



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
Sub-Regional Office for Central Africa

**TC-RAM: Poverty reduction within communities vulnerable to child
trafficking through the promotion of decent work in Cameroon**
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SUMMARY REPORT

**DIAGNOSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD TRAFICKING:
THE CASES OF
KUMBO, WUM, BALI (NWR)**



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ONG N°: E29/111/1016 of 03rd August 1994

Introduction and General consideration / Terminology

The ILO seeks to assist families that are exposed to various forms of vulnerabilities to support their own development process, by highlighting the promotion of social justice through access to decent and productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity for all. The TC-RAM projects aim at achieving this goal by seeking to support the protection of girls and boys from trafficking / labour and making the benefit from education, vocational training and social protection.

The ILO/TC-RAM project short listed IDF to carry out a rapid diagnostic study based on a participatory action-research in Bali, Wum and Kumbo council areas of the North West Region (Cameroon). That aims at putting at the disposal of the project data information in view of helping them take decisions and build up appropriate and sustainable strategies and interventions capable of supporting communities in the project areas to fight against child trafficking through the provision of decent jobs and as a way of fighting poverty.

So, the present study tries to have an overview of the situation and realities of child trafficking for labour exploitation in the three project zones that were selected because they are in the North West Region of Cameroon which is an area of preferred recruitment of children because of its dynamics in self-development spirit and especially because it directly or indirectly keeps certain forms of vulnerability such as child trafficking, the marginalization of indigenous and tribal peoples, HIV/AIDS, inequality and gender issues.

In other words and as the ILO convention 182 of 1999 puts it, this study will try to see whether there is “recruitment, transport, lodging or reception of children either by means of force, threat or other forms of coercion, or kidnapping, fraud, falsehood, abuse of authority or situation of vulnerability, or by offer or acceptance of payments or advantages to get the consentment of a person who has authority over a child for purposes of exploitation”.

Attention was paid to whether there is effective displacement and exploitation, even if the transfer can operate in a much smaller framework such as within a council area or a subdivision. The understanding of the notion of exploitation within the study zones is not exactly that of the International Community. People cannot understand how labour, that is a very vital aspect of grooming the child to fit in his/her society (father to son trades, mother to girl trades and tradition entrustment), should suddenly become a practice to be eradicated because it falls within the worst forms of child labour classified and targeted for elimination. It was a cultural arrangement that was valorized because it was a normal and salutary communal act of solidarity. That is why, it is a very common practice not only to meet masters who want to show their largesse and good will to help others use to see the sun but also children who pride themselves to serve as wishing, humble and obedient servants as a duty to show their gratefulness and thankfulness to their “benefactors”. The problem is how has a “good” and mutually benefiting traditional practice become “bad” and targeted by law.

To avoid further confusion in the context of the present diagnosis, it would be advisable to set some borderlines and make thing clear by defining some terms and notions related to our study:

- A child is “any person of either sex aged below 18 years”; (Cameroon law N° 2005 of 29/12/2005).

- Child labour; Article 3 of ILO convention of 1999 stipulates that the “worst forms of child labour” comprise:
 - a) All the forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
 - b) The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
 - c) The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties;
 - d) Work that by its nature or circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or moral of children;
 - e) This convention applies to children under the age of 18 involved in extremely hazardous and exploitative work.
- Child trafficking: the conclusion of a transaction (a practice) in which a person below 18 years is handed over by either or both parents, or by a guardian to a third person, whether for a fee or not, with the intention of exploiting the person or his/her work (ILO/IPEC/LUTRENA); “... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or position of vulnerability or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another, for the purpose of exploitation” (United Nations Convention).

Trafficking implies the movement of a person within a country or out of the country for purpose of exploitation. A trafficked child is cut off from his/her family and community. The child is found in a completely unfamiliar environment and has no control over him/herself. He/she is exploited and this involves demanding, damaging work for little or no pay with inadequate rest time and no safety.

Objectives of the Study and Methodological Approach

a. The overall objective of this study is to achieve a diagnosis of the localities of Bali, Wum and Kumbo as related to the phenomenon of child labour in order to make available to the project team relevant information that reflects the reality lived by the population of the concerned areas.

Through data collection, the process will aim at identifying, analyzing different aspects of the phenomenon while especially stressing on the case of children orphaned by the Lake Nyos disaster, and at recommending ways to improve the functional observation system and follow up of OVC and victims families. The final analysis will be related to training needs by target groups and by zone.

b. The various steps of the study can be organized as follows:

- Internal preparation to organize the working team;
- Orientation working sessions;
- Rapid field contact to inform major stakeholders of the work to be done and their role;

- Technical, pedagogical and logistical preparation;
- Field work;
- Processing, analysis and interpretation of data,
- Report to be submitted to sponsoring partners

The field work will target working children aged 14 to 18, traditional and administrative authorities, technical services, NGOs, producers, Mbororos, parents and former victims, security services, schools, judiciary services, media and trade unions.

Six questionnaires were prepared to be used for various stakeholders in the study that finally would be more qualitative than quantitative (reduced sample for study).

Results

The number of respondents amounted to 144, including children, intermediaries, community leaders, parents, institutions and Fondoms and civil society, with employers absolutely refusing to be interviewed. The average age of children was 15 years, in both sexes.

Child trafficking remains a known phenomenon in the North West Region and in Bali, Wum and Kumbo study zones. Tradition comes in to cause more confusion in the minds of respondents (placement and entrustment of one's child to other families for care, education and up bringing). The line of demarcation between child work and child labour becomes very slim, thereby making it very difficult to be able to pass from one to the other with ease.

Concerning the reasons/risks factors creating vulnerability to child labour, it must be noted that the council areas selected are supply zones, even though the potential is there to use, and are effectively transit zones. Supplier zones offer and reception zones demand. And when supply and demand meet in the context of poverty, the deal is concluded with much alacrity. This business turns around a network which links up parents who yield their children for laughable sums of money to intermediaries assigned to escort the children and place them with employers who use / exploit their labour. The child is doubly exploited because the three actors deprive him/her of the salary, thereby jeopardizing his/her life for ever. Automatically children become more of a liability to themselves, their families and communities than assets. Moral, socio-economic, family, personal, cultural, historical, social, gender causes are more recognized, not forgetting, porous borders with neighboring Nigeria, school drop-out, weak legal and regulatory environment, poor access to information and lack of Birth Certificates (legal documents) are conditions that promote the spread of child trafficking/labour in the project zones.

In addition to these conditions that characterize the field situation, one can mention:

- A bad knowledge of the phenomenon: no precise follow up of its evolution;
- Absence of field studies: hardly any documents dealing with child labour by giving it an exact description; no quantitative survey yet;
- A weak sensitization for a proper social mobilization of vital forces against the phenomenon despite existing law;
- A weak informational exchange system, networking and monitoring (inexistent mechanism of follow-up).

Moreover, in the absence of statistics, the number of potential children beneficiaries of the project (victim and vulnerable) is estimated at 30 000.

The worst forms of child labour identified in the project area are summarized as follows, and by order of priority importance:

- Domestic servants/work
- Barmaids;
- Petty trading / hawkers;
- Cracking of concrete (quarries);
- Farming;
- Prostitution/sex workers.

89, 70% of children are of primary level and 10, 30% are of secondary level.

Roman Catholic children take the lead and Christian religions dominate with 89.65%. 48% of the children come from married families, while 30% of them already have their parents deceased. They come mostly from the periphery or rural areas.

The above mentioned stakeholders (actors) show their readiness to play various roles in the event of inappropriate mechanism of monitoring. A three level model of mechanism of integration of strategies in the fight against child labour has been identified:

- Village (with traditional leaders on top)
- Council (main actor)
- Regional level (with the Governor capping).

To all, the central concern is the victim or vulnerable child. Interaction and inter relationship must prevail.

Child trafficking being a hidden activity, expected chain action must rely on three components:

- Identification of actors at community level (observing / monitoring even children at risk or in difficulty)
- Response at grassroots level (immediate action, as a reply to demand/need).
- Reporting, keeping contacts, linking with all actors (for steady information flow to empower field's actors.)

Active collaboration must characterize all stakeholders from various positions they occupy in the system strategy.

In the three zones, training needs have been identified as follows:

- Awareness raising and sensitization;
- Education in various forms;
- Advocacy and lobbying;
- Practical, adapted to the market vocational trainings;
- Training on monitoring; how to track down traffickers; evaluation of the phenomenon.

Difficulties encountered

- Inappropriate period, official, parliamentarian and council field activities greatly hampered our research;
- Short duration; a 22 days research carried out concerning a very delicate issue as that of child trafficking/labour;

- “Lettre d’accéditation” (accrediting letter) in French language; what was initially meant to facilitate work in the field ended up being a bone of contention. Violent verbal reactions from actors in the English speaking area did have an impact at the beginning of interviews;
- Research on children at work, on employers and intermediaries in a supply zone as was the case could become a real ordeal. To go round this problem, the team had to extend its scope to ex-trafficked children and even resorted to the parents/families questionnaire to be able to somehow enter into the world of employers and intermediaries;
- Vital information could not be gathered on time just because of unwillingness to respond or because the notion of child trafficking still sounded “foreign” in the ears of actors, as were warned to be very careful because it could be the basis of destruction of the image of the child, the family and the community at large.
- And last but not the least, late disbursement of funds did not help researchers in the field.

Lessons learnt

- The project zone that has been seen as supply zone is equally a transit and user zone.
- The perception of child labour in the project zone in a way contradicts with the perception of the international community.
- Child labour is common with Nigerian traders; whereas Nigerian children often report cases to police, Cameroonian children don’t, which can be seen as the situation of ignorance that prevails at all levels in the project zones;
- There exist so many actors in the trafficking chain in various villages that facilitate the practice. There are intermediaries at the level of community and towns; some parents are also intermediaries and often claim that the children are going to relatives;
- There is no synergy among various actors. Employers exploiting children are very aggressive and unapproachable. There are no chained actions and no collaboration among actors including forces of order.
- Children of school going age are very much involved in quarries rather than going to school.
- Some training centers likewise present themselves as areas of child labour. Children accomplish tasks above their capacities, work for very long periods and they are often used for domestic or farm work for their masters.

Practical conclusions and way forward

- Children are trafficked mostly due to their ignorance and that of parents (ignorance of Child Rights), and undergo tedious labour mainly for economic reasons, parents being farmers and polygamous;
- In the project zones, the law related to the phenomenon is not well known;
- Aged between 13 and 16 years and of both sexes, those children are mostly female, some orphans and have dropped out of primary school;
- A three level mechanism (community, council and region) to fight against child trafficking has been discussed and elaborated.

- The damaging nature of the practice is not perceived due to some cultural and historical opinions.
- At council level, efforts are made to fight against child labour and promote child rights.
- Actions to be taken in relation to the phenomenon include:
 - Participative right based and child centered approach to be used in a sustainable way;
 - Law and convention vulgarization and law enforcement mechanism put in place for punishment;
 - Concrete actions through studies, preventive mechanism, institutional support to actors and timely assistance to victims, parents or caregivers.
 - Advocacy activities to induce prevention and seduction of child labour and to promote education and legislation.
 - Sensitization, education and training with special consideration to people living with HIV/AIDS and to all victims of Lake Nyos Disaster.

Conclusion

Thanks to TC-RAM project management that provided all the funding, the phenomenon of child trafficking for labour exploitation in Bali, Wum and Kumbo councils has been tackled and studied to an effective extent. Since time and timing of the study did not permit the team to carry out in depth investigations, more qualitative and quantitative surveys are still necessary so as to have a good baseline knowledge and situation analysis that are essential for the development of logical and integrate program of intervention in order to develop indicators and evaluate the progress done by the project.