



Background

Challenging Heights works to address the worst forms of child labour and child trafficking in the fishing industry on Lake Volta and children in domestic servitude. More of Ghana's growing young population are being affected by poverty, a lack of parental understanding of how to protect them from abuses, as well as weaknesses in the country's social protection systems. This is worsened by deficiencies in law and policy enforcement and in implementing good practice to address these problems.

Research studies have evidenced the nature, scope and characteristics of the issues of child trafficking, hazardous child labour and domestic servitude in Ghana. A 2016 baseline scoping study by the International Justice Mission indicated that more than half of the 771 children working on Lake Volta who were interviewed had been trafficked, and that Winneba is one of the source communities they originate from. The US State Department's Trafficking in Persons' report in 2022 identified Ghana as a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. The problem of child trafficking and child labour occur between Ghana's regions, as well as across borders with neighbouring countries and internationally to Arabian Gulf countries. Based on statistics from the 2021 Global Slavery Index and the impact of COVID-19, it is safe to assume that the number of children on the move in Ghana has increased from the 2018 baseline figure of 193,100 Ghanaians living in conditions of modern slavery.

Sociocultural and climatic factors also influence migration within Ghana and to other countries, fueling the movement of children for exploitation. Challenging Heights' research work with Anti-Slavery International and the International Institute for Environment and Development in 2021 indicated that climate change has influenced the movement of children from coastal areas to the Volta Lake and from Northern Ghana to cities and towns.¹

Principles guiding our approach to delivering the interventions

General Principles Guiding Our Work

- **Rights-Based Approach:** We use a rights based approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. We empower rights holders through information on Ghana's constitution, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child, and the Children's Acts of Ghana, 1998, Act 560. Through workshops, emails, conferences and other advocacy related activities we create the interface for rights holders to demand and protect their rights from duty bearers.
- **Child Participation:** We work to encourage participation of children in decision making that affects their welfare and development. We use our child rights clubs in schools and

¹ The report can be found at:

https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ClimateMigrationReportSep2021_low_res.pdf

communities, and our rescue and recovery programme to seek and harvest the input of children in meeting their needs by designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating development projects.

- **Non-Discrimination:** We adhere to the non-discrimination principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We do not discriminate with regards to sex, religion, race and our organisation operates on a secular basis.
- **Behavioural Change:** We strongly believe that negative behaviour accounts for the problems that we face in Ghana and therefore, societal actors need to change their attitude to bring about the positive change we aim for in society. We therefore carry out sensitisation activities around societal values to change negative attitudes.

Specific Principles Relating to our Work

- **Quality Assurance:** We work to achieve quality assurance in our activities through our evidence-based system. We conduct baseline and end-line studies to measure the impact of our interventions which provides us with learning and best practices to improve our programmes and projects.
- **Gender focused:** We work to ensure gender equality and gender equity in the services we provide. We consciously implement gender-focused projects through affirmative action in recruitment into our programmes to bring a gender balance based on the needs of the work. For instance, we rescue more girls than boys in work on child domestic servitude, and vice versa for our trafficking project.
- **Team Work:** We promote teamwork to synergise efforts and build the capacity of staff internally or externally through advanced courses that will support the delivery of our programmes.

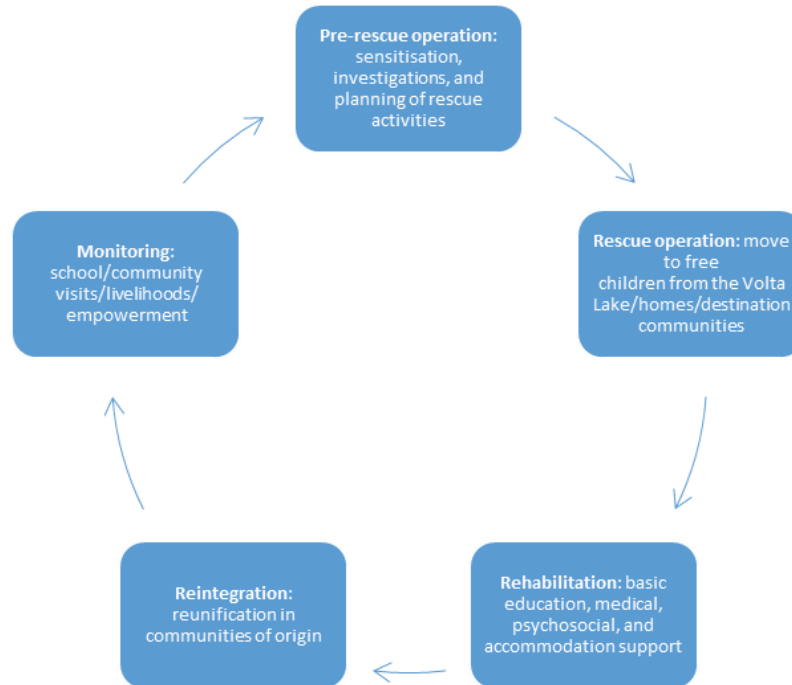
What we do

Challenging Heights' interventions focus on the following services to ensure the rights and the dignity of children on the move are protected:

- Direct rescue from Lake Volta of trafficked children identified as victims;
- Holistic rehabilitation of children at our bespoke recovery centre for survivors of trafficking/children on the move;
- Community reintegration of children on the move supported through long-term monitoring;
- Raising awareness of trafficking and the situation of unaccompanied children on the move, as well as about support systems so that no person can claim ignorance of the law. We do this through community sensitisation events and educational broadcasts;
- Embedding good practice in communities by supporting a network of Community Child Protection Committees;
- Taking action, where appropriate, against individual traffickers and those who assist them, including through community arbitration in the case of child labour and the prosecution of trafficking offenders where it is in the best interest of the child to do so;
- Providing school-based education to children in source communities so the risk of being trafficked is reduced significantly.

Flowchart

The following flowchart represents the process for delivering our Rescue and Recovery services to children:



The intervention explained

Rescue and Recovery Programme for children who have been trafficked: Challenging Heights takes a holistic approach to preventing the trafficking of children and protecting those at risk of being trafficked or re-trafficked, using interventions at multiple levels to ensure sustainable outcomes. This has yielded a significant reduction in child trafficking in the areas where we work with no cases to date of re-trafficking amongst those children we have rescued and rehabilitated.

Our Rescue and Recovery Programme activities are comprehensive and cumulative, providing victims with holistic rehabilitation in all areas including physical health, education, behaviour and trauma-sensitive psychology. We begin this rehabilitation support from the moment we rescue each child or receive them into our shelter from other organisations who have rescued them. After a period of about six to nine months and once they are ready, we reintegrate each child into the community.

We then support each child's reintegration for two years through a programme of ongoing monitoring, and educational assistance to the children. In 2023, we redesigned our monitoring to ensure that beneficiaries are either educated to tertiary level, or successfully complete their technical vocational skills training. We combine this with providing livelihood support for their families and carers, including skills training, economic opportunities and microfinance.

Pre-Rescue: We perform investigation-based rescue operations for children who have been trafficked from their communities to destination communities along Lake Volta. Our team works with

Community Child Protection Committee members to identify children trafficked into slavery from their communities. We also get referrals from our sensitisation programmes (video shows, open space durbars (meetings), dramas etc) which educate citizens on referral mechanisms (reporting to the Ghana Police, Social Welfare and Community Child Protection Committees). The list is kept from the public as someone could inform the traffickers of the pending rescue operation.

Rescue: Rescues usually span a two-week period. Due to the risky nature of the rescues, which can involve tussles with slave-masters and for us to have statutory permission, we always move with the Ghana Navy and the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service. They protect our team from harm and also arrest traffickers on the spot if they show strong resistance. Most times, we have been successful through the use of moral persuasion to free the children, but on a few occasions we have arrested the slave-masters and prosecuted them.

Rehabilitation: Our rescues are followed by rehabilitation of survivors. These interventions are delivered through our case management system in which each child is supported on the basis of his/her unique situation. Upon admission at the shelter, the children are medically screened for any treatments they may need. In addition, the findings from the screening also determines the class level of the student, and his or her medical and therapy needs. We use a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder tool to measure their behavioural patterns and how well they relate to their peers and staff of the shelter. Our recovery team provides counselling, including both individual and group counselling, to solve behavioural issues before they are reintegrated into their communities. Our rehabilitation process lasts from three to six months, during which time each child will have several reviews on their education, health and psychosocial development. When they meet the criteria for reintegration, children are reunited with their parents.

Reintegration and Monitoring: Following their return, we place children either in mainstream education or an apprenticeship to learn a trade. Whilst learning, we monitor the children by providing them with mainstream school support (school fees, supplies) and provide those in apprenticeships with tools and equipment to enable them to learn on the job. The tools also help them work to make money whilst learning on the job and also start-up capital. We have revised our programme to provide long-term monitoring support to the children so that they achieve financial independence to fight poverty.

Our complementary programmes: The long-term success of our Rescue and Recovery Programme relies on there being local community resistance to the trafficking of children, something that has been lacking historically. Increasing the level of community resistance to child trafficking is therefore integral to our work, helping us to secure the future of those rescued from Lake Volta and to reduce the number of potential new victims who are being moved. We do this by developing and supporting community volunteer groups that advocate for children's rights, investigate suspected cases of trafficking or cases of concern, work to achieve the voluntary return of victims and lobby for local government investment in anti-trafficking initiatives. We also carry out district wide sensitisation and education to raise awareness of trafficking and unsafe movement of children and its consequences.

As well as rescuing and rehabilitating those who have already been trafficked, we help to prevent trafficking in the first place through our livelihood and advocacy programmes.

The major cause for children at risk of being trafficked is poverty and lack of opportunity. Our livelihoods programme seeks to empower women and young people, also focusing on carers of

children at risk. Our Youth Empowerment Programme gives disadvantaged young people the technical skills they need to get on in life, including IT training. Our Women's Economic Empowerment Programme seeks to ensure that families can care for and protect their children themselves. We provide training that women can use to run their own successful business including in soap making, horticulture and fish preservation. We also run a community smoke oven to provide a year-round supply of fish to the local market in our operating areas. Micro-finance is provided to enable them to set up and grow their businesses.

Case Study

Name: Yaw (not his real name)

Age: 15 years

Date: 5th April, 2022

Yaw lived with his biological parents and was not in school. His parents hail from Winneba where he was born and can speak Fante and Effutu very well. His mother took him to Yeji Sukpekope to stay with his aunt, her husband and their five children. At Sukpekope, Yaw was never enrolled in school but was instead required to fish. He began working from the age of 6 until he was rescued 9 years later. His biological mother moved to work in Accra and was remitted by his aunt for the work he did on the Lake, but he was not told how much his mother was given. He fished every day apart from the day his aunt went to the market to sell. Yaw's mother visited him once, but he sometimes had telephone calls with her. He never heard from his father.

Whilst living with his aunt, he was fed inconsistently, and was starved as a punishment. He was regularly physically and verbally abused anytime he was considered to have behaved badly, including by being beaten by a cane, rope, paddle, wire, sponge, belt and slippers.

Yaw notes that one day, he was working on the lake with his aunt's son when a boat containing police and other officers on board approached them and he was asked some few questions. Afterwards, the officers told him that his father had asked them to pick him up and to take him to the Challenging Heights' shelter. He was very happy about that. This is because he once tried escaping but he was caught and severely beaten. Yaw was sent to Challenging Heights' temporary shelter at Atebubu for a few days before he was sent to the recovery centre at Agona Swedru.

Yaw is now at the Challenging Heights' recovery centre receiving rehabilitation services. He has improved his basic literacy and numeracy skills by learning how to recite the alphabet and numerals, a prerequisite for his re-enrolment in school. However, he needs more tuition to perform mathematical calculations, and to form basic sentences. Health-wise, he had a thorough screening upon which he was cured of bilharzia (a water-borne disease), skin rashes and an ear infection. Yaw has received Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder therapy and is beginning to relate well with his peers and staff at the shelter. He enjoys playing games with his friends and is now provided with three meals a day, clothing and accommodation to ensure he recovers in a sound environment before his reunification at home.

Stakeholders involved

Our interventions are delivered by a number of teams based on their expertise and the support needed by the children. We have a **rescue team** which consists of a boat crew, a Senior Manager

for Rescue, Recovery and Community Engagements, and a social worker who also works in the rehabilitation team. The team needs to be trained in undercover investigation skills to enable them to gather intelligence for prosecution. They also need to be trained in prosecution and in how to identify and screen child victims of trafficking. Our **rehabilitation team** consists of teachers, house parents, cooks, security, and a Recovery Manager, while our reintegration team is made up of monitoring officers.

We also work with government agencies in implementing our work, including the Anti Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service for our rescue operations, as it has the mandate to rescue victims of modern slavery, prosecute traffickers and deliberate with other stakeholders in law and policy design. We have also worked with the Human Trafficking Secretariat under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, to design the National Plan of Action to eliminate Human Trafficking, 2022-2026. We share with them our annual data on rescue and recovery, livelihood and advocacy. We work with the Department of Social Welfare to rehabilitate, reintegrate and monitor the children that we have reintegrated.

What has changed?

We have achieved the following outputs over eighteen years of operations in Ghana.

1. Approximately 1,800 child survivors of modern slavery have been rescued and recovered.
2. Approximately 1,800 caregivers have been economically empowered.
3. More than 100,000 citizens have been empowered with increased knowledge and understanding to fight modern slavery.
4. We have advocated to add/change/influence laws, policies, plans and practices to fight modern day slavery in Ghana.
5. We have assisted with the prosecution of at least 2 traffickers/offenders.
6. Increased referrals leading to the generation of our rescue list.

Our outcomes have been to:

1. Restore the rights and dignity of survivors rescued and recovered.
2. Secure the economic independence of caregivers through economic empowerment.
3. Deter potential traffickers as a result of successful prosecutions.
4. Develop proactive citizen responses to fight modern slavery.

Why it works

Top factors contributing to the success of the intervention

Our approach to protecting trafficked children has worked due to the investigative nature of our work, the experienced staff, our holistic models of recovery, our monitoring and evaluation work and partnership.

Investigative Rescue Operations: we conduct investigative rescue operations to free children on the move who are enslaved in labour or sexual exploitation. We work with our community structures, the Community Child Protection Committees, volunteers and individuals to identify children trafficked to destination communities along the Volta Lake, and collect demographic data and other information from them. This gives us a high chance of freeing the children from oppression and easing family tracing and reintegrating their children with biological parents/alternative care systems.

Holistic recovery model: Following rescue, we rehabilitate survivors through a trauma-informed care programme to ensure they recover fully from what they have experienced before reintegrating them into their communities of origin. We provide them with counselling and therapeutic care support, in addition to accommodation, food, clothing, medical, basic literacy education, entertainment and the chance to play with their peers. We make sure they get fully fit before we send them into their communities. We work in the best interests of the children by either sending them to school or sourcing apprenticeships to help them acquire employable skills for a living.

Monitoring and Evaluation: We have a robust monitoring and evaluation system that helps us to remain innovative in our programme implementation through a regular feedback process. We recently digitised our data collection through the use of specialist software inputted on tablet computers.

Experienced Staff: We have experienced staff who have worked with the organisation for more than ten years implementing our anti child trafficking work. Some of these staff are survivors of modern slavery, while others worked as civil servants and researchers before joining Challenging Heights - bringing diverse experience and expertise to benefit our work

Partnerships: We do not work in isolation; working closely with the statutory authorities as well as leveraging the efforts of other civil society organisations. We work with key government institutions with mandates to protect the rights of children, including: the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations; the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development; and the Ghana Police Service, amongst others. Challenging Heights is a founder and an executive member of the Coalition of NGOs against Child Trafficking, Civil Society platform for Social Protection and the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition.

Transparency and Accountability: A key aspect of our work is to gain the trust of partners to develop and share our annual reports and audit accounts with them. We have shared these documents with partners over the years and recently passed the equivalency determination assessment conducted by Techsoup in South Africa.

Challenges

The following are some of the key challenges in our rescue and recovery operations:

Slave-masters' resistance: Our rescue team always finds it difficult freeing enslaved children from their slave-masters due to the economic loss they may experience when the children are freed.

Solution: We collaborate with the Anti Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Ghana Navy and the traditional authority to persuade slave-masters and traffickers to free the

victims.

Ignorance by victims of reporting mechanisms: Most children who are trafficked are unaware of their rights and laws which protect these rights. As a result of that, they do not know where to report abuses and, even if they know, lack the confidence to report such cases.

Solution: We have been conducting sensitisation activities to educate people on the causes, effects and strategies to fight modern slavery. We always let them know the places to report abuses and also not to be threatened by slave-masters.

Weak state social protection: Ghana has a weak social protection system which makes the poor and survivors vulnerable, without the support of NGOs.

Solution: We have been advocating for the government to commit more resources to strengthen our existing social protection programmes, which include the School Feeding Programme, Capitation Grant and National Health Insurance Programme.

Resources needed

To achieve the objectives of our interventions to serve victims of child trafficking well, the following resources are needed:

Staff: Human resources are essential for us to implement our activities in protecting the rights and dignity of children in trafficking situations. We will not only increase personnel, but also amass a well-motivated and capacitated staff who will get trained regularly to solve challenging problems we come across. Where necessary, we engage external staff or consultants to implement projects as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills to our internal staff.

Funds: Our ten-year strategy indicates an average annual resource needs of USD2 million, and as a growing organisation, we need new funds for our expanded rescue and recovery, livelihood and advocacy programmes. We have therefore intensified our efforts in meeting our annual resource envelope needs of USD2 million.

Logistics: With an expanded logistical support, our operations will be facilitated to support our programmes implementation. This will give us the speed we need to meet our timelines by working within the communities to meet the needs of our clients.

Community Structures: The Community Child Protection Committees system is there and we will revive/strengthen dormant ones so we have constant eyes/ears working for us in the community. Where feasible, we form new CCPCs to support our interventions in our new project communities.

Further information

Website link for further detailed information: <http://challengingheights.org/>

