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# **GENDER: "EMERGING TRADE" AND NIGERIAN DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Large-scale trans-boundary prostitution for exchange for money was relatively unknown to many Nigerians before the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Prostitution was never popularized as many have done today in this part of Africa. Those who engaged in this trade in those days did it in secrecy though sometimes money was exchanged for the pleasure. Now, of recent, unemployment, underemployment, greed caused by economic downturn have driven productive young women and children to many western countries as merchandise for a living. In these countries they contribute to the growth and development of those economies while ours is declining. Equally, the nature and manner these services are provided for financial benefits have made it to be classified as an "emerging" trade in international economic relations. Indeed, the paper is expository, written in historical perspective without empirical grandeur. It is informative that all is not well with many Nigerians especially women and children. The aspect of this transnational trade is a disgrace to Nigeria, and besides it slows down growth and development especially in this era of globalization.

## **Introduction**

Trade, from the remote past has been one of the human occupations that brought and still bring people together for the benefits of the society, individuals within or without the borders of the sovereign, colonized or mandated states. All societies, however, do regulate trade to some degree in order also to serve the non-economic goals of the society. Trade provides for exchange relations, thus makes for an index of economic vitality. It stimulates economic growth, provides employment on part or full time; people produce goods and provide services only if market exist for them (Spodek, 1998).

However, though trade is regulated, certain articles of trade are highly controlled. In modern international economic relations, articles of trade controlled or regulated by various governments within the international system are hard drugs, small and large arms or weapons.



Today, there is an emerging trade, which forms part of international trade or services which to a large extent, trade without commodities or merchandise. This is sex trade across borders. It is so called "emerging" trade because its significance was relatively noticed and quantifies towards the last decade of the last century and became full blown in this 21st century. Since it was not and is still not acceptable as valuable commodities of services but provides for a living, it becomes an emerging trade. Though it is recognized as trade, governments are fighting to abolish it; the trades themselves are unbending in the choice of this trade. Indeed, it is an industry fashioned to suit the "producers and consumers"

### **Origin of the "New" Sex Industry**

The history of sex industry is very old, and may be traced to very many millennia before the birth of Christ. However, our main concern is that we are dealing with the transnational or trans-boundary movement of Nigeria women overseas for sex industry. The involvement of Nigerian women in transnational sex industry came to limelight and of grave concern to many in the early 1990s. They migrated such as Italy, Spain etc. and offered to serve as sex machines in these areas. It is estimated that over 20,000 Nigerians are in Italy alone for the trade and over 15,000 are scattered in various counties in Western Hemisphere (Poulin, 1994). This number largely involved female children between 14 and 18 years. Children become veritable market because many would be customers and it is believed this class of prostitutes is free from sexually transmitted diseases especially the much published HIV/AIDS. However, this is not the issue because in Cambodia, studies have indicated that children who are involved in this transnational trade are well over 50,000 to 70,000 and out of it about 50 percent of these young people are HIV positive (Kempadoo, 2004).

### **Background Information**

For a long time now reports from print, electronic media, law enforcement agencies have been giving the number of our young and highly talented women of varying ages, ranging from 14-30 migrating to Western Europe for sex trade. The belief is that all is well in a "Whitman's" country and perhaps there is nothing like hardship, unemployment, besides money is everywhere begging to be utilized. This distorting and parallel view about Europe has caused lot of dislocations within the country. Indeed, apart from being a national disgrace, distortion on our psyche, it is contended that the contributions made by these sex industrialists in those countries are enormous and of significance. It is considered that people between 18-30 years formed the bulk of the productive group within the economy. It is also argued that if the migrating population were to remain



here in Nigeria, they would have made some progressive marks on the Nigerian economy. Besides, since they were migrating it is believed they have been visiting home for one reason or another. As they visit home they usually infect others psychologically, economically and biologically with their wealth and or diseases. For explanation on the biological aspect, the problem is that some are carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. Of course sickness in a person is an indication of low productivity and such contributes less and consume more in the economy.

### **Causes of Migration for Sex Trade**

In Nigeria like other underdeveloped or developing countries, many women and men tend to migrate for greener pastures because of poverty caused by the level of underdevelopment. Or often, people move because of the liner level of or normal mobility of labour. However, underdevelopment has bred unemployment and its attendant unpleasant effects, greed and the general neglect. There are several young Nigerian graduates who have been on the unemployment market for years without any hope of "picking" up a job. Others too lack sufficient capital for small businesses. This group is often being enticed to leave Nigeria with false identification on the premise that they would be provided with work and earn good income only to be exploited and forced to work in brothels. Those who front them are mere agents (Lzugbara 2005). In another collorary, the poor and the down trodden in the society are neglected, they are poorly fed, live in squalor and house themselves in shanties. An opportunity of having a decent living in Europe wetted their appetite for migration only to find out they were being deceived, forced to submit to large numbers of sex exploiters. But, because they have no other option they become used to it and regard it as a way of life, a means for livelihood.

Another cause of some women involvement in transnational trade is greed. Some of them are carried away by material wealth – wanting to live a life above their means; the drive to drive posh cars; live in choice areas; indeed splendid living. In this connection they would do anything that would see them achieve their crude desires. To them it does not matter the outcome but what they need are riches. Some are pushed to this trade as a way to support their poor families to survive (Newswatch April 5, 1991). Research has shown that between 75 and 80 percent of prostitutes were sexually abused in their childhood (Satterfiled, 2004). There is this correlation between the local involvement in early prostitution and migration for international connection. UNICEF estimates that a million children are brought into the sex industry every year (Frances, 2003).



Other causes are that most women come from the economically depressed rural areas. To really illustrate the depressed rural situation,

Maria became a child prostitute when she was 14 years old, she adopted this horrible life-style at the insistence of her own mother, who told her that she was beautiful and that men would like her very much... she would earn a lot of money (Awake, Feb, 2003).

Maria and the mother lived in an economically, socially depressed rural area in one of the developing communities in Africa. They had been deprived of good things of life. The option for the mother to "catch up" and to live marginally was to encourage the daughter to take up prostitution as a means of survival. That is the picture in most depressed rural areas in Nigeria.

Equally unframed policies of government may be one of the factors responsible for the increase in the number of people involved in this trade.

### **Effects of Migrant Sex Traders (Industrialists) on the Economy**

There are some arguments that sex trade is beneficial to practitioners and countries involved. That it aids in the stimulation of the economies. On the other hand, some people condemn such benefits in all ramifications. Nonetheless, there are two perspectives of viewing this industry. One perspective is social and the other is economic.

#### **Social Perspective**

Morally, prostitution whether locally or internationally practiced debases womanhood. It reduces womanhood to the level of a dog. Moral decadence is bad before God and upright men. It is generally agreed that women who are involved in this trade have lost their sense of dignity, identity and self-esteem, and their capacity to trust is undermined. Their physical and emotional health is put at risk, their rights violated and their future jeopardized (Awake, April 8, 1997).

The nation's psyche is placed on 'shame' and in the state of nature. It portrays the economy of Nigeria in a very bad light. The economy engenders poverty and its attendant effects.

Nigeria as a country, and to a large extent has lost her pride of place among comity of Nations. The country appears as a nation incapable of fending for her



citizenry morally. This is so because by all standards, she is seen as a highly religious country and that she is losing grip of religious virtues. The issue of religion permeates here because most of the women seen to be involved and returned to Nigeria are religious people. Hence, they see themselves as such (Akpan, 2004).

It is also contended that a good number of those involved in this trade live on hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine hence have wasted their productive years. Living on drugs sometimes aggravates malnutrition and acute pneumonia.

Indeed, prostitutes whether local or international harbour sexually transmitted diseases. Nigeria has no real figure for the number of people living with sexually transmitted diseases. So, whether it is HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) Nigerians in this trade have negative contributions to the society. For countries who pay attention to social problems there is high reduction on the number of STDs carriers who engage in sex trade. For instance, it is reported that only 15 percent of the prostitutes in the United States have never contracted venereal diseases (Leidholdt, 2004). In Burkina Faso, 58 percent of the prostitutes have AIDs, 52 percent in Kenya and 34 percent in the North of Thailand (Mechtild, 1992). Sexually transmitted diseases have no home or boundary, they are found everywhere especially where the industry is booming.

It should also be known that AIDS acquisition by individuals or communities have implication on productivity. It slows down economic development, since people who live in it would be weak and unproductive but tend to consume more from the economy.

### **Economic View**

Economically, the migration of these young people into the industry away from Nigeria, constitutes manpower drain. Many of these immigrants are not mediocres, some are university and secondary school graduates, and by extension their type of trade affects the economy and their contributions to the growth of the economy within are hindered. What they would have contributed to Nigeria is transferred to other countries. They tend to stimulate the economy of the domiciled nations through taxes, house rent, feeding and other tariffs (Akpan, 2004).

However, few sex industrialists have been repatriating profits home for building of houses, building of cottage industries for their less fortunate relatives; some brought in cars for taxi cabs in big cities. These structures have assisted to stimulate the local economy Mfon and Nkoyo (2004), testified that they raised



their families from the ruin after returning home from Italy with the money they made through this trade. According to them, they have built houses for their parents, dug boreholes, purchased cars for commercial purposes.

In a more general economic effect in which Nigeria is beneficial directly, or indirectly is the fact that the trade has created market for sexual exchanges in which thousands of women have been converted into sexual commodities. Today these commodities are exchanged for money. Closely followed is that the industrialization of the sex trade has involved the mass production of sexual goods and services structured around a regional and international division of labour. These goods have provided employment to very many both in the economic sphere and social dimension. Prostitution and related sexual industries – bars, dancing clubs, massage parlours, pornography etc. depend on these industrialists for their living. At the same time, businesses such as international hotel chains, airline companies and the tourist industry benefit greatly from the sex industry which by extension provides employment. Productive employment has a strong linkage effect on the growth of nation economies.

All forms of sexual exploitation are incompatible with human dignity, and therefore violate fundamental human rights, regardless of the age, gender, race, ethnicity or class of the victim, UNESCO sources (Awake, 2003)

## **Conclusion**

Productive trade within and without nations is an index of development. The involvement of our children and women in this trans-boundary trade is undermining the integrity of the Nigerian nation among comity of nations. There is an adage which says that there exists no morality in business. Sex trade as business is evil. To stem the tide of illegal migration, Nigeria should entrench modern democracy in governance, provide social security for all, create an atmosphere where everyone feels and knows he or she is part of Nigeria. Government should fade poverty, probe into unquestionable wealth whether highly or lowly placed persons; fight AIDS through research. A healthy nation is surely a production nation.

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