

Child Tourism Prostitution in the Context of Development, In the Coastal Towns of Kenya.

This is a case study by Coast Women In Development steered Betty Sharon

Betty Sharon
Programmes Director
Coast Women In Development
P.O Box 12327 – 80117
Mombasa - Kenya

Sharon@coastwomen.org

Do not wait for extraordinary circumstances to do good action; try to use ordinary situations"

Jean Paul Richter

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Abstract:

My article examines the links between tourism and child prostitution in coast, Kenya. Efforts of the police and local NGO`s to prevent child prostitution including raids by the former tourist minister are discussed , as are events that lead elderly women prostitutes to turn girls at a tender age into prostitution to earn a living and the role of (retired) old tourists. The attempts to control the problem are largely fruitless owing to corruption. Although tourism is one of the most important industries in Kenya, concern about social impact of tourism is raised, since in this context the developments of both economic activities are related.

The Sexual Exploitation of Children on the Kenyan Coast.

- While tourism is the financial vigor of Kenyan economy, it is also the root cause of child prostitution in Kenya, being the single largest source of foreign exchange, the sector brings home 780,000 foreign visitors that earns Kenya about USD 500 million hard currency annually. But the Influx as well is not helping the society but affecting the environment in spite of the growing concern that tourism is contributing to a host of child sexual abuses.
- Most child prostitution incidents go unreported, but even when they're brought to light, authorities mostly do nothing. They downplay Mombasa, Malindi's role as a child-sex capital for fear that its thriving tourism industry would be affected. The laws don't help either, since they don't specifically address child prostitution or provide for stiff punishment of tourist offenders.
- The effort by Coast Women In Development to make press on the Government to stop child prostitution is hampered by the factor of the societal acceptance that the vice is an acceptable means of earning a living, to them nothing takes a man out of poverty faster than a daughter who has a white man as a boyfriend. In this rationale the young girls are encouraged by none other than their parents and relatives to look for older white men who will not only pay the girl for her services, but her family as well.
- The trend observes the locals tolerating pedophiles disguised as tourists, white men and women as old as between 70years to 80years sexually abusing youths as young as their grandchildren's age. The boy child is not spared besides there is an increase number of boys sexually exploited by foreign sex tourists. This practice is more predominance in Lamu which is now known as a place that attracts local and foreign men looking for young boys to satisfy their sexual interest.
- The study states that the organizers of tourist-oriented traditional dances use children in their shows, and it is not uncommon for tourists to request sexual favors of the performers the local and foreign tour agents too guide tourists to specific areas of the in the towns of Mombasa and Malindi where they can find children in prostitution..

- The famed raid by the former Minister for Tourism Hon Morris Dzero has not bear any fruit either, children are still lured into having sex with tourists along the beach. They are also forced to take nude photographs, which the tourists later use to produce pornographic material in their countries. High poverty level and pressure from parents are the main reasons given for the abuse.
- Hon Dzero told us that in his own way he had interviewed mothers of the three schoolgirls, who confirmed to him that they regularly offered their daughters, aged between 8 years and 14 years, to the tourists for sex in exchange for cash. It was also noted that even parents and other relatives initially willing to help, find themselves unable to cope with the additional responsibility of supporting their own children. As a result, parents are increasingly either sending these children out to the streets with instructions to return home with money or marrying them off at under age. So, what happens to a child with nowhere to go? What is the quickest way for a teenager to make money? For females, prostitution is usually the easiest option, and boys as well do opt for homosexuality .
- Frequent entreaties by the Kenya Association of Hotelkeepers and Caterers (KAHC) Coast branch chairman, Mr. Mohamed Hersi to the government to bar 29 listed international child sex abusers whose names and descriptions are on the internet from entering the country, have always fallen on deaf ears, even as the recent report by United Nations International Child Education Foundation (UNICEF) reveals that in the coastal part of Kenya, major hotels account for four per cent of child sex tourism while private villas and homes account for 12 per cent. Mr. Hersi moreover alleges that there can be a possibility of child sex abusers fleeing from mainstream hotels and finding new hideouts in the villas, small lodgings and private homes.
- What is even surprising is the fact that many of the children being exploited are not from the coast region but are imported from rural areas from around the country and some of the parents have to play a role in their children's entry into the trade. While the starting age of these sex workers wasn't revealed, the fact that they are in primary school puts them between ages 8 and 15 which is truly heartrending. The question is how can a country protect the innocence of its youth and help develop its children into mature and whole adults while they are exposed to such circumstances?

Child Prostitution:

- Prostitution of Children or child prostitution is a form of commercial sexual exploitation of children in which the child performs the services of prostitution for financial benefit. The term is habitually used to describe the prostitution of prepubescent or prepubescent children , however in legal definition the term usually refers to prostitution by a minor or persons under the age of eighteen years in Kenya .

- Child prostitution is one of the numerous abuses that dehumanize children in the coastal province of Kenya. Where children are not being enslaved into prostitution, they are being defiled, tortured and, at times, killed by the very people who are supposed to protect them. According to the study, child sexual exploitation in coastal part of Kenya exists in the form of child prostitution, incest, early child marriages, rape, sodomy, indecent assault, and defilement. The report notes that there are a number of children joining prostitution as a means of survival, high poverty level and pressure from parents were the main reasons given for the abuse.
- A client may negotiate an exchange directly with a child prostitute in order to receive sexual gratification or through an intermediary {pimp} who oversees the prostitutes activities for the profit. The provision of children for sexual purposes may also be an object of exchange between adults or sometimes their own parents.
- In Kenya child sex tourism is officially acknowledged as a problem requiring greater awareness raising, implementation of new legislation and a coordinated effort to protect and promote the rights of children. Although there is little data to verify the true scale of the problem, children are clearly vulnerable to such abuse given the levels of poverty and the large numbers of AIDS orphans and street children.
- Children in the sex industry are also often targets of sex tourists and as UNICEF report of 2006 estimates that some 30,000 Kenyan children are being exploited in the sex industry and that this figure is likely to be an underestimation due to the lack of monitoring and the social stigma inhibiting children from reporting abuses. Out of 250 girls we talked to in Ukunda 79 per cent are aged between 11 and 17, they admit to selling sex for cash at along the beach resorts and that most of their clients are retired European men.
- The ways in which children become exposed to sex tourism are numerous. Study implies that one of the ways that child sex tourists seek out children is under the guise of domestic workers in their private residences. The study reveals that this is practiced in Mombassa, Ukunda, and Malindi. On the beach resorts of Mombassa, both boys and girls appear to be sexually abused by male and female sex tourists. In some locations, there are suspicions that hotel staff brings children into hotels for abuse by sex tourists. Children also frequent the beach resorts catering for foreigners in order to make some money. This places them at risk from sex offenders as well as intermediaries who search for children to lure into the sex tourism industry.

Why Mombasa:



- The coastal city of Mombasa is one of Africa's major tourist destinations, with some of the best beaches in the world. Located on Kenya's Eastern coastline bordering the Indian Ocean, Mombasa has become popular for its exotic beaches, diverse marine life, world-class hotels and friendly people
- Mombasa has undoubtedly one of the best white sandy beaches in Africa. The warm waters of the Indian Ocean cater to all types of tourists: those looking for a quiet swim, a place for kids to play, deep-sea fishing, and water sports activities such as scuba diving and sailing. When coupled with its large selection of beachfront hotels, Mombasa becomes an ideal place for a vacation.
- In addition to its beautiful beaches, Mombasa offers a diverse cultural history. The City traces many of its cultural traditions to former Portuguese, Arab and British settlers – all of which have left a lasting influence on the City's food, architecture, and people. Tours of the town, safaris in game parks, and camping trips can all be included in your vacation plan.

Child sex tourism :

- *Child sex tourism* is a criminal multi-billion-dollar industry believed to involve as many as 2 million children around the world, the misdemeanor's spread is partially facilitated by today's tourist travel opportunities and infrastructures. In an effort to eradicate the practice, the **Coast Women In Development (CWID)** has committed herself to fighting the sexual exploitation of children in Kenya through a combination of information {Networks}, prevention, concrete projects and advocacy for policy and enacted laws to allow prosecution of tourists of child abuse, even if it is not against the law in their home country. For example, the Code of Conduct for the protection of children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism

The brutal circles of sexual exploitation

- The study uncovered a unique feature of child prostitution in Coast, where people take in needy children but instead of caring for them, they hire the children out as prostitutes from time to time. Some children are also kept in brothels alongside adult prostitutes .
- Another form of child sexual exploitation that the study notes is homosexual sex tourism, particularly for the boy child. This practice is associated with not only Mombasa but the coastal towns of Mombasa, Malindi, and Lamu. Tourist agents - both local and foreign - are known to direct and guide tourists to special child prostitutes. Production of child pornography is also found to be widespread in these towns.
- During the low tourism season, local demand sustains the sexual exploitation of children. Children involved in prostitution are also compelled to provide sex to locals who help them gain access to tourists, such as beach boys, bar staff, waiters and others. These illegal activities involve tour operators, hotels and well-connected agents. Girls working in the agricultural sector are apparently sometimes forced to provide sexual services in order to obtain plantation work.

Who are the abusers?

- It is well recognized that local men and those from neighboring countries sexually exploit Kenyan children, but sex tourists, both men and women, are most active in the country. Coast Women In Development believes that the rise in the sex tourism industry is the result of the weak application of the law and the corruption of some officials, which allows offenders to commit abuses against children with impunity.
- The methods used by sex offenders to access children are varied, but often involve an intermediary, be it hotel staff, street pimps, parents and other family members, criminal networks and various intermediaries in the sex industry. The Ministry of Tourism in its effort to avert child prostitution has detected that there are also some coastal areas where tour operators act as guides and direct sex offenders to children or lure children to sex tourists. Street and beach children are also picked up directly by sex offenders.
- The study documents that many of these offenders escape detection for a long time because they abuse boys and girls in private residences, particularly along the coastal areas of Mombassa. Sex tourists who abuse children for the first time are often offered the opportunity to do so through intermediaries working for the sex industry at bars and clubs. It appears that some brothels are being operated by women who also mediate in the exploitation of children by local or foreign child sex abusers.

- The few cases of sex offenders who have been convicted abroad for abusing children in Kenya show that they are often in possession of child abusive images. These images are either produced by the offenders themselves or downloaded from the Internet, indicating what appears to be an organized sex tourism industry. Women are also implicated in the child abuse, but not enough is known about their role and how they access the children.

Sex tourism thrives unabated

- The Kenyan coast is sitting on a time bomb, with a number of retired tourists visiting the destination ostensibly to have sex with children some even buy properties and settle Kenya since life is cheap , the currency exchange is low and getting away with a crime as long as you have the money is the progress.
- Many of the children being exploited are not from the coast region but are imported from rural areas around the country. You don't have to spend a lot of time at the Kenyan coast to know that child prostitution and sex tourism are rampant here. It is common and tolerable to see aging white men and women well into their 70s and 80s with girls and boys young enough to be their grandchildren.

Key Reasons:

- The breakdown of traditional family values and the culture of African extended family were frequently cited as most compelling causes leading to a moral breakup of families, again making children more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Children escape physical and sexual abuse from home and from dysfunctional families affected by unemployment, substance abuse and criminality, and end up in the streets. Cultural practices in some communities (such as Duruma in Kinango in southern coast of Kenya) where families send children out to earn money through prostitution are also compounding the problem of sexual exploitation of children, but poverty is once again the underlying factor.
- Another key factor is that tourists demand for children , a rationale that has seen overwhelming majority of Kenyan children especially those from slum areas dropping out of school to join prostitution as a means of survival.

Survival Sex:

- Child prostitutes in these towns play a risky lottery with HIV infections, the promise of easy money is seeing underage girls registering for identity cards to falsify their ages and be allowed to gain entry into hotels and entertainment spots, some of them lie to their clients to get better treatments while engaging in unprotected sexual activities.

- **“Angel”** not her real name, narrates, I am only 15 years old but because I have big body I inform wazungus {white men} that am 19years, I do this so that they treat me like an adult, when they identify that we are under age they don't take us to the hotel rooms they have sex with us in the bush or in the ocean while swimming, we don't use condoms since the price of unprotected sex is higher , also we have a high regard for 0.5 children , I would rather have protected sex with a black man but for the white man I prefer getting pregnant with his child so that I can give birth to a beautiful child. I have heard of HIV/AIDS but I would rather die of HIV/AIDS than of hunger, HIV/AIDS takes long time but hunger will kill me in a few days.
- We have to make a living, so we often turn to sex work and easily have sex without protection, we are also unprotected from sexual violence," **Jenipher** *“not her real name* said. We are especially vulnerable because many of us are children orphaned by HIV and have had no real family structures around us when we were growing up. With illegal drugs widely available along the beach, and while high on marijuana and other substances, we often make unsafe sexual choices or share needles, putting our selves at greater risk of contracting HIV. Most of our friends have succumbed to HIV due to the ' I don't care' lifestyle practiced along the beach. But after using the drugs we are extremely sexually active.
- Saumu not her real name, I am 16years I started prostitution when I was 13years old my own mother introduced me to a white man we are three girls in our family our youngest is 12years she goes around beaches with my mother , when she(mother) meets clients who wants younger girls she let her go with them, she does oral sex with them and my mother pockets the money, oral sex has a higher price.

Tourism in Kenya:

- Tourism is Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner. The tourism industry is growing as a result of the liberalization measures, diversification of tourist generating markets and continued Government commitment to providing an enabling environment, coupled with successful tourism promotion and political stability. Enormous opportunities exist for investment in film production; recreation and entertainment.
- The industry has grown by leaps and bound over the years. In fact , today Kenya is one of the most grown exciting and sought after travel destination in the globe . Earlier it was only the adventure freaks and wildlife enthusiasts who made a beeline for this amazing country. However, things have changed now as even leisure travelers have started looking at Kenya as a unique holiday destination to visit.

- Tourism officials admit that Kenya's role as a child sex destination has been downplayed for fear that it would undermine the crucial tourism industry that is already reeling from negative travel advisories from the US governments. Besides, Kenya's supremacy as the ultimate tourist destination in Africa is threatened by emerging destinations such as South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana and Namibia. Tourism is Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture.
- A Ministry of Tourism report recently revealed that pedophiles were leaving child sex tourism centers in Asia because of tough new laws and were headed for African countries like Kenya, where laws are lax. Besides laxity in the enforcement of laws, Kenya is yet to ratify international protocols, on Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking, and Children Involved in Child Conflict. The Children's Act does not specifically address the problem of child prostitution nor provide stiff penalty for offenders.
- The trend, if left unrestricted, could have a negative impact on up-market and family tourists, who are feeling uncomfortable mingling with open pedophiles.

The Result :

As a result, child sex is slowly blossoming in Kenya. While the Child Welfare Society of Kenya report confirms that Coast province is under threat of sex tourism, authorities keep quiet due to the sensitivity of the tourism industry.

Food for Thought

- Could Kenya be rivaling Thailand—known as the world's sex capital—if only to maintain its status as a leading tourist destination?
- If child prostitution was to be legalized in Kenya, would poverty be a thing of the past?

Coast Women In Development (CWID) `s is answering NO , that is why we have launch a campaign and advocacy for the Kenyan government to take action on the **National Plan of Action** that they had pledged to establish at the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation **WCACSE** in 1996 in Stockholm and eliminate commercial sexual exploitation in Kenya.

The government as well should give support to organizations like CWID that are working on the programs of economical empowerment to the parents of the of children who are the survivors of such abuse and exploitations and ensure sufficient programs of physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration to the survivors.

Conclusion:

The constitution of Kenya which have just been promulgated is one of the best in the world, if implemented well, it will strengthened the policies of the Kenyan children's Act 2002 which promotes child rights in family education and family development assistance , including understanding that both parents are equally responsible for their children with special intervention to prevent them from sexual violence and sexual exploitation. It as well acknowledges the sexual offences Act 2006 which defines sex with a person under 11years as rape and the offenders should be jailed for life ,while those who sexually abuse children between the age of 12-15 years and between 16- 18years to be imprisoned for a period not less than 20years and 15 years correspondingly .

The task now rest with organizations like Coast Women In Development, Networks and Coalitions of other CSO`s , all sectors of the Society including governmental , Regional , National and International donors and stakeholders to take essential role of the civic education on post referendum on the new constitution, since the constitution will formulate and implement gender –sensitive national and economical policies that will assist the society in resisting acts that lead to child sexual exploitation , harmful traditional practices and their impacts to girl child and promote the value of children as human beings consequently aid the children in enjoying their rights without any kind of discrimination.

The End.

