



BRIEFING PAPER FOR USDOL SECRETARY CHAO: MISSION'S INTERVENTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CHILD TRAFFICKING IN BENIN: November 17, 2003

I/ BACKGROUND

Child trafficking is a multifaceted phenomenon in West Africa. It started with parents placing their children with relatives. That placement is called in fon, one of southern Benin languages, "vidomégon". The culture of vidomegon, originally allowed more fortunate members of the community to receive the children of less fortunate members, in a climate of solidarity. The idea is that by confiding a less fortunate child in the home of someone who is better endowed economically, that child will be better taken care of. This practice is rampant all over West Africa. However, over time the practice has been abused by individuals who have sought financial rewards, resulting in a behavior where children are given to traffickers, who in turn sell them to agents in neighboring countries. Victims of this new practice are reduced to mere commodities that are bought, sold, transported, and resold according to market forces of supply and demand. Most trafficked children are threatened with physical and emotional abuse, and nearly all suffer from neglect or diseases. Poverty is one of the causes of child labor and trafficking in Benin. The social cost of trafficking to families, communities and countries is immeasurable, and, is an abuse of fundamental human rights. The Etiréno boat carrying trafficked children from Benin has brought to the forefront the vulnerability of these children to abuse and violence and the need for urgent community public and private actions.

II/ 205 CHILDREN REPATRIATED FROM NIGERIA TO BENIN

As of September 26, 2003, 205 victims of child trafficking, ranging from ages 5 to 18 years, were repatriated from Nigeria to Benin. These trafficked children were handed over to Beninese officials with 7 Beninese suspected child traffickers, at the Benin/Nigeria border, at Seme Krake. These operations were part of the implementation of a memorandum of understanding signed between Presidents Kerekou and Obasanjo, in Badagry, Nigeria, on August 14, 2003 to combat transborder crime. The children, rescued from different locations in Ogun State, were discovered by the Beninese community in Abeokuta and are originated from the village of Zakpota in the Central region of Benin. According to reports in the local press, the trafficked children were working in mines, quarries or farms in difficult conditions seven days a week from morning until night without salaries, or appropriate food. Before their transfer to Cotonou, they were kept in horrible living conditions resulting in the death of 3 of them. Most of the children had to be hospitalized in Cotonou and about 80% of them had various health problems. According to the Minister of Family Affairs, there exists an underworld of traffickers or "mafia" that entertain massive camps of children working in the mines and forests of Nigeria. Her statement was based on an inquiry visit organized by UNICEF to Nigeria. She believed that thousands more children could be repatriated from Nigeria in the near future. The Nigerian media stated that there could be up to 40,000 Beninese children victims and that considering the condition of the camps a considerable number of children die each month.

III/ DESCRIPTION OF ONGOING AND PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

A/ Intervention of the Benin Government and partners to reinstate trafficked children back into mainstream society

Trafficked children, upon their arrival at the Benin/Nigerian border, were transported to the National Stadium of Cotonou named "Friendship Stadium" by the Ministry of Family, Social Protection and Solidarity (MFPSS) officials. Of the first group of 116 children, all of whom are boys, "Terre des Hommes", a local NGO, volunteered to care for 50; the Belgian Red Cross volunteered to take care of 30 of the younger children, while two other organizations called "Messengers of Peace", and a Catholic center called Centre d'Ecoute et d'Orientation (CAO), agree to take the youngest. Some of the oldest, about 16, (ranging from ages 14 to 18 plus years) were kept at the stadium for questioning. Benin government officials were concerned that if the latter age group were placed in a less monitored center, they could leave without authorization as has happened in the past. Also, the Child Protection Unit (Brigade de Protection des Enfants) suspects that at least some of the older children are involved in the trafficking. Nevertheless, they were accepted among the Red Cross. 74 of the 89 new comers are still being housed and supervised at the national stadium until appropriate and secure centers are identified for them.

Mrs. Massiyatou Latoundji Lauriano, the Minister of Family, Social Protection and Solidarity, launched an awareness campaign towards various donors, NGOs, and the population specifically in the Zou region where children mostly originated from. The Minister thinks that to eradicate the phenomenon of child trafficking, poverty alleviation needs to be taken seriously. In addition, investigations are ongoing to find the children's families and relatives so they can be re-inserted in the education system. As a result, it is expected that around 140 of the 205 trafficked children will soon be returned to their parents.

UNICEF is leading an emergency committee set up to raise resources in order to build a camp for the returned children. The initial committee is made up of Terre des Hommes, Medecins Sans Frontière (French NGOs), Belgian Red Cross, UNICEF, the European Union and key Ministry of Family officials. The U.S. Mission, through USAID/Benin and the Catholic Relief Services (CRS-Benin) are actively working in collaboration with this core group.

B/ Support from the US Department of Labor

The Regional Food for Peace Officer in Dakar has been contacted for input. CRS-Benin requested and obtained authorization to distribute USG-FFP commodities to some of the organizations who accepted the children and for the children still housed in the stadium, to cover the nutritional needs for all of the children for three months. The issue was brought up at USAID's West African Regional Program Mission Directors conference in Accra, in order to develop a broader approach for addressing the problem regionally and develop a comprehensive approach with existing resources with the support of the Department of Labor.

The Department of Labor signed a Letter of Agreement with Benin's cognizant Ministries that have a stake in the anti-child trafficking issue in order to reiterate its intention to collaborate in the fight against child trafficking through education. The overall objective of this collaborative effort is to increase enrollment, attendance, and retention of working children in school, particularly victims of child trafficking and those at risk of being trafficked. Under the Letter of Agreement, USDOL allocated US \$2.0 million to the project in the last fiscal year, ending on September 30, 2003. The US Embassy in Cotonou is serving as a liaison between USDOL and the respective Ministries for this 2-year project. Under this agreement, a \$2 million grant has been recently signed between the Department of Labor and a consortium headed by the CRS for the prevention of child trafficking. CRS will implement this project in collaboration with World Education and the local NGO called "Terre des Hommes".

Terre des Hommes took care of a total of 517 abandoned children in 2002. Most of them, received in 2002 (488) were victims of bad treatments. The capacity of the Center is 60 children. However, they are presently simultaneously taking care of 92, 64 of whom are part of the repatriated children from Nigeria. This NGO intervenes in providing food relief and promoting legal protection of abandoned children. It also coordinates the reintegration of these children in their communities, and advocates for law enforcement. The NGO is collaborating with the Ministry of Family for the reintegration of repatriated children from Nigeria.

C/ USAID/Benin's activity

USAID/Benin's governance program intends to support the GOB's efforts to fight child labor and trafficking in Benin in (1) providing institutional and operational support to the Directorate of Family, Childhood and Adolescence (DFCA) of the Ministry of Family, Social Protection and Solidarity (MFSPS), and the "Centre de Promotion Social" (CPS) geared towards trafficked and abandoned children; (2) assisting local Civil Society Organizations for the development and implementation of income generating and literacy programs in target rural areas; and (3) providing alternatives to Beninese young women and children who are vulnerable to traffickers, working for cocoa plantations in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. A significant part of the present program aims at complementing awareness campaigns, legislation drafting and social actions implemented by the GOB, UNICEF and the European Community. It mainly targets poverty reduction, and fostering economical opportunities for women.

1. Under the Transparency and accountability Intermediate Result:

USAID/Benin signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to set forth its intention of supporting the fight against child labor and trafficking, as stated above. To enable the DFCA, the CPS and the local committees to better track the Government of Benin's efforts against child trafficking, USAID/Benin is providing them with appropriate tools, including:

- 2 Computers; 2 Printers ; 2 Smart UPS; 2 laptops; 1 Scanner; 1 Photocopier; 1 Video Projector; 1 Camera; 1 Screen, 1 Flipchart, 1 magnetic board, 1 VIPP card, flipchart papers and markers; and Internet Connection with one ISP for 12 months including user assistance for the DFCA.
- Office supplies and Specific furniture including Mag Lite Torches; and: Shoulder Type Megaphones for the CPS and the local committees
- Basic Training of the DFCA's technical staff in the use of computer equipment; and two Training Activities on children's right and protection for the CPS and local committees to reinforce capacity of the CPS to supervise the local committees and of the CPS and the local committees to discourage traffickers and protect vulnerable children in the Mono, Borgou and Oueme Regions

A grant will be awarded to a local NGO for Training in Income Generating activities. The income generating will be associated with literacy program, awareness campaign about child labor and trafficking that will touch civil society groups including the Parents Associations (APE), the media, the community groups, local watchdogs, female and youth associations, farmers' unions, religious leaders, police officers and other special interest groups to contribute to such a campaign.

2. Under the Agriculture Intermediate Result:

The goal of this intervention is to provide women and children viable livelihood options, alternative

to exploitation on cocoa plantations, by: (1) conducting an inventory and creating a database of the full-range of vocational educational options in Benin, with special consideration of agricultural training, (2) complementing the existing awareness campaign to include information on the full-range of viable alternatives, thus reducing the motivation to work in cocoa fields, (3) providing flexible scholarship opportunities for education, training, and employment for vulnerable young women and children through the identified existing organizations, and (4) tracking the professional development of the scholarship recipients.

Vulnerable young women and children who have the potential to succeed will be targeted by the scholarships program. Scholarships would be made available to provide training and education leading to viable employment opportunities. A database of scholarship recipients will be created and the progress of the young women and children recipients measured bi-annually.

USAID FUNDING MECHANISM

Organization	Description	Contribution (US Dollars)
<i>1. Transparency and Accountability</i>		
- USAID/Benin	Development Assistance Funds	200,000
<i>2. Agriculture</i>		
- USAID/Benin	Development Assistance Funds	300,000