

No Child's Play

Are current interventions far-reaching enough to tackle trafficking of child labour in Ghana's fishery?

Worldwide, the figures on child labour are worrying. According to estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), there are about 215 mn 'child workers', many of whom work full-time, and close to 170 mn are 'trapped' in activities considered as child labour. Typically, these children are denied education, proper nutrition, recreation and other basic rights.

More often than not, the cold statistics on child labour are glossed over since they do not reveal the misery and helplessness of children. A recent child protection baseline

protect children. But despite modest gains in rescuing and rehabilitating victims of child labour and trafficking (CLaT), the problem is still widespread.

The latest response to tackling the CLaT menace is a US\$24-mn USAID-funded Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP). While the SFMP has a broader objective of contributing to food security through Ghana's fishery, it also has a key anti-CLaT component backed by an elaborate, multisectoral action plan. This is a welcome addition to the myriads of CLaT initiatives, many of which are not yielding the desired results.

Arguably, the success of the SFMP will depend, to a greater extent, how it addresses fundamental shortcomings in previous interventions on CLaT.

The number of children engaged in child labour and trafficking in Ghana is estimated to be 1.9 mn, representing 21.8 per cent of children aged between five and 17 years. The range of activities vary but the common forms include fishing, stone quarrying, cattle herding, domestic servitude as well as commercial sex exploitation, mining, portering and commercial agriculture.

Young victims

In fisheries, child labour and trafficking occurs across the entire value chain, from downstream to upstream activities. Some victims as young as five are compelled to paddle or toss water out of canoes, and dive into deep waters to track fish movements or disentangle fishing nets from tree stumps. Others are involved in picking, sorting and cleaning fish for processing or marketing and distribution. Traditionally, young

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report shows that child labour continues to thrive in all regions of Ghana in spite of interventions by government and non-government organizations (NGOs). The report, published by the Gender, Children and Social Protection Ministry, also stated: "Many victims are daily exposed to hazards, hunger, exhaustion, neglect, verbal and physical abuse by caregivers and employers".

In theory, Ghana is committed to fighting child labour and trafficking. The country touts its track record as being the first to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the first to enact a host of legislative instruments to

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boys have been the preferred choice of child traffickers; but the demand for girls is believed to be on the increase.

In one study by the International Justice Mission in 2015, it was established that among female child traffickers, younger girls were preferred over older girls—the main reason being the fear that older girls will become pregnant or ‘husband snatchers’. And in cases where boys are ‘understaffed’, girls work equally as boys. Nevertheless, most CLaT victims, regardless of gender and age, perform physically demanding tasks, and work for long hours with little rest, under hazardous conditions.

While the number of CLaT victims in the fisher is given as 2.3 per cent of the estimated 1.4 mn children in Ghana trapped in child labour, CLaT in fishery is empirically proven to be among the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) in Ghana. The WFCL, also known as Convention 182 according to the ILO, in simple terms “include work that is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of children.”

Ghana is a signatory to several international conventions that establish standards to protect children. Some of these conventions include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the ILO’s Minimum Age Convention (C138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (C182) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Other notable instruments relating to child protection are highlighted below:

The Children’s Act, 1998 (ACT 560) and Juvenile Justice Act, 2003 (ACT 653)

The Children’s Act (1998) and Juvenile Justice Act (2003) reflect fundamental constitutional provisions and establish the foundation for national child-protection systems, and govern children’s access to justice with specific provisions. For example, Article 87 of the Children Act specifies that: “(1) No person shall engage a child in exploitative labour” and “(2) Labour is exploitative of a child if it deprives the child of its health, education or development”. These

two provisions harmonize with the provisions of the ILO Conventions No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and No. 138 on the Minimum Age, respectively. Regarding work, the Children’s Act establishes 13 years for light work, 15 years for engagement in non-hazardous work, and 18 years for full employment.

The Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (ACT 694)

The Human Trafficking Act of 2005 (ACT 694) was promulgated as an “Act for the prevention, reduction and punishment of human trafficking, for the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons and for related matters”. The Act defines trafficking as “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, trading or receipt of persons within and across national borders by (a) use of threats, force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, (b) giving or receiving payments and benefits to achieve consent”.

The Domestic Violence Act, 2006 (ACT 732)

The Domestic Violence Act, 2006 (ACT 732) was enacted as a direct response to tackle domestic violence of all forms. The Act primarily seeks to provide opportunities for addressing violence in the home and family setting. It also defines in clear terms

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Landing of the catch, Prampram, Ghana and in fisheries, child labour and trafficking occurs across the entire value chain, from downstream to upstream activities

the range of violence to encompass: assault (of marriages and within families), deprivation (of food, clothing, health, education, shelter, etc.) and abuse (physical, emotional and financial). The broad scope of the Act makes it practical for the protection of the vulnerable, of which women and children are the major victims of violence and abuse.

Despite many interventions, greater political will is needed to eliminate CLaT

In addition to these major legislative instruments, there are also other state-sponsored institutional structures and interventions aimed at addressing CLaT. These include:

- Child Labour Unit of the Ministry of Employment & Labour Relations (responsible for the National Child Labour Elimination Programme);
- National Steering Committee on Child Labour (the overall co-ordinating body for child labour elimination programmes in Ghana);
- Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE), School Feeding Programme, and the Capitation Grant to encourage schooling and increase retention.

Despite many interventions, greater political will is needed to eliminate CLaT. The general consensus by civil society is that current efforts at combating CLaT are not enough to constrain the practice. The US Department of State shared a similar perspective in its 2015 and 2016 human trafficking report, which placed Ghana on a Tier 2 Watch List. It stated: “The Government of Ghana does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.”

The worst form of child labour in Ghana’s fishery is flourishing mainly because of a combination of high levels of poverty, limited livelihood opportunities, lack of awareness of victims’ hazardous working

conditions, and weak enforcement of applicable laws.

The Sustainable Fishery Management Project (SFMP)

In spite of the lack of significant progress in preventing CLaT and punishing perpetrators, there are those who remain optimistic that it can be eliminated. Various governmental ministries and agencies, as well as a host of NGOs, are instituting and implementing strategies to combat CLaT.

In the year 2009, USAID initiated the Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance Initiative project (ICFG) with local partners in Ghana. The central objective of the programme, according to USAID, was to “assemble the necessary pre-conditions for a fresh approach to a formally constituted coastal and fisheries governance programme that could serve as a model for Ghana.” Upon completion of the ICFG in 2014, the Sustainable Fisheries Management Project (SFMP) was rolled out.

The SFMP, which will end in 2019, has this objective: “to rebuild Ghana’s marine fisheries stocks and catches through facilitating adoption of responsible fishing practices.” Whereas the previous ICFG focused primarily on fishery governance, the SFMP has a wider scope, as reflected in its goals, listed below:

- Improve the legal enabling conditions for effective collaborative management of marine resources, use rights and effort-reduction strategies;
- Increase the use of science and applied research to inform decisionmaking and to strengthen enforcement;
- Heighten public awareness of fisheries issues to build the public and political support needed to rebuild fish stocks; and
- Implement applied management initiatives for several targeted fisheries ecosystems.

Just like the preceding ICFG project, the SFMP’s lead implementing partner is the Coastal Resource Centre of the University of Rhode Island (CRC-URI). The CRC-URI is working

with a consortium of organizations, including Friends of the Nation (FoN), Hen Mpoano, the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), SSG Advisors, the Central & Western Fishmongers Improvement Association (CEWEFIA), Daasgift Quality Foundation (DQF), Development Action Association (DAA) and Spatial Solutions.

The CLaT component under the SFMP seeks to “adopt deliberate steps towards reducing child labour and trafficking in the Central Region of Ghana.” Accordingly, it held a stakeholders’ CLaT meeting in February 2016 with its main partners and other stakeholders from District Assemblies, the Department of Social Welfare, Central Regional Traditional Council, media, civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders, the Fisheries Commission, Ghana immigration officers, police officers, and focal persons identified during the SFMP’s initial CLaT survey.

According to the SFMP, the stakeholders’ meeting resulted in adoption of a three-pronged approach to address CLaT as follows:


1. Recognize the need for extensive communication, education and sensitization of the relevant stakeholders, including communities and vulnerable households to make the practices socially unacceptable;
2. Identify and work with key actors to address the underlying causes of CLaT among the vulnerable households. Proposed actions included livelihood support, improved access to development services (health, education, economic opportunities, etc.); and
3. Engage the security agencies for extensive enforcement and deterrence actions through on-the-ground investigations to identify the key perpetrators of the CLaT practice, and effect their arrest and prosecution.

Will this three-pronged approach really make any difference in addressing the vexing issues in CLaT? The Project proponents strongly believe so.

Victoria Koomson, the Executive Director of CEWEFIA, one of the implementing partners of the SFMP, in an interview, outlined a number of successes. Among them are: community sensitisation meetings (CSMs) in Ekumfi-Narkwa, Eku-Mpoano, Ekumfi-Otuam, Ekumfi-Immuna, Gomoa-Dago, Mumford, Abandze, Anomabo and Biriwa; formation of community child protection committees (CCPCs) and anti-CLaT advocates in Elmina and Moree; business model training for 76 participants from women groups; and hygienic fish handling training workshops for 42 women fish processors and 12 fishermen in Moree and 33 fishmongers and 18 fishermen in Anlo Beach in the Shama District.

FoN another SFMP implementing partner, also reports of similar success in contributing to behaviour changes to make CLaT socially unacceptable. Through radio programmes on CLaT at Ahomka FM and Radio Peace, FoN has created the platform to inform, sensitise and educate coastal communities in the Central and Western Regions where CLaT is particularly prevalent. In addition, SNV engaged a lead Ghanaian actor, Adjetej Annan, as an anti-CLaT ambassador to promote edutainment on anti-CLaT.

Clearly, the implementation of the SFMP has gathered momentum and there is the need to sustain the gains it has made so far. The use of an integrated approach, such as involvement of traditional authorities, law enforcement agencies and extensive actors in the fishery, makes it a potent force to reduce CLaT, but eliminating CLaT will require much more political will.

However noble as the SFMP goals may be, greater political will is needed to adequately resource dedicated anti-CLaT agencies to train law enforcers and child welfare workers, as well as investigate, prosecute and convict all child traffickers. Many doubt this can be achieved within a short time. 

For more

<http://fonghana.org/child-labor-and-trafficking-clat/>

Child Labour and Trafficking (CLaT)

<http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/Regionsandcountries/Africa/Ghana/lang--en/index.htm>

Ghana (IPEC)—ILO

<http://www.ilo.org/ipeccinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=28375>

Child Labour in the Fish Supply Chain on Lake Volta, Ghana: The Torkor Model

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3318e/i3318e.pdf>

Guidance on Addressing Child Labour in Fisheries and Aquaculture

http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/WorkshopFisheries2010/WFPapers/DAfenyaduChildLabourGhana.pdf

Child Labour in Fisheries and Aquaculture, A Ghanaian Perspective

http://www.fao-ilo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/WorkshopFisheries2010/WFPapers/MathewICSFChildLabourFisheriesFinalNote.pdf

Children’s Work and Child Labour in Fisheries: A Note on Principles and Criteria for Employing Children and Policies and Action for Progressively Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Fisheries and Aquaculture

<https://www.icsf.net/en/monographs/article/EN/39-the-state-of-wo.html?start=20>

The State of World Fisheries from a Fishworker Perspective: The Ghanaian Situation