

**THE INCREASING WAVE OF MODERN DAY
SLAVERY: ITS EFFECTS ON AFRICA SOCIO-
ECONOMIC GROWTH**

¹Dr Uche A. Opara

08038339464, *drutchayopara@gmail.com*

&

²Ebere Uchenna

08037710431/09043550474, *Ebereuchenna2014@gmail.com*

^{1&2}Department of History and International Studies
Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State.

Abstract

Modern day slavery has continued to raise its ugly head in Africa thereby undermining the socio-economic growth and development in the region despite efforts to eradicate it. Various forms of modern day slavery ranging from human trafficking, forced labour, forced marriage, sex work etc have continued to affect millions of Africans who were victims especially in Europe. This work, therefore, examines the effects of modern day slavery vis-a-vis African socio-economic growth and development. The methodology adopted is historical analysis and extensive review of data collected mainly from primary and secondary sources. The study argues that despite various efforts made by government and nongovernmental organizations towards curbing modern day slavery, yet it persist as a result of constraints arising from poverty, hunger, unemployment, greed, get-rich-quick syndrome and so on. The paper, therefore, recommends that effective border checks and control, adequate re-orientation and awareness on the dangers of modern day slavery should be properly emphasized in order to minimize or eradicate this monster.

Key words: Modern Day Slavery, Development, Socio-economic Growth



Introduction

In the African context, slavery was reorganized as a social institution and is as old as man. They were also regarded as domestic servants engaged by the wealthy class such as the kings and other prominent people in the society. It was a symbol of wealth and honor. Meaning that individuals were assessed based on the number of slaves they were able to have, helping them and their family members in their family's day to day domestic activities. In some parts of Africa, slaves had no right and as such the master could treat them anyhow, sell, or even kill them especially when the slave is no longer useful, (Buah,1981:56). However, in some places, they were treated almost like free members of the household, allowed to acquire wealth, marry and raise children (Onwubiko, 1999:206). Domestic servants then were obtained voluntarily as a pledge or agreement to serve for money borrowed until the money is paid back. At times, families may decide on their own to send their children to those wealthy people due to the economic burdens on the family.

This was quite different from the European Trans-Atlantic slave trade that was later introduced as a result of the contact between Europe and Africa. As was observed by Shehu (2018), this trade with the countries outside Africa remained around the coastal area until when the first industrial revolution introduced significant changes in production which led to struggle for raw materials for production. An increase in economic growth and developments became observable in Europe which necessitated the formation of triangular slave trade resulting to increase in slave trade business, cutting across the Atlantic Ocean and final encroachments on African hinterland (Onwubiko 1985).

This was not in consonance with African social institution and orientation because of its severe exploitative tendencies which have



far reaching negative implication on African regional socio-economic growth and development. Consequently, this marked the prelude to neo-slavery that has given birth to different forms of modern day slavery spreading like wild fire in African societies as well as cutting across borders to Europe and other continents of the world.

Modern day slavery commonly referred to as human trafficking has continued to occur in the present day society for various purposes such as forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, prostitution, organ harvesting, sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, arms smuggling across international borders. It has been estimated that the number of enslaved people today ranged from 38 million to 46 million (ILO 2010). Such indices like poverty, poor educational background, non-adherence to rule of law, corruption, poor leadership/governance, poor family/societal structures etc have been identified as factors propagating this modern day slavery. It has also been observed that modern day slavery is most prevalent in impoverished countries and those with vulnerable minority communities like Africa.

This study, therefore, seeks to determine the effect of this modern day slavery on the African socio-economic growth and development and how best to tackle this monster called modern day slavery that has been on the increase in the relationship between Africa and Europe so as to create room for an enhanced regional economic growth and development in Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications

In recent time, modern slavery is increasingly rising in developed world which has necessitated the high rate of African migration to Europe and other parts of the world, thereby, creating source of worries and concerns amongst the academia. For proper



understanding of this work, it is imperative to clarify major concepts used therein.

Modern Day Slavery

According to International Labour Organization (ILO 2016), modern day slavery has been used as an umbrella term for the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing or obtaining persons for forced labour or commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. It is a severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain, commonly referred as human trafficking. This has continued to grow day by day in our society like a wild fire manifesting in different forms with an evil intention of exploitation of the unsuspecting members of the public for personal or commercial gain. Modern day slavery encompasses all forms internal and external human trafficking as well as all manner of child abuse in this modern day era. Internally, it can be seen from one state to another within a country for the purpose of sexual exploitation, child labour, forced labour, street begging, domestic servitude etc. While externally, modern slavery occurs across international borders mainly for the purpose of labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, organ harvest, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, etc. Prevalently, modern day slavery across international borders, mainly Europe has become common in recent time mainly for the purpose of commercial sex workers, thereby jeopardizing the relationship between Africa and Europe. Modern day slavery is noted with high exploitative tendencies where people are entrapped in one form of exploitation or another.

Annie (2016) refers to it as institutional slavery that has continued to occur in present day society. He estimated that about 38 million to 46 million people are in one form of modern day slavery to another. Modern slavery is noted as one of the indices of African underdevelopment, thus, creating serious disequilibrium at the expense of dependent African nations. It is also an enemy to the



principles of the fundamental human rights which not only guarantees right to live and freedom of individuals to make choice about their lives but also negates the sanctity of human dignity.

In 2016, it was estimated that about 40.3million people worldwide were in modern day slavery including 24.9million in forced marriage, 70% of these are women and girls, (ILO 2016). Similarly, ILO (2017) also gave a report of how about 40million people are in modern day slavery and 152million in child labour around the world. Looking at these figures, Africans have always been victims of the circumstances of modern day slavery with women, young boys and girls as well as children as major victims, using them for worst jobs with poor working conditions.

Modern day slavery has resulted to the massive irregular migration of Africans to Europe and other parts of the world with fake promises of better life situations given by these agents of modern day slavery. The survival of these victims are not certain due to the conditional ties therein which is not inconsonance with what they were promised before embarking on their journey.

Economic Growth/Development

Socio-economic growth can be referring as an increase in the production of goods and services in an economy over a specific period of time. That is why Rostow (1960) identified three stages of economic growth as follows; traditional stage, the transitional stage or the pre-condition for takeoff stage and the take off stage into self-sustained growth. According to (Nkwocha, 2019) economic development is synonymous with economic growth because every development must have economic base. He equally stress that economic growth is vital for any successful polite. Kail Marx also argued that at the root of social and political development lies economic growth.



Development: The concept of development is also very imperative to discuss in this work. For Amucheazi (1980), development is realistically seen as a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological and social realities among others. From the above view, development is perceived as a rapid increase in the level of economic attainment which must be seen and observed. Therefore, African development in this work is seen as the positive manifestation of economic, political, social and cultural enhancement in Africa. It comprises every aspect of the region's potential (human and material) which exposes the region and her citizens to better opportunities in life unlike free modern day slavery societies, job opportunities, quality education, good health care system and good security network system for African development.

Opara (2018) observes that development is the process of creating something new that is likely to affect the future or what happens in continuing situation. On their own part, Todaro and Smith (2019) have described development as the process of improving the quality of all human lives. The three equal important aspects of development according to them include;

- i. Raising the people's level of living, their income and consumption levels of food, medical services, and education among others; through relevant economic processes.
- ii. Creating condition that is conducive to growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions that promotes human dignity and respect and
- iii. Increasing people's freedom by enlarging the range of their choice variables as by increasing varieties of consumer goods and services.

These indications point to the fact that things are really improving in different aspects of life; political, social, economic, educational, cultural, etc.



Socio-Economic Development

Ugwuala and Ucheoma (2021) expressed that socio-economic development is any activity, or programme that creates sustainable access to the economy for its beneficiaries. It touches both social and the economic wellbeing of the society through qualitative and progressive results on the masses. Socio-economic development entails a total integration of the economic and social development of a nation in all aspects of human life. For NEPAD (2003), socio-economic development projects should teach (equip) people to fish, rather than giving them fish. This implies that the process brings about positive growth that affects the social and the economic activities of the people through quality education, good health care delivery services, access to potable and good drinking water, equitable distribution of the nation's wealth and resources, observance of the rule of law etc.

Giving credence to this, Denen (2013) avers that socio-economic development connotes meeting the basic needs that are essential to live a life of dignity. Similarly, Ugwuala and Ucheoma (2021) in line with the above view believe that socio-economic development also requires action that will strengthen policies in the key social development areas like food, child welfare, gender equity and protection of the vulnerable groups – women, youths, children, the aged and the disable. This implies that there is need for an enhanced socio-economic development to address poverty and other major issues promoting migration and modern day slavery in the African region.

Forms of Modern Day Slavery: It's Operationalization

Modern day slavery activities have become globalized through its different forms that are aimed at exploitation for personal or commercial gains. These include, forced prostitution, sex trafficking, human/child trafficking, child abuse, forced/child labour, force/child marriage, child slavery, migrant labour, debt bondage slavery and so on. It also includes drug and currency



trafficking and some used as robbery activities. Severally, it is the African brothers and sisters that have used this medium to exploit their fellow African brothers and sisters mainly young girls and boys who are innocently lured into such act by their fellow Africans thereby endangering the relationship between Africa and Europe.

These innocent girls are mainly recruited from rural villages in African societies by their fellow Africans who serve as agents, with fake promises of better life in Europe and other parts of the world. Ilo (2008) avers that with the cooperation of the state actors like the police, immigration officers and other security agencies, they made their way to Europe especially in Italy that has the highest number of African prostitutes numbering over 50,000. There, they are meant to live under the control of these African business women whom (Ilo 2008) referred to as their “madam”, who ensure that they comply according to instruction through the use of threats, thereby forcing them to sleep with a good number of men with little or nothing that goes into the girls’ pocket in the name of forced prostitution. The continued threats put them in no other condition than to remain in this perpetual bondage.

Outside prostitution business in Europe most of them were also forced into different kinds of sexual relationships such as lesbianism, homosexual, and man sleeping with animal (bestialism) as well as forced marriage.

Another form of modern day slavery that also wreaks more havoc on the society today is child abuse in the form of child marriage, child trafficking, child abandonment, child sexual abuse, child battery, child deprivation and child labour. A child connotes a young infant either a boy or a girl, while abuse has to do with treatment that is inappropriate. Therefore, any treatment that threatens his or her safety or leaves in them, physical or emotional scars could be referred to as child abuse (Ake, 1996). In his own view Ilo (2008: 237) tries to broadens the concept by referring to it



as “any act of violence or exploitation of a child or any denial of a happy childhood should be seen as child abuse, whether it is caused at the institutional level by international or national governments, organizations, agencies or businesses or whether it is caused at the microcosmic level by parents, relatives, communities, or rebel groups”.

In the African traditional value system, a child is a blessing from God/gods and as such is held at a very high esteem. This is shown by the different names given to Igbo children, such as *Nwakaego* (child is more precious than money), *Ginikanwa* (what is greater than child), *Nwamaka/Nwadinma* (child is good) etc. They are always considered in the scheme of things. But the reverse is now the case, where the children are intentionally exploited which negates the sanctity of childhood. Child abuse denies the child the opportunity of social progress, that is living without love and hope for future. They are always angry and frustrated. This condition hinders the manifestation of the potentials in them.

Child abuse is not only perpetrated by people that are not related to the child, but also by parents and relatives. As noted by Pagare (2004) child abuse is any behavior directed towards a child by a parent, guardians, other family members or another adult who endangers or impairs a child’s physical or emotional health or development. For instance sexual abuse could come from the father, step-father, mother, step-mother, and other male or female members of a household. Female children between the ages of 8 and 13 are most times enlisted in prostitution by poor parents or older prostitutes who are care givers (Iyegbu 2003).

Another shameful and worst form of child abuse is child trafficking/child labour. This has really contributed in no small measures in destroying good number of children that are expected to turn around the economic fortunes of African states to a positive direction. It is estimated that over 200,000 children are sold into



slavery in West and Central Africa every year (UNICEF 2003). It further described it as one of the gravest violations of human rights in the world today. This is a situation whereby both the child and his or her parents are deceived with empty promises of a better life situation in their new environment. When trafficked, these children are subjected to all manner of exploitations and abuse of child's rights for the selfish interest of their traffickers. All round developments such as health, education, sexual life, social life of the child etc become endangered.

In many occasions, these children are forcefully recruited and used in armed conflicts as a form of slavery or practice similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and forced or compulsory labour. Sometimes they are forced into marriages without seeking for their consent. Most children are engaged in forced labour which involves the use of children for excessive tasks for low wages, often under conditions harmful to their health. Child labour also involves, children working for long hours and doing strenuous jobs. Sometimes, these children are deprived the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, clothing, education, love and affection. According to Gerd (2000), these children in an effort to run away from their problems end up in a more severe challenge in the cities where crimes, drugs and immorality remain the order of the day. Modern slavery is not limited to any single race, gender or age group. It affects men, women and children in and around the world, (Allianceagainstmodernslavery.org).

Causes of Modern Day Slavery

Migration and modern day slavery have complex phenomena with multiple causes. Besides, there are some common factors that could be pointed out as responsible for the emergence of modern day slavery. These include poverty, joblessness, over population, hardship/bad governance, absence of true democratic rule, bad economic policies, human right abuses, ethnic violence, religious



conflicts, inadequate social services, natural disasters, ecological and geographical factors get rich quick syndrome, insurgency, militancy, armed conflicts and so on.

The economic hardships in addition to the high rates of poverty as a result of joblessness (unemployment) and retrenchment have greatly contributed a lot to the problem of migration to Europe and subsequent emergence of modern slavery. Most families cannot afford to fend for their children and there is every intrinsic desire of them to survive by all means. So these children and their parents can easily be lured into becoming victims of modern slavery through fake promises of migration to Europe or elsewhere for a better living/job. With hope of survival, such opportunity is easily grasped. Many parents are compelled by prevailing hardship to give out their children as maids or house help as a survival measure to support the family without actually knowing that indirectly they have given out their children for child labour (Igbokwe 1998). This level of demographic expression of impoverished economy and inadequate levels of economic growth across most of the African nations are majorly responsible for the modern day slavery.

Other issues that have encouraged the growth of this monster in Africa are persistent bad governance as a result of corruption among the political class which has been the bane of leadership in African nations. According to Shehu (2018), lack of accountability and frequent change of economic policies by African leaders truncate dividends of democracy on the African continent due to the economic corruption in the African system of politics. Many African leaders have vowed to perpetually remain in power so as to continue to accumulate wealth from the public treasury. This has made Africans to remain undeveloped and struggle for survival becomes highly difficult. As a result of this, many are willing to accept poor and odd jobs in Europe than to remain in Africa.



Increase in the population of jobless youth is another contributory factor to the emergence of modern day slavery. Nwokolo (1985) observed that one of the factors responsible for street hawking is sometimes, the effect of one having more children than one can cope with. Therefore, the high rate of unplanned population of jobless youth in Africa pursuing very limited resources creates room for survival of the fittest which has conditioned many interests of the youth and made them vulnerable to modern day slavery. This mindset of the youths coupled with the quest for survival has made it possible for many to migrate to Europe illegally and engage in odd and dangerous jobs with poor salaries over there in order to make a living resulting to modern day slavery. Ethnic violence and frequent religious conflicts can also be held accountable for the subsequent emergence of the modern day slavery. Kohnert (2007) in German Institutes of Global and Area Studies indicates that since 1993 to 2003, African states had become a conflict zone and has currently increased the number of refugees. The report further pointed African refugees as constituting about one third of the global refugee's population. In addition to frequent clashes of various ethnic and religious groups that have bedeviled African states, migration outside African continent has been on increase. There is also an indication that some African nations that are bedeviled with crises like militancy, insurgency, banditry, natural disaster, armed conflicts etc also provided a gate way that has quickened the migration of Africans to Europe where they feel that they could be saved from the crises rocking their land and as such becomes very easy to be lured into the activities of modern day slavery especially those that migrated illegally.

Effects of Modern Day Slavery on African Economy

Most Afro-centric historians described Trans-Atlantic slave trade as the most iniquitous transaction of human being and also the most forced migration of the highest number of human being ever recorded in history (Ilo, 2008). The nature of modern day slavery



activities could be seen as taking after Trans-Atlantic slave trade. It has greatly impacted negatively on the development in Africa. This can be seen through economic, political, social and psychological angles. The depopulation of African citizens through cross border through irregular migration to Europe and other parts of the world and the subsequent appearance of modern day slavery have contributed in no small measure in abandonment of both small indigenous industries and agricultural activities in African societies. This led to extremely low ratio of population to cultivable land in Africa (Inikori 1980). Now, African leaders find it difficult to feed their citizens due to shortage of food supply. In addition, the depopulation impact which led to brain drain of potential or virile labour force of young men and women contributed in no small measure in the loss of human resources of the African nations. This is due to the fact that these agents deceived them with fake promises of better jobs and meaningful living in Europe.

Modern day slavery provided opportunity that has allowed few individuals or groups to enrich themselves, since victims are gotten relatively cheap and sold at a high profit for different purposes outside Africa. These victims are left in the hands of their abductors who are only after their own selfish interest. Modern day slavery negatively affects both the physical and psychological state of the victims. They are denied all manner of human developmental opportunities that can impact meaningfully in their lives, thereby exposing them to various life threatening situations such as discrimination, object of mockery and violence and also become infected with various kinds of diseases/ailments. This situation creates an intergenerational poverty upon the victims and their family members, thereby affecting the regional economic growth and development.

Modern day slavery also increases environmental hazard. Through irregular migration, victims of modern slavery have been exposed to all manner of environments that are considered harmful to the



victims. This irregular means have seriously accounted for many migrants missing, wounded, imprisoned as well as dead. More than two thousand Africans especially from Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Cameroon, Algeria and Morocco attempt to cross over to Europe illegally and 10% of them got marooned or die on the way, (Ilo, 2008:132). This situation pays back nothing to the society rather than agony.

Recommendations

Indeed, modern day slavery can as well be managed if the following recommendations are strictly adhered to by both the state actors, groups and individuals, who should join hands for effective collaborations towards achieving a crime free society for the overall benefits of the African nations.

Various African governments as a matter of their constitutional role should improve the living standard of their citizens by establishing enough industries to enable the youths so as to reduce the level of unemployment, poverty and hunger. This will save them from being vulnerable to modern day slavery which has a great negative impact on their nation's socio-economic growth and development. They must also be provided with adequate opportunity for education and entrepreneurial skills suitable to the African society which can improve their chances of becoming gainfully employed. This can keep them busy and reduce the rate of vulnerability to modern day slavery in Africa.

The security agencies should be adequately strengthened against all forms of insecurity and modern day slavery through joint security forecast and response strategy at local and national level. In fact they should be equipped with proper modern fighting equipment and their welfare well taken care of. This will avail them the opportunity of proper border management strategy against all forms of insecurity and modern day slavery. In addition, there should be strict monitoring/control team put in place against all forms of



bribery and corruption with adequate punishment for any defaulter, which can serve as a deterrent to others.

African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional and religious bodies should help in the fight by declaring a total war against modern day slavery and corruption in the land of Africa with high sense of sincerity and trust which will go a long way in reducing modern day slavery in Africa. Thus, this will zero the minds of people from seeing corruption as a genuine means of acquiring wealth without implication.

Various African governments should also take proactive measures, programmes and policies that are more appealing to the satisfaction of the citizens' legitimate needs and more aspirations which will help to reduce the feeling of inequality amongst them and vulnerability to modern day slavery. Because when groups and individuals are kept under certain conditions that are not favorable, they tend to revolt (Mmere 2012:6).

The reorientation agency of governments in different African countries should periodically conduct reorientation exercises in different states and local government areas in their countries through seminars and workshops. This can go a long way in changing and sanitizing the minds sets of individuals towards understanding the sanctity of human lives as against modern day slavery.

Finally, the fight against this monster should not be a government thing alone; every citizen should also be more committed and patriotic by making themselves available tools in the hands of the security agencies through the provision of necessary information on modern day slavery going on around one's environment to the law enforcement agents. Citizens of the region should also be involved in legitimate enterprises that are deemed worthy and eschew the



idea of “getting rich quick syndrome” that always makes them vulnerable to modern day slavery. They should realize that life has stages and must be followed gradually.

Conclusion

Modern day slavery is a great challenge to the African growth and development. It is an issue in Africa that has continued to generate a lot of concern both from the public and the government due to its key role in the economic growth and development. Certain factors like unemployment, poverty, corruption, inefficiency of the security personnel etc were identified as some of the major factors responsible for the menace in Africa. The paper, therefore, gives signal to governments to wake up to their responsibilities by ensuring that numerous job opportunities are created so as to forestall the continued growth of modern day slavery in Africa. Strong legislations should be made and judiciously enforced without sentiments (fear or favor) against anybody found culpable in modern day slavery activities. This will serve as a deterrent to others. Peace, justice and equity, which will go a long way in bringing cooperation, tolerance and respect for human rights, should be pursued vigorously. Above all, youth unemployment and poverty alleviation programmes should be given adequate attention as they reduce the rate at which the youth will plan to leave their country for greener pasture. It will also keep them away from crimes and other vices.



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