TRAFFICKING OF NIGERIAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR ATTAINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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This paper questions the endless debates on sustainable development in Nigeria that fail to address the obvious economic, social, religious, cultural, and political factors reinforcing the marginalization of women and children, as well as their susceptibility to human trafficking. The paper also acknowledges the gendered nature of human trafficking and the human trafficking discourse, where the tendency is to merge women and children into a single group of marginalized people. For Nigeria to attain sustainable development, this paper advocates introducing the involvement of women and children in decision-making that will enhance their empowerment, well-being, and development as an effort towards promoting social justice. Further, this paper calls for an anti-oppressive foundation for attaining sustainable development by introducing the idea of equal opportunities, which is entrenched in several international conventions and should be applied in reality to the situation of women and children in Nigeria.

The trafficking of women and children for exploitative practices is becoming a widespread occurrence in Nigeria. To some extent, the rise in trafficking cases can be traced to the country's deplorable economic conditions, which make women and children fall for dubious promises made by trafficking agents who claim they will provide them with employment opportunities in urban areas within Nigeria or abroad. In the late 1990s, human trafficking in Nigeria was associated with the trafficking of women and girls from Edo state for prostitution in Italy and other European countries. Recent trafficking literature shows that Nigerian women and children are likely to be trafficked for purposes other than prostitution. Women and children are liable to be trafficked for domestic servitude, forced labor, hawking, organ harvesting,

early or forced marriage, and other exploitative practices.[1]

In response to the rising number of human trafficking cases in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Assembly passed the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPLEA Act, henceforth identified as the NAPTIP Act) in 2003 to address trafficking in person and protect children and adults from criminal networks.[2] This NAPTIP Act established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) in August 2003 to investigate and prosecute trafficking cases, and rehabilitate victims of trafficking. The NAPTIP Act was amended in 2005 to prohibit different forms of trafficking in the country and give the agency more enforcement powers by increasing penalties for trafficking offenders.[3] Nigeria has also signed a number of international conventions to address the problem of human trafficking and protect women and children in the country. However, in order for the anti-trafficking agency to fulfill its mandate of removing women and children from trafficking, there should be an adequate provision of funds allowing agencies to undertake functions[4] for trafficking victims and those vulnerable to trafficking. Moreover, the anti-trafficking effort is often hampered by the dubious practices of corrupt law enforcement and border-control officials, as well as Nigeria's weak legislature structures for handling trafficking cases.[5] The NAPTIP Act notwithstanding, the persistently high rates of trafficking of women and children is evidence that the problem of addressing human trafficking transcends policy frameworks.

Bearing in mind that sustainable development is associated with an attempt by countries to meet the welfare and survival needs of their citizenry, the high incidence of trafficking in women and children disrupts Nigeria's quest for sustainable development. This paper is an attempt to question the endless debates on sustainable development in Nigeria, which

1   Muhammed Tawfiq Ladan, "Recent Legal, Policy and Case-Law Trends in Combating Trafficking of Children and Women in Nigeria," *Policy and Case-Law Trends in Combating Trafficking of Children and Women in Nigeria, January 8* (2016); S. Abdulraheem. and A. R. Oladipo, "Trafficking in Women and Children: A Hidden Health and Social Problem in Nigeria," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (2010): 37.

2   Abdulraheem and Oladipo, "Trafficking in Women and Children," 9; Adeola Ayodele Oluwabyi, "Legal Response to Women Trafficking In Nigeria," *Frontiers of Legal Research* 3, no. 1 (2015): 9.

3   Tade Oludayo, "Recruitment and Abuse of Trafficked Children in Southwest Nigeria," *African Security Review* 23, no. 3 (2014): 264-282.

4   Victoria Ijeoma Nwogu, "Anti-Trafficking Interventions in Nigeria and the Principle-Agent Aid Model," *Anti-Trafficking Review* 3 (2014).

5   Oluyemi Oyenike Fayomi, "Women, Poverty and Trafficking: A Contextual Exposition of the Nigerian Situation," *Journal of Management and Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2009): 65-79.

fail to address the obvious economic, social, religious, cultural, and political factors that reinforce the marginalization of women and children, and render them open to the exploitative intents of trafficking agents. Building upon this, the paper will dwell on asking and finding answers to questions pertaining to: the present situation of Nigerian women and children, especially in relation to what these groups currently have and lack; understanding what sustainable development means; and analyzing the extent to which women and children can contribute to the discourse by expressing factors contributing to their propensity to human trafficking. The paper will end by recommending a pathway to attaining sustainable development in Nigeria that explores a gender perspective.

If sustainable development refers to processes for maximizing the well-being of individuals in a society in a way that will not jeopardize that of future generations, it follows that the route to attaining sustainable development requires eradicating several external and internal impediments. These include impediments to resource acquisition and utilization, environmental preservation, and provision of a healthy and organized environment with flexible strategies for responding to current and future shocks that members of the society (especially women and children) are exposed to. The understanding is that human welfare should form the core of sustainable development activities. This entails a balanced look at diverse contributors to human welfare, including economic efficiency, social development, and environmental protection. It also means that in looking at these factors, the concern should not be exclusively about the future, but ensuring that the needs of the present generation are met.

For Nigeria to attain sustainable development, this paper advocates for immediate improvement in people's lives by introducing the involvement of women and children in decision-making that will enhance their empowerment, in addition to development as an effort towards promoting social justice. A society that has always marginalized women and children can be motivated to change some elements of its discriminatory traits. Key avenues for initiating and/or achieving such change could be through public awareness programs, conferences, and policy forums where affected victims or vulnerable populations are included as participants. Platforms for involving children in decision-making could be at deliberative processes for children-focused initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Children partaking in these interactive sessions should be victims or children susceptible to trafficking. Child-victims are more readily recognized as having major stakeholder status in addressing social woes when they are seen as people

able to recount their trafficking experiences and describe its effects on their lives. The expectation is that when children likely to experience a major social problem are involved in decision-making about social, economic, and educational incentives targeted at vulnerable Nigerian children, the identification of factors triggering children's susceptibility to trafficking will be more likely, with the adoption of appropriate policy strategies to curtail the occurrence of said problems.

The Present Position of Women and Children in Nigeria and West Africa

Global estimates indicate that approximately 700,000 to 2 million women and children are trafficked annually.[6] Evidence also shows that of the number of people trafficked globally each year, 32% engage in forced economic exploitation, with 56% of this number comprising women and girls.[7] Trafficking, especially when it involves the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, is considered an infringement on the rights of the trafficked persons. This practice also exposes trafficked persons to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.[8] The economy in most West African countries is based on agriculture and mining. Due to major inequalities in wealth distribution in these countries, there are high rates of poverty, and with the need for more families to get out of situations of crippling poverty, human trafficking has become an increasingly attractive option. Based on the economic mainstay of West African countries, children are likely to be trafficked to work on cocoa plantations or large farms,[9] while other children are found hawking, begging, or engaging in domestic or sex work.[10]

        Furthermore, Adepoju attests that clandestine migration in West Africa has been fueled by situations where a large percentage of the

6   Erin O'Brien, "Dark Numbers: Challenges in Measuring Human Trafficking," *Dialogue e-Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 1-21.

7   ILO, Forced Labour Statistics Factsheet, International Labour Organisation (2007).

8   Yvonne Rafferty, "The Impact of Trafficking on Children: Psychological and Social Policy Perspectives," *Child Development Perspectives* 2, no. 1 (2008): 13-18; Innocenti Insight, "Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children, in Africa," *Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre* (2003).

9   Kathleen Fitzgibbon, "Modern-day Slavery? The Scope of Trafficking in Persons in Africa," *African Security Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 81-89.

10   UNICEF, "Promoting Synergies Between Child Protection and Social Protection: West and Central Africa (2009)," accessed November 3, 2012, http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_UNICEF_ODI_5_Child_Protection.pdf.

populace lives in abject poverty.[11] Sawadogo reports that countries in West Africa have the lowest standards of living, with eleven of them falling within the bottom thirty countries on the 2011 Human Development Index.[12] Worsening economic situations in West African countries adversely affect young people and limit their access to employment, propelling them deeper into poverty and making them easy prey for trafficking agents who promise attractive jobs in foreign countries.[13] Some researchers also attribute the growing menace of the transnational crime of trafficking to globalization,[14] while others attribute it to a lack of employment or investment opportunities, which then pushes women and girls to partake in sex trafficking.[15] The growth of the social problem cannot be detached from the fact that when women lack assets or a steady means of livelihood, they are bound to resort to trafficking. A study by Adejumo also shows that when women and girls are poor, their poverty is evident in their low social status, low self-esteem, and susceptibility to exploitative practices.[16]

Trafficking literature often refers to parents' reliance on the extended family as a last resort for rescuing family members, especially children, from poverty.[17] The need for alternative sources of income for household sustenance, and educational opportunities for their children, are among the most important considerations for parents in making decisions about placing their children with affluent extended family members. Recently, a lot of risks have been associated with this child placement practice, especially when parents live in distant cities or urban areas. Relatives could potentially collude with trafficking agents to lure children away from their parents and eventually involve them in trafficking.

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11 Ibid., 17.
12 Wilfried Relwende Sawadogo, "The Challenges of Transnational Human Trafficking in West Africa," *African Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 1/2 (2012): 95.
13 Ibid., 18.
14 Noeleen Heyzer, "Combating Trafficking in Women and Children: A Gender and Human Rights Framework" (plenary address at the UN Development Fund for Women's conference regarding the trafficking of women and children, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 13-15, 2002), accessed May 14, 2016, http://www.childtrafficking.org/pdf/user/unifem_gender_and_human_rights_framework.pdf.
15 Izugbara C. Otutubikey, "'Ashawo Suppose Shine Her Eyes': Female Sex Workers and Sex Work Risks in Nigeria," *Health, Risk & Society* 7, no. 2 (2005): 141-159.
16 Gbadebo Olubunmi Adejumo, "Psychosocial Predictors of Involvement of Women as Victims of Trafficking in Persons in Southwest Nigeria," *Gender and Behaviour* 6, no. 1 (2008): 1480-1493.
17 Michael Bourdillon, "Children as Domestic Employees: Problems and Promises," *Journal of Children and Poverty* 15, no. 1 (2009): 1-18; Mike Dottridge, "Trafficking in Children in West and Central Africa," *Gender & Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 38-42.

Nigeria has a population of approximately 170 million people, with about 54% of its population living in situations of poverty.[18] In addition, Nigeria houses 10% of the world's children who are currently out of school,[19] where 191 children per 1000 live births die before the age of five from diarrhea and other diseases related to poor sanitation,[20] and an estimated 15 million children are engaged in child labor.[21] Of the former, 40% face the risk of trafficking, either internally within the West African region or internationally for forced labor, prostitution, organ harvesting, early marriage, domestic labor, or farm work.[22] Statistics indicate that more than 60% of Nigeria's population falls below 18 years of age[23] and that there are about 10,000 to 15,000 girls of Nigerian origin working in Italy as prostitutes.[24] Apart from class, gender, and ethnic issues that contribute to the marginalization of women,[25] Nigerian women are trafficked mostly in their attempts to cope with the diverse roles society expects of them as they assume headship of families upset by social, economic, and political situations existing in the country. There is also the feminization of poverty: women, as family breadwinners, have to migrate to earn a living that will enhance their social status and supplement household income.[26]

The spate of trafficking in Nigeria and other West African countries is also attributed to the questionable, corrupt practices of customs and immigration officers that allow a growing number of undocumented people to pass through country borders undetected.[27]

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18 British Council, "Gender in Nigeria Report 2012: Improving the Lives of Girls and Women in Nigeria: Issues, Policies, Action," *Department for International Development, British Council, Nigeria* (2012).

19 DFID, Bilateral Aid Review results: Country Summaries (2012), accessed October 2, 2012, http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/MAR/BAR-MAR-country-summaries-web.pdf.

20 Ogunjimi Lucas Olusegun, Rosemary Thomas Ibe, and Ikorok Maria Micheal, "Curbing Maternal and Child Mortality: The Nigerian Experience," *International Journal of Nursing and Midwifery* 4, no. 3 (2012): 33-39.

21 UNICEF, "Child Trafficking Information Sheet," April 2007, accessed July 10, 2011, http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/WCARO_Nigeria_Factsheets_ChildTrafficking.pdf.

22 Ibid.

23 Rebecca Holmes, Michael Samson, Wendy Magoronga, B. Akinrimisi, and J. Morgan, "The Potential for Cash Transfers in Nigeria," *ODI Project Briefing* 59 (2012).

24 UNODC, "The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union," Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2011).

25 Patience Elabor-Idemudia, "Race and Gender Analyses of Trafficking: A Case Study of Nigeria," *Canadian Woman Studies* 22, no. 3/4 (2003): 116.

26 Aderanti Adepoju, "Fostering Free Movement of Persons in West Africa: Achievements, Constraints, and Prospects for Intraregional Migration," *International Migration* 40, no. 2 (2002): 3-28.

27 Ibid., 2, 19.

By questioning the effectiveness of the drive for sustainable development in Nigeria vis-à-vis the persistent trafficking of women and children in the country, this paper seeks to determine if improvements have been made in the lives of Nigerian women and children within the last two decades. Considering the cultural domain that fosters viewing women as assuming secondary positions to men, or as people who should be seen, but not heard, there have been few positive changes. Nevertheless, more girls have access to education,[28] a larger number of women have also entered the workforce for formal employment, and the ratification of several conventions has helped protect the rights of women and children.[29]

Isolating the Situation of Women in Nigeria

It is important to address the contested issue of the role of women in society. Nigerian society still expects women to be more confined to internal domestic roles rather than external roles, where they are likely to occupy key economic or managerial positions. Different factors build up to subordinate the advancement of women. Women are marginalized in access to employment, because employers would rather recruit men than women. Women are unable to access high-paying jobs[30] or aspire to managerial positions in employment institutions since a large number of women have limited access to higher education. Even when women have access to higher-paying jobs, they are likely to be sidetracked for career enhancement programs in favor of men who are considered more dependable, jeopardizing their career advancement opportunities. As Anugwom argues, Nigerian men are also more likely to keep women at home in the usual role of housewives, rather than have them as competitors for positions in the formal labor market.[31] Social and cultural trends, especially in West African countries, appear to reinforce decisions taken by employment agencies concerning women. The way women are viewed by employment agencies reflects the way women are

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28 Renée Pittin, "Selective Education: Issues of Gender, Class and Ideology in Northern Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 17, no. 48 (1990): 7.

29 Deborah Egunyomi, "Access to Basic Education for Girls: the Nigerian Experience," *Widening Access to Education as Social Justice* (2006): 429.

30 Nkoli N. Ezumah, "Perception of Womanhood in Nigeria and the Challenge of Development," accessed October 26, 2012, http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/nkoli.htm.

31 Edlyne, E. Anugwom, "Women, Education and Work in Nigeria," *Educational Research and Reviews* 4, no. 4 (2009): 127.

perceived by the society within which they operate.[32] This is evident in the paper's interpretation of the current situation of women, using Nigeria as a case in point:

1. Women are considered employment risks mostly because of their reproductive potential;
2. Women, married or unmarried, are inclined to take more time off work to attend to family needs;
3. Women, married or unmarried, are inclined to have more responsibilities toward their extended and immediate families, which may affect job stability;
4. Women, married or unmarried, are inclined to experience sexual harassment at their workplaces, which will affect job performance and lead to termination of employment when these advances are rebuffed.

The gendered nature of the Nigerian labor market is reflected in huge income differences between men and women, especially for managerial positions in the banking sector.[33] While it is difficult to explain the growth in the income gap between men and women in the employment market in Nigeria, researchers like Oyelere attest that the trend began post-democracy, spanning from 1999 to the present.[34] Gender differences are also evident when looking at the insignificant number of women employed in the non-agricultural sector, which was 29.5% in 2004, compared to 70.5% for men in the same year. The number of women employed in the non-agricultural sector witnessed only a slight increase to 32.5% in 2007.[35] In the absence of high-paying jobs in formal employment, the next option for Nigerian women is establishing micro-enterprises that for a large number of women are usually small-scale roadside businesses, retail, or garment industries. Based on their gender and limited collateral, women are less likely to have access to loans and other credit facilities. Reports also show that more women than men

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32 Debra Meyerson and Megan Tompkins, "Tempered Radicals as Institutional Change Agents: The Case of Advancing Gender Equity at the University of Michigan," *Harv. JL & Gender* 30 (2007): 303.

33 John O. Okpara, "The Impact of Salary Differential on Managerial Job Satisfaction: A Study of the Gender Gap and its Implications for Management Education and Practice in a Developing Economy," *Journal of Business in Developing Nations* 8, no. 1 (2004): 65-91.

34 Ruth Uwaifo Oyelere, "Within and Between Gender Disparities in Income and Education Benefits from Democracy," *Available at SSRN 1136383* (2007).

35 Ibid., 9.

involved in micro-enterprises are highly educated and have post-graduate qualifications.[36] Considering that 43 percent of Nigeria's economically active women are involved in micro-enterprises,[37] which contributes to their empowerment in a gendered employment market, a large number of women are still denied loan or credit facilities in the country. Besides, since few women are elected into policymaking or legislative positions where patriarchal ideologies dominate, women are unable to change the policies, and other legal, economic, political, and social instruments or structures that underpin their marginalization.[38]

What Do Nigerian Women Currently Lack?

The UN-HABITAT reports that 25% of households worldwide are headed by women and attributes the migration of women from rural to urban areas as a means of earning a better income to enhance household survival.[39] The poverty that a large number of women experience makes them vulnerable to exploitative jobs, not only as a means of survival, but also as a way to ensure the survival of members of their families. If women are currently being pushed to accept exploitative jobs (human trafficking included) for household survival, it becomes difficult to discuss safeguarding the welfare of future generations. In these restrictive environments, gender disparity benefits men and gives them greater political and economic control, much to the detriment of women, who are engaged in multiple roles as mothers, wives, and workers, yet remain at the lowest levels of poverty. When there is reduced budget spending on the public sector, making fewer jobs available for families, the burden of earning extra income to keep the family together usually falls upon women.[40]

The diverse roles that women play in the household, as well as their contribution to household income, are dependent on where they live. Nigeria

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36 Giuseppe Iarossi, Peter Mousley, and Ismail Radwan, "*An Assessment of the Investment Climate in Nigeria,*" World Bank Publications (2009).

37 Ibid., 9.

38 O. V. C. Ikpeze, "Legislating Women's Affirmative Action and its Constitutionality in Nigeria," *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence* 2 (2011).

39 UN-HABITAT, "Gender, Culture and Urbanization" (paper for the World Urban Forum Second Session, Barcelona, September 13-17, 2004), accessed October 28, 2012, http://mirror. unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/3081_20354_K0471981%20WUF2-11.pdf.

40 Mariam Dem, "Sustainable Development: Women as Partners," *Gender & Development* 1, no. 1 (1993): 14-18.

has an estimated population of 78 million women, with more than half this number living and working in rural areas.[41] If women live in rural areas, then they are mostly involved in growing crops dependent on market fluctuations. Women's income is also dependent on the rent they pay, unless the land belongs to their family or husbands. Since women hardly own land, they are unable to make enough profit from the sale of their crops to provide for their families. A Department for International Development (DFID) report indicates that only about 7.5% of Nigerian women living in rural areas own the land they cultivate, while only about 15% have bank accounts.[42] These defects also limit women's access to loans and other credit facilities that enhance their businesses and contribute to their empowerment. If women live in urban areas, their productivity will also be dependent on prevailing housing costs, the unemployment status of males in the household, and the range of employment opportunities available in their locality. Notwithstanding the roles that women have played in the economic and social development of their homes and communities in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, the position of women in society has undergone little change.

Regardless of where women reside, the quest for women's sustainable development has to address the needs of women both at the rural and urban levels. These needs could relate to: (1) Making land accessible to rural women and their children because they need the proceeds from these lands to fend for their families; and (2) Including women in the decision-making process rather than assuming that women reside too far away to contribute to policymaking institutions, ensuring that their voices are heard and their circumstances taken into consideration in the allocation of resources. After all, during political campaigns, policymakers do not consider rural areas "too far away" to visit. Essentially, the poor should not be undermined by political and socio-cultural environments that inhibit their self-expression and agency.

The Road to Attaining Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The key challenge to attaining sustainable development in Nigeria relates to the inclusion of women and children in development activities. Several factors should be acknowledged in sustainable development planning.

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41   Ibid., 9.
42   Ibid.

These include the social, economic, and religious factors that make women and children vulnerable to unemployment, as well as the absence of social safety nets that reduce women and children's ability to cope, thereby increasing their defenselessness against diverse exploitative means, the key of which is human trafficking. If the trafficking of women and children persists in Nigeria as in other African countries, then it can be assumed that minimal progress is being made to protect the global environment and reduce situations of poverty that expose marginalized groups to risks.

In the quest for sustainable development, it is crucial to determine who makes those decisions on social, political, and economic development in Nigeria. For now, a closed group of policymakers performs this task, with narrow or rigid requirements about what areas to focus on. It is therefore necessary to adopt an inclusive, integrated, and human-centered approach to sustainable development that recognizes the differences between individuals and places, women and children, and that will then allow them to contribute to decision-making. The most affected or exclusive groups happen to be living in rural areas or in disadvantaged positions in urban areas. As these marginalized groups battle the effects of limited education, lack of access to health care and housing, and natural disasters, their vulnerability to economic and social shocks increases.

Gender Perspective: the Recognition of Differences and Sustainable Development

A gender perspective to sustainable development will ensure that women and children are included in both planning, decision-making and implementation of programs. As a step toward offsetting the imbalances in the involvement of women and men in sustainable development, Nigeria introduced the National Policy on Women in 2000, later amended and renamed the National Gender Policy in 2006.[43] The Nigerian government also introduced the strategic implementation action framework for the National Gender Policy from 2008 to 2013.[44] While the National Gender

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43 Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, "National Gender Policy: Federal Republic of Nigeria," accessed September 23, 2012, http://cewhin.org/pdf/National%20Gender%20PolicySituation%20Analysis.pdf.

44 Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, "National Gender Policy Strategic Framework (Implementation Plan): Federal Republic of Nigeria," accessed September 23, 2012, http://cewhin.org/pdf/STRATEGIC%20DEVELOPMENT%20RESULTS%20FRAMEWORK.pdf.

Policy tries to meet guidelines stipulated by other international conventions relating to women, the policy still faces difficulties in designing programs to acknowledge and address the diverse inequalities that women face in the country. For example, the first set of women to hold public office in Nigeria were elected in 1976, and to this day, the number of women in policymaking roles is less than the 35% stipulated by the National Gender Policy.[45] While women are often seen working or cultivating land, cultural restrictions ensure that men own land and command immense economic and social recognition from such property rights. Women are also involved in small-scale businesses, but are less likely to occupy leadership or policymaking roles. The limited involvement of women in leadership is also a precursor to their limited involvement in decisions about sustainable development.

A gender perspective to sustainable development also breaks down the trafficking discourse to isolate the nature of trafficking as it pertains to Nigeria and its unique human trafficking situation. This perspective actually opens up the trafficking discourse to present a clearer picture of who is trafficked and why they are trafficked. The trafficking of women and children (girls and boys alike) is also more evident in patriarchal societies such as Nigeria, where women and children are considered assets that could be traded for the well-being of the family. It is often the parents who perpetrate this trade, marrying girls off at an early age to obtain income to train their favored sons, start family businesses, pay debts, or keep the family fed in dire economic circumstances. For instance, young women and girls are more attractive to trafficking agents because they are regarded as more willing to accede to the demands of their future employers than boys, who are seen as having a more rebellious temperament.[46] Women and girls are likely to be involved in trafficking to ensure that they have a better future, either in urban areas or out of the country, and they may be enticed by offers of marriage abroad. Exploitation of women and girls could also occur in the bid to escape situations of early marriage or female genital mutilation.[47] Trafficking puts women and children in positions where they accept jobs considered menial for the inhabitants of the countries to which they are trafficked. Accustomed to getting either low or no wages in their countries of origin, trafficked persons may see relatively low-paying jobs in receiving

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45 Ibid., 8.

46 Ibid., 28; Ann D. Jordan, "Human Rights or Wrongs? The Struggle for a Rights-Based Response to Trafficking in Human Beings," *Gender & Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 28-37.

47 Elizabeth Warner, "Behind the Wedding Veil: Child Marriage as a Form of Trafficking in Girls," *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law* 12 (2004): 263.

countries as high-paying ones.[48] Most trafficked women and children also have a limited education and cannot actualize their rights in terms of employment; their voices are left unheard.

A gender-based perspective should form the hub of any means to address human trafficking and attain sustainable development because this framework acknowledges that women and children have human rights in need of recognition. The involvement of women and children in trafficking is an infringement of their fundamental rights to decent food, clothing, and shelter as citizens of a particular country. It also implies that in empowering women and children, factors contributing to their disempowerment should be looked into. Attempts should be made to isolate those factors that contribute to their marginalization—politically, economically, socially, culturally, and religiously—and how these impact their access to land, credit, employment, housing, and other necessary means of survival. In other words, a gender-focused approach will provide the means for women, girls, and children to claim their rights to sustainable development by paving the way for access to education, jobs, and networking tools.

Another issue that is not addressed in discussions on sustainable development in Nigeria is the fact that development affects people in different countries, regions, and communities of the world in different ways. As such, the planning and implementation of programs targeting men, women, and children should differ. Reflecting on gender differences in development planning is considered an attempt to introduce a "gender perspective," which offers preparatory ground for comprehensive research on the factors that, peculiar to a specific country, contribute to the marginalized position of certain groups of people. Introducing the gender perspective also offers evidence-based research that amplifies government efforts to implement inclusive and effective social policies targeting women and children.

Bearing in mind that over the years women have contributed in such non-visible tasks as farming, home care, and child rearing, they are not only marginalized, but their contribution to the development of Nigeria is rendered invisible.[49] What is necessary is an anti-oppressive foundation for attaining sustainable development by introducing the idea of equal opportunities, which is entrenched in several international conventions, and should be applied to the situation of women and children. Since the discourse on the

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48 Ibid., 21.
49 C. E. Onyenenkwa and Anayo Dominic Nkamnebe, "The Gender Gap and Sustainable Human Development in Nigeria: Issues and Strategic Choices," *Asian Journal of Rural Development* 1, no. 1 (2011): 41-53.

position of women and children are often linked together, when women have low status in society and are susceptible to trafficking, this also aggravates the situation for children, thereby promoting the likelihood that a circle of poverty and vulnerability to trafficking will be passed on to children. In addition, the idea of equal opportunities ensures that everyone, irrespective of their gender, age, and ethnicity, will be involved in development planning to secure the well-being of present and future generations.

Nigeria has signed a number of conventions to elevate the position of women and children but has had difficulty enforcing them. When conventions are at odds with the religious, cultural, and legal practices of a country, enforcement is often lacking, and this poses obstacles for attaining sustainable development in relation to the welfare of women and children. For example, Nigerian Senator and former governor of Zamfara State, Yerima Ahmed Sanni, wedded a 13-year-old Egyptian girl,[50] and despite calls for his impeachment by several NGOs and women's coalitions, the senator asserted his innocence, claiming that since he had not violated Islamic laws, he was unconcerned about violations attributed to the marriageable age of a girl in Nigeria. Yerima Sanni also claimed that historical accounts reveal that "Prophet Muhammad did marry a young girl as well. Therefore I have not contravened any law. Even if she is 13, as it is being falsely peddled around." [51] Since that wedding in 2010, no assessable attempts have been made to hold the senator accountable for engaging in child marriage, which could serve as a basis for protecting young girls in Northern Nigeria from the practice of early marriage.

How much protection can children be offered as citizens of a country as diverse as Nigeria? Only 24 out of 36 states in the country have ratified the Child Rights Act. The Northern States attribute the lack of enforcement of the Child Rights Act to portrayals of the religious practice of child marriage as sanctioned by Islam. Practices that marginalize and exclude women and children persist because a large number of women and children are not literate enough to understand their rights. Eneh and Nkamnebe argue that this may be related to the "traditional socialization" of women to accept their exclusion in contributing to public discussions of public policy or decision-

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50 BBC, "Nigerian Senator Sani Denies Marrying Girl of 13," April 30, 2010, accessed September 2, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8651043.stm; O. Iyabode, "Child Bride and Child Sex: Combating Child Marriages in Nigeria," *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence* 2 (2011).

51 Ibid., 49.

making.[52] When women accept roles that victimize them, they transmit the cycle of victimization to their children and future generations, defeating the objective of sustainable development, which is to ensure the integration of diverse factors for the health and well-being of citizens.

The trafficking of children has not appeared to wane entering into the twenty-first century; rather, the likelihood of seeing children peddling goods on highways in major Nigerian cities has increased and will reach uncontrollable levels if the country does not adopt effective interventions that attend to the needs of trafficked children. Poverty is often portrayed as the key cause of trafficking in women and children. This emphasis on poverty led to an influx of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria and other African countries in the 1990s. The most common ones were those implemented by the government's National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). These programs notwithstanding, it remains difficult to isolate aspects of NAPEP's initiatives that favor women, and such programs can often hinder more than help. For example, the most common program by NAPEP promotes tricycles popularly called 'Keke NAPEP,' used for public transportation within certain states in Nigeria. However, these tricycles are operated solely by "daredevil" male drivers, again reinforcing the belief that women should neither drive, nor be seen driving commercial vehicles.

Another program by NAPEP is the conditional cash transfer program, or In Care of the Poor (COPE). The intention of the COPE initiative is to reduce child labor and trafficking in poor families. The program, which began as a pilot study in 12 states in December 2007, is now in its third phase.[53] Families benefiting from COPE are expected to have children of school-going age and be households headed by the elderly, physically challenged, or women. Beneficiaries of COPE receive a monthly income of $10 to $33 for 12 months of coverage.[54] COPE has succeeded in reaching only about 22,000 households, just less than 0.001 percent of poor people in Nigeria, even nine years after its inception.[55] The COPE program is flawed by its inability to reach children vulnerable to child labor and trafficking (which is part of COPE's stated objective). There are also complaints from beneficiaries that

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52 Ibid., 48.
53 Rebecca Holmes, Michael Samson, Wendy Magoronga, B. Akinrimisi, and J. Morgan, "The Potential for Cash Transfers in Nigeria," *ODI Project Briefing* 59 (2012); Rachel Godfrey Wood and Deepta Chopra, "Nigeria: Social Protection and Child Malnutrition," 2012 Save the Children country briefing, accessed October 29, 2012, https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/social-protection-Nigeria-briefing-BT.pdf.
54 Wood and Chopra, "Nigeria," 2.
55 Ibid., 3.

the monthly payments should be increased to about $75 to address the needs of those with large families and account for inflationary upsets in the country.[56] Again, not much is known about the effectiveness of COPE and other poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. It is also difficult to evaluate government efforts at eradicating poverty when Nigeria, although a middle-income country, invests less on social protection than other African countries. Even when an investment is made on social protection, a sizeable portion of it goes toward the civil service, and programs are difficult to implement because of a shortage of trained personnel and ill-equipped health services.[57]

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper questions how to achieve a comprehensive discussion of sustainable development when it is a term that is difficult to understand. Many researchers refer to the idea of sustainable development as more charming than clear.[58] Although there are a broad range of indicators showing what areas need to be either sustained or developed in a country, the problem of measurement makes it especially difficult to know when a nation has achieved sustainable development.[59] In other words, while the indicators let countries know when they are following the wrong path in the quest for sustainable development, there are no guidelines that can be judiciously explored to attain sustainable development.

In developing countries such as Nigeria, there are also problems with the quality of data on sustainable development.[60] It follows, therefore, that to accurately address the problem of trafficking in women and children as a hindrance to attaining sustainable development, it is expedient to acquire available and reliable data that will direct research and policymaking. At the moment, data presented may not reflect the realities of trafficking in specific countries. For instance, for almost a decade now, statistics on the number of children involved in trafficking in Nigeria has been pegged at 40

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56 Ibid.

57 Ibid, 1.

58 Michael Redclift, "*Sustainable Development: Exploring the Contradictions*," Routledge, 1987.

59 Robert W. Kates, Thomas M. Parris, and Anthony A. Leiserowitz, "What is Sustainable Development?," *Environment* 47, no. 3 (2005): 8.

60 D. K. Shangodoyin, and T. A. Lasisi, "The Role of Statistics in National Development with Reference to Botswana and Nigeria Statistical Systems," *Journal of Sustainable Development* 4, no. 3 (2011): 131.

percent of the total number of children involved in child labor. Considering the population of Nigeria, this number could be either below or above the recorded number of affected children in the country. The government and NGOs involved in reintegrating trafficked persons are also not working together to present figures that are more reliable. Up-to-date, reliable statistics on the number of trafficked women and children in Nigeria would aid the path to attaining sustainable development and benefit policymaking and program design. The likelihood of obtaining such statistics is enhanced when returning trafficked persons are warmly received and provided with reintegration packages that serve as incentives for encouraging them to share their trafficking experiences. Evidence-based research with trafficked persons is crucial for insight into the Nigerian situation, especially those factors that propel women and children into trafficking.

It is important for discussions on curtailing human trafficking and attaining sustainable development to explore the extent to which a country's anti-trafficking programs incorporate the unaddressed needs of women and children likely to drive them into trafficking. Several studies indicate that Nigerian women and children are exposed to trafficking as a result of economic, cultural, religious, and social shocks. [61] Ultimately, disregarding these drivers means that the trafficking of this group of people will persist, and that women and children will continue to leave their countries of origin to escape deplorable conditions. Further, when removing women and children from trafficking situations and returning them to their home countries without ameliorating the conditions they were initially escaping from, then anti-trafficking services are bound to fail, since trafficked persons are likely to return to trafficking. Some researchers point out that trafficking victims have a fear and distrust of state-owned anti-trafficking agencies and are inclined to lean towards services provided by NGOs.[62] Another study criticizes the Nigerian government for attempting to address trafficking in the country without making information accessible to civil society, researchers, and irrelevant communities, especially those "sending communities" that could help create awareness and rally the general populace toward addressing the problem.[63]

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61 Ibid., 23, 53.

62 Marina Tzvetkova, "NGO Responses to Trafficking in Women," *Gender & Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 62.

63 R. Iyanda, "Community Perceptions of and Participation in Policy Formulation and Implementation on Human Trafficking in Nigeria," Nordic Africa Institute, accessed August 21, 2012, http://www.nai.uu.se/ecas-4/panels/81-100/panel-100/Rachael%20Iyanda%20-%20Abstract.pdf.

It is often emphasized that the demand for cheap labor in industrialized countries enhances the growth of human trafficking. The implication, then, is that if trafficked persons' countries of origin create jobs or employment opportunities that are accessible to people across genders, it will become unnecessary for women and children to endanger their lives by migrating for work. With a gender-focused dimension to sustainable development and human trafficking, it becomes easy to understand and address the gendered nature of trafficking or the recruitment of women and children for different trafficking-related activities. Moreover, a country that aspires for sustainable development in situations where a large number of its women and children are susceptible to trafficking should aim to check the potential effects of trafficking on the health and well-being of the affected groups.[64]

These problems notwithstanding, this paper has looked at sustainable development within the context of what is lacking. In an environment of gross inequality and marginalization of certain groups of individuals, it is impossible to speak about satisfying the needs of future generations, especially when the present generation is moaning under the yoke of an intense poverty that makes them vulnerable to diverse survival strategies, including human trafficking. This paper advocates for extending the discourse on sustainable development to accommodate the input of women and children in deliberations about the development process. A safe space for women and children to speak about the issues affecting them should ensure representation from grass-roots organizations or groups in the deliberative process. Presently, it appears that women and children may be remaining silent because they do not understand the nature of the problems afflicting them. It also becomes questionable how programs can target women and children without their representation in decision-making boards. The present structure of sustainable development projects in Nigeria should be torn down and rebuilt to recognize the diverse role of different individuals in the development process, with every individual understanding their own roles, strengths, limitations, and the resources available to them. This should serve as the foundation for a social justice and sustainable development that will nurture future generations in Nigeria. **Y**

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64 F. E. Okonofua., S. M. Ogbomwan, A. N. Alutu, Okop Kufre, and Aghahowa Eghosa, "Knowledge, Attitudes and Experiences of Sex Trafficking by Young Women in Benin City, South-South Nigeria," *Social Science & Medicine* 59, no. 6 (2004): 1315-1327.