Survivor Stories

Emmanuel Arthur: Once Left for Dead, Today Dreams of Future

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Emmanuel was robbed of freedom and an education before he could ever enroll in school. He nearly drowned in Lake Volta. But he survived the horrors of slavery—now he dreams of a bright future. Emmanuel was a slave before he could be a student.

The Cruel Cost of Poverty

His mother sold him into slavery before he ever had the chance to enroll in school. Poverty often forces vulnerable families into desperate situations. Children often pay the price. Emmanuel knows his mother took money from his trafficker, but he doesn't know how much.

Emmanuel was enslaved in a fishing village on Lake Volta, the biggest reservoir in the world. In this huge expanse of water, storms can easily capsize small vessels and kill all those aboard. Children are forced to dive into perilous waters to retrieve tangled nets. Many never resurface.

The poverty that leads to modern slavery deprives many children of their basic rights to education and freedom. It can also cost them their lives.

A Terrifying Encounter on the Lake

Emmanuel's slave holders did not beat him, but he was forced him to work day and night on dangerous, deadly fishing boats. He was under threat of violence and unable to walk away.

On one terrifying expedition, Emmanuel nearly drowned when an older slave threw him overboard and left him for dead in the powerful waters. “I was nearly killed by an older boy,” he says. A friend of his trafficker managed to rescue him—but he was still trapped in slavery.

Frightened and forsaken, Emmanuel could trust no one. The young boy started asking for his mother. His slave holders ignored him.

Freeing Emmanuel

Ignorance of laws outlawing slavery, as well as laws to punish, prosecute, and imprison perpetrators of child trafficking, exacerbates the modern slavery crisis in Ghana. The ignorance that leads to slavery also keeps it hidden—making it harder for the public to see and for vulnerable villagers to understand, and for those in slavery to call out for help.

FTS and our partners work on the front lines to educate communities on the risks of modern slavery. Our grassroots engagement efforts teach villagers their rights and help build resistance to child trafficking.

At a local meeting, Emmanuel’s father heard about the need to protect Ghanaian children. He is divorced from Emmanuel’s mother, but he insisted she call for their son’s return—or he would call for her arrest. His mother took action.

Emmanuel returned to his village after being a slave for three years. Since being freed, he has reported on other children enslaved by the same trafficker who preyed on him. “I know three children from this community that are still where I was sent,” he says.

Supporting Sustainable Freedom

Our Community-based Model for Freedom emphasizes the need to create viable economic alternatives to slavery and foster sustainable systems that resist re-enslavement. FTS is committed to freeing slaves, telling survivor stories, and supporting both freed slaves and their families.

After her son’s release, Emmanuel’s mother received training in business skills and financial literacy to help her develop a small business. Emmanuel was at last enrolled in school. International Needs Ghana, an FTS partner, supplied him with tuition fees, books and school uniforms. Today he is a pupil at a local primary school and wants to be a professional soccer player or a medical doctor.

As a child slave, Emmanuel could not think about his future. Today he is getting an education, making friends, enjoying his childhood, and looking forward to a life of self-reliance and freedom.

“I ask all traffickers to return children back to their mothers,” he says, in the hope other victims get the chance he has now as a survivor—to dream of a bright future.

The Growing Up Free Initiative

In June 2015 the Ghana government signed a Child Protection Compact Partnership with the United States. This partnership facilitates an investment of up to $5 million in U.S. foreign assistance to aid the government and Ghanaian civil society in reducing child trafficking and slavery, and improving child protection throughout the country.

The initiative supports the formation and implementation of a comprehensive, integrated plan for prevention, rescue, prosecution, rehabilitation, reintegration, education, wrap-around social services, the development of market-based livelihoods for vulnerable families, and the formation of communities united in the determination to drive slavery from their midst.

Growing Up Free embodies FTS' proven Community-based Model for Fighting Slavery. Our model's core principle is to create local assets that offset the most salient vulnerabilities that lead to modern slavery: lack of awareness, the absence of strong protective community organizations, household insecurity such as poverty or illness, inadequate legal protections, and survivor vulnerability to re-enslavement.

Growing Up Free pledges to build capacity, educate and mobilize, meet basic needs, and change attitudes and practices in Ghana.

To learn more, visit www.freetheslaves.net or email Ghana@freetheslaves.net.

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