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# **Background and Context:**

# Human Trafficking & Modern-day Slavery in Ghana West Africa

## Republic of Ghana

Well-endowed with natural resources, notably gold and cocoa production are major sources of foreign exchange. The domestic economy continues to revolve around agriculture, and fishing which accounts for about 35% of the GDP and employs about 55% of the work force, which are mainly small landholders. *-The World Factbook*, U.S.C.I.A. 2009

Domestic trafficking is more prevalent than transnational trafficking and the majority of victims are children. Both boys and girls are trafficked within Ghana for forced labor in agriculture and many in the fishing industry. Annually, the IOM reports many deaths of boys trafficked for hazardous forced labor in the Lake Volta fishing industry. Girls are trafficked within the country for domestic servitude and for sexual exploitation. - *U.S. State Dept Trafficking in Persons Report, June, 2009* 



Modern day slavery is a massive and growing international problem, in countless industries, slavery rears its ugly head to show the misuse and neglect of children and the outright abuses of nearly all forms of human rights. Ghana has not escaped this global issue and specifically despite a great amount of growth in many other sectors remains a huge problem for a Ghana which looks forward to the future with a large population of domestic child slaves.

A National Child Labour Survey by the Ghana Statistical Service indicated that out of the over six million children in Ghana of school-going age between five years and seven years, 1.3 million of them are engaged in hazardous labour. Ms Elizabeth Hagan, Head of Child Labour Unit of the Ministry of Manpower Development and Employment, said at a stakeholders meeting on child labour in the country at Koforidua. She said the figure represented 39 per cent of Ghana's children of school going-age, who were out of school and were in the labour market.



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Mrs Hagan said the estimated population of children between 5 years and 17 years in Ghana was 6,361,110 out of which 2,474,545 representing 39 per cent were engaged in economic activities while 242,074 are engaged in hazardous child labour and slavery.

# Forced labor in the fishing industry of Ghana

In the year 2018, more than 55% of children working on the Volta Lake were trafficked and forced into slave labor. Based on our on-going research, we found out that majority of these children are exposed to life threatening tasks in the fishing industry as young as 4-5 years of age. All these children are trafficked from the regions along the coastal zone; Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western region to be precise.

In the above mention regions along the coastal zones, parents for many complex reasons including lack of access to health care, information, and education are having children despite their already dire economic circumstances. Because they cannot afford to care for all or any of their children, parents from these areas at an alarming rate are leasing or selling out their children into fishing slavery for a contact of 2-20 years. Many parents don't fully understand the perils the fishing industry poses to their children, and even so many also feel that they are trapped with no better options and tell themselves that the child will be better off out of their care. In all, we have realized that because of the economic hardship of the country and the general lack of human rights education for youth and families, has brought about the huge level of fishing slavery in the country Ghana.

An additional factor is that the Aksoombo dam built in 1964 heralded the country's first independent large-scale development project- a hydro electric dam which subsequently created the largest man-made lake in the world and displaced over 80,000 people in 172 communities living along the river. After the dam, most of these communities were relegated to poverty often not receiving water, electricity, or road access. Communities downstream of the dam were hit equally as hard in many cases since they relied on the complex eco system that the flood season brought every year, but when the dam was build the flooding stopped entirely and so did the steady migration of diverse populations of fish and seafood, cutting the economic activities of the region in half. These economic hardships help to high light some of the factors which have caused a considerable increase of fishing slavery since the creation of the dam.

A study of the prevalence of child trafficking in selected communities in the Volta and Central Regions by the USA Department of State indicated that children from nearly one-third of the 1,621 households surveyed had been subjected to trafficking, primarily in fishing and domestic servitude. In the fishing industry in the regions surrounding Lake Volta, many children were subjected to forced labor; they engage in hazardous work, such as diving into deep waters to untangle fishing nets caught on submerged tree roots.



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Child laborers were often poorly paid, physically abused, and received little or no health care.

Another study conducted by Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, children as young as age 4 are subjected to forced labor in fishing in the areas around Lake Volta, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Youth Advocate Program International has also noted that the fishing industry in Ghana is among the worst forms of modern Child slavery in the world.

# Statistics on Child Trafficking into Lake Volta

In Ghana, child trafficking is known to occur in several economic sectors. The key sector that have children trafficked into labor is the agriculture where fishing along the Lake Volta dominates significantly.

The Ghana Child Labor Survey Report published by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in 2003 found that over 100,000 children were involved in the fishing industry in Ghana. Most of these children are made to work in the Volta lake with many being disproportionately young or underage to legally perform tasks in the fishing industry. (which are deemed to be hazardous under the law).

The report indicated that 25% of these children were between 5-9 years of age, 41% were 10-14 years of age, and 34% were 15-17 years of age. Though the study indicated that many of these children are found working in the Volta lake, it did not specify the number of children working within Lake Volta's fishing industry or how many of these children had been trafficked.

Government reports available at the social welfare departments of the Ada East district has it that most of the children trafficked into fishing in the Volta lake comes from Ada-East and Ada-West districts. Though government officials were not ready to release such reports, they believe that the government is working on changing the situation. According to officials, parents in Ada-East and Ada-West themselves trafficked their children out because of poverty. Most of them do this because they cannot cater for their wards school needs and daily upkeep. They often send them at the blind side of officials during the school vacations. The excuses such parents give when confronted by officials is that, the children are going to spend holiday vacation with relatives at Akosombo or Yeji (two popular towns known for using trafficked children in fishing in the Volta Lake in Ghana). Such children go and come no more but their parents receive occasional payment from the masters the children work for.

Other research and surveys in this area have revealed the presence of child work, child labor, and child trafficking within Lake Volta's fishing industry highlighting that many children live outside the legal safeguards Ghana has established to protect child welfare and have also documented the hazards and hardships faced by these children.



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A study by International Justice Mission (IJM) in 2013 and 2015 revealed that majority of children working in Lake Volta's fishing industry are 10 years old or younger. This shows that the majority of children are too young to legally conduct the hazardous tasks inherent in many aspects of the fishing industry. Part of the findings of the study states "Although the 2013 operational assessment overwhelmingly found boys working on Lake Volta (99.3% of children on the southern region of the lake were boys), the 2015 study found that girls also work in—and are trafficked into—the fishing industry. The findings demonstrate that girls have different roles in the fishing industry, completing most tasks somewhere onshore or further inland instead of on the lake where the 2013 assessment occurred. The 2015 study also revealed that both boys and girls have physically demanding, and sometimes hazardous, roles in Lake Volta's fishing industry."

Currently, the International Justice Missions study on child trafficking and child labor in the Volta lake is the most independent and most trusted study on the issue. The following are some of its findings that government officials at the ministry, Ada-East and Ada-West Districts have not objected.

The 2013 operational assessment found that more than half (57.6%, 444/771) of children working on southern Lake Volta's waters were trafficked into forced labor. In 2015, each of the fishing communities sampled during the qualitative study confirmed the presence of child trafficking. Across destination communities, most respondents estimated that 60% or more of the children working in the fishing industry were born in other communities. In source communities, most respondents estimated that between 40-60% of children leave the community specifically to work in Lake Volta's fishing industry.

Data collection in 2013 and 2015 found that children trafficked into the fishing industry had contractual agreements for their exploitation, which were frequently between the trafficker and the child's parent/guardian. The 2015 study found that while many perpetrators may be low-income fishermen themselves, they do not use trafficked children merely to survive. In fact, exploiting trafficked children enabled them to send their biological children to school and provide better accommodations and clothing for their own family. One male survivor accounted that, "We were more or less like house slaves, because their own children did nothing." Thus, several factors distinguished trafficked from non-trafficked children, including: access to education, working conditions—such as working longer hours and being assigned more intense, hazardous, or difficult tasks—and improper clothing and shelter. Physical violence committed against children was widespread in Lake Volta's fishing industry, with parents/guardians in source communities reporting that children were "beaten like goats." While trafficked children overwhelmingly experienced violence, this was not unique to trafficked children due to the cultural acceptance of physical discipline in Ghana.

Qualitative data in 2015 revealed that traffickers controlled children through violence and limiting access to food; and sometimes kept older boys in their employment through sexual rewards and marriage. The later control tactics rendered girls in the fishing industry vulnerable to multiple forms of victimization. These means of control combined with the working and living conditions



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affected trafficked children, with key informants citing that survivors displayed signs of trauma and underdeveloped social skills. Further, although everyone acknowledged that there are government programs in place and NGOs that serve trafficking survivors, the service needs of trafficked children far exceeded the availability and accessibility of services.

According to organizations engaged in the fight against child trafficking, most children trafficked in Ghana end up in fishing communities around Yeji on the shores of the Volta Lake, where they are subjected to major forms of abuse by their 'owners.' One fisherman is reported to have bought over thirty children whose ages range between three and 14 years with amounts ranging between GH150 and GH500, depending on the age. One basic thing associated with human trafficking is that the victim's fundamental human rights are abused through enforced labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, illegal adoption, and other such ills.

### **Assigned duties to the boys:**

Going to these fishing communities, we have realized that these children are involved in a lot of activities which are unbearable to the extent that even some of the adults in those communities complain about it. Some activities include diving deep into the water to set traps and untangle nets, pulling in fish heavy nets, mending nets, taking water out of the boat, baiting, and rowing the boat.

For the boys between the ages of 3-6 years, they are into the bailing of water from the boat, casting net, cleaning of the boat and also few of them dive as well. These children spent majority of their time working on the river or even doing other fishing related activities.

The boys from the ages of seven years and above are also into casting of net, mending, setting of net, drawing the net, setting traps in water and paddling the boat.

The other duties are; farming, rearing cattle, house hold chores and the processing of the fish.

### **Duties of girls:**

The main duties of the girls include the all known house chores for girls as the perception is, processing of fish (de-scaling, cleaning, smoking, salting and drying) and marketing. Sometimes when the boys on the boat are understaffed, some of the girls go on the river to undertake such tedious task.

**Working Hours:** Within the fishery industry, there are a lot of types fishing methods in the industry. The type or methods determine the number of hours that the children spend on the river. The other determinants includes; roles the child plays, availability of fish in the season, the masters drive and finally they also try to consider those in schools as well by given them that free will of operation.



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One type is called the net fishing which also involves a lot of work and time. According to these children, they work from 3am to 6am which after bringing the fishes ashore, they again go back again spending another three hours which means in all, they spend six hours.

The other type of fishing is known as the bamboo fishing in which the children spent between the hours of nine and thirteen hours on the river depending on the availability of the fish and sometimes they have to travel for hours before getting the fish.

All the types mentioned above are handled by children between the ages of three years and seventeen years who are able to handle this dangerous and hazardous work.

**Education:** Though we have mentioned education, these children have nothing to do with education. Their only duty is to make sure that they get enough fishes for the day. The funny issue is that, a gentleman wanted to establish one in the community but the parents and their masters got furious that the man was coming to destroy their businesses hence the school collapsed.

**Injuries:** Injuries are very rampant in the fishing industry and these children are always found under this very condition. Some of these injuries are; the children get prick by fishes which results in swollen hands or feet, they sometimes get shock in the river by electric fish.

Others also get hit by tree stumps in the river as they dive which results in bruises, cuts, drowning and death. Due to the slippery nature of the boat, some of these children fall into the river whiles others also fall into the boats which also result in fractures, dislocation and even disability.

Beating these children with paddles are the common issues in the industry. They are always beaten when they are unable to disentangle the net in the river as at the ages between 5-17 years.

**Drowning:** most of these children gets drown in the river when they dive and hit their head to the rocks and stump of trees in the river. Some of these children also get ensnared by the ropes and the nets which make them unable to swim. During heavy storms, the boat gets capsized and those that cannot swim gets drown in the river. According to the people of these fishing communities, drowning has been very rampant which it has never occurred to them to find a solution to it.

**Health:** Bilharzias has been one of the most common water-borne diseases in those communities. Others maladies include skin diseases, malaria, typhoid, yellow fever, black fly, concusions and stunted growth.

Visiting the health center has never been part of them in the communities unless issues have worsened before they will go and usually the victim later dies in process.

**Nutrition:** According to the children interviewed, they all confirmed that feeding has not been very good and they often eat the same type of food for a very long time due to the type of work they do.



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Sometimes, food is used as incentives for good work done for the day and punishment if the work is not considered 'good', sometimes this means the boy made a minor error and therefore will not be fed well for the subsequent weeks or months.

**Sexual Violence:** Rape cases have been one of the main issues in those fishing communities but just that they are not reported to any authority. The only evidence one can see in the communities are teenage pregnancy in the area. The boys are also raped in the communities but just that they find it to be a taboo so it is never reported base on what one boy revealed. The boys are raped by both men and women in the societies.

**Trafficked Communities:** The major communities where children are being trafficked from includes; Ada East, Ada West, Ningo Prampram, Winneba, Apam, Cape Coast and other parts in the Western Region.

Greater Accra: Ada East, Ada West and Ningo Prampram.

Central Region: Apam, Winneba and Cape Coast.

Volta Region: Akatsi, Denu, Aflao and its environs.

**Destinations:** The following are the various destinations where these children are being trafficked to; Yeji and Akosombo in the Eastern Region and Kpando in the Volta Region.

# Testimonials from the students in our Trafficked 2 School Program:

On 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, a team from the Volta Revival Foundation visited the Gorm Basic School to have interaction with school children who were survivors of child trafficking to Akosombo in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Our interaction with these children revealed that most of them were trafficked by single parents due to the single parent's inability to care for them. Most of them, as well, were trafficked to the eastern region town of Akosombo where indigenous people are into fishing in the volta lake. (The largest artificial lake created after the construction of the Akosombo Hydro Dam in Ghana). In all, the team had interaction with ten returnees (once trafficked children).

The following are the names of these children and a gist of their testimonies:

NAME: SEWU KOFI ISAAC AGE: 18 CLASS: SIX

The names of his parents are Esther Amewusika but the father passed on and he is currently staying at Gorm with his uncle but the mother is at Kasseh.

"One of my uncles came for me from my mother to be a cowboy for a three year contract which I did and completed. Prior to my three year contract with my uncle, I was taken to Akosombo by



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another uncle of mine for fishing and I stayed there for five years. My mother later came for me due to some misunderstanding that broke up between her and my uncle. My mother is currently striving to take care of me. I sometimes have to go and work as a laborer before I get money for school".

NAME: ELIJAH ADJONYOH AGE: 18 CLASS: SIX

The following words or phrases are what Elijah told us about his experience at Akosombo.

"I am currently staying in a village called Gborvenya which is some few miles away from the school. I am now staying with my parents there. I went to Akosombo with my mum when I was **FOUR** years. She later left me there in the hands of a man I don't know and since then fishing has been the work I found myself doing. I never had the opportunity to attend school for the ten years I stayed there. Within this period, I worked as a fishing boy for three different people at Akosombo. I had very bad experiences with the first person I stayed with. I was made to attend to works that are too physically challenging for my age. When we go for fishing, the work that we do on the river is very tedious and if I'm not able to execute a task, I get beaten mercilessly and there is no way you I complain. and this was the first person I stayed with for three years".

"With the second person I stayed with, I met some other young boys. I spent three years with him and he also meted out same abuse on us by beating us when we are not able to do a particular task. Our age is not taken into consideration when a task is to be given. We always wake up as early as **3am** for fishing and when we get back, we have other works at home to do. We work whole day from 3am to **6pm**". "In all these, I have personally never received anything in the form of payment or salary from this man. What he often tells me is that, he has paid a lot of money to my mother".

"After working for the second person, my mum came for me to Ada where I've started schooling from class one. Some few weeks later, someone came for me again to Akosombo where I spent four years. Here, we have to work on the river all night from 6pm - 7am. It was really hell of experience that I had. All the Uniforms on me now and my shoes are all from my hard work since I have to work and get money before coming to school".

NAME: JONATHAN AGBOKA AGE: 16 CLASS: FIVE

I'm currently staying at Angornya with my mother but my father died some years ago.

"My mother took me to Akosombo and she left me with my uncle and I served him for five years. I never had the opportunity to attend school all these years. I was later brought back to Ada. Throughout the stay with my uncle, he never beat me. However, I don't like the idea of staying and working for somebody whiles my age mates were in school. My mother is the one now taking care of me from the little she gets from the mat that she sells".



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NAME: ERIC DOE AGE: 17 CLASS: FOUR

He is now living with his grandfather and the mother at Gorm. His mother sells mango and the grandfather mould blocks.

"I was five years when my father took me to his friend at Kpando for fishing in the volta region. Throughout my stay with him, I never went to schooling. I spent about seven years working with my father's friend and will not let me go. I only had the opportunity to leave when I told him I wanted to attend my grandmother's funeral at Ada. When I came to my mum, she never bothered to send me to school but it was rather my grandfather who took the initiative to send me to school. Some of the abuses went through included serious beatings whenever I complain of tiredness".

NAME: DIVINE ADJONYOH AGE: 15 CLASS: TWO

Divine is currently living with his parents at a village called Gborvenya which is about three miles from the school. According to Divine both parents of his are disabled. He said the mother is blind and the father is lamed. They only depend on what his elder brother sends them through an illegal mining he is engaged in.

"I worked as fishing boy at Akosombo for eleven years. Whiles there, we were dangerously made to dive deep into the bottom of the lake to remove nets that get entangled with sticks. We often get beaten with paddles when we are not able to remove the net. We also prepare baits for fishing which takes us into the night and therefore we don't have much time to sleep. I did this for eleven years before I brought back to Ada. Here in Ada, during vacation from school, I have to work as a security in people's farm to drive away birds in other to get money for schooling. I was fortunate to meet a military officer who recently bought my books for me but apart from that the proceeds from the security job is what I used for my up-keep".

# NAME: FELIX TETTEH AGE 13 CLASS: ONE

"I am currently staying with my mum in a prayer camp. My mum is suffering from stroke and she was brought to this Prayer Camp adjacent the Gorm basic school".

"I was told that I was four years when my father abandoned us but in the year 2014 I was taken to Akosombo to a man called Abor for fishing business. As at now I know everything about fishing since I've been involved in every kind of work on the boat. Sometimes when we don't go for fishing, I have to mend the net and other associated works. I would never love to involve myself in this kind of work again. the kind of abuse meted out to me is something I am struggling to forget. Forinstance, If a fish should jump out of the net whiles we are rolling the net, I am denied fish in my meal for about a month. We are not fed well when I was there. My mother is now struggling and finds it difficult to fend for me".



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**AGE: 18** 

**AGE: 13** 

NAME: KABU MABEL

**CLASS: SIX** 

"I'm now with my parents at Gorm Mensah – korpey. My mother is jobless but my father is a pastor. I was taken to Tema to live with a woman as a shopkeeper with the promise that I will be taken to school. Thius women never sent me to school. Any time her kids are to school and question her about when I will also go to school, she postpones it to the next academic year. This never materialized. She kept postponing my schooling until my father finally came for me. I started school not quite long ago and my age is more than this grade but I am forced to stay there because I didn't start schooling early enough".

NAME: AHETO CHRISTIANA CLASS: FIVE

"I'm currently staying with my parents at Gbovinya. My father fishes and my mother weaves mat. I was once taken to an overbank in the Ada district to stay with my aunties who never send me to school. I was made to serve her for a long time. Whiles with her, I do all the house chores.

My parent felt they could not take care of me so she so I should serve her in return of her educating me. She never did till my parents came for me to attend school at Gorm. My parents a struggling to cater for educational needs and sometime absents myself from school".

NAME: VAJEH JENNIFER AGE: 12

**CLASS: FOUR** 

"I was once taken to my aunty who took me to school by I also help her in a hotel business by helping her to clean the environment. Most of the people who visit her criticize her for having me work in the hotel business at this age. The criticisms got her depressed and one day told me to come back to Ada to help my mum since she is sick. As at now, I'm currently staying with my parents who are into fishing and selling. My education is not going well since my parents are unable to afford some of the academic costs".

NAME: AKROFI PATIENCE AGE: 12 CLASS: FOUR

"I am currently with my grandmother at Angornya but my father passed on and my mother is now in Accra. It is my grandmother who taking care of me but my mother also supports her regularly. My grandmother is engaged in mat weaving. Her financial status is not good despite the support from my mum. She also keeps postponing getting me academic needs".

Unfortunately, Patience couldn't continue with the interview as she kept crying. One of the reasons behind her crying, we found out, was due to the fact that she lost her dad. We couldn't continue to probe since she kept weeping with our probe.



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# Trafficked 2 School Project outline Student Sponsorship

When we called out Kwame's name during our bicycle donation workshop at the beginning of April 2019, no one responded. No one responded because Kwame was not present, and he wasn't present because it was exam time and he wasn't able to pay the small exam fee necessary to continue to take the test which would determine if he passed to the next grade. When we were told this by his teacher we considered... it doesn't make very much sense to donate a bicycle to a student for the purpose of going to school when that student can't go to school, now does it? So we asked some more questions, talked with the school, and discovered that Kwame is a recently transitioned survivor of fishing slavery, a system of human trafficking which is quite common in poor fishing communities along the Volta River and that he wasn't the only one, in fact there are 11 more students like him just at his school. We also put together that both the country of Ghana and our district has been issuing asks for help with the issue of child trafficking into fishing slavery, and we knew, we were the ones to help support our communities through this issue.

The Volta Revival Foundation has a grass-roots approach to reducing and disappearing slavery in Ghana. We do this by empowering those who are most effected by human trafficking, this means we want to support the growth of those child trafficking survivors by funding their education, training them as human rights advocates, and providing emotional support through the traumas received through the slavery system. We will train them so that they not only have a brighter future, but are also capable of advocating against the child trafficking industry, and with time, change the on the ground realities for the children who used to be them.

For all 12 students to receive a full and rich education through Junior High School, the Volta Revival Foundation is asking for \$15,000, which is roughly:

### \$1,200 PER STUDENT INCLUDING:

- School fees (5%)
- School books, supplies and clothes (20%)
- Food stipends (10%)
- Holiday gifts (5%)
- Health needs (10%)
- Counseling (10%)
- Tutoring (15%)
- Field Trips and Outings (5%)
- Community human rights workshops (10%)



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• School Human rights workshops (10%)

## Ways to help:

Our sustaining goal is to have 12 sponsors, one for each of our sponsoered children in order for all of them to get the support they need! We ask that all sustaining sponsors commit to at least seeing their student through their Juniro high education, high school may be more expensive due to the fact that most students must also pay boarding fees, therefore at the end of junior high we give each sponsor the option to continue at the same amount or to increase in order to help the student push through high school as well! After high school we also plan to give each of our students the opportunity to get technical skill training or to go to university!

One-time donation (\$30 = 1 students school fees for 1 year, \$100 = health needs for all students for 1 year, \$250 = 1 students needs for 1 year, or \$1000 = 1 students needs through Junior High School)

Monthly donation (\$30/monthly = 1\$ students needs for 1 year, \$60/monthly = 1\$ students needs for one year, \$100/monthly = 1\$ students needs through junior high school + 1 students needs for one year)

Sponsors of this project will receive:

- -Quarterly updates and photos on the progress of the students along with high light stories
- -One-time gift for those who donate \$250 or more
- -Yearly gift for monthly sponsor
- -Regular thank you letters and communication with the students

# **Community Advocacy Program**

Volta Revival Foundation has started community advocacy work aimed at educating and discouraging parents from trafficking their children into all kinds of labor. The organization shall commence a full scale independent research into child trafficking in Ada-East and Ada-West by December 2019. The outcome of the research shall be as a dash board to launch formal advocacy work in the two districts. The advocacy shall target political authorities, chiefs, community leaders, government agencies, religious bodies, media houses, parents and other stakeholders.

Our budget for this project initially is \$3,000.

# **Petitioning the Government of Ghana**



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The outcome of the research shall also serve as credible stepping stone to petition the central government and the local government to act in enforcing its laws on child trafficking. The petition shall specifically remind the government of Ghana of her obligations under the UNICEF treaties. We are also working to build a local team of survivor advocates who can work towards pressuring the government. Specifially on a legislative level the Ghana Hauman Trafficking Act of 2005 is much too broad as has been described by many Ghanaian legal professionals and as such raises a number of concerns that need to be addressed to ensure its effective enforcement. For instance, the meaning of trafficking in the Act has been so defined as to make it ambiguous to determine what is meant by "force", "deception", "harbouring" or "exploitation of vulnerability.". Such issues within legislation will be duly addressed in any henceforth petition.

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