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Child Trafficking in Africa: The Need for Child-Centred Approaches

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Executive summary

About 200,000 African children are susceptible to trafficking each year. Children are likely to be trafficked for prostitution, forced and domestic labour and early marriage. Trafficking is considered a violation of the rights of children in several African countries however, the poverty existing in households and the absence of social protection safety nets for vulnerable households, the high profits earned by traffickers for successfully delivering trafficked children to user destinations, and the low conviction rates for trafficking offences across African countries, have caused child trafficking to persist.

Moreover, frameworks for addressing the issue of child trafficking are not grounded in the social, cultural, political and economic realities of the people vulnerable to the practice. It is expected that policies for addressing child trafficking should be based on the lived experiences of African children within the contexts of trafficking in their individual countries; rather than uniform frameworks for addressing trafficking or protecting children that are based on western notions of children, childhood, child protection and development.

To ensure that policies adopted to combat child trafficking target and are suited to the needs of children and families vulnerable to the practice, this policy brief recommends that African countries adopt a child-centred approach that is built on encouraging the participation of affected children in decision making on trafficking, and reinforces the need for evidence-based research with trafficked children themselves that provides useful information for policy making.

Policy goals

This policy brief:

- Amplifies the role of African governments in curtailing incidents of child trafficking in their countries by adopting anti-trafficking frameworks that are grounded in the realities of trafficking in their countries;
- Focuses on understanding the reasons for children's participation in trafficking. It is expected that when approaches for addressing a problem are rooted in the social, cultural and economic terrains of the country, their effectiveness in addressing the problem is reinforced.
- Promotes the need for platforms for engaging in discussions with trafficked children that are aimed at understanding children's needs, creating policies that are flexible enough to address trafficking and empower vulnerable children and their parents.

Significance of the issue being addressed

The need for alternative approaches for addressing child trafficking in Africa is significant because of:

- The rising cases of trafficking across the continent, and the need for awareness of the issue;
- That child trafficking exposes many children to exploitative practices that jeopardise their access to a safe and secure future.

Canada's interest in the issue

- Child trafficking is a major problem in several developing areas, Africa included.
- Children constitute more than 50% of Africa's population, and are the poorest and least educated segment of the population.
- The government of Canada's key interest is ensuring that when it provides assistance to partner African countries, that such assistance is channelled into priority areas that enhance the wellbeing of citizens.
- This briefing paper also recognises that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) initiated the Children and Youth strategy to amplify its efforts at improving the lives of children and youths in developing countries. The Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) new strategy is intended to contribute to the sustainable development of children and youths along three paths: child survival, including maternal, new-born and child health; access to a quality education; and safe and secure futures for children and youth.
- The priority area relevant to this briefing paper, securing the future of vulnerable children and youth, is attainable through evidence based research that puts trafficked children at the centre of research and policy decisions that will guarantee access to quality education, housing, good food, health care and future employment.

Policy Recommendations

- This policy brief acknowledges that policies for addressing child trafficking should be based on the lived experiences of African children and within the contexts of trafficking in their individual countries, rather than uniform frameworks for addressing trafficking or protecting children that are based on western notions of children, childhood, child protection and development.
- This policy brief also recommends that African countries adopt a child-centred approach which is based on empowering trafficked children to:
 - Ensure the provision of social, economic and political frameworks for children's development that are built on accountability and commitment of states to adapting International Conventions in ways that will enhance the wellbeing of African children;
 - Ensure that trafficked children and their parents participate in decision making about situations affecting them. Since it is difficult to reach trafficked children, it is important to listen to the experiences of those that are 'rescued' to understand: why they were involved in trafficking in the first place; how to keep other children out of trafficking; how to create safer spaces for discussion

with children; how to offer follow-up discussions and incentives for some period after children are 'rescued' from trafficking;

- Ensure that interventions for combating child trafficking are built on local interpretations of the practice (which can be discerned in discussions with children and their family members), and understanding of motivations for African children's participation in the trafficking activity.
- The briefing paper dwells on the need for policies that are founded on evidence-based research with trafficked children. While conceding that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has engaged in numerous projects with children world-wide, there is still limited focus on trafficked children and child-centred anti-trafficking strategies, especially in Africa. Moreover, this paper enjoins CIDA to emphasise that any projects it supports in developing countries should invest in reducing such unaddressed triggers as limited access to health, education, housing and employment that reinforce the exploitation of African children.

Introduction: Creating a safe world for children

When world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration which established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 as the new hope for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, fighting deadly epidemics, providing accessible education, improving gender equality and developing a global partnership for development, by 2015, the future appeared more secure for such marginalised groups as women, children and the elderly in developing countries (EU Insight, 2010). However, three years to that global promise, in relation to poverty reduction, estimates show that about 1 billion children and adolescents below 18 years out of a global population of 2.2 billion do not have guaranteed access to such basic services as housing, health care, education, food and drinking water (UNICEF, 2009). All the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are closely linked to the situation of the world's children, therefore progress made in attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is linked to progress made in ameliorating the condition of children. Though the MDGs are considered an encompassing step towards recognising the situation of children worldwide, the proposed policy brief holds that the MDGs only address a limited part of the everyday realities of children in developing countries by failing to target the violence and exploitation that a large percentage of children living in these areas face.

Every year, 275 million children either witness or are victims of domestic violence or abuse, 126 million children work in exploitative and hazardous situations, while 1.2 million children are victims of child trafficking with 32% of this number coming from Africa (UNICEF, 2006; Save the Children, 2007). In the African region where the policy brief is focussed, girls are more susceptible to trafficking because of cultural, class, gender and ethnic issues that marginalise female children (Elabor-Idemudia, 2004). For other children, poverty existing in households (Dottridge, 2002; Ebigbo, 2003; Hope, 2005; Truong, 2008), the expectation that children are likely to earn higher wages by working away from home (Dottridge, 2002), and problems of enormous debts, fending for large households and homelessness (Elabor-Idemudia, 2003; Truong, 2008), are factors contributing to children's susceptibility to trafficking in Africa.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) initiated the Children and Youth strategy to amplify its efforts at improving the lives of children and youths in developing countries. The Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) new strategy is intended to contribute to sustainable development of the children and youths along three paths (CIDA, 2011) summarised as follows:

1. *Child survival, including maternal, new-born and child health*

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) recognises that in developing countries, about 7 million children below the age of five die each year from diseases that compromise the health of children and their mothers. CIDA is therefore concerned with supporting efforts that focus upon increased access to health, sanitation and clean water for women and children in developing countries.

2. *Access to a quality education*

A main objective of CIDA is supporting initiatives that ensure the increased enrolment of children, especially girls, in schools, and the provision of high standard education that is aided by the availability of teaching materials, basic infrastructure, qualified teachers and a competitive curriculum.

3. *Safe and secure futures for children and youth*

More related to this policy brief is CIDA's awareness that a large number of children in developing countries are victims of diverse forms of exploitation and victimisation, child trafficking included. Based on this awareness, CIDA is interested in projects targeted at providing a safe and secure future for children and youths in developing countries.

To ensure that African children have a secure future, situations that contribute to their exploitation have to be addressed which in several countries are attributed to: disproportionate access to health, economic, social conditions and practices that ignore the rights of children. This policy brief builds on the notion that the current exploitation of children is attributable to unexplored power relations and structures existing in society that allow children to be dependent on 'others' who profit from the cheap nature of their work or services (Agbu, 2009; De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). The call to secure

a safe future for children also amplifies Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that states that children's voices should be more vocal in deliberating about the nature of programmes that affect them (Cousins and Milner, 2007; James, 2007; Spyrou, 2011; UNCRC, 1989). To understand the needs of affected children, it is crucial that policy makers avoid engaging in selective attention to voices; the more vocal voices should be those of children exposed to the present risk, rather than having adults or their more privileged peers advocate for what is 'good' or 'right' for them (trafficked children).

Based on these observations, this policy brief recognises the need for a child-centred approach for addressing the problem of child trafficking in Africa that is built on empowering trafficked children and adopting evidence-based research that will inform policy decisions for responding to the problem. A comprehensive outline is adopted that will look at the nature of interventions for addressing trafficking in Africa, the extent to which children contribute to these interventions the challenges facing the adoption of a child-centred approach, and offer recommendations for achieving a child-centred framework for protecting children from trafficking in Africa. It is hoped that information derived from research with affected children will provide data that will assist governments in shifting focus from listening solely to practitioners and researchers, to listening to trafficked children themselves.

This policy brief concedes that CIDA conducts research on such projects as education and peace building for children affected by armed conflict, and strengthening municipal capacity for portable water provision, where child participation strategies are adopted to give children a sense of ownership in projects affecting their well-being (CIDA, 2006). It is also acknowledged that CIDA enforces the rights-based approach to programme formulation that encourages the active participation of children in development interventions affecting their wellbeing. The need for active participation of children in programme design is based on the recognition that:

All of CIDA's partners in developing countries are Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have accepted a legal responsibility to promote and protect the right of children to participate in decisions that affect them. Values, beliefs and practices around child participation exist in every country and vary from one culture to another. CIDA strives to reconcile respect for cultural integrity with the realization of human rights. CIDA's strategy for promoting child participation is to engage local stakeholders in policy dialogue, and to support local partners in determining the most appropriate institutional, cultural and social application of their international human rights commitments. (CIDA, 2006, p. 3).

While recognising CIDA's role in enhancing the safety and welfare of children in developing countries, this briefing paper maintains that apart from armed conflict, there are diverse means through which African children are trafficked for exploitation, and CIDA needs to work with partners in African countries to design country and trafficking-type specific strategies for addressing these problems.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Children's Voices

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognises the importance of children's voices and enjoins leaders to ensure that their laws or policies build on three core principles in addressing problems facing children:

- Recognising that children have several needs relating to safety and security that may be different from the needs of adults;
- Recognising that the family is deemed the best protective environment for ensuring a child's development;
- Recognising that government and other adults in the society are expected to provide incentives for protecting and working in the best interest of children.

The CRC recognises that children just like other people in a society have opinions and ideas about issues affecting their existence; children know what they want, and children want to contribute to policy decisions that pave the way for the realisation of their dreams. This is not different from the aspirations of adults. However, some researchers or development workers may equate the need for

child-centred approaches with a call to liberate children from their present downtrodden situations without knowing or assessing the situation of children, knowing the choices children have or assessing the reasons children adopt their present choices, and without determining if the alternatives they are offering will be acceptable to children. In other words, discussions on the rights of children are often disguised in other discourses that may not be favourable to children and their needs.

In this policy paper, I accept that though the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises giving children a voice in discussions affecting them, attention should be given to allowing children, in consultation with their parents, to make decisions about these rights within their cultural values and their place or level of acceptance of cultural practices or beliefs operating in their locality. This can only be done by reflecting on trafficked children, their environment and their vulnerabilities within this environment.

Reflecting on the condition of African children within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Children are trafficked for different reasons in different parts of Africa. In West and Central Africa, boys are recruited to work in tea, cotton and cocoa plantations and mines, while girls are trafficked for forced marriage or domestic work (UNICEF INNOCENTI, 2003). In North and East Africa, girls are likely to be trafficked for forced prostitution, domestic labour and early marriage, and boys to work on farmlands, plantations or the livestock or fishing industries (UN.GIFT, 2008). Trafficking is considered a violation of the rights of children in several African countries, however, the poverty existing in households and the absence of social protection safety nets for vulnerable households, the high profits earned by traffickers for successfully delivering trafficked children to user destinations, and the low conviction rates for trafficking offences across African countries have caused child trafficking to persist.

When reflecting on the conditions of children that are vulnerable to trafficking in Africa, the focus usually leans towards how the rights of children are infringed upon and debates about whether the participation of children in trafficking is either right or wrong. The debate about whether child trafficking is right or wrong is usually contested in African countries on several levels. There are those who will ask if what children engage in is either trafficking or just the normal migration that has been practiced in African countries for which the literature has given so many labels: child fostering, child migration, or even a form of socialisation of children (Bourdillon, 2009; Dougnon, 2010:). Still others will ask if it is wrong for children to knowingly move to another location or seek alternative sources of income to avoid starvation due to severe poverty. Some may also question the morality of whether child trafficking is right or wrong in the absence of choices provided by the state to cater for disadvantaged children. Debates about whether trafficking is right or wrong will also differ with the form of exploitation children are exposed to by the trafficking activity - labour or sexual exploitation. Currently, it is difficult to understand what trafficking activity is considered right or wrong. For instance, when children engaging in an age-old tradition of migration for labour or child fostering, practiced in several African countries like Mali and Benin (Dougnon, 2011; Howard, 2011), are 'rescued' by anti-trafficking commissions and counted as victims of trafficking, people who consider the cultural practice beneficial to the social and educational development of their children may contest the 'rescue' of migrating children. Benin went further to set policies in place criminalising the practice of child fostering in the country that met with a lot of local opposition (Howard, 2011).

The issue of children's involvement in decisions about their wellbeing should not simply focus on notions of taking the child's best interests into consideration, but to extending the discussion to provide room for understanding what children need, how children prioritise these needs, the factors that condition the way these needs are prioritised, and the social networks that children maintain that determine how these priorities are made. It is insufficient to claim that policies are taking the child's best interests into consideration; the obligation should be to determine what meets the best interest of African children. The major factors should fit the best interest of children within their everyday lived experiences to establish if choices that children make are motivated by the circumstances that they live

in – which for trafficked children may be dire situations of poverty. Considering the circumstances that these children cope with, the protection discussed in the UNCRC may be difficult to enforce with the large number of African children that are unable to benefit from the safety net and protection provided by adults and government policies (Montgomery, 2002; Veeran, 2004;). Then again, the idea of working in the best interest of children could also be a ploy to silence the voices of trafficked children and prevent their participation in decision making processes.

Africa: Interventions for protecting children from trafficking

Protecting children from harm has been the focus of development and policy debates that have inspired national and international conventions for addressing the many exploitative or harmful situations that children contend with (Boyden and Levison, 2000). Restricted focus on the vulnerability of children to trafficking is evident in the three dominant frameworks for looking at trafficking: (1) The morality framework, which is mainly focussed on trafficking for forced prostitution without attention to other forms of trafficking; (2) the violence against women framework, which builds on the exploitation of women by a male-dominated world; and (3) the law enforcement framework, which combats trafficking by seeing it as an international crime and enjoining countries to implement stricter border rules to prevent illegal migration (Ray, 2006). These trafficking frameworks are adult-focussed and only female children trafficked for prostitution can fit within any framework. Further, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, also known as the Trafficking Protocol and which has been ratified by forty-three African countries, builds on the law enforcement framework (Afrique Avenir, 2010; Ray, 2006). The absence of child-focussed frameworks could be because children are not of the legal working age, children's work is invisible, meaning that children are not on the official pay-roll of any organisation, and because children are not recognised as officially migrating either for work or for other forms of exploitation to which they are exposed. Without a child-focussed framework, how can trafficking experiences and situations peculiar to children be effectively handled? When children are fitted within adult frameworks, the peculiarities of their situation are silent because these frameworks do not reflect their age, gender, ethnic background, level of education or socio-cultural background, or how these factors contribute to their trafficking while other children are safe at home or in school.

In the absence of specific frameworks addressing the trafficking of children in Africa, two common approaches for protecting children, namely the human rights and rescue based approaches, borrowed from western approaches to the problem and used globally, have been built into Africa's anti-trafficking approach.

First, most interventions for protecting children from exploitation are built on the human rights approach which is amplified by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). All African countries except Somalia have ratified this convention (Blanchfield, 2009), indicating that they are willing to accept the provisions contained in this convention as a basis for designing policies and laws aimed at promoting the protection of children within their territories. Even with this ratification, it is difficult to protect children within the provision of these conventions. Based on regional, religious, cultural and ethnic differences existing between Africans, several questions are raised about enforcing certain provisions in the CRC, especially those pertaining to discriminatory attitudes towards girls and contesting the claim that international law should automatically become domestic law (Nundy, 2004). It will be difficult to enforce the rights of female children to be protected from early marriage within religious and cultural settings that sanction it. For example, based on cultural, political and religious factors, Nigeria is only able to promulgate the Child Right Acts into law in 24 out of 36 states (Amalu, 2010). Also, statistics indicate that 65,000 Ugandan children were married in 2005; while 40% of African children are married before the age of 18 (UBOS, 2006; UNFPA, 2005). How do children fight to uphold their rights without the support of family members, the community or religious and cultural establishments existing in their locality? Based on these factors that reinforce infringements of children's rights, it can be argued that if children are recognised as having rights by key members of the society, it will be irrelevant to lay emphasis on their protection. Moreover, children cannot be protected

if the social, cultural, political and religious factors that cause their abuse are not identified and addressed. The implication then is that children need to be treated as being part of a larger system; this is achieved by treating children, their situations, and vulnerabilities, strong points and social contexts as one influencing package. There is also the tension concerning to what extent children can enjoy the rights assigned to them in international agreements when the conditions operating in their countries cannot ensure that these rights are enforced. Then again, the majority of children vulnerable to trafficking are uneducated, so do not know their rights, and it may not occur to their parents that children have rights which should be respected.

Despite this attention to the diverse exploitation that children face and the strategies for attending to them, debates still persist about the feasibility of using a universal approach to address problems faced by children across several localities. When international standards are interpreted using this narrow lens, it becomes questionable if the problems children face are adequately understood to detect the symptoms and prescribe fitting remedies. Also, resources are wasted in resource-strapped developing countries when solutions from elsewhere are either borrowed or imposed on them for curtailing the problem of trafficked children in Africa that will be rejected by the children (and their families), or are unlikely to reach the children the policies intend to help. There should be questions about adopting international standards for addressing problems within African countries because there are marked differences between western and non-western countries in terms of economic, social, cultural and geographic problems that will affect the developmental needs of children in these locations (Boyden and Levison (2000). If these differences across countries are recognised, why should international standards be uniform?

Second, interventions for addressing child trafficking also build on the fact that children are helpless, are victims of exploitative practices, and need to be 'rescued' from their present exploitation by adult members of the society (Bissell, Boyden, Cook and Myers, 2008). Do children need to be rescued? Bourdillon (2009) deliberates on this question in his work with child domestic servants:

Many children throughout the world voluntarily take up and remain in this form of employment. Although the rich often assume that they know what is best for the poor, development studies show that the views and judgments of the poor should be taken seriously. Similarly, although adults often assume that they know what is best for children, children's perspectives often show insights that adults miss. If so many children and their families opt for this kind of situation, perhaps it has benefits for children that might at least sometimes override the hazards (p. 5 - 6)

Again, the situation of children and the options available to them have to be understood before missions aimed at 'rescuing' the exploited child are devised. It is difficult isolating the problems children face without recognising children's need to function within a social environment that influences their smooth development and relationship with family and peers. Also, children's agency needs to be acknowledged - which is absent in the 'children as victims in need of rescue approach' to child protection. The treatment of children as victims in need of rescue, exposes children to more vulnerability, especially when children observe themselves as earning labels of 'helpless,' or 'victims,' they unconsciously accept these labels, gradually losing their agency and increasing their dependence on a society that may not provide desirable options for moving out of their present state of dependency. It is difficult to understand how children can also be rescued without contact with their parents or even knowledge of the social networks that children maintain that inform the decisions they take. The 'rescue' approach dominates and has global approval because most anti-trafficking efforts are partly funded by advanced countries who believe that 'rescue' is the best option for children. The 'rescue' of children fails to recognise poverty evident in families and the lack of alternatives available to families whose children were trafficked for exploitative work.

Based on the absence of a framework that specifically addresses the situation and experiences of children within the trafficking discourse, this briefing paper suggests an alternative lens for looking at child trafficking - the child-centred approach. The child-centred approach, unlike previous approaches, builds on the premise that the solution to trafficking as it relates to children cannot be alienated from

their real-life experiences of trafficking and the decision making processes leading to their involvement in it. Previous anti-trafficking interventions are designed without the input of vulnerable children and parents, as children are perceived to be innocent victims of exploitative processes that they may not understand or have control over.

The idea of a child-centred approach is not essentially a discussion of children's voices but the recognition that the level of acceptance placed on the voiced expressions of children rests to a large extent on African policymakers' understanding of the place of these rights in the interconnected processes of African children's childhood and development. Intrinsicly, the intention is not simply about bringing children into a discourse so we are lauded as promoters of the idea of social justice as it relates to children. The approach mostly recognises that children, especially marginalised children, are reasoning human beings that understand that the world they live in is different from that of others their age and they have to constantly strive to withstand the situations in that world. Children that can exhibit such resilience in the face of adversity are not passive recipients of interventions that do not address the realities in which they live. Such children should be actively involved in contributing to the debates that depict their social reality. That is social justice.

A look at the child-centred approach

The child centred approach acknowledges that adults do not have all the answers to problems that children face and nudges children toward identifying their problems, the triggers of their problems, and encourages their cooperation in identifying solutions to these problems. By adopting this approach, children are empowered with enduring coordination and analytical skills that enhance chances of a safe and secure future for them. Also, the child-centred approach puts children at the centre of discussions about their needs by:

- Encouraging the participation and contribution of children in decisions about services and projects for their wellbeing;
- Recognising the role of the dynamic political, economic, social and cultural contexts in which African children live on their growth and wellbeing;
- Celebrating children's agency and the effects of culture, beliefs and values on children's identities and outlook;
- Recognising that children have reasons for the decisions they take and providing a forum for children to express themselves;
- Recognising that parents, family members, peers, community members, teachers, social workers, care givers and community practitioners who work alongside children during their play, work and rest situations play essential roles in children's lives.

It is anticipated that when policy makers uphold the use of child-centred approaches, children are likely to voice other factors increasing their vulnerability to trafficking that are different from the poverty, the ignorance of parents, household income and other factors that have been highlighted in trafficking literature.

The child-centred approach also challenges the need for research to be extended to include government and policymakers charged with designing policies that influence children's lives to interrogate their dismissal of the rights of children to be involved in decisions about their welfare (Bissell et al., 2008). Children should not be seen as passive recipients of rights that society grudgingly hands out to them. Such rights include: the right to food, health, water, shelter, and education, which a large number of African families cannot afford as evident in the high poverty statistics across the African continent. It is crucial to understand what children have and can contribute to approaches for addressing their problems.

CIDA funds several projects in developing countries. Recently, particular concern has been placed in assisting 10 countries that have confirmed their potential for advancement in maternal, newborn and child health. The 10 countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania (CIDA, 2012). Nevertheless, this policy brief maintains that CIDA should enjoin partner African countries to adopt child-centred approaches that recognise that

children are not alone in mapping out their future, that relevant others in children's lives (parents, extended family members, peers, teachers, and the state) contribute to decisions about policy frameworks and alternative paths that children follow in determining their future. This is achieved by adopting my suggestion of a ten step child-centred strategy that involves:

1. Clearly indicating the child targets or beneficiaries of anti-trafficking programmes;
2. Making children key participants in initial deliberations about issues affecting them;
3. Involving adult partners (parents, teachers, community workers) that live or work closely with vulnerable children in the deliberative process;
4. Understanding the position of vulnerable children in the affected African country;
5. Understanding the gender motivators reinforcing child vulnerability in the affected African country;
6. Understanding the aspirations of vulnerable children;
7. Understanding impediments in meeting the goals or aspirations of vulnerable children;
8. Providing alternatives to the exploitation that children experience in African society;
9. Designing legal frameworks that identify and protect children from the victimisation and exploitation they currently experience; and
10. Enforcing programme evaluations that will support and enhance legislative frameworks for trafficked or vulnerable children.

Another thing to recognise is that with a child-centred approach, there are bound to be changes or infringements to the interests of those who benefit from the exploitation of children. Once children contribute to the discussion on child trafficking and highlight the factors that increase their vulnerability to the practice, many people in society will cease to benefit from the unpaid or cheap labour offered by trafficked children. These people include the working class lady who ceases to have a house-help to take care of her children and household while she is at work, or the shop owner who loses her young shop attendant that is prepared to receive the lowest wages for endless hours of service.

The child-centred approach, unlike other approaches, does not shy away from stating that children contribute to the economic and social development of different local and global economies - rather it recognises this early contribution of children as problematic and seeks to address its occurrence by including children in the discourse to emphasise that policy making and the decisions guiding them should be blended with the everyday experiences of those experiencing the problem. In other words, the child-centred approach reinforces the idea that evidence-based policy making should be extended to apply to issues affecting children.

Challenges in adopting the child-centred approach in Africa

There are obvious reasons to hesitate before advocating for a child-centred approach to addressing child trafficking. The hesitation stems from the fact that society opposes the involvement of children in decision making (Veeran, 2004). There is also the hesitation that there will be clashes between cultural, religious and social values of the people by consenting to the adoption of a child-centred approach. One may wonder why this hesitation exists. Interventions for addressing child trafficking in Africa have been based on western conceptions of the problem and the adoption of western interventions which are sold as being built on a global acceptability template¹ and ultimately used to address child trafficking in the South. Moreover, the use of interventions borrowed from outside are also contestable and may create conflicts due to differences in contextual differences which policymakers did not take into consideration before implementation. Why then should support be given to western interventions and minimal support given to interventions that will introduce the voices of African children and their families who live the experience that is being addressed?

¹ Is there a specific strategy that can combat child trafficking in countries across different continents? In the first instance, when trafficking frameworks are built on morality, law enforcement and labour-based frameworks, children have not had their roles or what embodies their identification as young people clearly highlighted in any one framework. Even if children are identified in a framework, these frameworks should be modified to suit the peculiarities of children of diverse cultures and ethnic orientations as they manoeuvre exploitative practices in their countries of origin.

The intention of the child-centred approach advocated in this policy paper is one that tries to relive children's experiences with trafficking by conducting research that expresses the reasons and consequences of children's involvement in trafficking, the options open to children, how available or unavailable other options are for children, and what children need to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking. Child-centred approaches are intended to make children the beginning, middle and end of attempts to understand their problem, and situate solutions to the problem with contributions deliberated upon with children in mind to ascertain that eventual solutions suit their peculiar situations.

The major challenge in adopting this approach is that the recognition of children's voices may appear to challenge the power relations existing in society (Bissell et al., 2008), especially the old belief that children should be seen and not heard. This recognition will upset the previous order in society because one of those in the voiceless category will then be seen to struggle for decision making with major authorities at local, state and federal levels. This has not been a comfortable trend in advanced countries and may be more uncomfortable to accept in developing countries. There is also the tendency that, as with other power situations in society, some other interest groups may have their own hidden agenda and the idea of propagating children's rights may only be a tool to advance this agenda, which in the end may not be in the best interest of children. This tension in giving a voice to children will persist because of society's belief that children are still maturing and their judgement may not be trusted on certain issues, especially when they are those such as participation in sex trafficking that could be traumatic for children. In such situations, it is expected that adults, parents, guardians and the state will act as gatekeepers, speaking on behalf of children and legally deciding what is in children's best interest.

Whatever the concession of proponents or opponents alike, the advantages in adopting the child-centred approach far outweighs the disadvantages because it introduces a new era in African development discourse in relation to children, and emphasises that we cannot ignore the voices of children if we want to solve the problem of child trafficking in Africa. It introduces the freshness of children's voices, allows new perspectives for understanding the needs and preferences of children, presents a better understanding of African childhood and children and society's place in this childhood, and how the totality of these actors affects the decisions children make at different stages in their growth or development as different from children in the western world.

Recommendations: making the child-centred approach work in Africa

Presently, it will be difficult to talk about ensuring a safe future for African children without understanding how to enforce children's rights, how to get society to acknowledge that children have rights that need to be protected, what protection means in relation to children, and what categories of abuse or situations children should be protected from. It cannot simply be said that children need to be protected without recognising the context in which children live. Parents and communities within these contexts may even question the rights of outsiders over their children. In Africa, parents and extended family members are the people recognised as guardians for children; adopting a new form of protection that alienates these known or familiar guardians may face some opposition. What children should be protected from should be clearly defined and again modified to suit the needs of individual African countries, rather than simply adopting the broad range of practices - societal threats, abuses and circumstances falling within factors that children need to be protected from - as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There should also be clarification about factors contributing to the loss of this protection that is essential to the healthy development of children. Knowing the triggers of children's lack of protection is important in designing interventions for a secure future for children. For now, several factors contribute to the exploitation of children, and the exploiters of children could be children themselves, due to peer pressure or the need for survival, parents, society, and the capitalist system that African children function in. Child care practitioners, researchers and policy makers should be ready for debates arising from diverse views on the best way to offer protection to children arising from equally diverse participants. The discourse on the protection of children will also uncover the voices of both proponents and opponents that will show the evident power

relations existing in society that reinforce the marginalisation of children and worsen their exploitation by the same people who see them as helpless and in need of protection.

Before advocating for the application of a child-centred approach to trafficking in Africa, policy makers have to look at the current situation of the problem, and this entails looking at the extent to which children and their parents are active in the design of interventions. The intention is to ensure that the voices of African children that are either involved in trafficking, were 'rescued' from trafficking, or are susceptible to trafficking are taken into consideration in the design of anti-trafficking interventions. It is insufficient to say that children are young and, as such, cannot handle the enormous task of securing a safe future for them. If society perceives that children are old enough to be trafficked and exploited in diverse forms, then society should perceive children as responsible enough to take up roles that will ensure that their rights and wellbeing are safeguarded.

For children to be protected from exploitation across African countries, policymakers should initiate research that provides feedback on the success or failure of child protection interventions used for trafficked children across Africa. At present, there is little evidence on these, because current child protection interventions are neither monitored nor evaluated for their impact on the children that they seek to protect. The platform for monitoring and evaluating the impact of child protection interventions on trafficked children will be unsuccessful if research with affected children remains isolated from the effects of a child's social network on that child's situation, and the impact of all these on the remedies that children seek to address their problems. Without policymakers understanding the importance of these associations to a child's adaptation, then there will be problems in understanding what rights to enforce with certain children (that will be appreciated by the children), and what forms of protection certain categories of children require.

Everyone - the media, government, parents, the community and children themselves - should be involved in the protection of children if their future is to be safe and secure (Bissell et al, 2008). The involvement of diverse stakeholders will allow for greater input on what works for African children within the children's perception of childhood. Interventions are not to be accepted as the rule because they work in western countries. For instance, there should be explicit policies that mandate anti-trafficking organisations in African countries to discuss with rescued children about the options available to them. The intention should not simply be about rescuing children and uniting them with their families, because anti-trafficking interventions are based on rescue as well as reintegration. Policies should be flexible enough to understand if children need to go home or need a different environment where they can have access to education, food and shelter; and such discussions should be made in consultation with their family members. Moreover, different outlooks to childhood have to be taken into consideration. One has to look at the rites of passage of different peoples. Policies have to fit into how children and their families approach the socialisation process. Children may feel disenfranchised when they are prevented from working, which for some children offers a sense of fulfilment when they can contribute to family development (Bourdillon, 2009), which in turn ensures their participation, socialisation and development within the context of their locality. This means that in some societies the safety of children is manifested in their contribution to factors that further their development; the safety of children is unimportant when children are not provided with skills for becoming contributing members of their societies.

The essence of the child-centred approach is to provide a framework for policymakers to identify the triggers of children's insecurity before they exceed levels beyond which a country's resources can handle. At the moment, African countries are aware that inattention to the social, economic and educational needs of children leave them open to exploitation. This exploitation is more traumatic for female children who still retain second class status in several societies, where their wellbeing falls behind that of each male child, younger or older than themselves living in the same household. The cultural marginalisation of female children remains the major trigger of their vulnerability to trafficking and diverse forms of exploitation: prostitution, early marriage, domestic servitude and serving as baby-making machines for traffickers engaged in international adoption. This implies that

policies in African countries should lay greater emphasis on prevention by identifying at-risk families and working with community groups to sensitise the public about practices that put children at risk, and by providing safety nets to families that are conditioned on keeping female children in school and away from trafficking. Moreover, African policymakers should be sensitised to enforce laws that are non-discriminatory and promote the wellbeing of female children. Essentially, the activity called child trafficking and its predominance in African countries has links in the structures existing in societies that allow children to be exploited by others. The interventions for addressing child trafficking should not work in isolation but should be linked to specific contexts, specific peculiarities, and the impact of these on children.

Finally, policy makers charged with designing interventions for children either involved in trafficking or susceptible to trafficking will meet with opposition and chances for failure, as has been seen with previous interventions, if they place little attention on the social units children maintain and fail to recognise that children have agency which they exercise in weighing the limited options available to them in a bid to create a safe world for themselves. Considering that CIDA (CIDA, 2011) also recognises that these cases of exploitation and victimisation have roots in unaddressed issues of lack of investment in "...protection and security issues, investment in health, education and other areas [that] bring lasting improvements to the lives of children and youths" (p. 3), this policy brief also enjoins CIDA to emphasise that projects it supports in developing countries should make meaningful and visible investments in reducing these unaddressed triggers that reinforce the exploitation of African children.

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