

Growing Up Free

Ending Child Trafficking in Ghana



Fishing and Modern-Day Child Slavery

Ghana's abundant natural wealth and stable democracy propelled the country to reclassification as a middle-income country in 2010. Yet deep inequalities persist, trapping millions of families in seemingly intractable poverty. Children in severe poverty are at an increased risk for trafficking. Desperate parents send their children away with traffickers when they see no viable option to care for them at home, in exchange for up-front payment or acceptance of false promises of earnings that will be sent home. Children, some as young as 4, are forced to endure 14-hour days of work on Lake Volta with very little food, clothing or rest; they are subjected to regular beatings. Their health is further impaired by hours spent in the depths of the parasite-infected lake, risking their lives untangling nets and hauling in hundreds of kilograms of fish per day.

Growing Up Free Initiative

In June 2015 the Ghana government signed a Child Protection Compact Partnership with the United States. The partnership will facilitate 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. Growing Up Free will focus on children enslaved in the Volta region's fishing industry and the communities of the Volta, Greater Accra and Central Regions that were once their homes. The initiative will facilitate 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 their determination to drive slavery from their midst.



Growing Up Free Strategy

Growing Up Free will embody the Free the Slaves *Community-based Model for Fighting Slavery*. This model's core principle is to create local assets that offset the most salient vulnerabilities that lead to modern slavery: a lack of awareness of one's rights; a lack of awareness of the risks posed by what seem like plausible schemes presented by traffickers; the absence of strong protective community organizations that serve as buffers against those who perpetuate slavery; household insecurity that traffickers can exploit, especially deficits in income, schooling, health and shelter; inadequate legal protections, which reduces the risk to slaveholders and traffickers; and survivor vulnerability to re-enslavement fueled by trauma, poverty, inability to attend school, lack of marketable job skills, social stigma, and gender and other discrimination.

Growing Up Free Activities

Building Capacity

Growing Up Free will build Ghana's capacity to respond to child trafficking by training and providing ongoing technical assistance to a network of civil society organizations, government agencies and individuals that protect children at each stage of abuse or vulnerability in communities affected by fishing, sex and domestic service trafficking of children.

Educating & Mobilizing

Using mass media advertising campaigns and an innovative child rights community learning group curriculum, Growing Up Free will educate and mobilize communities to identify children who have been trafficked into fishing slavery, commercial sex and domestic service, and refer them for direct rescue or supported return. Growing Up Free will train nonprofits and the Ghana Police Service to support rescues on the lake when needed.

Meeting Basic Needs

Growing Up Free will assure that families of children rescued through this program and identified as at-risk in program communities will be able to provide for the basic needs of their children, including shelter, food, healthcare and education. Services will include programs to develop financial literacy; opportunities to train for small-scale farming, livestock rearing and other locally appropriate vocations; apprenticeships and jobs in preferred businesses; access to seed capital for new micro-businesses; and access to community-based savings and loans cooperatives. Livelihoods that provide for the basic needs of families are critical to the long-term success of rehabilitation and to preventing slavery or re-enslavement.

Changing Attitudes and Practices

Growing Up Free will increase public awareness and knowledge of child trafficking in Ghana to prevent child trafficking from occurring and promote appropriate community action when child trafficking is suspected. A community-based child rights model will mold parents, community groups, and local government agencies into a unified force for prevention and rescue. It equips communities to identify child exploitation, decide on local solutions, take concerted action to protect children, and address systemic issues. The project will conduct a baseline study of prevalence and awareness in target area source and destination communities. The findings will shape the development of a context-specific educational curriculum of illustrated stories based on the local dynamics of child slavery and exploitation and designed to promote change in knowledge, attitudes and practices in favor of child rights and protection. The program will establish child rights clubs for children at local schools, and will train local assembly members that represent their communities.

