

# CURBING THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN DAY SLAVERY IN NIGERIA VIA INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE & GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

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## Abstract

*Despite the public outcry and outright condemnation via the UN prohibition of the illicit social activity called modern slavery, it still persists across the globe. Going by the global estimates, as enunciated by Alliance 8.7, about 40 million people are enslaved world wide. These innocent and unfortunate people experience torture and all sorts of inhuman treatments ranging from forced labour, prostitution by coercion, sexual harassment on girl child including early marriages. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, many countries of the world including Nigeria are still into slavery, despite the fact that it has been outlawed. In North Korea, Global Slavery Index had it that about 2.8m people are slaves in that country. Nigeria is not an exception as it was rated highest for having the largest number of enslaved people in sub-Saharan Africa. In all these, the girl child remains the most vulnerable victim. Most of them are lured into human trafficking via slavery by trick, and at times by force. Why they fall victim most times is because of ignorance and illiteracy. They are not educated through proper means. The challenges of modern slavery are enormous and need to be addressed. Therefore, in this write-up, the researchers posited that the most effective solution for curbing this menace is through the use of indigenous languages to educate the girl child especially the rural dwellers.*

**Keywords:** Challenge, Modern day Slavery, Language education, Girl child.

## Introduction

Slavery has been an age long practice. It is as old as mankind itself as it is referred to in almost all religious historical texts known to man (Vanguard, 2017). In the Holy Bible as recorded in Genesis (15:3), Abraham had a slave woman named Hagar who bore him his first son, Ishmael. The Israelites became slaves in Egypt as the Egyptians put slave-drivers over them to crush their spirit with hard labour (Exodus 1:11). Sarah treated her slave so cruelly that she had to run away with her son. In Exodus (3:7), God saw how cruelly and wickedly the Israelites were being treated by the Egyptians and then made the following statements. "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt. I have heard them cry out to be rescued from their slave drivers..."

Slavery dates back to ancient times and has left its trace across culture and continents. Slavery exists any time a person has been recruited, transported or compelled to work by force, fraud or coercion. According to the US State Department, victims do not have the means to leave their own will. Vanguard (2017). In other words, their rights as humans are denied them and they are more or less prisoners, even worse than prisoners.

The origin of slavery can as well be chronicled back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when transatlantic traders sailed from Europe to the West Coast of Africa where they traded on both goods and humans, most times these human beings are captured and taken as slaves. They were transported to places like West Indies and other European countries where they were placed on hard, rigorous and forced labour and many of them died on the process.

In those days, slave traders mostly focused on able bodied men whom they believed would work assiduously on their tobacco, plantain or sugar plantations as the case may be. So in those ancient times, many young men with few women were victims.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are still grappling with slavery. Slavery in this era is known as modern day slavery. It can also be called neo or contemporary slavery. Though sanctions have been placed on the practice of slavery due to evils associated with it, modern day slavery seems to be even worse. Modern day slavery focuses more on girl child with its attendant challenges and atrocities.

In Nigeria, modern day slavery still rears its ugly head, with girl child being mostly affected. According to the Punch Newspaper of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Vice President Professor Yemi Osibanjo launched Nigerian initiative to end the worse form of child labour, slavery and human trafficking in the country adding that they were clear indications that modern day slavery was still prevalent in Nigeria. This illegal trade still thrives in Nigeria especially in women folk. (This Day, 2016).

The high point of this discussion therefore in to alert the Nigerian government on the danger of relegating indigenous languages. Indigenous languages can do a lot in tackling the challenges of modern day slavery especially as it affects the girl child rural dwellers in Nigeria who need them for education and awareness.

### **Girl Child and Challenges of Modern Day Slavery in Nigeria**

The dastardly notorious and barbaric act of human trafficking cum human right violation is becoming more worrisome across the globe. Child labour and slavery is on the increase. There is wickedness, greed and lust for money. People are insensitive towards other peoples' plight. These sadists who perpetrate evil on daily basis do not bother about what they do to innocent children. Statistics from ILO indicates that about 152 Million children are engaged in child labour across the world, while 40 million people are in modern slavery with another 25m and 15m engaged in forced labour and forced marriages respectively (Wikipedia, 2015). A human trafficking victim survivor, Oyinolla Solanke as was reported by Punch Newspaper (2019) said that she slept in bathroom for one week in Omar while hiding as she luckily escaped from their slave lords.

Slavery occurs in the gulagates of North Korea, on the battle fields of Iraq and Syria, and in the brothels of Eastern Europe. In Libya, there is what they call slave markets. Their victims being children most of whom are forced to fight in battle fields. UNICEF estimates that approximately 650 girls and women alive today were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in West and Central Africa. ILO also gave an update yearly estimates of modern day slavery in its ascending order, as follows: in 2005, 12.5m people were enslaved, in 2012; 21.3m people; in 2013; 29.8m people and in 2018; 45.8m people. Most of the victims are girl children.

Vanguard (2017), and This Day 2016, stated that women and girls make up 71% of all the victims. So one in every four victims of modern day slavery is a girl child. This shows that the monster known as modern day slavery is still ravaging the world despite its abrogation in 1807. It is highly regrettable.

Nigeria which is the focal point of this discussion seems as earlier mentioned to have the worst record of human trafficking via slavery across sub-Saharan Africa. Many girl children especially from North and South South/ South Eastern part of the country are denied formal education. Instead they are forced to hawk or engage in business. During the process of hawking many are either kidnapped and or tricked and raped, especially the girl child. The Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osibanjo in Punch Newspaper (2019) disclosed that available figures from the International Labour Organization (ILO) revealed that about 25% of the 80m Nigerian children under 14 years (about 20m) are engaged in one form of economic activity or the other. National Bureau of Statistics also opined that 43% of Nigerians under 17 are facing similar problems.

Also a report from Akinremi (2018) has it that as the world celebrated the International Day for the Remembrance of Slave Trade and its Abolition, Nigeria still has the highest figure for modern day slavery in Africa. According to Global Slavery Index (GSI), 2018, the population of people in slavery in Nigeria is 1,384,000 more than the total number of all other West African Countries when added together which is 1,081,000. Again the European Union has estimated that 60% of all sex workers in Italy and Belgium are Nigerian women with Benin girls ranking highest in number. In 2014, the Boko Haram Jihadists insurgent group abducted more than 200 girls in Northern Nigeria and threatened to sell them into slavery. Only God knows the fate of these innocent unfortunate girls.

According to Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod (1996), slavery is an extreme form of stratification in which the enslaved have no rights or freedom and are subjected to total control of their masters. Cicely Hamilton in Dale Spenser (1982) opined that women were required to trade their persons in return for bread. Catharine Mackinnon in Dale Spender (Ibid) brought together many of these understandings in her description and explanation of sexual harassment. According to her, social harassment works to keep women in place against their will. The abuses that women received in the past have regrettably dovetailed into the present and is even worse now.

The challenges the girl children face as far as modern day slavery in Nigeria is concerned is enormous, because these children suffer psychological trauma as their human rights are blatantly abused. Most of them are deprived formal education and they wallow in ignorance and illiteracy. The girl children also suffer gender inequality and inferiority complex.

The causes of all these are not far fetched. First might be due to poverty. People tend to look for greener pasture and most times are deceived and lured out of the country. The girl child might be deceived into going for house maid but on the long run, becomes a prostitute by coercion. According to the Global Sisters Report as was related by Jamie Vieson (2017), traffickers may use force, deception, coercion or abduction.

Another cause might be due to cultural practices whereby girl children are denied various rights like right to formal education, rights to freedom of speech and are rather forced to hawk and marry very early in some part of this country. Other causes among others include rural urban migration and large family sizes. Finally the most worrisome being lack of awareness which is supposed to be done on regular basis through the use of indigenous languages in educating the girl child; this in fact forms the basis for our next discussion.

### **Indigenous Language Education: A Requisite for Averting Modern Day Slavery in Girl Child**

According to Webster's International Dictionary, girl child is a female infant or child, or a young unmarried woman. Much have been said about the effects, challenges and causes of modern day slavery on this category of Nigeria children. These problems, challenges and menace of modern day slavery stir us in the face and we grope in the dark as to what to do. The federal government including states and local governments seem to have been disillusioned after trying so many methods to end child slavery in the country. Perpetrators design so many means to evade arrest and even when arrested, some unscrupulous corrupt officers collect bribe and release them. So, despite overtures being made by Nigeria government to end modern day slavery, it still persists. According to Jamie Vieson (Ibid), in 2003, the United Nations Convention Against Transactional Organized Crime which Nigeria was a member entered into force with a bid to prevent, end, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children. However, when records were checked, Nigeria dropped from tier 2 to tier one implying that Nigeria does not meet the US law's minimum standard set forth in the Traffic Victim Protection Act of 2000. Nigeria also failed to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons especially in girl child.

The researcher therefore tries to bring to the notice of the National Policy on Education about the necessity of employing language via indigenous languages in educating the Nigerian children. Indigenous languages should be enshrined into the education curriculum of both primary and secondary schools and use such to create awareness on the danger and evils of modern day slavery. Language is a way of communication which involves symbolic representation. Language is possibly the distinguishing characteristics of humanity and enables the transmission of culture from one generation to another. It is also a source of information, for information is power. Language is therefore not just descriptive, but is in itself action.

According to Dikenwosi and Dimejesi (2015), language is central to the sustenance of a group of people for it is the vehicle through which other constituents of culture, information and political activities are communicated. Without language, there is bound to be problem in the society, for thoughts, ideas, information and other forms of social interaction would be greatly blurred.

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge and skills, both formally and informally. Although education is life long process which takes place in a wide variety of settings, sociologists have tended to focus on the formal education process and the specialists in institution in which it takes place. It is therefore very necessary to teach indigenous languages formally in Nigerian schools: Through this, awareness will be created. Information using local languages that is also the

language of immediate environment or the language of the community will be disseminated. Of course, there should be education for all women, so that they will have good reasoning and discernment. Mary Wollstonecraft in Spender (Ibid) argued that there should be no equality between sexes, until women were recognized as intellectuals and competent, and this was one of the reasons she demanded education for women.

Women too via girl children must be socialized in order to become members of the society. Women must learn the language, meanings and signs of time if they are to describe, understand and explain the world. According to the Director General of National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking In Persons (NAPTIP), Dame Julie Okah -Donli, as reported by Akinremi (2018) ignorance and misconceptions lead many Nigerians to seek greener pastures where it does not exist. Okah-Donli further stated that awareness campaigns were being done in the rural communities where most victims were being taken from as a result of ignorance and lack of education.

If therefore, these campaigns and awareness creation are to be effectual, the language they understand must be the one to be used in educating them since most of the victims are rural dwellers. It will be a wasted effort and also huge economic loss to use foreign language such as English to embark on such all necessary and important campaigns.

Formal education must therefore be mandatory for every girl child, where indigenous languages will be employed to teach them on how to evade human traffickers and slave traders. In creating these awareness, various means such as jingles, seminars in schools, communal meetings, media such as radios and television should be used to educate them, and of course through the use of indigenous languages. If actually they are religiously adhered to, they will put a final end to the monster called modern day slavery and the girl child will have peace.

### **Recommendations**

1. Perpetrators of these evils should be brought to book and severely punished.
2. Education and enlightenment campaigns on how to discern the antics and tricks of human traffickers and slave traders should be carried out on regular bases.
3. Parents should be cautious on who comes around to offer help to their children by suggesting to take them outside country.
4. Indigenous language education should be a focal point for use in educating the masses especially the rural dwellers who are most vulnerable.
5. Teachers in their roles as academia should always incorporate all these awareness in to their teachings.

### **Conclusion**

Notable figures such as William Wilberforce, Mary Sielessor, Olaudah Eguano, Mary Prince, G.C. Oldendrop including some corporate bodies such as National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking In Persons (NAPTIP) UNESCO, United Nations, Alliance 8.7, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), International Labour Congress Global Slavery Index, UNICEF among others have made frantic efforts to end slavery. In 1838, the British government was said to have passed a bill for final abolition of slave trade. That is why August 23<sup>rd</sup> every year is set aside by UN and UNESCO to mark the international day for the remembrance of slave trade and its abolition.

No doubt also, the Nigerian government had made some efforts. But all these yield little or no meaningful results. The fact therefore still remains that Nigeria should go back to the drawing board, in order to eradicate modern day slavery totally in the society. This implies that since all other means have failed, employing indigenous languages in schools and using them to educate and create awareness becomes a *Sine-qua-non*. It is actually such an indispensable and necessary tool to combat the menace and challenges of modern day slavery in Nigeria and by so doing the girl children in this country will be spared, and of course when others are celebrating the abrogation of slavery, Nigeria too in all honesty will join. Such custom had to be abolished. Centuries had gone by times and conditions had changed. Life had taken new forms. Emotions too needed to be reformed, and everybody needs to enjoy freedom.

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