



Young@HAART – Youths fighting human trafficking in Kenya

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HAART – Awareness against Human Trafficking, Kenya

Young People Against Prostitution and Human Trafficking:

The Greatest Violence Against Human Beings

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Introduction

Human trafficking is a problem that has been drawing the attention of media worldwide since the end of Cold War Era. It is a criminal activity that is often described as modern day slavery. Different activists call it **'a crime that shames us all'** since the stories of victims and survivors are similar to victims of slavery and slave trade in 19th century. Human trafficking also has a negative impact on democracy, state security and gender equality (since the majority of victims are women and children) within countries where it is present. It contributes to the spread of HIV, fuels terrorism, generates poverty and retards social development. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP), presented annually by the USA Government, Kenya is a source, transit, and destination country for women, children and men subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically conditions of forced labor, child labor and sexual exploitation.

Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) is a grass-root organization working in Kenya (mainly Nairobi and its suburbs). It has been a registered non-profit organization in the Republic of Kenya since 2010. Our projects use the UN methodology which categorizes counter trafficking activities as follows: Prevention, Protection of Victims, Prosecution of Traffickers and Policy Cooperation.

This paper is going to talk about what Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) does in Kenya and my experience with dealing with victims of human trafficking. The different forms of human trafficking are also tackled as well as recommendations on how to prevent youths from being victims of sexual exploitation.

Counter trafficking activities are further elaborated below:

1. Prevention Activities

At HAART we run a prevention project which entails capacity building at the grass-roots level through the training of volunteers on the dangers of human trafficking. HAART trains volunteers, who conduct half-day workshop trainings to local communities on issues like: the nature of human trafficking; how to prevent oneself from being trafficked and refer victims to our office. This is in line with the UN policy which declares that awareness creation is the best way possible to curb human trafficking. Within this program HAART established a network of grass-root partners (both governmental and non-governmental organizations) of qualified volunteers in Nairobi City and its environs and other parts of Kenya.

Out of this project evolved **Young@HAART**. This programme educates youths and sends them out to empower other youths through the social media (<https://www.facebook.com/HAART.Ke> & <https://twitter.com/HAARTKenya>), workshops, sports activities, cleaning the environment, visits to children centers, dance, spoken word that relate to human trafficking and in any way we can reach them. One of our best moments was when we were given a chance at the biggest catholic radio in Kenya two times to create awareness through a radio Drama. Having had been among the first volunteers to benefit from this programme it has helped me as an individual and it was my greatest motivation into going out and educating other people. Many youths always want to join us to spread the word after awareness sessions after seeing the effects it has on our future.

2. Protection Activities (Assisting Victims)

A network of trained volunteers/social workers at the grass roots level is used to identify victims who are then assisted by HAART or HAART partners. HAART reaches out and assists victims of trafficking (most trafficked to Arab countries) depending with their individual needs. This might be legal assistance, medical, Counseling, medical, startup capital, shelter, reintegration and any other pressing need which attention. Through the

program they were able to minimize the negative effects of human trafficking and many have a fresh start in their lives.

HAART is also involved in other activities like prosecution of traffickers where we have been able to have two perpetrators prosecuted. The youths are rarely involved in this.

Policy cooperation is also a key activity at HAART. With the government of Kenya having had passed the trafficking in persons Act in 2010, implementation of the same by the government agencies is yet to be seen. Awareness about trafficking among the different levels of government is also lacking. Advocacy is much needed in Kenya to ensure the government lives up to its responsibility. We have partnered with the Kenya Peace Network, Christian Organizations Against Trafficking in Human Beings and Regional Mixed Migration Task Force to enable us to work on a larger scale on advocacy, public awareness and research.

Different forms of Exploitation

Sexual Exploitation

We work mainly with women and children being trafficked within and outside of Kenya for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This involves them being introduced into prostitution and used in the compilation of pornographic images. This could also happen to victims of forced labor, many are minors and are subjected to sexual exploitation within the family of their 'employers'.

I remember Sr. Mary (coordinator of the victim's program) sharing with me the story of a lady who was promised a good job at the Coastal city of Mombasa by her lifelong friend. Mildred left her children in the care of her aged mother. She arrived after dark and was taken into a 'big house' which was in essence a highly secure brothel where the Madam in charge explained to her that she would "*comply with the requests of our customers*". Mildred complained that she could not do it but the lady insisted she "*will get used to it in time*" and it came with an offer to use drugs to help her. She did not see daylight or move out of the house for 8 months. One day she was sent out to clean the compound, she noticed public transport vehicles were passing. So, she pushed aside barbed wire and thorns and escaped, then boarded a mini bus and after narrating her story to the driver, she begged for her fare to be paid. She managed to get to Nairobi and went home to her family. She went through counseling sessions and was given a small grant to start up a small business. She is doing well currently but her HIV status is one of the things she said she can never share with her family members.

When I first heard of Mildred's story I was only dealing with awareness creation among the youths and I thought it was only being exaggerated till I met the survivor herself. It was my first time to meet a real survivor of trafficking. This changed my whole view of human trafficking. It was no longer theory or just sharing stories and statistics. I realized that these are real people with shattered dreams and broken lives – the impact of such violence will remain with them always.

As I am an intern in victim assistance – I have come to know the myriad of diseases and post traumatic stress they experience: physical injuries, infections, chronic illnesses, injury of rectal muscles due to sodomy, feelings of betrayal, low self-esteem, social-economic problems, strained family relations, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. These, and many others, are some of the effects that victims of trafficking undergo through and it is always most severe for those who are sexually exploited.

Forced labor

Forced labor seems to be the dominant form of exploiting victims of human trafficking in Kenya. Children are forced into domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation, including involvement in the coastal sex tourism industry. They are also frequently used for forced labor in agricultural production (for example in flower plantations), fishing, cattle herding, begging, street vending, and bar attendance, exposing many to incidents of drug abuse. Traffickers, who gain poor families' trust through familial, tribal, or religious ties, falsely offer to raise and educate children in towns, or promise to obtain lucrative employment for young women. Kenyan adults who are trafficked to different regions of the world including Asia, Europe and the USA, are exploited in involuntary domestic servitude, forced labor and sexual exploitation. Such vulnerable groups can also be involved in criminal activities, promoting insecurity in Kenya and within the region.

Trafficking for the purpose of forced labor cannot be overlooked; the victims are exposed to long working hours, abusive environments and little or no remuneration. Their physical and psychological health is likely to be affected.

Organ removal

Sadly, organ removal has a very dark side to it – it is mostly children but adults are also affected. Of children we call it "Toddler theft". Typically a little body is found some days later with eyes, tongue and/or genital organs removed and the organ thieves seem to target male children. This is usually for witch craft and rituals.

Push and pull factors for human trafficking

Push Factors

- Illiteracy and poverty

Many young men and women come from backgrounds of little or no education. A lack of school fees is a major barrier for many parents and therefore many children grow up without guidance and are easily lured by traffickers. You will usually find the most vulnerable people in the slums of the big cities and especially Nairobi as well as the rural areas. When I was listening to their stories, it seems that poverty and desperation dominated their narratives lives such that they were easy prey for the traffickers and recruiters. Opportunity knocked and they could not resist the offer, it sounded too good to be true.

- High unemployment (40% in Kenya at present). - Culture

Pull factors

- Growing demand of the sex industry
- The demand for cheap labor
- The demand for organs

Recommendations

- Raising awareness of the complexities of Human Trafficking

'Knowledge is power' and people perish because of lack of knowledge.

What will this do to the society?

- Make people aware of what human trafficking is and how it takes place.
- Reduce/eliminate demand for trafficked persons.
- Using both social and mainstream media we will reach more people.
- Have victims of human trafficking realize that they are victims of a crime.
- Invite different stakeholders to understand the crime better and know how they can help, for example we found police are unaware of trafficking as a crime and treated it as an immigration problem or a non-existent issue.

Advocacy campaigns

- Push the government to implement the 'Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010.
- Push for bilateral agreements/international agreements which could protect people abroad.
- Empower the vulnerable and potential victims to defend themselves.

Networks and partnerships

- Networks are channels through which we are able to create better resistance to human trafficking. Through partnerships our voice will be heard on many floors, amplification of our voice is crucial in this work.
- Engage with others who can assist in job creation and offer alternatives to 'slavery'
- Collaborate with existing religious institutions like COATNET to reach the masses.

Young people in Kenyan are increasingly risking becoming victims of human trafficking. It is a significant problem in Kenya; it not only violates individual human rights but also pose a threat to social development and human security. Therefore curbing human trafficking is a necessary condition for any society that wants to develop itself. This is only possible if different stakeholders - both Governmental and non-governmental bodies - cooperate by sharing responsibilities and assisting each other.

The youths should also come to realize that it is never as bad as they think and Work on what they have to better themselves. We should learn to find peace and happiness in whatever little we have and understand that Money is not what brings happiness to life; it might bring us more complications than we anticipated.