

# Linking Poverty, Irregular Migration and Human Trafficking: Observations from a Migrant Sending Area in Zimbabwe

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## **ABSTRACT**

Migration literature suggests that poverty, irregular migration and human trafficking are causally linked. However, empirical studies linking these aspects of migration are scarce. This is because, as clandestine activities, data collection on these aspects of migration presents serious challenges. As a result of these challenges human trafficking is receiving less attention in both research and policy than other aspects of migration. Using observations from a migrant sending community in Zimbabwe and a review of literature, this paper argues that the problem of human trafficking could more prevalent in these areas and other parts of the country than the attention it receives from both researchers and policy makers. This is because the conditions identified in literature as linked to human trafficking are present in these areas. The absence of data on human trafficking may be a result of the employment of inappropriate methods to the studies that involve "hidden populations" such as the traffickers and the trafficked.

#### INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is increasingly becoming a major concern for researchers, governments and various organisations involved in different aspects of migration such as human rights, health, law enforcement, and social services (Laczko, 2002). There is a global increase in human trafficking. According to Child and Law Foundation (2001) human trafficking has become big business, generating huge profits for traffickers. Apparently, the African continent has not been spared from this perceived global upsurge in human trafficking and its consequences. According to Adepoju (2005), there are

three main types of human trafficking occurring in the sub-Saharan African region, namely trafficking in children primarily for farm labour and domestic work within and across countries, trafficking in women and young persons for sexual exploitation, mainly outside the region and trafficking in women from outside the region for the sex industry in South Africa. Despite these observations, there is still scarce empirical literature on human trafficking. This is mainly because human trafficking has only recently attracted attention from researchers and policy makers. According to Laczko (2002) the expression "human trafficking" appeared in policy debates as recently as ten years ago. Human trafficking is an illegal, clandestine and risky activity for perpetrators, the victims and investigators. This largely explains the paucity of data on the magnitude of the problem of human trafficking as well as on the modus operandi of the traffickers. Based on observations a migrants sending area in the southern part of Zimbabwe and review of literature, this paper argues that the use of ethnographic methods is the most appropriate way of studying "hidden populations" which include the perpetrators and the victims of human trafficking.

## Aim and Objectives of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to advance an argument that human trafficking could be more prevalent in some parts of Zimbabwe than is currently understood. To this end, the paper seeks to fulfil the following objectives;

- To review literature relating to human trafficking showing how human trafficking is linked to issue such as poverty and irregular migration.
- To describe the socio-economic conditions prevailing in a migrant sending area in Zimbabwe which are conducive to the prevalence of human trafficking
- To advocate for appropriate methods in the study of those aspects of migration that involve "hidden populations" such as trafficking.

### **Literature Review**

### Conceptual issues

Migration experts distinguish between documented and undocumented, regular and irregular and voluntary and forced migration. Where it is irregular, the migrant is often assisted by a smuggler who facilitates illegal entry into a country for a fee (Kaye, 2003). Vayrynen (2003) sates that although different, illegal immigration, human smuggling and human trafficking are nested concepts. It is, however, important to be clear about the differences of these concepts because of the different legal and political consequences of each of these forms of illegal migration. The main occupation of smugglers is transporting migrants via illegal channels

traffickers combine transportation with exploitation (Laczko, 2002). These activities overlap as many smuggled migrants are exposed to abuse and exploitation either while being transported or on arrival, confounding attempts to paint neat lines between smuggling and trafficking (Laczko, 2002)

According to United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Traffic in Persons (2000) smuggling involves the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other benefit of illegal entry of a person into a state Party of which the other person is not a national or permanent resident. On the other hand, according to the Protocol human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. This includes exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. This definition of trafficking implies that trafficking is more than illegal transportation of people from one place to another but includes their recruitment and receipt so that any one involved in the movement is part of the trafficking process. It also implies that trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation and also takes place for forced labour and slavery-like practices. For example people who migrate for agriculture, catering, construction or domestic work but are deceived or coerced into working conditions they did not agree to are also defined as trafficked people (Kaye, 2003). A similar definition is adopted by the Child and Law Foundation (2001) which defines human trafficking as the forceful transportation of people from point A to B mainly for the purpose of profiteering at the expense of the victim. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2002) also defines human trafficking as the ...recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion ...for the purpose of exploitation.

In the case of smuggling, on arrival at their destination, the migrant is free to make their own way and normally does not see the smuggler again. In the case of trafficking, arrival at the destination is usually the beginning of problems for the trafficked person. Because of its exploitative nature, human trafficking has been referred to as a new or modern form of slavery where threats, intimidation and violence are used to break the victim's will and resistance (Laczko, 2002; Adepoju, 2005).

## Causes of human trafficking

Like many other forms of migration, human trafficking is an outcome of a combination of push and pull factors. The push factors refer to those negative factors that influence or force people to move from their places of origin. These include lack of employment and educational opportunities, lack of health provision, political persecution environmental disaster, discrimination

and family breakdown. The sickness or death of one or both parents which is increasing as an impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic often leaves migration as the only available way to improve the welfare of the family. As a result many families are forced to send some of their members, often children away from their homes to work and/or have better opportunities. Perceived better job opportunities, higher salaries and better standards of living abroad are also pull factors for migration including that type of migration that might lead to human trafficking. The existence of established migration routes and migrant networks because of the long history of migration are also pull factors. High expectations of opportunities in other countries boosted by global media and internet access also encourage migration including undocumented migration which might in turn encourage human trafficking (Kaye 2003).

According to Kaye, many people who fall victim to trafficking are those who are seeking to escape poverty, discrimination, improve their lives and send money back home to their families. They hear about well paying jobs abroad through family or friends or through recruitment agencies and other individuals who offer to find them employment and make travel arrangements. For most trafficked people it is only once they arrive in the country of destination that their problems begin – the work they were promised does not exist and they are instead to work in jobs or conditions to which they did not agree.

As stated by Adepoju (2005) deepening poverty, deteriorating living standards, persistent unemployment, conflicts, human deprivation and hopelessness, poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, family disintegration as a result of death or divorce and neglected AIDS orphaned children make young children vulnerable to trafficking. Deepening rural poverty forces poor families to give up their children to traffickers under the pretext of providing them the opportunity to secure good jobs and better lives. Many women assume sole responsibility for family members after husbands die of AIDS – saddled with increased responsibilities and in many cases, with little or no education and skills, some opt for migration in search of employment to improve their families' well-being only to fall prey to traffickers

Adepoju further argues that HIV/AIDS can in itself be a cause and consequence of trafficking. For example in Sub-Saharan Africa, the perception that having sexual intercourse with a young girl diminishes the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS has increased demand for young sex workers. In some instances, communities are aware of child sexual exploitation and justify this as a necessary evil in a society where children are increasingly needed to help supplement the family income or to provide for themselves. The Child and Law Foundation (2001) concurs that the major socioeconomic factor contributing to the trafficking of children is extreme poverty. The Girl Child Network concludes that the girl gets to engage in sex trafficking because she has no option (GCN, 2006). For Vayrynen (2003),

naturally, poverty and warfare contribute to the rising tide of migration, both legal and illegal.

## A growing phenomenon?

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that in 2000, 1.2 million children had been trafficked for sexual or labour exploitation internationally. Marshal (2001) observes that the past decade has seen a substantial increase in trafficking in people worldwide. Human trafficking has been described as the fastest growing and most lucrative form of international criminal activity (UN Association of Georgia/IOM, 2000, Sita, 2003; IOM, 2003; Adepoju, 2005).

Although information on cross-border trafficking is difficult to obtain indications are that human trafficking in Africa is on the increase with South Africa being the main trafficking centre as it is the destination for many trafficked children from many countries in the region. Those trafficked from countries in the region are sent to South Africa's cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and mines (Child and Law Foundation, 2001). A report of the Child and Law Foundation states that trafficking of children in Mauritius for sexual purposes is a recent development which has developed as a result of industrialisation and tourism. In Lesotho the report indicated that in a month an average of ten children are taken to South Africa and only an average of two of them return home. In Mozambique, there is evidence of cross border trafficking of children to South Africa, particularly in the Ressano Garcia district which borders South Africa. The report states that young Mozambican girls are reportedly lured to South Africa under the false promise of employment and then sold as sex slaves or forced to work in bars and other places where they eventually fall into prostitution. The United States Department of State (2005) describes Zimbabwe a source of and transit country for women and children trafficked for the purpose of forced labour and sexual exploitation. It reports the sexual exploitation of women and children in towns on the Zimbabwean border with South Africa as well as Zimbabweans being hired by false job promises to other countries. Smith (2006) reports the existence of people-smuggling rings which are cashing in on the prevailing unfavourable economic situation and taking advantage of the "incredibly porous" Zimbabwe-South African borders.

Although there is not much information available on cross border human trafficking in Zimbabwe several factors that make human trafficking a more widespread and therefore more serious problem than has far been realised. These include the increasing poverty and the devastating impacts of HIV and AIDS in the country which combine to weaken the capacities of families to provide for their material needs making migration, including undocumented migration, the only option available thus exposing the migrants to human traffickers. The Girl Child Network of Zimbabwe reports that trafficking highly prevalent within Zimbabwe's borders and takes place in some of the less obvious places such as households, churches and colleges. The Network reports that has handled "several" cases of human trafficking.

They have so far identified about nine brothels that are used as destinations for the trafficked children. They also state that trafficking is rampant in both the rural and urban areas (GCN, 2006). They found that the victims of human trafficking are mainly young girls aged below 18 years.

Some sources however, argue that the problem of human trafficking in Southern Africa might be over-stated. For example CoRMSA (2009) argues that the problem of human trafficking is South Africa might not be as severe as concerned parties have claimed it to be. CoRMSA's conclusion is based on two points. Then first one is that the discourse on trafficking in South Africa is based on just two pieces of research, one carried out by a Cape Town based NGo called Molo Songololo and the other by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The second argument is that the numbers of trafficking victims quoted by these two reports were;

...not based on rigorous, quantitative research, but rather on estimates that were likely to be inflated (CoRMSA, 2009:15).

On the basis of these arguments, CoRMSA recommends that;

Civil society and international organisations should spend less time developing counter trafficking strategies and more time and effort on ensuring that the sex industry itself is decriminalised and regulated to prevent exploitative situations that result from vulnerabilities of migrants women (CoRMSA, 2009:15).

#### **METHODOLOGY**

## Study Area

Ward Seven is located in Mangwe District of Zimbabwe's Matabeleland South Province. In ascending order, a ward is the third level administrative unit in Zimbabwe, after a households and a village. Above the ward are the districts, provincial and national levels. Ward Seven lies in agro-ecological region V which is characterised by low rainfall patterns, poor soils, hot weather and persistent droughts. Climatic conditions in this part of the country are not suitable for agricultural production especially crop farming. While livestock farming has been the major agricultural activity in these parts of the country, persistent droughts have reduced pastures and made livestock farming increasingly unviable. As a result of the people in this areas work outside the country and it borders South Africa and Botswana

### **Sources of Data**

This paper is based on observations made during fieldwork for two that I conducted between and ....The first study was a largely quantitative study funded by the Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA) focusing on the contribution of remittances from migrants to South Africa to household livelihoods. It involved a sample of 157 migrant sending households. The second project was an ethnographic study funded by the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). It focused on the transnational experiences of people living on the borderlands of Zimbabwe and its neighbours, Botswana and South Africa.

### Observations from the field

### Economic conditions and livelihoods in Ward Seven

Zimbabwe is divided into five agro-ecological regions based on the average amount of rainfall received annually and potential for agricultural productivity. Mangwe District is in agro-ecological region V which is characterised by low rainfall patterns, poor soils, hot weather and persistent droughts, making the contribution of agriculture, particularly crop agriculture, to household incomes and livelihoods negligible. There are no perennial rivers in the whole District and water for domestic use is obtained from boreholes or extracted from river beds (Hobane 1999).

People in Matabeleland mainly grow drought tolerant crops such as millet and sorghum. Maize is grown to a lesser degree as it cannot withstand the prevailing harsh climatic conditions. Due these harsh economic conditions, harvests are generally very low and income from crop production is insignificant. Crops are grown mainly for domestic consumption. Traditionally, cattle were the mainstay of the Region's economy. However, the recurrent droughts have drastically reduced their contribution to household incomes. Other livestock such as goats, sheep, donkeys, pigs and chicken are also raised for sale and domestic consumption. Wage employment within the District is low with most of the people in wage employment employed as migrant workers outside the District within or outside the country. The most popular destinations for migrant labourers are South Africa and Botswana. Most of the migrant labourers are men, leaving most of the households as female-managed households. Hobane (1999) found that 62% of the adults in Ward 7 were employed in South Africa and Botswana and that their remittances constituted an important source of household income. Other livelihoods include the sale of amacimbi (mopane worms), home brewed beer and crafts. Some residents are also engaged in petty trading in basic commodities such sugar, matches, salt and tea, sourced mainly from South Africa and Botswana, while others are engaged in crossborder trade.

### Migration trends

Two notable trends in migration from Ward Seven are its increase in aggregate terms and the increase in female migration. Labour migration from this region of Zimbabwe to South Africa has a long history. There are two periods in post independence Zimbabwe that have witnessed sharp increases in emigration from the areas in the southern parts of Zimbabwe. The first one is the immediate post independence period which is known for the Gukurahundi atrocities committed in the Matabeleland region by government ostensibly to rout out dissident activity in the region. The sharp increase in emigration during this period was mainly caused by people fleeing the country to seek refuge in South Africa and Botswana. The decade between 1991 and 2000 saw another sharp rise in the volume of emigrants from Ward Seven. This was a result of, *inter alia*, the unprecedented deterioration of the economy compounded by the events leading to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, unemployment, the rising cost of living, inflation, droughts and political disturbances. People migrating under such circumstances are very susceptible to abuse during the migration process and on arrival at the destination, including being trafficked.

Migration from Ward Seven is still dominated by men. There are, however, indications of an increase in the number of women migrants (Maphosa, 2009). A number factors account for this trend. These include the impact of HIV/AIDS where widowed women are turning to migration as a livelihood, the proliferation of migrant networks and the role of cross-border transport operators who facilitate cross-border travel including illegal entry into the country of destination.

#### Human Smuggling

Most of the emigration from Ward Seven and indeed many parts of Matabeleland region is irregular. Most of it is facilitated by human smugglers locally known as omalayisha (sing. umalayisha). These are informal crossborder transport operators whose business is ferrying people and goods across borders. They are locals and are either full-time or part time *omalyisha*. Part-time omalayisha either have paid employment or have other sources of income in South Africa or Botswana and engage in the activity occasionally either on month-ends or holidays. The advent of omalayisha has made the movement of both people and goods across borders much easier than it used to be. They are able to smuggle people without travel documents across borders. This is done mainly through bribing border officials, a practice locally known as ukudiza. They also accept delayed payment for their services, a practice referred to locally as pay forward. This practice can take various forms. A prospective migrant can be allowed to travel after making an undertaking to pay omalayisha as soon as he/she gets employment in the country of destination. Alternatively, a "sponsor" undertakes to pay umalayisha after the prospective migrant has entered into the country of destination. The "sponsor" is usually a relative who is already working in the country of intended destination, although relatives and spouses who remain

home often "sponsor" prospective migrants. Trust is very important in such arrangements. On the one hand, *omalayisha* trust that the "sponsors" will honour their promises to pay after the emigration has been completed. On the other hand, the "sponsors" trust that *omalayisha* will honour their part of the bargaining of safely transporting the prospective migrant to their destination.

Human smuggling creates conditions in which human trafficking can take place With regards to human smuggling arrangements in Ward Seven, a number of questions arise. For example, what happens to those who travel but fail to secure employment to pay within the agreed time frame? What happens when "sponsors" fail to pay? Are *omalayisha* accountable to anyone? How do the "sponsors" back home know that their "benefactors" have actually been taken to their intended destination by *omalyisha* after they leave home? Pay forward arrangements largely operate on trust. Trust is, however, no guarantee against abuse.

## Employment opportunities at destination

Despite the widespread perception in Ward Seven of an abundance of employment opportunities in migrants destination counties, especially South Africa, evidence has shown that immigrants to these countries are not guaranteed of employment. The study on the impact of remittances on livelihoods in the same area (Maphosa, 2004) showed that over 44% of the migrants in the sample were either unemployed or had very insecure jobs. They fell within the categories of the "unemployed", those who were "self employed", those who were doing "piece jobs" and those whose jobs were "unknown" by their relatives. The xenophobic attacks that broke out in many parts of South Africa in May 2008 were partly caused by competition for limited employment opportunities between locals and immigrants. Unemployment, especially in a foreign land increases vulnerability to abuse including trafficking.

## Migrants who lose contact with home

Migration between Ward Seven and South Africa and Botswana has always been largely circulatory in nature. Migrants do not cut ties with their home areas but keep close contact with those left behind in various ways including writing letters, phoning, sending remittances and occasional visits. There are, however many migrants who leave their homes and never write back, send remittances or visit. Such migrants are referred locally as *omadliawa* (sing. *umadliawa*) or *imigewu* (sing. *umgewu*). These and many less popular terms are derogative terms used to describe a person who has gets carried away by the pleasures of a foreign country and forgets those left behind. The attitude towards migrants who lose contact with their relatives back home results from the widespread perception of the abundance of employment opportunities in South Africa and Botswana. Those who lose touch with their relatives after leaving home are therefore perceived as irresponsible or selfish. While *ukudliwa*, literally meaning being eaten up by (pleasures) cannot be totally dismissed as a cause for migrants to lose touch with their relatives

back home, it would not be far-fetched to think that some of them might be victims of human trafficking. This is because for many, migration is a temporary survival strategy, not intended to be a permanent breaking away from relatives left behind or the place of origin. Besides, because of negative attitudes against immigrants in both South Africa and Botswana, total integration by immigrants into the communities of these countries is very difficult. The lack of attention to possible trafficking activities in these areas is partly attributable to the widespread perception of abundance of employment opportunities in South Africa and Botswana. This perception leads to either indifference or blaming the victim in case where one does not communicate or send remittances back home as a result of being victims of trafficking.

#### DISCUSSION

The challenge in understanding and therefore controlling human trafficking is its clandestine nature. As an activity involving "hidden populations" human trafficking is an activity that is characterised by misconceptions regarding the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators and lack of adequate data on its magnitude. This often leads to inappropriate policies and strategies of dealing with it. In some cases, however, both researchers and policy makers conveniently ignore human trafficking because of the challenges it presents in getting evidence about its existence and operations. This is despite the existence of conditions that are conducive for it to thrive such as those existing in Ward Seven. As a result human trafficking may go on for many years without it being detected.

Where victims of human trafficking are irregular migrants, they are very unlikely to report the perpetrators in both the country of origin and the country of destination for fear of the consequences of being known to have broken the law. Being an undocumented migrant virtually takes away the human rights of the individuals involved. Undocumented migrants have been referred to in criminalising terms such "border jumpers" and "illegal migrants" in both their country of origin and destination countries. Such criminalisation gives an impression that such migrants have right to legal protection. As observed by Adepoju (2005) victims of human trafficking in Sub-Sarahan Africa are reluctant to testify against human traffickers because if lack of assurances that the law enforcement agencies will act against the perpetrators. For example Langberg (2005) found that survivors of human trafficking preferred to remain silent because of the existence of institutional disincentives such as policies that criminalise rather protect victims, the absence of witness protection programmes and judicial proceedings that tend to re-victimise the victims of trafficking.

Another challenge in dealing with the problem of human trafficking are existing misconceptions about the profile of a human trafficker. Researchers, law enforcement agents and policy makers often develop profiles or typical characteristics of perpetrators of crime such as human traffickers, smugglers, serial murderers and rapists. While developing profiles of potential perpetrators is intended to enhance vigilance against such individuals, it is often misleading. Convicted rapists, murderers and other criminals often do not conform to conventional profiles of criminals. The media is replete with stories of people who have been victims of abuse by the trusted, descent and related individuals. In the same a human trafficker can be a trusted individual including a neighbour, friend or relative.

According to Marshal (2001) the dominant perception in the discourse on human trafficking is human trafficking is something done by a few, even many, bad people implying that the solution to the problem is to identify, arrest and lock up the perpetrators. Very often human trafficking is not forced removal but people who are trafficked would have made a "voluntary" decision to travel in the light of perceived better opportunities in the country of destination. Marshal also observes that while in many parts of the world, human trafficking is considered to be dominated by organised crime, in a lot of contexts trafficking resembles more cottage industry than organised crime with a range of small-scale operators along the way. The preoccupation with human trafficking which takes place within the medium of organised crime overlooks human trafficking that takes place in the guise of individuals or groups who provide a service to individuals and communities. As a result, as Adepoju (2005) observes, the community, including the parents and guardians of trafficked children are under false illusions and are unaware of the severe exploitation to which the victims are often subjected.

As observed by Kelly (2005) one of the problems with research on human trafficking is that it is generally funded, commissioned or conducted by international organisations as one element of counter-trafficking programmes. As a result there is an absence of pure and detailed research on trafficking. Furthermore, there is a limited number of social scientists who are involved in exploring the contours of human trafficking. According to Laczko (2002) most human trafficking research tends to action oriented. This means that studies on human trafficking are often conducted within a short time frame, usually with limited resources. There has been less funding for long term research that is intended to investigate in detail the causes of trafficking and the best way to prevent and combat it. As suggested by Laczko (2002), the development of comprehensive approaches to combating human trafficking necessitates moving beyond the snapshot short term approach typical of much of the existing research on human trafficking. Jahic and Finckenauer (2005) advocate for a research approach that moves away from an overemphasis on quantification. This is because quantification does not capture the true nature of the problem. They argue that for example knowing the number of trafficked victims would tell us very little about trafficking as a comprehensive problem or ways to deal with it. Human

trafficking research needs to move towards ethnographic approaches which involve prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation and triangulation (Maggs-Rapport (2000).

#### **CONCLUSION**

Human trafficking constitutes one of the worst forms of human rights violations and has very dire consequences to individuals, families and communities. Human trafficking is an aspect of migration that is probably the most challenging to research. Studies indicate that human trafficking is high in areas where people migrate under desperate conditions. They also indicate that irregular migration, especially human smuggling, increases the incidences of human trafficking. The very conditions that promote human trafficking are the ones that contribute to the difficulties encountered in trying to understand, measure and control it. As a result both policy makers and researchers tend to ignore it, of course with disastrous consequences. Understanding, measuring and controlling it is not an easy undertaking, especially in an environment where the victims and their relatives are, for various reasons, unlikely to report it. The starting point in dealing with the problem of human trafficking is to understand the traffickers' modus operandi. This is possible if research on human trafficking moves away from a preoccupation with quantification to qualitative, ethnographic approaches that allow researchers the opportunity to build trust with the participants who include survivors who are often unwilling to talk about their experiences.

The socio-economic conditions within which migration from Ward Seven to South Africa and Botswana takes place are similar to those described by many writers as causally related to human trafficking. These include poverty, widespread human smuggling and unemployment at the countries of destination. Using the lack of quantifiable information about human trafficking as evidence of the non-existence of human trafficking activities in these conditions is tantamount to complicity on the part of both researchers and policy makers.

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