

Child Trafficking & Child Protection Campaign “FREE TO BE ME”



Children participate in the child protection toolkit rollout: Photo IOM - Nicola Simmonds

March 2013

This report provides information about the IOM campaign “Free to be Me”, which includes the development of a child trafficking and child protection toolkit, and pilot implementation of the toolkit in Ketu South & North and South Tongu Districts of the Volta Region in Ghana.

In November 2012, IOM launched a new initiative aimed at building the capacity of local communities to address and prevent child trafficking and protection violations occurring in the Volta region of Ghana. With support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), IOM is developing a toolkit set to be piloted in 6 communities in Ketu South & North and South Tongu Districts of Ghana’s Volta Region in 2013.

ABOUT CHILD TRAFFICKING AND CHILD PROTECTION IN GHANA

Ghana has been identified as a country of origin, transit, and destination for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The US State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report for 2012 indicated that the trafficking of Ghanaian citizens, particularly children, within the country is more prevalent than the transnational trafficking of foreign migrants. According to this report, Ghanaian boys and girls are subjected to conditions of forced labor within the country in fishing, domestic service, street hawking, begging, portering, gold mining, sex industry and agriculture.

Additionally, the 2003 Child Labour Survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service, ranked the Volta Region as having

the highest number of child labour victims. The survey indicated that the region had 33% of the 1.2 million child labour victims identified in Ghana; the majority of these are trafficked children work in hazardous conditions in the fishing industry along Lake Volta.

However, Ghana has taken measures to protect its children and was the first country in the world to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has ratified other major international and regional instruments relating to child trafficking and child protection including the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (2000).

The country has also put in place legal frameworks and institutions to promote the protection of children and prevent children from being trafficked, including the Human

What Is Child Trafficking?

According to the [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children](#) (2000), “child trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation.” Child trafficking is therefore a violation of the rights of children, their well-being and it denies them the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Trafficking Act (694, 2005). It has also established an Anti-Trafficking Unit and the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit within the Ghanaian Police Service and a Human Trafficking Secretariat within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. However, situational analysis of children's rights and protection in Ghana indicates a wide gap between law and practice.

Traditionally, Ghanaian children grow up in closely connected kinship groups, with strong cultural traditions governing their birth, socialization and upbringing. In many communities, particularly in rural areas, the upbringing of the child is considered the responsibility of the entire community. Extended families often play an influential role in children's lives and are actively involved in the care and socialization of children. Informal fosterage has traditionally been used as a protection mechanism or "safety net" for children from poor families who live with and receive support from relatively wealthier family members.

Modernization which has resulted in the adoption of the nuclear family system by some extended family members has negatively affected support to children from poor families. Economic hardship faced by some families in Ghana has also created an opportunity for some traditional family members to take advantage of their family ties to abuse and exploit children.

At times, child trafficking occurs whereby parents sell their children into, for example, the fishing industry due to poverty or as a potential source of income for the family. Many children remain bonded labourers in the fishing industry, farming, cattle herding and Kente-weaving industries in the southern part of the region. Some girls have also become victims of the traditional practice called *Trokosi*, whereby girls are given to shrines as reparation for the sins of relatives.



Two boys working on a fishing boat on Lake Volta.
Photo: IOM –Dyane Epstein

IOM has an ongoing counter-trafficking project to rescue children trafficked into the fishing industry and provides rehabilitation, reintegration and long-term monitoring. To date 731 children have been assisted and 48,000 community members and fishermen sensitized about human trafficking child's rights. The new toolkit will therefore bolster efforts to prevent child trafficking and abuse and create a community driven approach.

The IOM counter-trafficking team, partner organizations and Ghanaian officials will pilot the child trafficking and child protection toolkit in North and South Tongu and Ketu South districts, considered major source areas for child trafficking practices. The IOM toolkit therefore aims to create capacity among village leaders and family members to more fully address child trafficking and protection challenges and bridge the gap between legislative measures and action.

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The IOM child trafficking and child protection project, or **FREE TO BE ME** campaign includes the creation of a toolkit, which will be used during the pilot phase to engage and educate 6 communities about the rights of children and how they can be protected by their family and village. The campaign will involve District officials, school personnel, village chiefs, parents and children in an interactive method to raise awareness.

This toolkit will serve as just one of the many necessary, integrated and nationally co-ordinated programmes or interventions created to address the root causes of child trafficking and abuse. The toolkit will be implemented by IOM and programme partners including UNICEF, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the sector Ministries of Health and Education and the District Assemblies. Additionally, Social Welfare officers from at the District and Regional level will be sought out to regularly visit communities where the toolkit is piloted for follow-up monitoring and to support the establishment of local community surveillance structures.

FREE TO BE ME will be tailored for trainers from each community, providing them with accessible and engaging tools for addressing child trafficking and other child protection issues in their community.

FREE TO BE ME seeks to mobilize village groups at the grassroots level to build new knowledge and empower women, especially mothers who will become key agents of change.

The **FREE TO BE ME** toolkit will begin in three districts identified in the Volta Lake Region and it is hoped that it will be utilised on a national and regional level in the future.



Photo: IOM 2013 - Nicola Simmonds

Content

The toolkit is being developed to raise awareness of core concepts and laws, adapted for understanding and practice at the local level. The contents include a review of the definition of child trafficking and international and national legislation and consequences. It explores the importance of birth registration and providing a legal identify for a child and how this can be done in practice. The harsh realities of child trafficking will be explored; including working conditions, the depravement of education and separation from family. This will include testimonials from parents and focus group sessions. The toolkit will also provide trainers with discussion points for sexual reproductive health and family planning sessions. It will further delve into the importance of play and education in childhood development and the rights of children.

The culmination of the toolkit is a community activity in which participants will create a 'Tree of Life', to demonstrate community buy-in of child protection. This is a group activity in which community members paint a mural of a tree. The roots represent the need to nourish children with health, education, play and good parenting leading into the trunk and leaves, plus a bird with wings – represented by handprints of all community members – which guide children through life and allow them to leave as adults with wisdom.

Child Specific Tools:

The toolkit will educate children about their RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES according to the law. A booklet called **THE LITTLE ALL ABOUT ME BOOK** will provide children with an interactive and tangible activity whereby they will write down all their important personal details that together create their identify. Trainers will also be given specific instructions for focus group sessions with children including the incorporation of play. For those children identified as having physical or psychological effects associated with abuse, referral mechanisms and techniques will be recommended.



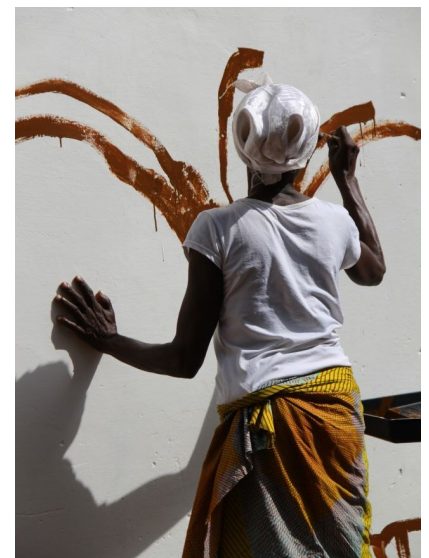
PILOT PHASE

IOM will collaborate with the Ketu South & North and South Tongu District Assemblies in the Volta Region to pilot the toolkit in 6 communities. These areas have been identified through research reports and IOM's extensive experience working in the Volta Region as areas vulnerable to the trafficking of children and other child protection abuses. The Volta Region is one of Ghana's 10 administration regions and is located along the southern half of the eastern border of Ghana with Togo. The region stretches from the coastal plains on the Atlantic coast to the northern arid lands. It is dominated by Lake Volta which was developed in the 1960s and is considered the largest body of water in West Africa. Thousands of children in the region aged 5 to 17 years have fallen victim to trafficking, exploitive labour and abuse.

During the pilot phase key community members and associated structures will be targeted and trained on child trafficking and child protection issues as part of **FREE TO BE ME**. Beyond training, sensitization and awareness activities will be organized in all pilot communities to ensure a protective environment for children. Interactive and lively formats such as drama, music and dance, cinema or documentary shows will be utilised. There will also be school-based programmes to more effectively inform children and teachers on their rights and responsibilities.

The pilot phase will also include reintegration assistance and monitoring of 18 children rescued from trafficking in 2011 . Particular attention will be paid to their progress in school and home life. Many of the children had little or no schooling prior to their rescue and education is found to be a key foundation for long-term reintegration. Therefore, sustained assistance in the form of school fees, supplies, uniforms and basic food needs and parental counselling are necessary to assist in the prevention of re-trafficking.

The implementation of the toolkit is intended to build the capacity of community structures, raise greater awareness and contribute towards the actualization of national child protection action plans for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Ghana.



A community member helps create tree branches for the community mural.
Photo: IOM 2013 —Nicola Simmonds

The **FREE TO BE ME** campaign is made possible with generous support from UNICEF. For additional information regarding IOM's Child Trafficking and Child Protection Toolkit, please contact Dyane Epstein depstein@iom.int or Daniel Sam dsam@iom.int