of forced labour is likely to persist. Different governments and non-state actors have developed and engaged in various strategies that are aimed at combating this serious social problem. While we are still waiting for an effective drop in the number of victims of forced labour, it is vital to stress the need for collaboration and coordination of different anti-trafficking programs. Otherwise, the reduction of trafficking for forced labour in one country will result in a higher number of trafficked victims in another one¹⁸.

¹⁷ For more information on the labour situation in Africa see the ILO World Employment Social Outlook 2016 report available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_443480.pdf

¹⁸ Such a scenario is well documented by Paulette Lloyd, Beth Simmons, and Brandon Stewart in: *Combating Transnational Crime: The Role of Learning and Norm Diffusion in the Current Rule of Law Wave*; but also in Africa by Awareness Against Human Trafficking, which observed that the introduction of compulsory free primary education in Kenya led to an increase in trafficking of children from neighbouring countries for the purpose of cattle herding.

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