Review of Research and Data on Human Trafficking in sub-Saharan Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a region characterized by a variety of migration configurations, including cross-border movements; contract workers; labour migrants; and the migration of skilled professionals, refugees, and displaced persons. Human trafficking is the latest addition to this list. Insight into the phenomenon came not from statistical data but from the alarm raised by activists, the media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria, Togo, and Benin in the late 1990s. For instance, the Constitutional Rights Project, a Nigerian NGO, in one of its reports in September 1996, focused attention on child trafficking within, into, and out of Nigeria. At about the same time, WAO-Afrique, a Togolese NGO assisting children brought from rural areas to work as domestic servants in Lome, investigated reports of Togolese girls being trafficked abroad, especially to Gabon. In 1997, a representative of the NGO brought the problems of trafficking children in West and Central Africa to the attention of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Working Group (UN, 1999). Unlike ongoing migration configurations that are male dominated and, in many cases, confined largely to the region, trafficking in human beings takes place within, outside, and into the region; involves intermediaries or third parties, especially scams and criminal gangs; and infringes on the victims’ human rights. Indeed, in recent years, trafficking of women and children, as commercial sex workers or as exploited domestic servants, has assumed such an alarming proportion that African leaders, especially in Nigeria, are breaking the normal culture of silence to address the issue with the urgency it deserves. For example, the Nigeria Television Authority routinely carries prime news items, special features, and plays on human trafficking to educate the public and raise awareness of the plight of trafficked victims.

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The focus of the paper is four-fold: (1) to present an overview of the main features of trafficking, its dynamics, and its root causes in SSA; (2) to review current research on trafficking in the region, focusing in particular on the methodology used and the extent to which findings of these studies can be generalized nationally; (3) to identify the ways in which governments have responded to human trafficking; and (4) to outline gaps in knowledge and suggest a range of research themes that could help enhance understanding of the dynamics of trafficking in the region.

**OVERVIEW OF MAIN FEATURES AND DYNAMICS OF TRAFFICKING IN SSA**

Recent years have witnessed a gradual increase in the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings to and from Africa, as well as within the continent. The exploitative nature of the treatment of the victims of trafficking often amounts to new forms of slavery. Many countries find it difficult to control and prevent the smuggling of human beings partly because they do not have effective policies designed to combat trafficking in human beings. Plus, they lack the capacity to respond adequately, as there are no national legislations with regulations to deal with the problem. The general public is insufficiently aware of trafficking in human beings in all its aspects, the extent to which organized criminal groups are involved in trafficking in human beings, and the fate of the victims. Parents or guardians of trafficked children are under false illusions and are unaware of the severe exploitation to which their wards are often subjected. A survey conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) indicates, for instance, that about half of African countries recognized trafficking as a problem, and that child trafficking is usually perceived as more severe than trafficking in women (UNICEF, 2003). There are, however, notable exceptions among the subregions. In West and Central Africa where trafficking is perhaps more widespread and recognized, more than 70 per cent of the countries identified trafficking as a problem, compared to one-third (33%) of countries in East and southern Africa (UNICEF, 2003).

Until a few years ago, little was known, and even less had been written on human trafficking in SSA. Three main types of trafficking have since been identified in the region, namely trafficking in children primarily for farm labour and domestic work within and across countries; trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation, mainly outside the region; and trafficking in women from outside the region for the sex industry of South Africa (Sita, 2003; IOM, 2003). Trafficking takes place at different levels, including exploitative
labour and domestic work and sexual exploitation of women and girls within, outside, and into countries of the region. Trafficking in the region is defined as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion…deception…for the purpose of exploitation” (ILO, 2002).

The geography of trafficking in West Africa is as complex as the trafficking routes. Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal are source, transit, and destination countries for trafficked women and children. The trafficking in young children from rural areas to capital cities, especially from Mali, Benin, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Ghana to Côte d’Ivoire’s commercial farms, from and through eastern Nigeria to Gabon has increased in recent years (Dottridge, 2002). UNICEF estimates – though this is highly contestable – that up to 200,000 children are trafficked annually in West and Central Africa.

Veil (1999) identified six types of child trafficking in West and Central Africa: abduction of children, payment of sums of money to poor parents who hand over their children on the promise that they will be treated well, bonded placement of children as reimbursement for debt, placement for a token sum for specified duration or for gift items, and enrolment for a fee by an agent for domestic work at the request of the children’s parents. In the sixth form, parents of the domestic workers are deceived into enlisting their children under the guise that they would be enrolled in school, trade, or training.

The main suppliers of child labour in the subregion include Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Togo for domestic work in Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Congo, and Nigeria. Togolese girls are being trafficked into domestic and labour markets in Gabon, Benin, Nigeria, and Niger, and locally within the country while boys are trafficked into agricultural work in Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Benin. Most of these children are recruited through the network of agents to work as domestic servants in informal sectors or on plantations (UNICEF, 1998, 2000). Parents are often forced by poverty and ignorance to enlist their children, hoping to benefit from their wages and sustain the deteriorating family economic situation. In many circumstances, however, some of these children are indentured into “slave” labour, as in Sudan and Mauritania, and are exploited and paid pittance, below living wages. The traffickers have recently extended the destination of child trafficking to the European Union (EU), especially the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), and so on.

Some Ghanaian women and children are trafficked to neighbouring countries for labour and prostitution (Anarfi, 1998), while other women are trafficked to
Europe and forced into prostitution (ILO, 2003). Ghana is a transit route for Nigerian women trafficked to Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands for commercial sex. Togolese young women are being trafficked as prostitutes to Ghana, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, and Lebanon (Taylor, 2002). Children are trafficked from Nigeria to Europe, the Gulf States, and some African countries for domestic labour and for sexual exploitation to France, Spain, the Netherlands, and South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Women are trafficked particularly to Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for prostitution and pornography; they are also trafficked to Côte d’Ivoire and South Africa. Senegal is both a source and transit country for women trafficked to Europe, South Africa, and the Gulf States for commercial sex, and is also a destination country for children trafficked from Mali and Guinea Conakry.

Women from war-torn Liberia and Sierra Leone are forced to prostitute in Mali, just as local women are trafficked to Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and France. Mali also serves as a transit country for trafficking women from Anglophone countries to Europe. Trafficking is done by syndicates who obtain travel documents and visas for the women and link them with brothels abroad. Hundreds of illegal immigrants and trafficked persons, especially those from West African countries en route to Spain, get stranded in Morocco for upwards of four or more years.

In East Africa, Ugandan women working as prostitutes in the Gulf States lure young girls from their country because they are usually preferred by male clients. More traumatic is the situation of young girls and women abducted from conflict zones in the north of the country who are forced to serve as sex slaves to rebel commanders or are literally “sold” as slaves to affluent men in Sudan and the Gulf States. In Kenya, trafficking of young girls to Europe by syndicates run by Japanese businessmen, and of girls from India and parts of South Asia to Kenya, is essential for the local sex industry. Kenya also serves as a transit route for trafficked Ethiopian women to Europe and the Gulf States (Butegwa, 1997). In Uganda and Kenya some orphaned girls in the care of relatives are reportedly “sold” to traffickers under the guise of securing them a better education, scholarship, or marriage. There are reports of Ethiopian migrant women recruited to work as domestics in Lebanon and the Gulf States who have been abused and sexually assaulted (UNICEF, 2003). Traffickers transport Ethiopian women via Tanzania and Kenya to avoid the Ethiopian Government’s employment recruitment regulations, especially the Private Employment Agency Proclamation of 1998 which sought to protect the rights, safety, and dignity of Ethiopians employed and sent abroad, and imposed
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penalties for abuses of the human rights and physical integrity of workers (IOM, 2001).

Trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation is a simmering problem in southern Africa, especially in Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia. South Africa is the destination for regional and extra-regional trafficking activities. The trafficking map is complicated, involving diverse origins within and outside the region. Women are trafficked from refugee-producing countries through the network of refugees resident in South Africa. Children are trafficked to South Africa from Lesotho's border towns; women and girls trafficked from Mozambique are destined for South Africa's Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces. In Malawi, women and girls are trafficked to northern Europe and South Africa. In addition to these configurations, women are also trafficked from Thailand, China, and Eastern Europe (IOM, 2003).

Ethnically based criminal syndicates in South Africa’s refugee camps recruit and transport their victims, usually married women from their home countries. In Lesotho, traffickers recruit male and female street children, victims of physical and sexual abuse at home, or children orphaned by AIDS. Such children normally migrate from rural areas and border towns to Maseru, the capital, from where they are trafficked by mostly South African white Afrikaans who use force and/or promise of employment in Eastern Free State, asparagus farms in the border region, and Bloemfontein. At the destination, victims are locked up in private homes and starved of food while being sexually, physically, and verbally exploited (IOM, 2003). Sexually exploited, humiliated, and penniless, these young victims are later dumped at border towns to make their way back to Maseru. Long-distance truck drivers also traffic their victims from Lesotho to Cape Town, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, with the help of corrupt immigration officials at the border posts.

Mozambican traffickers are mainly local women in partnership with their compatriots and South African men who transport trafficked victims from Maputo to Johannesburg or Durban. After impounding the victims’ documents and personal properties, they are sexually exploited and abused. Victims are sold as sex workers to brothels in Johannesburg or as wives to mine workers on the West Rand. With some 1,000 victims recruited and transported every year, the trade is lucrative for traffickers (IOM, 2003).

In Malawi, victims are trafficked to Europe and South Africa. Victims trafficked to Europe are recruited by Malawian businesswomen or are married to Nigerians living in Malawi who employ deception and job offers in restaurants and hotels to lure the unsuspecting young Malawian and Zambian girls through Johannesburg to Germany, Belgium, or Italy to be enlisted as prostitutes. Before departure,
rituals are performed to frighten the victims from escaping. A study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) noted that the Nigerian “madam” who receives the trafficked women and girls at the destination would threaten death by magic if the victims refused to cooperate (IOM, 2003b). Malawian businesswomen also collaborate with long-distance truck drivers to recruit young victims locally with offers of marriage, study, or employment in South Africa. The victims are gang raped or killed en route if they resist (Mertens et al., 2003). Tourists from Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK use gifts and cash to lure young boys and girls under age 18 who reside at tourists’ spots into pornographic sex acts. They later put the films on the Internet with the victims’ names and addresses. The victims’ parents are deceived with gifts under the pretence that their wards would be assisted with education and jobs abroad. The unsuspecting children who follow the tourists to Europe end up as sex slaves to the traffickers or are distributed into the paedophile network.

Between 800 and 1,100 women aged 25 to 30 from Bangkok, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore are trafficked into South Africa annually. Traffickers arrange transport for the victims while the Thai mama-sans (male agents) in South Africa coordinate their arrival with brothel owners. Trafficked victims from southern China are recruited by Chinese or Taiwanese agents with links to the Triad groups. They then enter South Africa through Johannesburg or land borders from Lesotho or Mozambique using tourist visas, study permits, or false Japanese passports and are forced to work in the sex industry. Trafficked victims from Eastern Europe include Russian and Eastern European women lured to South Africa with offers to be waitresses and dancers. These and other victims recruited for the South Africa-based Russian and Bulgarian mafia end up in Johannesburg and Cape Town brothels (Mertens et al., 2003).

ROOT CAUSES OF TRAFFICKING

A variety of factors, including deepening poverty, deteriorating living conditions, persistent unemployment, conflicts, human deprivation, and hopelessness fostered the environment for human trafficking to flourish in the region (Salah, 2004).

Child trafficking is a serious human rights issue but the problems of child abuse and neglect in SSA are rooted primarily in the deteriorating economic situation. Deepening rural poverty forces poor families to give up their children to traffickers, under the pretext of providing them the opportunity to secure good jobs and better lives (Dottridge, 2002). Poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, family disintegration as a result of death or divorce, and
neglected AIDS-orphaned children, make young persons vulnerable to traffickers (ILO, 2003; Moore, 1994).

In many SSA countries, poverty is a major factor forcing young children into work. The first evidence of unemployment came not from statistical data but from reports about the appearance in various towns of people who obviously had no jobs. They came in increasing numbers, and lived in shanty towns in desperation and poverty. Street children as beggars who simply work on the streets but are without families or homes are increasing in number in SSA’s major cities – Addis Ababa, Dakar, Lagos, and Nairobi (Moore, 1994). In Senegal, some of these children are forced by religious teachers to beg for food and money in the streets. Their lifestyle makes them vulnerable to exploitation from adults and they are easily drawn into prostitution, drugs, alcohol, and crime (Aderinto, 2003). As the products of famine, armed conflicts, rural-urban migration, unemployment, poverty, and broken families, street children are highly vulnerable to traffickers. Prostitution is often a common way for boys and girls on the street to make money, making them susceptible to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV/AIDS. In Nairobi, for example, such girls may be selling sexual services during the day and returning to their “community” at night (Moore, 1994). Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Thus, for instance, some of the young girls from Benin who work across the border in Nigeria, as are Ghanaian children in north-eastern Côte d’Ivoire, are sexually abused by older members of the host families.

It is alleged that some of the children are “sold” by their parents or contracted to agents for work in exchange for cash. The dramatic changes in Africa’s economic fortunes have undermined the abilities of families to meet the basic needs of its members. Driven by desperation, some fall prey to traffickers’ rackets in desperate search for survival. Irregular migration as well as trafficking in young boys and girls was stimulated and intensified by worsening youth unemployment and rapidly deteriorating socio-political and economic conditions and poverty. Most of these youths risk everything to fight their way hazardously to rich countries with the assistance of traffickers and bogus agencies, in search of the illusory green pastures. This traumatic development reflects the depth of the deterioration of SSA economies and poverty (ILO, 2003).

Many parents interviewed in a study in Togo had never been to school, were in polygamous unions, and had many children (Human Rights Watch, 2003). In such traditional settings parents often prefer to send girls into domestic service and use the income to finance the education of boys. In an African cultural setting, children are regarded as economic assets, and from around age 6, they are gradually integrated into the family’s productive process, performing vari-
ous services. In a subsistence economy, labour is a critical production asset and children are enlisted into the family labour pool, a situation dubbed child labour in the literature. Despite acceding to the various conventions designed to eliminate child labour, the practice is widespread in SSA as a result of generalized poverty and economic crisis. In many cases, the assistance that children provide – child caring, herding and fetching water or fuel wood – releases the adults, especially women, to undertake more urgent and major tasks. Thus, in seasons when extra hands are needed, families see no contradiction in withdrawing girls from school so that they can help, because all children are considered a family resource at all times (Adepoju, 1997).

Investment in family members is made based on who is perceived to be most likely to bring the highest returns. In most cases this boosts the biased family investment in education in favour of boys. Moreover, domestic work for children not enrolled in school or who have dropped out is an integral part of family upbringing strategies and survival mechanism. Poor parents, especially in rural areas, facing difficult resource constraints enlist their children in domestic work, hoping thereby to diversify family income (Veil, 1998). But in the process, fostered children and domestic workers, mostly young girls, may be unable to learn a trade or attend school even when they want to because of the exploitative heavy work schedule. The inability of parents to pay the fees for their ward’s education is exploited by traffickers who lure young girls with offers of education and employment opportunities elsewhere. In Togo, for instance, child trafficking begins with a private arrangement between an intermediary and a family member, with promises for education, employment, or apprenticeship only to be turned to exploitative domestic workers. Sometimes, parents have to pay an intermediary to find work for their children, in a number of cases, parents accepted money from traffickers as inducements for the transaction.

In SSA, traditionally child rearing is a shared communal responsibility, particularly in close-knit rural areas. As children who provide help in the home and on the farm are enrolled in schools, especially in the cities, this resource disappears from the family pool. This is evidenced by the case of Gabon where compulsory schooling and strict labour laws create a huge demand for domestic labour. A survey of 600 working children in Gabon from 1998 to 1999 found that only 17 were Gabonese. In 2001, between 10,000 and 15,000 trafficked Togolese girls were working in Gabon, recruited as domestic servants by agents who paid their poor parents and transported them for domestic work (UNICEF, 1998; Veil, 1998).

Child trafficking in SSA is a demand-driven phenomenon – the existence of an international market for children in the labour and sex trade, coupled with an
abundant supply of children from poor families with limited or no means for education in a cultural context that favours child fostering (ILO, 2002). Child trafficking has also increased as a result of a growing network of intermediaries, an absence of clear legal framework, a scarcity of trained police to investigate cases of trafficking, ignorance and complicity by parents, corruption of border officials, and the open borders that make transnational movement intractable (Salah, 2004). Child trafficking networks are secretive, informal, and involve rituals and cults. However, normal cross-border migration is equally infiltrated by child trafficking.

With regard to trafficking in women, the literature also indicates that women often fall prey to traffickers as a result of poverty, rural-urban migration, unemployment, broken homes, displacement, and peer influence. Butegwa (1997) insists that in SSA, poverty is also the major reason for trafficking in women. Unemployment, low wages, and poor living standards drive some desperate women into the hands of traffickers. These women then end up offering sexual services in brothels or as domestic servants. Poor women who wish to migrate to rich countries may simply be looking for better job opportunities in order to assist their families. In the process, some fall prey to traffickers. Though some of the trafficked women are willing to participate in prostitution in order to escape the poverty trap, deception is the most common strategy used in procuring them and young girls under the guise of offers for further education, marriage, and remunerative jobs. The trafficked persons who obtain huge loans for procuring their tickets, visas, and accommodations discover on arrival that the promise was bogus, and their passports are seized to prevent their escape. Many are stranded and helpless, but the absence of a judicial framework limits attempts by law enforcement agencies to prosecute and punish perpetrators and accomplices for their trafficking crimes.

Many women assume sole responsibility for family members after their husband’s die of AIDS. Saddled with increased responsibilities, some opt for migration in search of employment to improve their families’ well-being only to fall prey to traffickers. Sexual exploitation may also expose such women to HIV/AIDS. Trafficked women in the sex trade often work without the use of condoms and may lower their prices for sexual services to pay back their debt bondage. Some may be raped, tortured, and subjected to other forms of inhumane physical abuse by clients and traffickers. Repatriated women arriving back in Nigeria through Lagos are forced to undergo medical tests including tests for HIV/AIDS as part of the screening process (Pearson, 2002). Afonja (2001) reported that many trafficked Nigerian girls in Italy were battered by their clients and beaten by their employers for failing to cooperate, prompting some of them to seek protection from the Italian Government, NGOs, and the church. When deported, their reintegration is made difficult by the stigma of failure, and the
local communities are wary that the repatriated victims may spread diseases they contracted abroad. Many such victims of trafficking end up engulfed in, rather than escape from, the trap of poverty, bringing in its wake personal trauma and dishonour to their families.

HIV/AIDS can in itself be a cause and consequence of trafficking. In southern Africa, for example, the perception that having sexual intercourse with a young girl diminishes the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS has increased demand for young sex workers, and unscrupulous scams are cashing in on this situation by trafficking young girls to the country. In the case of trafficked girls from Benin and Togo, who travelled by sea to Gabon through transit points in southeastern Nigeria, some were raped, a few prostituted themselves, and others sold their belongings in order to survive while awaiting their boats. Many died when their rickety boats capsized. At their destination, many girls suffered physical and emotional abuse and sexual exploitation by boys and men in the hosts’ homes, experiences that pushed some to the streets as prostitutes. Despite the risks, few insisted on the use of condoms because clients pay more for unprotected sex, exposing themselves to HIV infection. A study of sex workers in Lome in 1992 showed that nearly 80 per cent of the women tested were HIV positive (Fanou-Ako et al., nd; Nagel, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2003).

**RESEARCH ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

Data on international migration in SSA is scanty and information on irregular migration is harder to find. Trafficking, as Kornbluth (1996) noted, lies along a continuum that runs from illegal migration to alien smuggling by criminal groups, including coercion of migrants into drug smuggling or prostitution. Like illegal migration, trafficking has become highly organized and extremely complex. Yet, the data base remains extremely poor and our knowledge of trafficking within or outside the region is incomplete.

Research efforts in West Africa have focused on gathering data on young children recruited and transported across frontiers and later exploited to work in agriculture and domestic service and for women trafficked into the sex industry. Often, researchers have glossed over or completely ignored the broader socio-cultural and economic contexts in which migration, in general, and more strictly trafficking in human beings, takes place. Yet it is obvious that these contexts, in the African situation, define who is selectively sponsored for migration, the nature of networks, the role of intermediaries, and the returns to migration. Child labour and “child” migration for work are engrained aspects of
the migratory configuration in many parts of Africa. As some of the studies reviewed below illustrate, a lot of grey areas exist between the concept of female migration for work, the aim being to improve the migrants’ conditions and those of her family, and illegal migration, smuggling, and trafficking of women.

A dozen or more studies have been conducted in SSA countries with a focus on child labour, child trafficking, and trafficking in women. Some of these studies are small scale, covering areas considered recruiting grounds for trafficked children and women; a few are based on secondary, archival sources, while others are empirical, based on surveys and interviews with victims and stakeholders, stretching from weeks to months. Some of these studies were funded by organizations mandated to work on trafficking; others were conducted directly by such agencies using primary or secondary sources of data, in collaboration with national research organizations or individual researchers. A selection of these studies from West Africa (Nigeria, Togo, Mali); Central Africa (Gabon, Cameroon); eastern Africa (Tanzania, Zambia), and southern Africa (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, and South Africa) is presented below.

**West Africa**

**Nigeria**

The aim of the study on trafficking in women and girls for prostitution in Nigeria’s Delta and Edo States is to assist the Government of Nigeria and local partners in identifying measures for the adequate protection of victims of trafficking returning to Nigeria, and the development of appropriate prevention measures to combat trafficking in women and girls. In doing so, it also aims to generate basic data for the development of measures to combat trafficking in women and girls (Afonja, 2001). The study used several approaches: structured questionnaires for household heads, women and girls at risk (unemployed, school dropouts, women of easy virtue, final year senior secondary school girls), and victims and returnees in the state capitals; in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including medical practitioners, teachers, market women, government officials, international organizations, and NGOs; and five focus group discussions (FGDs) in Edo State, two with market women, one each with female and male adolescents in schools and another with male adolescents out of school. In Delta State, FGD were held for female and male adolescents in school and adult males and females. Opinion leaders, government officials, NGOs working on violence against women, and officials from the embassies of Belgium, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands were also interviewed. A purposive sample selection captured 100 household heads, 400 women and girls at risk, and ten victims and
returnees interviews, mostly people willing to be interviewed oblivious of the state’s anti-prostitution law passed in September 2000 to prohibit trafficking and prostitution in Edo State. Secondary data from media reports, case studies, and policy statements were also collected from governments, NGOs, and the print media to complement the primary data.

The researchers noted that participation in trafficking involves a third party, which takes the form of an invitation from family members, friends, even strangers, who approach either the household heads or the girls concerned. The actual trafficking involves four processes: the planning phase, the trip to the country of destination, the sojourn, and the return journey, based on the group or the individual model. The group model involves the so-called Italios, adolescents aged 10 to 19 years old, their sponsors, and hosts in the country of destination. Before departure from the state, rituals are performed by the parents, Italios, and sponsors to “cement” a covenant between them, to protect them from being apprehended, and to incur favour with their employers. Parents involved in initiating the contractual arrangements provide all or part of the funds for the journey and may also be indebted to the sponsors (Afonja, 2001).

**Togo**

The study of child trafficking in Togo, conducted by the Human Rights Watch (2003), documents the problems of internal and external child trafficking, especially the trafficking of girls into domestic and market work, the trafficking of boys into agricultural work, and the hazards faced by the trafficked children. In the study, carried out between April and May 2002 in Lome and 13 towns and villages in the country, 90 trafficked children who had been released by their traffickers or who had fled and were identified through local authorities familiar with child trafficking cases and NGOs providing services to abused or neglected children, were interviewed. This procedure omitted other trafficked children who were unable to escape. In-depth interviews were also conducted with 32 government, NGO, and foreign embassy officials, judges, parents, teachers, police, social workers, and other stakeholders. Of the 90 children interviewed, 72 (41 girls and 31 boys) were trafficked according to the UN Trafficking Protocol; 13 were trafficked internally within Togo, 24 were trafficked outside Togo to Gabon, Benin, Nigeria, and Niger; and four were trafficked to Togo from Benin, Nigeria, or Ghana. All the 31 boys, mostly illiterates or dropouts, were trafficked from Togo to parts of Nigeria, Benin, or Côte d’Ivoire.

**Mali**
The research on child trafficking in Mali focused on the causes, context, and consequences of youth migration in four communities at risk, two each in central and south-east Mali; the perception and definition of the phenomenon of trafficking by communities and parents and an assessment of the factors that motivate young people to leave their home villages; identification of the routes that both trafficked and non-trafficked migrants take; and the experiences of the reintegration of trafficked and intercepted children into their home communities (Castle and Diarra, 2003).

The fieldwork, carried out between August and October 2002 in purposively chosen villages to incorporate areas of high migration and especially those where trafficking and repatriated children (so-called trafficked children) had been reported, focused on children aged 10 to 18 years. The researchers assumed that those younger than age 10 were unlikely to migrate and those older than 18 were less likely to experience problems as autonomous migrants (Castle and Diarra, 2003). A range of approaches was used: a random sample of households and screening of 10 to 18 year olds in the villages; a purposive sample of households furnished by village chiefs and elders where migrants had experienced hardship or trafficking and screening of 10 to 18 year olds; a purposive sample of households drawn from a list of names of individual 10- to 18-year-old migrant children (“trafficked children”) furnished by NGOs working with the authorities who had repatriated them; and a snowball sample based on names of migrants age 10 to 18 and their households furnished by interviewees who were able to recount hardship stories of their friends and peers in the villages.

Interviewers probed children for descriptions of the role, relationship, financial benefits, and remuneration received by intermediaries. In all, 950 children, 431 aged 10 to 13 and 519 aged 14 to 18, were screened. Of these, only four fulfilled the criteria as having been trafficked. Based on availability and whether their story appeared typical or atypical, 108 were eventually interviewed. In addition, four FGDs were conducted in each region involving 12 mothers and five fathers from the first village and seven and 13, respectively, from the second village. These were purposively selected to ensure a mix from each migration category. In each village, seven community leaders (chiefs and counsellors, imams, leaders of women’s groups, and teachers) who had strong social, religious, or political roles were interviewed. FGDs were held with transporters, law enforcement officers, local government officials and NGO representatives, and jurists.

This study is innovative in some respects. The qualitative-quantitative screening procedure identified subjects of study, around which was built a systematic classification of children by migration category, before a final selection of interviewees was made. The study also captures a wide variety of contextual migration, of which trafficking is an important subset, highlights many weak-
nesses in the conceptualization of international definitions of trafficking and the difficulty of operationalizing these in the field.

**West and Central Africa**

Veil’s (1998) study of child labour and trafficking in young girls as domestic workers in ten West and Central African countries (Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria) was based on secondary data, archival documents, and studies by UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), NGOs, and research institutes. The key objective was to analyse the factors affecting the supply of and demand for domestic labour, the various forms of domestic traffic and its volume, and cross-border networks. The focus was on trafficking in child domestic workers, particularly the situation of girls in domestic service, factors responsible for child domestic labour, as well as policies and measures at the national, regional, and international levels aimed at combating the phenomenon.

**West, Central, and eastern Africa**

Butegwa’s (1997) report is designed to sensitize African women’s rights NGOs to the magnitude of trafficking in women in Uganda, Kenya, Mali, Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Nigeria. In-depth interviews were conducted in Kenya, Mali, Uganda, and Nigeria with women who have been involved in trafficking as recruiters, the victims, money lenders, government officials in immigration, justice, police and social welfare departments, and journalists. In Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia, questionnaires were administered to NGOs actively involved in trafficking matters. The author highlights difficulties in conceptualizing trafficking in women for prostitution, forced labour, and slavery-like practices, particularly from a human rights perspective and provides a descriptive analysis of the situation and the challenges arising from trafficking in Africa. The report documents the various national legislative provisions and international legal standards applicable to trafficking in women, contradictions implicit in the standards and their applicability to the Africa region. Based on country case reviews, the author outlines the efforts of governments and NGOs to control trafficking in women from Africa. Not much is available on the methodology used for the study.

**Southern Africa**

IOM’s (2003) study in southern Africa covered Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, and South Africa’s four major cities (Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria). It focuses on the various definitions of trafficking, the legal
dimension, and the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation. The concentration on women and children, while recognizing the existence of trafficking for other kinds of forced labour, and of men, was due largely to the extreme vulnerability, abusive, and dehumanizing nature of the exploitation (Mertens et al., 2003). The survey, conducted from August 2002 to February 2003, interviewed trafficked victims, sex workers, traffickers, police and government officials, NGOs, and the media. The South African Broadcasting Corporation’s Special Assignment programme documented cases and trends of trafficking in Mozambique (IOM, 2003). Researchers spent three months in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Pretoria identifying and interviewing victims and other sources whose stories could be traced back along the trafficking routes to the source countries. The second phase, devoted to locating source communities to assess the reasons for, and extent of their vulnerability, was confined to Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Swaziland, leaving out Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Of the 232 interviews conducted, 25 trafficked women and children from 11 countries were identified, following which the number multiplied exponentially.

While these pioneering studies were conducted on difficult terrains and used painstaking approaches, the samples were small and non-random; hence, their results cannot be generalized in view of variations within countries. Future research on trafficking could also explore the use of quantitative and qualitative rapid assessment data gathering techniques to target girls and women at risk, those trafficked within the country, and others who returned. Tracer studies of trafficked victims at the destination involving collaborative efforts of researchers in the countries of origin and destination of trafficking are most desirable and should be encouraged.

GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE AND PRIORITY RESEARCH THEMES ON TRAFFICKING

A clearer picture of the map, route, causes, and dynamics of trafficking in children and women in, from, and to SSA is emerging. But the knowledge base remains poor and the distinction between trafficking per se, especially with respect to children, and the long standing seasonal migration of young persons for work across borders is blurred.

There is an urgent need to improve data gathering and training and retraining of officials in migration data collection and statistics in order to capture the main trends of trafficking. In the process, data collection on trafficking and other configurations of migration that may include elements of smuggling should be standardized. Because no single research methodology can adequately capture trafficking ramifications, a battery of methods is desirable both to capture the
diverse sources, causes, and dynamics of trafficking and to ensure that research findings can be generalized.

While information on the trafficking process and health conditions of the victims of trafficking is essential for the fight against trafficking, there is a general lack of data on the health aspects in SSA countries. Data based on the number of convictions, number of complaints launched, number of victims assisted, and medical data about trafficked victims simply do not exist in the region. Collecting such information would advance our knowledge.

One of the main obstacles in collecting data on trafficking in SSA is ignorance and, in some cases, indifference to the subject matter. Many people do not yet see trafficking as a serious crime, and many countries in the region do not have appropriate legal framework that makes trafficking a punishable offence. Child traffickers apprehended by the police are rarely prosecuted because most penal codes do not have specific provisions against trafficking in women and children, and where they are in force, parents and guardians are ignorant of its provisions. The lack of appropriate anti-trafficking legislation and weak enforcement has to be addressed by strengthening laws and policy framework to enable effective action against trafficking in human beings for labour or sexual exploitation through training and capacity building.

Trafficking is related to general vulnerability, and exacerbated by poor access to or withdrawal from education. Poverty and lack of parental support renders orphans more vulnerable to being trafficked. Governments must address the specific needs of extremely vulnerable groups (exposed to trafficking and forced labour) and make poverty alleviation the cornerstone of people-centred development strategy.

Research is needed on the root causes of trafficking in a broader context especially the traditional practices of child placements, child fostering, and domestic work, which are conducive to trafficking. Such studies should focus on the cultural values and traditional belief systems that push children to traffickers and weaken the protection of children’s rights. A more realistic approach is required to encompass the broader issue of children’s work, child labour migration (internal and cross-border), and child trafficking.

As Castle and Diarra (2003) suggested, there is a need to reconceptualize definitions of trafficking in view of the difficulties associated with its operational application in respect to child labour, migration of youths for labour, and child trafficking in, especially, West Africa. Violence, deception, and exploitation can and do occur within both regular and irregular systems of migration and employment within and outside national borders, which complicates a meaningful definition of trafficking. We need to broaden our understanding of the
mechanisms of border crossing and expand conceptual frameworks to incorporate internal child trafficking on which much less is known.

In West Africa, in particular, the direct involvement of traditional leaders in the identification and implementation of measures against trafficking is essential. In doing so, researchers need to posit trafficking in the broader context of forced and compulsory labour, as well as in local, historical, and socio-cultural contexts. The origin, causes, and manifestations of forced labour in former francophone West African countries require qualitative approaches that examine these issues in an integrated way, especially the cultural attitudes to and the economic imperative for child labour and trafficking.

In-depth gender sensitive studies are needed on the frequency of forced labour and trafficking. The results can help promote greater awareness among traditional and social institutions, as well as in consensus building, on the reality of forced labour and trafficking in the context of traditional social practices.

Incisive participatory research is required on the role of tourism in trafficking young persons for the sex industries in rich countries. The tourism industry in SSA has low entry barriers, is labour intensive, employs women and young boys and girls, and reaches remote rural areas. It is speculated in media reports in Gambia and Senegal that trafficking syndicates from rich countries have infiltrated the industry to recruit unsuspecting young boys and girls, as in Malawi, for the sex industry, including pornography and paedophilia, in Europe. Tourists must also respect the religion, culture, and traditions of local communities.

Leaders of trafficking rings employ intermediaries in source countries who make contact with potential migrants, organize transport for and sometimes accompany the migrants to ensure their arrival, and/or compel compliance with the terms of the agreement between the smugglers and their victims. These syndicated groups should be distinguished from intermediaries to whom parents entrust their children and the role of the latter needs to be re-examined in the context of Africa’s complex cultural reality. Trafficking occurs when: a migrant is illicitly engaged (recruited, kidnapped, sold, etc.) and/or moved either within national or across international borders, and intermediaries (traffickers) during any part of this process obtain economic or other profit by means of deception, coercion, and/or other forms of exploitation under conditions that violate the fundamental human rights of migrants. Culturally, social and economic transactions in many SSA societies are conducted in the presence of a third party, an intermediary, who is paid in kind or cash. In Mali, for instance, many of the presumed traffickers were found by Castle and Diarra (2003) to be simple intermediaries operating within a cultural system that demands payment for services.
Cooperation between governments is crucial to combating trafficking, more so because strict immigration policies in receiving countries can actually fuel markets for trafficking and smuggling and irregular migrations. Cooperative research and information sharing between countries of origin and destination, and increased operational contact between law enforcement authorities of recipient countries to share information on numbers and nationalities of trafficked persons, smuggling routes, and methods of interdiction should be encouraged. Cooperation between researchers in origin and destination countries with focus on tracer studies of trafficked victims is desirable. Above all, linkages between countries of destination and origin must be established and reinforced, and information sharing is a major component of cooperation.

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

Africa’s human trafficking and smuggling map is complicated, involving diverse origins within and outside the region. Little was known until recently about the dynamics of this trafficking. Today, analysts are looking into trafficking in children (mainly for farm labour and domestic work within and across countries); trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation mainly outside the region, and trafficking in women from outside the region for the sex industry of South Africa.

In West Africa, the main source, transit, and destination countries for trafficked women and children are Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. Trafficked children are recruited through networks of agents to work as domestic servants, in informal sectors, or on plantations. Parents are often forced by poverty and ignorance to enlist their children, hoping to benefit from their wages to sustain the family’s deteriorating economic situation. Some of these children are indentured into “slave” labour, as in Sudan and Mauritania. In East Africa, young girls and women abducted from conflict zones are forced to become sex slaves to rebel commanders or affluent men in Sudan and the Gulf States. Ethiopia is a source of trafficked women to Lebanon and the Gulf States. South Africa is a destination for regional and extra-regional trafficking activities. Women are trafficked through the network of refugees resident in South Africa, and trafficked from Thailand, China, and Eastern Europe to South Africa. Traffickers have recently extended the destinations of children to the EU, especially the Netherlands, UK, and beyond. Women and children are trafficked to Europe (Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Sweden, UK, the Netherlands) for commercial sex. Children are similarly moved in connection with domestic labour, sexual exploitation, and pornography. Trafficking syndicates obtain travel documents and visas for women and link them up with brothels abroad.
Leaders and politicians at the highest level are increasingly paying attention to human trafficking. This in part derives from the intensive advocacy by NGOs working in the subject area, and the wide media coverage of incidents of trafficking and repatriation of trafficked persons often in inhuman circumstances. The detailed account of human rights abuses and dangers to trafficked persons en route and at destination as chronicled by researchers in the case of Malawi, Lesotho, Togo, and so on provide sufficient evidence that human trafficking in the region has reached a crisis proportion and that national leaders need to take timely action to redress the deteriorating situation.

In the late 1990s, for instance, the adverse publicity on trafficking spearheaded by NGOs, activists, the media, and recently researchers in Côte d’Ivoire prompted the governments of that country and Mali to set up a commission of inquiry which led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2000 to cooperate at borders in combating child trafficking for labour, repatriation of trafficked children, detection and tracking of networks for trafficking in children.

The intensive international media coverage of 45 trafficked girls that travelled to Gabon in a ramshackle boat in 1996 with only eight surviving the hazardous journey probably prompted the Government of Togo to draft a new anti-trafficking legislation, establish committees to raise awareness, and make efforts to repatriate trafficked children. These are encouraging steps but the government also needs to address the root causes that foster child trafficking – poverty; denial of educational opportunities, especially to girls; and sustained commitment to prevention, prosecution, and protection of trafficking (Human Rights Watch, 2003). In 2000, the Government of Mali adopted a National Emergency Action Plan to combat trans-border child trafficking (Castle and Diarra, 2003). Surveillance committees organized information meetings with local communities and Transporters’ Unions who would inform their colleagues of the measures taken by the government to end child trafficking. In June 2002, a special legislation was enacted encompassing all measures for Child Protection in the country.

In Nigeria, where 25,000 nationals – 19,000 boys and 6,000 girls including trafficked children and prostitutes – were deported over the last two years from Germany, Turkey, Libya, Italy, and so on, an environment has been created to ensure the full protection and promotion of the rights of the child by the Child Rights Bill signed into law in 2003, thanks to the unrelenting efforts of local and national advocacy groups. This has fully domesticated the UN Convention on the Right of the Child. All segments of the population are being sensitized to
the Act, especially with respect to child labour, child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, and the penalty for offenders. The Nigerian National Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act approved in July 2003 criminalizes child trafficking and stipulates harsh punishment for offenders. This outcome is credited largely to the efforts of the NGO headed by the wife of the country’s vice president and others. Also, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons was set up to investigate, prosecute offenders, counsel, reintegrate, and rehabilitate trafficked persons (Salah, 2004). An anti-prostitution law was passed in September 2000 by Edo State Government in Nigeria to prohibit trafficking and prostitution in the State. Opening the Fourth Regional Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in Enugu, Nigeria in March 2004, President Obasanjo identified child labour, child trafficking, and sexual exploitation with all their attendant abuses as the greatest afflictions confronting humanity today, adding that any situation in which children are subjected to exploitative labour or sexual exploitation, with all forms of abuse and neglect, amounts to a crime against humanity.

At the subregional level, ECOWAS Foreign Affairs Ministers adopted in December, 2001 in Senegal, a Political Declaration and Action Plan against Human Trafficking which commits their respective governments to ratify and fully implement relevant international instruments that strengthen laws against human trafficking and protect trafficked victims, especially women and children. Training of police, immigration officials, prosecutors, and judges are essential components of the Plan, the aim being to combat trafficking of persons, prevent and prosecute traffickers, and protect the rights of victims (Sita, 2003). ECOWAS countries agreed to set up direct communication between their border control agencies and expand effort to gather data on human trafficking. Its Parliament has also prepared an action plan on human trafficking.

Early in 2002 in Libreville, officials from West and Central African countries agreed to a common Platform of Action to enact laws designed to protect child workers, improve the system of custody for child victims of trafficking, strengthen cooperation among governments, and establish transit and reception centres for repatriated children. As a follow-up, Benin, Mali, Gabon, and Nigeria established inter-ministerial committees to address the issue of child trafficking (Salah, 2004). Gabon has also established a National Commission to combat trafficking on children. In Benin, Togo, and Nigeria, the police have strengthened control posts along their common borders to track and repatriate trafficked children.

In eastern Africa, Ethiopia set up a consulate in Beirut to provide support for its female nationals being abused and exploited in that country. In southern Africa,
South Africa’s Law Reform Commission’s investigation of human trafficking is aimed at developing legislation to punish traffickers and protect victims. NGOs, rather than governments, are active in setting up projects for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The subdued interests of governments of southern and eastern Africa in problems of human trafficking could also be related to their perception of the subject matter – indeed, less than one-third of countries in these subregions recognized trafficking as a problem compared to 70 per cent of countries of West and Central Africa (UNICEF, 2003). In that sense also, very limited information is available on concrete efforts, if any, by governments in southern and eastern Africa to curb human trafficking through bilateral or related initiatives.

These measures are not limited to the region. In September 2002, for instance, an Africa-Europe Expert Meeting on trafficking in human beings, sponsored by the Governments of Sweden and Italy, called for a number of measures in both origin and destination countries related to: prevention and combating of trafficking and awareness-raising, protection and assistance to victims, legislative framework and law enforcement, and cooperation and coordination within and between states and regions. In Turin, Italy, one of the main destinations for trafficked Nigerian women, an outreach unit has assisted 1,250 victims, 60 per cent of them Nigerians, with practical assistance, including access to health services. Other countries of destination for African trafficked victims – Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK – are implementing a variety of such schemes.

Researchers need to refine their methodologies to ensure that they adequately capture trafficking ramifications, especially its diverse sources, causes, and dynamics. Data on the prevalence of trafficking using the number of convictions, number of complaints launched, number of victims assisted, and medical data about trafficked victims simply do not exist in the region. Collecting information on the cultural context of broader children’s work, child labour migration (internal and cross-border), and child trafficking would advance our knowledge. Above all, there is a greater need for information sharing and cooperation
between researchers in origin and destination countries with a focus on tracer studies of trafficked victims.

NOTE

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