AFRICA PAPER ON TACKLING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY FROM NIGERIA TO EUROPE

Summary of Paper

1. The number of Nigerian nationals trafficked across the Mediterranean and via other means to different parts of Europe for exploitation has reached very alarming proportions
2. The Nigerian authorities have been very silent and have shown a shockingly lackadaisical attitude in relation to this global calamity
3. European countries continue to spend a lot of resources to rescue and support victims and prosecute offenders. There is little being done in Nigeria to stop or reduce the flow of trafficked victims.
4. European countries must start to take the Nigerian authorities to task about tackling this problem at its source
5. It is possible to build an efficient governmental framework to address this problem at source, in Nigeria.
6. It is also possible to shift the focus on prevention of trafficking from “poverty alleviation” to “wealth creation” to help harness skills of many young Nigerians at risk and create opportunities for personal growth.
7. A high level summit on human trafficking from Nigeria to be held in London by the in-coming Prime Minister, the Nigerian President and other European leaders is crucial to draw up an Action Plan that centres on prevention in Nigeria, prosecution of offenders and protection of victims.

Preamble

1. Like other agencies working in the anti modern slavery and anti human trafficking sector, AFRUCA is very much concerned about the growing incidences of people trafficking within Nigeria, into Nigeria and from Nigeria across West Africa into different parts of Europe. Recent IOM figures regarding arrivals off the boats from the Mediterranean into Italy report a disconcerting high number of potential victims of human trafficking from Nigeria. Records by different NGOs and government agencies across Europe – in Italy, Finland, Germany, Spain and the UK here also attest to this deplorable situation. At AFRUCA, 90% of the 40 young people we work with each year are Nigerian victims of trafficking.
2. Of course the trafficking of Nigerians to Europe is not a new phenomenon. This has been going on since the 1980s when some university students were known to be dropping out of school to relocate to Italy. In the past, different governments in Nigeria have made attempts to deal with this matter – which led, for example, to the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act in 2003 by the Obasanjo administration. This act also mandated the creation of NAPTIP to enforce and administer the provision of the law around prevention, prosecution, rehabilitation and protection of victims. The successive governments of Umar Yar a dua and Goodluck Jonathan made some progress with the Jonathan government enacting a new, stronger Trafficking Act in 2015. Overall, within this period there was some progress made with Nigeria receiving a Tier 2 (average progress) position by the US Department of State in the yearly Trafficking in Persons Report – although in our view, with more political goodwill, a lot more could have been achieved.

Nigeria is Failing To Address the Problem of Human Trafficking

3. However, it is correct to say that since May 2015 when the new Buhari government came into power, the focus on anti trafficking policies and measures in Nigeria has reduced considerably. What this means is that there are currently very little attempts at using the governmental framework to prevent, reduce or address the problem of human trafficking and modern slavery in Nigeria. There are no new government initiatives to help address the different factors that lead to people being trafficked and exploited – the displacement of people affected by the Boko Haram conflict and the terrible situation in the Internally Displaced Camps which makes it very easy for human trafficking to flourish; the ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta which exacerbates the poverty levels in the area – these two phenomena receive very little attention by government in the form of measures to reduce the human impact and help to safeguard potential victims. For example, while the Nigerian government has just launched a pilot Social Protection programme of cash transfers for the very poor, none of the Niger Delta states where trafficking is a problem has been chosen to take part in this pilot programme – which could have helped to at least reduce the impact of poverty on potential victims (or show that the government recognises and prioritises action on poverty in these areas). There are regular media reports of the very poor treatments received by people in the Internally Displaced Camps – leading to hundreds of children dying of hunger and starvation, with others selling sexual favours in exchange for food or being married off to strangers who of course end up trafficking and exploiting them.

4. In addition to the above, state actors have become very lax in performing their roles – it is very still easy to move children and people across borders, still very easy to get a Nigerian passport and still very easy to bribe government officials to look the other way when crimes are committed. NAPTIP, the government anti-trafficking agency is largely comatose and severely under-resourced, seemingly unaware of the huge human catastrophe involving Nigerian nationals trafficked across different countries in West Africa into Libya and then put on boats across the Mediterranean en route to Europe. We can only guess how many victims of trafficking have perished in the desert and the sea while taking this route and how many have successfully landed on European soil straight into the hands of human traffickers to experience a lifetime of exploitation. Unfortunately and regrettably, the Nigerian government is totally non-reactive to this catastrophe befalling its nationals. The result is
quite damning – records show that most victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in different European countries are of Nigerian origin.

Europe is Working But This is Not Enough

5. Many European countries are working hard to help address the issue of trafficking from Nigeria. AFRUCA has delivered training courses for agencies across Europe and here in the UK where efforts are being made to improve mechanisms to support victims. Aside helping to build capacity, we have programmes to help and support victims – each year, we look after up to 40 young people who have been trafficked and exploited in different ways and almost all of them are from Nigeria. We are aware of efforts by many agencies including the Office of the Anti Slavery Commissioner to help address this problem at source via implementation of measures to tackle poverty as well as other preventive measures. Countries are helping to provide training and capacity building to Nigerian officials to be able to address this problem and achieve successful prosecution of traffickers. However, there is very little progress being made, as is apparent. There is of course a lot more to be done, but it seems foreign countries are reluctant to push the Nigerian government to act decisively on this matter. Our view is that at this stage, based on the unacceptable (growing) scale of the problem, European countries should DEMAND action from the Nigerian government to act to address human trafficking. The reason is simple – things cannot continue as they are because thousands of human lives have been lost and many more have suffered. Many human lives are still at stake – the financial cost of dealing with the aftermath of trafficking into Europe is secondary here. No responsible government should sit back and watch its country nationals suffer to such a very high degree without any willingness to act.

Nigeria Needs to Act

6. For this reason, while these initiatives by governments and NGOs across Europe are a good step in the right direction, the point is that they can only scratch the surface of whatever efforts are necessary to address human trafficking in Nigeria. What is largely absent is a strong, efficient governmental framework for addressing this terrible phenomenon in four key dimensions:

- Governmental Policy on human trafficking – Political Will to act is lacking
- Effective Governmental Framework on Human Trafficking – the current law is ambiguous
- Efficient intervention to address the problem – NAPTIP is currently not fit for purpose
- Policy on Youth Development is lacking

Governmental Policy on Human Trafficking is Weak

7. Many Nigerian embassies in Europe are oblivious of the extent of the problem which involves their own people and seem quite at a loss in relation to what to do and how to support victims. There has never been any comments, any signs at all that the current Nigerian President and his officials are bothered about this terrible phenomenon which we believe is seen as a European problem and not a Nigerian one. There is no “fierce urgency of
now” to deal with this calamity. For this reason, there is no single governmental policy to help push for urgent action, heighten protection for victims, and prioritise prevention at source. The Nigerian government must declare a State of Emergency where human trafficking is concerned and outline a top-level action plan to help address this massive problem.

**Nigerian Law on Trafficking is too Ambiguous**

8. The Trafficking in Persons Act is too cumbersome and too broad to enable any effective action to tackle Trafficking in Nigeria. The law established NAPTIP to carry out a number of key roles too broad for one agency in an institutionally weak state as Nigeria to be able to operate efficiently. In effect, the law needs to be reviewed and streamlined or broken into different parts to enable NAPTIP to be effective. For example, NAPTIP as an agency should only focus on the prevention and intelligence gathering in the fight against human trafficking, working in partnership with others. Prosecution of offenders/traffickers should be dealt with by the EFCC which already deals with economic and financial crimes – and human trafficking should be seen as economic crime because the whole point is the movement and exploitation of people for pecuniary gain. NGOs should be commissioned to provide effective and safe shelters for victims as is the case in the UK.

**Government Intervention via NAPTIP is Ineffective**

9. NAPTIP as an agency is not fit for purpose simply because its role is too broad. It is a victims’ support agency, an investigation and prosecution agency, an awareness raising agency, and of course also addresses “other related matters”. Aside trying to do too many things, it needs people who have the technical know-how and expertise gained from multiple international experiences to run it and there are many Nigerians in the Diaspora with the skills set to do so. Since inception, NAPTIP’s Director-Generals have been drawn from the pool of civil servants or political appointees who are mainly lawyers. However what is needed to run NAPTIP is not knowledge of the law but a strong, experienced administrator with a good understanding of how to effectively run an agency and deliver impactful interventions. NAPTIP needs to be run by people who can bring about disruptive change in the status quo and command the confidence of international partners. It needs people who can mobilise international resources and be trusted to deliver. An efficient and effective NAPTIP holds the key to any improvements in relation to tackling human trafficking from Nigeria and any efforts at reversing the current trend needs to start with this government agency.

10. NAPTIP sits as an agency of the Ministry of Justice with limited oversight of its work. There is really no basis for this because prosecution of offenders should not be the key factor determining NAPTIP’s role. NAPTIP should be upgraded to be an agency of the Presidency where it will report directly to the Vice President, for example, and where it can receive the high-level mandate and supervision it deserves based on the seriousness of the matter at hand, with direct links and co-ordination with other government policy interventions that
can aid prevention of trafficking including Social Protection and Cash Transfers, Youth Skills Development Programmes and Small Business Start-up Grant Schemes.

**Prevention Must Focus on Harnessing the Potentials of Young Nigerians to Encourage Economic Growth**

11. Efforts to address and prevent children and young people from becoming victims of trafficking in Nigeria have been piecemeal, uncoordinated and with no tangible outcomes or impact on the lives of those targeted. Such efforts have not helped to deter young people who are involved in the trafficking “business” or those who fall prey to the allure of traffickers. Trafficking prevention efforts should focus on removal of risk which will centre on far reaching improvements in the lives of young people.

12. Nigeria has a very young population with over 70% under the age of 30 years. Nigeria does not have any active policies on youth development which should tackle the following:

   1. Lack of opportunities to build their skills, access high paying jobs so they can contribute to national growth and competitiveness
   2. High poverty and deprivation levels that stifle individual growth and promote endemic inequality in society
   3. Young people are trapped in a generational cycle of poverty and deprivation with no way out. Most young people in poverty today will continue to be poor into adulthood and old age.

13. A core element of Nigeria’s human trafficking prevention framework should therefore centre on youth building and citizenship engagement. Strong efforts should be made to support young Nigerians to realise their potentials, build their skills and develop the capacity for them to secure good quality, well paid jobs that will lead them out of poverty and break the cycle of deprivation.

There is a key framework to consider:

- Help to build Nigeria’s Budding High Technology sector which is very attractive to the young. Increasing numbers of young people are gaining the high skills needed to be more involved in the sectors – setting up their own start-ups or gaining highly paid technology jobs – but this is mainly limited to the Lagos/South West area of Nigeria. Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook is well tuned into the huge potential of the Nigerian high technology sector by directly investing £24 million in a start-up called Andela. If the opportunities to build high-skill in this sector are opened up to young people in the Niger delta area where a large proportion of victims of trafficking come from, then we would see a more productive engagement in business growth and development. It has to be pointed out that anecdotally, many of those involved in trafficking – either as victims or as perpetrators are well educated young Nigerians with little or no opportunities to progress in life. (There are three universities in Edo State where majority of victims of trafficking originate.)
It is a Fallacy That Nigeria Cannot Address Human Trafficking

14. While at present the Nigerian state is quite weak in the delivery and implementation of social policies (examples are the starvations in the Internally Displaced Persons Camps, the Corruption surrounding Cash Transfers in pilot areas), there have been very good instances in the past where the Government has been very effective in addressing key social and economic problems – the key being having a competent and effective individual running the show – supported, empowered and enabled by the President and his officials. There are three key examples to draw on under the Obasanjo and Jonathan administrations and the Buhari government can be “encouraged” to achieve similar feats:

- NAFDAC – the Food and Drugs Agency was extremely efficient and highly result oriented when it was run by the now Late Dr Dora Akunyuli. Counterfeit drug production, importation and marketing went down to near zero and the number of deaths from consumption of fake drugs and medicine fell considerably.
- EFCC – Economic and Financial Crime Commission under Nuhu Ribadu was very well respected by Nigerians and internationally as it was able to deal effectively with the crime of ‘419’, online fraud and official corruption. Many high ranking Nigerians were prosecuted and convicted by the EFCC based on Nuhu Ribadu’s exploits.
- Ministry of Agriculture – The federal Ministry of Agriculture under Dr Akin Adesina (now President of the African Development Bank) achieved feats not recorded since the days after independence. Nigeria recorded a massive increase in food production, improved farmers’ access to inputs like fertilisers and the market through the use of mobile technology and helped tackle mass youth unemployment by empowering “nagropreneurs” to become involved in commercial agriculture.

Way Forward

15. It is obvious that the Nigerian government needs to be pushed to act here and we suggest the UK should take the lead in doing so. Based on the number of victims ending up in the country, the UK has a moral obligation to call for urgent action on the part of the Nigerian government. The current situation calls for high-level dialogue between Nigeria’s President and his counterparts across Europe (similar to the high level summit on Corruption by the former Prime Minister David Cameron). The aim will be to draw up an action plan with clear responsibilities for each partner to take forward in relation to prevention of trafficking, protection of victims and prosecution of offenders – both in Nigeria and across Europe but with Nigeria being a lot more proactive in protecting lives and preventing a worsening of the human trafficking situation.

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Updated March 2017