

**PERCEPTION ANALYSIS OF CHILD TRAFFICKING IN AKWA
IBOM AND CROSS RIVER STATES, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Child trafficking is a worldwide societal issue with grave implications for victims. Regrettably, the states of Akwa Ibom and Cross River are at the top of the list of Nigerian states with high rates of child trafficking, earning Nigeria a reputation as one of the leading African countries in this illicit human exploitation. A sample size of 1,110 respondents was used to gather data using cross-sectional survey research. The researchers performed an in-depth interview (IDI) with thirteen (13) carefully chosen respondents. Data from the questionnaire were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The information from the extensive conversation was analysed utilizing the thematic approach. In the two states under investigation, Logistic Regression Analysis (LRA) was utilized to identify indicators linked to child trafficking. The data analysis's findings showed that child trafficking is widespread in the research locations. In addition to other places, child trafficking and poverty are connected in the states of Akwa Ibom and Cross River. Based on the findings, the study recommends a massive public awareness campaign on the dangers of child trafficking by both the government and non-governmental organizations, as well as an effective and functional poverty alleviation program in both States to improve their living conditions and the abolition of gender discrimination in both societies.

Keywords: Analysis, Child Trafficking, Gender Issue, Perception, Poverty

Introduction

Concern over child trafficking is widespread and is especially acute in countries like Nigeria. Despite all odds, the problem continues to worsen the existence of push factors such as poverty and unemployment (UNODC, 2019). Everywhere in the world, children are used as slaves and for labour due to their worldwide character. As a result, every country is touched in some manner by the threat of child trafficking (Ifeakandu, 2019). Child trafficking is a multibillion-dollar criminal enterprise that affects 15.5 million kids annually (UNICEF, 2018). Tola (2008) cites drug trafficking and economic fraud as the two most serious offenses, with human trafficking coming in third. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) has become a key component of the global criminal agenda, gaining fresh traction and creating new patterns and techniques (Agbu, 2003). Because of its unlawful and hidden character, determining the scope of this activity is challenging. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), one out of every three known human trafficking victims is a child. As a result of human trafficking, at least 12.3 million people are thought to be abused on a global scale, while 9.8 million of those victims are made of e by private agents and more than 2.45 million being pushed into coercive labour (International Labour Organisation, ILO, 2017).

Between the UN Protocol to Prevent and the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade in 1804, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000), there has been a recurring international concern and a global consensus to develop a comprehensive instrument to combat the crime of human slavery, particularly involving women and children, according to Lyday (2001). The current form of globalization, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006), has increased the prevalence of child trafficking, creating a complicated scenario with many facets that involve multiple institutional and commercial partners. Tola (2008) claims that child trafficking is a market-driven industry driven by worldwide demand, with a significant market for inexpensive labour and commercial sex. It entails luring weak people into cities or other countries, like destitute women, kids, and young males

offering or making commitments of work and a better life. In summary, child trafficking has evolved into a serious global societal concern.

Lowe (2016) claims that Europe is seeing a boom in child trafficking, owing in part to the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis, with many youths being purchased for sexual servitude and other types of exploitation. He goes on to say that child trafficking is on the rise in Denmark, Lithuania, Sweden, and Slovakia, with youngsters being coerced to commit crimes. At least 2,375 of the 15,846 recorded unfortunate human trafficking in the European Union (EU) during 2013 and 2014 were minors. Odhambo, Kasmilly, and Manto (2012) found that child trafficking has grown in Kenya in recent years. Due to the nation's reputation as a hot sex travel location, child trafficking is strongly linked to upscale luxury villas, particularly along the country's coast.

Nigeria has a reputation for being one of the most hazardous African nations for both domestic and international child trafficking. Due to European influence, Nigeria saw significant economic, political, and social changes influenced by colonialism. According to Chapdelaine (2014), the transatlantic slave trade, the expansion of the legal palm oil trade, and the consequent need for domestic labour can all be linked to the lengthy history of child trafficking. Unreliable data on Nigerians participating in child trafficking has been found in Nigerian statistics. But the fact that the smuggling of children is on the rise in Nigeria is unaffected by this. For example, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP, 2013) stated that 1,426 minors smuggled out of the nation were deported to other countries between August 2011 and July 2012. The South-South Zone, which includes the states of Edo, Cross River (CRS), and Akwa Ibom (AKS), has the largest number of TIP, according to NAPTIP (2012). Additional provinces and districts had a decrease in instances reported, culminating in a 4% drop in 2011; the South-South Zone saw a 46.5 percent increase from 2010 to March 2012. Among the general populace and in institutional settings, this is a major source of worry. The assurances provided by trafficking networks, whose agents offer a better life and a way out of poverty, entice children and their families. These are, however,

misleading remarks carefully crafted by traffickers to appeal to victims' fragility and inspire their desire to flee poverty. Every year, hundreds of thousands of children are shipped across borders and sold as commodities.

Child trafficking is a big societal concern in the states of AKS and CRS. Several programs have been launched in the two states with the aid of Faith-Based Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and NAPTIP. To rehabilitate children and give them access to the abilities they have been denied, the two state governments have received rehabilitation services from NAPTIP. The Child Rights Acts, which highlight that the child's best interests must come first in all actions involving the child, have only been domesticated by a select few states, including Cross River and Akwa Ibom. Thus, denying children Western-styled education, especially, the girl-child is fraudulent, de-womanising, and de-humanising (Odey, 2015). Despite the aforesaid steps, child trafficking in AKS and the CRS has remained unabated.

Academic study on child smuggling has exploded in recent years. However, the majority of these studies concentrate on providing an overview of the scope of the problem, as well as describing or advocating for policy reforms to prevent child trafficking and assist any persons who suffer harm (Okorie, 2007). Others concentrate basically on the reasons that cause trafficking (Adulraheem & Oladipo, 2010) as well as a combination of socio and economic factors affecting child trafficking (Egwu, Ahmed & Tukur, 2014). Even though these examples represent critical areas of child trafficking study, there are still gaps in the available literature and expertise on the subject. As a result, this study aims to investigate the issue of child trafficking as well as the primary contributing variables that influence it. The following are the precise goals:

- (i) To ascertain the perceived degree of child trafficking in the states of AKS and CRS.
- (ii) to determine the perceived connection between child trafficking and poverty in the states of AK and CR.
- (iii) to determine whether gender and child trafficking are thought to be related in AKS and CRS.

Literature review

Due to the intricacy of the actions involved, cultural variations, beliefs and viewpoints of the many participants, including victims and traffickers, a uniform definition of child trafficking may be challenging. Children's trafficking is a type of human trafficking. The United Nations defines it as "recruitment, transit, transfer, harbouring, and reception for exploitation." Wijers & Lap-Chew (1997) expressed child smuggling as "all acts in the recruitment and transportation of (persons) for work or service within and across national borders, using violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception, or other forms of coercion." Child trafficking, according to Garba, Muazu, and Kamal (2016), is a multi-faceted societal problem driven by socio-economic problems and demand for the exploitative exploitation of children. Child trafficking is the practice of exploiting vulnerable individuals such as impoverished women, children, and young men by promising them jobs and a better life in the city or overseas.

Poverty has long been cited as the primary motivator for child trafficking. Poverty is defined as a lack of well-being that has several dimensions, including a lack of financial resources, health-related well-being, housing, and occupational and societal integration. Also, a person in solid financial standing may be hesitant to accept unexpected proposals. According to Adulraheem & Oladipo (2010), children from low-income families are more vulnerable to human trafficking as a result of their parents' need to make a livelihood. Poverty, according to Omono (2013), is undesirable. If we want to overcome the problem of child trafficking, we must address an economic and societal sickness, a devouring reality. Mashii (2004), who shares this opinion asserts a connection between child trafficking and poverty, which involves extremely high wages and a minimal danger of detection. They note that the poor have unstable incomes, limited property, and are unable to live a healthy lifestyle.

As indicated by Osezua (2016), sex alludes to socially characterized methods of going about as male or female that turn out to be important for an individual's self-appreciation. All in all, youngsters' sensations of being a kid or

young lady are characterized more by how they are treated by their folks than by their real natural attributes (Stockard and Johnson, 1992). Sexual orientation causes us to notice socially developed perspectives or contrasts between males and females. To Effah-Attoe (2018), sexual orientation suggests a task of socially characterized, socially framed personalities of people consistently likely to change. This has to do with the unique/inconsistent insights, sees, jobs, significance, rewards, and so forth, which society allocates through its way of life. Osezua further saw that ladies are socially identified as "momentary creatures" with no huge piece in the family bequest. Male inclination because of intrinsic social, social variables will in general ingrain mediocrity in the female youngster, subsequently advancing more female dealing.

Cultivating is the presumption of freedoms and obligations of parenthood by grown-ups, who are not the kid's regular guardians. This was pervasive in customary African culture and was an exceptional practice even in the early post-frontier time frame. Kids were cultivated into fruitful and unmistakable family members and surprisingly non-family members. Essien (2011) affirms that non-permanent parents were instructively and financially better positioned to give advantages to kids in return for giving home-grown work and at times monetary help than normal guardians. He noticed that such advantages incorporate giving essential and here-and-there auxiliary instruction, word-related preparation for the most part in craftwork, arrangement of suitable work hardware, and improvement of marriage possibilities. The cooperation of kids in homegrown work was secured by the assumption that non-permanent parents would deal with their youngsters like their own kids (Ladan, 2005).

Preferably, great temporary parents guarantee that encouraged kids are not tangibly oppressed in the family. In the normal family, homegrown work was similarly divided between cultivated and regular kids. Ladan states further that domestic work that encourages youngsters was seldom used to oppress them for food, attire, and relaxation. The cultivating foundation was successful to the extent that, in certain instances, young women stayed with their adoptive parents until

marriage, while young men stayed until they were ready to open their studios. When an arrangement of correspondence was gone into, the relationship suffered, here and there for more than one age.

Salah (2004), sees that tragically, the encouraging foundation has gone through a home-grown change. Provincial guardians who gave their kids to agents, who consequently dealt with them inside and remotely, will generally accept that they are as yet taking part in the conventional encouraging game plan. Guardians or watchmen of dealt youngsters are under a bogus deception. They are unconscious of the serious double-dealing to which their kids and wards are frequently oppressed. UNICEF (2018) reports that dealers exploit the trust of individuals' socially acknowledged normal cost of arrangement and encourage as a component of the more distant family security net. In certain cases, frantically poor and clueless guardians eagerly co-work with the dealers, parting with their kids in return for a little charge.

Theoretical Explanation

Strain Theory

Robert Merton advanced the strain theory in response to Emile Durkheim's (1938) work (1957). According to the strain hypothesis, societal systems can pressurize citizens into committing a crime. Merton's anomie theory, often known as Merton's strain theory, is strikingly close to the definition of strain. Schmalleger (1999) states that a situation in which societies unintentionally exert pressure or strain on individuals, which may result in rule-breaking behaviour is referred to as anomie. The gap between the institutionalized tools available to achieve these aims and the culturally determined goals causes this pressure or strain. According to Ugwuoke (2010), To explain the rising crime wave in America, Merton claimed that society instilled in members wishes for specific cultural desires and assigns prescribed sanctioned techniques of obtaining such desires. If a person's cultural aims are hindered by lawful means, Merton reasoned, he may resort to illicit

measures as a last resort. This, according to Merton, is achieved mostly among the lowest classes.

Conformity, innovation, retreatism, ritualism, and rebellion are the five forms of adaptation outlined by Merton. Because the innovator accepts society's socially recognized aims but rejects the authorized means to reach these goals, He or she is the one who is most likely to act illegally. As a result, the innovator uses the money gained from criminal activity, such as the selling of illegal substances, fraud, and the trafficking of children, to further culturally defined objectives. The theory of Merton applies to this investigation since it can explain the reasons for child trafficking. Nigeria's high rate of child trafficking, particularly in the states of AK and CR, will continue uninterrupted as long as wealth and means continue to be the prevailing cultural values of attaining riches that are not fairly dispersed.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey design is used in this investigation. Ugwuoke (2014) claimed that using a cross-sectional survey approach to collect data on a population's behavioural pattern based on their expertise, judgment, outlook, and perception of a social issue such as child trafficking is suitable. The research was carried out in the Nigerian states of AK and CR. Uyo is the state capital of AK and the state's economic centre. The state of AK is divided into three senatorial zones: Uyo, Eket, and Ikot Ekpene. AKS has 31 LGAs (LGAs). "AKS is located between 4^o 32 and 5^o 33 north latitude and 7^o 35 and 8^o 25 east longitude. Rivers State borders the state on the east, Cross River State on the west, Abia State on the north, and the Gulf of Guinea on the south. AKS has a total land area of 7,249 square kilometres. The State is home to 13.4 percent of Nigeria's 960-kilometer Atlantic Ocean coastline. 2015 (AKS)".

Calabar, on the other side, is the State capital of Cross River State (CRS). The Northern, Central, and Southern senatorial zones make up the State's division. CRS has 18 Local Government Areas. It is a coastal state in South-South Nigeria, sharing borders with Cameroon to the East, Benue State to the North, Akwa Ibom

State to the South, and Abia and Ebonyi State to the West. CRS lies between latitude $5^{\circ} 32'$ and $4^{\circ} 271'$ North of the Equator and longitudes $75^{\circ} 928'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian with 28269 km². The selection of the states of AKS and CRS for this study was a result of their nearness to other states, such as Benue and Ebonyi, which makes them particularly vulnerable to child trafficking. It has been highlighted that child traffickers use the strategically located Cameroon Republic as a route to bring unfortunate children into Cameroon and other African nations (NAPTIP, 2012).

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size from a limited population. All residents of AKS and CRS who are at least 18 years old are included in the research population, which is estimated to number 3 178,670 people (National Population Commission NPC, 2006). The selection of LGAs, communities, villages, dwelling units, and respondents was done through the use of a multi-stage sample technique. Using a statistical method known as proportionate population to size, 672 and 438 persons responded to the questionnaire, and were assigned to AKS and CRS, based on their population. Data was collected via a questionnaire and an in-depth interview. Six (6) research aids who are skilled in Efik and English languages and are acquainted with the study settings were hired to help with data collecting.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data from the survey. Tables and percentages were utilized to show and analyse the data using descriptive statistics. Chi-square statistics were used to evaluate the hypotheses (2). In the two states under investigation, Logistic Regression Analysis (LRA) was utilized to identify indicators linked to child trafficking. The information from the extensive interview was evaluated utilizing the thematic technique.

The respondents' perceptions on the scope of child trafficking in the states of

AK and CR

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by the extent of child trafficking in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states

Extent	State of residence		Total
	Akwa Ibom	Cross River	
High	491(74.2)	229(52.7)	720(65.7)
Low	153(23.1)	166(38.3)	319(29.1)
I don't know	18(2.7)	39(9.0)	57 (5.2)
Total	662(100.0)	434(100.0)	1096(100.0)

The goal of the survey was to ascertain respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of child trafficking in their various places of abode. According to the poll, 74.2 percent of respondents in AK state believe that the extent of child trafficking is large, whereas 23.1 percent think there is little child trafficking. The 2.7 percent left have no idea how widespread child trafficking is in their community. Moreover, half of those surveyed (52.7%) in Cross River State claimed the prevalence of child smuggling is high compared to 38.3 percent who claimed that it is small. The penultimate 9.0 percent have no idea how widespread child trafficking is in their community. These findings imply that child trafficking is a serious problem in both states. AKS respondents (74.2%) and CRS respondents (52.7%) are a clear indication of the preponderance of the problem in the study areas.

Qualitative data provided more insight into the link between the scope of child trafficking in AKS and CRS.

The fact that it affects both kids and plenty of families with kids, putting them through a lot of pain and cruelty makes it a nasty phenomenon that has infected human society. As so many of our kids have been victims of child trafficking in this

neighborhood, it is imperative that this practice end **[Interviewee: IDI, youth leader, male Akwa Ibom state]**.

Well in the community we have realised that in a year in every ten homes five get involved in this practice in the name of housemaids o the major cities. And these young ones end up being taken for other social ills ie society. I can comfortably say that in every ten families, five have been used for child trafficking.

Currently, if it's in percentage I will say about 50%in a year of the total people in the community.**[Interviewee: IDI, second youth leader, Male Cross River state]**.

The conclusion from the two IDIs corroborates the findings of the qualitative data which is evident that residents of both states believe child trafficking is widespread and of a serious nature. **Poverty and child trafficking**

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by the rating of poverty as the contributing factor to child trafficking and State of Residence

Level of poverty	State of Residence		Total
	<u>Akwa Ibom</u>	Cross River	
High	612(92.5)	355(81.7)	967(88.2)
Low	44(6.6)	70(16.1)	114(10.4)
Don't Know	26(3.9)	31(7.2)	57(1.4)
Total	662(100.0)	434(100.0)	1096(100.0)

The poll looked at respondents' perceptions of the severity of poverty in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states and its link to child trafficking. Firstly, a larger percentage of respondents (92.5%) in the state of AK agreed that poverty contributed to child trafficking as opposed to 6.6% who claimed it was minimal and 3.9% who said they had no idea. In contrast, 16.2% of respondents who live in Cross River state said they feel poverty has a minimal impact on child trafficking, while 81.7% said it has a big impact. The remaining 7.2%, in contrast, said that poverty rates did not in any way influence child trafficking.

One of the interviewees, considered that this conclusion was supported by qualitative data from the in-depth interview:

Well, poverty! Poverty, especially now the economy of Nigeria, is very terrible. We have found out that poverty is like a friend to Nigerians. However, the level of poverty now is so high that we try to do anything to make a living [interviewee: **IDI, second social welfare officer, female in CRS**].

Research implies that child trafficking in the states of AK and CR is significantly influenced by poverty.

Gender most likely to be trafficked

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by Gender most likely to be trafficked and state of residence

Gender	State of Residence		Total
	Akwa Ibom	Cross River	
Males	371(56.0)	152(35.0)	523(47.7)
Females	254(38.4)	248(57.1)	502(45.8)
I do not know	36(5.4)	27(6.3)	63(5.8)
Both	1(0.2)	7(1.6)	8(0.7)
Total	662(100.0)	434(100.0)	1096(100.0)

The above table displays the opinions of respondents on the sex of young people who were most likely to be trafficked. According to the findings, 56.0 percent of AK State respondents think that male children are more likely to be trafficked than female children, while 38.4 percent think that female children are more likely to be trafficked. A few respondents admitted they were unsure of which gender was trafficked the most. Females appear to be the gender most likely to be trafficked (57.1 percent) in Cross River state, according to 35 percent of respondents. Finally, 6.3 percent stated that they were unsure. This demonstrates that males are trafficked more than females in Akwa Ibom, but females are

trafficked more in CRS. This may be associated with the people’s culture and belief system toward girl children.

Qualitative information from both states supported these conclusions, "well, both the two sexes are all victims of child trafficking, but in our record here we find out that more males fall victim to child trafficking than the female ones" **[Interviewee: IDI, head of social welfare, male, AKS].**

Also, qualitative data revealed that females are sought because:

We found out that some cultures, especially among the Efik in Cross River state, believe that their male children are likely to be their source of income. Also, they believe that the male children have higher value, and will attract wealth to them. They are like an asset to them, so they don’t believe so much in giving out their male children because of their cultural background that males are their source of income **[Interviewee: IDI, community leader, Male, CRS].**

Table 4: Logistic regression of respondents’ description of child trafficking

	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
State of residence	.070	.323	.047	1	.829	1.072	.570	2.020
number of children	.536	.752	.509	1	.476	1.710	.392	7.466
Monthly income	-.038	.457	.007	1	.934	.963	.393	2.358
Edu. Qualification	1.318	.355	13.801	1	.000	3.735	1.864	7.485
Age group	.900	.362	6.181	1	.013	2.459	1.210	4.998
Constant	2.218	.293	57.397	1	.000	9.192		

Note: Age was categorized as 0 for young and 1 for elderly, monthly income as 0 for low and 1 for high, and HEQ was marked as 0 for low and 1 for high education. 0.05 is significant.

Table 4 displays the results of the analysis, which reveal that various criteria were likely to foresee it after reading the description of child trafficking. Two of these factors are the highest level of education and age. The level of education has a substantial relationship with the perception of the evil of child trafficking. Otherwise put, persons with higher levels of education are more inclined than those with lesser levels to think negatively about child trafficking. Similarly to that, there was a strong correlation between age and how child trafficking was described. It was shown that elderly individuals are more likely than younger ones to consider child trafficking to be detrimental. Other relevant characteristics are a place of abode, the size of kids, and earnings per month, which did not indicate a negative assessment of child trafficking.

Discussion of findings

The study's findings are discussed in this section. They will be presented under several topics based on the study's findings.

Range of child trafficking

According to the report, the prevalence of child trafficking is considered to be high by the people of Akwa Ibom state. Comparatively, 23.1% believe it to be less. Similarly, more than 50% of respondents (52.7%) in Cross River State said that child trafficking was a serious problem. Yet, 38.3%% believe it to be below. This shows that citizens of both states believe child trafficking is widespread and of a serious nature. This finding is justified on the ground that parents or guidance of trafficked victims are under the false illusion that their economic conditions will be improved through their trafficked children. They are not aware of the serious exploitation and abuse that frequently affect their kids, thereby propelling them to engage their children in child trafficking.

Lack and child trafficking

In AK and CRS states, the study discovered a connection between poverty and child trafficking. This result supports UNICEF's (2018) observation that the majority of trafficking victims come from low-income households. The level of poverty in the area under study makes it difficult for parents to send their children to school and also cater to them as they would have wanted. Because these parents want a better life for their children they, therefore, send them to places where they think they have a better chance in life. This is even more worrisome considering that Nigeria's economy is currently not at its best. As such many cases of child trafficking, as noted by the study, take place in poor and broken homes and this is mostly in rural areas where the wealth gap is a contributing factor to child trafficking. However, poverty alone is not enough to explain this desperation since they are not the only group exposed to hardship in Nigeria.

Gender and child trafficking

The study looked at the gender of children who were mostly trafficked. In Akwa Ibom State, Males are slightly more likely than females to be trafficked, but in Cross River State, the opposite is true. For example, in Akwa Ibom State, more than half of those whose families had transferred a child to live with someone stated that men are more likely to be trafficked than girls (38.4 percent). In Cross River state, 57.1 percent, or more than half, believe that girls are more likely to be trafficked than males (35.0 percent). As a result, both males and females are trafficked in equal amounts. This finding is a result of male preference due to inherent socio-cultural factors that tend to instill inferiority in the female child thereby promoting more female child trafficking in CRS. However, in AKS males are mostly trafficked. This discrepancy shows the importance these societies placed on gender.

Conclusion

The study looked at how people in Nigeria's AK and CR States perceived child trafficking. The main goal was to learn how people in Akwa Ibom and the Cross River States felt about child trafficking in general. The study discovered a

significant frequency of child smuggling in the states of AK and CR. Poverty is blamed for the high frequency of child trafficking in the studied locations. Poverty is not only a financial problem; it is also a social one. In essence, the inference is that governmental assistance is required in the fight against child trafficking in the states of AK and CR. The research also showed various cultural practices that serve as a boost to child trafficking in the study region, such as giving preference to particular genders, as well as the social and economic consequences of child trafficking. If a variety of government rackets and laws intended to prevent it are correctly carried out, child trafficking may be minimized to the absolute minimum.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are given based on the findings of this study:

1. To extensively fight child trafficking in the states of Akwa Ibom and Cross River, pertinent government organizations, the media, faith-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations should launch a significant public awareness campaign.
2. The government should partner with private sectors to establish effective and functional programmes to alleviate the poor condition of individuals in the Akwa Ibom and Cross River states.
3. Gender discrimination should be abolished. Every child should be accorded equal importance in society irrespective of sex to avoid vulnerability to traffickers in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States.

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