



A Strategy to Tackle Sexual Exploitation in Kédougou is Underway

By Pape Amadou Fall | Published in La Gazette, December 23, 2021



A gold mining camp in Kédougou, Senegal.

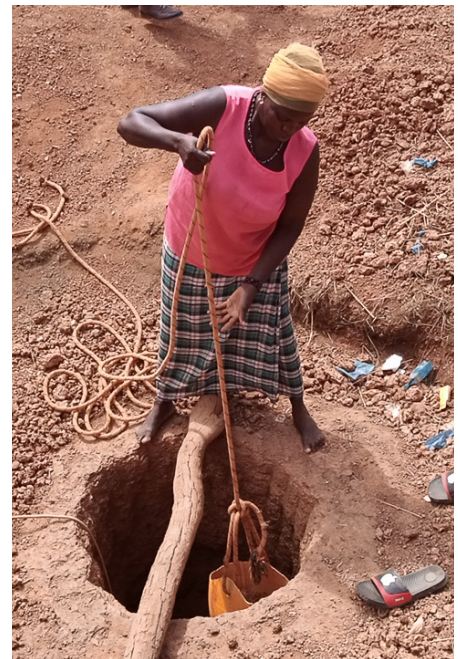
the Senegalese government reiterated its commitment to support and provide concrete responses to the fight against sexual trafficking of girls and young women in the gold mining region of Kédougou. Thus, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection, and the Ministry of Mines and Geology confirmed their role in implementing an enabling framework to fight sex trafficking in Senegal. Presenting their policies, programs, and projects related to this issue, they demonstrated that each of them has a role to play in prevention, protecting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators. These roles are essentially oriented towards the formulation of strategic guidelines, the implementation of an adequate institutional framework, taking appropriate measures, as well as the elaboration and follow-up of initiatives contributing to the elimination of sex trafficking causes, risks and consequences.

The African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery (APRIES), partnering with the National Unit to combat Sex-trafficking (CNLTP), are working on a strategy to support women and children who are victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking in the gold mining areas of Kédougou department. In a memorandum prepared after a virtual panel discussion on the protection of women and children in the gold mining areas of Kédougou last August, the participants noted that “due to its transboundary nature, the phenomenon of sexual exploitation in Kédougou requires a transnational approach in prevention, protection, and prosecution efforts, with victims coming from several Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries.”

According to the memorandum, it is crucial not only to systematically implement strategies and policies for the protection of women and children in Senegal, but also to adapt them to the fight against sex trafficking. Five points were identified during the discussions to ensure the success of the program implemented by APRIES, an international consortium that is part of the Center on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach (CenHTRO) at the University of Georgia. These five points are: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Research, and Partnership, as well as capacity building and sustainability. During this meeting,

Stakeholder Commitments

The U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office) reaffirmed its support to fight trafficking in persons and highlighted that efforts to protect, strengthen law enforcement, and increase prevention are key to significantly reduce sex trafficking in Kédougou. The TIP Office fostered partnerships and welcomed the use of research and evidence-building to guide policy responses in a context where the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has created even more marginalized communities. For its part, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar announced that it will continue the work already underway and help improve anti-trafficking efforts in Senegal. Through support for the implementation of projects and programs to further improve the situation of human trafficking in Senegal, coordination of anti-trafficking activities, and the establishment of reflection and action frameworks, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar will continue its dynamic partnership with APRIES to combat sex trafficking. The Gaston Berger University in Saint-Louis, a stakeholder in the program, is committed to promoting a better understanding of the phenomenon through knowledge sharing and human trafficking research projects and studies. On the other hand, the Siggil Jigeen Network is committed to supporting the government and community stakeholders in the identification, assistance, and protection of victims. Moreover, the network can support prevention efforts through sensitization and training activities, as well as through the promotion of the family and women's leadership.



Transnational Organized Crime

The roundtable highlighted three key parameters that must be taken into account by the actors involved in the fight against sexual exploitation. These are the need for a transnational fight against a transnational challenge. At this level, the main challenge in the fight against sexual trafficking is its transnational nature, which involves several ECOWAS countries and beyond. It was pointed out that in Kédougou, sex trafficking takes place in a context of transnational organized crime and economic migration, which adds to its complexity. This challenge requires effective policy development and implementation in terms of security, coordination, and legislation beyond Senegal's borders. Capacity building in investigative techniques specific to transnational crime is therefore critical. Furthermore, the report highlights the need for prevention, protection, and prosecution initiatives that must incorporate a transboundary dimension. The second point concerns the operationalization of ongoing strategies, policies, and programs. At this level, Senegal has a number of policies, strategies, and instruments that all contribute to better protect girls from violence, including sexual exploitation. The main challenge lies in the prompt and effective implementation of these policies. A strong recommendation focused on prosecution plans that are often hampered by the lack of judicial cooperation between the countries involved. This issue is crucial since strengthening the system to identify and punish perpetrators is key to the strategy to combat sexual exploitation. However, this action is hindered by the lack of effective cooperation between the judicial actors of concerned countries.

The workshop recommended adopting an approach that takes into account the transnational nature of sexual exploitation through the implication of ECOWAS to fight sex trafficking and its transnational dimensions. This involves collaborating with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the concerned countries, in order to raise girls' awareness on the risks of sexual exploitation they face in Senegal, and to promote their access to information, justice, and basic social services. The Ministry of Women has already set up a toll-free hotline to alert and provide telephone-based support to children victims of abuse. A toll-free number covering the countries of origin of sex trafficking victims and survivors could be set up in a similar way.

It will be also necessary to increase reception and care capacities for victims in Kédougou and Saraya by creating shelters for victims and survivors who need support as well as medical and psychological monitoring, and sustain the work of the Bajenu Gox, who shelter victims. Advocacy was recommended for the effective implementation of laws and international standards on the protection of women and girls in the field of sex trafficking, capacity building, and community engagement in the fight, through awareness raising and training on the identification, orientation and protection of foreign women victims. The workshop also recommended a mapping of companies based in gold mining areas, and ensuring that their corporate social responsibility activities must be effective and oriented towards supporting girls living in these sites. In addition, the promotion of women's rights in legislation related to the mining sector should be strengthened and emphasized.

As for the prosecution of offenders and perpetrators of sexual predation and trafficking, the establishment of a framework for dialogue and consultation between the judicial actors of concerned countries will facilitate cooperation in criminal matters to fight transnational sex trafficking, and will allow a complete dismantlement of networks. Sex trafficking will be placed at the heart of the criminal policies of the various ECOWAS jurisdictions, as well as capacity building to deal with this phenomenon through the creation and training of special investigative units, both at the national and regional levels.

Authorities have noted the need to address challenges associated with the reintegration of victims. Indeed, once their traffickers have been arrested and prosecuted, many trafficking survivors continue to engage in sex work to find sources of income to meet their basic needs. Sex trafficking survivors may not be able to immediately return to their country or community of origin. Therefore, a greater involvement from countries of origin consular authorities and administrative authorities in Senegal is needed to help with the repatriation of survivors. Another strong recommendation is to increase prosecution of traffickers who settle in border villages, where they maintain their networks in Senegal and continue trafficking operations.