

# CENTER ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESEARCH & OUTREACH

## African Programming & Research Initiative to End Slavery

### Sierra Leone Implementation Projects

The mission of the Center on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach (CenHTRO) is to conduct research, develop programming, and influence policies that drastically and measurably reduce human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. We are an interdisciplinary center housed within the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia (UGA), with current engagements in 10 countries across the world.

### Program to End Modern Slavery Award (PEMS)

CenHTRO has received a PEMS award from the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to reduce the prevalence of all forms of child trafficking in Sierra Leone by conducting targeted prevalence baselines and developing programming that builds off this research. World Hope International (WHI) is CenHTRO's implementing partner in Sierra Leone on two Prevention and Response to Child Trafficking in Persons (PARC-TIP) projects.

### Sierra Leone Baseline Study Findings

- **The overall rate of child trafficking, based on direct prevalence estimates, was 33% in the Eastern Province among the household sample of children aged 5–17 years old. The highest rates of child trafficking were found in Kono (45.7%), followed by Kailahun (32.9%), and Kenema (26.6%).**
- **Survivors reported unaddressed needs post-trafficking which could increase their vulnerability to re-trafficking or exploitation.** For example, survivors described lacking resources to pay school fees, having unmet medical and psychosocial needs, as well as housing needs post-trafficking. Key informants reported a lack of basic resources (such as staffing, funding, and transportation) to support survivors in their recovery. Comprehensive reintegration services do not appear to be present in local communities.
- Reports from key informants and community members who participated in focus groups indicate that **there is a lack of sustainable collaboration and trust between local authorities (such as paramount chiefs) and governmental authorities** which results in an uncoordinated response to child trafficking, difficulty in reporting child trafficking incidents, and disruptions in prosecutions of traffickers.



# Prevention and Response to Child Trafficking in Persons (PARC-TIP): Survivor Protective Services and Judicial Support (Survivor Project)

**AGENCY:** World Hope International (WHI)

**INTERVENTION:** Prosecution, Protection

**LOCATIONS:** Kono, Kenema, Kailahun, Freetown

**TIMELINE:** February 2021-March 2023

**IDENTIFIED GAPS:** Psychosocial, community, and judicial support for survivors of trafficking

**TARGET POPULATION:** Child survivors of trafficking

The WHI Survivor Project aims to strengthen the prosecution of perpetrators, provide shelter and psychosocial services, and ensure community support for the successful reintegration of survivors. During its implementation from February 2021 to March 2023, the project aims to serve 93 child trafficking survivors and their families through its Recovery Centre in Freetown and through services provided to survivors who reside in other shelters or communities. The project also provides logistical support to Family Support Units (FSUs<sup>1</sup>) to carry out investigations of child trafficking and facilitates coordination among three government ministries (Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, and Ministry of Justice) to expedite court proceedings of child trafficking cases. The project personnel include staff members with training, experience, and expertise in the assessment of trafficking survivors' needs, implementation of psychosocial therapy and life skills training, and assistance with legal processes.

## Protection

WHI operates its Recovery Centre, the only confidential shelter for survivors of child trafficking in the country. Upon admission to the Recovery Centre, child survivors' needs are assessed and, if needed, referred for additional medical or psychiatric care. As part of a pilot research study, WHI counselors receive training and implement child-centered play therapy for child survivors who are up to 12 years old while survivors between 13 and 17 years old continue to receive cognitive therapy. Every child survivor is offered individual and group counseling sessions as well as ongoing educational support and life skills training. In preparation for child survivors' reintegration to communities, WHI social workers assess the safety and suitability for child survivors to return to their families and communities followed by continued support during reintegration marked by a handover ceremony in the community. Based on assessments of child survivors and their families' needs, WHI also provides reintegration packages and income generating activities to help families become empowered and self-reliant in caring for their children.

## Prosecution

WHI also provides legal assistance for child survivors at the Recovery Centre by supporting the investigation of their trafficking cases and advocating for the successful prosecution of the child traffickers. Community members and key community leaders of each hotspot are trained and sensitized to identify and report on crimes against children, including child labor, human trafficking, and indecent work. FSUs receive training and logistical support to fully investigate the reported child trafficking cases. WHI also works alongside various ministries to advocate for expedient, decentralized court hearings that protect the rights of children. By the end of the project, 25 of 60 child trafficking cases will be presented in court and 8 cases will result in successful convictions as evidence of timely and appropriate prosecution of perpetrators.

<sup>1</sup> Family Support Unit (FSU) is the police branch that deals with sexual violence and abuse, especially cases involving children, as well as child abuse and domestic issues.

# Prevention and Response to Child Trafficking in Persons (PARC-TIP): Community Awareness and Policy Implementation (Community Project)

**AGENCY:** World Hope International (WHI)

**INTERVENTION:** Prosecution, Protection

**LOCATIONS:** Kono, Kenema, Kailahun

**TIMELINE:** February 2021-March 2023

**IDENTIFIED GAPS:** Collaboration with law enforcement, policy makers, and local communities to increase understanding and beset practices of child trafficking

**TARGET POPULATION:** Law enforcement, community leaders and members, upper primary and junior school-level students

The WHI Community Project aims to strengthen the harmonization and enforcement of local policies to protect children and implement community sensitization (awareness) efforts to prevent child trafficking. The target populations are local authorities (Paramount Chiefs, inter-religious council heads, District Councils, City Councils, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, and Ministry of Justice), community groups (Village Parent Groups and Child Welfare Committees), and upper primary (Class 4-6) to junior school-level (JSS 1-3) students in the districts of Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun. The project activities are implemented with the goal of changing attitudes, practices, behavior, and knowledge linked to menpikin and other forms of child trafficking.

## Prosecution

WHI collaborates with local government and community leaders to establish bylaws that are harmonized with the National Anti-Human Trafficking Act, the Child Rights Act, adoption laws, Three Gender Acts, Sexual Offenses Act, and other relevant legislation. In Kenema, advocacy meetings are held with their 16 paramount chiefs and 2 inter-religious council heads to identify gaps in local government awareness and bylaws. Based on this, a training manual is designed to address gaps in awareness and harmonize existing bylaws to include protection against child trafficking. These leaders then prepare and cascade information to members of their respective chiefdoms. Similar training is provided to the three District Councils in Kenema, Kono, and Kailahun and the two City Councils in Kenema and Kono.

## Protection

WHI supports collaboration to strengthen and streamline the existing referral process for survivors of child trafficking. Through focus group discussions on current laws and practices, a common referral process will be established to ensure timely and appropriate protection of child trafficking survivors by the end of the project.

## Prevention

WHI strengthens partnerships with local authorities and community groups to identify and prevent menpikin practices linked to child trafficking. Meetings with paramount chiefs, Ward Development Committees, law enforcement, religious leaders, and community members inform processes for documenting menpikin cases and preventing child trafficking. New and existing Village Parent Groups and Child Welfare Committees also receive training to disseminate information on child trafficking to schools and other community groups. In addition, WHI partners with the Children's Forum Network to facilitate activities through school clubs to raise awareness of child trafficking among students in upper primary and junior school-levels.



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