

UTILIZING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Trafficking of human beings is one of the cruelest violations of human rights in the world today. Women and girls in particular are vulnerable to local, national, and international forces that have a strong vested interest in the perpetuation of rural-to-urban and cross-border human trafficking. Because of the transnational nature of the problem, it requires a coordinated effort among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions across the region. However, there is currently very little sharing of information due to the wide distribution of NGOs addressing the problem, the difficulty of communications in remote areas, low levels of information technology (IT) capacity in anti-trafficking groups, and the hesitancy to share sensitive information over insecure channels.

The Asia Foundation (TAF) is supporting a regional program to address human trafficking in Southeast Asia that includes a series of IT-related initiatives to increase the level of coordination and information sharing throughout the network of anti-trafficking groups in the region. These programs will facilitate NGO coordination and increase linkages between civil society organizations, government officials, and institutions; improve the IT capacity of anti-trafficking groups; and promote bilateral and international networking to increase pressure and generate political support to address the problem.

Highlights of Foundation Programs

HUMAN TRAFFICKING WEB PORTAL

One of the goals of The Asia Foundation's initiative is to build linkages between isolated anti-trafficking groups across the region. Many of these groups maintain information that could be of tremendous value if shared with counterpart organizations. For example, many NGOs in rural areas will maintain a list of missing persons, especially those who are likely to be victims of trafficking. In cities that tend to be destinations of trafficking, several NGOs and authorities maintain information on victims who are currently seeking help. If the NGOs and authorities across the region (rural and urban) could share information, the victims could be put in contact with their families, and many of the cases on missing persons could be resolved. As another example, there is no comprehensive list of anti-trafficking NGOs and relevant authorities across the region. If an NGO in Bangkok makes arrangements to return a victim to her

home in Cambodia, it is very difficult for them to identify local NGOs near the victim's home that could facilitate the journey and contact the family.

TAF is supporting the development of a web portal on human trafficking, which will support information sharing and dissemination throughout the network of anti-trafficking groups. The portal will have both a secure intranet space for sharing sensitive information between anti-trafficking groups, as well as a public space for disseminating information. The web portal will include the following content:

Missing Persons Page — a listing of missing persons who are likely victims of trafficking, and a mechanism to assist those survivors of trafficking who are seeking help.

Laws and Regulations Page — an explanation of the laws and regulations in each country that pertain to human trafficking.

The Asia Foundation is a private, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization working to advance mutual interests in the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S. and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.



THE ASIA FOUNDATION

Headquarters
465 California Street
14th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104
U.S.A.
Tel: 415.982.4640
Fax: 415.392.8863
info@asiafound.org

Washington, D.C.
1779 Mass. Ave, NW
Suite 815
Washington, D.C. 20036
U.S.A.
Tel: 202.588.9420
Fax: 202.588.9409
info@dc.asiafound.org

www.asiafoundation.org

Information Clearinghouse on Human Trafficking

— a public web site containing reports of violence and trafficking incidents, research, survey findings, and relevant information from Southeast Asia.

Listing of Anti-Trafficking Groups

— a listing of the NGOs providing services to survivors (i.e. shelters, psychosocial counselors, legal aid, translators) and trusted authorities (i.e. police, prosecutors, attorneys, judges, government departments) who are working to address the problem of human trafficking, with regularly updated contact information.

This project will initially focus on Thailand and eventually be expanded to Cambodia and Laos. Based on user demands, additional content will be added over the course of the project. The website development and ongoing management will be handled by a team of Thai NGOs, including The Mirror Art Group (www.bannok.com) of Chiang Rai, the Information Technology Center for Education (www.itce.in.th) of the Foundation for Children, and the Development Support Consortium (www.thaingo.org).

Target Countries: Thailand, Cambodia, Laos

HUMAN TRAFFICKING DATABASE

Lack of reliable data and access to information is a recurring obstacle for coordination of protection efforts and services to victims of trafficking. In Cambodia, the relationship between the police and communities is often characterized by mutual mistrust, which hinders protection of women and children. In order for coordination and collaboration to take place in Cambodia, information needs to be accurate, easily available, and secure. It is also essential that information is made accessible for advocacy efforts on trafficking, domestic violence, and rape.

To effectively raise the profile of the issue of violence against women and trafficking of women in the public domain and to make persuasive arguments to policymakers, NGOs must provide reliable statistics about the nature and scope of the problems. TAF will support the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) to develop a database to store and analyze thousands of victim's records. The database will allow the CWCC to capture critical data on the nature and scope of violence against women and trafficking in Cambodia and facilitate better coordination of services. This information will be made available for wider advocacy and public education efforts.

Target Country: Cambodia

ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

Survivors of human trafficking tend to have profound difficulties reintegrating into society, and often require vocational training so that they can earn a living and avoid long-term dependency on shelters and other services. TAF is supporting an innovative new initiative to provide IT-skills training and entry-level employment to victims of trafficking. The program is managed by Digital Divide Data (DDD), a nonprofit organization based in Cambodia that provides IT-enabled services (the outsourcing of data entry and other services that can be performed over the Internet) to local and international clients. DDD trains and employs disadvantaged Cambodians as data entry operators, and will be collaborating with the CWCC to train trafficking survivors in basic skills to become DDD operators.

Target Country: Cambodia