



Little hands of the stone quarries

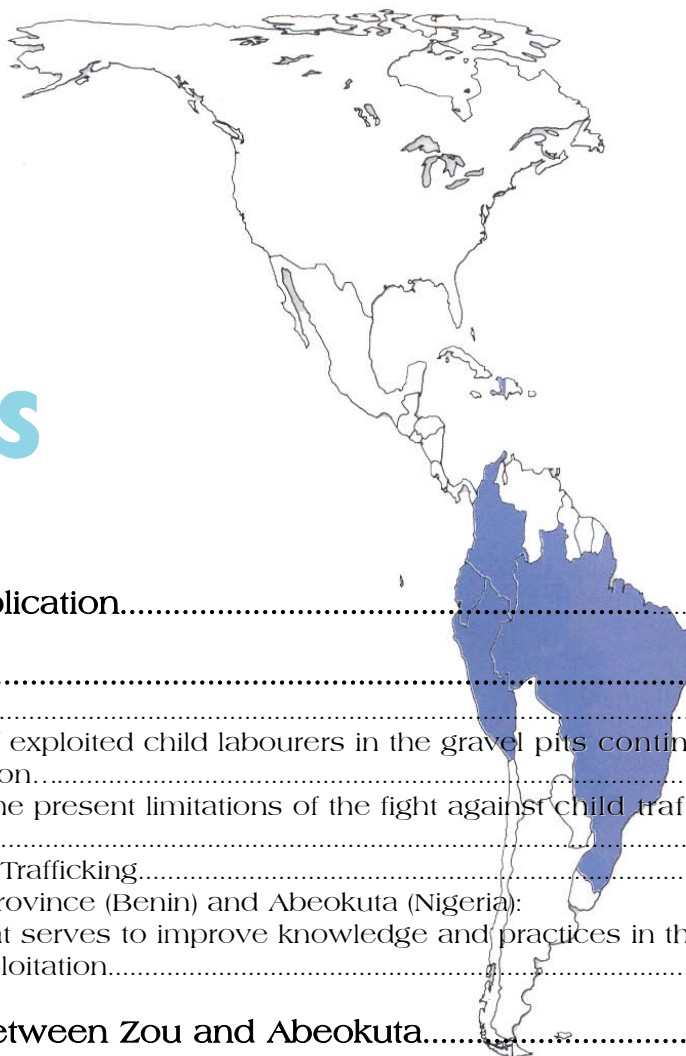
investigation of child trafficking
between Benin and Nigeria



Terre des hommes

child relief - www.tdh.ch

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General Outline of this publication

This investigation into child trafficking is in a simple and easy-to-read format. The text aims to give the reader a maximum amount of information and food for thought. It has three main sections:

Part 1 (p. 5 - 14) : this first section describes the events that occurred between September and December 2003 (the "crisis"). It aims to highlight both on a micro and macro level the interventions and strategies that lead to the political and media "crisis" and to resolving it. Here underlining the fact that this unfortunately did not put an end to the fundamental problem at the origin of this "crisis" - that is, the child trafficking occurring from the Zou province to the quarries and agricultural plantations of Nigeria...

Part 2 (p. 15 - 19): this section deals with describing and analysing the logic and mechanisms behind child trafficking and exploitation of Beninese children in the quarries of Abeokuta. This analysis reveals the difficult challenges presented by the problems particular to the child trafficking occurring between the communities of Zou and Abeokuta and what they mean for States and child protection organisations.

Part 3: (p. 20 - 31) the final section deals exclusively with a well intentioned yet realistic critical review of the emergency response action taken by local authorities and child protection organisations (including Tdh) in light of the sudden and unacceptable problem they faced. The analysis of the method of intervention, the obtained results and effects produced by collective action leads to reconsidering the present and past stakes in the fight by highlighting the lessons learned by Tdh over the past 24 months.

Conclusion (p. 32 - end) At the end of the 3 parts a conclusion sums up the essential elements of the work and the field research undertaken by Tdh. In closing, a list of recommendations and special notes for the main partners working with Tdh is made. These recommendations lobby for steps to be taken both at the source and the destination of this trafficking. They focus on prevention and assistance interventions that can anticipate "crises"; community participation; rapid protection of children in distress or at high risk; and a clear understanding of the reasons for and factors involved in the child trafficking between the Zou province and Nigeria. ■

GENERAL OUTLINE





Abeokuta, two years on...

Abeokuta, Nigeria, September 2003. Two years after the Etireno affair the Nigerian and the International press is seized by another scandal. The incident very quickly sparks the beginning of a true political and media "crisis" between Benin and Nigeria re-kindling the argument on the inefficiency of child trafficking and child mistreatment policies in West Africa and the sub-region.

In the mountainous fertile region of Western Nigeria, in Abeokuta, not a hundred kilometres from the Beninese border, citizens of the two countries hand over a large group of children found working in the surrounding gravel pits to the local police. The children - all boys, all Beninese - reveal that they have been exploited in the gravel pits five to six days a week for eight hours a day. Against their will, they have been living for months or sometimes years in small groups in the bush beside the gravel pits they call "holes", having to work continuously whilst waiting for their day of "liberation". On this day, their employer would allow them to return to their village for several weeks to rest, see their parents, relatives and friends. A few weeks of respite before being made generally by either parents or employer, to go back, willing or not, for another two year cycle of forced labour until their definitive liberation at the end of six years of exploitation and semi-slavery...

Over and above a simple news item concerning a handful of exploited children the "crisis" of the Abeokuta gravel pits shed light on a case of veritable child trafficking, the scale of which until now was unsuspected. It turns out to be a long established trans-border traffic which has somehow gone unnoticed, and indeed has been tolerated.

December 2005: the scandal of exploited child labourers in the gravel pits continues, despite international denunciation...

Between September and October 2003, 261 children victims of exploitation and trafficking were recuperated during the rescue operations lead by the Beninese community of Abeokuta as well as the Nigerian Police and Immigration services. Once taken out of the gravel pits the children were kept in transit areas before being repatriated to Benin by the authorities. The children were all young (between 8 and 14 years); were all deprived of affection, education and leisure; they were left alone to fend for themselves against the stronger ones and those in a position of seniority; and suffered living conditions that were harsh and abusive as well as dangerous for their health, integrity and moral well being.

What became of them after repatriation to Benin? Were they properly assisted by the governing authorities, the child protection organisations and by their families? Did they recover well from their harsh ordeal? Were they able to start a new life? A better one in which their rights were respected, their personal development could improve and they had better options for the future?

What happened to the other children from the quarries that were not rescued but came back to Benin in greater numbers than those by the official channels? Did they find some salvation? Or, on the contrary, have they once again been caught up in child trafficking and been sent back to Nigeria or to another destination to be exploited and mistreated once more?

Finally the central question: Have the Abeokuta gravel pits really ceased to use, abuse and mistreat hundreds of defenceless Beninese children?

Unfortunately concerning this last question the answer is doubtful and most probably negative...

In fact in 2004 reliable sources informed us of the presence of tens of children being exploited in Abeokuta and surrounding areas. It was also reported that other stone quarries and numerous agricultural plantations of the fertile South-West region of Nigeria (Osun, Ogun and

Oyo states) had taken over a large portion of the child labour soon after their "liberation" from Abeokuta. There is therefore reason to believe that the exploitation of Beninese children has persisted, and continues to this day, in the bordering region of Nigeria. Thus the scandal remains current in 2005 despite international denunciation in 2003 and the numerous interventions and commitments made by government authorities of both countries as well as international and non governmental partners over the past two years.

If this is the case it is then our duty, as child protection institutions and other concerned members of the community, to evaluate what has really been done over the two year period. We should extend investigations and reflection on the subject, learn together from the lessons of our successes and failures, and commit ourselves as quickly as possible to new interventions that will prevent the phenomenon and protect children that are

The limitations can be broadly classified into three different categories:

1. Despite the rapid expansion of the fight against child trafficking, close analysis of signals and indicators reveal that the phenomenon in itself has not actually declined: presently it cannot be considered as a marginal or deviant practice and can no longer be reduced to a bundle of criminal practices by deranged populations and organised groups. On the contrary, for at least two decades the phenomenon has proliferated and become acceptable in the eyes of the different local populations. More now than ever - like the arguments to justify it - the practice is rooted in the structural realities (social, cultural, econo-



Definition
Trafficking or Smuggling Children?
Two terms for the same definition?

Since 2000 the internationally used legal term is child "trafficking" not "smuggling".

victims or run a high risk of becoming victims.

Beyond the Abeokuta "crisis", the present limitations of the fight against child trafficking in West Africa.

On the one hand we can congratulate the progress made at different levels by government authorities, United Nations agencies and defenders of children's rights over the last six years in the fight against child trafficking in West Africa. On the other, it is necessary to put these political and media successes into perspective. It is important here to underline the limitations rather than the successes or half successes realised so far.

mic, political) that characterise the present situation in the countries concerned. Impossible to get around, these realities hinder any attempts to eradicate or reduce the phenomenon that do not take into account its complexity and longevity and above all the fact that the phenomenon is fundamentally sociological, economic and historical rather than criminal in nature.

2. Despite "awareness raising" efforts and mobilisation brought about in certain levels of society, the fight against child trafficking has remained unpopular or misunderstood in the social sphere most concerned with the phenomenon. Even some local or national officials are of the opinion that behind the outward display of concern and showy deployment of funds there lies yet another attempt to impose values, norms and programs on African societies that benefit only those instilling them... Following an approach that promotes the rights of children has not helped to open the dialogue on the nature of the problem between opposing mentalities and different view points as it is often received as accusing and stigmatised.. Veritable understanding of the problems identified by governments, the international community and those working to protect children, either by the elite or the

population at large, has not yet occurred. The challenge is thus great, as without such understanding and new social norms of those affected, what sort of social changes can we expect in favour of child well-being and their protection from today's general mistreatment?

3. Finally, the strategies implemented to reduce or prevent trafficking as well as those to protect and assist child victims or at risk of becoming victims, have indeed had positive results in some cases, nevertheless in other cases these results are less evident and there is no assurance of their continuity. Namely in re-integration, re-insertion and prevention there remain many theoretical and practical difficulties to overcome. Reflection on and research into innovative solutions must be pursued. These should be based on a comprehensive shared effort that puts the issue under question, evaluates actions carried out, reviews the logic of interventions put into practice as well as the underlying concepts and theories.

International Definition of Child Trafficking The Palermo Protocol - 15 June 2000

Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol makes the following definition of trafficking in persons:

"(a) "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;"

Regarding the definition of child trafficking the Protocol specifies:

" (c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;"

Finally it is important to note that the Palermo Protocol "supplements" the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Likewise "it shall be interpreted together with the Convention" (art. 1).

This means including a third key element in defining child trafficking which is, that legally speaking, **child trafficking refers to the movement of children for the purpose of exploitation is carried out by "an organised criminal group"**.

" (a) "Organised criminal group" shall mean **a structured group of three or more persons**, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit;" (art. 1a)

" (c) "Structured group" shall mean **a group that is not randomly formed for the immediate commission of an offence and that does not need to have formally defined roles for its members, continuity of its membership or a developed structure;**" (art. 1c)

Child trafficking between Zou province (Benin) and Abeokuta (Nigeria): A representative case study that serves to improve knowledge and practices in the fight against child trafficking and exploitation

Many governing authorities and organisations today are willing to question where they are headed and the scope of their child protection strategies. This publication serves that very purpose - collective reflection and dialogue between all partners, stakeholders and observers as well as with those directly concerned.

The relative failure of the fight against child trafficking between Benin and Nigeria is probably the result of shortcomings, loopholes and errors in the strategies developed by stakeholders on both sides of the border. These elements are worth identifying, measuring and analysing from a collective standpoint regarding the observed realities and difficulties encountered in the field. This would allow child protection stakeholders to develop and promote more adequate and effective solutions that are based either on approaches and methods that are more efficient or on more appropriate modes of intervention.

Meanwhile, it seems that the public at large, as well as many important specialised stakeholders, have remained in the dark regarding the Abeokuta gravel pit "crisis" and the entirety of interventions that have been carried out over the past two years. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at what really happened before and after the beginning of the "crisis" with regards to child trafficking between Benin and Nigeria. In an attempt to reconstruct the past events, a focus on the concrete actions of the main stakeholders has been chosen as the starting point for reflection on the difficulties and challenges involved in the fight. These include operations carried out by committed stakeholders in favour of preventing and reducing the phenomenon as well as operations carried out by stakeholders implicated in processes leading to child trafficking and child exploitation.

From this case study, which focuses on Abeokuta and Zou province in Benin

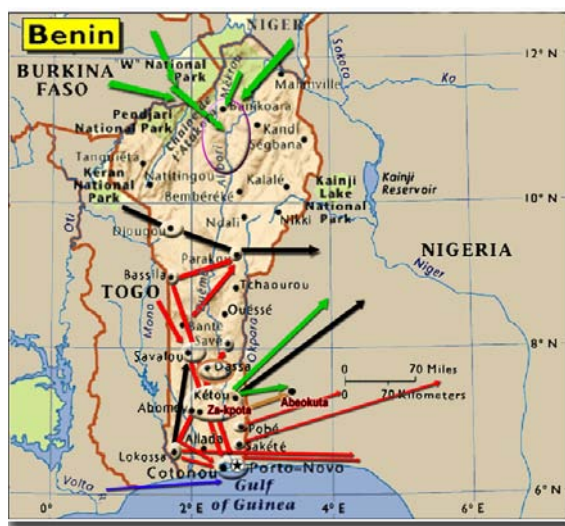


(98% of repatriated children originate from the province), the present publication offers a detailed analysis of a particular form of child trafficking, whilst shedding light on several ways of thinking, contexts and processes which confront all the states of West Africa and the organisations working in child protection. At this point let us clarify the stakes: there would be no use in sharing the information and analysis of this publication if the process does not lead, *in fine*, to the elabora-

tion and implementation of common action borne from networking and transnational collaboration between States and international and non-governmental organisations.

Two years after the Abeokuta "crisis" hundreds of Beninese children continue to suffer in dire conditions of exploitation in Nigeria.

The alarm bell needs to be re-rung in order to break the cycle of servitude once and for all.



Map Legend:

- Domestic work and urban informal sector
- Fishing (sea, lake, river)
- Mining
- Agriculture
- Other sectors of economic activity
- Zone of child exploitation in the mining sector

Principal Child Trafficking Routes within Benin and towards South-Western Nigeria (2003 - 2005)



From Abeokuta to Za-Kpota Investigation of child trafficking between Zou province and Nigeria lead by the Foundation Terre des hommes (Tdh) (2004)

From emergency action to research based action

From the very beginning of the "Abeokuta crisis" Tdh has been actively implicated in resolving the problem alongside other non-governmental and international organisations and the States of Benin and Nigeria. Once the crisis blew over, the Foundation pursued its effort by implementing institutional support in Nigeria and monitoring and supporting the re-integration of the children repatriated to Benin,

specifically to Zou province and the commune of Za-Kpota. During 2004 a lengthy investigation and much research was carried out by the Tdh staff and specialised collaborators. Within this team was an investigator of Beninese origin, who whilst living and working for many years in Nigeria, has maintained close family and professional links with Benin.

Investigation Methodology

The investigation first dealt with the causes and consequences of the Abeokuta crisis, and then with the specific characteristics of the type of exploitation and trafficking discovered there. The investigation also focused on the evolution of the children's situation and the trafficking system as well as the fight against trafficking in Benin and Nigeria. Lastly it took a close look at what occurred within the Beninese community of Abeokuta before and after the crisis.

The investigation was essentially qualitative - direct and participative observation and open interviews were used, as well as a documentary review and systematic information gathering. We also used documents on situations very similar to the reality under investigation. Moreover the agents carrying out the investigation were able to rely on the fieldwork carried out by Tdh in Za-Kpota and Abeokuta to contribute to the document. The investigation was to some extent included in the monitoring and evaluation system of Tdh's projects.

Tdh intends now to put this information at the disposal of all project directors, donor agencies, fieldworkers, press agents, government authorities and international organisations

involved in the fight against child trafficking that wish to have better knowledge and understanding on the happenings since September 2003 in Zou province and in Abeokuta. This is with the intention of determining what suitable action to take to improve the current situation and fate of hundreds and even thousands of mistreated or highly vulnerable children. ■

FROM ABEOKUTA
TO ZAKPOTA



The September 2003 "crisis" - the unveiling of a child trafficking route from Benin to Abeokuta in Nigeria

What is the Abeokuta quarry "crisis"?

What is commonly called the Abeokuta quarry "crisis" is in fact the sudden appearance of a sizeable political and media problem which developed after the September 2003 "discovery" that hundreds of Beninese children were being exploited in the gravel pits of the town of Abeokuta in south-west Nigeria. Recognition of this case of child trafficking was followed by an emergency intervention aimed at retrieving, repatriating, protecting and re-integrating the children from the gravel pits of Abeokuta. This happened under the supervision of the Beninese and Nigerian local authorities and with the assistance of international and non-governmental organisations that specialise in child protection.

Initially, at the beginning of September, the "crisis" began with the discovery of the shocking and scandalous situation in which hundreds, even thousands of Beninese children were being held by force and exploited at Abeokuta in Nigeria. A great deal of press coverage followed, especially in Nigeria. It was the chief of the Beninese community of Abeokuta himself who personally brought the situation to people's attention. The children, mostly between 10 and 15 years old, were forced to work in appalling conditions in "holes" or "gravel pits". They worked all day extracting tonnes of gravel for the local building and construction

industry. According to rumours, there were more than 4000 children working in hundreds of gravel pits dug out of the bush around Abeokuta. Other sources say 6000 and some even calculate the number as high as 16000 children! The discovery, seized upon by the press, now also involved the local authorities from Nigeria and Benin - what should the authorities do to help these exploited children?

After a few weeks of hesitation Beninese authorities decided to react strongly and to stage an emergency rescue effort with the cooperation of the Nigerian authorities, UNICEF, the European Union, and some non-governmental organisations such as Terre des hommes (Tdh) and the Beninese Red Cross. The rescue effort effectively began at the end of September and lasted until the beginning of December. During the three month period, the "affair" drew a lot of attention in Benin and became a politically sensitive dossier, the "crisis" was dealt with by the Ministry of Family Affairs and Social Welfare (MFPSS). Nonetheless interest shown by the press and the intensity of the "crisis" fell markedly after the re-integration of 190 children repatriated from Nigeria back into their families (on the 4th December 2003). The problem seemed to be rectified, everything appeared to be back in place, all that needed to be done seemed to

CRISIS

Number of children by age	Age of repatriated children	Percentage
5	From 5 to 7 years	1,9%
17	From 8 to 9 years	6,5%
52	From 10 to 11 years	19,9%
63	From 12 to 13 years	24,1%
50	From 14 to 15 years	19,2%
48	From 16 to 17 years	18,4%
19 adults	From 18 to 19 years	7,3%
7 adults	20 years and over	2,7%
261 in total	From 5 to 20 years	100%



have been done. It was as if there were no more trafficked children to rescue from Abeokuta. On the outside in any case, the "crisis" and emergency were over.

Two years after the end of the Abeokuta "crisis" 3 questions should nevertheless be asked:

◆ What did the "crisis" reveal about the nature and extent of the phenomenon we

were faced with?

◆ Why was the "crisis" suddenly triggered in September 2003 and not earlier (in 2001 for example, the year of the Etireno affair) ?

◆ Should we now assume that the problem of children working in gravel pits has been rectified once and for all? Or, should we learn from this lesson how to anticipate future "crises"?

What the "crisis" revealed about the trafficking of children to the gravel pits

Despite the suddenness of the "crisis", it revealed the duration and scale of the trafficking that no one had yet calculated. It turned out to be easier to gauge the duration of the practice than its scale due to a lack of quantifiable data. Since officially "only" 261 children were rescued and repatriated from the gravel pits, the staggering numbers heard in the beginning of the crisis were not verifiable. A feeling that the figures were deliberately exaggerated fuelled the doubt in some officials' minds and provided a pretext for those who had participated in the trafficking or had hidden it in an attempt to conceal the seriousness of the reality.

Meanwhile, the information gathered from the investigation carried out by Tdh confirms the results of the investigations carried out by the Beninese police and several journalists. The data gathered is unquestionable and confirms that the current situation is neither recent nor economically based but instead, one that is extensive and dates far back with social and historical roots.

Interviews with the children from the gravel pits, ex-traffickers and middle-men, the families that sent their children to Nigeria and other sources, reveal several things:

1) 261 children were taken from the gravel pits and repatriated to Benin. Most of them were

between 10 and 15 years old. Over 50% of them had spent between 1 and 2 years in the pits, 35% between 3 and 4 years and the rest between 4 and 7 years. This data confirms the scale and duration of the trafficking.

2) In addition to the 261 repatriated children, a thousand others (at least) returned to Zou without any help or institutional protection (so-called "informal return").

3) Tens, even hundreds of other Beninese children exploited at Abeokuta remained in hiding in the bush for several weeks or months before being re-routed to other areas of exploitation in south-western Nigeria (Ogun, Osun and Oyo states) where they probably joined other Beninese children already having been exploited in the gravel pits or in plantations¹.

4) Child trafficking of Beninese children to the gravel pits and fields of Abeokuta expanded rapidly in the mid-nineties but began even earlier, as far back as the seventies. It is the work of Beninese individuals, and not Nigerians, who themselves had generally experienced the difficult economic migration to Nigeria before commencing their illicit operations. Some of them however, were born into the Beninese community in Nigeria and settled there for many decades due to numerous invasions which left close-knit relations between people living in that area of Benin and south-western Nigeria.

¹ In order to obtain this data, Tdh directly administered a first questionnaire to 66 schools in Za-Kpota, whilst the CPS asked the CLLT to administer a second questionnaire in all 56 villages and neighbourhoods of the commune. However this only took place in 7 villages.

5) The trafficking discovered at Abeokuta does not concern children being trafficked from Benin to Nigeria but more specifically children trafficked between Zou province and Abeokuta. In actual fact, 256 (98,8%) of the 261 repatriated children turned out to be from Zou province (southern Benin), 201 (75%) of them coming from the same commune, that of Za-Kpota. This data illustrates the social and historical dimensions linking two regions and two peoples between which considerable trade exists since the middle of the 18th century.

6) As in all organised social groups, the child traffickers were structured in a generational hierarchy. The "elders" (40 - 55 years) were

the pioneers. By increasing the number of children they could "recruit" new traffickers (25 - 40 years) who in turn evolved in the business and formed beneath them a third generation of traffickers much younger in age (15 - 25 years).

7) Growing poverty in rural communities of Benin only encouraged the traffickers, facilitating their role and legitimising their existence amongst the poorest people. By "borrowing" children for several years in exchange for small sums of money and sometimes offering them the opportunity to become associates in the business, over time, the traffickers gave life to a new socio-economic "model" capable of sustaining itself.

Definition

Who were the so-called "informal return" children?

Hundreds of children were exploited at Abeokuta. Only 261 of them were repatriated. Alongside the return via "official" channels, hundreds of other trafficked and exploited children returned to Benin by informal means, otherwise meaning by their own means. That is to say: alone, accompanied by a trafficker hoping to avoid capture in Benin, or else, with the help of a family member that came to fetch them in Nigeria or at the border post.

In collaboration with the Centre for Social Welfare (CPS) of Za-kpota and with support from local committees against trafficking (CLLT), a study was carried out by Tdh in 2004 which established that 178 children originally from Za-kpota had been working in the Abeokuta quarries prior to September 2003 and returned by informal means between September and November 2003.

These figures only regard the commune of Za-kpota where data gathering conditions were difficult due to hostility and suspicion from the local population. It is thus safe to assume that these 178 children only represent a small percentage of the totality of children who made an "informal return" to Zou province and the rest of Benin.

The driving forces that triggered the crisis

If in fact child trafficking to the gravel pits is long standing and extensive, why wasn't the Abeokuta "crisis" triggered earlier, for example back in 2001 when the Etireno affair revealed the existence of considerable child trafficking along the northern coastline of the Gulf of Guinea and Gabon? Since the situation in Abeokuta had persisted for at least a decade, why then was the "crisis" triggered in September 2003?

Close analysis of the "micro" and "macro" context in which the Abeokuta "crisis" occurred challenges some pre-constructed ideas. This could help us to understand how events occurred, and what were the limitations, successes and failures.

The first important point is that neither child protection NGOs nor government authorities, not even groups of activists against child labour, brought the situation to the attention of the press triggering the scandal and the emergency action that followed. On the contrary, members of the Beninese community, who themselves were implicated in the system of exploitation and child labour in the gravel pits,

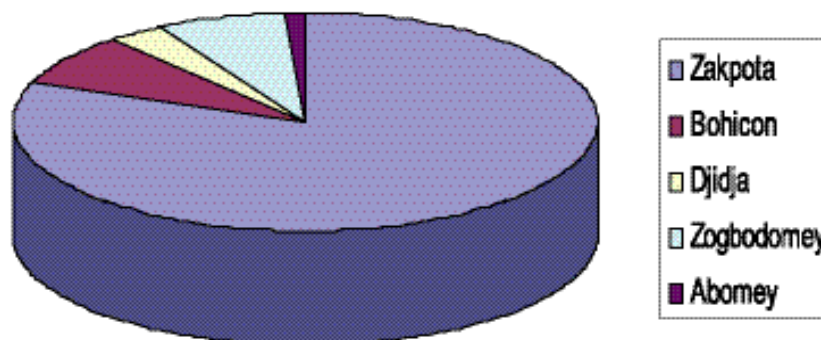
brought information on this trafficking into the open. They also carried out raids seizing other traffickers child labourers and handing them over to the local police. So began what became known by traffickers and their young victims as the "war". It was not a war declared by NGOs and the state on traffickers but rather a war between traffickers which the different stakeholders against child trafficking then seized upon.

What were the reasons behind the "war"? There were at least two: one individual, the other structural.

The "war" began with one man, a traditional chief and nobleman amongst noblemen in the Beninese community of Abeokuta, also known for his talents as a healer. He made a sudden attack on those that questioned his authority and were working on changing the political and legal status of "his" community, the Egun Community. Allies and protégés backed him whilst their opponents soon organised themselves. The confrontation was fuelled by division and conflicting interests within the

Over 75% (201 out of 261 repatriated children) come from the commune of Za-kpota.
In Zou province the children from Za-kpota represent 77% of repatriated children

Commune of origin in Zou province



community with sizeable economic gains at stake (mostly linked to the system in the gravel pits²) as well as ethnic rivalry. The chief's side seemed dominated by Gouns originally from Oueme (pronounced Wehmeh) in Benin, whilst the leaders of the opposing side were in majority Fon from Zou province (Benin). The chief and his allies tried in vain to label their efforts as humanitarian action - probably in the hopes of gaining political and financial support - but in turn lost "their own" child labourers. The "war" between traffickers completely destabilised the entire Beninese community and incited panic when 7 traffickers, including the principal enemy of the chief of the Egun Community, were arrested. A few months later the chief too was arrested and deported to Benin. Whilst his trial awaits him in Benin he has since been authorised to return and live in Nigeria.

Analysis of the "crisis" on a "micro" level reveals why the rescue operations did not attain the expected results since the majority of them, up until November 2003, were carried out for private interests and not by government forces. Government forces and NGOs

attempting to intervene to detect and rescue trafficked children from the areas of exploitation came up against surveillance and alarm systems that prevented their penetration attempts. Traffickers even succeeded in taking back some children that had been rescued and who were awaiting repatriation to Benin in supposedly secure transit zones...

In this "micro" analysis it is however not evident why such localised socio-economic conflict managed to trigger such a political and media scandal in Nigeria and then Benin. Here the "macro" context of the "crisis" comes into play, most notably two major factors:

- ◆ Strong international pressure on Benin and Nigeria since the end of the nineties concerning child trafficking
- ◆ The tense political circumstances between Benin and Nigeria during the months preceding the "crisis" were marked by a Memorandum of Understanding at Badagry in August 2003 affecting three elements of border control between the two countries: transnational organised crime; contraband and... trafficking in persons.

Eye witness reports (I)

A long standing and socially structured phenomenon

Eye witness report from a leader and advisors from a village in Za-kpota: "Men began to mi-grate to the region of Mahi to work in the agricultural sector [in the early seventies] (...) and as there were many children they took some of them with, who they left behind to work whilst they, from time to time, returned to the village with the fruits of their labour to support the members of the family that had remained there. (...) On their arrival in Mahi they realised that they could go to the Ivory Coast and would come back by car and well dressed."

Eye witness report from a past trafficker: "Firstly the children followed the adults from their families. Since they brought back good things they inspired other children and families. (...) The first time I took two children (to Ivory Coast). (...) Over the years I realised that the gravel pits (in Nigeria) were better, that is more profitable. I had 30 children that I divided into 3 groups."

These two factors are evidently at the origin of the swift reaction of Nigerian and Beninese authorities concerning this new development of child trafficking. They also account for the speedy process of politicisation and the extensive media coverage in Benin, and particularly the communication strategies used by the MFPSS to highlight, and promote its operations.

²See the next section: "The system in the gravel pits", p15



In late 2005 hundreds of children from the Zou province continue to be exploited in Nigeria

In 2003 lobbying efforts developed by the international community and organisations defending children's rights bore fruit. This occurred under exceptional circumstances of far-reaching concerted and coordinated action between two neighbouring states and the support of several other national and international stakeholders. On the flipside, one wonders whether the particular context at the time did not indeed have an effect on the social and humanitarian aspects concealed by political and press related stakes. Was it not in the hopes of calming the situation down and keeping it out of the limelight that the government authorities acted on the "crisis"? Did we not turn a blind eye to the hundreds of children that returned informally, to the role of their families in sending them to the gravel pits, and to large numbers of traffickers who walked free? This indicates that the phenomenon could easily repeat itself and that a future "crisis" is not far off. In turning a blind eye have we not merely pretended to have found a durable solution to the problem when in fact all that was really undertaken

was a simple matter of emergency action...?

Now in late 2005, Terre des hommes and all other organisations committed to stopping trafficking have the responsibility to invite those responsible on all levels to anticipate future events, drawing from lessons learned and realities revealed. The challenge is to avoid being trapped by either the cultural acceptance of child trafficking or a strict application of international regulation and a ban on child trafficking.

In several states of Nigeria on the border with Benin, hundreds of children from 6 to 15 years are exploited daily in fields, plantations and gravel pits. Their fate bears the mark of indifference and their numbers will continue to grow if nothing is done about it in the future. Must we wait for the traffickers to tear each other apart again before helping them? Have we learnt from the past lessons exactly what interventions to carry out in the greater interest of these children taking into account the realities of their environment? ■

Eye witness reports (II)

How we were arrested in the gravel pits...

A., 13 years: "It is Chief X (the chief of the Beninese community of Abeokuta) who asked us to stop. Then he came to check on our arrest by the police."

R., 12 years: "[after our arrest], Baba Y (Beninese nobleman of Abeokuta) came to tell us we would be freed. But I don't understand why we weren't. Sometimes he lets some go, sometimes he hands us over to the police."

P., 15 years, ex work-gang leader, younger brother of a young trafficker who was also exploited: "Baba Y and the chief of E. came in Baba Y's car to arrest us and take us to immigration. There were 9 children and 3 adults. Baba Y. told us that we could return to Abeokuta as soon as he had sorted the situation out."

P., 15 years: "Baba Y. and chief X were friends but when Baba Y. heard that chief X was about to send the children back home, he did not agree."

What is meant by child exploitation?

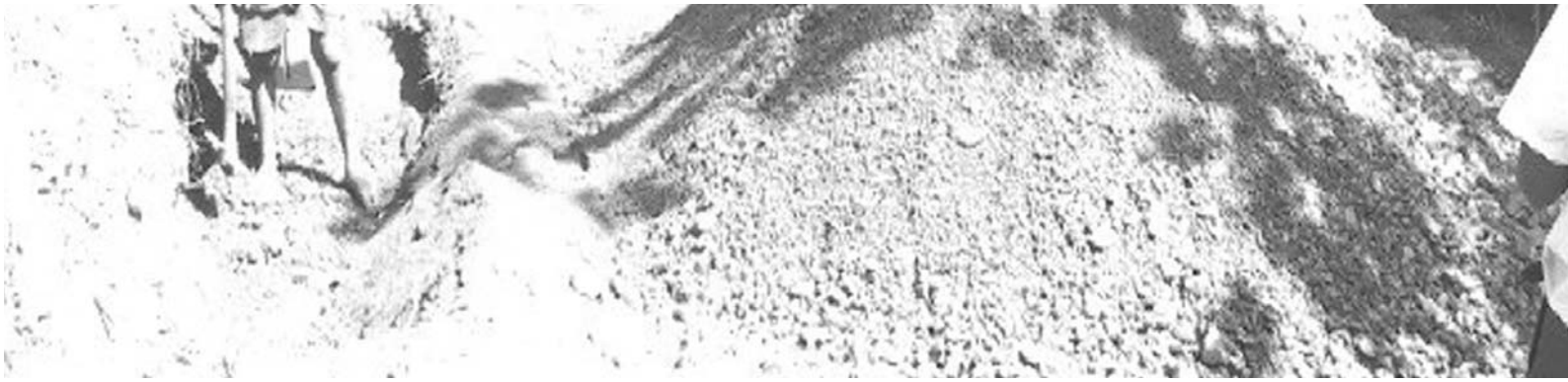
The notion of exploitation is not defined in the Palermo Protocol. However the protocol does stipulate forms of exploitation linked to child trafficking. Exploitation shall include: the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal or organs.

Most forms of exploitation mentioned in the Trafficking Protocol have been defined in other international conventions*. The word "exploitation" is used to refer to situations that are prohibited as an abuse of human rights, not in the classic Marxist sense of referring to all situations in which an employer makes a profit on an employee's work. (In Mike Dottridge, 2004. "Kids as commodities? Child Trafficking and what to do about it", FITDH.)

*ILO convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999), ILO Convention No 138 on the minimum employment age (1973), The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993), Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), Convention on Slavery (1926), Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, Trafficking in Slaves and Practices Resembling Slavery (1956).

In the approach taken by Terre des hommes in West Africa, the definition for "exploitation" used to identify, denounce and act on the exploitation of a child is: any act that abuses or makes a profit (economic, material or other) from forced child labour which overburdens a child's personal capacities and may compromise the child's education, health, security, integrity, or physical, mental, sexual, spiritual, moral or social development.

These types of exploitation of children are not only an abuse of internationally or universally recognised rights of every child, but are also an abuse of the recognised rights of other children around them that form a part of the same society to which the exploited children belong or the one in which they live.



The system in the gravel pits: how child trafficking and exploitation works

When help came for the trafficked children of Abeokuta at the end of September 2003 within the context of the "crisis", there was one fundamental element missing that would have helped the different stakeholders to understand the phenomenon they were confronting and to choose the most pertinent strategies. This element was no other than a knowledge of the gravel pit world, how it works, and the mechanisms constituting the very specific type of trafficking being dealt with. In the meantime the investigation carried out by Tdh at Abeokuta and in Zou province during 2004 has enabled the gathering of sufficient information to clarify this point. With hindsight it is thus possible to ask ourselves a few questions about the situation prevailing at Abeokuta. Then attempt to understand why so many Beninese children, mostly from Zou province and Za-kpota, were working in the gravel pits of Abeokuta at the time and why the trafficking was never denounced before, either by the Beninese community of Abeokuta, the communities from whence the children were sent, or the Nigerian authorities or population of Abeokuta.

The organisation and functioning in the gravel pits

There are three types of pit in the mountainous area of Abeokuta: sand pits (Kindo in Yoruba), gravel pits and granite pits. The gravel and sand pits were dug out in order to extract the required material. In the case of gravel, it is found naturally either in the form of small gravel stones, or in chunks of stone that need to be extracted and then broken into smaller pieces to make gravel stones. The work is different with granite which is found in big blocks or rocks on the surface which are broken by heating them on log fires. It is used to make cooking utensils (grinding boards made from granite), wall plastering or gravel for the manufacture of mortar. The pits in which the children repatriated from Nigeria worked were mostly gravel pits, "holes" which were in fact small deposits or veins in which "gangs" of two or three children worked for several weeks before moving to another gravel deposit.

The aim of the pits is simple: fill up as many truckloads as possible (25 to 30 for a good deposit) with gravel destined for building and construction.

Who organises the production and sale of the gravel? Who owns the pits?

1. There is firstly the owner of the land where the deposit lies. Either there is a real owner or a "middle-man" who claims the rights

to the deposit when (in certain cases) the owner is not able to exercise his rights. The owners are almost always pure Nigerians, mostly Yoruba, generally local noblemen or rich and powerful individuals with far-reaching, even national, influence.

2. Next there is the middle-man, approached by the land owner who proposes the exploitation of the deposit for a monthly payment calculated according to the number of gangs working the pit. The middle-men are generally Nigerian Yoruba women.

3. In order to exploit the deposit, the middle-man requires labour and approaches a trafficker/employer to provide it. The middle-man provides the work tools, contacts the buyers, controls the loading of trucks and receives the money for the sale of the gravel from the transporters.

4. The trafficker/employer is responsible for providing the children that will form the work-gang. He recruits them himself, sometimes with the help of a scout, channels

THE SYSTEM IN THE GRAVEL PITS

them from Benin, gives them food and shelter, and in return, receives 50% to 60% of the sale price of each load of gravel. He is the owner of the children, their manager. He is not called "trafficker" but is known as the "boss". [All the gravel pit traffickers that Tdh has identified since 2003 have been Beninese](#), whether having a Beninese name or one that they have made more English sounding, or Nigerian sounding, in the hopes of gaining Nigerian nationality.

5. [The haulage contractor, driver or owner of the truck, buys the gravel on site from the middle-man](#), has it loaded by the children and makes a profit by re-selling the gravel on the construction market. They are most often Nigerian, sometimes Beninese.

Trafficking and exploitation in the gravel pits: a mountain of profits!

The gravel pit economy is based on two resources as it turns out: the gravel and..... forced child labour. It is a lucrative business for the different parties. On analysis of the combined working interests in the gravel pits, one can better understand why such a diverse mixture of people (Nigerians and Beninese from Abeokuta, Beninese from Benin) have accepted, encouraged, maintained and trivialised the phenomenon over the last decade. It seems that only the child labourers and their families do not receive much from the business. It is also necessary to take into account the amount that this menial financial gain represents to their low standard of living in order to understand its given value.

The children's parents gain by being relieved of the cost of another mouth to feed for several years, and from a sum of 75 000 to 150 000 cfa francs (115 to 230 euro)³ generally every two years. It is most certainly a very small amount of money according to the work that a child has done in 24 months of labour in the gravel pits - it is the equivalent of 3000 to 6000 cfa a month (5 to 10 euro)! However this amount is paid in cash in a lump sum to parents (often farmers) who only earn up to about 200 000 cfa (300 euro) a year from the sale of their annual production...

The labourers' profits are nevertheless minute in comparison to those made by the

6. [In this system the child, between 6 and 18 years](#), provides cheap and docile labour. Recruited by the trafficker/employer if possible at a young age so as not to contest his authority, but not too young to make profitable labour, the child lives and works between 5 and 7 days a week at the gravel pits. The "contract" lasts normally for 6 years (three cycles of two year contracts), during which time the child doesn't receive what can be really called a salary. Rather, at the end of a two year contract the child may receive a bicycle and/or a radio. A modest sum of money is handed over to the parents on specific dates and at specific periods over the 6 year period of forced labour and semi-slavery.

[traffickers. Each load of gravel brings the trafficker 16 000 cfa \(24 euro\)](#). A load of gravel is sold on site for 28 000 cfa (42 euro), the difference goes to the middle-man (12 000 cfa, or 18 euros). A gang of two children working on one deposit produces 4 to 5 truckloads of gravel a week, that is between 200 and 250 truckloads a year. At the price of 16 000 cfa a truckload, counting 220 truckloads a year, per gang per year, the trafficker makes up to 3 200 000 cfa annually (4 885 euro). The profit made from "owning" a single trafficked child is thus 1 600 000 cfa a year (2440 euro), less the monthly costs, approximately estimated at 20 000 cfa a month (food, clothing), or 240 000 cfa (365 euro) per child per year, in addition to the annual remuneration of each child, a maximum of 75 000 cfa (115 euro). These calculations show the minimum gross profit made per child per year to be 1 285 000 cfa (1960 euro), without taking into account the costs of recruiting and transporting the children (scout, carrier, vehicle, fuel, border and roadside corruption ...)

or any health problems the children may suffer. Using the figures from the Tdh study whereby a trafficker on average "owns" thirty or so children, it is possible to estimate that the cumulative profit made by a trafficker of this size (30 children) before the "crisis", was in the region of 38 million cfa (60 000 euro) a year, or 3 million cfa (5 000 euro) a month!

[Stopping the traffickers and disentangling the trafficking network](#)

Only a handful of traffickers (7 people) were arrested over child trafficking to Abeokuta during the 2003 crisis. They were all released at the end of 2004 after a period of temporary detention followed by prison sentences from several months up to a year. Their return after a 14 month absence was openly celebrated in their villages of origin as well as in the Beninese community of Abeokuta. However there was no plan to facilitate their re-insertion into economic activity and thus nothing that encouraged them not to return to their illicit practices of the past. A year and half after the crisis, the trafficking routes and networks between Benin and Abeokuta remain in place, capable of generating a large cross border flow if conditions become favourable once again, that is, if the pressure being exerted by the State and by NGOs wanes, or the population becomes weary due to the economic difficulties faced.

³ Since the creation of the Euro the official exchange rate is 1 Euro for 655 Francs CFA

A trafficker's profile and means of operation

In Benin, the minimum wage is 27 000 cfa per month whilst a civil servant officially earns between 60 000 and 75 000 cfa a month (90 and 115 euro) depending on their level of education and experience. It is thus easy to understand what a gold mine the exploitation of children in the Abeokuta gravel pits represents, especially for individuals generally lacking any schooling.

The typical profile of a trafficker operating in the Abeokuta gravel pits is that of a migrant: a pioneer from the seventies, with over 50 years experience; a second generation migrant to Nigeria; or a youth under 20 years. He comes from a poor rural background without any real trade, except that of a farmer. The trafficker is most often unscrupulous and unashamedly seeks financial and material gain having been himself hardened by the trials and tribulations of migration. Nevertheless not all traffickers fit this description nor work in the same manner.

There are firstly the traffickers that directly recruit children from families, and present themselves not as recruiters but as friends or benefactors who accept to take the burden of the child whilst providing a service to a brother, a cousin, a sister... This way the trafficker spares himself the lengthy process of seeking out children or of employing someone to do so in his stead. It is a matter of simply targeting households in financial difficulty within one's own community and knowing the number and ages of relatives' children in order to anticipate the demand and make an offer that cannot be refused. There is no need to go out of one's way to dupe others or to use intermediaries when the members of one's own family know very well what it means to go and work far from home and to extract gravel from the pits. There is even less need to find prospective clients who will buy or rent the children since the benefits from their exploitation come directly to the trafficker. In this case however, the trafficker does have to pay the children's "salary" regularly, as well as taking basic care of them to avoid problems with the family later on. This way of working has other advantages with regards to control, the child is conditioned to obey his uncle and this makes it easier to manage if there is an accident or any kind of problem with the child's parents. The trafficker also has the possibility to make the due payments over the period of family festivities, usually at the end of the year. Using his pre-eminent role and money, the

trafficker overtly displays his wealth, making a show of distributing hand-outs which, although are more costly to him, help to reinforce his prestige and power in the minds of the community.

Another way of recruiting is more similar to other forms of trafficking well known throughout the sub-region. Some traffickers that operate "within the family" have no qualms about also being involved in this second kind of trafficking. In the second case, the trafficker seeks children from areas where he has a good chance of finding his targets. If he must, he will pay up to 5 000 cfa (8 euro) a head to someone else to seek out the children and prepare the way for him so that he might arrive as a saviour, awaited like the messiah! Parents that decide to send their children to Nigeria are generally in dire need of cash. A loan of 10 000 to 30 000 cfa (15 to 45 euro) should suffice to conclude the transaction. In these cases however, the child runs a greater risk of mistreatment whilst the parents risk not receiving the entirety of the promised sum since there are no blood ties binding them. The trafficker often lies about the real destination of the child, as greedy and immoral intentions, not present in the former form of trafficking, lie buried at the heart of such transactions.

Eye witness reports (III) Our (mis)treatment in the gravel pits...

S., 12 years: " We worked seven days a week. (...) from Monday to Saturday we would extract gravel and on Sunday we would go to the fields to cultivate tomatoes and chilli peppers. (...) For food the boss gave us 2 cobs of maize a day and at the weekend he brought us maize flour."

S., 12 years: " When a child first arrives he does two weeks of training and then joins an experienced child who becomes head of the gang. From then on he must fill a required number of truckloads per week."

A., 11 years, comes from a family of traffickers: " We never went home. We would always sleep at the gravel pit. We would eat twice a day, either manioc flour or maize with chilli pepper sauce bought by the gang leader. He received 3000 to 5000 Nairas (8000 cfa, 12 euro) a week for our food. "

Mister V., trafficker in the past: " We give 600 N per two children per week and on Saturday 100 N each. The established minimum is between 500 and 800 N per week, but each boss can decide to give more, up to 2 500 N for two children but usually the most experienced of the two would keep all of it for himself."

In the case of trafficking to the gravel pits, the abduction of children with the intention of forced labour, occurring outside of the other two forms of recruitment, constitutes an exception. Such exceptions exist and have been reported to Tdh researchers.

The conditions of departure and daily life of the children in the gravel pits

If both parents and trafficker agree on the destination of the child and the motive for leaving, the child will usually be informed that he is going to Nigeria but is little or ill informed about the realities that await him and the work he must carry out. Amongst the children's reports some claim to have been made to believe that they were going to work in a bar, to help make palm wine, or to do housework: tasks known to be less harsh than the work in the gravel pits. Nevertheless, some children had already heard of Abeokuta and dreamt of their independence, and so they followed their brothers and left their homes or jobs. For these children leaving for the gravel pits was synonymous with hope, even if they were right in supposing that the task before them would be difficult. Instead of working the fields in Benin for nothing, they preferred taking their chances in the gravel pits in Nigeria. It is a well known fact that one earns twice as much working in the gravel pits as in the plantations in Nigeria, but even working in these plantations is more lucrative than the fields of Benin.

There is indeed much suffering in the gravel pits. For the first two weeks, each child must follow some training before being put with another more experienced child who has been in Abeokuta for two or three years already. The latter becomes the "gang leader" and regularly abuses his power: power in managing the weekly money rations for food, power to make the other child work longer and harder; power to beat up the other child if he is smaller and weaker... The living and working conditions are brutal. The physical work is intense and dangerous, particularly harsh on the hands and knees, and the children run a high risk of accidents. The work day is long (8 to 10 hours), the days off are reserved for the weekend, but even on these

supposed days of rest the children are often sent off to labour in the fields. On week nights, they sleep in the holes or under any type of shelter. There is permanent violence between the children added to which sometimes the adults also swear at, bully and hit them. The hardest part perhaps, is to have to eat gari, maize meal and chilli pepper day in and day out, suffering permanent hunger pangs and pain from exhausted limbs. Regarding hygiene and sanitary conditions, they can only be bad considering the children live in the bush 5 days a week and are left to their own devices concerning washing, clothing and taking care of themselves. In addition, they are distanced from parents and friends further lowering morale, especially amongst the youngest ones who are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

During the first two years a trafficked child finds himself in an extremely vulnerable situation, growing up in an environment of physical and emotional suffering. This is the fate for all the little inhabitants of the gravel pits. There is a risk of death, one case of which was reported by a child in an interview. This said however, the life in the gravel pits is not necessarily worse than the life they left behind in the village. Reports received sometimes leave much doubt as to the children's inner feelings and sense of judgement. Perhaps, once the children are no longer prisoners of their own situation, they are able to trivialise it (strength of resilience); or maybe with time, they become hardened by the situation and are resigned to facing their harsh reality, keeping a secret inner hope that the experience will enable him to have a better life someday, starting with a bicycle, a radio, or a few thousand francs for someone who has never even had a 5000 franc note (8 euro)...

Eye witness reports (IV)

Why did we come to work in the gravel pits...

P., 15 years, ex-gang leader, younger brother of a young trafficker who was himself exploited: "My parents decided to send me because my brother came back with many things: a radio, a motorbike and clothes. The motorbike is now used as a Zemidjan (motorbike-taxi) and my mother uses it."

F., 15 years: "I wanted to become an apprentice builder but needed 20 000 cfa for the contract. As I didn't have any money my father sent me to Nigeria."

Mister V.: "Three years ago (2001) [the amount of children leaving for the gravel pits] increased because of the fall in cotton production and the low prices. (...) There was a drought and the harvest was very bad. People got themselves into debt."

Women's group "Vivote": "the main reason is debt, (due) to sickness, funerals or wedding ceremonies."

V., headmaster: "I have students that work well and suddenly disappear. (...) The father borrows money on condition that he gives up a child and the child disappears. (...) When the father needs money again, as he already knows the system, he sends a second one."

Family B., with several members who are traffickers: "It was our maternal uncle that got into the habit of taking children to Nigeria in order to relieve the family. It's a matter of reducing the family's suffering. The trafficker makes an offer to assist the family. (...) Before children that had been to school were not sent, but when there are no means to keep them at school we send them too."

The evolution and cycle of exploitation: careers of the children from gravel pits

The first cycle of exploitation in the gravel pits ends after two years with a short break home to the village for the end of year festivities. At this point the trafficker pays the parents and gets assurance that the child will return to Abeokuta to terminate his "contract". The child still has two more two year cycles to do. During these cycles he will become a gang leader and contribute to the system of adult domination within the gravel pits. Having some experience, the child now learns how to profit from the situation and to improve his daily circumstances by abusing others and especially by misappropriating some of the money destined for the middle-men or the traffickers. In their absence he will organise extra loads of gravel himself by making the younger ones work harder, thereby maintaining a level of productivity that conceals his business on the side. At 13 or 14 years old, a child that arrived in Abeokuta at the age of 10 is no longer simply an innocent victim of the system. Indeed he is still a victim, but has also become a cog in the system, heading towards a career as trafficker which could begin as early as 16 to 17 years old, after "liberation" and 6 years of good and (not so) faithful service. Before him a far more lucrative

but totally immoral new career opportunity arises. There is great sadness behind the apparent success of the rapid wealth the young trafficker will accumulate. The "career" opportunity finalises the total failure of parental education created by handing the children over into the world of trafficking and exploitation. All chances of passing on some humanity and dignity from the community are abandoned and there is a risk of creating shameless individuals that seek only to make a profit, deprived of knowledge and skills, left only with the capacity to survive in the gravel pit hell and to earn favour with the elders.

Eye witness reports (V)

Trafficking: a problem of poverty ... and ways of thinking

F., villager: " someone with many children is very respected, you can do anything and people will be afraid of the number of children behind you. It's an honour, a sign of social prestige. "

V., headmaster: " When families don't have enough money [between 7000 and 8000 cfa annually to send a child to school], even if the child works well, they take the child out of school and send him to Nigeria."

B., villager: "A child is wealth. Once you have a child it means that you have something to exploit, you will no longer die from hunger, the child will fulfil your needs."

V., headmaster: "Parents only see the money they receive and the beautiful house built by the trafficker. It's a huge system: if the child accepts to leave he will learn the trade and become a trafficker in his own time. He will be liberated and will be able to build a house as well."

A., villager: "These are my children and I am already old. I have to get something out of them before I die."



What was done for the children in the gravel pits of Abeokuta : an account , lessons learned and perspectives for the future

At the beginning of September 2003 in Benin, information circulated by the press and by diplomatic services on the existence of hundreds or even thousands of Beninese children, victims of trafficking and exploitation in Abeokuta, reached government authorities, the international community and child protection organisations. This triggered the "crisis". In the absence of any pre-meditated rescue plan, the improvised response of stakeholders was the implementation of an emergency relief plan of action aimed at rescuing the trafficked children.

With hindsight we can see that there were two main reasons for the dictated strategy which consisted of the rapid return of the child victims firstly to Benin and then to their homes:

- ◆ On the one hand, there was pressure from the State of Nigeria to rapidly return the Beninese children who were seen both as victims of trafficking but also as clandestine workers;

- ◆ On the other hand, the humanitarian nature of this sort of operation focuses on the trafficked children in distress and demands that they be taken out of the forced labour circumstances in which they are prisoners.

The Beninese Ministry of Family Affairs and Social Welfare (MFPSS) took charge of the situation with the support of UNICEF, the European Union and a few organisations with recognised experience in fighting child trafficking. From the outset the child rescue operation from the gravel pits was an emergency relief intervention. This explains why no alternative solution to their repatriation was proposed regardless of their age, the conditions by which they arrived in Nigeria, the relations they may have had in the Beninese community of Abeokuta, or their own will to leave or stay in Nigeria. A unique method of intervention was chosen based on the urgency that for some, lay in the importance of controlling the situation as quickly as possible, whilst for others, the importance lay

in taking the victims out of the clutches of their tormentors for good. The intervention was based on the principle of repatriation, itself inspired by the system of sheltering and protection practised by the main NGO partners, a system based on:

- 1) providing shelter and rehabilitation for child victims in an institution;
- 2) seeking out the parents and re-integrating the children into their families.

By the end of September 2003, several waves of repatriated children became part of a cycle whose main stages were: reception in an institution or shelter; identification of the most traumatised individuals; restoring the children's basic rights (food, shelter, security, affection, hygiene, health, education, leisure,...); a two to three month stay in a shelter in order to guarantee the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the child; research that covered seeking out the parents of each child and ensuring the child would return home under decent conditions; and lastly, the re-integration of children into their families and social environment.

Due to a lack of preparation and experience of collective action, admittedly the relief action was not an easy task to put into effect. The success in coordinating efforts and steering task forces was indeed a job well done by the MFPSS and all the different partners. Nevertheless it is necessary to recap on the specific conditions prevalent in the largest phases of the operation so as to learn from them. With this in mind two questions can be asked:



◆ What are the main observations regarding the way in which the different stakeholders responded to the problem and the obtained results?

◆ What long serving instrument or mechanism has been put in place since the

September 2003 "crisis" that will be used in the future for more appropriate and efficient interventions with regards to victims of transnational trafficking that are exploited in similar circumstances to those of the Abeokuta gravel pits in Nigeria or elsewhere?

Nigeria: Detection, release and care during transit and repatriation

One factor that stands out in this stage of the operation is the lack of a defined detection and rescue strategy which could have been delegated to a single stakeholder to carry out these tasks in order to attain a specific objective in the overall plan of action. Instead, under the urgent circumstances and without any well-oiled cooperation between the two countries, it was not possible to designate one or several competent stakeholders to find all the children that were suspected victims of trafficking. No precise objective or operational "tactic" was established in the rescue plan. Agents in the Beninese community thus were left for two months to carry out the task of finding and rescuing children. Local police were initially very helpful, allowing the local police station to be used for the rescued children, as well as identifying them. Later a Nigerian NGO, WOTCLEF (Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation) made available a centre where the conditions were more adequate to care for the children in transit. In November 2003, the federal government of Nigeria put the Ogun State immigration service in charge who created a Task Force to pursue rounding up and repatriating children. The Task Force was able to take back sixty children from the traffickers, however by the time it intervened almost all of the victims had already fled to Benin or other work sites. Interestingly the statistics gathered by Tdh on the repatriated children reveal that from November 2003 onwards, only 25.49% of rescued children were under the age of 14, compared to 76% prior to then.

The so-called "relief" operation seen from the point of view of the "rescued" child victim, is wrought with problems. Witness reports from repatriated children give some indication of

the psychological damage and rights abuse they suffered during the raids organized by the traffickers in their conflict and then by the "Task Force". The "bosses" put their stress on the children, making them take part in the "war" and using them as hostages. They were conditioned to flee from any adult that looked anything like a policeman or member of a child protection organisation. The traffickers spread rumours about what would happen to the children if they were "caught". They also prepared the children on how to avoid the identification process thereby lying to police and NGOs in order to avoid giving correct information which could trace back to them. During their stay at the Oasis Centre, Cotonou, many of the children changed versions of their experience in Abeokuta. It was necessary to wait several weeks before children exploited by a close relative or coming from what was considered a "trafficking" family would confide in the social workers. Through information gleaned from the children, Tdh was able to make a reconstruction of the "system of the gravel pits" and become aware of the psychological difficulties that the children were subjected to under the "warlike" conditions.(see insert p. 14).

The lack of strategic planning and an operational rescue framework was due to the unexpected trigger effect that started the "crisis". Moreover, September 2003 saw the creation of NAP TIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons), a Nigerian agency set up to deal with interventions of this sort but whose services were not yet operational. There was not one reputed organisation working in the line of child protection in Abeokuta, nor was there one from outside with enough

field knowledge to give on site advice and support to decision makers and institutions. It is important also to mention the difficulty faced by the different authorities in their attempt to take control of the situation. Analysis sheds light on episodes of corruption that were reported during the "war" which divided the local Beninese population and weakened Beninese diplomatic influence on the local community. Several reports gathered by Tdh revealed that certain members of the local police force and immigration services sold children back to the traffickers and leaked information on the Task Force's operations. The fact is that many children disappeared and missed out on being repatriated and that many of the operations carried out by the Task Force were a complete failure. The traffickers' strategy was most probably to control those capable of taking "their" children away or to undermine their enemies. It will be necessary to incorporate this dimension into any future operations in Nigeria aimed at taking trafficked children away from their exploitive work sites.

As for the actual repatriation processes, it is

Bad Practices (I)
Detection, Identification and Repatriation

1. In Nigeria in 2003, the intervention carried out to assist the exploited children from the Abeokuta gravel pits was affected by a lack of any real intervention plan, guidelines, procedures and clear method of action centred on the children as well as on respecting their rights and their higher interest.
2. The intervention hindered the detection and the ability to rescue hundreds of other children exploited in the gravel pits. It did not respect the minimum guidelines for protecting victims (traffickers bought children back; no one was attentive to the children's needs on their release from the work sites; there was forced repatriation; children were transported with their traffickers...)
3. Correct identification of victims and their circumstances was not achieved by the intervention and lead to certain cases being incorrectly handled. Later in Benin it became apparent that 26 "children" were in fact over 18 years old, that 50 teenagers were between 14 and 16 years old and that 48 others were between 16 and 18 years old. They could no longer be sent to school but could legally work. This leaves a big question mark on the pertinence of their forced repatriation in the place of seeking solutions in Nigeria to end their exploitation while taking into account their own wishes, capabilities and intentions. Lastly we now estimate that many of these children were not actually working in the gravel pits but were cultivating manioc, tomato and chilli pepper etc., often accompanied by members of their family, in conditions that were neither as harsh nor scandalous as those in the gravel pits...

Inside shelters in Cotonou, followed by re-integration into the family

Between September 2003 and March 2004, 261 Beninese child victims of trafficking and exploitation were finally taken out of the gravel pits in Abeokuta and were repatriated to Benin. Here they were taken to three children's shelters of organisations that specialise in caring for trafficked children (Tdh, Beninese Red Cross and Carrefour d'Ecoute et d'Orientation), or they were taken to a make-shift shelter inside the National Stadium and left under the responsibility of the MFPSS. All the children were given a medical check-up and during their stay were well attended to, boosting their confidence before being sent back to their

certainly positive to have succeeded in returning 250 children by official channels and putting them in the hands of institutions capable of ensuring their care and protection. And yet, it has already been highlighted that the Nigerian authorities did not clearly choose between dealing with this case as a child trafficking issue or an illegal immigration issue. Several stakeholders and outside observers have also made reference to the fact that the preparation of and the repatriation process itself did not conform to the minimum standards required for this type of operation. The children were neither consulted nor given the opportunity to express their wishes; their point of view was not taken into consideration; and over 100 of them were over 14 years of age at

the time. Some of the children were even repatriated in the same bus as their trafficker. These bad practices are essentially due to the fact that those responsible for organising the repatriation did not have adequate expertise or tools (legal arrangements, guidelines, operational frameworks, practical guides etc.) to guide them and enable them to see the gap between what was taking place and what should have taken place⁴.

families from the beginning of December in the Zou (256), Atlantic (2), Mono (1) and Couffo (2) provinces.

The climax of the joint action carried out by the authorities and international and non governmental organisations was the re-integration operation, organised by the MFPSS, that took place with great ceremony on the 4th December 2003 in Za-kpota. Politically orchestrated and with much media coverage, the operation intended to raise awareness within the local population and send a message out loud and clear, that sending children to work in Nigeria was prohibited from now on.

⁴The absence of such guidelines was highlighted by Unicef, the regional branch of which situated in Dakar, in 2004 organised a workshop to elaborate on "Guidelines", stretching from the problem of repatriation to other aspects of legal and social protection of children in the context of the fight against child trafficking. With regards to bilateral cooperation between Benin and Nigeria, progress was also made as this issue has been integrated into the new Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two countries in June 2005

The 190 children that had stayed in the different shelters or in the stadium since September and October 2003 were collectively re-integrated into their families. Unfortunately much confusion overshadowed the operation causing tension to rise within the population which then had to be managed by the NGO and the CPS social workers (the Ministry's decentralised Centers for Social Welfare). (see insert on p.25) There had in fact been too many un-founded promises of financial and material gain made to very poor people who, naturally, tend to place economic issues above all others. On their return home, the child was once again seen by the community as a money earner, or as a sort of bargaining commodity - the parents were promised some welfare aid from the state and from development partners to NOT send their children back to Nigeria. Many promises were made in vain since the child support provided under the overall framework of the intervention had not really foreseen any post-reintegration strategy, other than the distribution of a few thousand francs to some lucky individuals ("family" allocation between 20 000 and 60 000 cfa, 30 to 90 euro). Monitoring the re-integration of the children and finding solutions to ensure that they would not be trafficked again was left to the goodwill of NGOs with a somewhat limited capacity to carry out such a task.

In contrast to the initial fanfare, several small scale and more discreet reintegration operations were carried out in the following months. 71 other repatriated children were returned home in this way by NGO partners who were able to take the time to explain in person the trauma experienced by their child, so that they would no longer send the child to work far away from them nor repeat the same pattern with younger brothers or sisters. Precautions were taken during the family reintegration to set up informal protection networks comprising people from the village and social circle of the child with the aim of ensuring minimal surveillance of the child and preservation of his fundamental rights.

Nevertheless, how could one hope to change the circumstances which lead to

sending hundreds of children to the hell-like gravel pits without regular periodical follow up ; without supportive advice from a social worker or person in the community; and without working in close contact with the families to help them understand

the interests of the child and the value of respecting his choices? How could one bring about a more hopeful outlook for both the present situation and the future of children and parents alike?

Best Practices (I) Rehabilitation

1. Judging from Tdh's own experience and that of other child protection organisations in Cotonou, the care and attention shown to the traumatised children repatriated from Abeokuta, as well as their protection whilst in the centres in Cotonou, reveal a high standard of professionalism. The knowledge gained and practices used are now considered as good examples which should be followed by other stakeholders in the fight against trafficking (sharing standards and protocols, distributing training modules).
2. For children affected by the terrifying experience of being trafficked and exploited in the gravel pits, the stay time in a shelter was fixed to a period of a few weeks up to 3 months, so as to take the time needed to really rehabilitate the victims in the centres. However, it was judged important to avoid a longer stay at any of the centres to ensure that the children's re-adaptation to village life and conditions occurred smoothly.

Follow up and support for social re-integration and re-insertion of child victims into the school system or vocational training

As previously noted, there was no modus operandi endorsed and promoted by the MFPSS at the outset of the re-integration process of child victims of trafficking. Considering that the Beninese government did not assume all of its responsibilities on this point, the repatriated children were still able to benefit from two so-called "re-insertion" projects carried out by UNICEF, ILO-IPEC and their partner NGOs. The projects combined econo-

mic support for the families, follow-up of the children's welfare and support for their re-insertion into school or the work force⁵. These projects have enabled enrolling and maintaining 90% of the children in school or vocational training, despite the strikes of public sector primary school teachers which took place during the whole of the first semester of the 2004-2005 school year.

⁵ The first of these projects was put into effect by Tdh (112 children) in collaboration with the Beninese Red cross (88) and with financial support from Unicef and the Swiss Development Co-operation (DDC), the second by the Beninese NGO Carrefour d'Ecoute et d'Orientation (44 children) with funds from ILO/IPEC

The limitations of this re-integration / re-insertion strategy

Although excellent results have been achieved by the "re-insertion" programme (see insert p.26), it has to be noted that these results are vulnerable. In deciding to suspend or lessen this type of aid, it is especially important to consider:

- 1) that before the intervention of NGOs, the fate of the children was to work in shocking conditions abroad in order to contribute to the family revenue; and
- 2) that in the absence of any outside assistance or regular follow up checking on the presence of each child in the programme, there is a great risk that the parents will not continue to finance their children's education alone...

In addition, the children that returned by themselves did not benefit from any assistance until 2005 when a new programme run by UNICEF and Terre des hommes in collaboration with the "Education First" project began⁶. This programme aimed to help several hundred of these children return back to school at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year. The strategies included: to ensure each one had a birth certificate, to pay the enrolment fees, to distribute school packs and to ensure the follow up of these children and families with the help of teachers, parents associations and mothers' associations.

In the end, the fundamental problems at the root of this child trafficking were not resolved. The affected communities await improvements in their day to day living by the implementation of programmes such as: micro-financing for small projects; setting up small-scale revenue generating activities; forming cooperatives or youth organisations; reinforcing women's groups; productive projects

such as ones that can ensure the payment of community teachers or establish school canteens; drilling boreholes; equipping community services such as the health service etc. And yet the re-insertion programmes in general only put in place support and follow up for schooling and vocational training - as was the case with the repatriated children. Regarding prevention methods, they remain concentrated on promoting children's rights and on raising awareness of the children's suffering, talking to people's consciences - firstly concerning the negative consequences of trafficking, and secondly, emphasising the need to work together with institutions and NGOs in an attempt to eradicate the pestilent and criminal act of trafficking.

In adhering to this, in Zou province, and particularly in Za-kpota, the efforts carried out by Tdh and the Red Cross sometimes went against the wishes of the parents and the children themselves. The situation revealed the inadequacies between anti-trafficking projects of NGOs and the issues preoccupying the families and communities within which the NGOs were operating. Some parents outright refused to "walk the talk" as they stood to gain nothing from the exercise. Others tried to negotiate their collaboration in exchange for assistance that could improve either their personal living conditions, those of their families, or less frequently, the conditions in the community. During the investigation and interviews in the field, the continuous exchange and proximity with the community showed a need, in the future, to implicate the affected population in the elaboration of objectives and in seeking long term adequate solutions. This applies to both Benin (supply of children) and Nigeria (children's destination or transit zone), so that, from now on, issues of child protection should be integrated into a more global approach to local and community development.

⁶ The primary objective of the "Education First" project (2003-2007) is to anticipate child trafficking in Benin (Zou, Borgou and Alibori provinces) by ensuring the access to and the maintenance of formal and informal educational programmes for at least 6000 children victims or at risk of becoming victims of trafficking.

Lessons learned (I)

Creation and reinforcement of shelters and transit centres in Zou province?

1. As the shelters and transit centres were concentrated in Cotonou, it was impossible to organise quick and easy visits or encounters between the children and their families **because the centres were far from the communes and villages of the repatriated children.**
2. Using one or several centres in Zou province with a capacity to accommodate a few tens of children would have facilitated not only the preparation of their re-integration into the family, but also, in some cases, the parents, a relative or people from the community could have been involved with the rehabilitation process undertaken with the children.
3. Proximity between the children's shelter and their homes **could have allowed the social workers to organise family visits to the shelters so as to confront them with their parental responsibilities by showing what a shocking state the children were in on their return from the gravel pits.** This contrasted with the enviable state they were in several weeks later after intense care and attention had helped to reinforce their resilience and to regain their physical and psychological strength.
4. The lack of centres for child protection in Zou province capable of accommodating trafficked children and adhering to the required standards of quality meant **that children returning by non-official means could not be assisted. This is with regards to their rehabilitation or preparation to return to their families** - that is to say the first two stages of the re-insertion process.
5. In Zou, Borgou and Alibori (North-west Benin) provinces in 2005, **work on sharing experiences and capacity building carried out by Tdh in the Caritas Centres ("Education First" project),** constitutes a concrete action in response to lessons learned from the Abeokuta "crisis".

Eye-witness reports (VI)

Frustration encountered during re-integration

Mister V., trafficker in the past (talking about the parents reaction whereby they threw themselves onto the bags distributed by UNICEF at the re-integration ceremony organised by MFPSS at Za-kpota): *"people are very disappointed by the return of their children, they thought the bags given to the children were full of money. (...) Now they are ready to send the children away again."*

Mister G., member of a Committee against child trafficking: *"(the people from the villages) ask us "what are we going to receive from the people who won't allow us to send our children away?"*

B family., family to which renowned traffickers belong: *"Our situation hasn't changed since the arrival of the whites. We are still as hungry at the end of the day. You won't resolve the issue in this way."*

Good Practices (II)

Re-integration and re-insertion of trafficked children into their home environment

1. There is a clear need for a sufficient quantity of high standard human resources working consistently and in close contact with local stakeholders and communities to support and strengthen their work with children (teaching staff, parents groups, students' mothers groups, women's groups, local protection networks...)
2. Identifying the child victims by establishing court issued birth certificates has proved to be of utmost importance. Without a birth certificate (more than 90% of repatriated children were not recorded at birth), or without a court issued birth certificate in its place, it is impossible to obtain proper national identification papers. Without identification documents many larger administrative complications occur, such as not being able to sort out one's circumstances as migrant worker, or not being able to enrol for final examinations at school.
3. It was far more satisfactory, to parents and children alike, to put children of 12 years or over into vocational training rather than into primary school in cases where the children had little prior schooling or had been prematurely taken out of school. The satisfaction can be measured by its duration. Beginning vocational training also means receiving a tool kit that belongs to the child and can be used during his training or on the side. This gives the child a concrete opportunity to become independent faster, both socially and economically. The biggest financial outlay for vocational training is at the beginning, on signing the contract, organising the ceremonies and buying the necessary equipment. After this there is a small annual sum of money paid to the tutor for daily living expenses and transport between home and the workshop, this ensures that the child remains in training and can slowly begin to earn a living.
4. There were several ways in which the parents intervened in finding educational solutions: by identifying schools or workshops for the young trainees; participating in negotiations with the bosses of these workshops and sometimes negotiating the contractual costs. This meant they strengthened their support for the solutions found and the recommended norms, even if this support was strongly conditioned by the material and financial contribution made by Tdh.
5. The pilot project of a system of alternative schools set up for children over 10 years by the AILTEB project (Integrated Approach to Fighting Trafficking of Beninese Children, CREER NGO and CRAP NGO) is a promising experiment that activates community resources and progressively innovates its educational material (alternative and nursery school classes) and provides other opportunities in comparison to the classical schooling system which is not adapted to children from 10 - 11 years and over who were taken out of school.

Costs of re-insertion
School fees, vocational training costs and court issued birth certificates

Field of re-insertion	Average cost of the re-insertion
Vocational Training	
Mechanics	44000
Sewing	41250
Carpentry	48000
Boiler making	45000
Driving	50000
Building	49000
Tyre repair	35000
Welding	58750
Car painting	55000
Schooling	
All grades	8250 + school pack
Legal assistance	
Establishment of birth certificates	8500

**Present situation of 142 children repatriated from Nigeria
and re-inserted by Tdh into Zou province (October 2005)**

A - Professional re-insertion

Trade	numbers	Present situation
Mechanics	20 (1 gave up in 2005)	All these children are continuing their vocational training
Sewing	05	
Carpentry	10	
Boiler making	0 (1 gave up in 2005)	
Driving	04	
Building	08	
Tyre repair	01	
Welding	09	
Car painting	01	
Total number of children still doing vocational training after 18 months of re-insertion (July 2005)	58 out of 80 children (90,00 % success rate)	

B - School Re-insertion

Grades	numbers	Present situation
C1	11 (2 gave up in August 2005)	All of these children went up to the next grade and went back to school at the start of the 2005 – 2006 school year
CP	41	
CE1	17 (1 gave up in August 2005)	
CE2	08	
CW1	02	
CW2	02	
Total number of children still in school after 18 months of re-insertion	79 out of 82 children 97,56% success rate	The three children that gave up school are presently receiving attention from social workers in an attempt to reinsert them to school or to a vocational training

The dilemma between re-insertion and prevention faced by NGOs working against trafficking

Presently in Zou region, Tdh and other NGOs trying to protect Beninese children from trafficking, exploitation and the worst forms of labour, are all faced with the same dilemma.

Is it better to focus on the re-insertion of those child victims that have already been detected and dedicate enough time, and material, financial and human resources to carry through and perpetuate this programme? Or, is it better to focus the greater part of our means on preventing the risks that threaten thousands of very vulnerable children?

In the case of the programme concerned with the children repatriated from Abeokuta, Tdh intends to pursue the efforts begun by the Foundation to restore the children's rights and keep them out of danger of further trafficking or exploitation. At the same time however, these 142 children that benefit directly from the project live alongside hundreds of other children under the same risk, or those victims said to have "returned unofficially" who benefit from neither direct nor indirect aid. Moreover, we have proof that since 2003 the trafficking of children for exploitive purposes from villages in Zou province and specifically Za-Kpota has continued. In spite of the effectiveness on the individual level - 90% success rate after two years of work - all these elements reveal that the kind of operation carried out up until now is not sufficient if the objective is to do more than give only simple assistance to a limited number of child victims. *Is not the definitive aim of the fight against child trafficking to reduce, in the mid to long term, this extensive and complex social phenomenon, which is essentially unacceptable, and yet functions as a system of practices and ideas that are deeply rooted in people's minds and capable of crushing the existence of thousands of children every year?*

If Tdh were to stop the specific operations being run to assist the children repatriated from Abeokuta and to use the resources that are available to benefit a larger number of children, those repatriated would feel even more betrayed and defenceless than before. In fact, if Tdh were to stop assisting these children in 2006, we know that at this stage, few parents would be capable of taking over the costs of education. It is probable that a large percentage of the 82 children would leave school more or less immediately. Under such circumstances, *only the (60) children undertaking vocational training would still have a chance of pursuing their re-integration independently.* This is simply because the overall and daily living costs of vocational training are less than for schooling once the contract has been signed and the festivities that launch the training are paid for. This is also because, in the eyes of both children and parents, learning a trade provides more tangible opportunities and credible socio-economic independence and thus a contribution to managing family resources.

All the same, *it is evident that regular assistance to individuals, even lasting over a further period of one or more years, would not be enough to disembrace the system of attitudes and behaviours that the children suffer from within their own families and communities.* The impact of this method of intervention is not extensive. The children and their families become dependent on outside assistance, and there will always be more children without than those receiving support in the villages where there is assistance for individual re-insertion. *Moreover, this form of assistance has a passive effect on the beneficiaries. It puts them in a sustained position and mindset of dependency. In this way, it contributes to strengthening the very system we would like to change.*

Lessons learned (II)

Prolonged individual assistance and holding families responsible

Material assistance to individual child victims and their families is a common practice to support the re-insertion process. There are various ways, the most widespread being individual patronage whereby, during several months or years, a donor financially and materially helps a specific child. This outside assistance seeks to improve the child's circumstances and is entrusted to an NGO working in the field that will ensure it goes to the intended child and serves to achieve the fixed goals.

This approach has undoubtedly achieved positive results such as paying school fees and keeping children at risk in educational programmes (school, vocational training). Nevertheless, it is important to underline the many negative effects and the interferences that are the result of this approach in contrast to projects that dare to undertake work on fundamental issues with parents and the community which actively implicate them in taking responsibility for their own children. It has been noted that the prolonged sizeable aid from the system of patronage creates deep inequalities between beneficiary and non beneficiary families, strengthening the feeling of dependency (already well established) in local communities. It fuels counter-productive reactions, such as seeking "the trafficking hand outs" (a trafficked child receives aid whilst a non-trafficked one doesn't...) or pulling a child out of a project which "doesn't pay well enough" or which "costs too much" for the parents, so they will be put a child into another project "where there is a lot to gain"...

By creating a temporary group of privileged few amongst the population this strategy feeds and maintains a mixture of structural ideas reinforcing a system which favours and justifies trafficking. For example, ideas according to which:

1. only outside aid will enable poor children to break away from their conditions
2. schooling is too expensive and is not made for those that cannot or who do not have the means to access it
3. if a child cannot be used to obtain material and financial aid from a project, it is better that the child works to earn money than costs money by going to school...

In other respects it has been observed that failing a school year; stopping mid-term; the abrupt removal from school; and any kind of stagnation in the small classes reduce a child's chances of acquiring sufficient and long lasting skills which could prove the importance and utility of schooling. These early interruptions, maintained by repetitive strikes on the part of the teaching body, fuel a different and widely spread view that schooling does not teach anything important to children. If it is difficult to gather proof which can convince parents of the usefulness and effectiveness of the schooling system, from their point of view, why then should they go without in order to send their children to school?

A new approach to prevention, combining prevention and re-insertion efforts

Re-insertion is aimed at specifically identified child victims whose path has already been tainted by trafficking and exploitation. Successful social re-insertion of a child who has been a victim of trafficking and exploitation, should thus present a real, sustainable opportunity to never again live under such dangerous and destructive circumstances. This is assuming that the child succeeds in becoming independent and ensures healthy development, *that is regarding his rights*, in a manner that is acceptable to the society to which he belongs.

With regards to prevention, it intends to benefit more people and to reduce the amount of children that become victims in need of immediate assistance to a bare minimum.

In the hopes of improving efficiency and effectiveness, would it not be possible for the re-insertion efforts undertaken for some of the child victims to be used, not only to forewarn of any new victimisation of children, but also to put other vulnerable children on their guard concerning the dangers of trafficking?

We give a positive reply to these questions, on the condition that the re-insertion programmes really bring about changes and transformations on a scale larger than that of child beneficiaries: that is, families, clans, generational

groups and local communities. It is important to note that this re-insertion approach goes hand in hand with the prevention approach which is no longer what was most often developed by stakeholders working in the fight against child trafficking over the last 5 to 6 years. There was an approach which used intensive "awareness raising" of the local population in areas qualified as "supply" zones.

The "awareness raising" let us remind ourselves, until now, consisted in delivering informative messages of denunciation or promotion to the target public (parents, local leaders, children etc.) in order to modify their perception of the realities, increase their sensitivity and rejection of certain practices, to raise the level of information and to increase the degree of moral conscience. Essentially, these operations were directed at parents of so-called "vulnerable" children, living in areas where trafficking "originated" or was "prevalent". Taking the example of the awareness raising campaigns carried out in Zou province between 2000 and 2005, nearly all of them encouraged parents to keep their children at home or within their home environment. *With what definitive results? Have we taken into account all the negative effects that resulted from this approach?*

Definition What is meant by prevention?

Preventing child trafficking means:

- preventing the development of circumstances of child exploitation or trafficking by first acting on the factors, causes and reasons (stakeholder rationality) which can bring about these sorts of circumstances;
- planning the development and implementation of necessary means and arrangements to be used in the case of harmful circumstances to enable efficient rescue efforts for victims (protection operations).

Lessons Learned (III) **Moving on from "awareness raising"**

The present awareness raising carried out in Zou province does more harm than good. Sensitisation puts pressure on the target population using repetitive and insistent means to inform them of the ways in which the institutional stakeholders want them to conform. Instead of winning them over, this form of sensitisation makes populations suffer a lot of symbolic violence (stigmatisation).

At the same time, it induces little change in behaviours by the population, or else produces superficial change which does not fundamentally modify the representation of their reality or ways of thinking concerning how family affairs are managed (1); the education and protection of children (2); and the creation / management of individual and collective resources (3).

All things considered, the era of emotional, accusing and only informative awareness raising campaigns seems to have given rise to effective awareness raising founded on educational initiatives and learning through action, experience and demonstration. This should bring the target populations progressively closer to the norms and values that the international community promotes, by, in a participatory manner, actively including the populations in the development and implementation of development projects, alternative educational means and codes of conduct or protection for all children, working or not.

The basic principles of a participatory community approach

The study carried out within the adult population of Za-kpota, the repatriated children, their families and other children from villages, clearly revealed the existence of a deep discontinuity and differing wavelengths - one could even say a "gap" - between the ideas put forward by those working against child trafficking (government authorities, NGOs and their representatives inside the villages) and the conceptions of the problem coming from those to whom these official ideas are directed. It is thus necessary to seriously question why, after so many years of "awareness raising", the most common attitude encountered amongst the heads of families in Za-kpota continues to vary between an unconvincing reproduction of the ideas that come "from outside and from above" and the pure and simple rejection of these ideas and what they represent. We have even encountered on several occasions, notably within local committees in the fight against child trafficking, people who present the official ideas as their own when dealing with representatives of these ideas, whilst in reality; they remain implicated in clandestine trafficking, and go even so far as to justify these actions in private.

On the whole, we have observed that a large portion of the population targeted by the awareness raising campaigns in Zakpota, has not in fact been keeping with the trafficking fight, but has been playing a double game, concealing their real opinions to make the most of the situation by benefiting from the NGOs and what they hand out. By letting them believe that they shared the same vision and objectives, by showing they were willing to help, and by adopting the appearance of the expected behaviours (participating in

ceremonies and sensitisation campaigns, becoming part of local committees to stop trafficking, informing on certain cases of trafficking...), these people were taking precautions against the sanctions that threatened them, whilst also giving themselves the opportunity to profit from the resources that were distributed by those working against trafficking.

Having learnt from the lessons of such observations and analyses, Tdh has already begun a process to revise its method of operation. This will develop and put into effect a new approach that whilst maintaining the initial and fundamental objective (preventing the risks of trafficking and exploitation), from now on, will promote the development of the communities inner capacities and focus on issues at the heart of the local populations. This is in the hope of helping them to solve the problems that they will have identified themselves and which they will therefore be committed to solving.

This approach aims to create a permanent framework of collaboration and mutual understanding which can guarantee, on the one hand, genuine long lasting commitment from the affected population, and on the other hand, adequate support from the NGO. It will be based both on shared interests and a relationship of trust which will be strengthened by close ties with the people whilst working on concrete action. This form of collaboration should bring about more learning experiences, initiatives and changes that will affect specific individuals and groups, as well as social relationships and community institutions.



Bringing in outside support will be facilitated by Tdh's position as financial intermediary and interface on the local and national level. This is necessary in order to put forward solutions to important structural problems which will affect the development of some basic services (health, water supply, roads, markets, education...) or economic activities. In the meantime, other changes can be brought about by stakeholders in the community using their own means and capacities supported with the appropriate technical expertise to bring about progress in terms of organisation, communication, the feeling of responsibility and harnessing the resources available and potential within the communities.

In this way, prevention will be perceived as a participative and community based process which aims at a general improvement of the standard of living, education and children's working conditions in the areas identified as either supply or demand zones of trafficking and exploitation. The priority therefore is no longer to simply communicate and raise awareness (CCC, press campaigns...), by focusing explicitly on the problem of trafficking. Now we seek to focus on trafficking as

part of a number of issues that the population itself considers of major importance. The key idea here is to accept and to adapt our operations to the needs and the resources of the community - exactly the opposite to the approach consisting of predefined operations whereby the communities are subjected to the orders and expectations of outside institutions who are often in a hurry to obtain visible, quantitative results.



The challenge of changing mindsets is thus central for Tdh, however, the method of operation we have chosen is to accompany the stakeholders by organising activities to bring about progress all the while respecting their specific view points and adjusting to their realities. Whilst the objective is to bring about sociological changes with regards to children (firstly by the transformations that condition such changes) from "within" - that is, by supporting various

stakeholders in the clans and communities - the adopted approach does not exclude using the advantages of more restrictive strategies such as the organised repressive measures of the law.



Linking a community approach and coordination on macro and micro levels

To achieve tangible results from the participative and community approach, which resembles what is called "[endogenous animation](#)", it is necessary to intervene on levels other than just the families and local welfare groups (women, men, youth, organised groups, resource people, etc.) that make up the social environment where child victims and those at risk come from. [Firstly, it is imperative to move the focus towards those people involved in the lives of the exploited children on site](#), in this case, the Beninese and Nigerian communities living in Abeokuta and other areas in Nigeria where a large number of children from Zou province are working. There is a dire need for real social work that includes the identification of the issues at hand, counselling, mediation and finding acceptable solutions for all parties at involved every time that a simple removal and repatriation of the mistreated or child labourer does not seem to be the best way to protect and help the child.

[Again, the core idea is to learn to use and lean on the community and inner dynamics](#) by holding back from going entirely against the most deep-rooted ideas in people's mindsets and social relationships. Otherwise, there would be no hope of profoundly and durably preventing trafficking without using restrictive and uncompromising solutions. Let us not forget that in both Benin and Nigeria, the government services do not yet have the necessary means to enforce adherence to new legal norms, nor do they have the means to put into effect the extensive poverty reducing policies and promotion of education paramount to improving general living conditions of the children and their families.

We finish off this analysis by insisting on the importance of the central role played by the State and on the challenges presented in coordinating all the stakeholders: public and private; governmental and non-governmental; national and international; as well as local and decentralised structures. It is true that the first

and most important kind of protection that a child receives should come from someone close (family, clan, neighbours...). But intervention from the authorities is also essential. With regards to the protective programs of other citizens and NGOs, it is also important, and yet remains, in terms of effectiveness, almost completely dependent on commitment to protecting children from the family and especially from the State. [At the same time, it is essential that in pushing families and communities to resume fundamental responsibility for their children, the primal responsibility of the State in protecting children from today's perils and confusion is not forgotten.](#) As sovereign institution, is not the State responsible not only for the fate of the Nation and its multiple components, but also, the sole national body capable of ensuring long-lasting action on micro and macro levels, by organising the coordination of stakeholders and facilitating links between public policies and local and private initiatives?

Although in the sub-region States are confronted with great financial and organisational difficulties, each State has a considerable capacity for action and holds in its hands the political levers that can transform the life of its citizens and their children. [In the fight against child trafficking, the State should further develop its role](#) in convicting criminal offenders, assisting child victims and in strategically and operationally coordinating stakeholders especially through support and emphasizing the work done by decentralised services. The State's main focus should be in preventing the structural causes of child trafficking and exploitation. Here the challenges are: the extreme poverty of rural populations; the weakness of the educational system; the subordinate position of women in society; and the predominance of the agricultural and the informal sector in the countries' economic structure - both of which have a high demand for child labour. ■



CONCLUSION

The Abeokuta "crisis" revealed to all those working in the fight against child trafficking, and especially to the governments concerned, what the limitations are of emergency action which seeks to hurriedly repair any harm done to the children, without having really measured the type and extent of the underlying problems.

The research work and investigation carried out by Tdh amongst the population in Zou province and the Beninese community of Abeokuta, revealed the complexity and long period of time over which child trafficking between these two regions has existed. It showed that the phenomenon takes several forms; that it is commonplace; that it has many particularities and is rooted in social, economic and cultural practices of certain populations living in Benin and Nigeria. It also revealed that we cannot effectively fight this phenomenon if we consider it simply as a criminal act or an economically based "social irregularity".

The Tdh investigation proved above all else that the gravel pit scandal is still alive and well in 2005, and that hundreds of children from Zou province continue to be sent, with the help of their families and communities, to Nigeria to be exploited. An important question can be asked here: what are the affected States and the other child protection stakeholders doing today to put an end to this intolerable situation, in order to give the child victims and those vulnerable to the same fate a concrete chance of escaping from it?

Many useful lessons on good and bad practices used in the field were learned from the analysis of the driving forces behind the September 2003 "crisis", the gravel pit system and the different interventions carried out as

part of the emergency action plan of the States of Benin and Nigeria and of NGOs working to rescue the trafficked children. The study attempted to emphasise the lessons learned and proposes sharing several "best practices" with other stakeholders.

How to right the wrongs?

Better understanding of the ways of thinking and the mechanisms behind trafficking as well as deep reflection on the failures, limitations and gaps in the "awareness raising" approach, have emphasized the present shortcomings in the fight against child trafficking in Zou province, and especially in Za-kpota. The child trafficking phenomenon is so deeply rooted in local mentalities as well as being linked to the social, economic and even political structure in the Zou province, that it would be illusive to think that simple "awareness raising" could topple the way people think and bring about profound changes in behaviour. Activities related to trafficking and indeed to the business of trafficking are so well integrated into the trafficking world and its organisation that we cannot implement a strategy which is not ambitious in its aims to implant alternative forms of social and financial success as well as alternative methods of education. This sort of project is committed to tenacious, tough and pragmatic long-term efforts that will coordinate economic, social and cultural programs on micro and macro levels enabling thousands of individuals, children or adults, to experience other ways of doing and living. In order to have a profound and long-lasting impact on reducing trafficking in Zou province, it is necessary to give tangible evidence to the local population which proves that they can live just as well by managing their reality differently. That is, without having to turn to traffickers/benefactors, without having to send their children to work abroad at an age where they should be at school learning to be constructive in society and not destructive to humanity.

CONCLUSION



According to our analysis, the priority is to undertake extensive prevention efforts, as soon as possible, in three principale directions:

- ◆ prevention directed at children and those close to them that follows a holistic, integrated, participative and community approach founded on internal response building to the general issues of child protection, instead of "raising awareness" about trafficking within the specified population...;

- ◆ prevention of the flow of already identified trafficking routes, thus carried out within the social groups living in the supply area of children as well as the groups living in the children's destination or exploitation zone;

- ◆ prevention of the structural causes of trafficking, firstly the lack of economic opportunities and the low level or inadequacies of the education system, mainly in Benin.

Large scale orchestration of such prevention must be carried out by the governments of the affected countries. For the stakeholders in the fight against trafficking, especially those organisations with good knowledge of the realities on both sides of the border and with expertise in working with communities, they will have to work alongside the governments, giving support to their strategies by providing an interface and being an intermediary between stakeholders from institutions and from the community that are committed to the prevention process. This scale of coordination presents a real challenge. Regarding the coordination on strategic and institutional levels, it has been noted that despite the existence of informal coordination since July 2004⁷, the operations of NGOs in Zou province are still hampered by an obvious lack of coordination and by institutional over exposure, mainly in the commune of Za-kpota.

The negative side effects of the lack of concerted efforts, discretion and coordination can be classified into four major categories:

1. The problem of social and territorial coverage due to a lack of synergy and complementarity (children benefiting from different reinsertion projects are spread out over the entire province complicating follow up programs and reducing efficiency - moreover, the inequalities in dealing with village communities and vulnerable families are emphasised by this lack of communication and information sharing);

2. The problem of lassitude felt by the population and the general loss of credibility of NGOs due to the disorderly and indiscreet methods of aid intervention (there is a multitude of similar and uncoordinated operations that always emphasize "sensitization". They feed excessive hope to the populations who end up with the feeling that NGOs really follow their own interests rather than those of the populations they are supposed to care for...)

3. The problem of competition between different "offers" giving "beneficiaries" the choice between the aid program that best suits them. This generally encourages and reinforces the feeling of dependency instead of parents and communities taking responsibility for their actions. This sort of competition gives rise to a lack of joint action concerning 1) the type of aid given to the target populations (technical, material, financial aid), 2) the identity of the beneficiaries (some of whom were "taken out" of one project and encouraged to join another with a more enticing "offer"), 3) the methods and approaches used, 4) the monitoring and evaluation of the effects and impacts that the different projects have produced;

4. The problem of insufficient collective capitalisation and common evaluation of projects against trafficking in Zou province and Za-kpota, despite or because of the pro-liferation of different interventions (lack of communication, information and experience sharing, transparency and common efforts which would enable learning on how to be more effective by working together).

⁷ The Informal Working Group (GTI) for Child Protection in Benin was jointly created in July 2004 by several international and non-governmental organisations. It consists of 15 different organisations and constitutes an important platform from which joint action, information exchanges and project development are shared. Programs in the fight against child trafficking are predominant due to the extent of the problem in Benin. The GTI has not as yet succeeded in initiating any real operational synergies outside mobilising its members call for the adoption of a law "which is specific, applicable and appropriate against child trafficking in Benin". All international NGOs operating in the Zou province and specifically in Za-kpota attend monthly GTI meetings, which, in the future, could facilitate bringing these operators together and developing a common and concrete strategy to confront child trafficking between Za-kpota and Nigeria.



Working together in 2006

Our findings have thus been transmitted to the partners, which is in fact the main objective of producing this publication. Now it is up to the involved stakeholders to react to the analyses and observations made by working together to directly confront the obstacles and difficulties ahead. If the vision is shared, together the outcomes of strategies, methods of operation, concepts and practices can be put to use. Likewise it would be interesting to pool together and harness resources in the fight against trafficking between Zou province and Nigeria in order to pursue the work of observation, investigation, research and capitalisation of experiences that have made this study possible. The study by Tdh which until now has been experimental, should be prolonged and strengthened through collaboration with other non-governmental and governmental stakeholders, firstly with



Lessons for West Africa

In closing, we would like to draw attention to more distant horizons, to point out that beyond the specific case presented here,



NAPTIP in Nigeria, the Beninese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and information services and police in Nigeria and Benin. The outcome of this publication, including distribution and sharing the results of the analysis and experiences, constitutes a new phase of intervention and co-laboration for Tdh. We now look to the main partners in the fight against child trafficking and exploitation : government agencies, UN agencies, donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, community leaders and contacts in the field etc. to take action. We hope that the alarm has been sounded and that the ideas put forward today will not be forgotten, but instead, in the near future in Nigeria and in Benin, stakeholders will join together to bring an end to the scandal of systematic exploitation of hundreds of children of 8 years and over, in gravel pits or agricultural plantations, where their lives are in danger and their childhood irreplaceably stolen, damaged or destroyed.

comparisons can be made with other forms of trafficking and exploitation observed in the sub-region, and even further, in West and Central Africa. Knowing that the best way to improve our knowledge and interventions is to compare experiences, methods and analyses, it is our hope that this study will be used by more than just the limited group of partners, observers and stakeholders already operating in Zou province and Nigeria. We believe that all stakeholders working for children's causes should be able to find useful information or ideas in this publication to fuel debates across the globe. It is also our hope that this publication will stimulate reflection on the largest possible scale and that consequently, in the near future, feedback and sharing of experiences and analyses will emerge. ■



Recommendations to child protection stakeholders in Zou province and Za-kpota

First Recommendation

Put networking, coordination and stakeholder synergy first

1. Put everything in place necessary to establish a solid and permanent information framework. Implicate all institutional and community stakeholders committed to child protection in Zou province and particularly in Za-kpota.

2. Focus work on Za-kpota in order to improve efficiency and concrete action. This same initiative can be used as an example to get other communes in Zou province to follow the lead.

3. Use three complementary methods to create the information, reflection, collaboration and joint action framework:

◆ **Amongst NGOs active in the field**, take the initiative to regularly bring together the twenty or so NGOs working in Za-kpota via the GTI. During the first trimester of 2006, together decide upon the terms of reference and prepare the organisation of a 3 to 5 day workshop which considers important questions on strategic and operational planning;

◆ **Concerning MFPSS regional administration in conjunction with the head of the CPS (Social Promotion Center) of Za-kpota and other local authorities** such as the mayor and local and traditional chiefs, organise meetings with all stakeholders (local informers, services and administration of other ministries involved, NGOs, community organisations, the press, civil society...). This is in order to establish coordination and follow up mechanisms. The MFPSS will then assume a lead role in the decentralised coordination of child protection operations.

◆ **Regarding NGOs and decentralised structures of MFPSS**, establish coordination, information and follow up mechanisms

necessary between local, regional and national levels. This will take the form of:

- **National Child Protection Unit** (CNPE, previously known as National Unit for Children Needing Special Protection)

- **National Monitoring Commission** operating under the Multilateral Cooperation Agreement against child trafficking in West Africa

- **National Commission for the Rights of the Child**

- **Informal Working Group for Child Protection** (GTI)

- **Network of Child Protection Structures** (ReSPESD)

4. From the start, link the information, coordination, reflection and joint action framework with all other frameworks, networks, structures, all stakeholders in child protection and the fight against child trafficking in Nigeria and Benin, as well as in all other countries where children from Zou province are victims of trafficking and exploitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Second Recommendation

Review prevention strategies to guarantee better understanding by affected populations as well as clarify the meaning, value and extent of child protection programs

1. Get a critical analysis underway of awareness raising methods we've already used (studies, evaluations) and organise a workshop around using new awareness raising methods to improve their effectiveness.
2. On both sides of the flow of trafficking, organise the concerted development of community and participative approaches founded on:
 - a. **establishing trust and dialogue** with community groups and authorities (various committees, parents' and mothers' associations, community based organisations, organised groups, political, moral or religious authorities, community leaders...);
 - b. **identifying in collaboration with stakeholders what are their priorities** concerning problems, expectations and types of support we can give them (participative diagnostics);
 - c. **supporting community initiatives** which aim to address these problems. Also put in place mechanisms that will raise living standards, improve education, security and conditions of transfer and work of children, as well as open up future opportunities;
 - d. **to systematically value local internal resources and solutions;**
 - e. **effective, sustained participation from children and young adults** in all of the above processes.
3. **Create synergies on a macro scale (political institutions, projects, donors etc.) and a micro scale (experiences of population and children).** This is so that the necessary means to attend to the urgent needs of the population are mobilised to coincide with community initiatives.

Definitions

Main functions and uses of an information, research, coordination, collaboration and joint action framework

Information :

- inform each other about what is happening or has happened in the field of child protection in general and more specifically in the fight against child trafficking;
- share and gather information, statistics and qualitative data to highlight what is being done and allow better analysis of what is happening in the operations being carried out in the field.

Joint Action :

- listen to others and agree on what action to take.

Research :

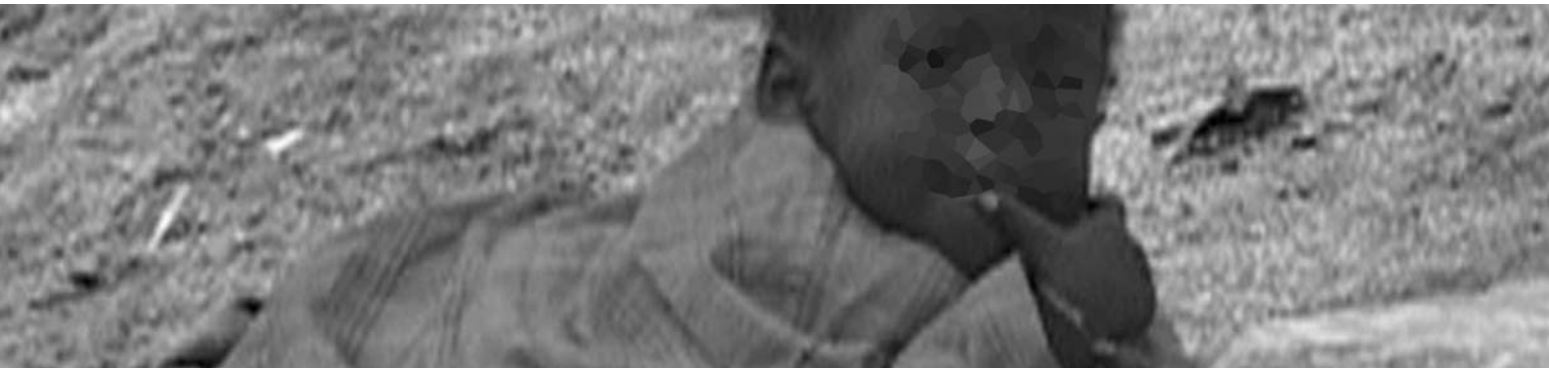
- examine the situations and issues confronting us;
- seek out solutions to overcome these difficulties and improve the quality and effectiveness of operations;
- extend and harmonise knowledge gained, points of view and analytical capacity;
- refine, adjust and renew techniques and conceptual tools.

Coordination :

- set out our strategies, approaches, resources, areas of operation and programmes to make the operations globally more coherent and bring about better results in the field.

Collaboration :

- work together on the conception, development, implementation and evaluation of common programmes in order to boost our resources, strengthen synergy and increase effectiveness in the field.



Third Recommendation

Prioritise strengthening educational and vocational opportunities of children from 10 to 14 years who are victims or are at risk of trafficking or exploitation

1. **Prevention:** specific solutions must be sought and found to improve the present situation of vulnerable children between 10 and 14 years. According to the statistics they are especially at risk of being taken out of school (if indeed they are in school...) and of being trafficked or exploited.

2. **Re-insertion:** specific solutions must be sought and found to improve the present situation and future opportunities of children between 10 and 14 years who have been victims of trafficking or exploitation.



a. These children are caught in a hard place between their young age, their profile and the characteristics of the formal system in place. It is necessary to increase the amount of informal educational opportunities (alter-native classes, literacy classes) and to reform or to adjust the curricula and timetables to the local realities.

b. Re-insertion through vocational or professional training also presents specific sociological and legal problems (legal age for vocational training, learning difficulties due to insufficient education, difficulties experienced in the transition from vocational to professional training or to practising etc.). Effective and long lasting solutions will only be brought about if institutional and operational stakeholders (the learners themselves, craftsmen's associations and parents' associations) mobilise themselves in this direction and collaborate on the framework of coordination mechanisms on both micro and macro scales.

3 **Advocacy:** collectively organise lobbying of "macro" scale decision makers to put the issue of child protection and the worst forms of child exploitation (an extensive list of which has not yet been drawn up in Benin) at the forefront of poverty reduction and civil society development policies. ■



Special Message to the government of Benin

◆ Develop and establish, in 2006, a governmental plan of action and a national child protection strategy which prioritises the fight against child trafficking and exploitation, in collaboration with civil society.

◆ Prepare for commissions or mixed working groups between Benin and Nigeria or the state and civil society :

1) "surveillance plans" to select exploitation sites and keep them under surveillance, to watch trafficking flows, routes and networks (e.g. Abeokuta gravel pits and plantations, the flow between Za-kpota and Abeokuta);

2) "intervention plans" to anticipate responses in case of an emergency, or else to voluntarily launch well organised widespread action beginning with detection in Nigeria up to the re-insertion phase in Benin;

3) "contingency plans" to manage arrival en masse and transit of children that have been taken abruptly from the place of exploitation in Nigeria and repatriated to Benin. This is taking into account the short time delays and always bearing in mind the rights of the child;

◆ Agree with Nigerian authorities and locally active NGOs on a prevention

strategy that is specifically centred on "trafficking" in Beninese communities. The strategy should seek to modify the socio-economic and cultural trading conditions which are at the base of organised and "community" networks of child trafficking that link communities based in Benin and others implanted in Nigeria.

◆ Consolidate and expand collaboration with NGOs according to their location and fields of expertise as part of the above mentioned plan of action and national strategy.

◆ Give special attention to reinforcing the human, technical and material resources of the Police Child Protection Unit (*Brigade de Protection des Mineurs, BPM*). The presence and authority of this Unit must be ensured across the country and especially in (red) child supply zones (Zou, Mono/Couffo, Ouémé, Donga, Collines provinces) as well as destination points and exploitation areas (Cotonou, Parakou, Porto Novo,...).

◆ Promote capacity building with Centers for Social Welfare (CPS) that are established in communes (computers, data bases, means of transport, human resources) to ensure their tasks in the fight against child trafficking are carried out properly (especially the coordination of NGOs in the piloting of local committees against trafficking).

◆ Tighten control on the social and economic dealings and political organisation of the Beninese communities settled in Nigeria.



Special Message to the government of Nigeria

◆ Using NAPTIP as the intermediary, actively contribute to commissions or mixed working groups between Benin and Nigeria and the state and civil society on the preparation of:

- 1) "surveillance plans" to select exploitation sites and keep them under surveillance, to watch trafficking flows, routes and networks (e.g. Abeokuta gravel pits and plantations, the flow between Za-kpota and Abeokuta);
- 2) "intervention plans" to anticipate responses in case of an emergency, or else to voluntarily launch well organised widespread action beginning with detection in Nigeria up to the re-insertion phase in Benin;

3) "contingency plans" to manage arrival en masse and transit of children that have been taken abruptly from the place of exploitation in Nigeria and repatriated to Benin. This is taking into account the short time delays and always bearing in mind the rights of the child.

◆ Using the police and immigration services to tighten control on the social and economic dealings and political organisation of the Beninese communities settled in Nigeria.

Special Message to UNICEF and ILO (IPEC and LUTRENA programs)

◆ Facilitate, guide and support dialogue and collaboration between States and civil society with regards to the fight against child trafficking and exploitation (worst forms of labour) on national and trans-national scales.

◆ Give support to action initiated by NGOs so as to adjust the action of institutions to the realities in the field. Actively contribute to updating concepts and frameworks of reference.



Special Message to donors

◆ Promote the merging of financial resources/sources that are usually confined to distinct and unchangeable fields of work (child protection; water; agriculture; micro finance; education; infrastructure...) in order to facilitate setting up integrated projects that are based on participatory and community development, and centred on putting platforms into place to carry out multi-sectoral

programmes whilst upholding the protection and education of vulnerable children.

◆ Give support to action initiated by NGOs so as to adjust the work carried out by institutions to the realities in the field. Actively contribute to updating concepts and frameworks of reference.

Special Message to national and international NGOs

◆ Actively contribute to the implementation and the functioning of reflection within formal and informal joint action frameworks so as to share experiences and information between NGOs thereby strengthening coordination, complementarities and synergies.

◆ Give support to the sharing dynamic and to strengthening links of mutual understanding to develop common analyses and responses (strategies), common projects (partnerships), standardised reference tools (intervention protocols, data bases, management tools) and collective lobbying pleas to political decision makers, the international community and donor agencies.

◆ In order to establish and improve on collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organisations working against child trafficking and exploitation, actively support the implementation of mechanisms that work within civil society in Benin and Nigeria particularly. Mechanisms

dealing with information, designation and representation (national commissions or units, monitoring committees, networks, international conferences etc.).

◆ Prioritise research on finding viable, long term solutions. Local institutions and stakeholders should be strongly implicated in the research. To do so, it is necessary to develop participatory approaches and to innovate in communication, training and supporting affected populations (children, parents, stakeholders in the community, employers / teachers, clients, traffickers, police, magistrates, highly placed officials, decentralised civil servants, social workers...)

◆ Become involved in developing and implementing the surveillance, intervention and contingency plans. This will ensure bringing about responses to the trafficking phenomenon between Benin and Nigeria, and even to Togo and Gabon, that are concerted, pertinent and effective.



List of abbreviations

AILTEB Project	Approche Intégrale de Lutte contre le Trafic des Enfants au Bénin (Integrated Approach to Fighting Child Trafficking in Benin)
CLLT	Comités Locaux de Lutte contre le Trafic des enfants (Anti-child Trafficking Local Committees: Community based Committees) (Bénin)
CPS	Centre de Promotion Social (Center for Social Welfare : MFPSS local administration) (Bénin)
CNDE	Cellule nationale des Droits de l'Enfant (National Unit for the Rights of the Child) (Bénin)
CNPE	Cellule nationale de Protection de l'Enfance (National Unit for Child Protection, previously known as National Unit for Children Needing Special Protection) (Bénin)
CRAP NGO	Partner in AILTEB Project
CREER NGO	Leader of AILTEB Project
GTI	Groupe de Travail Informel pour la Protection de l'enfance au Bénin (Informal Working Group for Child Protection in Benin)
MFPSS	Ministère de la Famille, de la Protection sociale et de la Solidarité (Ministry of the Family, Social Protection and Solidarity) (Bénin)
NAPTIP	National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic In Persons and other related matters (Nigeria)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
ReSPESD	Réseau des Structures de Protection des Enfants en Situation Difficile (Network of Child Protection Structures) (Bénin)
WOTCLEF	Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (Nigeria)

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Working for the good of the children in the Abeokuta gravel pits (2003 - 2005)

Tdh teams at the Cotonou *Oasis* centre, the project *URGENCE Benin-Nigeria* and the project *Vivê*

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Map: Tdh (Original source: ILO / IPEC / LUTRENA) *National and Transborder Trafficking Routes in West and Central Africa*, 4th Version March 2005.

www.tdh.ch
www.terredeshommes.org

www.childtrafficking.com
www.stopchildtrafficking.org

A large graphic consisting of a series of vertical white bars of varying heights, resembling a barcode, set against a red background. The bars are arranged in a way that they appear to be part of a larger, stylized representation of the text 'STOP CHILD TRAFFICKING'.

STOP CHILD TRAFFICKING



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