Under the provisions of section 21 of the prevention of trafficking in persons PTIP Act 2009, a coordination office for the prevention of trafficking in persons was set up at the ministry of internal affairs headquarters to be responsible for coordination, monitoring and overseeing the implementation of the Act.

This office facilitates the day to day operational partnership between several stakeholder Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) which have mandates that relates to human trafficking issues, i.e. prevention of the crime, protection and support of victims and prosecution of the perpetrators.


New Vision’s Owen Wagabaza talked Commissioner of Police Moses Binoga, the Coordinator Prevention of trafficking in Persons on a number of issues regarding the handling of human trafficking in Uganda. Below is the interview:-

What is the state of human trafficking in Uganda? Traffic in persons remains a big challenge, we have continued to register high numbers of reports of trafficking of Ugandans both at the domestic and transnational levels. Between January and June this year, we registered a total number of 110 cases, out of which 12 were related to internal trafficking and 96 were cases of transnational trafficking; involving more than 198 victims of whom 58 are victims of internal trafficking and 156 victims of transnational trafficking.

All internal trafficking cases involved children trafficked from one place to another for various forms of exploitation, notably child labour including street begging, domestic labour, sexual exploitation and use in criminal/terrorist activities; for example many children were recently rescued from Usafi Mosque, in Mengo, Kampala; while they were being indoctrinated with radical extremists Islamic ideas so they can be used later in terrorist missions.

On the transnational side, most victims are youths, mostly women between the ages of 15 to 35 and are trafficked out of the country for purposes of labour and sexual exploitation. A few of them have also been trafficked to the DRC and Somalia for use in rebel and terrorist activities.

During the past one and half years, we also registered cases of foreigners trafficked to Uganda for labour and sexual abuse. Most of them are from Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia. I.e. During the Month of June 2018, 22 Burundian young ladies were intercepted at Mutukula border on the way to Oman for unspecified jobs.

What is influencing human trafficking in Uganda? The key issues are unemployment and poverty. The youths are looking for all ways of survival and this has forced them to take risks in search for better survival opportunities. Most of the trafficked children are from poor families and they are given away by their parents and guardians with hope that they will be assisted only for their children to end up being subjected to various forms of abuse and exploitation.

Trafficking in persons is a lucrative business which yields good amounts of income for the dealers in the illegal business. There are many illegal recruitment agents who have taken it as source of their livelihood and they continue confusing many Ugandans into the human trafficking trap despite the ongoing sensitization.

The existence of some controversial cultural and employment practices, especially in the Middle East has exposed Ugandans to abusive and exploitative working conditions.

The misconceived attitude of some Ugandan youths that working abroad is a form of prestige has led to many of them take risks to travel abroad for jobs without taking the required due considerations.

What is the modus operandi of these human traffickers? Most of the traffickers are using deceptive means of recruiting their victims. They deceive the children’s parents and guardians that they are going to assist their children get free education or care; while for the adults, they are deceived that they are going to get good jobs with attractive salaries.

They have also been using fraud means to smuggle Ugandans out of Uganda through unofficial routes along the porous Uganda-Kenya border; while using forged immigration stamps. There exist criminal syndicates between Uganda and Kenya who coordinate the illegal border movements and sometimes the corruption of some officials to facilitate disguised travels out of the country.

This criminal syndicate between Uganda and the traffickers in Kenya has played a major role in promoting human trafficking; many of the victims have indicated that they were connected to someone through Nairobi. To entirely eradicate human trafficking; this criminal syndicate needs to be dealt with.

What districts in Uganda are most vulnerable to human trafficking and why? The entire country is affected though Kampala and the surrounding districts plus most of the Central region have been hit most. Also the Eastern districts bordering Kenya have been affected, including Mbale, Namisindwa, Tororo, Busia, Bugiri, Iganga, Jinja, Kamuli. Namanyigo, etc.

Karamoja and Busoga sub regions have been the most affected with incidents of internal child trafficking.

The possible reasons for this trend include high levels of poverty and unemployment in those districts and easy proximity to Kenya through the porous Kenya / Uganda border.

What are the most popular destination countries for victims of trafficking? Popular destinations mostly include Middle East countries of Oman, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar; plus India, China, South Africa, Kenya and this is because there are markets for non-skilled or mid-skilled labour in these countries. i.e. Housemaids, cleaners, drivers, unarmed security guards, mansions, plumbers, waitresses, etc. In Qatar for example, they are constructing stadiums and hotels in preparation for the next world cup and they have markets for people with limited skills in the building industry.

In the case of Middle East Countries, the problem is that the deceptive recruitment makes Ugandans to go for those jobs without proper orientation and understanding of what they are going to do, and in the process, they get frustrated when they find the working conditions so hard and yet the conditions for withdrawal are stringent. The working conditions are reported to be very bad, people are overworked, and the pay is less than what they were promised. Some are raped by their bosses and because they have no where no to report, they linger on under such abusive conditions.

When they want to withdraw from work, due to unbearable working conditions, they are forced to pay a big compensation which is between US$1000-US$3000 when they are earning less than US$200 a month. Because they don’t have the money, they are forced to continue working under such abusive and exploitative conditions.
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IS STILL A BIG CHALLENGE IN UGANDA DESPITE ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

Awareness rising on the existence and dangers of trafficking and how to avoid becoming a victim of trafficking

iii. We have come up with a number of preventive actions which involve:

- Causing awareness of the public about the existence of human trafficking, its changing trends and the available safe ways for migration.
- Interceptions of potential victims of trafficking at all border points and Entebbe airport. The immigration and security officials at those places have been carrying out interceptions through detection and identification of suspected victims of trafficking.
- Monitoring of labour export business through the licensed recruitment companies in the country has been enhanced by the Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development in close collaboration with the Police, intelligence organizations, the Immigration Directorate and Civil Society Organizations.
- Through the Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government has also negotiated bilateral labour agreements with some of the countries where Ugandans are going for these kind of labour; to stream the monitoring of the working conditions of Ugandan migrant workers to those countries.
- We have also been engaging officials from Kenya to come up with a harmonized way of intercepting Ugandans transiting through Kenya to stop them from going to Countries where they may get abused and exploited.

iv. On the prosecution side, Police, Intelligence Agencies, Office of the DPP and the judiciary have progressively built enhanced capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute increasing numbers of Cases related to trafficking in persons. Over 30 Cases were prosecuted last year and since the beginning of this year over 16 Cases out of the 110 registered cases have already been taken to court. Besides the offence of trafficking in persons, there are many other perpetrators charged with engaging in labour recruitment without a licence, obtaining money by false pretences and forgery of immigration stamps.

v. In addition to working together to cause awareness on trafficking in persons and prosecution of the perpetrators as stated earlier on, we have developed a coordinated syndicate to assist and protect victims of trafficking. The coordinated stakeholder victim assistance processes involve many Government Agencies and it is very often backed up by some Civil Society Organizations and International Organizations. Many victims have been rescued, assisted with return air tickets, offered temporary care, rehabilitated and re-integrated in an organized manner. Out of the 138 victims of transnational trafficking registered by end of June 2018, 80 victims have already been rescued through the national coordinated syndicate.

vi. We have also enhanced capacity building for key stakeholders especially the police, prosecutors and the judicial officers through training in the techniques of handling these cases in more effective ways.

Prosecuting offenders has been difficult mostly because of the complexity of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, what are you doing to solve the challenge?

- We have finally come up with the final draft of the regulations for the Prevention of trafficking in persons Act 2009, pending final stages of drafting by the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. The Regulations shall explain and guide the people who are going to implement the Act on how to apply it in the most effective way.
- There has been enhanced training of the personnel from the key stakeholders implementing the police, prosecutors and judges; as well as the general public about this Act.
- The Office of the DPP has set up a Desk at the Headquarters to guide and monitor the handling of human trafficking Case Files. There is improving operational relationship between the Police and the Resident State Attorneys with Human trafficking Cases.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs has progressively increased the budget for supporting investigations and victims to promote quick investigations and also as a way encouraging the victims, as key witnesses, to cooperate with the Police and prosecutors during the investigation and prosecution process.

What other challenges are you encountering in the fight against human trafficking?

- The persistent push factor of unemployment and poverty which increases the desperation of Ugandans to become vulnerable to the tricks of traffickers.
- Another challenge being able to establish a harmonized understanding with the neighbouring Countries, especially Kenya, so that victims of trafficking being made to pass through such countries are easily identified and intercepted without being criminalized as illegal migrants.
- After Bilateral Agreements have been signed between Uganda and other Middle East countries, there are challenges with proper implementation of the same.
- We also have a challenge of securing more agreements with other countries especially UAE and Qatar where many Ugandans go.
- Making information about the licenced recruitment companies to the public all the time is a challenge.
- Investigations of transnational trafficking Cases is a challenge because of lack of capacity to gather collaborative evidence from the countries of transit and destination; which sometimes makes the cases presented to courts look weak.
- Rescuing victims from the middle East is a big challenge due to differences in the laws of the two countries.

What achievements have you registered so far?

- The key players in the war against trafficking among the Government Agencies and Non Government Organizations have been mobilized and brought together to respond to the crime of trafficking in persons in a coordinated and standardized manner.
- There has been increased consciousness about the crime amongst the identified key stakeholders and they have been deliberate efforts to plan for more initiatives to counter trafficking in persons more effectively, both individually and collectively, i.e. There are plans for policy reviews, structural development & strengthening, budget improvements and other many other operational actions.

- There is general awareness among the public that human trafficking exists and it is dangerous; and that there are safe ways through which one can get jobs abroad.
- Through the improved record of prosecutions, the number of new Karamojong children being brought to Kampala has reduced and many wanted Illegal Labour recruiters are in hiding.
- Most of the people who get into human trafficking situations know that there is a system in the Country through which they can be assisted.

What is the way forward?

As Government stakeholder agencies and other partners continue to work together to initiate effective strategies and build sufficient capacities to tackle the problem of human trafficking, the public should tread cautiously and follow the guidance we often give them on safe migration and child support.

As Government stakeholder agencies and other partners continue to work together to initiate effective strategies and build sufficient capacities to tackle the problem of human trafficking, the public should tread cautiously and follow the guidance we often give them on safe migration and child support.

The public should also report illegal recruitment agents operating in their localities to the concerned authorities so that suspects can be arrested and prosecuted accordingly.

Meanwhile, given the challenges related to employments in foreign Countries, the youth should be encouraged to embrace the available initiatives by the Government aimed at improving their employment opportunities in Uganda. I.e. Youth and Women empowerment programs, Operation Wealth Creation, vocational trainings, taking strategic University Courses, etc. Going for jobs abroad should not be looked at as the only option rather; it should be the last resort.