

ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA AND BENIN REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

States economy is a foundational structure that supports all superstructures of the state. Economic instability has been linked to several factors, such as malnutrition, increased in crime activities, human trafficking etc. An unstable economy creates various pull factors that promote recruitment of victims of human trafficking, ineffective border management, and other conditions that enable human trafficking in Nigeria and Benin Republic. The research was built on Failed State Theory and Delanda's Account of Assemblages and Social Complexity Theory. A mixed-method research design was adopted, utilizing a population of (n=56) victims of human trafficking and other documentary evidence on human trafficking worldwide. The study found a link between persistent economic instability in Nigeria and Benin as a main pull factor that fans the ember of human trafficking like: inefficient border control, increased activity of cartels fueling human trafficking, higher chances of citizens being recruited as agents or victims, and the inability of government institutions tasked with curbing human trafficking to function properly. The study recommends that tackling the menace of human trafficking requires a robust economic plan capable monitoring agencies and suitable technologies for border managements.

Key words: Economic instability, Human Trafficking, Porous Border, Recruitment

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, the incidence of human trafficking in Nigeria and the Benin Republic has skyrocketed, with victims comprising mainly women and children, alongside a significant number of males. Scholars from various disciplines and perspectives have advanced multiple theories on the causes, nature, and government as well as international strategies designed to curb this menace. Some environmentalists argue that the increase in the rate of human trafficking in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region near Lake Chad, is linked to climate change. This is because Lake Chad, which served as the primary source of water for the people in the area, has

been severely impacted by climate change. The inhabitants, who are predominantly farmers, now lack alternative sources of income, leading some to either rely on aid or join human trafficking cartels, or be recruited by Boko Haram.

On the other hand, security scholars like Ojo, Oyewole & Aina (2023) and Onuoha (2013) attribute the rise in human trafficking to Boko Haram's activities. The group depends on human trafficking and other forms of transborder crises for survival. Other scholars in the same field argue that security challenges along the border have hindered institutions mandated to police the border and combat trafficking from effectively discharging their duties (Ibeagha, & Mgbemena, 2018).

Furthermore, other scholars have linked the increase in human trafficking in Nigeria and Benin Republic to the porous borders between the two countries, which they argue are enablers of trafficking (Eselebor, 2019). Studies note that Nigeria and Benin share over 250 unmanned border points, which serve as key hubs or transit routes for human trafficking in the region (Oladopo, Aladejebi & Opeyemi 2021). The views of the above scholars can be summarized as attributing porous borders as the root cause of human trafficking between Nigeria and Benin.

The widely held views and contentions among the three categories of scholars mentioned here are relevant but do not provide a complete explanation of human trafficking in Nigeria and Benin. Looking at the issue of porous borders, Nigeria and Benin have always had unmanned borders since independence, yet the data on human trafficking remained low until recently. Climate change and security issues are emerging threats and contributors to human trafficking in the region, but Nigeria and Benin are not the only countries affected by insecurity and climate change, and yet the rate of human trafficking has increased (Adewoyin, 2019).

It is, therefore, based on the weaknesses of these contending notions, which fail to fully explain the reasons for human trafficking between the two countries, that this study seeks to examine the role of economic instability as an enabler of human trafficking in Nigeria and Benin Republic. Using the economy as the central issue, or the base upon which other structures lie, the contributions of factors like porous borders, climate change, and insecurity can be better understood. This is because the state's failure to strengthen the economy impacts climate change, insecurity, and porous borders (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Other manifestations of economic instability, such as unemployment, pave the way for citizens to either join trafficking cartels or be more easily lured or recruited as victims. It is, therefore, through this lens that economic instability as a precursor for human trafficking is studied.

Studying the two countries together is essential because they share common borders and have different legislations and approaches toward human trafficking. The methodology adopted in this study aims to bridge the methodological gap by adopting a mixed-method approach, combining two main research designs to gather sufficient data for empirical analysis. The study leverages the fact that most previous studies failed to appreciate that unemployment, porous borders, and other factors linked to human trafficking in Nigeria and other parts of the world are consequences of economic instability. This idea draws from Karl Marx's notion that the economy forms the foundation on which the superstructure of the state is built. A weak economy is incapable of sustaining state institutions and ensuring maintenance of law and order.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Human Trafficking

The conceptualization of the term 'human trafficking' has been difficult due to the existence of various legislations around the world, each adopting different definitions of the term and the offenses that constitute the act. Human trafficking includes all acts related to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through the use of force, coercion, deception, or abuse of power for exploitation (Olonisakin, 2008).

The United Nations, through the Palermo Protocol, defined human trafficking as an act that "involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person (a woman, man, or child), often over international borders but also frequently within the boundaries of a single country, for exploitation" (UN General Assembly, 2000). This definition provided a yardstick for measuring human trafficking. Factors such as "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs" constitute human trafficking.

In Nigeria, the agency created to monitor, combat, and prosecute human trafficking is NAPTIP. Section 17 of the NAPTIP Act 2015, states: Unlawful detention with intent to defile. Any person who—(a) conspires with another to induce any person under the age of eighteen years using any pretense or other fraudulent means, and permits any man to have unlawful carnal knowledge of such a person, commits an offense and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for five years; (b) detains any person under the age of eighteen years against such person's will, in or upon any premises, to be unlawfully carnally known by any man, whether a particular man or not, commits an offense and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for ten years.

In summary of the definitions of human trafficking, three irreducible minimums were adopted to constitute human trafficking: The first is the act, which refers to all activities linked to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, and/or receipt of a person. The second is the means of accomplishing these acts, which involve the threat or use of force, deception, abduction, abuse of power a position of vulnerability, or other forms of coercion. The third factor is the purpose, which includes 'exploitation,' expanded to mean the prostitution of others, forced labor, slavery or servitude, or the removal of organs

Economic Instability

Economic instability is a phrase used to depict a condition of unpredictable fluctuations marked by high volatility in both microeconomic and macroeconomic indicators such as growth rates, inflation, unemployment, and overall economic performance. These fluctuations affect both gross domestic product (GDP), gross national product (GNP), and the general standard of living in a nation over time. As noted by Haan & Sturm (2017), the most common manifestations of economic instability include irregularities in a nation's economic growth, with boom-and-bust cycles in alternating economies like black markets, smuggling, and other forms of cross-border crimes.

Due to the harsh socio-economic conditions such as unemployment, lack of healthcare facilities, and food insecurity that accompany economic instability, the rate of social vices increases in Nigeria. The unsustainability of legitimate trade opens up opportunities for illicit economies. According to Lupo (2015), illicit trades run by organized criminal groups become viable business ventures when formal economies become unstable and show conditions or indicators of alternate economies becoming more feasible. This description portrays the situation in Nigeria and Mexico,

where economic instabilities and failures have fueled various types of transborder crimes, including kidnapping and other forms of illicit trade.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Several related studies have been conducted on human trafficking. This study approaches the review of related studies on human trafficking, paying close attention to the causes, victims, recruitment methods, and socio-economic implications. In discussing the drivers of human trafficking, Miraglia, Ochoa & Briscoe (2012), in *“Transnational Organized Crime and Fragile States”*, adopted a systematic review of fragile states and how they contribute to the growth of organized cartels that engage in drug trafficking, human trafficking, or the trade in human parts. The study pointed out that most West African countries, like Nigeria and Chad, are fragile states, which favor the growth and dominance of non-state actors like Boko Haram. These groups survive through illicit activities like drugs and human trafficking. This assertion is consistent with Cockayne's (2011) ideas in *“State Fragility, Organized Crime, and Peacebuilding: Towards a More Strategic Approach”*, which argue that fragile states cannot enforce territorial integrity through border control. Cockayne noted that border patrols require significant funds and technology, which trafficking cartels exploit in most fragile states.

While some scholars believe that economic instability enables illicit activities or trade across borders, others, like Eselebor (2019), argue that human trafficking would not be possible if borders were secure. In *“Porous Borders and Human Trafficking in Nigeria”*, the author noted that the inability to effectively manage and secure Nigeria's borders is an enabling factor for human trafficking. The study pointed out that Nigeria has over 250 unmanned borders, and between 2020 and 2023, 197 cases of human trafficking in Nigeria were facilitated through the country's unmanned borders. Similarly, Adeleye (2017), in *“Victims, Actors, and Violence: Human*

Trafficking and Prostitution in Communities Along the Nigeria-Benin Republic Border”, observed that most reported cases of human trafficking along the Benin border are linked to the porous border between Nigeria and Benin. A similar report presented to the United States Congress, “*How Porous Borders Fuel Human Trafficking in the United States*”, cited porous borders and challenges in controlling irregular migration as one of the main causes of human trafficking in the United States.

In a paper published by Chatham House, authored by Leah de Haan, Aghedo & Eaton (2022), “*Tracing the ‘Continuum of Violence’ Between Nigeria and Libya: How the Movement of People from Edo State Fuels the Libyan Conflict Economy*”, the authors illustrated the drivers of human trafficking and the movement of people from Nigeria to Libya. The study adopted a survey research design and described how people are easily motivated by economic hardship to migrate, even when they understand the risks of such irregular migration. The authors noted that economic reasons have been the key motivation used by agents and syndicates to recruit their victims.

A report published by UN. GIFT (2020) indicated that vulnerable youths, children under 18, and young girls are mostly the victims of human trafficking in West Africa. The report noted that these youths are trafficked either for forced labor, as domestic workers, for prostitution, or organ trade across Africa and Europe.

In reviewing the policies and laws put in place to curtail human trafficking in Nigeria and Benin, the Palermo Protocol, the Nigeria NAPTIP Act, and the *Brigade de Protection des Mineurs* (1999) were examined. It is evident that more than fifteen West African countries have ratified the Palermo Protocol, but domesticating and implementing it has been hindered by economic fragility and political instability. The Nigeria NAPTIP Act provides a clear definition of human trafficking, recognizing that people can be trafficked both internally and externally. The law classifies various

abuses and exploitations as forms of human trafficking. Despite the holistic nature of this act, economic instability and insecurity in border communities, especially those affected by Boko Haram insurgents, have made the implementation and monitoring of border activities that promote human trafficking in Nigeria very difficult. Furthermore, the *Brigade de Protection des Mineurs* (1999) law failed to address the abuse of underage girls within the borders of the Benin Republic. Also, Ogunniyi & Idowu (2022) in “*Human Trafficking in West Africa: An Assessment of the Implementation of International and Regional Normative Standards*” adopted a systematic review approach to analyze anti-trafficking instruments in Africa. The study noted that despite over 20 years since the adoption and ratification of the Palermo Protocol, incidences of human trafficking in West Africa have continued. It highlighted that poor implementation and lack of economic and political will are the sustaining factors behind human trafficking in West Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The study is built on two theoretical foundations. The first is the Failed State Theory, and the second is Delanda's Account of Assemblages and Social Complexity Theory. The Failed State Theory, developed by Siad Barre in 1991 after drawing inferences from the Somali crisis, highlights the inability of a government to provide necessities to its people. There are several scholarly debates about what constitutes a failed or failing state. Rotberg (2002) noted that a common feature of a failed state is its inability to provide the essential necessities of a functional state to its citizens and maintain sovereignty over its territories. Studies like Jackson (1990), Englebort (2000), and Menkhaus (2004) observed that subsets of failed states include economic instability or total economic collapse, loss of territory to external forces (in this case, Nigeria's loss of territory to Boko Haram insurgency), inability to control borders effectively, loss of sovereignty, and legitimacy.

On the inability of states to function and meet the needs of their populations, Rotberg (2002) emphasized that state institutions remain paralyzed, showing signs of an inability to enforce laws for the collective good. Failed states manifest constant, unregulated class struggles among the ruling or political class, who attempt to delegitimize the government or seize state instruments through unpopular or unconstitutional means. Other forms of struggle include conflicts between armed groups. State failure looms when violence escalates into all-out internal war, when living standards drastically deteriorate, when the infrastructure of daily life collapses, and when the greed of rulers overwhelms their responsibility to improve the welfare of their people and their surroundings.

On the other hand, Delanda's Account of Assemblages and Social Complexity Theory was propounded in 2006. Assemblage theory assumes that entities are made up of heterogeneous parts that, when assembled, can influence the functions of a system or whole entity. Assemblage theory may also be applied to social entities, and its relevance across the nature-culture divide reflects its realist credentials.

The Failed State Theory and Delanda's Account of Assemblages and Social Complexity Theory are foundational in understanding economic instability and the trafficking of underage girls in Nigeria and the Benin Republic. While economic instability is seen as the main causal factor, other factors such as border insecurity, unemployment, and nonfunctional institutions are ripple effects of economic instability. The Failed State Theory highlights characteristics such as the inability to provide for the population, increasing unemployment, lack of social security, a degrading health system, and the inability to control borders—key factors that threaten national security. These factors, when linked together as suggested by Assemblage Theory, pave the way for easy recruitment and illegal logistics networks that support the trafficking of underage girls in Nigeria.

Economic instability serves as an enabler for the easy recruitment of victims, who are promised free education, employment, or other opportunities by trafficking agents. The state's failure to secure its borders provides further opportunities for these agents to move their victims undetected by authorities. Corruption, another index of a failed state, plays a significant role in this regard. For instance, it is documented that Nigeria and Benin have 86 legal access points and over 1,400 illicit ones (Idris et al., 2024), while there are over 56 illegal border posts between the Seme-Krake border, which are highly monetized and lack proper checks. The security agencies manning these checkpoints are more focused on monetary gratification than enforcing border rules.

Methodology

The study leverages the extensive advantages of a mixed-methods research design to combine various research methods, especially in a scenario similar to this study, where relying on a single method would limit data access. According to Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri (2021), mixed methods encompass the use of multiple means of data collection and analysis within a single study. In this study, mixed methods are adopted due to their benefits in addressing complex research issues, as they integrate the philosophical frameworks of both post-positivism and interpretivism (Fetters, 2016), interweaving qualitative and quantitative data in a way that meaningfully explains research issues. Mixed methods also offer logical grounding, methodological flexibility, and an in-depth understanding of smaller cases (Maxwell, 2016). In other words, using mixed methods enables researchers to answer research questions with sufficient depth and breadth (Enosh, Tzafrir, & Stolovy, 2014).

In applying mixed methods to this study, data will be collected by surveying victims of trafficking, convicted traffickers, and employees of government institutions in Nigeria and the Benin Republic

who are responsible for fighting human trafficking. In this regard, senior employees of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) will be interviewed. Additionally, data will be collected from newspaper publications, NAPTIP and immigration reports, and other journals where issues of human trafficking have been previously discussed.

The collected data will be analyzed using content analysis. Through this method, the relevance of the data collected from interviews with key informants and documentary sources on the subject will be determined.

Economic Instability and Human Trafficking

The post-COVID economy of most West African states has been characterized as highly unstable. Major economies in West Africa, such as Nigeria, Ghana, and the Benin Republic, are struggling to keep inflation and unemployment rates low, while also managing exchange rate fluctuations.

The link between economic instability and human trafficking has been demonstrated through document analysis and surveys involving victims of human trafficking. The assumption that economic factors contribute to human trafficking is built on the premise that the economy forms the foundation upon which state institutions are built, and these institutions, in turn, support the socio-economic and political needs of the population. According to Busza et al. (2018), the economy plays a significant role in human trafficking, as economic factors drive migrants to make employment choices, such as choosing to work in brothels despite the high risks involved. The author expanded on this assertion, noting that promises of economic incentives, the desire to migrate, and structural unemployment are linked to the economy and influence human trafficking. Furthermore, those seeking to change their livelihoods, particularly migrants from the agricultural sector, are often victims (Howard, 2014).

It has been observed that the majority of West African migrants migrate for economic reasons. This is linked to rising unemployment in West African states, such as Nigeria, where the unemployment rate is around 65%, and the lack of local opportunities. In a survey conducted by Howard (2014), labor migration was seen as an economic activity and a means of earning a living. Supporting this assertion, parents willingly give their children to unknown agents or relatives for financial returns (IOM, 2022). In a study conducted by Goz'dziak (2016), involving 140 youths trafficked to the United States for sexual exploitation and forced labor, the economy was identified as one of the main drivers of human trafficking. Similarly, a study by Arhin (2016), which analyzed 72 court cases of trafficking, found that victims' testimonies showed they were lured through promises of economic rewards. In Sierra Leone and Senegal, economic reasons have also been major contributors to irregular migration. Like Sierra Leone and Senegal, other African countries face similar scenarios when it comes to transborder crimes, especially human trafficking.

Economic Instability, Insecurity, Ungoverned Space and Human Trafficking

The economy is a supporting structure for state institutions, policies, and, very importantly, the sovereignty and legitimacy of the governing class. A stable economy is essential for building state institutions, providing employment and security, and ensuring that all spheres of the state are well-governed (Aning, & Lartey, 2019). The 2008 global economic meltdown and the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the effects of the economy as a means of sustaining state policies. The widening economic gaps and the increase in inflation levels in Nigeria and the Benin Republic have had two distinct effects on Nigeria (Aucoin & Yahia, 2019). They have led to an increase in trans-border crimes and heightened the vulnerability of Nigerians to being used as victims of transnational crimes. According to experts, economic instability and hardship create conditions where illicit trades become appealing to citizens (Aziz, & Monzini, 2015). People are eager to

engage in illegal trades and even join cartels to make ends meet. In Nigeria, the global economic meltdown in 2014 and the great inflation of 2016 encouraged cybercrimes among the youth. Apart from creating a condition where people are willing to join cartels and take up illegal businesses, economic hardship also makes it easier for citizens to be recruited as victims.

Furthermore, when the economy is strained, government institutions are more likely to underperform. To this study, the inability to effectively police the borders between Nigeria and the Benin Republic is not only linked to insecurity at the border but also to a lack of funds to recruit and strengthen staff numbers, as well as deploy state-of-the-art technology like drones and satellites for border surveillance. Nigeria has over 250 unmanned borders despite a population of over 200 million people and 70 million unemployed youth. The country struggles to pay its 70,000-border staff monthly. The question is, "How can Nigeria employ more staff to manage its borders when the current economic realities do not support it?"

The role of the economy as an enabler is crucial in understanding the impact of prolonged insecurity at the border and human trafficking. Despite the unstable economy providing fertile ground for human trafficking cartels to thrive and nurture potential victims, the defense and security infrastructure of all state's rests on the economy (Broad, & Turnbull, 2019). The inability of the current economies of Nigeria and the Benin Republic to support the security challenges faced by both countries is a serious problem. Since 2012, Nigeria has been battling the Boko Haram extremist group, which has displaced more than 10,000 Nigerians, forcing many into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Insecurity in Nigeria has, for instance, increased the number of street beggars and underage individuals taking up domestic jobs or even working in brothels as sex workers.

The insecurity in Nigeria's northern borders has created a situation where individuals are kidnapped for various reasons. According to Onuoha (2013), 'Since the start of 2024, civilians have faced intensified violence across Nigeria, with near-daily attacks by armed groups. Since January, at least 580 civilians have been kidnapped in incidents across several states, including Borno and Kaduna.

Recruitment and Abuse of Victims of Human Trafficking

The recruitment methods of human trafficking victims are highly dynamic. This is largely due to local, regional, and international pressures on trafficking syndicates, as well as global awareness campaigns aimed at exposing their activities. A survey of fifty-six (56) human trafficking victims in Nigeria revealed over eight (8) related strategies used by traffickers. This aligns with oral evidence provided by an employee of NAPTIP, who confirmed that syndicates employ various methods to evade border checkpoints, immigration controls, and other enforcement measures at borders and ports.

The data presented in the bar chart above reveals the results from the data collected from 56 victims of human trafficking in Nigeria. Five percent (5%) of the respondents noted that they were lured outside Nigeria after trafficking syndicates provided them with fake travel documents. They were cleared at the immigration land border. The victims recounted that upon arriving in the destination country, they discovered that the documents were fake and could not be used to secure meaningful employment. To survive, they were forced to work in brothels or factories. Nine percent (9%) of the respondents received fake employment offers, while 13% were offered jobs in companies that did not exist. One victim stated that she was given links to job advertisements to apply online. The interview was conducted online via Google Meet, and at the end of the recruitment process, they

were offered jobs with phone numbers to contact upon arrival in the destination countries. These jobs turned out to be fake, and the victims were forced into domestic work or prostitution.

Victims who were lured through romance-related methods constitute 39% of the respondents. Of these, 23% were lured by individuals they met on matchmaking apps or social media, while 16% were enticed by promises to meet lovers. Fake school admissions constitute another means of luring youths, with admissions and fake scholarships being offered online. The victims applied, were scrutinized, and then given offers of admission to universities with scholarships. Most of the victims only realized they had been deceived after they had traveled abroad. Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents were kidnapped, while 7% were referred by relatives and friends.

NAPTIP (2023) noted that victims were also easily recruited in Quranic schools, where they were forced to beg on the streets to raise money for their masters, sent out as domestic workers while their masters collected their pay, and coerced into prostitution.

Furthermore, victims of human trafficking are subjected to various forms of abuse. Tagziria & Lucia (2023) identified four (4) different types of human rights abuses that victims are forced into. Similarly, Udoka (2024) noted that many victims of human trafficking are subjected to hard labor by agents who paid for their travel expenses, only to have their documents seized until they repay a certain percentage of the money used to relocate them.

Tagziria & Lucia (2023) noted that depending on the country where the victims were trafficked, most victims of human trafficking are subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labor, domestic servitude, forced begging, and, in some cases, are admitted into Quranic schools in the Middle East.

The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement and Human Trafficking

Porous borders are a major contributor to human trafficking in Nigeria and the Benin Republic. Victims are smuggled through unmonitored borders. The increasing levels of insecurity in Nigeria have made trafficking through porous borders a common route to their ultimate destinations.

Another contributor to human trafficking through the border is the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement. The four supplemental protocols, adopted between 1985 and 1990, committed member states to providing their citizens with legitimate travel documents, allowing community members to reside to seek and perform income-earning employment, ensuring that those being expelled receive proper treatment, preventing mass expulsions of community members, and restricting the grounds for individual expulsion to matters of national security, public safety, order or morality, public health, or non-fulfillment of an essential condition of residence (Clark, 2014).

Thousands of individuals have moved from failing economies to developing ones due to the ease of entering member nations without a visa. There are significant numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers in each member state who are either unemployed or inadequately employed. Human traffickers exploit the developing economy of West African nations as both transit and destination points. Desperate unskilled laborers searching for better opportunities are at risk of being trafficked. They end up as sex workers, plantation laborers, or part of other illegal enterprises after being promised well-paying jobs in emerging countries (Hughes, 2004).

Human traffickers have used the free movement protocol to continue their heinous acts, even though its goal is to promote economic activity. This has significant ramifications for regional security. When trafficking activities go unchecked, human security is compromised. Human trafficking in the subregion has not decreased due to the challenges posed by the protocol. While

ECOWAS takes pride in being the first African region to implement the free movement initiative, the protocol is poorly executed. Rather than promoting regional trade and economic growth, it increases human trafficking and compromises security (Olonisakin, 2008).

There is no sufficient system in place within ECOWAS to monitor the arrival of undocumented immigrants. Thus, the misuse of the privileges granted by the agreement enables human trafficking (Sawadogo, 2012). Instead of fostering integration, the protocol exacerbates national and human insecurity in the subregion. The unrestricted movement of people within the subregion can contribute to human trafficking, spreading HIV/AIDS and other diseases within West Africa. It also leads to the proliferation of small arms and narcotics, potentially jeopardizing public peace and order in member states (Okeke et al., 2014).

According to Article 2(d) of the ECOWAS Treaty, member nations must address obstacles to the free movement of persons, services, and capital. All administrative barriers preventing the flow of money, people, goods, and services between member states, including those imposed by national laws, immigration, customs, and other law enforcement agencies, must be eliminated (Agyei & Clottey, 2008). As these barriers are removed, human traffickers are emboldened to continue their illegal operations in the prosperous West African economies (Mohammed, 2005).

Indeed, since the 1980s, political and administrative constraints have hindered the growth of the convention on the free movement of people, goods, and services. For instance, before conducting business in Ghana, ECOWAS citizens are required by Ghanaian national legislation to register their businesses with a minimum of USD 30,000. This requirement has turned Ghana into a trafficking transit hub, as traffickers cannot afford to pay the USD 30,000 to start an illegal

business. If this precaution had not been implemented, Ghana could have become a permanent destination for traffickers (Mashil, 2005).

Border officers also facilitate human trafficking. Numerous individuals have crossed the region's borders without proper travel documentation. Human traffickers pay border or immigration authorities as little as 100 Naira or 200 CFA (less than \$1) to cross borders.

West African nations are known to have experienced civil wars, unrest, and violence. Many West African states have been plagued by violent intra- or inter-communal wars, which have contributed to their low socio-economic conditions (Rima, 2001). As a result, many residents of struggling West African states prioritize traveling to neighboring West African nations in search of better living conditions. This makes many West Africans more vulnerable to human trafficking. Victims desperate for better living conditions are able to travel freely due to the ECOWAS free movement protocol's weak cross-border movement surveillance (Fitzgibbon, 2003).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic instability remains a major push factor for human trafficking globally. Economic conditions either create opportunities for victims to be recruited or prevent governments from fully implementing measures to curb trafficking, such as addressing porous borders, insecurity, and unemployment. In Nigeria and the Benin Republic, measures to curb human trafficking exist, but due to increasing economic instability, these measures are not effectively implemented.

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that:

1. A well-thought-out economic plan capable of providing employment, raising living standards, and funding institutions responsible for border security and combating human trafficking is essential.

2. There is a need to address the issue of terrorism at the borders. If extremist groups like Boko Haram continue to hold territories and control borders, illicit activities will persist. The two governments must coordinate security at the borders to limit the influence of these groups.

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