A Christian Response to Child Trafficking

Research Notes on Child Trafficking, Child Labour and Child Slavery

Theme: The Role of the Citizenry and the Church in Confronting Child Labour, Child Trafficking and Child Slavery Holistically

Research updated October 2026



A young boy alone on Lake Volta. (GlobeServe Media)

37.7%	45.1%	Tier 1	2,331
of children in three lakeside districts likely trafficked	more in exploitative child labour	Ghana's new US trafficking ranking (2026)	trafficking victims identified in Ghana in 2025

How to use these notes

These notes gather the latest research on child trafficking and child labour on Lake Volta, what Scripture says, GlobeServe's work, and practical steps to protect children. Excerpts from Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya's address appear throughout in green quote boxes. You are welcome to share them freely, unchanged and with credit to GlobeServe Ministries International.

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1. The Problem at a Glance

Across Ghana, children carry burdens that should be carried by adults. Nowhere is this clearer than on Lake Volta, where thousands of children work on the water instead of sitting in a classroom. When a child is in a canoe on dangerous water, in a mine, on a farm with chemicals, hawking late into the night or doing unpaid work in a stranger's home, we must ask: **who is protecting that child?**

> *"A child is not an economic tool. A child is not a commodity. A child is not a debt to be paid. A child is not a worker to be rented out. A child is a human being, created in the image of God, with a name, a future, a voice, and a right to protection."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

The scale: what the latest research shows

There is no reliable count of children in forced labour across the whole of Lake Volta today. The best current evidence comes from a careful household survey in three lakeside districts.

- The **IJM and Kantar Ghana prevalence study** surveyed **1,286 children aged 8 to 17** and 489 caregivers in Krachi West, Kwahu Afram Plains and Sene East (fieldwork 2022, published 2023 to 2025):
  - **37.7%** were likely trafficked.
  - A further **45.1%** were in likely exploitative child labour.
  - Together, about **83%** of the children studied were harmed. Only **17.2%** were doing normal child work or help.
  - **15%** had gone underwater to free nets, and **22.4%** were not enrolled in school.
- These results describe the three districts studied. They should not be applied to Yeji or to the whole lake.
- Some children start on the water as young as **4 years old** (US State Department TIP Report, 2024).
- Nationally, about **2.5 million** Ghanaian children aged 5 to 17 (**27.9%**) were in child labour in the last full survey (MICS 2017/18). New national figures from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 8) are expected.
- Worldwide, nearly **138 million** children were in child labour in 2024, about **87 million** of them in sub-Saharan Africa (ILO and UNICEF, June 2025).

About the "20,000" and "21,000" figures. These widely quoted numbers trace back to a 2003 national survey of children in fishing and the 2016 Global Slavery Index. They are now out of date and were never lake-wide counts of forced labour. The survey results above are the best current evidence.

Ghana is Tier 1, but the lake is not yet safe

In October 2026 the US State Department moved Ghana to **Tier 1**, its highest ranking, for the first time. In 2025 Ghana investigated 222 trafficking cases, prosecuted 212 and convicted 28 traffickers, and identified **2,331 victims**.

Yet the same report still states: "Traffickers exploit children in forced labor in Lake Volta's fishing industry." It warns that women and girls in fishing are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and that monitoring in the fishing sector remains limited.

Many of the victims identified in 2025 were foreign nationals in cross-border cases, so the higher national numbers do not mean conditions on the lake have changed. **Tier 1 is progress, not the end of the problem.**

Picture two children

Picture a young boy who wakes before dawn, not for school, but to work on the water. He is cold, hungry and afraid. He may not know how to swim. He is beaten when he makes mistakes and has learned that asking questions brings punishment. While his agemates are reading and playing, he has learned fear.

Picture a young girl sent away with the promise of schooling or a better life. Instead she becomes a domestic worker, a street hawker or a victim of sexual exploitation. She is overworked, underfed, unpaid and isolated. She does not know where to report. She may be threatened with curses, shame or violence, and she may carry trauma that no one sees.

Bring it home. The next time you buy a fish called "Akosombo" or other fish from the lake, remember that a young child may be behind that catch.

Why Yeji?

- Yeji, in the Bono East Region, is the main destination and distribution point. Trafficked boys are known across Ghana as "the boys who went to Yeji" (World's Children's Prize).
- **Source areas:** Central Region, the Tongu districts, Greater Accra fishing towns, and the Eastern and Ashanti regions.
- About **70% of non-indigenes** in and around Yeji come from the North, South and Central Tongu districts (GlobeServe finding). This is why GlobeServe works at both ends: the source communities in the south and the destination in the north.

How children are trafficked

- Poor families, often single mothers, are promised schooling, an apprenticeship or money for the child.
- Children are placed under 1 to 3 year "contracts", sold, or given away to settle debts.
- Traffickers exploit the custom of sending children to relatives in exchange for schooling or training (US TIP Report, 2026).

> *"What did they come to tell you, before you gave us to them? Sometimes they convinced you that we were going to school."*
>
> **Pastor Newton Dzakpasu, GlobeServe Missionary Church, speaking at a Justice Conference, 2026**

- Boatmasters prefer children for economic reasons: a child is paid for once and then worked for years.

Conditions on the lake

- Up to **14-hour days**, often starting before dawn, with little food or rest, no pay and no school.
- The deadliest task is **diving to free nets** caught on a submerged forest. The trees were never cleared when the Akosombo Dam flooded the valley in 1965, and many children drown.
- Among likely trafficked children in the IJM study: **58%** reported extreme fatigue, more than half worked in the dark, and **36.7%** faced physical violence or threats.

Girls are affected too

Trafficking on the lake is not only about boys in boats. Girls work onshore in fish processing, selling and domestic work in fishing camps, where they face sexual abuse and exploitation. Of the **120 children** Challenging Heights rescued from the lake in 2025, **51 were girls**.

Root causes

Root cause	What the evidence shows
Poverty	Nkwanta North has a 79.7% poverty rate, the highest in Ghana. Desperate families are the ones traffickers target.
Declining fish stocks	IJM researchers link the demand for cheap child labour to declining fish stocks on the lake.
Gaps in protection	The 2026 TIP Report notes limited shelter, poor access to justice for rural victims and limited monitoring in the fishing sector.
Cultural practice	Traffickers exploit the custom of sending children to relatives for schooling or training, which hides exploitation.
Barriers to school	In the IJM study, children missed school because they needed to work (24%), the school was too far or unsafe (22%), or it cost too much (19%).
Disease	Bilharzia (schistosomiasis), malaria and waterborne illness keep families sick, poor and vulnerable.

Health risks on the lake

- **Bilharzia** rose from 5 to 10% of people before the dam to over 90% in many lakeside communities afterwards, and remains a major problem (Ghana Health Service and partners, 2025).
- In a Volta Region school outbreak study, children who fished had about **seven times** higher odds of bilharzia infection.
- Safe drinking water helps, but it does not remove the risk from wading, bathing or diving in the lake.
- Diving to free nets brings a real risk of **drowning**, and malaria is common among rescued children.

Why the distance matters

Lake Volta is the largest man-made lake in the world by surface area, at about **8,500 km²** (about 3.6% of Ghana's land). Its shoreline runs about **4,800 km** past around **1,200 fishing villages**. Many communities sit on islands with no road, clinic, school or police presence. The children furthest from help are the ones most at risk.

2. Know the Difference: Definitions

People often use child labour, child trafficking and child slavery as if they mean the same thing. They are related, but they are not the same. Knowing the difference helps us recognise what is happening to a child and respond correctly.

Who is a child?

Under Ghana's Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, **a child is anyone below 18 years of age.**

Child work is not the same as child labour

Not every task a child does is child labour. A child helping briefly at home, assisting a parent after school, or doing light, age-appropriate work is learning responsibility. Families and communities rightly teach children diligence. The line is crossed when the work starts to harm the child.

Child labour

> **Definition:** Work that deprives a child of their childhood, potential and dignity, and that harms their physical or mental development. It includes work that is dangerous, or that interferes with schooling by keeping the child out of school or making them leave early. (Based on the ILO definition and Ghana's Children's Act.)

Ghana's Children's Act sets clear limits:

- No child may be engaged in **exploitative labour**, meaning labour that deprives the child of health, education or development.
- **15 years** is the minimum age for general employment.
- **13 years** is the minimum age for light work that is not harmful and does not affect schooling.
- **18 years** is the minimum age for hazardous work, meaning work that poses a danger to the health, safety or morals of a person.
- No child may do **night work** between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- In 2024 Ghana ratified **ILO Convention 188** on Work in Fishing, which sets **16** as the minimum age for work on fishing vessels.

Fishing on Lake Volta, with diving, long hours, night work and heavy loads, is hazardous work. No child should be doing it.

Child trafficking

> **Definition:** The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child **for the purpose of exploitation**. (UN Palermo Protocol, 2000, which Ghana's Human Trafficking Act, Act 694, follows.)

For adults, trafficking has three elements. For children, only two are needed:

Element	What it means	Needed for a child?
1. The ACT	Recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person	Yes
2. The MEANS	Threats, force, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or payment to someone in control of the person	**No.** Moving a child for exploitation is trafficking even without force or deception.

Element	What it means	Needed for a child?
3. The PURPOSE	Exploitation: forced labour, slavery, sexual exploitation, servitude and similar	Yes

Under Ghana's law, **the consent of the child, or of the parent, is no defence.** A parent who "gives" a child to a boatmaster under a contract does not make the arrangement legal. Trafficking carries a minimum of **five years' imprisonment** under the Human Trafficking Act.

Child slavery

> **Definition:** The condition of a child over whom another person exercises powers of ownership: the child is controlled, bought, sold or kept, and **cannot freely leave**. It includes forced labour (work exacted under threat of penalty), debt bondage and servitude. (Based on the 1926 Slavery Convention and ILO Forced Labour Convention.)

Signs of slavery include: the child is not paid, is not free to go home, is controlled by threats, beatings, debt or deception, is cut off from family, and must call the employer "master".

Side by side

	Child work	Child labour	Child trafficking	Child slavery
What it is	Light, safe, age-appropriate tasks	Work that harms health, schooling or development	Moving or receiving a child in order to exploit them	Owning and controlling a child who cannot leave
Key question	Is it safe and does the child still go to school?	Is the work harming the child?	Was the child moved or received to be exploited?	Is the child free to leave?
Lake Volta example	A child helping a parent sort fish after school	A 12-year-old fishing all day instead of attending school	A boy sent from Tongu to Yeji on a 2-year "contract"	A boy beaten, unpaid, unable to go home, diving for nets

> **How they connect:** Not all child labour is trafficking, but on Lake Volta the three often happen together. A child is **trafficked** to the lake, put into **hazardous labour**, and held there in conditions of **slavery**.

> *"For a child who has been trafficked, neither the child's consent nor a parent's consent can justify the crime. A child cannot consent to exploitation. Poverty cannot legalise exploitation. Culture cannot sanctify exploitation. Silence cannot excuse exploitation."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

3. What Exploitation Does to a Child and to Ghana

Area	Effects
The body	Injuries, malnutrition, exhaustion, illness, stunted growth, drowning, exposure to chemicals, sexual violence and disability.
The mind	Fear, anxiety, depression, nightmares, anger, low self-worth and broken trust. A child who has been controlled may struggle to believe any adult is safe.
Education	Attendance falls, learning suffers and many drop out. Their choices shrink, not because they lack intelligence, but because adults failed to protect their opportunity.
Relationships	Separation makes children feel unwanted. Some carry shame that was never theirs, and survivors are sometimes stigmatised when they return home.
Faith	A child may ask: "If God loves me, why did adults who speak about God allow this?" The church must never ignore that question.

The cost to Ghana

A nation that sacrifices its children sacrifices its future. When children are denied education, Ghana loses future teachers, nurses, farmers, entrepreneurs, engineers, pastors, chiefs and leaders. Communities then carry the cost through poverty, unemployment, ill-health, violence and broken families.

> *"When our economic activities depend on the suffering of children, our development becomes morally weak and unsustainable. We cannot build a prosperous Ghana on the backs of exhausted children."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

4. What Scripture Says: God's Heart for Justice

Justice is not an optional extra for the church. It flows from the character of God, who sees the oppressed and calls His people to act. A child is not an economic tool, a commodity or a debt to be paid. A child is a human being, created in the image of God, with a name, a future, a voice and a right to protection (Genesis 1:27).

The two core passages for today

> *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."*
>
> **Isaiah 1:17 (NIV)**

> *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*
>
> **Micah 6:8 (NIV)**

> *"Scripture says in Proverbs 31:8: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.' This is not a suggestion for the church. It is a command."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

Further scriptures for reflection

Scripture	What it teaches
Proverbs 31:8	Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. This is a command, not a suggestion.
Psalm 82:3-4	Defend the weak and the fatherless; rescue them from the hand of the wicked.
Amos 5:24	God wants justice that rolls like a river, not empty worship.
Matthew 18:5-6	Jesus welcomes children and warns severely against anyone who causes them to stumble.
Matthew 25:40	Whatever we do for the least of these, we do for Christ Himself.
Luke 4:18	Jesus came to proclaim freedom for prisoners and to set the oppressed free.

> *"The church must be more than a place that prays for suffering. The church must become a place that interrupts suffering."*
>
> *"We preach that every person bears the image of God. Then we must defend the image of God in the child who is exploited. We preach that Jesus welcomed children. Then our churches must be safe for children. We preach salvation and freedom. Then we must confront every system that enslaves the vulnerable."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

5. Questions for Reflection

Use these questions on your own, with your family, or with your church or community group.

Reflecting on Isaiah 1:17

1. What does it look like in our community to “seek justice” and “defend the oppressed” for children on the lake?
2. Who are the “fatherless” in our setting? Think of children sent away, fostered out or working far from home.
3. What is one practical step our church or family can take this month?

Reflecting on Micah 6:8

1. What would it mean for a boatmaster, a parent or a chief to “act justly” toward a child?
2. How can we show mercy to struggling families without excusing the exploitation of children?
3. How does “walking humbly with God” change how we approach the people involved?

To finish

What is one thing God is asking you to do for the children of the lake?

6. The GlobeServe Story

Since 2019, GlobeServe has been fully committed to the justice cause. Through special justice outreaches, we have studied the Yeji enclave in the Bono East Region and the fishing communities along the Volta Lake. The goal is to build strong relationships, deepen trust, and engage people beyond sharing the gospel and distributing items.

The centrepiece is the **Justice Conference**, which brings boatmasters, their wives, chiefs, pastors and families to one table. The gospel is preached, and groups of community leaders, mothers, church leaders and traditional authorities discuss practical ways to care for their own children and other people's children.

GlobeServe's work is now on public record: in September 2026, MyJoyOnline reported on the annual Yeji conference for boatmasters and their wives, held with Westwood Community Church.

> *"We have not come to stand above this community. We have come to stand with you."*
>
> *"When a boat leaves the shore, what is the most precious thing it carries? Not the net. Not the catch. Not the money the catch may bring. If a child is in that boat, the most precious thing in it is that child."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Gospel of Justice address to boatmasters and families, September 2026**

13	1,977	32	243
Justice Conferences held	conference attendees	communities reached	boatmasters' wives trained

Justice Conferences: 13 in total

Sector	Location and years	Why there
Southern (6)	Ho, 2019 and 2021	To reach the Volta Regional House of Chiefs and regional directors
	Adidome, 2023 to 2025	Central Tongu was identified as a source area
	Mepe, 2026	To reach the families most likely to send children to Yeji
Northern (7)	Tamale, 2019	To reach stakeholders
	Yeji, 2021 to 2026	The heart of the fishing communities and the destination for most trafficked children

Attendance

Year	South	North (boatmasters and wives)
2019	108	106
2021	89	230
2022	–	84
2023	138	131
2024	128	166

Year	South	North (boatmasters and wives)
2025	158	256
2026	163	220
Total	**784**	**1,193**

Combined total: **1,977 attendees.**



Participants at a GlobeServe Justice Conference. (GlobeServe Media)

Justice trips and community outreach

- **6 justice trips** made to build relationships and trust.
- **32 communities** visited since 2020, including Kofi Basare, Tonka, Vutidekey, Parambo, Kobre Nsuano, Brekente, Kadue, Chokrombo, Dzatakpo, Avorkope, Kajiah, Kpeveme, Makomanya, Bankama, Sokpe, Kodome, Awudzakope, Korpevikope and Gbetekpo.
- **5,110 community members** served with 3,421 mosquito nets, 2,942 child dewormers and 2,830 adult dewormers, plus toothpaste, toothbrushes, sanitary items and second-hand clothing.

How a community visit works:

1. Pay homage to the chief and seek permission.
2. Introduce GlobeServe to the community.
3. Preach, linking the message to the Great Commandment.
4. Teach about malaria and worms, then distribute nets and dewormers.
5. Invite people to the Justice Conference.



A community gathering during a GlobeServe justice outreach on the lake. (GlobeServe Media)

Empowering boatmasters' wives

Mothers receive two days of practical training in making liquid soap, antiseptic, pomade, ointment and pastries. **The goal:** when a mother earns an income, her household no longer needs to pull a child out of school to fish.

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Women trained	47	45	38	50	63	243

- **195 women** from **25 communities** received start-up capital over four years.
- About **GHS 120,000** spent on equipping and setting up the women.

2026 targets against results

Target	Goal	Achieved
Communities engaged	30	32
Wives trained	200	243
Justice Conferences	10	13

All three targets were exceeded.

Why our model fits the evidence

What GlobeServe does	Why it works
Trains boatmasters	Mirrors the ILO's Torkor Model, on which Ghana's national strategy against child labour in fisheries is based.
Empowers wives	Tackles the poverty that pulls children out of school.
Water purification, nets and deworming	Breaks the cycle of disease, poverty and vulnerability.
Brings stakeholders together	Changes community attitudes, which is what makes prevention last.

Signs of change

- In **October 2023**, GlobeServe secured the release of **5 children in Yeji** through dialogue with boat owners.
- After the Adidome conference, two children released from Yeji, **a girl aged 14 and a boy aged 9**, now live with their grandmother and attend basic school.
- At a Yeji conference, a mother committed to working alongside her husband so her children go to school instead of fishing.
- Chiefs in both the south and the north publicly committed to keeping children out of child labour.

7. The Five R Journey: The Pathway to Justice and Transformation

GlobeServe uses the gospel of justice to transform hearts. The Five R Journey is a biblical process that seeks healing for victims, transformation for offenders and restoration for communities. The goal is to move boatmasters from **repentance** all the way to the **rehabilitation** of the children they have harmed.

Step	What it means	In practice	Key scriptures
1. Repentance	Turning hearts back to God: acknowledging wrong and turning from it	Name the wrong truthfully; accept responsibility; commit to changed behaviour	Acts 3:19; Luke 19:1-10; Ezekiel 18:30-32
2. Restitution	Making wrong things right	Identify the harm and who was affected; repair what can be repaired, transparently and safely	Exodus 22; Luke 19:8; Numbers 5:5-8
3. Reconciliation	Restoring relationships	Create safe space for truth; support forgiveness without forcing it; rebuild trust through consistent action	2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Matthew 5:23-24
4. Restoration	Renewing lives and communities	Support emotional, spiritual and practical recovery; reconnect children with safe families	Joel 2:25; Isaiah 61:1-4; John 10:10
5. Rehabilitation	Equipping people for a new future	Education, vocational training, livelihood support and mentoring	Isaiah 58:6-12; James 1:27; Luke 4:18

> **Important principle:** Forgiveness does not erase accountability. Reconciliation must never be forced. GlobeServe follows the law, safeguarding procedures and referral pathways, and never substitutes mediation for protection. Restitution and rehabilitation must be safe and supported by qualified professionals where needed.

Five commitments every community is called to make

1. **Protect every child.** Refuse to recruit, receive, transport, keep or employ any child in conditions that endanger their life, freedom, health or education.
2. **Keep children in school.** Fishing may provide today's meal, but education builds tomorrow's livelihood.
3. **Protect those in danger.** Identify children at risk and connect them with trustworthy leaders and protection services.
4. **Strengthen households.** Support lawful livelihoods, savings and vocational skills, so poverty never makes exploitation seem necessary.
5. **Let every leader become a protector.** Pastors teach justice and mercy, chiefs set clear expectations, boatmasters keep their boats places of lawful work, and mothers speak early.

8. Three Days on a Tree: Pastor Newton's Story

Pastor Newton Dzakpasu of GlobeServe Missionary Church was once one of the children of the lake. At our Justice Conference, he stood before parents, chiefs and boatmasters and told them what it was like.

It began with a lesson he could not survive. He was taken far out on the water to learn to swim, but he did not know how. He was sinking when they pulled him out. Then the boat master took him into the water himself, and let him struggle until he could not go on.

The storm

One night, Newton and another boy went out to cast their nets. A storm came. In the middle of the night, with only lightning to see by, the boat sank.

> *"He couldn't see me, I couldn't see him. The waves were tossing me from here to there. God is so good. If not for a tree, where would I have gone?"*
>
> **Pastor Newton Dzakpasu, GlobeServe Missionary Church, speaking at a Justice Conference, 2026**

He held on to a tree standing in the water through the whole night, and through the whole next day. On the third day, passing fishermen saw him, found he was still alive, and brought him back to his master. The master had already been preparing to tell Newton's family that he was dead. Instead of relief, the boy who had survived was **beaten again**.

The paddle

The children were beaten with the canoe paddle. One day, Newton saw the master strike another boy on the head with it. The boy fell into the water. **He was never found.**

The promise

> *"What did they come to tell you, before you gave us to them? Sometimes they convinced you that we were going to school."*
>
> **Pastor Newton Dzakpasu, GlobeServe Missionary Church, speaking at a Justice Conference, 2026**

Sometimes the promise was school. Sometimes it was a cow, to be given to the parents after three years.

The question

> *"Is it a sin to be born?"*
>
> **Pastor Newton Dzakpasu**

He did not answer the question with words. He sang, in Twi, a song the children sing on the lake. It asks: Where does my help come from? Who will answer my cries? Who will save me? And it answers: You, God, are my Saviour. Take me into your arms and lead me safely home, for I have no one else. My help comes from the Lord.

It is the cry of Psalm 121, sung by children who had no one else. Today, that boy is a pastor. **His story is why we keep going back to the water.**

9. Two Approaches, One Goal

Following the IJM video **"The Deep Place"**, a short film on the real-life rescue of a trafficked child on the Volta Lake, it helps to understand the two main ways organisations respond.

	The law approach	The gospel approach
Who	International Justice Mission (IJM) and law enforcement	GlobeServe Ministries International
How	Uses the law and law enforcement agencies to rescue victims and prosecute offenders	Uses the gospel to convict the hearts of boatmasters so they willingly release children
Strength	Holds offenders accountable and deters others	Changes hearts and community attitudes, reaching places a raid cannot
Example	Police-led rescue operations on the lake	Five children released in Yeji in October 2023 through dialogue

> **Both are needed.** The gospel can reach a heart that no raid could reach, and a transformed boatmaster will release a child and not simply take another. The law protects children when hearts do not change. Where a child is in immediate danger, report to the authorities at once.

10. What Recent Research Says Works

Rescue alone is not enough. Recent studies point to what protects children over the long term, and where the church can make a difference.

Approach	What the evidence shows	How GlobeServe applies it
Community ownership	The ILO's 2025 fisheries guidance highlights the **Torkor model**: fishers, canoe owners and women fish processors made their landing site child-labour-free, and adults were trained as divers to replace children.	Training boatmasters and engaging whole communities at Justice Conferences
Rights education	A study of Senya, a source community, found higher school enrolment after child-rights education (Journal of Human Trafficking, 2023).	Teaching on the value and rights of every child
Household support	Ghana's LEAP cash transfers have been evaluated for their effect on child labour (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024), and the average grant rose sharply in 2026.	Skills training and start-up support for boatmasters' wives
Care after rescue	Survivors describe "conditional freedom": out of danger, but facing broken schooling and uncertain futures (Children & Society, 2026). Parents can be the ones who send children back (re-trafficking research).	Following up released children, school support and family visits

Recent rescues

- In 2025, Challenging Heights freed **120 children** from Lake Volta in five operations, and in August 2026 rescued **25 more** from Bono East and Northern Region communities with the Police Anti-Human Trafficking Unit and Social Welfare.

Government plans

- Ghana's **National Plan of Action against Human Trafficking (2022 to 2026)** ends this year. A successor plan is awaited.
- The **Ghana Accelerated Action Plan Against Child Labour (2023 to 2027)** aims to halve child labour in priority sectors by 2027.

The church's part

- More than **80 Ghanaian churches** observed Freedom Sunday 2026 with IJM to raise awareness of trafficking.

> **An evidence gap we can help fill.** Researchers found no rigorous evaluation of church-led anti-trafficking work in Ghana. By keeping simple records, such as school enrolment of boatmasters' children and the number of children released and returned home, GlobeServe can show what the gospel of justice achieves.

11. What We Can Do

As citizens: stop looking away

If you see a child being beaten, working in danger, kept from school, moved suspiciously, isolated in a household or selling late at night, do not dismiss it as "someone's family matter." A child's safety is everybody's concern. Ask:

- Is this child in school?
- Where are the child's parents?
- Is the work appropriate for the child's age?
- Is the child free to leave?
- Is the child paid, or being exploited?
- Who benefits from this child's labour?

As parents and guardians: verify before you release a child

Traffickers rarely introduce themselves as traffickers. They may be relatives, neighbours, respected community members or agents promising school, an apprenticeship or a better life. Before releasing a child to anyone, confirm:

- ☐ Where exactly the child is going
- ☐ Who will care for the child
- ☐ Whether the child will stay in school
- ☐ What work, if any, the child will do
- ☐ How you will stay in regular contact with the child

> *"No family should surrender a child into uncertainty."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

As chiefs, queen mothers and elders

- Make it clear that no family, boat owner, farmer, miner, trader or household may exploit a child.
- Convene community discussions and support child-protection committees.
- Let palaces and community meetings be places where children are defended, not places where their suffering is concealed.

As district institutions

Social welfare, schools, health workers, police, traditional authorities, faith leaders and assembly members must work together to identify, refer, protect and support children: with clear reporting pathways, confidential handling of cases, psychosocial support, family tracing, school reintegration and livelihood support. **Rescue without rehabilitation is incomplete.** A child returned to the same hunger and danger may be trafficked again.

Tackling the poverty traffickers exploit

> *"A parent who sends a child away may not be wicked; often, that parent is desperate. But desperation must not become the doorway through which a child is stolen."*
>
> *"Charity is important. But justice goes further. Justice asks why families are forced to choose between a child's education and the family's survival."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

As the church

- Preach clearly on child labour and trafficking. Do not bless wealth without asking how it was acquired.
- Set up child-protection practices: trained leaders, safe reporting channels, clear rules against abuse and partnerships with social welfare.
- Train Sunday school teachers and youth leaders to notice trauma, neglect, exploitation and sudden school absence.
- Know the names of your children: which are out of school, working in danger, sent away, or silent and afraid?
- Be a sanctuary for survivors, not a place of gossip or shame. Tell them: "What happened to you was not your fault. You are loved by God, and we will stand with you."

Accountability

> *"Those who traffic, abuse and exploit children must not be protected because they are wealthy, influential, related to us, or religious. A community that covers up exploitation becomes part of the exploitation."*
>
> **Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026**

Warning signs a child may be trafficked or exploited

Watch for a child who...	
Has suddenly stopped attending school	Is living with a non-relative far from home
Looks exhausted, underfed, injured or unwell	Is fearful, withdrawn or afraid to speak
Works long hours, at night, or in danger	Is not paid, or has pay taken by an adult
Has no contact with their family	Calls the adult in charge "master"

If a child tells you something

A child who speaks up is trusting you. How you respond in the first few minutes matters.

Do	Do not
Stay calm and listen. Let the child use their own words.	Do not interrogate, ask leading questions or make the child repeat the story to others.
Tell the child they did the right thing by telling you.	Do not promise to keep it secret. Explain that you will tell people who can help.

Do	Do not
If the child is in immediate danger, get emergency help at once.	Do not confront the suspected adult, negotiate a release or move the child yourself.
Report to the police and Social Welfare, and inform the GlobeServe safeguarding lead.	Do not try to settle the matter privately or accept money to keep quiet.
Write down the date, what you saw, the child's exact words and who you told.	Do not take photos of the child or share the story in prayer groups or on social media.

Your role is to protect and refer, not to investigate. Trained professionals will assess the case.

Where to report

- **Emergency:** call **112** or Police **191** if a child is in immediate danger.
- **Orange Support Centre (toll-free): 0800 111 222**, for reporting abuse and getting referral.
- **Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection helplines (toll-free): 0800 800 800** or **0800 900 900**.
- **DOVVSU (Ghana Police) hotline: 055 100 0900**, or the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit at your nearest police station.
- **Department of Social Welfare:** your district office (Pru East for Yeji; the North, Central or South Tongu offices in the south).
- **GlobeServe:** speak to any member of the GlobeServe team for guidance and referral.

Local contacts: _____

Numbers checked October 2026.

12. Our Covenant

Rev. Dunya closes his address with this covenant. We invite you to make it your own:

> ✓ We will not buy cheaply at the price of a child's suffering.
>
> ✓ We will not employ children in hazardous or exploitative work.
>
> ✓ We will not send children away without safeguards.
>
> ✓ We will not keep silent when we see danger.
>
> ✓ We will not use culture, poverty, family ties or religion as an excuse for injustice.
>
> ✓ We will protect children, report abuse, support survivors and hold offenders accountable.

May Ghana be known as a nation where children are not traded but treasured; not exploited but educated; not silenced but heard; not enslaved but free.

Rev. Samuel A.K. Dunya, Southern Justice Conference address, Mepe 2026

13. Partnership and Next Steps

No single organisation can end this alone. We invite churches, chiefs, district assemblies, businesses and individuals to collaborate, share ideas and pool resources to fight injustice against children in our communities and our nation.

Pray	Partner	Give	Spread the word
For the children, boatmasters and families of the lake	Stand with a Justice Conference in Mepe or Yeji, or bring us to your church	Fund boatmaster training, a water purification kit, or nets and medicine for a community	Share what you learned today with your family, church and community

Where we are going next

- Expanding to other fishing communities, including **Krachi, Afram Plains and Dzemeni**.
- Following up released children and gathering their stories of transformation.

GlobeServe Ministries International

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Serving West Africa, the Sahel and North Africa since 1996

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All estimates are the best available and should be read as ranges.