

# Combating trafficking in girls



Girls doing a role play on trafficking and its effects in one of GPI's fora organized for parents and guardians

## The learnings of Girls' Power Initiative (GPI), Nigeria

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Human trafficking is recognized everywhere as the transfer of persons by fraudulent means for exploitative purposes. The working definition used in our work is the same as contained in the United Nation's Protocol on Human Trafficking which recognizes trafficking as *“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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.”* In the case of child trafficking, it is not necessary that fraudulent means be used for a situation to be classified as trafficking.

GPI's interventions to reduce human trafficking dates back to 1997. We have carried out public awareness campaigns on the issue. This was after a research on trafficking by Grace Osakue and Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi revealed that human trafficking in boys and girls existed in the region but awareness on it was still very low. In 2000, GPI commenced a research into the incidence of trafficking in four of the six States that make up the Niger Delta region of Nigeria to validate existing data on the issue as well as to provide a basis for interventions by both GPI and other organizations and the government. The study set out to answer three questions: 1) what makes girls susceptible to trafficking, 2) what can be done to enable girls to resist trafficking, and 3) what services should be put in place for girls who do not desire to be trafficked.

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

- While national and international attention is focused on external trafficking, there is a very visible internal trafficking in girls and boys in the region. Victims are recruited from villages and brought to the cities to be used as house helps, shop attendants, waitresses, sex workers in hotels etc. In external trafficking, victims are transported abroad and used mainly as sex workers by their 'sponsors' (traffickers) until such a time as they gain their freedom.
- Whether internal or external, girls between ages 13-25 years form the majority of victims.
- Persons trafficked are never fully aware of the nature of work in their final destinations. Some are forced, some go willingly, many take oaths and most are bonded until full payments are made to the trafficker.
- Trafficking is thriving because of notions that it leads to affluence.
- Despite the many economic gains

identified by many, most of the victims loath to go back or allow their relations to go through the same experiences.

### Susceptibility to trafficking

Traffickers (sponsors) and agents go out of their way to convince girls, parents, boyfriends or other family members. Some parents actively look for sponsors for their daughters and some girls look for sponsors by themselves with/without the knowledge of their families. Some victims are even trafficked by their close friends and relations who live abroad and visit or send messages back home for such girls to join them.

Although boys are being trafficked as well, Nigerian girls are more susceptible to trafficking for various reasons. There is parental pressure on girls to rescue their families from poverty. Son preference and low value placed on girls makes the family choose a girl if one of the children has to risk his/her life to aid the others. From the point of view of traffickers, girls are highly 'marketable' because there is a high demand for them in the sex sector abroad.

The research also identified what can be done against trafficking:

- Girls need to be well educated and given personal empowerment skills so that they will be able to make healthy decisions on issues affecting them.

- Gainful employment or skills acquisition opportunities should be provided for girls to learn trades and meaningful grants to set up their own businesses when they finish training.
- Crisis centres should be set up to attend to reports of forced trafficking for the traffickers or their agents to be apprehended.
- Girls that are under pressure from parents to work abroad should be given the opportunity to achieve their career aspirations, if necessary, out of parental custody.
- Enlightenment programmes are needed for girls and parents to broaden their scope of knowledge on trafficking especially the hazards involved.
- Social Welfare departments of relevant government ministries have to be more functional in meeting the needs of girls who do not desire to be trafficked.

### Lessons learned

- The incidence of trafficking in girls is directly related to the low status of the girl child in the society, it is fuelled by poverty and has adverse effects on the struggle for gender equality.
- To be able to say no to agents of traffickers, or their parents, girls need to be confident and knowledgeable on sexuality-related issues; sexuality education should therefore be part of the school curriculum.
- The sensitization of lawmakers, heads of government institutions, heads of schools and the general public on the issue of trafficking is necessary to reduce the incidence.
- The best strategy is one that includes the benefiting group in every step and draws on the strengths of as many other organizations as possible. As most organizations have limited resources, networking with and referral to like-minded organizations offering complementary services is a productive approach.
- The fight against trafficking will remain a lost battle until either the traffickers and their agents find an alternative lucrative means of income, or children have the wisdom and the voice to say no without dire consequences.

The above findings were widely disseminated and GPI actions on trafficking have been guided by them. Since the release of the research results in 2001, we have opened up two new centres in two of the states with high incidence of trafficking in girls in an effort to address the problem more closely. We have dedicated some editions of our quarterly newsletter to public awareness raising on the issue. Our strategy for addressing the problem of trafficking in girls focuses on empowerment of the girl child, enlightenment of parents on the issue, and advocating appropriate laws:

- *Preventive education and personal empowerment skills building for children*
  - Realizing the need for girls to be able to say no to traffickers or their parents, we have added the issue to our curriculum on sexuality education and have been in the forefront of advocating for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in schools, so that girls acquire the confidence and ability to make and insist on healthy choices for themselves. The three-year curriculum has modules on personal skills development, human development, relationships, sexual health, gender, society and culture, violence against women, legal protection, youth activism and economic skills development. This curriculum is not only in use in the training programmes for girls in the GPI centres but it is also used in our school outreach activities and for the training of programme beneficiaries of other organizations.
- *Public awareness raising* – Awareness-raising programmes such as the annual marking of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence with activities on one of these days addressing human trafficking; dedication of several slots of our weekly television programme to the issue of trafficking in girls; production and airing of radio and television jingles with messages to dissuade the practice; airing of radio drama serials on trafficking; campaign visits to markets, parks and rural communities with films, dance, drama and talks on the issue. As a



Ehita Aikpitanyi and Grace Osakue of Girls' Power Initiative

result of our programmes many parents are now aware of the dangers of trafficking in persons. We have had testimonies of parents who through our seminars and sensitization have resisted the lures of so-called 'Good Samaritans' who promise to end their poverty by trafficking their daughters.

- *Interventions to assist vulnerable persons*
  - GPI is into direct service provision and referrals for victims of trafficking as well as girls who are vulnerable to being trafficked. These girls have on many occasions been linked with resources, given scholarships for schooling, or reunited with their parents. One girl was supported to prosecute her trafficker though unsuccessfully, 20 were given scholarships to complete their secondary school education and over 40 were trained on self-esteem building under the TAMPEP ALNIMA project for returned victims and vulnerable girls.<sup>1</sup>
- *Networking* – Networking with other civil society and government agencies has been a very productive strategy and GPI has used it effectively in its public awareness efforts and in ensuring that a multifaceted approach is used to address the problem. Whereas we emphasize prevention through awareness raising and personal skills building, other members of our coalition against trafficking specialize in the provision of other services both to vulnerable and trafficked girls such as economic skills building, micro finance, shelters, counselling and legal aid.
- *Advocacy campaigns to implement sexuality education* – We not only belong

to a national coalition against trafficking but co-ordinate local coalitions on the issue in all the States where we have centres. Efforts at law reform and legislation on trafficking and sexuality education have been very time-consuming and are yet to produce expected laws at the local levels because of the red-tapism in our legislative houses and near non-responsiveness of legislators to the issue. However, they have so far produced a better understanding and closer working relationship among the civil society groups and government agencies involved; the sensitization of lawmakers, heads of

government institutions, heads of schools and the general public on the issue of trafficking and how personal empowerment skills training in our schools can help reduce the incidence.

In Nigeria, GPI has become well known as an organization with capacity for addressing the issue of trafficking especially as it relates to the girl child. In conjunction with others, we have successfully raised knowledge levels on the issue, carried out actions to support victims and vulnerable girls. We believe that within the next two years, our advocacy on effective preventive education will yield more results. ■

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1. The ALNIMA Project is aimed at providing girls who had been trafficked to Italy (from Albania, Nigeria and Morocco) with the necessary assistance that will enable them to be reintegrated back into their home countries.

## Resources on gender-based violence

### Gender-Based Violence Network website

The website of the GBV Prevention Network is filled with the experiences, innovations and knowledge of over 100 member organizations in Africa. It is a place where often hard to find regional and international resources about gender-based violence prevention can be accessed.



[www.preventgbvafrica.org/home.html](http://www.preventgbvafrica.org/home.html)

### Violence against girls and women

*Implications for HIV and AIDS in Africa*

B. Makinwa & B. Kinfegebriel, The African Child Policy Forum/UNAIDS, 2006 (22 p.)

This paper identifies links between gender-based violence and the higher rates of HIV infection among African girls than among their male counterparts. It further identifies strategies to reduce HIV prevalence among girls in Africa through tackling the violence they experience in their homes, at school and in the community. The paper was prepared for the Second International Policy Conference on the African Child: Violence against girls in Africa, which took place in May 2006 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Several other papers on violence against girls can be found on the ACPF website.

[www.africanchildforum.org/publications.asp](http://www.africanchildforum.org/publications.asp)



### Violence against women and HIV/AIDS: Critical intersections

*Intimate partner violence and HIV/AIDS*

WHO, Information Bulletin Series, number 1 (9 p.)

This WHO bulletin highlights that there is a compelling case to end intimate partner violence both in its own right as well as to reduce women and girls vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The evidence on the linkages between violence against women and HIV/AIDS highlights that there are direct and indirect mechanisms by which the two interact.

[www.who.int/gender/violence/en/vawinformationbrief.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/en/vawinformationbrief.pdf)

### HIV & AIDS – Stigma and Violence Reduction Intervention Manual

N. Duvvury, N. Prasad & N. Kishore,  
International Centre for Research on  
Women (ICRW), 2006 (130 p.)

This manual is a guide for community-based organizations to facilitate a community-led and -owned process that addresses stigma and gender-based violence in HIV prevention efforts. It is based on findings from the Stigma and Violence Reduction Intervention (SVRI) project, conducted in Andhra Pradesh, India from 2003 to 2005. The SVRI project explored and described the origins and manifestations of stigma and intimate partner violence, including sexual violence experienced by mobile and mobility-affected sex workers, truckers' helpers and truckers' spouses.

[www.icrw.org/docs/2006\\_SVRI-Manual.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006_SVRI-Manual.pdf)

