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Protecting the Nigerian child against child trafficking: issues, challenges and prospects

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Abstract

Trafficking in children is a major global challenge confronting the world today. It is a crime that involves gross violations of human rights which threaten children's survival and development. This highly profitable trade poses a relatively low risk of capture or conviction when compared with trade in drugs and arms. This paper discusses the scourge of child-trafficking in Nigeria and how it thrives, despite several measures designed by the government to tackle the problem. Nigeria is a signatory to many international and regional instruments aimed at checking child-trafficking. Besides, there are municipal laws directed towards the same goal, but with little results. Different factors predispose Nigeria to child trafficking, mainly; poverty, ignorance, greed, peer-pressure, manipulation of religious and cultural beliefs, among others, have been identified as leading causes. This paper explores the problem in Nigeria, the causes, effects and challenges facing attempts to tackle the problem. It proffers appropriate solution. In doing these, the paper carefully x-rayed the strength and weaknesses of the various legal regimes designed to tackle the problem of child-trafficking in Nigeria. The findings of the paper reveal that the causes of the problem are multi-dimensional and the effects are far reaching; and in consequence, the paper further recommends a more expansive view of and approach to the problem. This may require a total overhaul of the legal regimes and its enforcement mechanisms.

Keywords: Child, child-trafficking, child-protection, legal regimes, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Child-trafficking is one of the three most profitable trades. It comes next to drug trafficking and trafficking in arms ^[1]. However, it is hard to ascertain the exact number of persons, including children that are trafficked across the globe ^[2]. Trafficking in children is directly associated with child abuses, as trafficked children are forced into prostitution and other forms of exploitation. These children do not only become victims of psychological and physical abuse, but also face many violations of their fundamental rights ^[3].

Child-trafficking (or, generally human trafficking), is one of the most challenging issues affecting the modernisation and developmental aspirations of Nigeria, as a country ^[4]. While human trafficking, in general, is exclusively motivated by a financial profit, wherever it occurs; child-trafficking in Nigeria, on the other hand is founded on custom and tradition, such as child-fostering. Accordingly, the current legal responses, in Nigeria, to the problem of child trafficking obviously indicate a clear disinclination to tackle the cultural and institutional foundation of the problem ^[5]. Research has revealed that in Nigeria, there are two dimensions of child- trafficking. The first, conveniently tagged as internal dimension, consists of a situation where young women, boys and girls are trafficked, through intermediaries or sometimes by organised criminal networks, from their natural rural homestead to urban territories in the country. The aim is to procure for the victims of trafficking households where they can serve as house helps with little or no remuneration for their services. This practice is rooted in local custom peculiar to Nigeria and most African communities, where poor members of the community dwelling in rural areas send their children to their relatives in urban areas who are more financially capable to take care of the children. The agents or intermediaries in this transaction often get compensated ^[6].

The second dimension, styled as external dimension by researchers on the subject, has been an issue of grave concern in Nigeria recently; given the bad image it gives the country at the global level. This dimension involves trafficking of victims (including children), by organised crime syndicates, to other African and European countries in exchange for financial gain. The illegal transactions have assumed such a level of sophistication that they often involve documentation and written agreements ^[7].

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Although, many researchers on this subject have placed great emphasis on poverty as the major cause of the demand for exploitative use of children, this paper examines every other conceivable factor, but gives considerable attention to the efficacy of the laws designed to tackle the problem in Nigeria and the effectiveness of their enforcement. Since child-trafficking in Nigeria, as stated earlier, derives some of its motivating factors from local custom and cultural practices, it is expected that these may influence the formulation of the laws and the implementation of the rules prescribed in them. This paper attempts to examine the subject mainly from this perspective.

2. Conceptual analysis

a) Child

Who is a child?

Although, childhood, according to Montgomery and Woodhead, resides in the perception and categorisation of children by each population, according to their social and economic realities. This lends credence to the view that there is a cultural construct to the definition of who is really a child^[8]. Nevertheless, there are acceptable clues or parameters on deciding who qualifies to be called a child.

In Nigeria, there are different types of definition given to a child, depending on the particular law and purpose under contemplation. Statutorily, a child is defined as a person under the age of 14 years, while a young person is a child under the age of 17 years but who has attained the age of 14^[9]. However, under International instruments such as Organisation of African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, a “child” is every human being below the age of 18 years^[10]. Furthermore, various laws in Nigeria give expansive definitions to who qualifies to be called a “child”. The Criminal Code Act provides that a child under 7 years of age is not criminally responsible; whereas, there is a rebuttable presumption that a child under 12 years cannot commit a crime^[11]. Again, under the Children and Young Persons Law, a child is defined as a human being below 14 years of age, while a young person is older than 14 years, but is below 17 years of age under Children and Young Persons Law of Lagos State^[12]. Under the Land Use Act, the minimum age to acquire land in any part of Nigeria is 18 years^[13]. Furthermore, the Infant Relief Act 1874^[14] defines infant as any person below the age of 21 years^[15]. The Act determines the age at which a person could have the capacity to enter into a contract^[16]. Moreover, the minimum age under the Electoral Act, 2010 (amended) at which a person could exercise his voting rights in Nigeria is fixed at 18 years^[17]. Lastly, in Nigeria, the age at which a person is eligible to marry varies, depending on the type of marriage contracted. For example, under the Matrimonial Cause Act, 1970 is 21 years as majority age^[18]. (usually styled as “marriage under the Act”), as well as at common law, the marriageable age is fixed at 16 years, but under the Customary and Islamic Law, there is no uniform marriageable age. Nevertheless, the Nigerian Child’s Rights Act^[19] defines a child as anyone below the age of 18 years. Invariably, a “child” under the discussion in this paper presupposes any person below the age of 18 years.

b) Child-trafficking

Child trafficking is one of the components of the general concept of human trafficking; hence, analysis must start from the consideration of the general concept of trafficking in

people and an examination of the relevant international, regional and national legal instruments.

The most important international legal instruments on the concept is the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (adopted 15 November 2000, entered into force 29 September 2003) known as Palermo Protocol; and it defines human trafficking as follows:

People trafficking is defined 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^[20].”

A closer study of the above definition discloses that for an act to constitute trafficking, the following three elements must exist:^[21]

- a. **The Act (What is done):** Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons.
- b. **The Means (How it is done):** Threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim.
- c. **The Purpose (Why it is done):** For the purpose of exploitation-prostitution, sexual abuse, forced labour, slavery or similar practices.

It should be understood that in the case of child-trafficking, the first element (a) above) is the decisive factor in making a distinction between children and adults, both of whom are victims of human trafficking^[22]. Why? In the case of child-trafficking, the recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring are imposed by adults, without the consent of the child. Indeed, the child does not make any decision regarding to his moving to a different location, away from his/her parents or guardian^[23].

c) Necessity for child protection

Children are the assurance of the continuity of the human society, without which there will be no human society tomorrow^[24]. Yet, they are the most vulnerable members of the human society, because they lack the physical, emotional and mental maturity required to face life. Accordingly, they need special safeguards, care and protection^[25]. Invariably, child protection is a natural obligation^[26]. Child protection is a critical issue in every human society^[27]. However, although the need to protect the child in every human society seems obvious, yet child protection is still a matter of great concerns in many societies^[28].

3. Factors responsible for child trafficking in Nigeria

There are factors responsible for the upsurge of child trafficking in Nigeria. Some of these factors include: cultural practices, poverty, inverted values, economic backwardness, corruption, cravings for prostitution, and high financial returns, among others.

a) Cultural practices

As stated earlier on, some of the customs and traditions indigenous to Nigeria (and most African countries) facilitate child trafficking, and make all efforts to tackle the problem pretty difficult. The local custom in this context refers to a situation where young women, girls and boys are trafficked

from their natural rural environments to urban areas in the country, with the intention of procuring for them relatively financially capable households where the trafficked children can serve as house helps, with little or no payment to the children^[29]. However, the parents of the children will receive gifts and sometimes meagre sums from the hosts of the children. In rare cases, the children are sent to school by the host households. This practice derives from the traditional African practice where less endowed members of the community who live in the rural areas send their children and wards to relations living in urban areas who are more financially endowed to take care of their less fortunate relations. This cultural practice has considerably reinforced the practice of child trafficking in Nigeria, as well as in most other poor African countries.

b) Poverty

This singular factor is a corollary to the one mentioned above. In actual terms, it is self-evident that abject poverty, depressed economy, high rate of unemployment, massive retrenchment, under employment and poor quality of life had all influenced the practice of neglecting children to the care of others who do not share direct biological affinity with the children. In spite of Nigeria's potentials and its position as the largest oil producing country in Africa and the eleventh largest in the world, Nigeria, as of recent, is rated as the capital of poverty in the world; with a GDP per capita of about US \$1,000^[30]. The ugly situation is accentuated by the rapidly increasing population of the country, which is estimated to be a little below 200 million as at 2018^[31]. Research has demonstrated that in countries with political instability and poor economic development, a sizeable fraction of the population usually migrate elsewhere in search of sustenance and better opportunities, both within and outside the country. In developing African countries, like Nigeria, the pattern of this internal migration is often from rural areas to urban areas, where most of the public amenities are present. As such, it is easy for parents in rural areas to allow their children trafficked in exchange for financial return.

c) Inverted values

Before the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in the early 1960s, the traditional values of honesty, contentment, hard work and consideration for other were given a premium and were inculcated in the younger generation by the older. However, shortly after the discovery of oil and its immediate benefit of bringing prosperity to the nation, these time honoured values were gradually eroded, giving way to crass cravings for illegal wealth, greed, and avarice. This erosion of value also crept into the corridors of power, and the era of gargantuan corruption and mindless looting of the treasury by public officials began in earnest. The situation was worsened by the 3-year long Civil War, one of the aftermath of which was the upsurge in violent crimes; particularly, armed robbery: the net effect of influx of arms during the civil war. Against this background, it is not difficult to understand why parents and guardian would readily trade their children or wards for pecuniary gain. This erosion of noble values has significantly aided the prevalence of crime and inhumane practices like child trafficking.

d) Under development

There are many parameters used to assess the level of a

country's level of development. Some of these parameters are in abstract terms (e.g. good governance and rule of law), however, in concrete terms, development of a country is manifested in the quantity and quality of its infrastructure and amenities (roads, communication network, hospitals, schools, electricity etc), the quality and effectiveness of its institutions (courts, security agencies, prisons, armed forces etc) and the ratio of the "fortunate" to the "less fortunate" in terms of prosperity. Nigeria is unarguably a less developed country. Most parts of the country have little or no quality infrastructure. Even where there are, they are in a state of decay. There are few jobs and limited access to quality education, particularly to the "less fortunate". This distressing situation provides a fertile ground for the mindless practice of child trafficking.

e) Corruption

One of the major reasons for the continued practice of child trafficking in Nigeria is corruption. Corruption pervades every level of human endeavours and every institutions (both public and private), in Nigeria. This phenomenon affects the state institutions and agencies charged with the duty of combating the problem of child trafficking. Despite that the criminal laws of the country prohibits and penalises bribery and corruption, yet these obnoxious practices still thrive in Nigeria. It is for these reasons that the criminal networks and syndicates involved in child trafficking (as well as other forms of human trafficking) find it easy to escape arrests and prosecution by the relevant state agencies^[32].

f) Cravings for perverted sex

The singular fact that there is readily available market for trading in humans for sexual purposes, makes it easy for child trafficking to thrive in the country. There are paedophiles who derive perverted satisfaction in engaging in sex with children. The weird sexual desire of these perverts contribute immensely to the rapid increase in child trafficking for the purpose of commercial sex. In many human trafficking cases, children are trafficked from one part of the country to the others; or in many cases, from Nigeria to other countries; particularly Europe, where the number of white paedophiles who take delight in having sex with under-aged children has tipped the scale^[33]. As a matter of fact, the root cause of trafficking is demand for commercial sexual services, without which trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation would be wiped out.

g) High financial returns

Child trafficking thrives because of its profitability. It is the third largest profitable "business", and ranks behind drug trafficking and trafficking in arms; mainly because it is easier to move human cargo across borders than drugs or weapon, because of easy detection. As such, child trafficking is by definition has been described as a complex, clandestine, underground business, constantly changing and evolving both in response to demand and is designed to be flexible in order to escape arrest and prosecution^[34].

All the above and other factors are behind the soaring rates of child trafficking in the country.

4. Effects of child trafficking in Nigeria

a) Health effects

It has been pointed out by researchers that trafficking exposes the public to health risks which range from physical, mental,

emotional as well as sexual ^[35]. These health risks include Hepatitis B, long-term pelvic pain, HIV/AIDS, illegal abortion, destruction of reproductive system, undesirable conception, infertility, cervical cancer as well as sexual trauma leading to hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb) ^[36].

b) High mortality rate

The fact that child victims of human trafficking are exposed to serious health hazards in a situation with inadequate or non-existing health facilities make their eventual death inevitable. Apart from being exposed to health risks, the combined factors that usually occasion the mortality rate include: malnutrition and starvation, therapeutic abuse and ritual killing ^[37].

c) Unwanted pregnancies

This is one of the significant effect of child trafficking. Unwanted pregnancy arises as a result of unprotected sexual intercourse, which had often being by force imposed on the mature party and the child. Sexual exploitation, in forms of rape and prostitution happen to be one of the manifest outcome of child trafficking. In some cases, after the forced sexual relations, the child victim may decide to resort to abortion. In very many cases, the child victim loses her life and also delivered of still birth ^[38].

d) Other Effects of Child Trafficking include

- Promotion of the vicious cycle of poverty.
- Reduction in the rate of enrolment in primary and secondary schools. This is particularly common in the Northern parts of Nigeria.
- Increase in the level of illiteracy
- Increase in the rates of crime
- Promotion of other moral decadence like prostitution, drug abuse, abuse of the alcohol etc
- Psychological trauma suffered by the victims, like anxiety, depression, and other mental challenges.

5. Response of the Nigerian government to the problem of child trafficking

Nigeria is a signatory to many international legal instruments designed to check child abuses (including child trafficking), such as International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 182, 195, 29, 105 and 138 ^[39]. Also, United Nations Convention to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, 2000 (Trafficking Protocol). Convention 182 particularly relates to child welfare as it is styled as Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Nigeria also signed regional instruments such as 1983 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It also has migration policies and bilateral agreement with the UK, Benin Republic, Italy, South Africa and Spain on human trafficking ^[40]. Besides, there are existing municipal laws in Nigeria enacted to protect the Nigerian Child from trafficking. These include: Child's Rights Act, enacted in 2003; Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003; the Children and Young Persons Act, 1959; the Immigration Act, 1990; as well as the Criminal Code and Penal Code of 1916 and 1960 respectively ^[41]. Again, there is the 2003 National Agency for the Protection of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) Act. All these laws jointly prohibit child trafficking in Nigeria, and also prescribe for

penalties in cases of infraction.

Nevertheless, Child trafficking has proved to be a serious problem to the Nigerian nation and has evaded all attempts by all attempts by government and even international organisations and partners to tackle it effectively ^[42].

6. The challenges confronting effective tackling of the problem of child trafficking in Nigeria

a) Challenges relating to Enforcement of Anti- Child Trafficking Laws

Law enforcement is the task of ensuring that the laws of a community are obeyed. In that context, law enforcement is designed to discover, deter, rehabilitate or punish anyone who violates the rules and norms administering a community ^[43]. The Nigerian government had this position in view when, in 2003, it enacted the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person Act, which established the Agency in charge of tackling the problem of child trafficking in the country. It should be stressed here that the Agency works in partnership with sister agencies like the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Customs Service as well as the Nigeria Immigration Service. The Agency, despite the numerous challenges confronting it with respect to enforcement of the law, had made giant strides regarding the enforcement of the laws. Some of the successful prosecutions the Agency has conducted included the cases of Attorney-General of the Federation v. Tony Ogbemor ^[44], Attorney-General of the Federation v. Chioma Ogbnna ^[45], Attorney-General of the Federation v. Sunday Effiong ^[46]. Nevertheless, the challenges confronting this Agency are many, some of these are:

- Complicity of parents and guardians in the trafficking of their minor children
- Inadequate training of relevant officers on the end results of trafficking
- Lack of capacity to detect victims and traffickers
- Constraints in inter-agency relations between the Agency and other sister agencies like the Police and Immigration Service

b) Challenges with respect to indigenous cultural practices that promote child abuse

As stated above, the perception of a child and what he stands for-his duties, obligations, expected behavioural patterns and also privileges- in a specific cultural context is very critical in understanding why tackling the problem of child-trafficking in Nigeria has been a daunting task. In Nigeria, (as in most African countries), the distinction between abuse (or, an improper handling of a child) and discipline (and other locally accepted method of handling a child) is often blurred ^[47]. Practices deemed as child abuse in the Western world are deemed by traditional communities in Nigeria as the unchallengeable way of teaching social virtues ^[48]. This local worldview has therefore made it difficult to effectively check the menace of child trafficking; particularly in the rural areas.

c) Miscellaneous challenges

Apart from the challenges highlighted above, political and economic problems, lack of resources, the enormity of the child trafficking problem and the lack culture and research experience that could have gone far in helping policymakers in designing measures that could best tackle the problem of child trafficking in the country ^[49].

7. Analysis of some of the legal framework of anti-child-trafficking in Nigeria

a) The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, 1999

The Constitution being the grundnorm of the Nigerian legal order creates the foundation upon which every other domestic anti-child-trafficking laws rest. The relevant sections thereof are sections 17, 34 and 42. Trafficking in persons (including children) is prohibited by the combined reading of the above mentioned sections. The sections guaranteed the ideals of freedom, equity and justice. It also provides against slavery and forced labour or compulsory labour, sexual exploitation and deprivation of personal liberty of Nigerians. Section 46 of the Constitution allows anyone whose rights, as guaranteed by these provisions, has been violated to challenge the violation in the High Court of a State.

b) Criminal code and penal code

The codes contain the specified criminal offences and corresponding penalties for such offences in Nigeria. The first; Criminal Code applies to the Southern States of Nigeria, while the latter; Penal Code applies to the Northern States.

Under the Criminal Code, there are different specified offences against liberty or slave dealing, which can be applied to prosecute trafficking in persons and prostitution. Examples of the sections are 223, 224, 365 and 369. The Penal Code contains similar provisions of the Criminal Code on trafficking. The relevant ones are sections 275, 278, 279 and 280.

c) Trafficking in persons (Prohibition) law enforcement and administration Act, 2003

In 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria, concerned by the alarming rates of trafficking in person, enacted the above mentioned the above mentioned law. Under the law, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Person (NAPTIP). The law was amended in 2005. It is a Federal Law and applies throughout Nigeria. The enactment defines the categories of offences dealt with under it. As an instance, section 64 of the Act defines the word 'trafficking' as:

All acts involved in the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigerian borders, purchases, sale, transfer, receipt or harbouring of a person, involving the use of deception, coercion or debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the person whether or not in voluntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in forced or bonded labour or in slavery-like conditions

The Act provides for varying penalties, upon conviction by a court of competent jurisdiction, against offenders ^[50].

d) Child rights Act, 2003

This Act sets out the rights and responsibilities of a child in Nigeria and provides for a system of child justice administration and the care and supervision of a child, among other things ^[51]. Subsequent to its enactment in 2003, the Act has been adopted in 23 states including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Part 3 (sections 21-40) of the Act provides for the protection of the rights of the child through the prohibition of child marriage, child betrothal, infliction of tattoos, exposure to use, trafficking....abduction and unlawful removal and transfer of a child from lawful custody, forced, exploitative or hazardous child labour....using children for prostitution, unlawful sexual intercourse, other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation prejudicial to the welfare of the child.

8. Prospects of the campaign against child trafficking in Nigeria

As observed earlier, child trafficking thrives both within and across the borders of Nigeria and have severe implications for the welfare of the children as well as the image of the country within the comity of nations. As a country of origin, transit and destination, there is usually the outflow and inflow of trafficked victims, particularly through Nigeria's porous borders, which allows easy access for traffickers to operate without being caught by the law enforcement agents ^[52]. To demonstrate its zero-tolerance for child trafficking (as well as any form of trafficking in persons), the Federal Government of Nigeria, sometime in 2014 was the first country in the West African Sub-Region to sign, ratify and domesticate the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Children {and Women}; as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it followed, in July 2003, by enacting into law the Child Rights Act ^[53].

It is the considered opinion of this author that the state of Anti-Trafficking Law in Nigeria is far from being satisfactory for the following reasons:

- It is not broad enough to accommodate the provisions of International Human Rights Convention in that regard
- The Act does not include offences of organ trafficking and human smuggling, etc
- The Act is far from being the standard anti-trafficking law that it is meant to be when considered against International Conventions in that regard; such as, United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children; and also the United Nations Conventions Against Transnational Organised Crime, 2000 (Trafficking Protocol), amongst others.
- Lastly, Nigeria's policy on international treaties is an inhibiting factor because treaties validly entered into by Nigeria can only be part of Nigeria's domestic law by the process of specific adoption that is, domestication by local enabling laws. Nigeria has often chosen the alternative of creating home grown laws that would reflect well-entrenched cultural, religious and social practices to wholesale adoption of most critical international legal instrument (as in this case, anti-trafficking laws) enacted as her domestic law. The net effect of this approach is the prevalence of occurrences that the international community obviously considers as abuse of human rights.

It is this against the background of the above analysis that it becomes crucial to propose an effective legal framework to combat the practice of child trafficking under discussion here.

9. Recommendations

Traditionally, and for a long time, the problem of child trafficking has been perceived from the human rights angle ^[54]. This perspective was an endeavour to emphasise the critical nature of the issue not only in Nigeria, but also around the world. Simply put, the fight against child trafficking in Nigeria requires a paradigm shift ^[55]. Some of the recommendations in that regard are outlined as follows:

Reforms of the anti-trafficking law and ensuring effective enforcement

It is suggested that the inadequacies in the anti-trafficking law highlighted above should be addressed. Besides, effective and

impartial enforcement of the law is key to achieving the goal of tackling the problem of child trafficking in Nigeria.

Redefining the practice of child fostering

One of the factors contributing to the practice of child trafficking in Nigeria is child fostering. As explained earlier, it is the traditional practice in most parts of Africa whereby it is natural for children to grow up with many relatives who share responsibility for their care and to whom they are obligated throughout life ^[56]. However, in modern times, the increasing economic and financial needs have distorted the essential moral value of the practice, leading to all types of abuses towards such foster children ^[57]. Accordingly, child fostering has become a breeding ground for child trafficking. It is suggested that the practice can be regulated under the adoption regime as provided for under the Child Rights Act ^[58]. Such regulation would meet the requirements for the protection of child welfare as guaranteed under the Act.

Addressing many pitfalls inherent in elements of culture and tradition by way of regulation

In many cases observed, the lack of enforcement of international legal instruments has often been blamed on their incompatibility with local cultures. Experience has shown that on many occasions, especially where reforms are required, traditional practices often conflict with modern imperatives ^[59]. The inevitable consequence of this is that the complex cultural context of Nigeria hinders the straightforward enforcement of international legal instruments, particularly those related to human rights ^[60]. Nowhere is this fact more visible today than in the *Almajiri system* established in the North of Nigeria; a system that abridge the children's right of exposure to Western education and reduces children to pseudo modern slaves, denying them of the opportunities of self-enhancement and self-actualisation that Western civilisation offers. It is suggested that the Federal Government should initiate moves to dismantle the system and open more channels that would free thousands of children rendered victims of this obnoxious system.

Provision of effective structures for child protection

Traditionally, there are four structures of protection for the child. These are: the family, the community, the state and international community ^[61]. Among these four, the family is the primary structure of child protection, while the others are merely secondary ^[62]. It is suggested that policy makers in the country should advert their minds to strengthening the primary structure, most importantly; and these can be done by provision of social security and welfare for the families, public moral suasion, enlightenment campaign etc. The realisation of this goal also requires the participation of civil society, NGOs, religious bodies and socio-cultural groups.

Provision of equal access to education

The position of formal education in checking the incidences of child trafficking is crucial. Formal education of the population will bring awareness and enlightenment. This will also erode gradually traditional practices that reinforce odious practices like child fostering/child trafficking. In this regard, a reform in the nation's educational system is urgent. Moreover, investing in education will also break the vicious cycle of poverty, which is one of the contributory factors to the practice of child trafficking.

The above are some of the recommended measures that could

assist considerably in tackling the problem of child trafficking in the country.

10. Findings

The findings of this paper reveal that child trafficking is one of the major criminal and anti-social practice now plaguing not only Nigeria, but other countries of the world, both developed and developing. However, while the developed countries have designed effective means of tackling the problem and are seeing credible and satisfactory results, Nigeria, like other developing countries are still grappling pitifully with the problem. The findings also demonstrate that the causes of the problem are cultural as well as institutional. Besides, the paper finds that the act of child trafficking is supported by inhuman act of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception and other forms of luring the victims into the culprits' net. Invariably, the consequences of the practice of child trafficking are far reaching; including but not limited to adverse health effects, high mortality rates, unwanted pregnancies, promotion of ancillary crimes, creating vicious cycle of poverty and moral decadence, amongst others. The findings also demonstrated that though challenges confronting the attempts by the government to tackle the problem are daunting, even more so, the legal framework designed to assist in tackling the problems has many inadequacies, coupled with poor enforcement. The paper therefore recommended the reforms of the legal regime and also canvassed for the regulation of certain traditional practices that reinforce child trafficking, among others.

11. Conclusion

This paper shows that the practice of child trafficking is not only criminal, but is also dehumanising and negates every civilised norm. The paper acknowledges the various multi-dimensional efforts of the Nigerian governments to stem the tide of the obnoxious practice, but with limited success. The paper having examined the existing legal regime on tackling the problem realised that inherent inadequacies in the legal regime constitute one of the reasons for the inefficacy of the legal regime in successfully tackling the problem. Accordingly, there is a legal mandate to rejig the legal framework in order to tackle the problem. Moreover, there is a further need, as canvassed earlier to adopt a paradigm shift in the approach to fighting the problem by going beyond the traditional human rights based approach to combating the problem. Admittedly, the problem as it is now poses serious challenge for Nigeria; yet with the right mind set, committed and genuine attitude, the problem can eventually be solved.

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