



**MAMA DORAH: UPLIFTING GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO COMBAT  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

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## Abstract

*Human trafficking is the second largest organized crime (superseded only by drug trafficking) where millions of children are trafficked annually (UNICEF). The average age of trafficked children is 12. This multibillion-dollar industry is a major issue throughout South Africa. However, a small area north of Soweto is home to a major ring of trafficking. The paper provides a brief history of the problem on trafficking throughout the world, but especially in Johannesburg, South Africa. This history will include some of the reasons that have led to the many street children who are at greatest risk for trafficking as well as how Mama Dorah came to open her home to these children for protection. This paper examines a simple intervention model between one multilingual and multi-racial community church that partnered with Mama Dorah to keep fifty orphaned children off the street, fed, educated and protected from human traffickers. This intervention was intentional and well planned but not without trials. The issues faced and how they were addressed is included. Finally, the paper encourages social workers, church leaders and the general audience on the importance of understanding the community needs and how to address those needs. Social work and faith communities/church leaders need to work together to address the growing needs of people.*

## Mama Dorah: Uplifting Grassroots Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a major problem all over the world (Amato-McCoy, 2011) and no doubt the problem increased during the World Cup in 2010 (Skinner, 2010) especially in South Africa. As a result of human trafficking in the West Rand of Johannesburg, Mama Dorah Mazibuko and a local congregation in South Africa stood together against the multi-billion dollar industry to prevent orphaned children from being lured into the human trafficking business.

The backstory to this partnership is that during a sabbatical from teaching over thirteen years ago, the author served as evaluator of a human trafficking prevention program in Northern Thailand. This led to working with her church in the Caribbean to help teach the local churches about caring for the oppressed and marginalized with preventing human trafficking of children as the focus. In South Africa, when the author learned of Mama Dorah's efforts to care for children at risk for human trafficking, she sought to know more. Initially, this project seemed to work outside the traditional social service system and as a social worker/pastor, the author was cautious of involvement. However, in the process of learning about the grassroots organization, Dorah's Ark as well as the founder, Mama Dorah, the author recognized the invaluable contribution being made to protect orphaned children. As a result, she encouraged her multicultural church to develop a deeper partnership with Mama Dorah to protect and provide for more children who were at risk.

This paper and subsequent presentation explores the ways in which the two worked together to protect vulnerable children despite the system that fought against the

efforts. The author served in a unique role of initially observing to becoming more deeply involved in the protection of children and partnership with Mama Dorah as social worker/pastor.

### **Human Trafficking**

Exploiting people through sex and labor is a problem that cuts across all nations throughout the globe. “Trafficking in persons refers to the illegal trade or sale of human beings for sexual exploitation or forced labour through abduction, the use or threat of force, deception and fraud” (Perkins, 2005, p. 54). While primarily attacking women and children, human trafficking impacts all people and is seen as modern day slavery. While it might look different in various cultures and countries, its impact can be felt worldwide (Manjoo, 2014). The prevalence of the problem is a challenge to measure as it frequently goes unreported and undetected (de Vries & Dettmeijer-Vermeulien, 2015). Accurate and detailed statistics are needed in order to really address the overall details of human trafficking. Without knowing who, what, when where, and how; effective intervention can’t occur (de Vries & Dettmeijer-Vermeulien, 2015).

According to the United Nations’ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2012), over 20 million people are estimated to be victims of forced labor around the world. This includes victims of human trafficking. Further, this report purports that at least 136 different nationalities were trafficked and detected in 118 different countries, showing evidence to the broad scope of persons impacted by this global social problem. While the official number according to the UN is 20.9 million, many suggest closer to 30 million as the incidence of human trafficking (Hall, 2014).

The statistics on Africa reveal that the highest incidence of person's trafficked are children. It is suggested that about 68% of all person trafficked in Africa are children. While reports indicate forced labor (49% of the cases) to be more common than sexual exploitation (36% of the cases) in Africa as compared to other world areas, there is no doubt that children are at risk for all forms of trafficking in Africa (UN Report, 2012).

### **South Africa**

Specific to South Africa, the issue of human trafficking while a historical problem, increased in intensity during the 2010 Soccer World Cup (van der Watt, 2015). While the 1996 constitution prohibits slavery, South Africa has no specific laws addressing human trafficking (Skinner, 2010). Skinner (2010) found during a three-week qualitative study as he interviewed people involved in human trafficking syndicates that the business was very active during the World Cup. One of the informants told Skinner said he “found a lucrative trade in child sex. The children, sold for as little as \$45, can earn more than \$600 per night for their captors” (2010, p. 54). His investigation led him to discover the South African government was either superficial in their response to address human trafficking or at times in support of the traffickers (Skinner, 2010).

### **Dorah's Ark**

With the increase in supply and demand of persons in trafficking during the 2010 World Cup in Johannesburg South Africa, it became evident to Mama Dorah that something needed to be done. As a Pastor's wife who was intent on ending the oppression of children living on the street, she decided to reduce the supply of children at risk for trafficking (Wolf-Branigin, Garza, & Smith, 2010). She decided she couldn't

wait for an organization to do something, so she began a grassroots organization to meet the needs that were growing daily.

At the time, Mama Dorah had been operating a soup kitchen with her own resources in an area called Roodepoort. She recognized more children on the streets and heard of the growing concern of children going missing in the area. The missing children were believed to be orphans who lived on the street. As a result, Mama Dorah allowed the children to stay in the soup kitchen so they were safe and off of the street at night. This eventually grew to making the soup kitchen a residence place for orphans living on the street (D. Mazibuko, personal communication, August, 2012).

Shortly after the inception of the project, a growing multicultural church with a focus of social justice and reaching all persons in need began ministering on the streets. Members of the church eventually heard about the project and the growing needs to help care for the children. Because the project wasn't falling under specified governmental requirements (mostly because the wait was too long to officially apply and receive approval), there was little assistance for Mama Dorah and her staff. Most of the staff worked for free, although many, like Nomsa Tshaba were qualified with qualifications in Childcare. However, their commitment to the children was deeper than earning a salary (N. Tshaba, personal communication, November, 2012).

The church was not only committed to social justice (Lupton, 2007) but the leaders were aware of the growing concern about children being kidnapped in the area. For several weeks, while not documented in the news, children attending Roodepoort Primary School in the same community as the church were receiving letters warning them of children being kidnapped while walking along home from school. The church

leaders considered how to respond but realized Mama Dorah was already responding but needed help to effectively care for more children. This is when the beginning of what continues to be an effective partnership between Cornerstone and Dorah's Ark began.

### **Partnership**

Like any effective partnership, the church was supportive and assisted Mama Dorah; not take over the project. The partnership began and continued to be grounded in mutual respect and a mutual focus on protecting children (Pulido, Miglietta, Cortez, Stovall, & Aviles de Bradley, 2013). The initial discussion centered on the mission of both the organization and the church. Since the church's mission is to 'Make Christlike Disciples' with a focus of being the hands and feet of Jesus in the community and the world and the mission of Dorah's Ark is "to provide the protections of shelter, sustenance, education, medical care, spiritual and emotional support, to needy orphans and vulnerable children in our area" (Constitution, 2015, p. 4), both felt they could accomplish more by working together.

Dorah's Ark continued to provide housing, meals, transport and fees for school, school uniforms and supplies as well as medical care. Cornerstone provided transport to youth group on Friday evenings and Sunday morning services (Sunday School and Children's church or regular church) as well as pastoral care. Additionally, Cornerstone bought about R3000 (approx. \$250 USD) of food each month, 'adopted' each child at Christmas (gift giving), and offered extracurricular activities some of which included being part of the annual Christmas play, annual Birthday Party for Jesus on Christmas Day after church, Bible quiz team, and the opportunity assist in jumble sales and other events at the church. There were approximately 30 children who attended on a regular



basis. All of the children gave their lives to Christ during a Friday night youth group and were baptized on a Sunday morning. The children regularly told people at Dorah's Ark they were members of Cornerstone or that Cornerstone was their church. While all of the staff continued to fellowship in their home congregations (most of them specific language groups like Zulu, Tswana, or other African languages), the children attended the English service church with many of their home cultures represented in the multicultural congregation.

### **A Model that Works**

As indicated previously, the essence of the success within this partnership was the mutuality (Pulido, Miglietta, Cortez, Stovall, & Aviles de Bradley, 2013). While the church, with its ample resources could have marched into the make-shift orphanage and attempted to be the Saviour to the children, it did not. The focus of the initial partnership was in asking Mama Dorah and the other leaders what they were doing that was working and where they were struggling and desired support. Because the leaders of the church aimed to empower the leaders of the orphanage, the focus stayed on what they were already doing and how to help them do it better and for more children (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012) rather than taking over or undoing something good.

In addition to the resources directly for the children, the church offered training and opportunities for the staff in the areas of Human Trafficking, HIV/AIDS care and counseling, Child Development training as well as basic counseling techniques to help the children cope as many of them were double orphaned and then taken advantage of by their extended families. Finally, the church offered support and respite as some of the members offered their homes to children as needed.

Each time someone from the church had ‘an idea’ about what might help the children the first question asked was whether this was something Dorah and the staff could be doing on their own. Finally, the focus shifted to whether or not it was sustainable and if it would really help or hinder (Corbitt & Fikkert, 2012) the mission of Dorah’s Ark.

### **Conclusion**

The Cornerstone leaders and Dorah’s Ark staff continue to partner for the good of both organizations. The life and excitement of having thirty children in children’s church and youth group, helped to revitalize a church that had previously struggled in their ministry to children. As the church reached out to her community, the partnership assisted a struggling organization by standing by them, encouraging them and supporting their efforts so they could continue to reach the children in the home as well as expand the numbers of a growing population of at-risk children and youth.

If churches seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus, rather than starting their own programs, they can consider looking for a program or service that is addressing the area of need God laid on their heart and partnering to help more people or help in a deeper way. Empowering a grassroots organization that is effectively meeting the needs of a population can extend the resources of both the community of faith and the organization.

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