

Building CSO capacity end human trafficking from Sub-Saharan Africa

On 22nd January 2013, the PICUM gathered together 27 leading Nigerian NGOs in Nigeria's capital city, Abuja for a one-day capacity building training. As the anchor of the Beyond Irregularity project in Nigeria, under which this training was taking place, I asked myself, what can we achieve in one day? Well!! A lot was achieved!! NGO representatives seized the power of the participatory sessions of workshop, steering the debates and discussion around questions of primary importance to them, PICUM and IPPR. They asked - why are the youth of Africa still risking their lives to make the perilous journey to Europe despite the numerous stories of death in the desert? They also asked why are there so few NGOs working to end human trafficking how they could be strengthened to do more and increase networking across the sub-region?

The passion and the frustration with which participants deliberated on reasons for the continuing outward flow of youth to Europe worried us all and made us all sit up. Stifling of opportunities for youth, the feeling of hopelessness, impunity, and corrupt practices were all push factors identified. Against this background, participants wondered out loud – why shouldn't the youth leave? At least they may have a chance on the other side. But it was the second question about the work these NGOs are doing that gave us all hope and lightened the mood of the workshop. Representatives of the NGOs told stories meeting stranded returnees late at night at airports throughout Nigeria, of the tracing and resettlement services they provide and of the free legal aid provided through email for irregulars thinking of returning home.

Ironically, it was the comings and goings of the NGO representatives, sometimes disrupting the workshop, that turned out to be the greatest beacon of hope. Throughout the workshop, participants took calls quickly, giving advice to office staff or rushed out to police stations to handle urgent cases of sexual violence, trans-border child trafficking, coerced marriage of under-age girls or referrals to shelters for returnees. The activities of the NGOs gathered in that training room on the 22nd January showed the interconnectivity between human trafficking and broader issues of gender based violence, early marriage, child mobility, sexually transmitted infections and services provided or not provided by government agencies for returnees. NGOs were carrying out these activities with limited funding and capacity building support. While the information-driven morning session of the workshop sought to address capacity gaps, a lot more needs to be done to support NGOs working on human trafficking related areas. With knapsacks on their backs and quick response time, many of these groups are providing value for money services, meeting flights late at night and re-settling returnees who remind them of their brothers and sisters in the village. The day ended with the NGOs pledging to work together and expand networking across the sub-region. This was a day well spent in the fight against human trafficking.

Judith-Ann Walker (PhD)