# Trafficking and enslavement of **Children** in Uganda

# A FORM OF MODERN-DAY SLAVERY



Uganda Youth Development Link



The United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery

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It is aimed at increasing awareness on the growing trend of child trafficking - A Modern-day slavery in Uganda that needs urgent attention.

#### **Our Vision**

"A Uganda where young people are enabled to maximise their potential to achieve an improved quality of life free from exploitation"

#### **Our mission**

"To empower disadvantaged young people with skills that will enable them reach their full potential and become use"

#### **Our values**

- Meaningful participation of young people
- Community participation and empowerment
- Non-discrimination
- Gender equity and equality
- Respect and protection of human rights
- Accountability and transparency
- Friendliness and Reliability

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## Introduction

Trafficking of children is a heinous and hidden crime that exists in Uganda and is becoming a serious human problem attracting international attention. Trafficking of children violates the inherent right of a child to grow up in a protective environment and the right to be free from all forms of abuse and exploitation. Trafficking violates the rights to survival, growth and development and robes children of their childhood, life, education, health liberty and protection from all forms of abuse and slavery.

The US report 2005, on human trafficking estimates that of the 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children trafficked across international borders each year, approximately 80 percent are women and girls and up to 50 percent are children. Trafficking in persons is one of the most lucrative and fastest growing transnational crime that generates about USD \$10 billion per year worldwide.

In Uganda, there are no clear statistics on the total number of boys and girls trafficked within and outside boarders. However, some studies show that some survivors of child trafficking; 2.7 million are victims of child labour, 12,000 trapped in commercial sex, 10,000 street children, between 25,000 and 30,000 abducted for armed conflict and over 20,000 living in the slums of Kampala City.

Children in Uganda are commonly trafficked from rural areas to urban cities/towns to work as housemaids, bar/

lodge/restaurant attendants, karaoke dancers, prostitutes, plantation workers and engage in other odd and illicit activities with little or no pay and working under inhuman conditions. Due to the exploitation involved, many children have ended up on streets, have contracted HIV, become teenage mothers, died (sacrificed), become destitute and completely dropped out of school.

Some of the children have been trafficked to the *Middle East, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Asia* and the *United Kingdom (UK)* to serve as sex slaves and domestic labourers among others.

According to recent studies, children, particularly girls are more vulnerable because they are traditionally destined to do domestic work. Other children are poor, orphans due to HIV/AIDS and wars, or school drop-outs. Other factors poverty, peer pressure, ignorance and negligence of parents/guardians and lack of a restrictive legal framework help explain the vulnerability of children to trafficking and its subsequent worst forms of child labour.

Unless steps are taken in terms of prevention prosecution and protection of survivors of trafficking, more vulnerable Ugandan children are at greater risk of falling victims to this modern day slavery.

# **Definition of Child Trafficking**

## A child:

Is any person under the age of 18 years.

#### Child trafficking:

Is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation where exploitation includes at minimum, prostitution, other forms of Sexual Exploitation, forced labour, slavery and/ or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

# **Types of Child Trafficking**

#### Internal trafficking:

The movement of boys and girls from rural areas to urban areas is of such large proportion that it has taken on a life of its own and is almost considered the norm among the rural populace. Domestic trafficking of children is a bigger problem in Uganda than cross-boarder trafficking.

#### Cross-border trafficking:

The Movement of children from their homes/communities over international borders. This form of trafficking is fast growing in Uganda where children are trafficked to the United Arab Emirates, the Middle East, the United Kingdom and Asia for sexual exploitation and domestic service.

# The Traffickers

The traffickers of children in Uganda vary but may include:-

- Individual women and men from the some village living in urban centres.
- Churches and religious people.
- Transport agents (taxis, boda bodas, Lorries of agricultural products etc.).
- Pimps, bars, brothels and karaoke owners.
- Employment bureaus and recruitment agencies.
- Business men (Farmers, fishermen, miners, builders etc.).
- Humanitarian workers through their activities move children to other places such as orphanages and schools.
- Peers and friends known to children.
- Formerly trafficked children.
- Traditional healers.
- Strangers.
- Rebel groups (for instance the Lords Resistance Army -LRA, a rebel group in Nothern Uganda).

Some traffickers operate covertly (undercover and pretend to be good people/philanthropists) either as individuals and are part of a loose local or cross border network.

Others are organized in small trafficking groups, operate in phases i.e. recruitment, transportation, harbouring, receipt and exploitation, with intermediaries known to the community and while others operate in large criminal groups.

# How children are recruited for trafficking purposes

#### Deceived/enticed:

Children are promised a good life and good things by traffickers. For instance

good clothing, good accommodation, jobs, marriage, education. remitting money to parents and generally а brighter future which never materialises once they reach the destination. This can be done by peers, recruitment agent or other perpetuator case of adolescents in



who are most likely to make the decision to leave home by themselves with or without parental consent. The situation is worse if relations between child and parent are bad, children would see this as an opportunity to leave home in the hope for a better life.

#### Abducted:

Large numbers of children in Uganda are abducted by rebel groups particularly in North and Western parts of Uganda to service in the rebel groups. Many research and testimonies have been published about children that were abducted from schools *(e.g. Aboke Girls in Gulu - Nothern Uganda)* some have died, while others are still in captivity. Even in non-war areas, children are abducted and moved from one place to another for purposes of exploitation. This could be done while the child is awake or under intoxication so that he/she does not identify the traffickers or even the route back home.

#### Abducted children

According to UNICEF, over 30,000 children were abducted by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda, 8000 are still un-accounted for. These children were involved in fighting, carrying heavy luggage and serving as sex slaves to commanders.

#### Abducted children

Some children lost their lives while others were exchanged for guns and other merchandise in Sudan and the Middle East.

Children especially in war-torn areas are more vulnerable as the family system is broken down as a result of death of caretakers. They are left powerless and defenceless, end up in dehumanising situation and enslavements because they are easy target for traffickers.

#### Stolen:

Many children are stolen from their unsuspecting parents from homes and communities while playing, on the way from school, moving alone or sent alone at night. According to police records, the number of children stolen from parents is increasing some are recovered, while others go completely missing.

#### Forced to move by own parents:

some parents due to apathy willingly give away their children or force them to leave their homes with relatives or strangers to go work or start their lives in the cities or other place. Because some children drop-out of school and remain idle at home, which are sometimes big families, some parents feel that if some left the home the family would avoid expenses of catering for their needs. In case of girls, parents would be worried of them becoming older and getting pregnant there.

#### Parental consent:

Majority parents in Uganda consent to their children being trafficked from rural areas to urban areas to work due to poverty and hardships in the family. Trafficking usually starts with an agent *(often known to the family)* visiting and telling a story of the many opportunities waiting the child if they allowed him/her to move with the child. These could include among others education, marriage, good employment, a better life and a better future. Because the agent is usually known to the parents, parents usually trust that their child would be in safe hands in the hope that she/he will be better off than others and if working, the remittances and on spot payment by the trafficker will help the family survive. These in most cases never materialize.

#### Public advertisement:

In many small towns and trading centers in Uganda, the use of loud speakers and posters for news and announcement is a very common method of public communication. It is these very means that traffickers use to recruit children who would like "better opportunities" in towns, cities or abroad.

The ways in which children are recruited and trafficked vary a great deal from one region to another and according to the age of the children being trafficked. Younger children are frequently presented to authorities as the children of the adults accompanying them. The older ones may even be coached a story to tell police or other authorities incase questioned. While in the case of abduction in Northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where larger numbers of children are abducted and forcibly recruited into the ranks, sex slavery and forced marriage and laborers of the Lord's Resistance Army. The violence and trauma involved in these two recruitment methods are different and consequently require different interventions.

## How trafficked children are exploited

Although the motive of the trafficker is usually to make money out of the exploitation of the child, trafficked



children are often used for different purposed depending on age, gender, physical appearance and strength and interest of the trafficker and exploiter. For instance the experience of *a Karimojong baby begging on the streets of Kampala* 

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is very different from a teenage girl from Masaka who was trafficked for Karaoke Dancing and sexual exploitation. Below are some of the common ways in which trafficked children are exploited in Uganda categorized into sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, adoption and sacrifice.

## Sexual exploitation

Otherwise known as child prostitution, this form of exploitation absolutely makes child trafficking a gender issue due to the gender based violence involved and the fact that if mostly affects adolescent girls. Girls and sometimes boys find themselves in custody of **pimps and brothel owners** who sell them for profit for sexual activities with older men. In most cases the pimps ("Aunts") accommodate, feed and buy "*appropriate clothing*" and find "*customers*" for them. They (pimps/brothel owners) receive and control the pay. According to ILO (2004) study on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), the pimps working in slum areas of Kampala City and other five upcountry towns were formerly trafficked and exploited in the same way but now turned experts, exploiting other children.

The new wave of **Karaoke dance/strip clubs** is in many ways carrying along trafficked girls who are exploited by *"managers"* usually male to strip dance as a marketing avenue for the audience (some men) to choose which girls they would need to have sex afterwards. Because they are under the custody of the manager, who accommodates,

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feeds and clothes them they have no choice but accept to sleep with the men chosen by the manager for purposes of public relations for the club. Just line the 'aunt' pimps, the karaoke manager receives and manages money obtained from selling the girls into sexual activities. The demand for pornography has also perpetuated the demand to use children for such purposes. Children in custody of pimps brothel owners and karaoke dance groups are usually exposed to pornography and/or used to produce pornographic materials.

Other trafficked girls are employed in towns as bars/ hotels/lodges and restaurants attendants for purposes of attracting male who customers in turn use them for sexual purposes. In fact



many girls employed in this businesses do not receive pay but are supposed to use the workplace to look for market and pay themselves by engaging in sexual activities with customers.

The other form of trafficking for sexual exploitation

marriage. it is common for an intermediary to be involved in the negotiation, abduction or enticement of an adolescent child in order to make a profit by delivering her to her prospective husband. Although some parents may consent to this, girls also may be deceived by their peers to move in order to get married.

#### False adoption:

In an economically constrained Uganda where more than half of the population especially in rural areas leave on less than one dollar, a "good Samaritan" seen as willing to help

a poor family look after some of the children is seen as God sent. Traffickers have exploited this vulnerability to traffic children within and out of the country in the form of false adoption. There are increasing cases of mothers in Uganda selling their children to wealthier



families/persons without knowing the reasons behind. Many are promised a good life for their children but do not really understand that once they sign documents, the child seizes to be theirs. This is compounded by corrupt officials who sign and legalise the adoption procedures and the lack of an effective monitoring system for adopted children within and outside Uganda. Some of the children trafficked outside the country in the name of adoption have been reported dead or their body parts removed.

#### Child Sacrifice:

Uganda has recently witnessed children trafficked for purposes of ritual sacrifice by wealthy people. The chain of trafficking in this case starts with the witchdoctor prescribing a child sacrifice, then an intermediary who is paid for his/her efforts is hired and paid an amount of money to abduct and deliver a child *(alive, dead or some parts/organs of the childs body)* to the person who needs to perform the sacrifice.

There are also increasing reports that poor people are trafficking children on the advice of witchdoctors for sacrifice in order to get wealth. The vulnerability of children to this vice stems from their innocence as a symbol of life and the future.

Although this trend is higher within Uganda, there are also increasing reports that children are trafficked to other countries for organ removal and sacrifice as well.

#### Labour exploitation

This is one of the most common forms of exploitation of

child victims of trafficking many of whom are employed in poor working conditions characterised by heavy workload, long working hours and little or no pay. Some of these activities include:-

- Domestic labour (*House girls/boys*).
- Commercial activities (*Fishing*, *plantation agriculture*, *mining*, *stone quarrying*, *building etc.*).
- Informal boarder trade including smuggling.
- Military Conscription (child combatants and sex slaves).
- Bonded labour.
- Street begging.

# How children are transported to trafficking destinations

- By public means of transport (*taxis, buses, bicycles, boats, waterway transport, transit goods trucks carrying merchandise and agricultural products, Boda-boda etc.*).
- Planes.
- Walk.

#### ILO/IPEC:

A 2007 Uganda study on trafficking indicate that 79% of children trafficked internally were transported by only one agent. The remaining 21 percent involved more than one person. In most cases move straight to their final destinations, but can be harboured in transit points usually in homes of agents before they are taken to their final destination. Other children stay with their friends and commanders before leaving for their final destinations.

# Some of the activities that trafficked children may engage in

- Domestic work (house girls or houseboys).
- Shamba boys.
- Fishing (making nets, laying nets and drying and smoking fish).
- Smuggling at boarder points.
- Commercial sex (child prostitution).
- Street begging.
- Scrap collection.
- Food vending (selling eggs, ice cream etc.).

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- Casual labourers (*digging*, *fetching water etc.*).
- Fighting in rebel ranks and sex slavery.
- Early marriages (housewives).
- Bar/lodge/brothel/restaurant attendants.

# Factors that increase vulnerability of children to trafficking

Unlike adults, children have limited capacity to assess risk, articulate and voice their concerns about being exposed

danger, defend to themselves against traffickers/exploitation and look after themselves in terms of providing their basic needs. This kind of vulnerability is what the perpetuators of trafficking and eventually the exploiters take advantage of. Global trends indicate that human trafficking and other forms of organised crime are among the most lucrative businesses some of the factors that



contribute to this vice include but not limited to:-

- Poverty, weak and under developed social protection systems.
- HIV/AIDS orphans and children without care givers.
- Peer pressure (*lack of social life skills*).
- Unemployment (school drop-outs, lack employable skills).
- Status of children in society.
- Gender inequalities between boys and girls (girls more vulnerable because of their socially ascribed roles of domestic service).
- Lack of birth registration.
- Armed conflict.
- Natural disasters.
- The status of children in society (*easy to exploit* because they do not question actions of adults).
- Community acceptance of working children.
- Weak legal framework on TIP and poor enforcement of existing ones.
- Poor examples from responsible people (*i.e. law* enforcement themselves employ house girls in their homes).
- Porous boarders.
- Ignorance of devastating effects of trafficking

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on children (limited public education and limited research on trafficking).

• Poor education systems.

# Nature of enslavement faced by trafficked children

- Children are controlled in terms of movements and are not allowed to leave the job premises.
- They may be isolated from public, confined in rooms or houses.
- Fear to talk or escape from their bondage is instilled in the victims. They may also be forced to refer to traffickers and exploiters by familial titles *(i.e. Aunt, uncle, 'jajja', mummy)*.
- Children are moved to places where they do not know the language *(cannot communicate)* and thus creating a communication barrier.
- Personal documents (passports, visa identification) mat be confiscated in case of cross boarder trafficking.
- Debt bondage (financial obligations).
- Control of victim's money or their money sent to their parents.
- The child is given different names to conceal identity.
- Their identity may be concealed by getting other

names, changing hairstyles and dressing so that they look like adults.

- Inhumane working conditions (long hours, no pay or little pay, poor feeding etc.).
- Threats of deportation or being chased away from exploiters home.
- Violence (including physical abuse, verbal abuse and sexual abuse).



# Hazards faced by trafficked children due to exploitation

These stem from the conditions of the exploitative activities that children are forced to do. Such may include: long working hours, uncomfortable seating/sleeping arrangements, poor feeding, dangerous work such as fishing, smuggling and mining, carrying heavy loads and sexual abuse.

#### Social and Emotional hazards

- Fear to be punished by the employer or the trafficker.
- Feelings of guilt due to mistakes made.

- Anger and self blame for the bad things in their lives.
- Feelings of betrayal to the family/guardians who sold them into slavery.
- Lack of trust for other people due to the exploitation *(especially in sexual exploitation)*.
- Helpless, due to the inability to change their situation.
- Feelings of shame/shock that lead to lack of control of their lives.
- Worry that they may not be accepted back into their communities and families (*the case of child soldiers*).
- Rejection by families and communities (child soldiers who are forced to kill their family members are seen as murderers when they return and may not be easily accepted).
- Some of the children involved in commercial sex are arrested by police, exposed to the public in the media as *"prostitutes by choice"*.
- Girls involved in commercial sex and getting a lot of money get used to the practice and may pose challenges rehabilitating them or proposing other income generating options.

#### Physical and health hazards

- Children may be forced to abuse alcohol, drug and substance abuse in order to withstand hardships. These later lead to addiction, diseases and mental problems.
- Early sexual initiation, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and fistula.
- Exposure to risks of unprotected sex (including sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS).
- Bruises and wounds; resulting from unsafe working conditions and physical violence.
- Deaths; resulting from dangerous work (such as mining and fishing, as well as suicide, sacrifice and accidents).
- Nightmares, hallucinations and mental disorders resulting from torture, worry and exploitation.
- Early motherhood and huge responsibility associated with it that could cause emotional stress.

# International and National Legislation on Child Trafficking

#### Trafficking in persons' Act

The parliament of Uganda passed the *"The anti-trafficking in persons"* Act in April 2009, which is yet to be enforced. The Act provides for legislation that criminalizes the

offence of trafficking in persons, provides for prevention of trafficking in persons, prosecution of offenders, protection of victims of modern-day slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children.

It provides the definition of trafficking in the case of Uganda, the forms of trafficking (sexual exploitation/ prostitution, child labour, military conscription, early marriage, illicit adoption, human sacrifice, removal of body parts/organs, slavery and forced/bonded labour).

The bill specifically focuses on the **3Ps** (*Prevention* of trafficking in persons, Prosecution of offenders and Protection of victims). The Government of Uganda has also established the anti trafficking police unit in the Uganda police force and trained some law enforcement officers in anticipation for the enactment of this law.

#### The Penal Code

The penal code criminalises parts of the process of trafficking in persons. It provides for prosecution of:-

#### Offences against morality:

Which include; Rape, abduction, defilement, indecent assault, detention for prostitution, operating a brothel and living on earnings from prostitution.

#### Offences against liberty:

Which include; Kidnapping with intent to murder,

confining, buying, confining and selling of slaves, child stealing - forcibly or fraudulently taking, enticing, detaining, knowing, receiving and harbouring such a child below 14 years of age.

#### Offences against a person:

Which include murder, manslaughters, causing death disabling, stupefying, grievous harm, and common assaults.

# **The Immigration Laws**

#### International Conventions:

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (The Palermo Protocol).

The Protocol provides the first clear definition of **'trafficking in persons'** in international law. It also emphasizes that it is not necessary for a child to have been coerced or deceived for the case to amount to trafficking. The definition of trafficking in the Trafficking Protocol is wide reaching when it comes to children, implying that all cases in which children are recruited and moved away from home so that they can be exploited are cases of trafficking.

#### International Conventions:

The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

This protocol requires Member States to prohibit forms of abuse associated with trafficking, committed domestically, transnational, on an individual or organized basis.

## Strategies to combat Child Trafficking

Child trafficking is a complex practice that affects government, communities, families and individuals. It therefore requires comprehensive and integrated strategies at all the above mentioned levels and commitment of all stakeholders to prevent the trafficking act, prosecute of offenders and protect victims.

Below are some suggestions on what you/we can do to fight child trafficking.

#### Prevention

- Increase awareness about child trafficking in source and destination areas:-
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Disseminate information, education and communication messages (*posters*, *stickers*, *leaflets*, *billboards e.t.c.*).

- Sponsor anti trafficking campaigns *(media forums and community education activities)* through corporate responsibility.
- Write articles for newspapers, E-mails, journals, web-sites, reports and magazines.
- Sponsor and discuss child trafficking issues on televisions, radios and both public and community dialogues.
  - Address the root causes of child trafficking in source areas (such as household poverty, HIV/ AIDS, conflicts, ignorance, school drop-outs and unemployment among others).
- Support skills building programmes, children's rights and responsibilities and life skills programmes.
  - Provide accurate information about traffickers, risks and dangerous places to avoid.
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- Fundraise local resources to support antitrafficking programmes or campaigns.
- Involve local communities and children in dialogues to identify issues related to child trafficking and address them using locally available resources.
- Promote a zero tolerance policy against child trafficking at all levels.
  - Invest in research to provide accurate

information about the nature and dynamics of child

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Trafficking that will guide planning of interventions.

- Support the implement effective rescue and rehabilitation programmes to reduce demand at destination areas.
- Support activities or clubs that that build the capacity of children and parents to recognise to build self esteem, recognise trafficking and deal with it when it occurs.
- Register all births of children and provide national identification to each Ugandan child to ease identification and tracking in case trafficking occurs.

#### **Prosecution**

This refers to the country criminal proceeding in which an accused person is tried. Interventions may include:-

- Adequately equip law enforcement officers with the tools *(information, skills, equipment and funds)* to effectively enforce the law and handle children's cases in friendly ways.
  - Improve capacity for proper record keeping and tracking of human trafficking crimes.
- Increase and improve transnational cooperation.

- Ensure appropriate systems are in place to ensure implementation of existing laws and realisation of children's rights.
- Strengthen bilateral agreements on investigation, victim assistance and adoption.
- Ratify and domesticate international conventions on anti-human trafficking.
- Enact and enforce the newly passed antihuman trafficking law
- Increase efforts and commitment to prosecute, convict and punish offenders.
- Monitor places where children are likely to work in the informal sector, fishing, commercial agriculture and border trade and private homes.

#### Protection

This may means all those activities and measures put in place to enable individuals at risk to enjoy the rights and assistance foreseen them by international conventions. Rehabilitation and, re-integration are apart of protection measures.

Others may include: -

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Report any suspicion of actual situations of child trafficking and exploitation to police and local authorities nearest to you.

- Provide funds for running anti-trafficking projects/programmes that provide psychosocial support services to rescued victims.
- Sponsor construction of shelter homes and quality service points.
- Train staff of civil society organisations to effectively support survivors.
- Forster a strong networking and collaboration among stakeholders to promote shared learning and effective referral systems.
- Establish and support 24/7 toll free child help lines managed by professional counsellors.
- Provide or sponsor rehabilitation of rescued victims through vocational skills training and return to formal education.
- Create a code of ethics/child protection policies among civil society organisations and partner institutions.

# What to do if you need help

- When you suspect a child to be a victim of trafficking, talk to them and clearly understand whether the circumstances they are in are a result of the act of child trafficking, by asking relevant questions.
- Do not blame the child for the situation he/she is in but assure them of support and protection.

- Report the case to a police station/post, local council leadership or child rights NGO nearest to you.
- Seek for help from NGOs, government facilities or local leadership for medical, counselling, temporary shelter, food and clothing among others.

# Some of the places where you can get help in Uganda

- The Child and Family Protection Unit at any police station near to you.
- Local council committee in your area.
- Immigration office at boarder points
- Child Rights Organisations (including Community based, faith based and Non-Governmental such as:
  - The International Organisation on Migration.
  - Uganda Child Rights NGO Network.
  - Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL).
  - Save the Children in Uganda.

# Glossary

#### Child:

An individual being below the age of 18

#### Child labour:

Any work performed by a child which is detrimental to his or her health, education, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development

#### Children's rights:

Inherent claims or entitlements of every child that protect them from abuse and deprivation that would prevent them from attaining their full potentials. These are categorised into four: survival, protection, development and participation rights.

#### **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of children:**

This involved using the child for remuneration in cash or in kind usually but not limited to parents, family member, trafficker, pimp or karaoke manager, mainly for the purpose of prostitution and pornography.

#### **Gender:**

Is the social and cultural construct of roles, responsibilities, attributes, opportunities, privileges, and status access` to control over resources and benefits between women and men boys and girls in a given society.

#### Trafficker:

Is a person who is moving people in order to obtain money pOr other benefits through deceit, kidnapping, or by other forms of exploitation.

#### Trafficking in persons':

Means recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threats or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power of the position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of the person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (Palermo protocol, 2000).

#### Vulnerability:

The condition of being at risk of becoming poor, or other misfortunes such as violence, and natural hazards (exposure to risk, sensitivity to shock and level of resilience).

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