The Challenges of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa

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Abstract: A major challenge to good governance, transnational trafficking in human beings has been a serious problem for years in West Africa. Attempts to understand the phenomenon have then been initiated, which unfortunately have resulted in contradictory viewpoints amongst researchers and the impacted populations. Indeed, seen by some as a mere entertainment, a source of profit, or an abstract notion with no influence and no bearing upon their lives, transnational human trafficking is, in contrast, considered by others as a crucial preoccupation, a deadly reality that has drastically influenced their daily routines. Complex in its nature and forms, transnational human trafficking has raised deep divisions on issues of principles, theories, perceptions, and the strategy to address it; hence the necessity for domestic and international actors to pay serious attention on the phenomenon. My present work seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, its causes and consequences while trying to draw out suggestions and recommendations which could contribute to better strengthen the West African regional security framework. In a word, governance in West Africa needs to be transformed into an effective cooperative framework where enhancing the dignity of human beings and their rights becomes a priority.

Introduction

The majority of West African states, despite their huge and enviable natural resources, have failed to develop their economies. Empirical evidence demonstrates West Africa's peripheral role in the world economy. For example, West African countries have in common the lowest standards of living in the world. Eleven out of the fifteen members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are among the bottom thirty countries in the 2011 Human Development Index (HDI) compiled by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).[1] The conscientization of African people in general and West African population in particular has led to the creation and proliferation of regional entities to address the obstacles of African economic development. ECOWAS, founded by the Treaty of Lagos (1975), aims to promote the region's economy. To this, can be added the West African Monetary Union (or UEMOA, Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine), which is limited to eight mostly Francophone countries that employ the CFA franc as their common currency. The Liptako-Gourma Authority, composed of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, also seeks to jointly develop the contiguous areas of the three countries. All these regional organizations denote West African

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countries' ambition to unite and their eagerness domestically and regionally to fight common threats such as, among others, transnational crimes and their perverse consequences.

Despite being an old phenomenon, transnational crimes have recently taken complex, dramatic, shocking, and even deadly new dimensions with the wake of globalization. In much of Africa, globalization has ironically increased the power vacuum by empowering criminal networks so much that assaults on human dignity continue to increase proportionally to the growing globalization. Such a claim can be supported by the realist perspective according to which the weakening of state power has resulted in the empowering of criminal activities, because with the wake of globalization, political boundaries and national loyalties are no longer as relevant. The consequences thus of this new-old threat to West African society are as destructive as the 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia and Hurricane Katrina (2005) that caused horrendous damages in the United States.[2] A serious threat to the international community and Africa in particular, transnational human trafficking has become a global industry.

The lack then of a real African perspective on the subject, the timeliness of the topic, and the exciting nature of the debate that surrounds this question in the contemporary globalizing world are the main reasons that drive us to explore the problem and negative influence of transnational human trafficking on the domestic and regional security framework in West Africa. To do so, this article examines from an African perspective the causes and consequences of transnational human trafficking in West African context (part one). Beyond such a theoretical and empirical approach, it will also attemt to figure out practical mechanisms that could help frame a viable regional security framework aimed at tackling transnational human trafficking in West Africa, a framework that could also be applied to other regions as well (part two).

Causes and Consequences of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa

The causes of transnational human trafficking in West Africa are multiple. But for the purpose of synthesis, we would like to organize our ideas around, on the one hand, the socio-economic causes and consequences and, on the other hand, the politico-institutional causes and consequences.

Socio-Economic Causes and Consequences of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa

West African economies are mainly based on the exploitation of natural resources. Mining and agricultural activities constitute the leading economic sectors of most West African countries. The fast growth of West African populations, the uncontrolled urbanization in the region, poor security, and economic hardships associated with wide inequalities in the distribution of wealth contribute to an increased salience of human trafficking as an available option to break out of poverty.[3] For example, trouble and violent unrest across West Africa in late March and beginning of April 2008 were undoubtedly potential factors leading to transnational and intercontinental human trafficking as a potential means for both traffickers and trafficked persons or victims to cope with surging food prices, bridge poor economic conditions, and overcome hunger.[4] As we have seen across the African continent and elsewhere in the world, the soaring prices of commodities remains a security risk since it destabilizes vulnerable governments and can therefore constrain people to behave even in contradiction with social

moral norms in order to break through their miserable conditions. By the same token, on April 22, 2008, the UN World Food Program (WFP) compared the escalating global food crisis to a "silent tsunami" due to the fact that it has threatened to plunge more than 100 million people into hunger and poverty.[5] The current growing economic crisis coupled with rising food prices will remain, without any doubt, fertile ground for transnational human trafficking in West Africa and Africa in general.

Besides poverty, West African cultural patterns fertilize the expansion of human smuggling. For example in the context of the extended family, tribal, and religious affiliation, children are often placed outside their biologic family with the objective of securing better education and working opportunities for them. Parents' ignorance of the risks involved in entrusting their child to other persons in this era of a greedy race for economic achievement associated with the desire of young people for emancipative adventure contribute inexorably to the growth of transnational trafficking in persons.[6] For instance in Africa, family solidarity is sometimes so over-valued that parents usually do not pay much attention on inquiring on the morality of the relatives to whom they entrust their children.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), backing the statistics of the International Labor Organization (ILO), around 200,000 to 300,000 children are trafficked each year for forced labor and sexual exploitation in West and Central Africa.[7] In addition, according to a 2001 survey on child labor in West and Central Africa, about 330,000 children were employed in the cocoa agricultural industry in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria. Out of the 230,000 children working in Côte d'Ivoire, around 12,000 had no family connection to the cocoa farmer or any local farm in the country, and 2,500 were recruited by intermediaries in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.[8] An alarming reality is that girls are more frequently the victims of child trafficking than boys. Table 1 shows the empirical evidence from a 2003 study for Benin, Nigeria, and Togo.

Table 1: Gender and Age of Victims by Country

Gender	Benin*		Nigeria**		Togo***		Total
	Minor	Adult	Minor	Adult	Minor	Adult	
Male	85	37	3	1	2		128
Female	112	65	16	10	17	20	240
Age Gender Unknown	Age and gender unavailable for 18 victims				6 (+3 girls; age un-known)		24

* The Benin sample includes information on gender from the 284 (182 children and 102 adults) victims interviewed and the information contained in the 13 case files.
** The Nigerian sample includes information on 30 victims interviewed.
*** The Togo sample includes information on 45 victims obtained from case files. One of the case files involved 16 Nigerian girls and young women stopped in transit through Togo. They were being trafficked to The Netherlands and Italy for work in prostitution.
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2006a.

In addition, in a study on child trafficking between Benin and Gabon, 86 percent of the 229 children interviewed were female, and more than 50 percent were under the age of sixteen.[9] Table 2 below corroborates our argument with empirical data from three West African countries (Benin, Nigeria, and Togo).

Table 2: Age of Victims

Age	Benin*	Nigeria**	Togo***	Total Number
0 – 5		2	-	2
6 – 10	1	11	5	17
11 – 15	9	6	11	26
16 – 18	5	-	9	14
19 – 20	-	-	10	10
21 – 25	-	-	7	7
26 – 30	-	-	2	2
30+	-	-	1	1
(Exact) information unavailable	18		3	21
Total	**33**	**19**	**48**	**100**

* Benin sample based on data gleaned from 13 case files; ** Nigeria sample based on interviews with 19 child victims; *** Togo sample based on data gleaned from 10 case files. Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2006a.

Moreover, in transnational trafficking, as revealed by a research done under UNICEF sponsorship, followed by a field study published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo constitute the main countries from which child workers are exported to the main urban centers and agricultural sites of countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Nigeria, and Senegal.[10] As an example, Table 3 below shows a sample of Togolese recruitment regions and destination sites.[11]

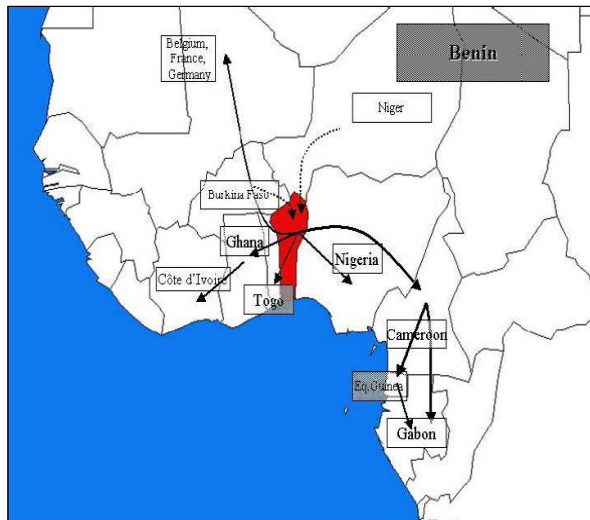### Table 3: Togo Regions of Recruitment, Transit, and Destination Countries

Region	Locality	Transit Country/City	Destination
Savanna	Dapaong, Cinkasse (Togo-Burkina Faso border)	Burkina Faso: Tenkodogo, Ouagadougou Ghana: Accra, Kumassi, Yendi Benin: Cotonou, Seme	Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Benin, Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, Persian Gulf States, Europe
Kara	Kara, Kabou, Kambole		
Centrale	Kemerida, Aledjo		
Plateau	Akebou		
Maritime	Lome		

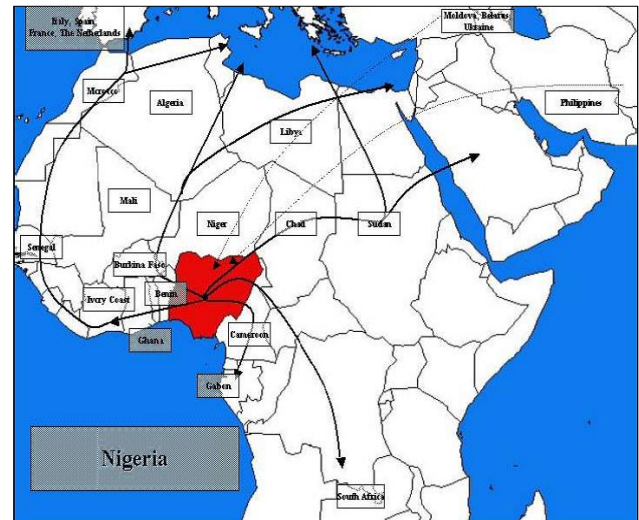Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2006a.

To illustrate our argument, the maps below show the itinerary and destination sites of transnational human trafficking victims from three West African countries (Maps 1, 2, and 3). Even though they display specific areas of recruitment, transit, and destination, it is worth noting that it is also common for a country to both supply and receive young boys, girls, and young women while also serving as a transit country. Children are most of the time trafficked for exploitation in the agricultural, fishing, and informal sectors, or for begging.[12] Most of them are exploited on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire, the world's largest cocoa producer. The remaining children usually labor on farms in Ghana, Cameroon, and Nigeria. Another sad reality of transnational human trafficking in West Africa is that many young victims are employed neither in the primary nor in the informal sectors but on battlefields as soldiers known under the appellation of "children soldiers."[13] This was also the case in Cote d'Ivoire during a particularly the troubled period of the country from 2002 to 2010 as well as in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the wars in those countries.
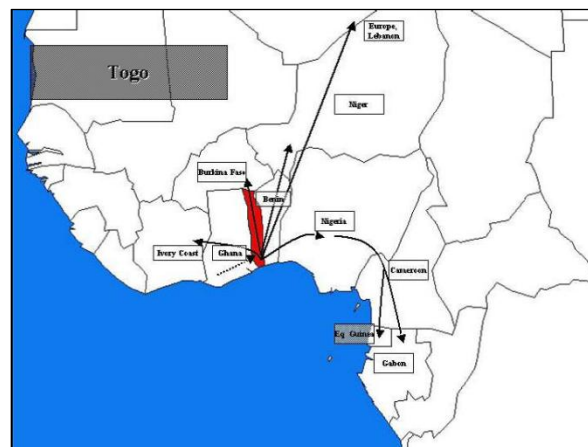
Transnational Human Trafficking Routes in West Africa

Map 1. The Case of Benin   **Map 2. The Case of Nigeria**

Map 3. The Case of Togo

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2006a.

As human rights organizations have noted, after the end of the war in Liberia in 2003, 11,000 children aged thirteen to seventeen were demobilized under the UN-sponsored program.[14] The situation could even be worse, for according to Amnesty International, Liberian government and rebel forces alone recruited up to 21,000 children, sometimes as young as six years old, over the course of the civil war. With respect to Cote d'Ivoire, when the armed insurrection broke out in September 2002, money (around US $300 to $400), food, and clothing were offered to encourage children to fight on behalf of the Ivorian government.[15] The same situation held for the rebel camp as well, raising the total number of child soldiers in Cote d'Ivoire to thousands.[16]

The severity of transnational human trafficking is further aggravated by, among other things, the porosity of regional and continental boundaries and the shocking scope of this deadly reality. For instance, trafficked girls and young women are mainly destined for either domestic services or forced into prostitution in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States (refer to Maps 1, 2, 3 above). As a palpable example, Nigerian and Italian authorities estimate that there are 10,000 to 15,000 Nigerian prostitutes in Italy (See Table 4 below for further details on the global reach with regard to repatriated victims based on the single case of Nigeria).[17] And according to the US Department of State 2004 data, the Moroccan police arrested seventy Nigerian traffickers and rescued 1,460 Nigerian victims hidden by traffickers near Mount Gourougou, outside the Spanish enclave of the Autonomous City of Melilla.[18]

Traffickers of children are both women and men, and in many cases they are relatives of the victims who are animated by the deadly agenda of maximizing profit. Trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation or forced labor is one of the largest sources of revenue of organized human trafficking. And as a clandestine activity, transnational human trafficking is hard to measure. Nevertheless, in a typical child-trafficking scenario, as Antonio L. Mazzitelli has argued, "the recruiter may earn from $50 to $1,000 for a child delivered to the 'employer.' Profits vary according to the source country, destination and 'use' of the trafficked person."[19] By going a step further, Mazzitelli added, citing the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, "An African child taken to the United States might net a trafficker $10,000–20,000."[20] According to a July 2006 UNODC report, the business of smuggling migrants from Africa to Europe has a turnover in excess of $300 million per year.[21] Mazzitelli highlighted the situation by affirming: "A recruiter and transporter of a woman to Europe for commercial sexual exploitation spends approximately $2,000 to bribe appropriate officials, procure travel documents and safe houses, and transport the woman to a 'madam,'who pays approximately $12,000 for the victim."[22]

Although it is not clear how the above data were collected and calculated, the figures may even be higher since there is a crucial lack of reliable data due to various reasons such as, among others, the underground and illegal nature of human trafficking, the lack of anti-trafficking legislation in many African countries, the reluctance of the victims to report their experiences to the authorities, and the lack of a governmental priority given to data collection and research on the subject in West Africa and in Africa in general. To reverse the crucial lack of data collection systems, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2005 formally launched a "Program Data for Africa" with an initial duration of three years. Nevertheless the change expected still remains barely perceptible. With strict rational principles

aimed at minimizing risk and maximizing profit, traffickers, as argued by Mazzitelli, have diversified their portfolios in order to tactically mitigate risks and make difficult, if not impossible, the traceability of their criminal activities by law enforcement agencies at various levels.[23]

Table 4: Number of Repatriated Persons to Nigeria, 2001-2004

Country from which repatriated	Male	Female	Children	Total
Europe				
Italy	4	800		804
Spain		327		327
Netherlands	107	174		281
Ireland		6		6
Germany		2		2
Swizerland		2		2
Total Europe				**1422**
Africa				
Cote d'Ivoire	6			6
Republic of Benin	150	154		304
South Africa	13			13
Libya	13,150			13,150
Niger		6		6
Total Africa				**13,479**
USA				
USA	40	14		54
Total USA				**54**
Other				
Saudi Arabia	6,486	7260	281	14,027
Turkey	13			13
Thailand	237	55		292
Total Other				**14,332**
Total	**20,206**	**8,800**	**281**	**29,287**

Source: Nigeria Immigration Service, Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Abuja, "Record of Deportations 2001 – 2004"[24]

In a word, human trafficking is an egregious and profound abuse of human rights. It maintains people in a state of dependence since it hinders the freedom of individuals, which is akin to modern-day slavery and thus a serious human rights violation. For example, the way trafficked people are treated on plantations in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana or in mines in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Liberia reveals the extent to which human rights violations appear to be rampant in West Africa. To corroborate our claims with respect to Burkina Faso, one can take as example gold-rich localities such as Djibo and Kongoussi, where children, mainly young girls, are often trafficked for the purpose of profit-maximization.[25] Trafficking in persons appears to

be a particular form of violence against women and children. It deteriorates human relationships since it drives the trafficked persons from their families and regions, thus creating an atmosphere of social frustration and a negative influence on the dynamics of regional integration, thereby compromising the national and regional efforts of West African states to change the destiny of their societies.

Corruption and laundering of money, which are sometimes directly related to human trafficking activities, remain so far the most essential means by which criminals benefit from their illicitly acquired revenues and expand their activities and power. For instance, through corruption criminal operators can obtain protection from public officials, influence political decisions, and infiltrate legitimate businesses. Therefore, corruption and money laundering contribute to the maintenance and proliferation of transnational human trafficking activities in West Africa.

In sum, the transnational crimes in the form of trafficking or smuggling human beings are primarily and basically caused by limited economic alternatives, disparate socio-economic conditions, regional imbalances, feminization of poverty, discrimination against women, patriarchal socio-cultural structures, lack of social supports for single mothers, shortage of employment and professional opportunities, and the universal greed for money and power.[26] They are also facilitated, among others, by: cultural perversion (due to the influence of illicit activities from foreign nationals); illiteracy and partial literacy (due to the lack of an adequate educational environment); the lack of accurate information (due to a certain negligence from local authorities and communication channels); and the unregulated enticement and movement of human capital via use of the internet (due to an unregulated access to the internet that has encouraged cybercriminal activities), leading *ipso facto* to disastrous socio-economic instability.

Actually, human trafficking impedes legitimate economic activities (as the trafficked persons do not freely contribute to legitimate economic activities in their home countries), disorganizes the national economy (as human trafficking activities constitute an economic loss to the country of origin of the trafficked persons), and slows down foreign investment and its linked-advantages (as transnational human trafficking activities send a negative message to foreign investors with respect to the financial security risk that their investments may face in the host country which may have failed to tackle corruption and criminal activities or create a business-friendly environment). It increases the cost of doing business to both foreign and domestic investors by eroding West Africa's social and human capital, degrading the quality of life, and pushing skilled workers overseas due to the lack of opportunities. It also damages access to employment and educational opportunities, discourages the accumulation of assets, and encourages tax evasion (as criminal networks avoid paying taxes due to the illegal nature of their activities). It deters potential tourism (as tourists may be afraid of being themselves kidnapped as prostitutes and forced labor), displaces productive investments, and fosters consumption of imported items (as domestic industries remain disorganized due to transnational human trafficking having taken away many of the younger generations that would have played a central role in domestic economies as productive forces). In short, it diverts national and regional resources and drives business away from Africa, affecting *ipso facto* West Africa's financial sustainability.

Besides the above-mentioned socio-economic causes and consequences, it is worth noting that transnational human trafficking in West Africa to a certain extent is also caused and aggravated by the failure of domestic, regional, and international politico-institutional systems, which in return have a boomerang effect on state institutions. One must therefore be aware that the socio-economic causes and politico-institutional causes pointed out throughout this paper remain to a certain extent embedded in each other just like the two sides of a coin. So trying to separate them from one another appears to be a misleading enterprise. However, here the separation in two different sections is only for academic purposes and the search for better clarity. So the next paragraphs seek to analyze the impact and consequences of politics and state institutions on transnational human trafficking.

Politico-Institutional Causes and Consequences of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa

The false conception that national natural and financial resources belong to the individual(s) in power has led to a disregard for domestic and regional regulations and a trend towards the use of institutional prerogatives for private goals; hence the spread of corruption as an easy way to achieve extraordinary ambitions. Acting in the belief that the end justifies the means, an attitude of impunity has assumed horrendous proportions. Human traffickers in West Africa have gained more power and influence leading, *ipso facto* to a relative weakening of state power vis-à-vis globalizing criminal networks.[27] Traffickers were enjoying nearly complete immunity because until recently the vast majority of West African states did not consider trafficking in women and children a punishable offence. Most states, even now, have done little to integrate human rights concerns or strategies into their laws or policies relating to human trafficking or smuggling. With few exceptions, trafficking in human beings remains a relatively low priority among officials. So for criminal networks West Africa was a "haven" and still presents a comparative advantage in reducing risks and consequently maximizing profits via transnational trafficking in human beings.

The available literature from NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and scholars of global governance such as David Held and Anthony G. McGrew (2002) makes it obvious that the causes of transnational crimes can also be explained through certain theories of international relations. These include the political philosophy that promotes individual liberty and the free exchange of goods and market privatization that has in turn led to the illicit human trafficking for economic gain. For instance, linked to economic liberalization illicit human trafficking has taken a dramatic worldwide upturn and no more so than in West Africa. This in turn threatens the integrity of the region's countries and undermines their political stability. Furthermore, human trafficking inhibits the processes of democratization and development. It challenges state authority, threatens public order, and undermines the rule of law and citizens' confidence in government, which will be increasingly viewed as weak and lacking credibility. In addition, human trafficking weakens the social contract between people and state or regional institutions, and leads to tremendous national tragedies. It can even be a potential source for financing terrorist activities, giving *de facto* roots to political and institutional insecurity at the national, regional, and international levels.[28] In a word, it goes without saying that transnational human trafficking has a negative impact on West African

regional endeavors to promote and implement good governance, a *sine qua non* for sustainable development. Hence, the crucial need for a regional security framework to combat transnational human trafficking and which guarantees civilian safety and advances the national interests of West African countries.

A Security Building Framework for Combating Human Trafficking in West Africa

Responding to West African transnational human trafficking requires developing a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to tackle the phenomenon. No country or region is immune from such trafficking. The experience of West Africa and elsewhere clearly demonstrates that human trafficking can only be successfully resisted when those concerned work together; hence the necessity of the creation of appropriate cooperation mechanisms at the national, regional, and international levels to tackle this deadly phenomenon. West African efforts to combat transnational human trafficking have been accompanied by the efforts of diverse NGOs and inter-governmental organizations, whose contributions have helped lead to a West African strategy to set up a regional security framework.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

International, regional, and local NGOs have been at the forefront of efforts to combat transnational human trafficking and build a West African regional security environment. Most government officials are ill informed about the causes and consequences of this trafficking. They also are unaware of the appropriate rights-based approach to this issue. Therefore, NGOs, as the "conscience of government" and are representative of the civil society, usually bridge this gap by bringing in their expertise. Advocates for the development of human rights-based responses to transnational trafficking, NGOs traditionally show up in situations where governments have failed to take crucial initiatives.

Fear and distrust towards state-based organizations have led trafficked persons to give preference to NGOs. So NGOs have always been the first line of action, raising awareness, lobbying for change, and providing assistance. As an example for the very first time, a Lome-based NGO, WAO-Afrique, was able in April 1998 to bring together officials from Togo and Benin to discuss the problem of transnational child trafficking in the presence of representatives from NGOs and UNICEF. During the same year, a Beninese NGO called ESAM also investigated child trafficking from Benin to Gabon. A newspaper in Cote d'Ivoire in 1998 denounced the trafficking of children from Burkina Faso and Mali into Cote d'Ivoire. This denunciation led in September 2000 to the creation of a commission of inquiry aimed at curbing the phenomenon.

Nowadays, a panoply of NGOs such as Save the Children, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Union for Human Rights, Global Survival Network (GSN), the Foundation for Trafficking in Women, the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GATW), and the Human Rights Law Group, to only name a few, are very active in the West African region, and their contributions remain very crucial to the West African regional security building. For example, Save the Children has addressed the escalating threats to children, including gender-based violence and trafficking, in emergency situations resulting from severe economic and social disruption.[29]

The Dutch-based Foundation Against Trafficking in Women was created in the early 1980's in response to the then highly publicized issue of prostitution tourism, especially in the regions where mass tourism was becoming an alternative paradigm for development. It has worked worldwide to spread anti-violence programs and pro-rights campaigns to benefit vulnerable women. In 1993 it launched a campaign to develop an international lobby to review existing instruments to prevent and combat human trafficking, a campaign that has also generated benefits in West Africa.

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) was created to provide a critical analysis of counter-trafficking efforts and their implications for women as key players in social change and development. n 2007, GAATW published an in-depth study, "Collateral Damage," about the impact of anti-trafficking initiatives on the rights of trafficked persons and migrant workers. This study has covered eight countries, among them Nigeria, and spelled out recommendations on behalf of its members.[30] This has been a tangible contribution towards setting up regional and global strategic alliances against transnational human trafficking.

Despite their cultural, political, and geographical differences, NGOs have been able to provide services to West African victims and survivors of transnational human trafficking. For example, NGO support for trafficked people and other vulnerable groups often includes social and psychological assistance, shelter provision, financial, return, and reintegration assistance, advice and counseling, housing, vocational training, legal advice, and documentation assistance. However, NGOs remain powerless to protect a victim if s/he decides to testify in court, because witness protection is basically a state prerogative. Hence, the need of a real political will to accompany NGOs actions. Without such political will, NGOs can essentially only hope, as Marina Tzvetkova states, "to dress the wound with sticking plaster.[31]

Initiatives by Inter-Governmental Organizations

Various inter-governmental organizations have been created to promote directly or indirectly human rights. These include the various agencies of the United Nations. For example, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focuses on the criminal justice element of crimes that include human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants. In 1999, it proposed a "Global Program against Trafficking in Human Beings" that would focus on the role of organized crime groups in smuggling and trafficking and on the development of criminal justice-related responses.[32] In May 2011 it issued a report on organized crime's role in smuggling West African migrants into the EU.[33] The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states at the outset on its web site that "At a time when some 214 million people are on the move globally, the UN Human Rights office has identified migration as a priority and is working to identify the protection gaps in law, policy and practice that leave migrants vulnerable to abuse at international borders."[34] Also, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 3, states: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery and servitude; slavery and slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."[35]

Other specialized UN agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are addressing trafficking in relation to their education, relief, and development work. It was particularly in 1998 that the issue of human trafficking began to receive the attention of international organizations starting with UNICEF which, in July 1998,

held a sub-regional workshop on "Trafficking in Child Domestic Workers, in particular Girls in Domestic Service in West and Central Africa."[36] The UN Center for International Crime Prevention, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Bank also stepped in by engaging themselves to work with ECOWAS to produce an ECOWAS Declaration and Plan Action against Trafficking in Persons in December 2001.[37] These international organizations have sponsored programs and helped local and regional organizations in West Africa. Unfortunately, there is a lack of coordination among them that has diverted their strategies and led to contradictory demands on governments and societies involved. Such a situation has hampered the efficacy of their actions.

The European Union (EU): Since 1996, the European Commission (EC) has taken a number of initiatives at the European level in order to assist West African countries' efforts to address transnational human trafficking. For instance, the EU has funded African regional collaboration to combat trafficking, especially of children, involving seven French-speaking countries in West and Central Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Mali and Togo).[38] The EU aid was disbursed mainly through the Italian NGO "Alisei" and with the help of the ILO. So the EU has been able to squeeze the potential of West African countries by having them pledge to expand their preventive capacity and harmonize their legislation against the trafficking of human beings. The EU has also funded awareness-raising campaign on child trafficking in Benin.[39] By deduction, then, the EU has helped establish an inter-regional network to fight human trafficking in West Africa.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM): The IOM has been active in conducting research on migration trends, including human trafficking in West Africa. It has provided technical cooperation on migration management and capacity building to West African countries through information dissemination for the prevention of irregular migration. It is currently playing a key role in assisting voluntary return of trafficked children in the ECOWAS zone. Moreover, the IOM has organized various international and inter-sessional workshops aimed at discussing migration policy issues, in order to explore and study policy issues of common interest and cooperate in addressing them. Its activities have also benefited West Africa throughout its programs dedicated to Africa in general and specifically to the West African region. For example, the IOM has taken a leading role, together with West African governments, to promote and enhance research and information dissemination, policy advice, capacity-building and technical cooperation, and project implementation with a goal of tackling West African socio-economic problems, major factors in the flourishing of transnational human trafficking.[40] IOM has also developed a resource book containing best practices, recommendations, and techniques for combatting child trafficking.[41]

The International Police Organization (Interpol): One of Interpol's priority crime areas is to provide its expertise toward ending human abuse and exploitation. Thus, it has worked globally to support police forces to counter the rise of transnational crimes. For instance, Interpol has produced many documents, held several conferences on trafficking, and is attempting to help co-ordinate transnational law enforcement efforts against trafficking in women and children. It has also offered its experience in the investigation of various offences against human beings such as transnational commercial exploitation of human beings. Interpol continues to be a valuable resource for law enforcement agencies.[42] However, it is significantly

underutilized in West Africa, and the need for Interpol services in West Africa should be better promoted. Interpol and has recently initiated steps to enhance its anti-trafficking work in West Africa. One example has been to organize an Advanced Trafficking in Human Beings Training Programme to focus on transnational trafficking. Workshops were held in 2009 and 2010.[43]

In sum, despite several incongruities, new laws have been implemented, international conferences hosted, new and existing conventions signed for the sake of alleviating, if not eliminating, transnational human trafficking in West Africa. In addition, the UN, the EU, and other IGOS have dedicated substantial resources to West Africa in order to develop more effective solutions to combat trafficking. Beyond such international support, however, it is worth stating that the resolution of West African problems lies in the hands of West African leaders and people. Therefore it is imperative that West African states and Africa as a whole unite to address transnational human trafficking on the continent. This requires political will, a strong engagement, and commitment as well as regional and national unity. Confronted with the problem of scarce resources, regional and continental cooperation could help alleviate human capital, economic, infrastructural and other resource shortages to set up a workable and results-oriented cooperation framework. An important element is for West African states to overcome their differences by defining shared objectives through a mutual understanding that the common denominator underlying all their efforts is the protection of the victims of trafficking and the punishment of its perpetrators.

TABLE 5: Overview of the Organizational Personnel Interviewed

Individuals Interviewed	Number
Public Administration (Provincial, District, City, and Social Services)	69
Security and Defense Forces (Police, Gendarmerie, Customs)	45
Justice	19
Entrepreneurs, Businessmen	31
Financial Institutions, Tax, or Fiscal Services	40
Insurance Companies	4
Information Technology	6
Media	22
Grassroots Associations, Organizations	38
Other Sectors	6
Total	280

Source: "Promotion au Burkina Faso des Principes de la Gouvernance Internationale en Matière de Criminalité Transnationale," final document of the field research undertaken by the Ouagadougou Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (IDRI) in August 2005, p. 9.

Efforts must be made to raise domestic and regional awareness on the reality and deadly consequences of human trafficking in domestic, regional, and international frameworks. For example, the Burkina Faso Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the sponsorship of the European Union conducted research on trans-frontier criminality in August 2005, a project in which this author participated.[44] Such field research can make an important contribution to the fight

against transnational human trafficking. Indeed, throughout this fieldwork, we collected information and disseminated information on the dangers of transnational criminality in Burkina Faso and similar developing societies. The research project covered the major cities of Burkina Faso. A questionnaire was addressed to a number of specific important public and private local entities in order to measure their awareness of the phenomenon (Table 5 above). Its objective was broader than just the issue of human trafficking, for it also included questions on drugs trafficking, arms trafficking, economic infractions (money laundering), and the phenomenon of cyber criminality (See Tables 6 and 7 for further details). These tables highlight the degree to which local officials and other notables knew or had heard about the phenomenon

TABLE 6: Answers to Research Questionnaire by Category

Infractions and Level of Knowledge		Individuals Interviewed			
		Gendarmerie	Police	Customs	Justice
Human Trafficking	Known	7	15	2	13
	Unknown	3	4	5	3
	No Comments	4	1	4	2
Drug Trafficking	Known	12	19	10	17
	Unknown		1	1	
	No Comments	2			
Arms Trafficking	Known	12	16	7	17
	Unknown		1	1	
	No Comments	2	3	3	
Economic Infractions	Known	x	x	x	17
	Unknown	x	x	x	
	No Comments	x	x	x	
Cyber Criminality	Known		3		16
	Unknowns		1	1	
	No Comments	14	16	10	1

Source: "Promotion au Burkina Faso des Principes de la Gouvernance Internationale en matière de Criminalité Transnationale," final document of the field research undertaken by the Ouagadougou Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (IDRI) in August 2005, p. 31.

of transnational crimes in their country. There were three categories of answers:
- Known: for those who have clearly said that they have heard and know about the phenomenon of transnational crimes in Burkina Faso and its neighboring countries.

- Unknown: for those who have clearly expressed their opinion by saying that they do not know about the phenomenon of transnational crimes in Burkina Faso and its neighboring countries.
- No comment: for those who have categorically refused to provide any clear answer by saying that they do not have any comments on the phenomenon of transnational crimes in Burkina Faso and its neighboring countries.

TABLE 7: Answers (by Percentage) to Research Questionnaire by Category

Infractions and Level of Knowledge		Individuals Interviewed			
		Gendarmerie	Police	Customs	Justice
Human Trafficking	Known	50	75	18.18	70.59
	Unknown	21.43	20	45.45	17.68
	No Comments	28.57	5	36.36	11.76
Drug Trafficking	Known	85.71	95	90.90	100
	Unknown		5	9.09	
	No Comments	14.28			
Arms Trafficking	Known	85.71	80	63.63	100
	Unknown		5	9.09	
	No Comments	14.28	15	27.27	
Economic Infractions	Known	x	x	x	100
	Unknown	x	x	x	
	No Comments	x	x	x	
Cyber Criminality	Known		15		94.12
	Unknowns		5	9.09	
	No Comments	100	80	90.90	5.88

Source: "Promotion au Burkina Faso des Principes de la Gouvernance Internationale en matière de Criminalité Transnationale," final document of the field research undertaken by the Ouagadougou Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (IDRI) in August 2005, p. 32.

The findings of our field research have had a positive influence with regard to policy changes and concrete steps that have been undertaken to tackle transnational human trafficking both in Burkina Faso and in the West African region in general. Our research has contributed to identifying the main actors involved in the fight against transnational crimes, measuring the scope of the phenomenon in Burkina Faso, and finally making proposals for national and regional capacity building to combat transnational crimes. Our enterprise has also contributed to an assessment of the judicial and institutional mechanisms put in place to address transnational organized crimes in the country. The follow-up on our findings has contributed to

raising rural and urban authorities' awareness of the phenomenon. This has spilled over to the central government, which in turn has begun taking initiatives to consolidate democratic principles defined in terms of human rights promotion and good governance implementation with respect to transnational trafficking in human beings. Based upon the study's recommendations, concrete actions have then been taken at regional level to strengthen transnational controls. This led to the establishment of the joint Ghana-Burkina Faso and Benin-Burkina Faso border commissions, thus helping promote regional stability and the security of the populace of these countries.

Conclusion

Highly complex by nature and interlocked with other phenomena such as globalization trafficking in human beings in West Africa is a crucial issue that constitutes a recent challenge to good governance for the entire region. Addressing the phenomenon requires a sharper strategy and an intelligent implementation of theoretical and practical solutions. The starting point is for West Africa governments to understand and objectively accept the existence of the phenomenon as a serious regional and international problem instead of somehow naively denying it.

   The only viable option for eradicating human trafficking in the foreseeable future is to fully cooperate and pool West African human and material resources in order to expand regional capacity and to form robust strategic alliances against crime and trafficking. This requires creating and strengthening a West African border security management entity (or entities) with joint regional capacity-building mechanisms based upon common training and exercises. On this specific point, West African authorities have already established joint border controls such as the joint border posts initiatives between Ghana and Burkina Faso, Benin and Burkina Faso, and Mali and Burkina Faso. These initiatives `contribute to the better regulation of transnational movements, enhance regional border security, and strengthen West African initiatives to fight transnational human trafficking.

   Combatting transnational human trafficking also requires the strengthening and universal ratification of anti-trafficking protocols such as the UN Anti-trafficking Protocol (which has been ratified by thirteen out of the fifteen West African countries), and the unification of regional and international institutional frameworks, for coordination and strategic monitoring remain indispensable in the fight against transnational crimes, including of human trafficking. The fight against transnational human trafficking, however, will remain ineffective if regional legislation and judicial systems are not properly harmonized to

    effectively respond to the lack of mechanisms for the expedient extradition and readmission agreements with countries of origin. To this can be added the necessity of exchanging crucial intelligence, expertise, and security information between and among West African states.

   In addition, a successful strategy against transnational human trafficking requires both the implementation of projects to fight human trafficking at local, regional, and international levels and the enhancement of public awareness through programs aimed at sensitizing local and regional populations about the problem. Furthermore, it is necessary that regional and international actors maintain an accessible regional data bank that will also be a reference

source for future generations. Actually, the absence of reliable information and data collection techniques and effort contributes to the limited attention devoted to resolving human trafficking. It may also hamper the proper development of targeted technical assistance. This situation may then negatively impact the overall development of West African countries and all efforts by African governments and the international community to reverse the situation. Finally, the findings of our research should not be regarded as absolute and may require different approaches, dependent on time and place.[45] Hence the necessity of ongoing research to define the sectors of priority related to transnational trafficking in human beings.

Notes

1   For further details UNDP 2011.
2   Ibid.
3   Africa is registering the fastest population growth in the world. See, for instance, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/world/africa/in-nigeria-a-preview-of-an-overcrowded-planet.html?_r=1.
4   Countries such as Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mauritania, Guinea, Senegal, and Sierra Leone have seen violent unrest due in part to food making up a disproportionately large share of household spending and imports.
5   *Taipei Times* 2008.
6   The shift is nearly always from more economically disadvantaged areas (and countries) to those more economically secure (urban areas and more developed countries, but also rural areas offering seasonal job opportunities).
7   UNICEF 2001.
8   IITA 2002.
9   For further details please see: http://www.dol.gov/ilat/media/reports/iclp/cocoafindings.pdf (Accessed January 21, 2008).
10   UNICEF 2004.
11   UNODC 2006c.
12   Regarding begging children, see for further details Lagunju and Diop 2006.
13   There are many conflict areas in West Africa. As examples, we can cite Cote d'Ivoire 2002-2011, Niger and Mali with the longstanding issue of the Touareg who have been claiming more consideration from the Malian and Nigerian governments. In the aftermath of Qaddafi's overthrow and death in 2011, the flow of arms and return of Toureg mercenaries from Libya, organized as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), has led to their March 2012 seizure of the northeastern two-thirds of Mali in the aftermath of the army coup that overthrew that country's civilian government. On April 6, 2012, the MNLA declared the area independent from Mali (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17635437). Niger has taken steps against Touraeg leaders to try and forestall a similar outcome (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17462107). In other countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, the question of "child soldiers" is not yet fully resolved and thus continues to constitute a crucial problem in their democratic transition.
14   Human Rights Watch 2005.
15   Ibid.

16 UNICEF 2007. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/cotedivoire_39645.html (accessed November 25, 2011).

17 For further details and research, see also UNICRU 2004.

18 US Department of State 2005.

19 Mazzitelli 2007, p. 1079.

20 Ibid., p. 1079.

21 UNODC 2006b.

22 Mazzitelli 2007, p. 1079.

23 By the term "at any levels" I mean domestically, regionally, and internationally as regards the worldwide reach of international organizations in the fight against transnational crimes such as Interpol.

24 The relatively high number of Nigerians being sent to Saudi Arabia can first of all be explained by the politico-diplomatic proximity between the two countries that facilitates movement between the two countries. For example, former President Umary Yar'Adua was hospitalized in Saudi Arabia for his ill health instead of in Europe or the US as is usually the case for African leaders when they are seriously ill. Nigerians perceive Saudi Arabia as a country full of opportunities, which leads for a growing number of them to seek to immigrate at any cost, even illegally, to this imagined "Eldorado." According Nwogu (2006, p. 32), "Nigerians constitute the largest population in a growing flow of migrants from developing countries" to industrialized countries. Some emigrate from their own free will and others have been trafficked. This also helps explains the large number Nigerians in Saudi Arabia.

25 *Le Pays* 2011. 28 November. For further details see: http://www.lepays.bf/?TRAFIC-DES-ENFANTS (accessed December 27, 2011).

26 In principle, the term "human smuggling" is distinct from "trafficking in persons." In the case of human smuggling, migrants pay to cross international borders because of their lack of adequate formal travel documents or prior approval to enter the destination country. But in the case of trafficking in human beings, only the traffickers find their subterfuges to cross the borders with the trafficked person(s). Basically, it is this link between the transport of migrants and the purpose of the transport that differentiates "trafficking" from "smuggling."

27 Realists such as Robert Gilpin (2002) have claimed that the weakening of state power has resulted in the empowering of criminal activities, because in the wake of globalization political boundaries and national loyalties are no longer relevant.

28 Many experts maintain that terrorists are increasingly funding themselves through crime. They have been linked with criminal groups in money laundering, counterfeiting, use of children as soldiers and "kamikazes," and other activities. For a comparative case it is interesting to note Wagley's (2006, p. 3) citation of US Treasury Assistant Secretary Juan Zarata's press release of February 1 that noted that funding for the March 2003 Madrid train attacks came the illicit drug trafficking. Wagley also cited Lal (2005) reporting that

       "the Dubai-based Indian mobster Aftab Ansari . . . is believed to have helped fund the September 11 attacks with ransom money earned from kidnapping."

29   Save the Children 2005. Save the Children is a leading international organization that was founded in London, England in 1919.

30   As already noted (Nwogu, 2006) Nigerians the largest flow of migrants from developing countries to industrialized countries in Europe and elsewhere. For further details see GAATW 2007.

31   Tzvetkova 2005.

32   UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention 1999. This office was established in 1997 and renamed the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in 2002.

33   See UNDOC 2011.

34   See http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo of Nigeria serves as the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons with a particular focus on women and children (2008-2011).

35   For the UNDR see http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a3.

36   Jordan 2005.

37   The Meeting of ECOWAS Heads of States, in December 2001, adopted a Declaration and the ECOWAS Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons (2002-2003). It directed the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat to prepare proposals for controlling trafficking in persons in the sub-region, with special consideration to the situation of trafficked children.

38   For further details please see: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/traffic/index.htm (accessed November 25, 2011).

39   For a US official cable assessing Benin and EU efforts, see http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=07COTONOU912.

40   The IOM has worked since 1997 to counter trafficking in persons with some 500 projects in 85 countries. Its Counter Trafficking Division has also developed the "IOM Human Trafficking Database." ww.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/.../iom_ctm_database..pdf.

41   For the IOM resource book, see www.iom.int/jahi.

42   For an overview of Interpol's efforts, see http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Trafficking-in-human-beings/Trafficking-in-human-beings.

43   For more on the workshops, see http://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News-media-releases/2010/N20100414.

44   This research has been conducted in Burkina Faso during fifty days (from 25 July to 15 September 2005).

45   What is urgent in Burkina Faso may not be the same in Ghana. Also what was a priority for the 2005 research project might not have the same importance in 2012.

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