

AFRICAN TOURISM ORGANIZATION

(Tackling Human Trafficking as a Development & Migration Issue)

(Advocacy Office)

1705 ,DaSale St 3rd Floor NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

Phone (202) 328-2191 • Fax: 202 265-6682

Email ato@voladv.org Web [www. African - tourism.org](http://www.African-tourism.org)

SOURCE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING & ILLEGAL MIGRATION IN AFRICA

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The problem of human trafficking is intricately tied to development or lack thereof in sub-Saharan Africa, especially the steady decline of the rural sector. The most telling sign is the recent warning issued by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that 27 countries need urgent food aid. That's more than half the continent's countries. The development link is the fact that African agriculture is in deep crisis and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) estimated in a recent report that 200 million Africans are malnourished. The causes of the latest food crisis in particular and the stagnant agricultural sector in general, are two-fold: political problems and drought.

The FAO pointed out that political problems such as civil strife, refugee movements and returnees account for the urgent food needs in 15 out of the 27 countries, compared to 12 out of the 27 where hunger is caused by drought. So, years of benign neglect of the agriculture sector and political instability (wars, coups and civil strife) account for more hunger than natural disasters. A corollary effect of the breakdown of the agriculture sector is the unrelenting rural migration, with a steady stream of people swelling the already unemployed urban population and seriously stretching the already fragile social services. The teeming population of unemployed youth is a primary source of human trafficking.

SYSTEMIC CRISIS

The breakdown of the rural economy can be attributed to a series of interrelated factors:

1. Decades of under-investment in rural areas, with little or no political clout. This problem is compounded by corruption and mismanagement

- (poor governance), which hinder a government's ability to promote development efforts, especially in the vital rural sector where 70 percent of the population lives.
2. Wars and political conflict which inevitably lead to refugees and instability. In 2004 the chairman of the African Union reminded an AU summit that "the continent had suffered from 186 coups and 26 major wars in the past 50 years." It is estimated that there are more than 16 million refugees and displaced persons in Africa. Needless to say that farmers need stability and certainty to produce the food their families and countries need.
 3. HIV/Aids are depriving families of their most productive labour force, especially in southern Africa, where it is estimated that over 30 percent of sexually active adults are HIV positive. "When a family member becomes infected, food production can fall by up to 60 percent," according to Oxfam, since women are both carers and producers of most of the food
 4. Unchecked population growth has also compounded the food crisis. "Sub-Saharan Africa's population has grown faster than any region over the past 30 years, despite the millions of deaths from the Aids pandemic," according to the UN Population Fund. "Between 1975 and 2005, the population more than doubled, rising from 335 to 751 million, and is currently growing at a rate of 2.2 percent a year." In some parts of Africa there is abundant land, but in others land is scarce. In the latter case this has serious consequences, with families subdividing their land several times, leading to tiny plots or families moving to unsuitable and overworked land.

CONSEQUENCES

According to a book titled: "The African Food Crisis" the continent which was more than self-sufficient in food at independence 50 years ago, is now a net food importer. In less than forty years sub-Saharan Africa went from being a net exporter of basic food staples to relying on imports and food aid. In 1966-70, net exports averaged 1.3 million tons of food a year. "By the late 1970s Africa imported 4.4 million tons of staple foods a year, a figure that had risen to 10 million tons by the mid

1980s.” Since independence, agricultural output per capita remained stagnant, and in many places declined.

The relentless rural migration adding to the population of the already overcrowded cities, with countless unemployed youths, is a fertile recruiting ground for unscrupulous “dream merchants” in general, and human traffickers in particular.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

To stem and ultimately reverse the human trafficking problem requires concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels. These include revitalizing the agricultural, community development, and responsible tourism through meaningful and targeted investments, employment generation initiatives that will make staying home attractive to would-be migration candidates, law enforcement, legal assistance to victims, and the latter’s rehabilitation/reintegration into society through long term development programs.

National governments, the African Union and donors are better equipped to tackle the major development issues discussed above, such as economic policy reforms promoting development of the rural sector, good governance and anti-corruption programs, as well as poverty alleviation policies and programs.

Civil society organizations can play a crucial role in implementing poverty alleviation policies and programs in both urban and rural areas, as well as serving as anti-corruption watchdogs. They can also be catalysts for change by designing and implementing income generating activities for vulnerable and needy groups before they fall prey to unscrupulous “dream merchants” who lure them into human trafficking and illegal migration. In addition to the prevention, legal and social assistance aspects of human trafficking, examples of feasible and effective interventions include funding rural micro-enterprise activities and the distribution of seeds and other forms of aid to women’s groups.

BY IBIDUNI (DUNI) JONES SIERRA LEONE