



SUFA REPORT NO 1

CHILD SLAVERY

A resource for all who are interested in understanding modern slavery in Africa



“ No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. ”

Article 4, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

This report is the first in a series of resources that will be published by SUFA on the issue of child slavery in Africa. It focuses on the issue as it affects different parts of Africa and uses the case of Benin in West Africa to deepen the understanding of anyone interested in the issue.

Part 1 explores and defines the various forms that contemporary slavery takes. The main part, Part 2, focuses on child slavery as it occurs in the whole of Africa; the extent of the problem, the countries affected, why it occurs in the first place, and its impact on children and the continent as a whole. Part 3 looks at child slavery as it occurs in Benin. The section also details the various actions taken in Benin to address the problem.

Many people think of the slave trade as “part of our history rather than our present. But the reality is slavery continues today. Millions of men, women, and children around the world are forced to lead lives as slaves”.¹ In fact, contemporary child slavery is thriving, and crimes and abuses are well known and have been extensively reported. Despite the efforts of many non-government organisations (NGOs), there are signs that the problem is worsening.

The concluding part of this report provides a review of the scale and impact of the problem. It seeks to pinpoint areas where more can be done to improve the lives of victims, and emphasises why it is so vital to address the root causes of child slavery.

“ Slavery... I didn't know that all these forms exist. I think it's largely because we aren't expecting it. It is hidden. Generally people would not believe that it is possible under modern conditions. They would say 'No, I think you are making it all up' because it's just too incredible... ”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Part 1: Definition of a slave

Anti-Slavery International uses specific criteria to define what constitutes a slave: *“Forced to work – through mental or physical threat; owned or controlled by an ‘employer’, usually through mental or physical abuse or threatened abuse; dehumanised, treated as a commodity, or bought and sold as ‘property’; physically constrained or has restrictions placed on his/her freedom of movement.”*

This definition is sufficiently broad to include the various forms that contemporary slavery takes. The fact that contemporary slavery takes various forms and affects people of both sexes and of different ages and races makes a single and simple definition of this phenomenon extremely difficult.

Examples of contemporary slavery include:

Bonded labour: at least 20 million people around the world are affected by this kind of slavery. People become bonded labourers when they take (or are tricked into taking) a loan for as little as the cost of medicine for a sick child. To repay the debt, they are forced to work long hours, seven days a week, 365 days a year. They receive basic food and shelter as ‘payment’ for their work, but may never pay off the loan. Often the ‘debt’ is inherited by successive generations.

Forced labour: this affects people who are illegally recruited by governments, political parties, or private individuals and forced to work, usually under threat of violence or other penalties.

Worst forms of child labour: tens of millions of children around the world work full-time, often in exploitative or dangerous conditions, and are deprived of the education and recreation crucial to their personal and social development.

Commercial sexual exploitation: children and women are exploited for their commercial value through prostitution, trafficking, and pornography. They are often kidnapped, bought, or otherwise forced to enter the sex market.

Trafficking: this involves the transport and/or trade of humans, usually women or children, for economic gain using force or deception. Often migrant women are tricked and forced into domestic work or prostitution.

“ Women from Eastern Europe are bonded into prostitution, children are trafficked between West African countries and men are forced to work as slaves on Brazilian agricultural estates. Contemporary slavery takes various forms and affects people of all ages, sex and race. ”

Anti-slavery International

Part 2: Child slavery in Africa

2.1. The problem

In many African countries the slavery trade has reached a point where it is impacting on the largest portion of the continent's population: children.

Children affected by this trade can be seen working all over the continent as domestic servants, market workers, and labourers in mines, factories, and on farms. Some are forced onto the streets to beg or to engage in drug trafficking, pornography, or prostitution. Some are forced to become child soldiers. Under such circumstances, the children are subject to abuse, poor nutrition, social isolation, psychological trauma, ill health, and even death.

“ In September 116 children from Benin [West Africa] were rescued from granite quarries in south-western Nigeria. Three died before they could be repatriated.”

**Daily Mail,
17 October 2003**

2.2 The extent of the problem

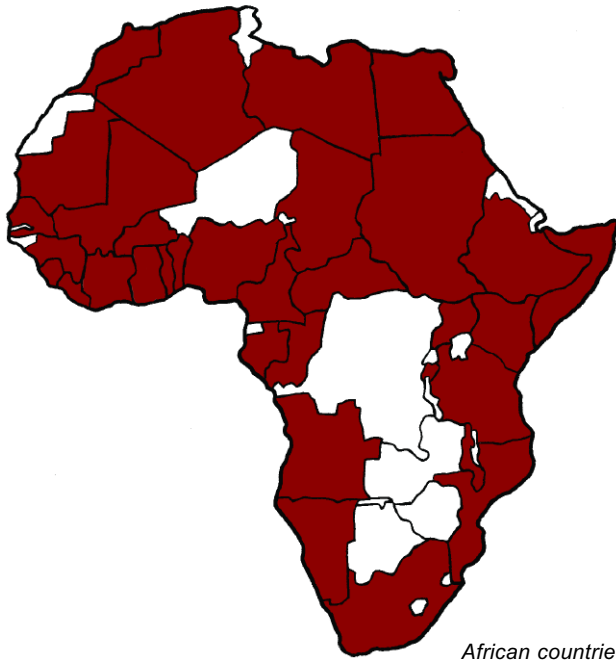
It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of child slaves in Africa. No objective figures exist. Government estimates by and large tend to be significantly smaller than those of the numerous NGOs that are fighting this inhuman trade.

There are many reasons for the differences in estimates. For example, children involved in forms of slavery, such as begging, that are practised openly, are more easily included in figures than those involved in criminal activities or in a closed environment such as private houses, brothels, and sweatshops.

Because of the difficulties of making direct contact with children that have been trafficked, figures are often based on indirect indicators, such as the number of unaccompanied children arriving into a country, and what they come to do²; but such indicators do not produce precise or comprehensive figures. UNICEF estimates that 200,000 children are trafficked every year in West Africa alone.

2.3 Countries affected

The proportion of African countries affected by the child slave trade is also striking: as many as 34 of the continent's 53 countries – almost 60% – are involved in some way. The forms slavery takes in each of these countries are diverse, and include the use of child slaves within and outside their native countries.



African countries affected by child slavery

The following countries are all affected by child slavery: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central Republic, Chad, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda.³

2.4. Receiving countries

Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Gabon, and Central Republic are notorious as the primary recipients of child slaves. These countries are increasingly becoming attractive sites for foreign investment because of the cheap labour they can provide; they are therefore countries that are comparatively wealthy and in which there are more working opportunities.

Many people from less well-off neighbouring countries choose, or are coerced by traffickers, to migrate in the pursuit of a better life. However, working conditions in these wealthier countries are often not what the migrants expect. Conditions are often harsh and wages are usually low as employers seek big profits at the expense of their workers. A UNICEF study notes that the trafficking of child workers, both within and across borders, is the fastest growing informal-sector income generating activity in West and Central Africa today.



2.5 Most affected countries

People migrate, or are trafficked from, many African countries including Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Mali.

2.6 What are the causes?

There are many factors that contribute to the difficult choices that people in these countries are forced to make including:

i) **Absence of economic opportunities**

Many families lack the means to feed their children. While it is a fundamental achievement that infant mortality rates in many African countries have dropped significantly in recent years, this has led to a rise in the number of children in poor families. In such conditions, sending children away in the hope of a better future seems a reasonable, or even necessary, option.⁴

ii) **Lack of education**

Research by the World Bank and Terre des Hommes in Burkina Faso highlights the link between a lack of available schooling and the inclination of parents to send their children away to work for others.⁵ Education is one of the means by which the vulnerability of African children to slavery is reduced. Parents and children who are deprived of education are less aware of the alternatives to the way of life they are familiar with, and less informed about the risks involved in migration.

iii) **Discrimination**

Gender and other forms of social discrimination make some children more vulnerable than others to slavery. Because of marriage-related customs, girls are often considered less deserving of education or a stake in the family's business than their brothers. In search of an alternative source of income, many young girls have only two choices: early marriage or leaving home to work, often as domestic servants. In some communities education is simply not considered to be important or prioritised.

Ethnic or racial prejudices are another contributory factor: some children are made slaves because they are viewed as lower class citizens. In addition, faith and other cultural social norms mean

that children generally are expected to be obedient and subservient; all factors which create a climate in which they can be exploited.⁶

iv) *Natural disasters and conflicts*

Children that have become orphaned because of natural disasters, epidemics, or conflicts become easy prey for traffickers.

v) *Hope and ambition*

One of the most tragic causes of migratory slavery is the genuine desire of parents to seek a better life for their children. Many African families face crippling poverty. Children are trafficked or migrate to negate the effects of poverty but child slavery rarely lifts a family out of poverty. On the contrary, it usually cuts family bonds, and deprives children of an education and safe and rewarding employment.

2.7 The impact of child slavery

i) *Immediate effects on children*

One immediate effect is that of physical violence and danger. Anti-Slavery has published a report that details testimonies of children who, while en-route to Gabon from Benin by sea, witnessed children dying and being thrown overboard.⁷ Thousands of children are reported to have drowned in unauthorised sea crossings.⁸

ii) *Long-term impact on children*

The age of a child and the type of exploitation that he or she experiences will determine the physical and psychological impact in the long-term. Most forms of exploitation undermine their self-esteem by requiring them to be subservient; children are also made to fear police and inquiring adults. Experiencing such an abusive environment, often at an early age, leaves most children with deep emotional scars.

It is important to consider not only what children experience but also what they do not: schooling, normal socialisation, and affection. Such deprivation can have the long-term effect of perpetuating poverty and increasing vulnerability to slavery.

iii) *Impacts on countries and the continent*

Child slavery has negative long-term effects on each country in which it occurs, and on Africa as a whole. It deprives many countries of their young people. Youths who could contribute to the development of their country's economy and help build a strong society are instead being enslaved, abused, and exploited for profit.

Child slavery contributes to Africa's cheap labour market and helps to cement the continent's subservient position in the global economy. Child slavery deprives Africa of its human resources. Child slavery helps to prevent Africa from building a prosperous future that is free of conflict, poverty, and suffering.

“ Numerous children reported to us the ill-treatment they had been subjected to, such as being burned with cigarettes on their bodies, slapped, insulted, made to swallow shampoo for having looked ill, and obliged to sleep outside...” ”

Terre des Hommes

Part 3: Child slavery in Benin

3.1 Country profile

Benin is bordered by Nigeria, Togo, Niger, and Burkina Faso in West Africa. The economic capital is Cotonou, and the political capital is Porto-Novo. The country's population of 6,752,669 comprises approximately fifty ethnic groups including the Fon and Aja in the south, the Yoruba in the central region, and the Somo and Peulh in the north.

Benin is primarily an agricultural country, with agriculture occupying 45% of the population and producing 40% of the country's GNP. Unemployment is widespread.⁹ The total foreign debt in 2002 was of US \$1,845 million.¹⁰ Nearly 30% of the population lives in rural areas, and household expenditure is well below the poverty line.¹¹

Benin is a former French colony, which became independent in the early 1960s. After the first decade of independence, Mathieu Kerekou became President through a military coup, and established a Marxist-Leninist regime. The main industries were state-owned.

In 1989, following nationwide riots, Kerekou accepted a transitional government, and a National Conference was held. The National Conference denounced the numerous violations of human rights, and perpetrators of major violations were brought to court. President Mathieu Kerekou was freely elected and Benin now appears to be one of Africa's leading democracies.¹²



3.2 Scale and traits of child slavery in Benin

The improvements in the political sphere have not been matched by development and stability in the economic sector. Benin is exceedingly poor, even by African standards. Its economy relies primarily on subsistence agriculture and is highly vulnerable to drought and other changes in the climate.

As this report indicates, poverty and economic instability are among the main causes of child slavery. Today, Benin is a transit hub for the trafficking of child slaves throughout West Africa. The trafficking of children from Benin to neighbouring (relatively wealthy) countries has become a booming, highly-organised business. In April 2001, a ship that departed from Benin was reported to be carrying more than 250 child slaves.

Enslaved children are denied an education and forced to work seven days a week. When they grow older, they may be discarded or escape. But with no identity papers, no family, and no funds, they often simply disappear into the margins of society.

International NGO Terre des Hommes runs a rehabilitation centre for trafficked children in Benin, caring for up to 55 children at a time. The average age of its residents is 10. The facility treats children for psychological trauma, malnutrition, and general ill-health. Since 1990, 824 victims of child trafficking have passed through the institution – 500 in the last four years.

3.3 Causes of slavery

Grinding poverty drives the supply side of Benin's slave trade. The relatively prosperous economies of Benin's neighbours drives the demand for slaves. Urban dwellers can often afford to buy a child to keep house or to help with a business. In an increasingly competitive global market, cocoa and coffee plantation owners buy slaves in order to lower their labour costs. Police and customs officials often look the other way while children are trafficked across land borders and by sea.

3.4 The process of enslavement

Some children are simply abducted off the streets, or bought from desperate parents. In a country where families live on less than \$1 a day, children can be purchased for as little as \$15. Often, slavers promise prosperity in neighbouring countries. Some impoverished parents are all too ready to believe these stories.

Slavers often exploit parent's interest in *vidomegon*, a tradition whereby village children work as servants for wealthy urban families in return for education and training. Many poor families know of children who have greatly benefited from this exchange. But children who fall into slavers' hands are trafficked into slavery in neighbouring countries. Girls are usually used as domestic servants or prostitutes. Boys often find themselves trapped on cocoa or coffee plantations, producing commodities destined for European and North American consumers. Some children are trafficked to South Africa or the Middle East.

3.5 The response of the government

i) Ratification of international conventions

The government, member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) since 1960, has ratified 26 ILO conventions. Among these, the Minimum Age Convention (setting 14 as the working minimum age) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention were ratified in 2001.¹³

The government has also ratified the Optional Protocol of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child, and on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. It has also signed the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.¹⁴

“ Child slavery contributes to Africa's cheap labour market and helps to cement the continent's subservient position in the global economy. Child slavery deprives Africa of its human resources. Child slavery helps to prevent Africa from building a prosperous future that is free of conflict, poverty, and suffering. ”

Stand Up For Africa

However, the government has not ratified the UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, and the UN International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families.¹⁵

ii) National legislation

To protect victims

Limited government funds have been allocated for the assistance victims of trafficking. There are too few structures to handle the large number of vulnerable children, and little effort has been made to provide reintegration services.¹⁶

However, the government appears to have made progress towards improving protection services for victims. During 2003, the government provided temporary housing for about 300 child trafficking victims until they could be transferred to facilities operated by various NGOs.¹⁷ In March 2004, the government also set up a national child protection committee to oversee the fight against child trafficking and the work of child protection organisations. The 15-member committee includes the representatives of several child welfare organisations, the government, and the police.¹⁸

To prevent trafficking and slavery

There is currently no law specifically prohibiting the trafficking of persons. Laws criminalising prostitution, kidnapping, forced or bonded labour, and the employment of children under the age of 14 have been used to prosecute traffickers.¹⁹ These laws are inadequate and not one trafficker has been convicted to date.²⁰

In June 2003, the Minister of State for Family, Social Security, and Solidarity held a consultation for a project to draft a law against trafficking in children. The government is currently supporting NGOs that are running anti-trafficking education campaigns targeting vulnerable children and their families.

Following an August 2003 summit on cross-border criminality, the government has made concerted efforts (in conjunction with the government of Nigeria), to fight all types of illegal cross-border trafficking, including child trafficking.²¹ Benin also has bilateral agreements on border controls and repatriation of victims of trafficking with Togo and Gabon. In addition, Benin is participating in an International Labour Organisation (ILO) trafficking project with eight other countries in the region.²²

Overall, the government appears to have engaged in the fight against the trafficking of children. In recent years it has ratified most of the international conventions addressing child slavery. It has also taken action to extend existing laws so as to make

“ Activists agree that poverty is the root cause of child slavery. Unless the government tackles the widespread poverty in Benin, it will not be able to eradicate human trafficking. ”

the prosecution of traffickers effective, and has increased its efforts toward the protection of children who have been trafficked or are vulnerable to such trade.

However, activists agree that poverty is the root cause of child slavery. Unless the government tackles the widespread poverty in Benin, it will not be able to eradicate human trafficking.²³

“ A fundamental element of an NGO's response to child slavery is to address the root causes. ”

3.6 The response of non-government organisations (NGOs)

Numerous local and international NGOs are currently working in Benin; their activities vary significantly reflecting the complex nature of the problem of child slavery.

i) Assistance

Several local and international NGOs (Défense des Enfants, Association des Villages d' Enfants, SOS au Benin, Terre des Hommes, Tomorrow Children, Care International) provide shelter, care, and basic education to children that have been trafficked. Some also facilitate family reunification.

ii) Prevention

A fundamental element of an NGO's response to child slavery is to address the root causes. This involves:

- **Enabling people to be involved** in economic activities so that they can break free of the poverty-slavery cycle. Some NGOs have established micro-credit schemes to support the most disadvantaged people, including women, and people living in rural areas.
- **Raising people's awareness** of their legal and human rights, and of the risks involved in sending children away for work. Local (AHAVA, Institut des Droits de l'Homme et de Promotion de la Démocratie, Association des Femmes Juristes du Bénin) and international (Catholic Relief Service, UNICEF, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society) NGOs are working toward this aim.
- **Education is a primary concern** for many NGOs: enabling children to go to school will not only help limit their vulnerability to slavery but will also allow them to secure employment and escape from poverty.

Part 3 includes extracts from www.iabolish.com

Conclusion

Child slavery is not simply part of our history, it is part of our present. Every year, some 200,000 children are victims of trafficking in West Africa alone, and child slavery is far from limited to this area. Trafficking directly affects about 60% of African countries.

Trafficking and slavery have a tragic impact on children. At the mercy of smugglers and unscrupulous employers and with no possibility of escape, they are completely defenceless and endure physical and psychological abuse. Such experiences, in addition to what these children are denied (education, affection, and normal socialisation) result in terrible suffering and deep psychological scars.

Child trafficking and slavery are complex issues. However, it is undeniable that the common underlying factor is poverty. Poverty prevents people from ensuring a decent future for their children. Poverty denies children of their rightful education, and of a safe and rewarding job that will help them to build a secure future.

In recent years, many African governments have recognised the problem of child slavery, and have adopted national and regional strategies to combat it. Much work is being done to introduce legislation that can be used to prosecute and punish those involved in child slavery. Inter-regional agreements have been signed to make repatriation of victims easier, and border controls have been tightened in the fight against illegal trafficking. Increased funds have also been allocated toward the assistance and protection of children who have been trafficked.

But there is much more work to be done.

The small percentage of children who are rescued usually suffer from severe trauma and poor health. Many have lost their identities and have no place to go. These children need education and skills that will allow them to lead a safe and decent life. They need support so that they can avoid the situations that made them vulnerable to slavery in the first place

Some NGOs are responding to these children's needs. In Benin, NGOs have created refuge centres, which have recently benefited from the government's increasing efforts to combat child slavery.

The work of the refuge centres is crucial but it is also vital that we prevent children from falling into the hands of traffickers and slavers in the first place. This means tackling the widespread poverty in Africa. The eradication of absolute poverty is the vital first step towards the eradication of child slavery.

“ The eradication of absolute poverty is the vital first step towards the eradication of child slavery. ”

Appendices: Press coverage

SUFA is raising awareness of, and advocating against, child slavery, which causes suffering and misery for millions of impoverished families in Africa.

Appendix 1: Daily Express 31-05-2004

26 Daily Express Monday May 31 2004

/MTX

THE office in a business enterprise unit is a world away from the glamorous setting of a fashion shoot but it's here that Elsie Nemlin works seven days a week in her bid to push for action against a plight thousands of miles away – but close to her heart.

Elsie, originally from the Ivory Coast, once worked as a model but is now dedicated to establishing a charity that will help wipe out Africa's child slave trade.

In August last year, she founded Stand Up For Africa because she felt that not enough was being done to stop children being taken from their parents at an early age and then put to work, often in dreadful conditions.

"I went to an event about the Fair Trade campaign and I realised there weren't many representatives from Africa tackling the issues about Africa," she explains.

"That's where people are suffering, particularly children, but nothing was being done about it."

Elsie, 33, has lived in this country for 10 years and previously worked with Oxfam.

Nations in the west of Africa are thought to be especially hard hit by the practice of child trafficking. Children as young as eight are taken to other countries to work as domestic servants, market workers and labourers in mines, factories and on farms.

Some are forced on to the streets to beg, or become involved in drug trafficking, pornography or prostitution.

According to a report from the west African state of Benin, around 480,000 children are part of the child slave practice in that country alone. In September last

Rescuing child slaves of Africa

**DAILY EXPRESS
CHARITY
CHAMPION**

Each week, the Daily Express examines the work of your favourite charities. This week, **MOIRA HOLDEN** meets a former model who is dedicated to wiping out the child slavery in Africa which affects thousands of families

year, 116 children from Benin were rescued from quarries in south western Nigeria. Three died before they could be taken home.

But reformers face a big task. Jedo Gliza, 15, was returned to Benin from the Nigerian quarry.

"Back home in Benin there was hardly anything to eat and no paying work to do," he explains.

"After five years working in Nigeria I had gained the trust of my boss and was earning enough to save some money. If I have the chance, I will return to the quarries."

Elsie runs the charity from a business unit in Battersea, London. "The states of Benin, Togo and Ghana are badly affected," she says. "The root of the problem is the dire poverty."

"Within the African culture, when you don't have enough resources it's OK to send your child away to another family or another person. The thinking behind it is that the child will be

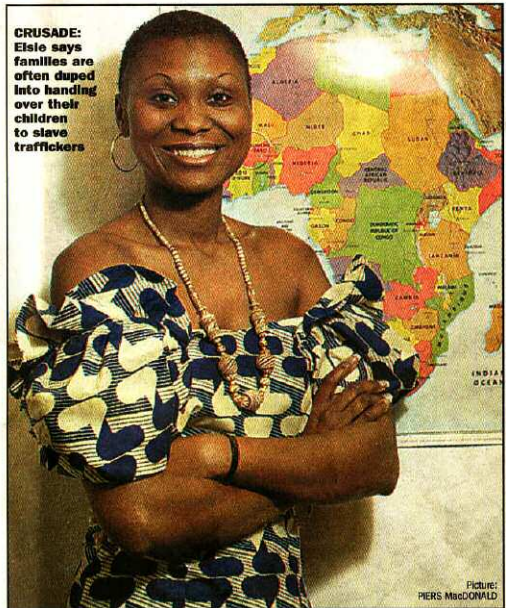
fed, get an education and a job. But traffickers take advantage.

"They often promise to send money back to the family from the child's wages. Parents are duped into agreeing because they cannot offer the child anything themselves. But the traffickers hand over some money, take the child and then no more is heard about them and no more money is ever sent. The families are too poor to do anything about it."

Elsie hopes to raise enough money to carry out a feasibility study in Benin. In the long term she hopes to address the poverty by raising money to set up small businesses so families won't feel forced to send their youngsters away. Child sponsorship and loans will also be established.

"Many children's futures have already been jeopardised by this trade," says Elsie, "and more children are under threat unless more is done today to prevent it."

CRUSADE:
Elsie says families are often duped into handing over their children to slave traffickers



For more information or to donate to
Stand Up For Africa:
WRITE: Stand Up For Africa, PO Box
46815, London SW11 5SF. Make

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ONLINE: www.standupforafrica.org.uk
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Spotlight

Fighting for an end to child slavery in Africa



Beauty cares: Former model Elsie Nemlin's Stand Up For Africa charity is working to abolish child slavery in the continent.

Deadlinepix GH0397-B

A cramped office in a Battersea business unit is about as far from the full horror of child slavery in west Africa as it is possible to get.

But this is the home of Stand Up For Africa (SUFA), a charity campaigning for the abolition of the vile trade which sees hundreds of thousands of children oppressed and exploited in Benin and Ghana.

Former model and Oxfam fundraiser Elsie Nemlin, 33, originally from the Ivory Coast, set up SUFA last August because she was so frustrated at charities and non-governmental organisations failing to address the child slavery issue.

The figures are simply astonishing. In Benin, around 580,000 children work in slavery or are taken to other countries to do manual labour, work as domestic servants and even forced into prostitution and drug trafficking.

But Elsie says the key to solving the crisis is to change the underlying cultural and financial situation in countries in west Africa, which means parents allow their children to be taken by slavery gangs.

She said: "There are so many charities working there, but the problem is still getting worse. It means more help is still needed and we in the west need to do more.

"People [in west Africa] don't really think it is so dire. It is justified by people being poor and all they think is it is another way to help the children instead of having your children sitting with you

by Charles Heymann

not having anything to give them."

She welcomes Tony Blair's Africa Commission to address the continent's crisis and description of Africa as a "scar on the conscience of the world".

She argues, however, that the solution has to come from Africans themselves.

As SUFA's slogan runs, "Just imagine the effect on a global level if all who love Africa tried to live up to that ideal".

Elsie's plans are rather less grand at this stage. She wants to go on a fact-finding trip to Benin and ~~eventually set up small businesses~~, children sponsorship and loans schemes so families will not send away their children.

But despite winning a £4,540 grant last year which helped her set up the charity and making good contacts within Benin's government, the task has been hard with only two student volunteers.

She said: "I want to appeal to people who love Africa, who want to give up their time and financially help the charity.

"Someone needs to go out there and stand up for Africa."

For more information, or to make a donation, write to Stand Up for Africa, PO Box 4815, SW11 5SF, send an email to info@standupforafrica.org.uk or visit www.standupforafrica.org.uk.

cheymann@london.newsquest.co.uk

Appendix 3: IRIN 15-07-2004²⁴

Benin: Customs Police Intercept 27 Children Being Smuggled to Work Abroad

HILLACONDJI: Benin customs police said on Thursday they had arrested four traffickers trying to smuggle 27 Beninese and Nigerian children out of the country on a minibus, first to Togo and then on to Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. The traffickers were stopped with the children aged between 6 and 12 at the Hillacondji customs post on the Togo border, 105 km west of the capital Cotonou, a customs policeman told IRIN.

"First of all they tried to tell us they were taking the children to a holiday camp in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana," explained Jean N'Tia Bokombo, a police officer at Hillacondji.

The four detainees – two from Benin and two from Nigeria – all said that the children had come with the consent of their parents, who wanted them to earn a fortune abroad. Police said some of the children had confirmed this account.

"Alphonse Vodounon, a ten-year-old from... Benin, told us that one of his father's nephews had negotiated his departure with his father, promising the boy would find a job as salesman in a big shop in Cote d'Ivoire," N'Tia Bokombo said.

He added that the 17 children from Benin would be taken back to their parents, once social services had finished their enquiries, and the 10 Nigerian minors would be handed over to the Nigerian authorities.

Child trafficking is widespread in West Africa, with children from poorer countries in the region often moving to the relatively prosperous states like cocoa-producing Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, and oil-producing Nigeria and Gabon. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), some 200,000 minors have been drawn into the illegal trade that spans West and Central Africa.

And the problem appears to be especially becoming particularly acute in Benin, where the authorities have recently increased their vigilance.

"With the growing traffic in children, we systematically question any individual travelling with children," N'Tia Bokombo told IRIN.

Last week, police intercepted eight young Togolese girls who had been smuggled into Benin to work as domestic servants. A female trafficker was arrested and handed over to the Benin division of Interpol, while the children were sent back to the Togolese authorities.

Appendix 4: IRIN, 02-03-2004 ²⁵

Benin: Government creates anti-child trafficking committee

COTONOU: The government of Benin has set up a national child protection committee to oversee the fight against child trafficking and the work of child protection organisations.

The 15-member committee includes the representatives of several child welfare organisations, the government and the police. It was set up last Friday for an initial period of 12 months.

Rita Sodjiedo-Hounton, the president of the Beninois Association of Assistance to Children and Families, is a member of the committee.

She told IRIN that the body would publish a directory of the country's child protection organisations and evaluate how effective each one had been in the fight against child trafficking.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), some 200,000 minors have been drawn into the illegal trade that spans West and Central Africa.

However, Benin is perceived to have an especially acute problem.

Child welfare organisations believe several thousand Beninois children have been acquired from poor families or seized by force to work in near slave conditions in neighbouring Nigeria. Many have been put to work there in gravel pits and quarries.

Terre des Hommes, a French relief agency whose name means 'Land of the People,' runs a rehabilitation centre for trafficked children in Benin that deals with up to 55 children at a time.

The average age of its residents is 10. The facility treats the children for psychological trauma, malnutrition and ill-health.

Since 1990, 824 victims of child trafficking have passed through the institution, 500 of them in the last four years.

Child trafficking in Benin hit the headlines in 2001 with the case of the 'Etireno', a Nigerian-registered vessel that left the port of Cotonou, carrying dozens of young boys and girls, destined to work in Central African countries. The ship was denied entry to several ports and eventually returned to Cotonou.

Appendix 5: IRIN 12-11-2003 ²⁶

West Africa: Traffickers hold thousands of children, women in bondage

Police chiefs from Togo, Ghana, Benin and Nigeria met in the Togolese capital Lome in October, to discuss cooperation in dealing with cross-border crimes. Human trafficking was top on the agenda.

They decided, among other things, to reduce immigration protocols that often hinder collaboration and rapid response in criminal cases where response speed is critical, a source who attended the meeting told IRIN.

Another meeting later in October in Accra, Ghana, brought together security officials from Ghana, Nigeria and the ILO, the US Department of State and anti-child labour NGOs to discuss how to tackle what was seen essentially as a trans-border problem.

"We need to put in place wide networks of informants to work with security services. Laws and sanctions on child trafficking need to be revised constantly in order to tackle this problem," Cornelius Dzakpasu, ILO head in Ghana, told delegates.

Mark Taylor, a US State Department specialist in trafficking of persons, said though figures on trafficking and child labour are hard to come by, an estimated 400,000 children are involved in labour across West Africa based on baseline estimates. "Trafficking is illicit. The activity is underground and it is very difficult to find and track people who have been trafficked," he told IRIN. Taylor said it had become more difficult to tackle child trafficking within the less organised sector of domestic labour. It was equally difficult to track the movement of girls within West Africa and to Europe.

Governments in all the worst affected countries in West Africa have initiated measures aimed at curbing human trafficking. Mali and Cote d'Ivoire have jointly set up a commission to study child trafficking between the two countries while Benin enacted a new law in 1995 to regulate the travel of children under 14 years. It subsequently signed an agreement with neighbouring Togo to cooperate in the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking.

Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo in July signed a new law prescribing stiff sentences, including life in prison, for perpetrators of trafficking. Ghana is in the process of passing new legislation.

All the countries in West and Central Africa have signed major international conventions forbidding trafficking of children. These include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Organisation of African Unity's African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the ILO's Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and of Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery.

Need to address poverty first

Most children and women's' rights activists say much will not be achieved towards eradicating human trafficking without first dealing effectively with widespread poverty in West Africa because poverty is the single major cause of the trade.

Sharp losses in revenue by cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Gabon have actually become an incentive for farmers to take in cheap, child labourers to cut costs, the activists say. Among the poorer countries in the region, relatively affluent countries such as Cote d'Ivoire and oil-rich Nigeria and Gabon remain attractive destinations for parents to send their children to work in the care of intermediaries.

Yinka Aderigbigbe, who has been involved in rehabilitating Nigerian women who had been trafficked to Italy, said poverty is the biggest issue exploited by traffickers to lure away young women away from their homes. "If a young prostitute can make as much money in six months of walking the streets of Italy than she would make from 10 years of working in a farm, then you can see we have an uphill task against traffickers," she told IRIN.

It is poverty that perhaps explains why 15-year-old Jedo Gliza had no regrets as he was being returned by the Nigerian authorities to Benin in October in the company of 73 other children who had been working in granite quarries.

"Back home in Benin, there was hardly anything to eat and no paying work to do," he told reporters. "After five years working in Nigeria I had gained the trust of my boss and was earning enough to even save some money. If I have the chance I will return to the quarries."

There is also the problem of conflict in several West African countries. Ghana's Interior Minister Hackman Owusu-Agyeman fears that with the region's conflicts, (such as those of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire) refugee camps teeming with poor displaced women and children provide attractive recruitment grounds for traffickers.

Appendix 6: Global Exchange, 22-10-2003 ²⁷

Cotonou (Reuters): Rescued child workers shine light on abusive trade

The scars splitting the palms of Isidore's small hands reminds him of the six months he spent crushing stones in a Nigerian quarry. The 13-year-old from the tiny country of Benin is one of tens of thousands of children sold into near-slavery across West Africa each year. The problem is especially acute in dirt-poor Benin, best known as the ancestral home of the voodoo cult.

This month, Isidore was rescued along with 73 other boys, some as young as four. Looking tired and thin, the children were handed over to Beninese officials at Krake on the 700 km-long (430 mile-long) border with oil-rich Nigeria. It was the second time in a month that Beninese children had been repatriated from Nigeria under an agreement to stop cross-border crime. In September, 116 children were sent home after they were found working in quarries.

The rescues offer rare hope in a region where childhood is a luxury many can't afford. But they also illuminate a dark trade fuelled by greed and shored up by tradition and necessity.

Isidore says he was taken from his home in the town of Za-kpota in central Benin by an uncle. He ended up breaking stones near Abeokuta in southern Nigeria: "I only did six months. I didn't get anything because the police came to get us," he said at a sports stadium in Benin's main city Cotonou where the rescued children were being cared for by UNICEF after their repatriation. Dressed in cut-off jeans and a T-shirt, Isidore sat on a bed in one of three ad-hoc dormitories, eagerly gulping down his first hot meal in a long time – rice in tomato sauce.

Whipped not paid

Benin has long been a source of cheap labour. Several hundred years ago it was dubbed the 'Slave Coast' by the European powers who set up trading posts there to ship tens of thousands of slaves to the Americas, and Haiti in particular. Now it provides illegal child labour for richer countries in the surrounding region, such as Ivory Coast, Gabon, Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea.

Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF representative in Benin, says children can be taken away by members of the extended African family – as in Isidore's case – or by professional traffickers from both sides of the border with Nigeria. "The children work in unacceptable conditions. Their parents are paid derisory sums of money," he said.

Traffickers sometimes pay as little as 20,000 CFA francs (\$35) per child. The money is sometimes supplemented with cheap gifts such as lanterns, bolts of cloth or bottles of gin. "Some say they will place the children with families who will take care of their education. Others admit they will work but say they will live in good conditions and be able to build a better future for themselves," Duamelle said.

Some parents are duped. Others know the reality of the deal – but poverty often leaves little room for compassion. The dealers can sell the children for up to 250,000 CFA francs (\$440).

Duamelle and his team visited Za-kpota this year and found a well-organised system, where children were taken away for three years at a time then given a break. After nine years, or three cycles, they were freed. Some later became traffickers. Maxime, an 11-year-old with weeping wounds on his knees, was rescued with Isidore and is from Za-kpota. He worked at the quarry for a year but his boss kept his salary: "You have to have your knee on the ground to work well," he said, explaining his wounds. "We had to be good to avoid the whip. I was whipped twice at the beginning."

UNICEF says some 200,000 children are believed to be trafficked each year in West Africa. They work on cocoa and coffee plantations in Ivory Coast and in diamond mines in Sierra Leone. Many become domestic servants.

Officials at Benin's Minors Brigade say 326 children have been repatriated or intercepted so far this year. UNICEF quotes Nigerian sources as saying thousands of Beninese children might still be exploited in Nigeria.

Non-governmental organisations in Benin are trying to persuade parents to keep their children at home. Local activists alert police when traffickers are spotted. But Duamelle admits much more needs to be done.

"We need to redouble our efforts and combine the energies of everyone – governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the media," he said.

Ending the practice will be particularly difficult because of a tradition known in Benin's Fon language as *vidomegon*, under which children from rural families are often placed with relatives in cities to work as domestic servants: "There has been a perverse mutation of the system and this leads to trafficking," Duamelle said.

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SUFA is an independent fundraising, development, and advocacy non-profit organisation. We are working with and for Africans who are striving to overcome poverty and suffering. We formed in August 2003.

SUFA believes that not enough is being done in the West to raise awareness of, and to advocate against, the unnecessary suffering endured by millions of impoverished people in Africa. We believe that these people deserve better.

SUFA's first programme tackles the issue of child slavery, which is a widespread problem across the continent.

SUFA is Africa-focused, Africa-driven and African-led. Our UK-based trustees come from various African countries. Their aim through SUFA is to tackle the continent's problems as a single, unified entity.

SUFA is managed by a voluntary Executive Director, who works full-time with the support of interns and other volunteers.

SUFA received a 'start-up cost grant' from Awards for All (a Lottery grants programme for local communities) in December 2003. This has enabled us to establish our operation with office space, fundraising materials, information resources such as this report, charity status, and UK-based volunteers. Our on-going operation is dependent on financial and 'goods in kind' donations from our partners, supporters and the general public.

SUFA seeks to establish working partnerships with other NGOs who share our vision.

SUFA is an acronym, which is pronounced like the English word suffer. Our name is a reminder of Africa's suffering. We hope it inspires her children and friends all over the world to STAND UP FOR AFRICA.

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