Spotlighting Child Trafficking in Akwa Ibom State

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Description

Trafficking of babies is increasingly becoming prevalent in the Niger Delta, especially in Rivers, Edo, Delta, Cross River, Imo, and Akwa Ibom states. It has taken various criminal and economic dimensions, involving kidnapping of babies, proliferation of ‘Baby Factories’ and a growing black market for the sale of babies. Over the years, there has been an increase in ‘Baby Factories’ - illegal orphanages, maternity homes, clinics, or buildings - where young girls and women are kept for the purpose of getting them pregnant to produce babies for sale in black markets, mainly for adoption by infertile couples and for ritualistic purposes. According to data (see map below), over 100 child trafficking incidents were reported in the Niger Delta between 2015 and 2019. The trend has become alarming with frequent media reports of mothers selling their babies. On February 5, 2020, for instance, operatives of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) reportedly arrested two suspects who offered to buy a baby from a pregnant woman for five hundred thousand naira in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom state capital.

Why it Matters

The prevailing trend of child trafficking in Akwa Ibom state is worrying, especially the selling of new born babies by their mothers or parents. The situation threatens to become more prevalent with far-reaching social, economic and political implications for the state.

Social: The emerging trend of child trafficking and selling of babies to couples or individuals could generate paternity disputes that can lead to broken homes. Moreover, young women in ‘Baby Factories’ are often exposed to different men which increases their chances of contracting sexually transmitted diseases which are major causes of infertility. Increase in infertility can also increase patronage for ‘Baby Factories’. Victims of child trafficking could also feel exploited and debased, and end up as child traffickers or prostitutes in the future.

Economic: Child trafficking could negatively impact economic development in the state. As a clandestine business, child trafficking can distort the economy by diverting human and economic resources from legitimate businesses into criminal networks. By diverting resources into criminal networks, child trafficking can undermine legitimate businesses and reduce government revenue from taxation.

Political: The prevalence of child trafficking highlights the seeming ineffectiveness of existing anti-human trafficking laws and lack of political will by the government to prioritize the fight against child trafficking in the state. This can cause loss of confidence in the government, which can engender a culture of impunity, undermine public security, and cause political instability in the state.

Prognosis

The prevailing trend of child trafficking in Akwa Ibom state has the potential to intensify, if appropriate actions are not taken by stakeholders. While the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is making efforts to address the situation nationwide, the state government must work with other relevant stakeholders to develop a multi-faceted approach that combines appropriate legislation with suitable policy measures that address the root causes and drivers of child trafficking in the state.

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