

**THE ROLE OF NGOS IN COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND
IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN BENIN: A CASE STUDY OF PATRIOTIC
CITIZENS INITIATIVE (PCI)**

OTAIGBE INCREASE

ART2100682

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

OCTOBER, 2025

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF
BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS
(B.A) HONOURS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND
DIPLOMACY**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out by **Otaigbe Increase**, with matriculation number **ART2100682**, in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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Mrs L .O Enadeghae
(**Project supervisor**)

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Prof. J. C. Nwaka
(**Ag. Head of Department**)

Date:

Date:

DEDICATION

To God almighty, the source of my inspiration, strength, guidance and wisdom, with whom this journey have been made possible. To my parents Mr Paul and Mrs Augusta Otaigbe , for their unwavering love , support encouragement and prayers.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The world has been battling complex issues such as human trafficking and irregular migration.¹ Nations on every continent have established measures to combat these societal issues. To fully understand the significance of these two concepts, it's essential to define them properly. Human trafficking can be likened to modern-day slavery, characterized by the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of individuals through force, coercion, deception, or exploitation, with the goal of exploiting them.² This complex phenomenon involves various individuals, including traffickers, victims, and enablers, and can take many forms, such as forced labor, sex trafficking, and organ harvesting, with severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for its victims.³

Furthermore, irregular migration occurs when individuals cross international borders in ways that do not comply with the destination country's laws and regulations.⁴ This may involve entering without proper documentation, overstaying a visa, or violating the terms of their residency. Various factors drive this type of migration, including economic inequality, conflict, and environmental issues, which affect both migrants and the countries involved.⁵

The causes of these two global issues differ. Historically, countries that have encountered issues such as human trafficking are mostly found in Asia and Africa.⁶ This is because they lack the resources and finances needed to enforce anti-trafficking laws.⁷ In the case of irregular migration, the most renowned causes are mainly due to extreme poverty and a low standard of living in a country, or bad governance, which forces inhabitants to seek refuge elsewhere, often in neighboring states or countries with developed economies.⁸ Another major cause of this issue can arise from the existence of wars, both internal and external, which drive citizens away from their country to live in other countries.⁹

Whatever the cause, one thing is certain: the destruction and problems these societal issues bring have necessitated the establishment of global organizations to tackle them. One such globally recognized organization is the International Justice Mission (IJM), a human rights organization based in the United States that helps various countries rescue victims of human trafficking and bring perpetrators to justice.¹⁰ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is another globally recognized organization, established in 1997, that works to combat human trafficking in various countries.¹¹ To combat irregular migration, international organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have been created to protect and assist migrants and refugees.¹²

Domestically, various countries have established internal organizations to combat these issues.¹³ For instance, in Nigeria, one of the countries dealing with human trafficking and irregular migration, which contribute to its underdevelopment, several anti-human trafficking organizations have been set up. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was established to combat human trafficking.¹⁴ Additionally, the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) was established to handle immigration issues in the country.¹⁵ These organizations help tackle these issues in various states of Nigeria, particularly in Edo State, specifically in Benin City.

The history of human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin City, Nigeria, is complex. There have been numerous cases of trafficked individuals, mostly women and children, which has been a source of concern for the state and country. The high level of poverty and low standard of living among the inhabitants of Benin City has also been a major cause of irregular migration.¹⁶ The frequency of conflicts and inter-group tensions in Benin City is another significant factor driving migration, prompting the government to take action and establish organizations to address the issue.¹⁷ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also been formed to tackle human trafficking and irregular migration. One notable example is the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI), established on February 4, 2010.¹⁸ PCI is a non-profit organization that provides support to individuals in areas of returns, reintegration and readmissions.¹⁹

The organization has been addressing the developmental needs and challenges of irregular migration, human trafficking, and reintegration of individuals back to their home countries, including offering humanitarian support, safety, and protection to all individuals.²⁰

Through the establishment of PCI and other organizations, Benin City has demonstrated its commitment to tackling these societal issues. In subsequent chapters, we will examine the history of human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin City, Nigeria, as well as the establishment and roles of the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI) in combating these issues. We will also discuss the pros and cons PCI has encountered in its efforts to combat human trafficking and irregular migration in the city.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

- i. To investigate the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in combating human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin, with a specific focus on the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI).
- ii. To examine the prevalence and impact of human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin
- iii. To assess the interventions and strategies employed by PCI to combat human trafficking and irregular migration.

- iv. To evaluate the effectiveness of PCI's interventions in reducing human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin.
- v. To examine the challenges and limitations faced by PCI in combating human trafficking and irregular migration.

Scope of the Study

The scope covers the establishment of the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI) in the year 2010 up until 2017. The scope was chosen to examine its impact in the first seven years of its establishment and to also examine the challenges it has faced over the years.

Research Methodology

The historical methodology will be used in this study. Both primary and secondary sources will be carefully analyzed to achieve a detailed analysis.

Primary Sources

Primary sources like oral interviews were held with the staffs of the organization, in Benin City, Nigeria. Other primary sources employed will semi-structured oral interviews with the staffs and victims of human trafficking and irregular migration in

Benin City, others include immigration service and other Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to examine menace of irregular migration and human trafficking.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources were comprised of books, articles in journals, edited books, newspapers and online materials. Sources were obtained on subject matter. The two sources were critically analyzed using historical narratives.

Literature Review

Over the years, there has been increasing research on the causes and effects of these global issues. In light of this, there exist a number of written works about human trafficking and irregular migration, however no author has written a comprehensive work about the subject, particularly relating to its causes and effects in Benin City Nigeria, and the role of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI) in tackling such issues. The various books that serves as foundations to which this study will be based on and will overtake include;

According to Roland Aghahiusi Ukhurebor's article in a journal, "Human Trafficking and Nigeria's Development: An examination of the Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria,"²¹ states that human trafficking poses a substantial challenge in Nigeria and predominantly affects young girls and women, who are often subjected to forced labor and sexual exploitation. He posits that several factors contribute to the vulnerability

of Nigerian youth to traffickers, including economic hardships, cultural influences, and the aspiration for improved opportunities abroad.²² Nigeria serves as a source, transit, and destination country for victims of human trafficking, with many being trafficked to nations such as Italy, Spain, and Germany. The impact of human trafficking is severe, resulting in physical and psychological harm to victims.

Furthermore maintains that it hampers the country's development by depriving it of the potential contributions of its young population. The work provides a solid foundation to this research, however it fails to examine the establishment of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI) and it's importance in tackling the issue of human trafficking in Benin City, which this study will definitely cover.

Moreso, Cynthia Olufade's work titled, *Sustenance of Sex Trafficking in Edo State: the Combined Effect of Oath Tacking, Transnational Silence and Migration Imaginaries on Trafficked Women in Edo State*,²³ is useful in this research. It explores the role of oath-taking rituals in human trafficking networks in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. It examines the mechanisms used by traffickers to control victims, the responsibilities of different actors, and the interactions between various groups in society, including religious organizations, families, and state institutions.²⁴ The study highlights the distinctiveness of the Edo sex trafficking network, which incorporates oath-taking rituals that exploit victims' beliefs. In spite of it's relevance to this research, the article

fails to examine the causes of irregular migration in Benin and the efforts taking by NGOs in combating the issue of irregular migration in Benin City.

Modupe Adeleye's work titled, "Victims, Actors and Violence: Human Trafficking and Prostitution in Communities in Nigeria"²⁵ is useful as it examines the principal actors in Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation in border communities as well as the recruitment pattern of victims of trafficking in the border locations. It however did not examine the potential consequences of human trafficking and the roles taken by government and organization to tackle it. This study hopes to fill this void.

Clementina O. Osezua, in her article titled, "Gender Issues in Human trafficking in Edo State, Nigeria"²⁶ is also essential to this study, it examines the global trend in trafficking activities all over the world. It also moves further by analyzing the causes of Human Trafficking in Edo State. It however streamline the causes and effects of human trafficking to Edo as a whole. There is need to examine the causes and consequences of irregular migration, which this study intends to examine.

Alenkhe Odianonsen Augustine in his article titled, "Beyond Bargaining: The Scourge faced by illegal international migrants of Benin descent"²⁷ explores the challenges and hardships faced by individuals from Benin who migrate internationally without proper documentation. The book examines the migration routes, risks, and dangers faced by these migrants, including exploitation, kidnapping, and death. It also

analyzes the economic and social factors driving migration, such as poverty and lack of opportunities, and evaluate the responses of governments and regional organizations to irregular migration.²⁸ Additionally, the book focuses on the human rights of migrants and the need for more effective and humane policies to address the issues faced by these individuals. Overall, the book seems to promise a nuanced exploration of the complex issues surrounding irregular migration. However, there is need to examine the establishment of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI), and its roles in combating human trafficking in Benin City.

Adeyemi A. Ajoke's article titled "Reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria"²⁹ examines the reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults in the Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria. It investigates the risks and consequences faced by young migrants, particularly women, including exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancies. The article also explores the role of factors such as lack of access to healthcare, exploitation, and violence in exacerbating reproductive and sexual health problems among this population.³⁰

Additionally, it discusses the need for targeted interventions and policies to address the unique health needs of young migrants and promote their reproductive and

sexual well-being. In spite of its usefulness to this research, it however fails to explain the establishment of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI), and its role in combating irregular migration in Benin City.

Furthermore, Lara Rebello's work titled, "African slaves cut open for their kidneys in Libya's burgeoning organ trafficking market",³¹ is a very good work on organ trafficking in Libya. It specifically focuses on the exploitation of African slaves who are being cut open for their kidneys. Lara Rebello, sheds light on a horrific situation that involves human rights abuses, exploitation, and violence. The author also explores the dark underbelly of Libya's organ trafficking market, where vulnerable individuals, including African migrants and slaves, are being targeted and subjected to brutal practices. The author may be highlighting the need for greater awareness, action, and accountability to address this egregious human rights issue. Due to the author's focus, she restricted her study to other aspects of modern slavery, however, there is need to examine illegal migration in Benin City, Edo State, which this study hopes to fill.

The book "*Chasing a Mirage... My Search for an Oasis*" by Comrade Osita Osemene, with Yvonne Awosanya-Adefajo,³² they expose the issues surrounding illegal migration, human trafficking, and the search for better life opportunities, particularly among African youths. The book highlights the dangers and challenges associated with irregular migration, including the risks of death, exploitation, and unfulfilled expectations. The

book also provides an interesting and educative narratives that sheds light on the complexities of migration and the need for governments and societies to address the root causes of migration, such as lack of opportunities and poverty. The book provides a brief history of the author who is also the owner of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI).

Statement

Given the above-reviewed works, it is obvious that they focused on other aspects of human trafficking and irregular migration. Some of them examined the roles of the federal and state governments in combating human trafficking and irregular migration, while others analyzed the roles of government agencies. Therefore, there is a need to examine the role of non-governmental organizations, using the case of PCI in combating irregular migration and human trafficking in Benin.

Chapterization

The research will comprise of four chapters

1. Introduction
2. History of Human Trafficking and irregular migration in Edo State, Nigeria

3. The establishment of the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI) and its roles in combating Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration in Benin
4. Challenges face by the Patriotic citizens initiative (PCI) in carrying out its objectives
5. Conclusion

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PATRIOTIC CITIZENS INSTITUTE (PCI)

The need to curb human trafficking in the land of Benin necessitated the creation of an establishment, the one which remains a central point of our discussion, the Patriotic Citizens Institute. The PCI was established as a direct result of the personal journey of its founder, Comrade Osita Osemene. In his early years, Osemene was engaged in business, but when his business began to fail and debts piled up, he was forced to consider leaving the country to seek better opportunities abroad.¹ Like many young Nigerians hoping for better opportunities, he thought traveling abroad would be his way out of debt and hardship. But his first attempt quickly turned into a bitter experience because when he got to the airport, he discovered that the man who promised to arrange his travel was nothing but a fraud. The shock was heavy, but what hurt even more was the thought of going back home to face the family and friends he had already told about his plans. The shame of returning empty-handed affected on him so much that he felt trapped and brokenhearted.²

In his confusion and deep disappointment, someone told him about another way to leave Nigeria, the irregular route through Libya. This path was painted to him as a faster and cheaper way to reach Europe, and like many desperate people in his situation, he was tempted to try it. But the truth of this route was far from what he had imagined.

As he began to journey, he quickly came face-to-face with the harsh reality of irregular migration. The road was filled with danger, fear, and uncertainty. He saw how people suffered along the way, the hunger, the thirst, the endless walking, and the constant threat of death. The conditions were so terrible that he realized this was not a road to freedom but a road to pain, and the more he went forward, the more he saw the mental and physical stress that many other migrants were going through.³ Some were too weak to continue, others had lost hope, and many had been deceived into believing that the journey would be easy. The closer he got to crossing further into North Africa, the heavier his heart became. Deep inside, he knew he would not survive it, because he understood that the path ahead was not a road to a better life but one that could lead to slavery, exploitation, or even death in the desert. It was at this point that he made a decision that would change his life forever. He describes this act as a privilege and an act of grace. Upon journeying to the unknown, his decision was to turn back, refusing to continue the journey and he then returned to Nigeria.⁴

Although he had decided to return home, the journey back was very difficult. He did not just come back home empty-handed, but he returned carrying heavy shame, deep disappointment, and the painful realization that his dream of traveling had collapsed before his eyes. It felt as though everything he had hoped for was gone, and the thought of facing his family and friends, who had believed in his plans, became a heavy burden. For a long time, he struggled with the sense of failure and wondered how to start his life

all over again. The following years became a period of personal struggle and recovery. He had to gradually rediscover himself and accept that his life had taken a completely different path from what he once imagined. But even in the middle of this pain, something began to dawn on him, his experience was not useless. The memories of what he had seen on that dangerous route stayed fresh in his mind, refusing to leave him. Instead of allowing the pain to crush him, he started to see it as a lesson, a message that could help save others from making the same mistake.⁵

This reflection led him to think deeply about the many Nigerian youths who were being misled the same way he had been. He knew they were driven by desperation, misinformed about the realities of migration, and often deceived by traffickers who painted false pictures of life abroad. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that his story was not just his personal story, it was a tool that could be used to warn, enlighten, and guide others toward better choices. This strong belief eventually developed into the idea of establishing the Patriotic Citizens Institute.⁶

Establishment of PCI

By 2004, he began to seriously think about creating a platform to warn young people about the dangers of irregular migration and human trafficking. He no longer saw his experience as just a personal failure, but as a lesson that could help protect others from making the same mistake. His first major step was through writing. He authored a book

titled *Chasing the Mirage*, which told his painful story and exposed the lies, false hopes, and traps behind irregular migration. The book gave him a voice, created awareness, and showed people that he was speaking from real experience, not theory. This effort laid the foundation for what later became the Patriotic Citizens Institute, formally established with its headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria.⁷

Starting the organization was not easy, especially because of funding. Like many NGOs, Osemene made personal sacrifices, relying on his own little resources to keep the dream alive. Over time, his family and friends began to support him financially and morally. With consistency, the institute slowly grew and eventually attracted international partners who shared in its vision. What began as one man's painful experience gradually transformed into a strong organization, a symbol of resilience and a platform of hope for countless Nigerians seeking protection from the dangers of irregular migration and human trafficking.⁸

Objectives of PCI

The aims and objectives of the Patriotic Citizens Institute (PCI) were formed with one clear goal in mind, which was to reduce human trafficking and irregular migration by giving young Nigerians the right tools and opportunities to build their lives at home. PCI understands that many young people do not set out to destroy their future but rather, they are driven by poverty, unemployment, and they believe that success only

comes by leaving the country. Because of this, the organization focuses first on empowerment. It designs programs that give young people practical skills such as tailoring, catering, hairdressing, carpentry, computer literacy, and other vocational abilities that can help them survive and grow economically. Beyond training, PCI also connects youths with mentorship opportunities and business guidance so that they do not only learn skills but also know how to turn those skills into income. By equipping them this way, PCI makes it easier for young people to see a future in Nigeria instead of risking their lives on irregular migration routes.⁹

At the same time, PCI paid attention to returnees, those who have already taken the dangerous step of migrating irregularly but ended up back in Nigeria. Many of them return with scars that are not only physical but also emotional. They face trauma from abuse, memories of suffering, and sometimes even rejection from their own families or communities who see them as failures. And so the PCI works to break this cycle of pain by creating programs that welcome returnees back with dignity and pride. These programs include counseling sessions to deal with emotional wounds, workshops to rebuild confidence, and empowerment schemes that allow them to learn new skills or improve the ones they already have. This way, returnees are not left stranded like that, but instead they are given a chance to restart their lives and rebuild their dreams.¹⁰

An important part of PCI's objective is to make returnees part of the solution rather than silent victims. Many of them have powerful personal stories that can discourage others from making the same mistakes. PCI therefore trains and encourages them to share their experiences with communities, schools, and youth groups. By doing this, returnees are transformed into advocates who warn others about the reality of irregular migration, creating a ripple effect of awareness that reaches more people than any single campaign could achieve. Through these efforts, PCI works on two important fronts, prevention and rehabilitation. On one side, it tackles the root problem by reducing the desperation that drives young people into the hands of traffickers, offering them skills, opportunities, and hope for a better life at home. On the other side, it focuses on those who have already fallen into the trap of irregular migration, helping them recover, rebuild, and find new strength. This balanced approach makes PCI's work stand out, because it goes beyond talk and awareness, providing real support and real solutions that change lives.¹¹

One of the important goals of PCI is to build strong partnerships with other groups, both within Nigeria and outside the country. The organization understands that the problem of irregular migration and human trafficking is too big for one body to solve alone. For this reason, PCI works hand in hand with government agencies, international organizations, and other non-governmental organizations so that their combined efforts can reach more people and create a bigger impact. This has led PCI to work closely with

groups like the European Union, NAPTIP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Edo State Migration Agency. Through these collaborations, PCI has been able to run bigger programs, reach more victims, and provide stronger support for young people who need help.¹²

Another key objective of PCI is education and awareness. The institute believes that preventing irregular migration starts with proper knowledge. Many people fall into the hands of traffickers because they are not well informed about the dangers and lies that come with irregular migration. To deal with this, PCI carries out sensitization programs in schools, churches, and markets. These places are chosen because they bring together both young people and adults, making it possible to spread the message across entire communities. PCI teaches students, traders, parents, and church members about the risks of irregular migration, with the aim that they will spread the awareness to others so fewer people are misled. PCI's focus on both partnership and education shows that its work is not just about rescuing victims but also about preventing future cases.¹³ When families and communities become informed, they are less likely to let their children or relatives fall into the trap of traffickers. This makes the whole community stronger in standing against irregular migration. In this way, PCI is not just helping individuals but also changing the thinking and attitudes of entire groups of people.

Overall, these objectives show that PCI's mission and vision are not just empty words on paper but real steps that bring change. After many years of working with international partners and carrying out constant education in local communities, PCI has built a system that tackles human trafficking from many sides. This practical and complete approach makes its work effective and long-lasting. Over the years, the institute has also developed several strategies and programs to fight irregular migration and human trafficking. One of its main strategies is creating awareness through direct outreaches, meaning the PCI organizes awareness campaigns in schools, churches, and marketplaces where many people can be reached at once. These sessions are guided by the belief that "information is power." When people clearly understand the dangers of irregular migration, they are less likely to be deceived by traffickers and are also able to guide others in their families and communities.¹⁴

Another important strategy is the provision of life skills and vocational training. PCI runs programs that train young people and returnees in practical skills such as small business management, vocational crafts, and entrepreneurship. These trainings help participants build a livelihood for themselves, reducing the desperation that often pushes them to attempt unsafe migration. Through these efforts, PCI turns vulnerable people and returnees into empowered, productive members of society. Reintegration and rehabilitation also form a major part of PCI's work. The organization offers counseling services for returnees, meeting both their financial and emotional needs. Many victims of

trafficking or failed migration come back traumatized, hopeless, and broken. PCI helps them go through a healing process that restores their confidence and dignity. Along with counseling, the institute also provides financial support for small businesses, giving beneficiaries a steady source of income after their rehabilitation.¹⁵

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CHAPTER THREE

ROLE OF THE PATRIOTIC CITIZENS INITIATIVE (PCI) AND ITS ROLES IN COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN BENIN

Introduction

Human trafficking and irregular migration have become major social and humanitarian problems in Nigeria, especially in Edo State. Over the years, Benin City has gained attention as one of the main departure points for irregular migrants leaving Nigeria in search of better opportunities abroad. Thousands of young men and women have left their homes, trusting traffickers who promise them good jobs and comfortable lives in Europe. Sadly, many of them end up being deceived, stranded, or even enslaved in foreign countries like Libya, Mali, and Italy. The dream of a better life quickly turns into a nightmare of exploitation, abuse, and regret.¹

The problem of irregular migration became worse during the political crisis in Libya, when several Nigerians were trapped in terrible conditions. The stories of torture, imprisonment, and death among migrants drew national and international attention to the need for urgent intervention. It was clear that government efforts alone were not enough to solve the problem. Non-governmental organizations and community-based groups needed to step in to educate the people, support victims, and help reduce the growing number of migrants leaving through dangerous routes.²

In this context, the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI) was born. PCI became a voice for awareness, rehabilitation, and empowerment, especially among the youths of Edo State. It emerged as one of the most active organizations in Benin City fighting against human trafficking and irregular migration through education, empowerment, and collaboration with both government and international partners. This work discusses how PCI was established, its main objectives, and the roles it plays in reducing human trafficking and irregular migration in Benin.³

The Patriotic Citizens Initiative was founded in Benin City, Edo State, as a non-governmental and non-profit organization with a focus on protecting human dignity and promoting patriotism among citizens. The organization was established by Comrade Osita, a passionate humanitarian who had witnessed the pain and suffering of many Nigerians stranded in foreign lands. He was particularly touched by the stories of Edo youths who were deceived by traffickers and suffered unimaginable hardships in Libya, Mali, and Europe. His personal encounters with returnees and victims inspired him to create an organization that could provide real help and lasting solutions.⁴

PCI was officially established to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking, to assist returnees in reintegrating into society, and to promote safe and legal migration. The name “Patriotic Citizens Initiative” reflects the belief that every Nigerian

has a responsibility to build a better and safer society. Patriotism, in the vision of PCI, means protecting fellow citizens from harm, ignorance, and exploitation.

At the beginning, PCI faced many difficulties. Funding was limited, and few people understood the seriousness of the problem. Some members of the public even believed that migrating irregularly was the only way to escape poverty. However, through consistent effort and community engagement, PCI gradually gained recognition. It began organizing town hall meetings, school campaigns, and radio programs to educate people about the realities of human trafficking. Over time, it grew into a respected organization with both local and international partnerships.⁵ The founder, Comrade Osita, also wrote a book titled “Chasing the Mirage: My Search for an Oasis”, which gives a deep insight into the causes and dangers of irregular migration. The book has been used as a tool for education, especially among young people who dream of traveling abroad. Through these efforts, PCI established itself as a symbol of hope and enlightenment in Benin City.

Goals of PCI

The Patriotic Citizens Initiative was built with clear goals that guide all its activities. The main objectives include:

1. To create awareness about the dangers of human trafficking and irregular migration, especially among the youth.
2. To support and rehabilitate returnees who have suffered exploitation or trauma abroad.
3. To provide skills training and empowerment opportunities that give people a means of livelihood.
4. To promote safe and legal migration by educating people on proper travel procedures and documentation.
5. To work with local and international bodies in strengthening the fight against human trafficking.
6. To promote patriotism and community responsibility by encouraging citizens to take part in nation-building.⁶

To achieve its goals, PCI focuses on four main areas, awareness, rehabilitation, empowerment, and partnership, believing that solving the problem of human trafficking requires not only rescuing victims but also preventing future cases by addressing poverty, ignorance, and unemployment. In line with this, PCI plays a very active role in both prevention and rehabilitation through programs that cover public enlightenment, skills training, counseling, and support for victims. Some of this active roles include:

Strategies of PCI

1. Public Awareness and Sensitization

PCI has carried out several campaigns to educate people about the tricks used by traffickers. It organizes community outreaches in markets, schools, and religious centers, where people are taught the realities of irregular migration. PCI explains how traffickers lure victims with promises of jobs abroad and how many of those promises lead to slavery and death. The organization has created what it calls “Safe Migration” programs, where people are taught the legal and right ways to travel abroad. It has also established “Anti-Human Trafficking Vanguard” in schools to teach young students early about the dangers of human trafficking.

2. Counseling and Psychological Support

Victims of human trafficking often return home with deep emotional scars. PCI provides counseling to help them recover and regain confidence. Many victims are ashamed or traumatized by what they experienced abroad, and without guidance, they might fall into depression or attempt to migrate again. PCI’s counselors and volunteers help these returnees find hope and meaning in life again.

3. Empowerment and Skills Training

One of PCI’s strongest areas is empowerment. The organization believes that giving people useful skills is the best way to stop irregular migration. PCI organizes

training in areas like tailoring, catering, hairdressing, shoemaking, and small business management. It also helps beneficiaries with start-up kits so they can begin their own businesses. This not only reduces poverty but also keeps them occupied and productive. PCI has successfully empowered thousands of people, especially women and youth, making them financially stable and less likely to fall into the trap of traffickers.

4. Medical and Social Assistance

In addition to counseling and skills training, PCI has also provided medical support for victims who returned home sick or injured. Some returnees came back from Libya and other countries with health problems, and PCI stepped in to assist them with medical care, food, and basic needs.

5. Advocacy and Policy Support

PCI has been involved in advocacy by calling on the government to do more in protecting citizens. It played a role in encouraging the Nigerian government to evacuate trapped Nigerians in Libya during the 2011 uprising that led to the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. PCI also campaigned for Nigerians imprisoned in China, leading to inter-governmental discussions about their release and fair treatment.⁷

Partnerships and Collaborations with Non-State Actors.

The strength of PCI lies in its ability to work with other organizations. Its partnerships with international and government bodies have made it more effective in fighting human trafficking. Some of these international organizations and governmental bodies include:

PCI Collaboration with the European Union (EU)

The EU has many projects designed to support returnees and promote safe migration. It often looks for local organizations with good reputations to partner with, and PCI has been one of such organizations. Through this partnership, PCI helps in training and monitoring returnees who benefit from EU-funded empowerment programs. PCI ensures that the people who receive training or business support use them properly to improve their lives.

PCI Partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Between 2017 and 2021, PCI worked closely with IOM to implement the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in Nigeria. This project was funded by the European Union and focused on helping migrants return home safely, rebuild their lives, and learn useful skills. PCI played a leading role by providing training, monitoring progress, and ensuring that returnees were truly empowered. Many of these returnees later became business owners and community role models.

Relationship with NAPTIP

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) is responsible for enforcing laws against human trafficking in Nigeria. PCI collaborates with NAPTIP whenever it encounters cases of trafficking. Since PCI is not a law enforcement agency, it reports suspected traffickers and victims to NAPTIP, which then investigates and prosecutes offenders. Together, PCI and NAPTIP also organize awareness campaigns in schools and communities to educate the public on how to identify and report traffickers.

Collaboration with EDMA

The Edo State Diaspora and Migration Agency (EDMA) works closely with PCI in profiling and empowering victims. When returnees arrive in Benin, PCI helps to gather their information, provide counseling, and recommend suitable empowerment programs. This partnership ensures that victims are properly rehabilitated and reintegrated into society.

Membership in NACTAL

PCI is part of the Network Against Child Trafficking, Abuse, and Labour (NACTAL). Through this network, it joins forces with other NGOs across Nigeria that are fighting

similar problems. This connection allows PCI to share information, strategies, and best practices for combating trafficking and migration abuse.

International Partnerships

Beyond national collaborations, PCI has partnered with international governments and organizations. It has worked with countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark on migration and reintegration projects. This international cooperation shows that PCI's work is widely recognized and respected.⁸

Achievements and Successes of PCI

Ever since its establishment, PCI has recorded several remarkable achievements that show its impact on individuals and the community. Thousands of people have benefited directly or indirectly from its programs. PCI has facilitated the empowerment of many returnees in collaboration with the Edo State Government, especially during the administration of Governor Adams Oshiomhole in 2011. It played a part in ensuring that the government supported migrants returning from Libya during the crisis.⁹

Through its partnership with IOM and the EU, PCI has trained hundreds of returnees who now run their own small businesses. Two inspiring examples include Mrs. Lilian and Miss Joy Osawaru, both of whom returned from Libya. Lilian and her husband received humanitarian aid through IOM, including food and medical support, and later

started a new life in Nigeria. Joy, on the other hand, attended PCI's training under the EU–IOM initiative, where she learned business management. With this knowledge, she started a successful grocery and soft drink business that now supports her family. These stories show the real impact of PCI's empowerment programs.¹⁰

PCI also achieved national recognition when it ran one of the few shelters in Benin City that could accommodate victims of trafficking. This shelter has been used by international organizations such as the EU and IOM to house and care for returnees. The organization has also trained several returnees who now serve as peace and advocacy ambassadors for PCI, spreading the message of safe migration across Edo communities.¹¹

Impact of PCI in Benin and Edo State

The activities of PCI have greatly changed the way people in Benin see migration. Before now, many young people believed that traveling abroad, no matter how, was the only way to succeed. But today, because of PCI's campaigns and training, more people understand that it is better to travel legally or to build a life at home. The organization has also reduced the number of victims falling into the hands of traffickers by empowering them economically. The presence of PCI in Benin has encouraged other NGOs to rise up and work towards the same goal. It has also improved coordination between government and international partners in migration management. PCI's influence extends beyond Edo State, as its programs have been adopted in other parts of Nigeria.¹²

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CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE PATRIOTIC CITIZENS INITIATIVE (PCI) IN CARRYING OUT ITS OBJECTIVES.

The Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI), like many non-governmental organizations that work to solve social problems, faces several serious challenges while carrying out its objectives. These challenges affect its ability to reach more people, sustain its programs, and maintain the quality of its operations. Even though the organization is deeply committed to fighting human trafficking and irregular migration, it must constantly struggle against issues such as poor funding, limited manpower, inadequate government support, lack of proper facilities, social stigma, and emotional pressure on both staff and returnees. Each of these problems plays a big role in shaping how the PCI operates and how much impact it can make across Nigeria, especially in Edo State where irregular migration is a major problem.¹

Poor Funding

One of the biggest challenges that PCI faces is poor funding. Running an organization that deals with victims of human trafficking and irregular migration requires a lot of money. The programs PCI carries out, like skill acquisition training, awareness campaigns, counseling, and rehabilitation, need constant financial support to be effective. The organization depends mostly on donations, grants, and occasional support from

international partners, but these funds do not come regularly, and sometimes they are not enough to cover all the needs of the victims or the organization itself. Because of this, PCI often finds it difficult to organize large-scale programs or sustain long-term projects.²

The founder, Comrade Osita Osemene, and other members have had to use their personal resources to keep the organization running whenever external support is delayed or unavailable. This puts extra pressure on the team and makes it hard to maintain consistency in their activities. When funds are low, some programs have to be postponed or canceled, which affects the progress of many victims depending on the institute for help. Poor funding also limits the number of people PCI can reach and the kind of help they can provide to returnees who need housing, food, medical care, and emotional support.

Furthermore, financial constraints make it difficult for PCI to expand its operations to rural communities, where many people are vulnerable to trafficking and irregular migration. Sometimes, awareness programs are restricted to urban areas because of transportation costs, lack of materials, or inability to pay field officers.³ This means that many people in remote areas remain uninformed about the dangers of irregular migration. Poor funding therefore remains a major obstacle that affects almost every aspect of PCI's work, from planning and implementation to sustainability and growth.

Another challenge is inconsistent support from international partners and donors. While organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union have worked with PCI in the past, their support often comes in specific project phases and ends after a period of time. When the project cycle ends, PCI struggles to continue the work on its own. This kind of short-term support makes it difficult to maintain long-term programs or to plan ahead. It also affects the morale of staff and beneficiaries who rely on continuous engagement. Sometimes, strict donor conditions and reporting requirements also make it hard for PCI to access funds quickly, especially when they lack the technical staff to prepare detailed proposals or reports.⁴

Limited Man Powers and Human Resources

Another major challenge is limited manpower and human resources. The nature of PCI's work demands a large number of trained professionals who can handle different areas such as counseling, training, administration, and logistics. However, the organization does not have enough full-time staff members. Most of the people working with PCI are volunteers who give their time out of goodwill. While their dedication is commendable, it also means that the organization sometimes struggles with commitment and professionalism, especially when volunteers have to leave for other jobs or personal reasons. This shortage of staff makes it difficult to follow up on every victim or to

monitor the progress of those who have gone through rehabilitation. It also slows down operations when there are multiple programs to run in different communities.⁵

The PCI also faces inadequate government support, which makes its work even more difficult. Although the government of Nigeria has agencies like NAPTIP that deal with human trafficking, collaboration between NGOs and government bodies is often weak. Many times, organizations like PCI are left to carry out their programs with little or no backing from the authorities. This can be discouraging because it limits access to resources and information that the government could easily provide. In some cases, bureaucratic processes delay joint projects or prevent PCI from accessing grants and permissions quickly. There are also times when political interests and corruption affect how funds meant for public awareness campaigns are distributed, leaving smaller NGOs like PCI struggling to fill the gap. Without strong government partnership, the burden of fighting human trafficking and irregular migration rests heavily on PCI's limited capacity.⁶

Lack of Proper Facilities and Infrastructure

A further challenge is lack of proper facilities and infrastructure. The rehabilitation and empowerment of returnees require physical spaces such as training centers, counseling offices, and safe shelters, but PCI does not have enough permanent facilities to carry out all these activities. Often, the organization has to rent halls or

borrow spaces for training programs and workshops, which adds to operational costs and limits the number of sessions they can hold. The absence of dedicated training centers also makes it difficult to provide continuous and structured programs, as beneficiaries may have to travel long distances to attend sessions, reducing attendance and engagement.⁷

In addition, the lack of equipment and materials needed for skill acquisition programs further limits PCI's capacity. For example, vocational training such as tailoring, hairdressing, carpentry, or computer literacy requires specific tools, machines, and learning materials. Without sufficient resources, PCI can only train small groups at a time, which slows down the process of empowering returnees and other vulnerable youths. This limitation also affects the quality of training, as instructors may need to share equipment or adapt lessons due to shortages, making it hard to provide the full experience necessary for beneficiaries to become skilled and self-reliant.⁸

Another dimension of this challenge is transportation and mobility. Field officers and volunteers need vehicles or reliable transport to reach remote communities where irregular migration is prevalent. Due to limited infrastructure and funds, PCI often struggles to move teams and materials efficiently, which reduces the frequency and reach of awareness campaigns.⁹ Remote villages and towns may therefore remain uninformed about the dangers of irregular migration, leaving gaps in the organization's preventive

work. Finally, the lack of proper facilities also affects privacy and safety for victims. Returnees and victims of human trafficking often need safe and secure spaces to receive counseling, medical care, and emotional support. Without dedicated shelters or offices, PCI may have to conduct sensitive sessions in temporary or public spaces, which can compromise confidentiality and the comfort of beneficiaries. This situation can hinder the healing and reintegration process, making it more difficult for PCI to fully support those it aims to help.¹⁰

Social stigma and public misunderstanding

These are also major problems that PCI faces. Many people in society still view returnees with suspicion or shame, believing that anyone who returned from Libya or other migration routes failed in life. This negative perception makes it hard for returnees to reintegrate into their communities. In some cases, even families reject their relatives who come back empty-handed. PCI has to spend a lot of time and effort not only counseling returnees but also educating the public to see them as survivors, not failures. The stigma also affects PCI's work during awareness programs, as some people doubt the truth of the stories told by returnees or feel that the organization is only exaggerating the dangers of migration. This lack of trust makes it harder for PCI to convince young people to stay and build a life in Nigeria rather than trying to migrate through dangerous means.¹¹

Another major challenge is the emotional and psychological strain faced by both staff and beneficiaries. Working with victims of human trafficking and failed migration is emotionally draining. Many of the people PCI helps have gone through extreme suffering, including abuse, starvation, and trauma. Listening to their stories and helping them rebuild their lives requires patience and emotional strength. Counselors and volunteers sometimes get overwhelmed by the number of sad experiences they hear daily. Without professional psychological support, even the staff members can suffer emotional burnout or compassion fatigue. On the other hand, returnees often struggle to trust others again, making it hard for counselors to reach them. Healing from such deep trauma takes time, and without consistent mental health support, progress can be slow.¹²

Lack of awareness and misinformation

These also pose significant difficulties. Many young people who plan to travel abroad do not know the full truth about irregular migration. They are often deceived by traffickers who promise them easy jobs and wealth in foreign countries. Even when PCI holds sensitization programs, not everyone listens or believes the message. Some people still take the risk because they think they will be luckier than others. This wrong mindset reduces the effectiveness of PCI's campaigns. In addition, reaching rural areas where illiteracy is high makes awareness even harder because not everyone understands the

language or the message easily. PCI must constantly look for creative ways, like using drama, radio, and storytelling, to pass across their message clearly.¹³

Other Challenges

Cultural and religious beliefs can also stand in the way of PCI's work. In some communities, people believe that migration is a divine opportunity that should not be questioned. Parents even encourage their children to travel abroad, believing it will bring blessings and financial breakthrough to the family. This deep-rooted belief makes it difficult for PCI to convince such families that irregular migration is dangerous. Also, in some traditional settings, women who return from failed migration experiences are seen as unclean or cursed, which makes reintegration harder. Overcoming these beliefs requires time, patience, and constant community engagement.¹⁴

The organization also faces security and safety challenges during fieldwork. PCI staff and volunteers often travel to remote areas or border communities to carry out awareness campaigns. These areas can sometimes be unsafe due to banditry, kidnappings, or political unrest. There have been times when outreach activities had to be canceled or postponed because of security threats. Apart from external dangers, some traffickers who lose their victims to PCI's rescue operations may also become hostile toward staff, putting them at risk. Without proper security arrangements, the safety of PCI members in the field becomes a serious concern.¹⁵

Finally, the lack of modern technology and data management systems makes it difficult for PCI to track progress effectively. Keeping records of beneficiaries, measuring impact, and producing accurate reports require proper data collection tools. However, due to limited funds and technical capacity, PCI still relies heavily on manual methods. This slows down documentation and sometimes leads to loss of important information. Without strong data systems, it also becomes hard to convince potential donors of the full impact of the organization's work.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The global challenges of human trafficking and irregular migration have drawn significant attention due to their devastating social, economic, and humanitarian impacts. Human trafficking, often described as modern-day slavery, involves exploiting individuals through force, deception, or coercion for purposes such as forced labor, sex trafficking, or organ harvesting. Irregular migration, on the other hand, refers to crossing borders without legal authorization, driven by factors like poverty, conflict, and poor governance. Countries in Asia and Africa, including Nigeria, face severe struggles with these issues due to limited resources and weak enforcement mechanisms.

To combat them, international organizations such as the International Justice Mission (IJM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and International Rescue Committee (IRC) have been established, alongside national bodies like Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS). In Benin City, Edo State, a region notably affected by trafficking and migration, governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI), have played vital roles in rescue, reintegration, and rehabilitation efforts, showcasing a growing commitment to addressing these deep-rooted societal problems.

The Patriotic Citizens Institute (PCI) was founded out of the personal experience of Comrade Osita Osemene, whose failed attempt to migrate irregularly through Libya exposed him to the harsh realities of human trafficking and the suffering faced by many desperate Nigerians seeking better lives abroad. After being deceived by a fraudulent agent and witnessing the pain, death, and exploitation along the irregular migration route, Osemene made the life-changing decision to return home. Though he struggled with shame and disappointment, his painful experience inspired him to turn his story into a tool for change. In 2004, he began raising awareness through his book *Chasing the Mirage*, which exposed the deceit behind irregular migration and helped lay the foundation for the establishment of the PCI, headquartered in Lagos. Despite financial challenges, Osemene's resilience and passion gradually transformed the institute into a reputable organization devoted to preventing human trafficking and unsafe migration.

PCI's mission centered on empowering, rehabilitating, and educating young Nigerians and returnees. The organization provides vocational and life skills training in areas such as tailoring, catering, carpentry, and entrepreneurship, helping young people build sustainable livelihoods and reducing the desperation that drives migration. It also supports returnees through counseling, trauma healing, and reintegration programs that restore dignity and self-confidence. Additionally, PCI trains returnees to become advocates who share their stories to warn others, creating a ripple effect of awareness across communities. Through partnerships with local and international bodies like

NAPTIP, IOM, the European Union, and the Edo State Migration Agency, PCI carries out sensitization campaigns in schools, churches, and markets, emphasizing that informed citizens are less likely to fall into the traps of traffickers. By combining prevention, rehabilitation, empowerment, and collaboration, the PCI has become a symbol of hope and transformation in Nigeria's ongoing fight against human trafficking and irregular migration.

The organization was born out of compassion for victims deceived by traffickers and trapped in harsh conditions in countries like Libya and Mali. With a mission rooted in patriotism and human dignity, PCI set out to raise awareness, rehabilitate returnees, and promote safe and legal migration. Despite early challenges such as poor funding and public ignorance, the institute grew steadily through community engagement, school campaigns, and radio programs that educated people about the dangers of irregular migration. Its objectives focus on creating awareness, offering counseling and rehabilitation, empowering citizens through skills training, promoting patriotism, and working with both national and international bodies to combat trafficking.

Through its well-structured programs, PCI has made a lasting impact in Benin and beyond. It has empowered thousands of people, especially women and youth, through vocational training, small business support, and psychological counseling for victims of trafficking. PCI's partnerships with organizations like the European Union

(EU), International Organization for Migration (IOM), NAPTIP, and the Edo State Diaspora and Migration Agency (EDMA) have strengthened its reach and effectiveness. Its role in the EU–IOM Joint Initiative (2017–2021) helped hundreds of returnees rebuild their lives and become advocates for safe migration. The organization also runs shelters for victims and continues to influence public attitudes by teaching that success can be achieved legally and locally. Today, PCI stands as a respected voice in the fight against human trafficking, symbolizing hope, empowerment, and positive change in Edo State and across Nigeria.

The Patriotic Citizens Initiative (PCI) faces numerous challenges however, that hinder its ability to fully achieve its objectives in combating human trafficking and irregular migration. The most pressing problems include poor funding, limited manpower, weak government collaboration, lack of proper facilities, and inconsistent donor support. Because the organization depends largely on irregular donations and short-term grants, it often struggles to sustain long-term programs or reach remote communities where the risks of trafficking are high. Limited manpower further complicates operations, as most workers are volunteers who cannot always commit long-term. Inadequate government support and bureaucratic delays also prevent effective partnerships, while the absence of sufficient facilities, equipment, and transport makes it difficult to conduct regular training, rehabilitation, and awareness programs.

In addition to these structural problems, PCI also contends with deep social and emotional challenges. Many returnees face stigma and rejection from society, which makes reintegration difficult and discourages others from seeking help. Staff and volunteers also experience emotional exhaustion from working closely with traumatized victims. Misinformation and cultural beliefs about migration further reduce the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, as many people still view migration as a divine or guaranteed path to success. Security threats during fieldwork and the lack of modern data management systems make operations even more difficult. Despite these setbacks, PCI remains resilient, showing strong commitment and courage in its mission. With greater financial, governmental, and public support, the organization can expand its impact and continue saving lives across Nigeria.

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