



International  
Labour  
Organization

# First Hand Knowledge

## Voices Across the Mekong

Community action against trafficking of children and women

A 'Good Practice' Publication



The Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women

First Hand Knowledge

Voices Across the Mekong:  
Community action against trafficking of  
children and women

Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking  
in Children and Women

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour  
International Labour Office Bangkok

Copyright © International Labour Organization 2005  
First published 2005

Publications of the International Labour Office enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to the Publications Bureau (Rights and Permissions), International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email: [pubdroit@ilo.org](mailto:pubdroit@ilo.org). The International Labour Office welcomes such applications.

Libraries, institutions and other users registered in the United Kingdom with the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP [Fax: (+44) (0)20 7631 5500; email: [cla@cla.co.uk](mailto:cla@cla.co.uk)], in the United States with the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 [Fax: (+1) (978) 750 4470; email: [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com)] or in other countries with associated Reproduction Rights Organizations, may make photocopies in accordance with the licences issued to them for this purpose.

---

Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women  
First Hand Knowledge – Voices Across the Mekong: Community action against trafficking of children and women

Bangkok, International Labour Office, 2005  
92-2-118064-6 (print)  
92-2-118065-4 (web pdf)

---

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Labour Office concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the International Labour Office, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

ILO publications can be obtained through major booksellers or ILO local offices in many countries, or direct from ILO Publications, International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland. Catalogues or lists of new publications are available free of charge from the above address, or by email: [pubvente@ilo.org](mailto:pubvente@ilo.org).

Copies of this publication can be obtained at:  
ILO Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women  
10th Floor, United Nations Building  
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue, PO Box 2-349  
Bangkok 10200 Thailand

Visit our project website at: [www.childtrafficking.net](http://www.childtrafficking.net)

Cover photo by ILO/Nick Rain

Printed in Thailand

## FOREWORD

This report has been produced in support of the ILO Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (TICW) which was established in selected communities in Cambodia, China (Yunnan), Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam in 2000.

The following accounts are the views and stories of children and women, and the communities to which they belong, who explain their engagement in a program designed to help prevent trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation.

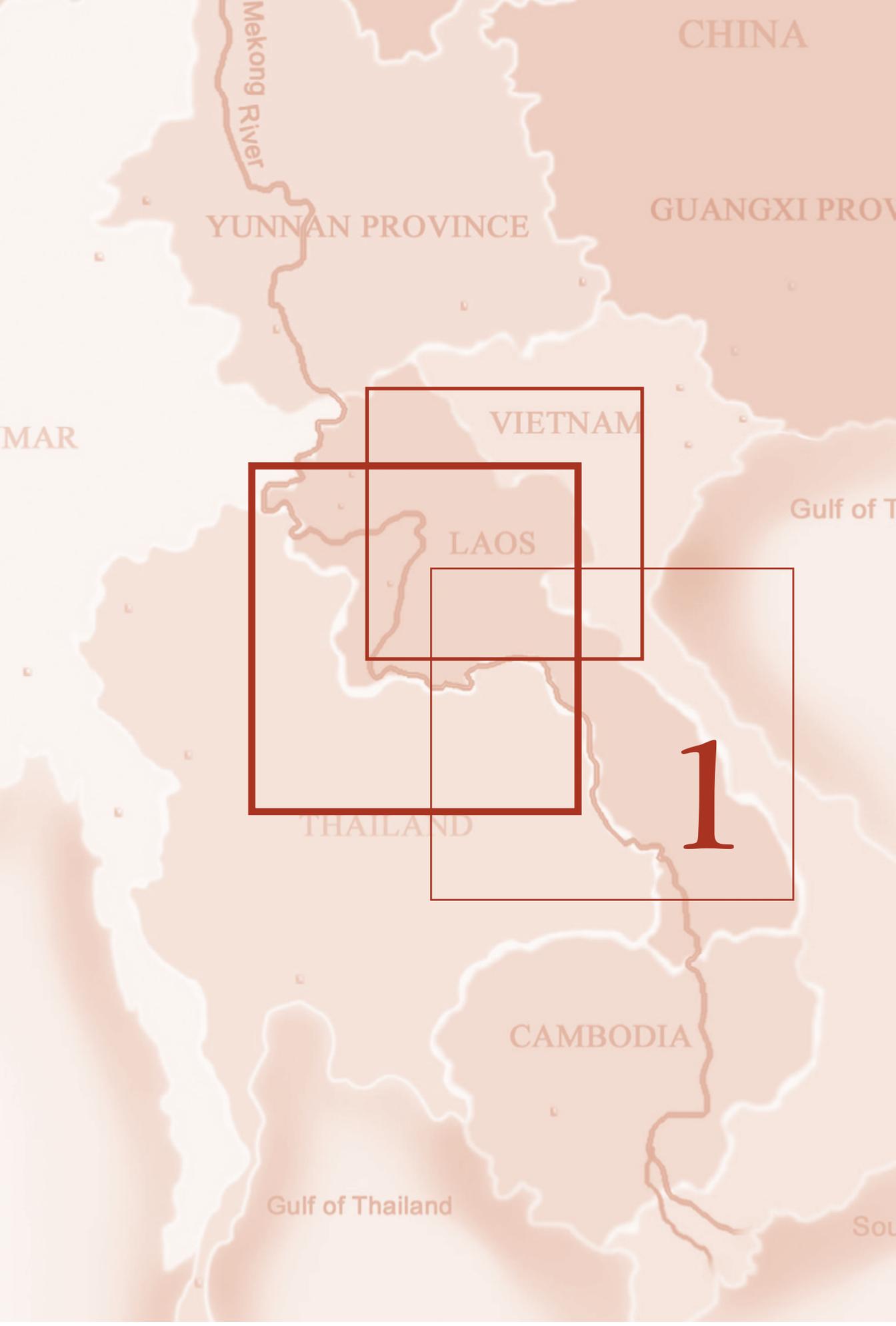
Gathered by special correspondent, Ms Victoria Rialp, the respondents recount the most positive results of the project to date, and how their shared experiences (consultation and participation) have made a difference in their lives. They speak of learning about their rights and ways to take action to protect themselves through a range of community efforts designed to raise awareness about trafficking, to promote gender equality, and to organize self-help groups.

By linking upward to initiatives at the provincial and national levels, these women and children have seen their efforts produce positive results. Project stakeholders – from community to national levels – now speak of expanding and exchanging their experiences with other at-risk communities in their respective countries and in neighboring countries as well.

Throughout this publication the reader will find references to SELLS, TIAs, and other documents. These can easily be found at the project Website: [www.childtrafficking.net](http://www.childtrafficking.net)

# CONTENTS

Foreword	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. Thailand	7
3. Cambodia	17
4. Lao PDR	27
5. Viet Nam	39
6. China (Yunnan Province)	53
7. Summary	63
8. The Future	71



CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

Mekong River

VIETNAM

MAR

Gulf of T

LAOS

1

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The ILO- Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (TICW) considers PREVENTION as the crux of the approach to the problem of trafficking of children and women for sexual and labor exploitation.

The project incorporates a rights-based, participatory, and preventive approach through community development. Indeed, in each of the five participating countries, the project sites were chosen based on their perceived high incidence of trafficking in women and children (generally associated with high poverty and other criteria involving vulnerability) and the political commitment of project partners to reduce and prevent trafficking in these communities.

Working since 2000 in five countries in the Mekong Delta - Cambodia, China (Yunnan), Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, the project encourages and supports at-risk children, families and communities – i.e., as the primary stakeholders – to take local self-help action through a range of awareness raising activities, micro-finance schemes, savings and credit groups, skills training, education, and gender equality promotion. This preventive work “on the ground” is guided by macro-level policy and supported by capacity building initiatives at the district, provincial, and national levels.

The results to date have been encouraging, and these community models have been received positively. As the project moves into its second phase, the expectation is that these community initiatives will be expanded and replicated on a larger scale, and made even more responsive to community needs and capacities for preventive action against trafficking. The project also begins to address the situation of women and children in both sending and receiving communities within the broader context of labor migration across the Mekong region.

Given that the second phase of TICW aims to build on and strengthen support to community involvement, this report highlights the experiences of participating children and women from selected project communities in Cambodia, China (Yunnan), Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The project provinces selected by the project teams for their interesting and promising experiences worth presenting in this report were Prey Veng in Cambodia, Yunnan in China, Champassack in Lao PDR, Phayao in Thailand, and Thanh Hoa in Vietnam.

The visits to the provinces in the five participating countries were facilitated by the project teams and project partners. They arranged the site visits, the meetings and discus-

sions with project beneficiaries and relevant central and local authorities, and provided full translation support throughout. The central project office in Bangkok and the national project offices in the five countries scheduled a five-week mission to the different sites between early July and early August 2004.

Important background and contextual information were drawn from the Evaluation Report by Crawford, the set of SELs (Sharing Experience & Lessons Learned), the Good Practice Reports from the five project countries, and other progress reports from the project teams.

The approach to preparing this report is essentially that of appreciative inquiry, to relate the stories of children, women, and community leaders as they themselves tell it. Essential to this approach were the visits to the communities and the focus group discussions and interviews with the children, women, and community leaders in the project areas. For each of the provinces visited, there were also meetings and discussions with the relevant provincial and national level authorities who make up the national and provincial and district project steering committees.

The report therefore seeks to recount, in as personal and direct a manner as possible, the stories of the children, women, community leaders, and officials who have been directly involved with the TICW project. Each meeting and focus group discussion was introduced as a session during which each participant was asked to “tell his or her story”. It was explained that the collection of stories from the different participants and groups would then be the basis on which this report would be developed. Much of what they related were around two questions posed to them: (1) What in your experience are the happiest results from the project? (2) To what do you attribute these happy results?

The report highlights the shared perceptions among children, women, and community leaders about what have been achieved to date through the project, and the factors and processes of community action to which they attribute these positive results. By retelling their stories in their own words, this report aims to complement the wealth of TICW technical reports on project activities and accomplishments, by putting a “human face” and a “personal voice” to them.

The women and children were especially enthusiastic about sharing their views and experiences. Most of the local leaders and higher-level officials expressed their pleasant surprise and appreciation for being asked about their personal views and sentiments about the project. Many officials spoke about having “very deep feelings” about their experiences with the project.

From the meetings and discussions in each province visited, there emerged some high points of project experience, and points of consensus about results and factors contributing to these results, among the children, women, community leaders, and officials during the interviews or focus group discussions. These apparent points of consensus were

taken as the bases for the slant of the “collective story” of each province (and country) in this report. Although the TICW project runs across the five countries according to a set pattern of project objectives, indicators, inputs, and expected outcomes, the strengths of the project and areas of emphasis have varied from country to country. What came across as a major strength, if not THE major strength, voiced by the children, women and community leaders in each of the provinces (and country) visited, makes up the theme for their respective story as a country case example.

The following section presents an account from each province and country visited during this mission, each with its respective theme. Each account echoes the voices of participating children, women, and their communities, as stakeholders claiming their rights and also exercising their roles and responsibilities, in a preventive approach to trafficking. Their statements indicate some of the significant changes in relationships resulting from their involvement in the project. In particular, they point up the increasing participation of children and youth in aspects of awareness-raising, capability-building, and direct assistance interventions as a crucial and most promising dimension for sustaining the gains emerging from the project.

In order to have children, women, and community leaders “tell their story like it is”, much of the text is presented as direct quotes. In truth, however, these are at times paraphrased or abridged versions of what had already been translated – and some license in interpretation has been taken.

The account for Phayao province in Thailand is entitled “The Prime Minister is coming to visit!” - as announced by the provincial governor himself at a provincial conference on trafficking. It points up the increasing national attention that the trafficking problem and the TICW project experience in Phayao province has generated.

The section on Prey Veng province in Cambodia is entitled “Our children are better protected now” – using the words of a commune leader who describes the child protection efforts that have been organized by the communities.

For the province of Champassak in Laos, the theme is community solidarity – “Our secret is community ownership” – a statement from the head of the province’s steering committee.

In Thanh Hoa province in Vietnam, the consensus was “Our children and women are our IEC workers.”

The children and women and leaders in Yunnan province in China have twinned the problem of trafficking with the status of women, convinced that “It’s a matter of promoting gender equality.”

The latter sections of the report summarize what seem to be emerging across the five project countries as collectively perceived ingredients for success found in the project's initiatives to prevent trafficking, upon which scaling up or replication can be built. It suggests the cross-country success story of the TICW project to date from the perspectives of children, women, and communities. The concluding section indicates a few issues which they raise as remaining challenges to preventive community action.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

2

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

## 2. THAILAND

Voices from Phayao Province:  
*“The Prime Minister is coming to Visit!”*

This was the big news announced by the Governor of Phayao Province during the Provincial Conference on Trafficking that he convened on July 7, 2004 with more than 200 participants attending.

### Message from a former victim

The all-day meeting had opened with a lengthy and moving account by a Phayao woman who recounted her painful experience as a migrant worker to Japan. She had been tricked by her recruiter and had ended up in a brothel. Pressured to take on many customers in order to earn enough to send money to her family as well as to repay her agent, and facing constant death threats from her Yakuza recruiters, she took to drugs. She was married off to a Japanese, but was not treated well by her in-laws who insisted that it was her duty to serve the family the entire seven years that she stayed with them. Now that she has returned to Phayao, she said she is determined to help other young girls and women in Phayao avoid the same mistakes and hardships by speaking out publicly.

She recounted how through the long years of her ordeal, she was nagged by feelings of regret and shame.

*“Why did I want the money? Why did I want to be rich? It was mostly pride in being able to send money to my parents – to buy a house, a car, give them security in their old age. But sometimes parents squander the money or lose it to gambling.”*

She was very emphatic about her message to those who may be entertaining offers from recruiters:

*“Don’t even try, you’ll be sorry... Do not be influenced by friends.... There is no turning back.”*

### Phayao youth speak up

During the question and answer session, many in the audience thanked and congratulated her for her honesty and courage in sharing her experience. Among the mostly adult and official participants were a few girls from a secondary school. One student came forward to express her worry about other people her age who continue to aspire for a life and job abroad.

*“We know that for most people, Japan is a dream society. Many young people still want to go to Japan. Also, we have many friends with Japanese affinity. Some of them have problems because they do not have a national ID and therefore cannot claim a nationality or an education.”*

Later that day, the students were interviewed by the local newspaper.

Their attendance in this provincial forum presided by the Governor, and to which the Minister of Social Welfare and Human Security was invited, was noteworthy. Members of Parliament, the Japanese consul, provincial and district officials were hearing not only what the returning ex-victim from Japan had to say in her opening talk, but how women and children from the communities were addressing the problem of trafficking.

That young people and women were beginning to speak up about their concerns in their communities and in public forums was stressed by project staff of the Rak Thai Foundation – a partner NGO in Phayao that was participating in the conference.

*The youth in Phayao are changing. They are learning to stand up for themselves, and to work for development. In schools and in youth seminars, young people are speaking up about their concerns -- with school and hospital authorities, with tambon administrators. Many have been trained in drama and carry on a mobile theater campaign against trafficking, and have been performing in six villages. As a result of the project, target families are more watchful and less inclined to send their children out...*

*“Moreover, women leaders from the six target communities came to this meeting to present their own agenda to the provincial authorities. They represent their Women Development Groups dealing with issues of economic development, family strengthening, women in politics, and trafficking. They are reiterating the concerns which they had raised in an earlier district forum on women’s issues.”*

## Women of Dokkhamtai

So it was that among the audience in the provincial meeting on trafficking was a delegation of women from Dokkhamtai involved in the TICW project. During our visit to their community-built market the day before the workshop, the women talked about their 55 members who were grouped into different economic activities – raising chickens or fish, setting up food stalls, sewing dresses, or planting tamarind trees. They described themselves as poor, having no land, with children in school, and family members who had migrated.

One of the more outspoken women selling foodstuffs at the roadside market said she was an ex-sex worker. She came from a poor family of 7 children and had to go begging as a child. At 16 she left with friends for Bangkok. During her life abroad, she was married to a Chinese for 7 years and later to a German with whom she moved to Germany. She lived in Germany for 16 years, during which she left what she said was an abusive

relationship and stayed to work in a factory. She decided to return to Phayao in 1999 to start life anew.

A woman leader in the group – Senglan - 47 yrs. old - has been cited as an outstanding village health worker. She said she encounters about 35 AIDS cases per year, and knows of 5 in her own village. She is divorced and has two children in school. She says the income-generating projects have been successful, except perhaps for the chickens which were hit by the recent virus. Selling cooked food makes money and helps her put her daughter through college out of town. The sewing group is also successful, and the families who raise fish in small backyard tanks have something to eat as well as to sell.

She added that the children in the village are learning much about trafficking in the schools. There are TV spots and a weekly radio program for youth in which her own nephew participates. She recalled a drama that young people staged one Mother's Day celebration entitled "I am not a product."

The 30 women in the market group put up their roadside shed with the Baht 30,000 from the project and contributed their labor. The small plot of land on which they built the shed and a nearby toilet is owned by the government who allowed them to use it after discovering that they were part of the ILO project. They still have no water or electrical connections. They sell vegetables, chili, fish, meat, duck, cooked food, and sweets, most of which they produce themselves. In the evenings they say they have more customers, have more products for sale, especially cooked food which their neighbors buy to bring home. Business is improving, and already they are planning on laying a cement floor, putting up a banner, and expanding the covered space so that they can have a section for clothes and other dry goods and perhaps even rent out space to others in the community.

When asked what message they might have for their provincial and national leaders, they suggested building a center to bring women's groups and people together. They would also like to expand their membership and to support bigger groups.

They have been requested by women from other villages to help in setting up similar market projects but they say they have no money even for transportation.

## Strengths of provincial efforts

During an afternoon break at the provincial meeting, the vice governor of Phayao who headed the provincial project steering group during phase one of the project, confirmed the positive changes occurring at the community level. She insisted that working closely with NGOs will help expand the work more quickly.

*"The biggest change can be seen in the village volunteer team which watches over the problem of*

*trafficking. The working task force is effective at the tambon and community level. That is why we see Dokkhamtai changing from a “red” district to one with no more cases of trafficking.”*

*“We need to rapidly extend the network, and to work more in local areas with NGOs given their flexibility and the fact that government is downsizing, in the face of expanding work. The income-generating projects have been too small-scale and should be expanded within a provincial strategy to cover more areas.”*

In a similar vein, the provincial public welfare officer who manages the project attributed their success to the active participation of many different partners who learned to work together well. She said that the most important project components have been the direct assistance and skills training interventions, and training in financial management for both target and other economic groups. Field trips have also been valuable, as for example, the market group got their ideas from a study visit. She said that the village committee-managed grants have worked well with district level technical support to the projects, even though turnover of government staff has at times interrupted technical follow-up.

*“Our strength is based on the fact that the project involves many parties, engaged in varied activities, each contributing their respective expertise, through participatory processes. But we had difficulties in the beginning because we had no previous experience as a team, and had to adjust to different organizational cultures. We had to learn along the way as we worked together – starting from the same goals, discussing, sharing, talking together, with the support of the project consultant or specialist.”*

She emphasized that non-government organizations such as RTF, the Rak Thai Foundation and PPAT, the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand have been valuable project partners in the province. According to her, RTF stays and works directly with the community, employs good participatory processes and skills building activities, and has experience with AIDS and trafficking groups. PPAT is known for their ability in awareness raising. As a result of these NGOs’ work in the communities, young people have become involved in leadership camps and peer education, and have learned to work in the community with women’s groups, teachers, and tambon officials.

She looked forward to increasing the project’s effectiveness by better targeting and broader collaborative efforts.

*“In Phase II it is necessary to link production with marketing and strengthen district support, perhaps by bringing in more organizations to support community initiatives. The poorest are still unattended. We have surveyed and identified them. Phase II can make things happen by pulling in other agencies. I recommend joint Ministries MOUs - operational from central to provincial levels. This way, we can address trafficking in a broad context to include prevention, victim assistance and rehabilitation, legal enforcement, public health, occupational skills, jobs, non-formal education. For example, the labor department has not been previously involved.”*

## First Hand Knowledge: STRENGTHENING VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL LINKAGES

The TICW project has encouraged and achieved both vertical and horizontal linkages and coordination in many aspects of the project.

In Phayao, the project partner the former governmental Provincial Public Welfare Department (PPW) – now the Provincial Social Development and Human Security (PS-DHS), collaborates with two national NGOs – Raks Thai Foundation (CARE) and PPAT, the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand. The activities in Phayao are notable for the good GO-NGO collaboration and the strong commitment and leadership from the Vice-Governor. These three agencies presented a joint work plan for government support and meet on a monthly basis to share work progress. Three levels of committees: provincial (chaired by Vice-Governor), district (chaired by District Chief) and community levels coordinate efforts vertically as well as horizontally. Lateral linkages include coordination with the offices for Education, NFE, Agriculture Administration, Public Welfare and Community Development.

Although it is unusual for a governmental agency to be the coordinating body for a number of non-governmental agencies for the ILO-TICW project, as is the case with PPW in Phayao, there are excellent working relations among the partners leading to effective work. The commitment of the PPW is demonstrated by its provision of 60% of the project budget. Moreover, its role as secretariat gives the project and the relevant issues the recognition and clout that an all-NGO effort could not have. The sharing of human and material resources also means that efficiency is being achieved through economies.

However, experience has shown that coordination among NGOs themselves and between NGOs and GO is not easy. NGO-government collaboration requires trust and openness, regular meetings, and discussion of respective roles. Support from national ministries to their staff in bureaus at provincial level to coordinate is necessary to create the right environment within the government machinery. Coordination is also more likely to succeed if there is a neutral secretariat that backstops inter-organizational meetings, for which the ILO-TICW project staff have frequently been called to assist.

Strategies used by partners to overcome difficulties and strengthen their collaboration include:

- Maintaining a positive outlook, e.g., interpreting the pressure as an opportunity to learn to work in challenging situations
- Focusing on learning from the experience, including from ILO-IPEC capacity building programmes for partners
- Affirming their belief in the principle of multi-sectoral collaboration
- Adhering to their commitments and responsibilities and affirming their commitment to the cause
- Looking to potential collaboration with partners and donors in the future
- Having realistic expectations of each other and accepting one another's limitations
- Looking at each other in a positive light
- Always seeking clarifications and fine-tuning ideas to avoid holding misunderstandings and grudges against one another
- Holding regular meetings to provide opportunities for updating, coordinating, sharing of ideas and experiences

- Using personal networks and connections to offset the rigid official, formal structures

See also

- *“The whole is greater than the sum of the parts: working together (Programme Coordination) SELL-4*
- *Good Practices paper: Mission Impossible: Multi-Sectoral Collaboration in Phayao*

## Concerns of the Governor

One reason the governor of Phayao province gave for convening the meeting was:

*“I am concerned that Phayao families are unhappy families.”*

The governor of Phayao province, in office 8 months and a former vice-governor, said the trafficking problem is a priority on his agenda. He says that family debt, agricultural failure, lack of land and off-season work were pushing people to the big cities or to other countries (men to go into construction, women into services and prostitution). He saw as the biggest challenge that of a consistent effort to convince families, local people, and national government of the importance of the issues related to trafficking.

*“I invited the Minister of Social Welfare and Human Security to today’s conference to come see for himself what the situation is and what we are doing about it. He is visiting crafts groups and women’s groups working with reeds and textiles. This seminar will create interest nationwide and will send a positive signal to the other Northern provincial governors who have started to discuss trafficking and to prepare budget allocations to address the problem.”*

*“The Prime Minister will visit Phayao on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July. We will present him with a proposal to improve our infrastructure, especially irrigation, to increase agricultural income. We will link up more with OTOP - One-Tambon-One Product – for government to help in marketing and exporting our products. We need to create jobs for young people which will allow them to stay with their families. We particularly seek partnerships with the private sector. Already we are able to place 2,500 young people in part-time work in hotel and restaurant businesses. We also want to involve more young people in our jewelry and gemstones training center and factories.”*

## Support from the Minister of Social Development and Human Security

The Minister of Social Development and Human Security formally opened the provincial conference by admitting that he had been inclined to pass up the invitation. But upon reading the briefing material, he decided that it was too important an issue which deserved to be on the national agenda.

*“Trafficking is a social problem that can happen to any family. We need all people to help. We need cooperation from all sectors – not government alone.”*

He was especially interested in seeing the community watchdog project in Phayao. He cited the National Conference held in May 2004 in Chiang Rai, with UN agencies, embassies, and international and national NGOs participating. He announced the forthcoming national conference on 5<sup>th</sup> August to be chaired by the Prime Minister himself during which proposed laws on prevention of human trafficking would be submitted to the Cabinet.

Speaking after the returnee trafficking victim, he emphasized:

*“We must persuade victims to tell their stories but we must also protect their reputation and their family reputation. We are grappling with age-old cultural roots. The government is addressing the poverty situation, and the poverty eradication program has surveyed and registered the poor, the street people, and the homeless in Phayao.”*

*“We also need to work with neighboring countries in the Mekong as Thailand is a sending, transit, and receiving country. We may consider support to development in our poor neighbors. We should discuss repatriation and study the originating countries’ reactions.”*

## SUMMARY

The story from Phayao province in Thailand is drawn from the accounts of a village women’s group during a visit to their community market, and from interviews with the Governor, the vice-governor, the provincial project coordinator, and an NGO partner, over the course of two days which coincided with a special conference on trafficking convened by the provincial government. Excerpts from the speeches of the two guest speakers at the conference – a returning ex-victim of trafficking and the Minister of Labor and Human Security begin and end the story respectively.

The story highlights the “tipping point” of the TICW project in Phayao – from a local initiative spearheaded by the provincial public welfare office and implemented at village level toward an expanding arena of action which has already caught the serious attention of the national government. The positive results and the lessons learned in Phayao province have been broadcast to other northern provinces who are now forming an alliance to collectively address the problems of trafficking which they have in common. The provincial government has over the course of the project demonstrated its linking and brokering role between the village and district levels, among the different agencies and civil society groups at provincial level, and between the local community and the higher administrative levels. Deliberate moves to partner with nongovernment organizations with field presence and established records in community work relevant to the prevention of trafficking proved to be effective and are expected to continue. The immediate

challenge which the province hopes to meet is to place the issue of trafficking in the province (both in terms of problems and solutions) high on the national government's agenda.

Indications are already present that this has begun to happen – particularly in terms of the national poverty reduction agenda in which the poor and at-risk population groups in Phayao have been identified. Major proposals and programs for development of rural infrastructure, job creation through village enterprises and larger private sector investments, and expanded access to educational opportunities are gaining momentum – and are seen as critical investments to stem the flow of labor out of Phayao. The province is also seeking memoranda of understanding with a wider band of partners among the provincial and national ministries and departments to accelerate these proposed investments and respond more directly to specific issues such as labor and legal problems.

An important development is the stance that Thailand has taken in recognizing itself as a sending, transit, and receiving country, as a result of which it is taking steps for intensive dialogue with its neighbor countries, and exploring ways of assisting them for mutually advantageous benefits in combating trafficking.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

Mekong River

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

3

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

### 3. CAMBODIA

Voices from Prey Veng Province:  
*“Our children are well-protected now”*

During the meeting with the Peam Ro District Child Protection Committee, in the province of Prey Veng, I asked the group what they thought their children were likely to say about the project’s happiest results. A commune chief volunteered : *“The children will say - ‘We are well protected now – against dangerous strangers.’”*

His statement was confirmed the next day during an afternoon visit to the Batti primary school in Peam Ro. More than a hundred students from the fourth and sixth grades crowded into a classroom and pointed up some interesting aspects about life and the current situation of trafficking in the community.

The children did say that they now knew how to protect themselves:

*“We definitely know about the dangers of trafficking – from our teachers, even from TV. Yes, our life is much better. We know so much more. We know even more than our parents – and we tell our parents what we know afterwards. We can go to other schools and share our knowledge with other schoolchildren.”*

However, they said that they could still see people migrating – more than ever – although in their own families, there were fewer now. A few had parents working outside Prey Veng. Some had brothers and sisters who had left school to seek work elsewhere.

They explained that they had a neighborhood childwatch network through which they would report to schoolteachers and local authorities instances when their acquaintances dropped out of school or went away. They say however, that so far, none of the children they reported has come back.

Many said they wanted to become doctors, teachers, police, farmers, and animal raisers, because they wanted to help their community. Most planned to go on to secondary school, although they would most likely have to go to Phnom Penh if they wanted to go to higher studies. But for community life to improve, they said

*“We need garment factories, better schools, health services. We also want skills training, particularly in garments, farming, animal raising, and computer.”*

The school headmaster and some teachers described their continuing awareness raising activities among the students. The teachers brought out students’ drawings, mostly de-

picting the contrasts between village life (blessings) and city life (perils). Among their teaching materials was a large colorful cloth poster from UNICEF which illustrated four areas of child rights: survival, development, protection, and participation. They also showed sets of flash cards used during their anthem ceremonies and Saturday morning sessions which were devoted to talks on trafficking.

At the project outset, they had formed a student drama group which performed for the community different situations based on real-life stories of trafficking victims, and they were considering reviving this activity.

## Commune leaders describe child protection committees

Members of the Peam Ro District Committee, in particular the commune chiefs, cited the effective work of their child protection committees, not only in preventing trafficking but also in addressing child abuse and domestic violence.

*“We are more conscious about child development, about domestic violence and child abuse. We have disseminated information about laws against child abuse using leaflets and posters, and therefore reduced child abuse at home and at school. Even mass media such as TV and radio have educated the parents and authorities about child rights. You can also ask children about treatment from the police.”*

*“We have our child protection committee. Recruiters can no longer move around freely as before. We inform children about their right to family care and protection.”*

*“We promote understanding of child rights and dangers of trafficking in village reality – teaching about legal aspects and tricks of recruiters. Women and children participate and we involve the schools and the bureau of education. Compared to other districts, we now have less cases of trafficking.”*

Many in the district committee, in particular, the police and the district governor, commented on the resulting social stability and improved security situation in the community.

*“One significant result is social stability. The young know about the consequences of trafficking because the flow of information has been mainstreamed. Schoolteachers talk to the children. Monks and nuns are involved, especially on Full Moon days. There is less blind migration.”*

*“There is collaboration among civil society, community groups, police and security forces and the local authorities. As a result, even in the difficult urban area of Neak Leung, for example, the pornography industry has been eliminated. Timely intervention has suppressed juvenile delinquency and gang activity (Big Brother)”*

*“Security forces understand the problem and are therefore better able to manage the problem. Although sometimes when arrests are made, they are criticized by human rights groups who file complaints against them.”*

*“The information network is extensive, the reporting and intervention timely. We take precautionary measures and have interventions across districts. For example, the entry of sex workers are now closely monitored and reported.”*

The provincial social welfare (labor) officer offered her summary of the project results:

*“The situation has improved over the past few years because there is a new generalized attention to child protection. The training and the meetings have raised awareness and improved capacity among local authorities. We are working together more, with police and others, such that court cases with children are better handled. The village data base has improved. The district plan of action and commune development plans all include trafficking. We now also have a resource directory of NGOs and service providers in Prey Veng.”*

At the meeting with the Commune Child Protection Committee in Peam Ro Commune of Peam Ro District, the commune leader talked about their efforts to reduce child abuse and domestic violence in their villages. He said that among poor families, fathers may start gambling and drinking from early morning. When cases of sexual abuse are reported to them, the commune leaders counsel the family. They explain the law, and for example, make the husband make a written promise to stop beating his wife. They refer the case to the police if the offense is repeated.

## First Hand Knowledge: TRAINING KEY PEOPLE AS COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS TO RAISE AWARENESS IN THE COMMUNITY ABOUT TICW

In Cambodia, four partner NGOs (HCC Healthcare for Children, VCDC Volunteer Career Development Community, CCPCR Cambodian Centre for the Protection of Children's Rights, CAAFW Cambodian Association for Assistance to Families and Widows) have provided awareness raising training to some 470 "key people" in target communities. These are community organizers selected from relevant agencies, such as district officials, village and commune leaders, police, nurses, women from social affairs agencies, children's representatives and school directors. Topics covered in their training included the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, child labour, gender issues, violence against children, child trafficking and prostitution, tricks of traffickers, effects on children's health, and education about sexual and labour exploitation, laws against kidnapping and exploitation. There were also discussions about how to set up monitoring mechanisms, network relevant information, and run an awareness raising campaign in the community. These key people then "cascaded" the same information to more than 27,000 villagers and 15,000 schoolchildren, using the 'friend-to-friend' method, in particular through Children's Committees in schools. The project then selected around 700 most at-risk families for direct assistance, including NFE and skills training, support for food security and income activities such as loans for small business, rice bank, and livestock rearing.

See also:

- *The medium is the message in awareness raising* – SELL -11
- *Holistic is integrated and integrated is holistic* – SELL - 3

### Self-help groups and skills trainees

Aside from the child protection committees, the village leaders told of how their self-help and credit groups had improved their situation, allowing them to send their children to school. The sole woman commune committee member said that not only did these help reduce poverty but also released women from some heavy workload.

*"Before the project, we had very bad living conditions, especially among families with many children and women-headed households. But with the HCC (Healthcare Center for Children) organizing self-help and credit groups, living conditions have improved."*

The Healthcare Center for Children (HCC) had provided capacity building and technical support to the self help groups that they organized in the villages. This capacity building included training on topics such as participatory planning techniques, group and credit management, human rights training, and education on the perils of trafficking and blind migration.

During brief visits to one fish-raising group and one pig-raising group, members (and their children) were proud and happy to show their backyard fishponds and pigpens to visitors.

*“Our savings group of 7 women and 2 men have been raising fish for a year now. Our situation has improved because not only do we have fish for our food, but fish to sell. All our children are going to school. We think we are the best self-help group with the best income-generating project in our community. We may invite new members because many others are waiting to join.”*

*“Some of us started with two pigs, and now have four. We can sell our piglets after one month. We have been able to improve our houses as well as send our children to school.” (Woman whose husband had returned to the village after working in Phnom Penh and becoming infected with HIV-AIDS).”*

There was also occasion to visit two young women who had taken the HCC sewing training course, had set up their own sewing businesses, and were now doing well.

- One was a young wife expecting her first child. She started her sewing business with some capital provided by her mother. Although she has some walk-in customers, she competes with nearby shops along the same main road. She therefore relies mostly on helping a relative who specializes in sewing gowns for village weddings. They go to the villages scouting for clients.
- The second young woman was not able to complete the HCC course but later joined another sewing course at another NGO. At this latter NGO training, she also learned the business side of sewing, and therefore set up business 2 years ago. Although she says there is much competition, she is doing very well, and now has two sewing machines – one for light fabrics and another for heavier fabrics. On display in her home shop were made-to-order dresses and gowns with fine beaded handiwork.

Their former trainer at the HCC sewing course joined us in the visits. She strongly recommended that the ILO continue with a longer-term project, one which would work with boys also, not just girls, and work with urban, not just rural, youth.

Even as they cited the reduced numbers in cases of trafficking and child abuse, the commune leaders pointed out their need for more and wider support from district and provincial authorities to strengthen their child protection and community development initiatives. They specified facilitation for better infrastructure such as drainage canals and schools; agricultural inputs such as seedlings, fertilizer, and gasoline; technical advice for rice production and integrated pest management; and a health center.

## First Hand Knowledge: SKILLS TRAINING FOR IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD

The TICW project comprises three linked areas – capacity building, awareness raising and direct assistance. Direct assistance is provided to enable those at risk of trafficking to engage in sustainable income generating opportunities in the village or to participate in legal labor migration schemes.

In Cambodia, rural skills training – mainly mobile courses – were provided through NGO partners to over a thousand people in areas where trafficking occurs. Some trainees received non-formal education (NFE) and basic literacy courses before embarking on skills training. Technical courses included animal raising (cow, pig, duck), vegetable growing, sewing and tailoring, and small business management (including rice and cow banks). In addition, village development committee (VDC) members were trained in community organizing, animal husbandry, small loan management and report writing. VDC members also learned how to use participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques as a method to carry out training and employment needs assessment of village people at risk. The VDCs have been active and supportive in project management and participatory monitoring. There has been close cooperation and collaboration with agriculture offices and relevant specialist local institutions, which have developed appropriate training modules, conducted training, and followed up trainees in implementation of their own businesses.

Basic business management skills were integrated into the training to ensure that eventual small enterprises (predominantly cash crops or sale of animals or handicrafts) are locally viable. Market opportunity analysis was crucial to deciding what skills training to provide, as was an analysis of the potential of the villagers and of the land and other community resources.

Among the lessons learned from the project is that it is good to diversify production and not to train all villagers in one set of skills, as this may result in undue competition in the community which may drive prices down. It is better to provide training in a diversity of skills to ensure all can then earn a decent living.

Also, the provision of training in the target villages is more effective than centre-based training in the cities. It puts the villagers more at ease, allows a larger participation of villagers, gives opportunities for the trainers to move from theory to practice in the real context familiar to the villagers. The training is better adapted to the needs of the villagers and more likely to lead to self-employment. Theory is kept to a minimum, and hands-on prioritized, so that post-training implementation and results come quickly. By contrast, centre-based vocational training leads to expectations of wage employment and can encourage migration (which can lead to trafficking). Training costs are also reduced when only the trainer has to move to the village, rather than the trainees to a training centre.

The project experience also affirmed that access to credit and/or guaranteed funds are crucial in order to provide villagers with newly acquired skills the possibility to put them to use right away. Otherwise, investments in the skills training will be wasted.

Moreover, agricultural extension workers going to the field to assist in solving problems encountered during training helps build the confidence of the farmers and improves results.

See also:

- *Start with what you have and where you are (Skills training for self-employment)- SELL-9*
- *Non-formal education and rural skills training: Tools to combat the worst forms of child labour including trafficking – TIA*
- *Final Output Report of AP-HCC (Dec 2000-Nov 2001)*

## Provincial commitment to child protection

At the meeting with the provincial steering group, with its members from the education department, women's affairs, rural development departments, the first deputy governor gave their prognosis about the poverty and trafficking situation of Prey Veng. He emphasized that much had been accomplished, but much more remained to be done.

*“Before the project, we did not know the real situation. Now we know more as the information comes up from the villages. Now we push them to address the situation directly. We expect more accountability...”*

*“ We have had serious problems of domestic violence and parental neglect of children. Our people had little understanding of trafficking and its consequences. Given their poor income and living conditions, persuasive neighbors who have gone abroad lured them into fake marriages and recruitment. Prey Veng is the fourth most populous province, with 80% of the population farmers who are subject to frequent floods and drought.*

*“Therefore we set up multilevel child protection networks. Our leadership structures are in place, although not yet fully responsive. But the problem has been reduced, with professional skills upgraded, data base established, and with close collaboration with local authorities, police, international, and national NGOs. HCC with its participatory approach has produced positive results for all levels. Our work with judges and the courts have reduced the likelihood of compromises in the prosecution of abusers.*

*“We still have to worry about child domestic workers and children in businesses – those who are hard to reach or hidden, in the worst forms of child labor, suffering abuse, debt bondage, and slave conditions.”*

## SUMMARY

The story from Prey Veng province in Cambodia is drawn principally from focus group discussions with the Peam Ro district child protection committee and the Peam Ro commune community-based protection network group, as well as meetings with students and teachers at Batti primary school, and visits to self-help groups in Peam Ro.

This account highlights the child protection networks established in the province across all levels but functioning directly to serve children and families at the village level.

The TICW project is considered an important dimension of the functions of the existing community-based child protection network – a concept initiated and supported by UNICEF to cover the broad range of promoting child rights – with respect to survival, development, protection, and participation.

Thus, the district and commune steering groups in Peam Ro speak confidently of their child protection committees and the effective work they have done not only in practically eliminating trafficking but in reducing the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse. They emphasize the importance of educating families about their rights and responsibilities as children and parents, about the laws that protect such rights, and the ways that they can obtain protection when needed.

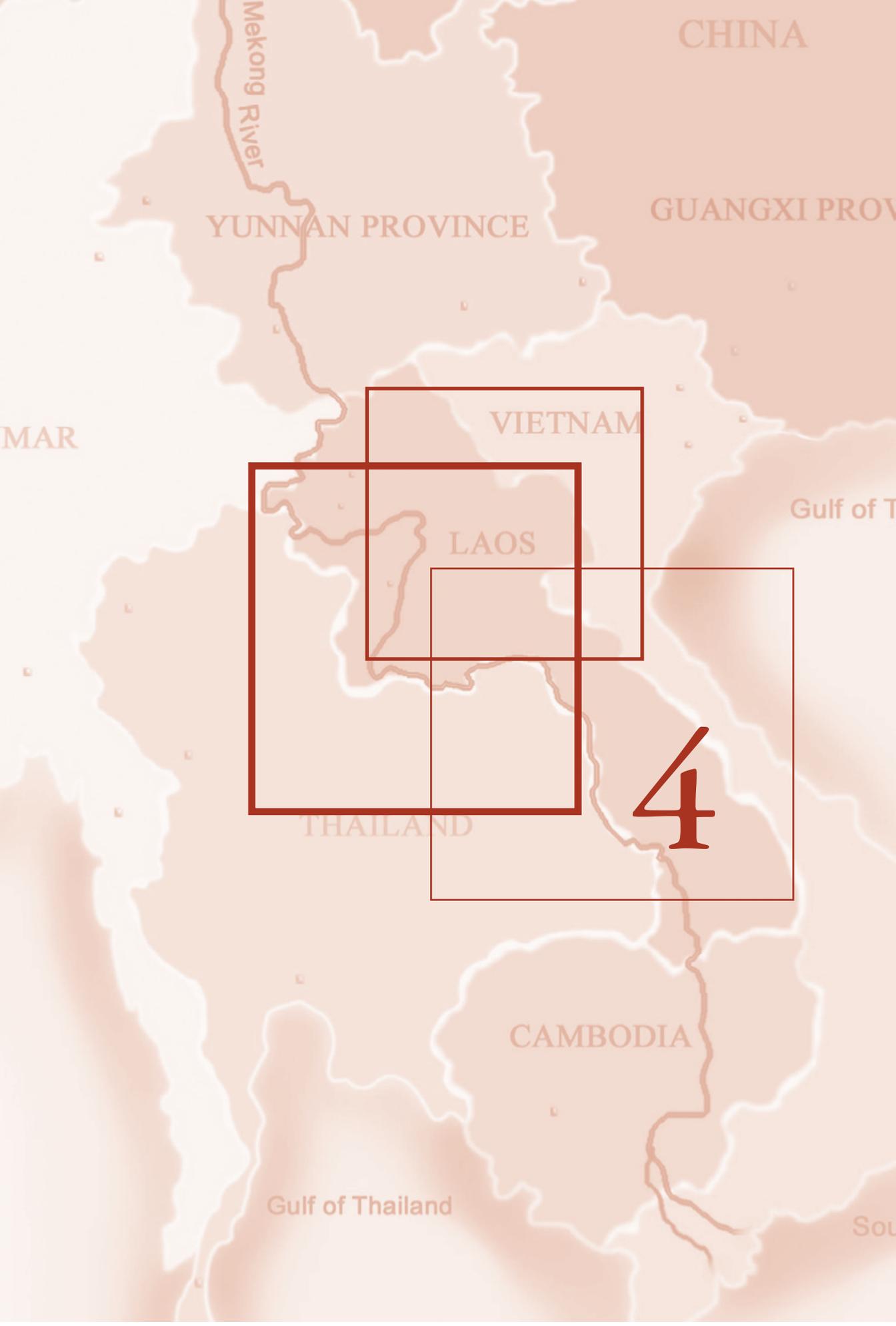
Provincial, district and commune leaders spoke of more effective action in public security and police protection, for example, in immediate crime reporting, in apprehending and prosecuting kidnappers, traffickers and other violators of child rights, (e.g., those involved in pornography), and of reducing youth gang activity, among others. Young people in the community have been trained to watch out for other young people, and to report those who seem to have left the community. Even at the family level, those who abuse wives or children are summoned and counseled by the commune leaders, made to promise not to repeat the offense, and warned about prosecution if the offense recurs. As a result, the leaders claim, communities and children in particular are much safer, and feel they are better protected than before the project.

Some public security officials also indicated that they have learned to look upon trafficking and the victims of trafficking with greater understanding as a social and economic phenomenon beyond the purely legal and criminal aspects that they have been used to.

For phase two of the project, serious discussions are underway between ILO-TICW and the UNICEF offices to explore areas for enhancing collaboration at district and community levels through the child protection networks. Both parties look to round out the community development initiatives (e.g., in education, health and nutrition, livelihood support, other basic services, etc.) directly benefiting at-risk women and children and therefore preventing them from becoming victims of trafficking or unsafe (or “blind”) migration.

Provincial officials also stress that other categories of children needing special protection are still to be reached by the existing networks – for example, those in domestic work, in sweatshops, in debt bondage, suffering abuse and slavelike conditions.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

VIETNAM

LAOS

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

4

## 4. LAO PDR

Voices from Champassak:

*“The Secret of Our Success is Village Ownership”*

### Ownership by the youth

Ownership is evident among the young people in Champassak who make up the PART – provincial awareness raising team. Organized in April 2001, they work on themes ranging from environmental protection, to combating trafficking, to campaigning against drug use. Gathered at their usual meeting place at an English and computer center in Pakse, each member of the youth group (the youngest is 11 while most are 16 yrs. old) answered the question: Why are you in this group? They were one in seeing themselves as helping their community and in the process developing personally.

- *I want to help my community and the children.*
- *I want to help disadvantaged children.*
- *I want to help others.*
- *We make children happy and make them stop thinking of migrating.*
- *I was looking for new experiences, new places to learn about.*
- *I am getting lots of experience.*
- *We have adventures together.*
- *I wanted to join my brothers who were already members of the group.*
- *I like to travel and visit the villages.*
- *I like being with my friends on these adventures. It is fun to go to the villages and have lots of activities.*
- *I need practice to overcome my shyness.*
- *I want experience in acting and self-expression.*
- *I enjoy acting and performing, and sharing knowledge through acting*
- *My parents are very happy I joined the group.*
- *I get practice in speaking up and expressing myself. It is a good **experience** to help society in many ways.*
- *I don't want to waste my time. By getting involved I can develop myself and help others at the same time.*
- *It's a good project which helps us develop ourselves, and help combat trafficking and illegal migration.*
- *It's a very interesting project because of the challenging problem of trafficking.*

PART started out with 18 youth volunteers trained by the NGO PADETC. The local group has taken over completely and is now working with another 100 members at the provincial cultural center. They have become trainers to younger children – in acting,

singing, drawing, games, producing props, and playing musical instruments. Among their upcoming activities are entertaining a delegation of 18 youth volunteers from Vietnam and a similar group from Japan in a foster family exchange program. They are likely to participate in the Children's Forum.

## First Hand Knowledge: CHILDREN CREATE AND PERFORM THEIR STORIES TO DELIVER THE MESSAGE ABOUT TICW

In Lao PDR, the Thiep Phong Phan Traditional Theater Troupe trained and established the Nong Bok traditional theatre to campaign against trafficking in the target districts and provinces, using a mixture of mobile advocacy, theater performance, song and music concerts, story books and VCDs to convey the message of preventing the trafficking of children and women. Their approach engaged children in both the creation of the plays and songs, and in their performance with the assistance of influential writers, song producers, and experts in traditional theatre.

When twenty trafficked Lao girls were returned from Thailand to Lao PDR, some of their personal true stories were used in writing storybooks (2,000 copies already published) for schools and mobile libraries, and public sale. Their stories of situations of exploitative work also inspired a performance staged in all 22 project villages and other villages and served as dramatic warnings to their neighbors and peers.

See also:

*The medium is the message in awareness raising – SELL -11*

## Ownership by the village

The statement “Our secret for success is ownership by the village” came from the provincial coordinator, the acting director of the Champassak Labour & Social Welfare office. “We have a monitoring mechanism that supports village commitment, consistently.”

The District Steering Committee head in Pakse elaborated on the villagers' initiatives.

*“In preparing the action programs, the villagers organized themselves and elected the Village Committee. They focused on the women. They set the rules and regulations for managing their Village Development Fund. They emphasized that loan repayment must be guaranteed and that they should lend only to those who are willing and able to repay the loan. Priority was given to families of returning migrant workers or to families with potential migrants such as children who had dropped out from school.”*

*“Three years ago, there were more than 70 illegal migrants in Thailand from the community, now only 10. The villagers' 24M Kip initial seed fund has grown to 32M Kip. The villagers congratulate themselves for their good work since the VDC was organized in July 2001.”*

In a visit to Danna Vieng village, a discussion about choosing the Village Development Committee indicated the rigorous selection process that villagers have set for themselves in choosing their leaders. Members of the group said

*“We have clear criteria and procedures for selecting people.”*

*“We insist on transparency, responsibility.”*

*“We target the poor.”*

*“We organize to help each other.”*

*“Trust is necessary.”*

*“People in the village know the family background, parentage, education.”*

*“We separate politics from village affairs.”*

Thus, for example, in their recent elections for a new VDC, they said they chose a young man from the Youth Union because he was “a youth leader, trustworthy, clean.” They pointed out that he was educated in Russia and graduated with an electrical engineering degree 4 years ago. He worked for a time in a government agency but was now devoting his time to community service.

Another VDC member was a permanent member of the Women’s Union and a former schoolteacher who had resigned due to illness. The group said they chose her because she was educated and trustworthy.

During the visit to another village in Phonthong district, the village leaders held our meeting in their temple which fronted a wide-spreading sacred tree. Among those present were the village head, the chairperson and members of the village fund committee, representatives from the women’s union, the pig-raising group, brickmaking group, gardening group, and the National Front.

Here as well, a major part of the discussion was about how they had organized their village development committee and how they had chosen the people who would make it up. They explained that they started out by nominating seven residents. Then at a village meeting with the 200 households, the villagers invited the 7 nominees to explain their respective “platforms”. They then elected five –3 women and 2, choosing a woman leader to head the committee. When asked to explain their choices.

The first man they chose because:

- *“He is a good model for gardening”*
- *“He is industrious and active in the community.”*
- *“He is of good character, helps other people.”*
- *“He is friendly, ready to share knowledge with others.”*

As for the man himself, he says he was surprised that he was chosen. He says he has to be even more hardworking now, since he has to be a model to the village.

The woman they elected to be chairperson was said to be:

- *“An active leader in the women’s union”*
- *“A brave and outspoken leader... experienced in many things.”*
- *“She has contributed a lot to village development, organizing the women, leading youth activities.”*
- *“Theirs is a model family and husband-wife relationship.”*

Another woman had volunteered to serve in the committee from the beginning, and was nominated and eventually elected because she was “industrious.”

The third woman was chosen

- *“because of her knowledge, and (she is) the best educated in the village.*
- *“She is industrious and has potential as a leader who can take us somewhere.”*
- *“She and her family are good role models, and her children are in good schools.”*

The fifth leader, a man, was sick that day and could not attend the meeting. The groups said they chose him because they thought he would be good at following up loans.

After carefully selecting the leaders and members of the Village Development Committee, the village set about organizing the community revolving fund. They described how community cohesion and solidarity underpin the way they manage their revolving fund to support groups engaged in vegetable-raising, brickmaking, and animal-raising.

*“We have organized ourselves and the revolving fund in such a way that we know how each member is doing, how much income he is earning. We follow up and help each other so that everybody succeeds. The project attracts migrant workers and is interesting to them. For example, we now have 4 families who have just returned from Thailand joining the brick group.”*

*“We also assist trafficking victims, receiving them through hand-overs from the border. We help them with vocational training – such as sewing – tying up with the Department of Social Welfare and the IOM in their rehabilitation and repatriation project.”*

*“We manage the loans among many families in various activities – amounting to 32 M Kips among 64 families (18 in bricks, 34 animal raising, 12 vegetables).”*

*“Now people have work to do.”*

*“There are other and new small ventures to get into: small business such as mini-groceries, small trading, making biscuits, weaving traditional skirts, for which we need experts in design because there is a market for these.”*

## Vegetables, bricks, pigs

The meeting was followed by a walking tour of the village, specifically to see the vegetable gardens, the brickmaking site and kiln, and the families raising pigs in their backyards.

Families were now raising vegetables and herbs on land alongside the river which were previously uncultivated brushland. One woman showed her plot on which her children who were on school vacation were planting herbs – a cash crop that she said fetched good prices in the market. They change crops depending on the season and on the prices for which she can sell them. She also pointed to a young man watering another section and explained that he had been persuaded to come back to the village after working outside because the gardens could now keep him fully employed.

Other families showed off their neat rows of planted vegetables and small improvised greenhouses. Already, more land was being cleared, because they were expanding the areas for planting.

In another part of the village, a mother and her son were busy making brick blocks by hand. A small shed beside them displayed stacks of bricks that were left to dry. They would be baked in the large kiln a few meters away. The women said that there was a growing demand for their bricks. Customers could either pick up their orders from the kiln or request delivery at added cost. The villagers were proud to say that the new office building of the Provincial Department of Labor and Social Welfare under construction was being built with bricks produced by their village.

A visit to the home of a family raising pigs in their backyard indicated the significant increase in family income and that there were always ready buyers for the pigs.

## First Hand Knowledge: SETTING UP VILLAGE SAVINGS AND CREDIT FUNDS

Trafficking and the eventual exploitation of women and children is frequently the result of having no livelihood prospects at home. The TICW project's direct assistance component therefore facilitates access to funds by people at risk and enables them to go into some economically viable activity. These services are targeted at poor people with opportunities rather than the poorest people who prefer jobs/work (security of income) to credit (debt to be paid back) and self employment. Closely linked to the provision of micro-finance services (savings and credit) has been the vital preparatory work in market research and assessment of local potential for income generation, as well as relevant skills training, including life skills through the awareness raising component of the TICW project, and non-formal education.

One way to provide credit with a reduced burden of debt is to encourage cash and kind savings among organized groups of similar people. The ILO-TICW project has supported training in community organizing for this purpose, and revolving funds have been established so that group members can take turns in borrowing. Non-cash banks have also been set up (rice banks, cow banks) with support in managing these.

### Micro-finance activities:

In most project target sites, the provision of micro-finance services was an essential sequel to the project's prior agricultural market research activity and appropriate on-site technical skills training. It is important to maintain the momentum of the trainees' motivation by allowing them to put their newly acquired skills into practice straight away. These interventions included the following key components:

- Encouraging savings in the community and the establishment of savings groups. Savings are not only in cash, but can be in kind such as rice, farm animals, and other items with a saleable value. The latter is a more traditional way of saving for rural people, for whom cash is a more recent means of exchange.
- Group formation for the loan guarantee, and agreeing on the interest rate and repayment period. Instead of collateral, peer pressure from the group ensures that all members follow the rules and procedures, and keep to the schedules.
- Establishment of fund management committees – elected by villagers – and to the extent possible composed of women and men.
- Making available micro-loans to develop small business by poor people with economic opportunities. It is important to understand poverty levels and target services to generate income at the right audience, as providing credit to the poorest of the poor may lead to heavier indebtedness.

## First Hand Knowledge: THE SAVANNAKHET EXPERIENCE:

In the project plan of Savannakhet province, the desired output - Seven village development committees set up and functioning in target villages (Indicator: regular meetings, minutes shared, follow up undertaken, plans developed, situation monitored, reporting to respective district committee), was to be achieved through the following activities:

### Activities:

- Design a standard list of criteria (at provincial level) for the use of a village revolving fund (to be provided for direct assistance) and submit this to the heads of 7 selected villages – the funds should contribute to combating trafficking in children and women from the province;
- Instruct the MOLSW district office to ask village heads to organize village meetings to agree on criteria for selection of village project committee to manage and monitor a revolving fund of USD 2,500 per village (advice: aim for the same members as in the village committee under the State Planning Commission), and let them organize a village election to elect the committee members;
- Let the village committee agree on criteria for selection for individual funds, and transparency arrangements (regular bookkeeping, and easy access to information);
- Let the village committee agree on repayment period, interest, use of returned funds + paid interest;
- Ensure that committee members of the 7 villages participate in the training under output 4 (i.e., Relevant 20 provincial, 20 district staff, and 300 village staff capacitated to improve baseline data, analyze information, and plan holistically).

In Lao PDR, micro-finance services have been provided in 22 target villages after appropriate skills training. Over 1100 families were trained and provided loans for income generating activities. Varied income activities have been going on including groups for pig raising, vegetable growing, and brick-making – all profitable even in the first year of activity. Other target villages have embarked in masonry work – making concrete house poles and well rings – all gainful activity which has attracted potential migrant workers to stay at home to earn their living, and has brought actual migrants back.

Project experience has shown that sound support from the government authorities is important for managing loans and providing technical advice. Revolving fund and credit management is a specialized technical area such that experienced people or experts – including business people/entrepreneurs – are needed to advise, train, and help set up the systems in the first instance. Partners should liaise more with entrepreneurs/business people who can offer technical assistance in finance management, entrepreneurship, marketing, as well as untapped facilities for training and training facilities.

When humanitarian NGOs do not link sufficiently with expert service providers in micro-finance, the result is ineffective micro-credit programmes. Many NGOs go for the easy credit option, without checking the savings potential of poor people. Micro-finance activity is not suitable for the destitute poor or for mothers of large families who lack time and space for any enterprise, as they may need welfare assistance first, not debt in the form of credit.

### See also:

- *Business enterprise can be any size (Micro-finance services and business development to combat trafficking)* SELL – 10
- *Summary Project Outline – Savannakhet Integrated Provincial Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women – Phase 1*

## Lack of opportunities for higher education

Although they were happy that their children were now more likely to stay in school, the village leaders said they were concerned that after high school, further education was not accessible. Vientiane was too far, too costly, unsafe. They would like their children to pursue higher education for example to learn computer education and English, in a competitive university, or to attend the police academy. Vocational training was not always relevant (e.g. mechanics ) because there were no jobs or family businesses for them. They said one needs a bachelor's degree to land jobs. There was a need to create jobs and suggested that at least two factories be set up in their area.

## National Steering Committee supports village as well as cross-country efforts

Back in Vientiane, the Vice-minister of Labour and Social Welfare again stressed how the village level was the critical arena for effective action and results.

*“Success has to be effectual at village level. The National Steering Committee can only give guidance from the top.*

*“At the village level, we are careful to have traditional ways maintained, to see to it that women are involved, that family values remain strong and for children to respect their parents.*

*“Village life has improved but they need more support. The steering committees at provincial and district levels and the network of implementation for macro activities must be carefully formed. As much as possible we want funds to go directly to beneficiaries at village level to enhance their participation as stakeholders.”*

Speaking of the next phase of the TICW project, he stressed the need to sustain and build on the successful community efforts even after the project ends.

*“For the next phase of the project, we will expand to other sites and cover new provinces. We consider the poverty situation and magnitude of the problem as well as the readiness of officials to take on the work. It is essential to improve the capacity of the province to take over after the project ends. Who will carry it out? Who will continue it? Most probably the mass organizations – the youth union, the women's union.”*

He also anticipated the October interministerial meeting on trafficking in Yangon with insights about sharing project experience and learning among the participating countries.

*“We have been learning by doing. We may share similarities with other countries in the Mekong region in that we all have problems of trafficking. But each country context is different and important. In sharing learning with other countries, we realize that some are not appropriate to our respective country contexts.”*

*“We are facing the same problem. Perhaps we can propose to organize meetings two or three times a year to find solutions together. In particular we can have a coordinating mechanism to resolve the problem of the internal and external migration across countries. In ASEAN we should bring the issue to the table as well and regularly discuss it and see how the CRC and the ILO Convention are being implemented.”*

## SUMMARY

This account from Champassak province in Lao PDR highlights the results of focus group discussions with the youth making up the provincial awareness raising team, with the provincial and district steering committees, and the village development committees, and the interview with the vice-minister of Labor and Social Welfare.

It highlights the almost palpable sense of ownership that young people, women, community leaders, and local officials have - both in terms of “owning the problem” of trafficking as well of “owning the solution”.

“Owning the problem” at community level has meant, for example, that children and youth, women, and community leaders came to recognize that trafficking had gone on unchecked in the past, partly because of their ignorance, and partly through indifference, and partly through perceived lack of better alternatives for making a living.

They also see the phenomenon of trafficking within the context of the traditional and customary cross-border flow of families and people to live and work between Lao PDR and Thailand.

“Owning the solution” to address these recognized problems has meant deliberate and continuing efforts to assess the actual situation of trafficking in their midst, to educate themselves about the risks and dangers to their women and children, and to create ways of generating income and improving living conditions in the community. Children, women, and community leaders saw the project and themselves in the project not only as benefiting a few individuals and families, but as a valuable way to protect and help the wider community. Community cohesion and community solidarity were constant themes in their sharing of project experience. Community leaders stressed that these underpinned their rigorous selection of those who comprise the village development committees, the careful formulation of rules and procedures for organizing and managing the self-help and credit groups, the close monitoring and constant support to group members. They cited the organizing and supportive work of the youth unions, the women’s unions and the National Front committees, for example.

Part of owning the solution also meant that they at times took the initiative to introduce components or aspects to the project which were not specified in the original project design. For example, they established variable loan ceilings, variable interest rates, and

variable repayment periods, depending on the nature of the economic project for which self-help groups took out loans. Some set aside part of the community income earned from the revolving fund for specific community development projects like improving schools and temple buildings. Some community groups are also exploring linking up community savings schemes with a matching grant scheme from the TICW project and other government-supported loan windows.

They also demonstrated that if community solidarity allowed for solid foundations and effective results for the project in the community, the project in turn strengthened community solidarity even more – creating a “virtuous cycle” of community solidarity – effective action – stronger community cohesion. Children, women, and members of the community became more trusting of the leaders, more willing to work with the project, more eager to contribute their ideas and voice their concerns.

District and provincial leaders expressed their satisfaction with the level of community ownership and cohesion which allowed for smoother implementation and monitoring of the project.

It is not surprising therefore that the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is already looking forward to local communities assuming greater responsibility for sustaining the initiatives against trafficking among their constituents. He suggests a project phase-out strategy which supports community organizations led by the women’s and youth unions, for example, to take over when the TICW project ends.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

5

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

## 5. VIET NAM

Voices from Thanh Hoa Province:  
*“Our Children and Women are IEC Workers”*

### Consensus: IEC is all-important

Awareness-raising is recognized as a critical element of community action in Thanh Hoa province in Viet Nam. The importance attached to it is reflected in statements by almost all groups of stakeholders about what they term IEC (information-education-communication). Members of the Provincial Steering Committee in particular cite the critical role of the women who have been trained as IEC workers. They are quick to point out how children are also beginning to advocate for themselves and the community. Their extensive awareness raising work is supported by the provincial broadcasting station – Than Hoa TV – as a member of the Provincial Steering Committee. Television and newspaper coverage of what women, children and communities are doing to prevent trafficking, and of the dramatic results they are achieving, have helped other communities deal with similar problems in their localities.

Taking together the statements of various stakeholders in Than Hoa give a clearer idea of who their IEC workers are and what they are about.

### Women’s Union representative in Provincial Steering Committee

During the focus group discussion with the Provincial Project Steering Committee, the member representing the Women’s Union attributed the reduction in trafficking cases to effective IEC work in the communities.

*“According to the survey in the three communities, there are no more trafficking cases here. The awareness and capacity of community people has increased a lot. Before, the leaders did not see trafficking as a priority or urgent issue but IEC has mobilized the people and the leaders.”*

*“The IEC workers play a crucial role. IEC workers know all the changes in family situations and support families and share their experiences with them and with everybody. Provincial people can only visit once a month. The IEC workers have really raised awareness about trafficking so that women are now better informed and alert.”*

She explained that the IEC workers in the community were women selected by the commune steering committees. Each is assigned a geographic area of responsibility. The IEC workers live in the community, and may often be hamlet leaders, teachers, or members of the women’s union, youth union, or National Front.

She reported that the provincial project steering committee organized a training seminar for those selected by the communes to become IEC workers. Aside from the training pertaining to trafficking - causes, consequences, prevention – the women also received training in communication skills, such as: listening skills; how to reach the target audience; how to speak; how to conduct meetings, role play, and individual consultations; and how to stage dramas. She said that the IEC workers are instructed not to impose their ideas on people but only to give suggestions.

*“They are volunteers who know their neighbors well. They maintain a list of people who plan on leaving the community, and provide them with advice, contact numbers, and information, for example, about employers and conditions of employment. Most importantly, they teach them what to do when they are in danger.”*

### First Hand Knowledge: COORDINATING AN IEC CAMPAIGN TO RAISE AWARENESS OF TICW

An immediate objective stated in the Thanh Hoa project plan of action was: Raised awareness of the provincial population, especially those at the target communities in the issues of women and children trafficking and methods of prevention.

The corresponding expected output was stated as: Coordinated and sustained IEC campaigns undertaken by organizations involved at target communities to raise awareness about women and children trafficking issues (situation, legislation, rights, prevention methods, etc.) and accessible opportunities/services to improve socioeconomic situations of those at risk through leaflets, posters, handbooks, and other propaganda activities.

### IEC workers – Hai Ha and Ngu Loc commune

During the meeting with the women’s group in Hai Ha commune, one woman described her involvement as an IEC worker in her hamlet and confirmed that families are no longer victimized by traffickers.

*“After I attended the training and many meetings, I came to understand the trafficking situation. In my work I spend most of my time visiting families. I talk to them about prevention. I broadcast news on the loudspeaker. I share my knowledge and give advice and support to women in difficulty. I work with families whose members have been trafficked or kidnapped.”*

*“Because of our work and because women’s living conditions improved with the loan fund, there are no more women trafficked. In our hamlet of 220 families, there are no more families victimized.”*

Other women in the Ngu Loc and Hai Ha groups added that IEC workers also distribute posters and give out leaflets to every household. They also advise about ways to increase income. Sometimes they are able to persuade women who are planning to leave the community to stay instead. When women return from the big city, the IEC workers are also

there to help them reintegrate into the community and to benefit from the project's loan fund.

## IEC CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES:

Project assessments have shown that the activities listed below have been undertaken and brought positive results.

**Activity 1** – Hold a PPSC meeting to discuss a collaboration plan for designing and implementing the IEC campaigns (division of tasks, venues, timelines, etc.) and to form a task force with representatives from member organizations and beyond.

**Activity 2** – In collaboration with local IEC institutions and communities, design the campaign strategy including the reproduction and distribution of leaflets and posters, special events and contests, women and children forums, etc. and submit to the PPSC and the NPC for comments and suggestions. IEC materials should include key and easy-to-understand information on nature of trafficking, potential victims, profile of traffickers, relevant legislation, also prevention methods, including information on available consultation (gender equality, legal literacy, family planning, STDs including HIV/AIDS preventions etc), income generation/employment/vocational training services. The task force should also collect and make use of available IEC materials produced by other programmes/organizations.

**Activity 3** – Amend the design according to comments and suggestions

**Activity 4** – Select 120 IEC workers from the 3 target communities to receive training on IEC skills aimed at trafficking prevention

**Activity 5** – Implement IEC design

(Complementing these activities are the IEC campaigns incorporated within an Action Plan of Vietnam Women's Union and CPCC at the national level. The VWU and CPCC planned together to produce a TV and a radio programme aired nationally and in turn aired by the local TV. The videotapes and audiotapes of these programmes were to be duplicated and distributed to all districts of three target provinces. VWU and CPCC plan included going to the three provinces to film and record cases, interviews so that programme content would be relevant to the provinces).

- (i) Install 4 clusters of posters and 10 bulletin boards at key locations in 3 target communes
- (ii) Widely distribute 10,000 leaflets to households in 3 target communes
- (iii) Organize 3 contests on the topics of trafficking, including prevention methods, in three target communes
- (iv) Organize 6 women's forums (by the Women's Union) and children's fo-

rums (by the local CPCC and the Youth Union) in the target communities on trafficking issues, prevention methods, and available opportunities and services

- (v) Organize presentations by IEC workers at all hamlets/wards in the target communities
- (vi) In each school in the target communities, work with the school to form youth groups consisting of the school pioneer leaders. Provide leadership training courses (3 days at each school) to group members. Groups then hold school meetings on TICW and prevention, and distribute IEC materials as well as relevant materials on gender equality; on family planning, STDs and HIV/AIDS, etc. integrated in the curriculum of the last grade of primary schools and lower secondary schools.

**Activity 6** – Monitor IEC activities through regular reporting and visits

**Activity 7** – Document lessons learnt and good practices.

**Output 2** – i.e., Trafficking prevention groups established in 19 hamlets of the target communes composed of representatives of the community with the aim of establishing “traffic-free communities”, the following activities were undertaken.

**Activity 1** – In each hamlet establish an anti-trafficking unit composed of the neighborhood leaders, youths, and volunteers who already received training on TICW and prevention methods

**Activity 2** – The anti-trafficking units meet with local authorities and relevant local organizations as well as local resource persons to draw plans for anti-trafficking activities

**Activity 3** – Provide anti-trafficking units with IEC materials

**Activity 4** – Implement the plans

- (i) Hold hamlet meetings to raise awareness of trafficking and inform of prevention methods (using the IEC materials provided, available vocational training/saving and credit/consultancy services and their accessibility)
- (ii) Encourage families to sign a “trafficking-free family” commitment
- (iii) Regularly visit families to build network and support
- (iv) Identify children and women at risk and their needs to inform the local authorities and the project staff for immediate support. This also includes introducing them to vocational training/savings and credit/consultancy services

- (v) Identify traffickers and suspects and inform law enforcement forces.

*See also: Proposal of Integrated Provincial Action Programme to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women Thanh Hoa Province*

## Hai Ha and Ngu Loc Commune leaders

In both Hai Ha and Ngu Loc communes, members of the steering committees cited the IEC workers' role in building trust between the women in the community and the commune leadership. The concrete demonstrations of caring support from the IEC workers for the most vulnerable women and families reflect the caring support of the wider community and leaders that women are increasingly sensing. The community leaders in turn sense the growing trust of women in the community.

### In Hai Ha

*“We have been successful in preventing trafficking in the community especially among women and children leaving for unknown destinations. As leaders in the community, we take more responsibility for this task. Before, it was not a matter of specific interest to us. Now we are organized and have mechanisms in the community. The IEC workers are very active in performances and in dramas, and meet with individual women in difficult circumstances – a basic factor for our success.”*

*“We have gained the trust of people in the community, especially the women, because of the project's results. We realized that we need to understand people, in particular, the situation of at-risk people, to help them in the most practical way.”*

### In Ngu Loc

*“IEC is very important in prevention. Every member in the committee and in the community considers it a personal responsibility. Good IEC work helps to improve the socioeconomic situation.”*

*“Women feel they are being cared for by government and international organizations, who are giving special attention to poor women, especially those seeking work outside.”*

## Greater voice for women

The TICW project as a whole has helped build trust between the women and the community, particularly its leaders. The women also speak of their stronger participation in

community affairs and of their desire to get a wider hearing from the community leaders as they express their immediate and more long-term concerns. They see it as a continuing dimension of IEC work.

For example, the women's group in Hai Ha stressed that the community trusts the project, and that women have become more active at the hamlet meetings. They are happy that no more children are kidnapped but other serious problems trouble them.

*"We are under threat of relocation due to plans to construct the deepwater port and oil refineries. But there has been no news since last year, so we may stay after all."*

*"There is also the serious situation of children heading to the South – in increasing numbers, usually with their families. We are worried about the situation -- about children ending up as domestic workers or as street children."*

*"We have no playground, no evening classes. We propose more support, more funding, for example, for night classes. We have no kindergarten, and the higher secondary school is in another commune."*

*"There are so many demands on the commune leadership, but the commune budget is too low and therefore we cannot expect much. The government should bring in investments in fishing. Already 1/3 of the population is working in the South."*

As for the women in Ngu Loc, the general sentiment is expressed by a widow who is a grateful participant in the project. As someone who has to take care of her small children and a sick mother, she said that now that she is with the project, she feels

*"The government cares and is helping me... The commune is very keen on keeping a tight anti-trafficking policy."*

She has opened a small shop selling soap, fruits, and cakes, and is now able to support her family. But her newfound trust in the government that cares for children and for women like her also raises her expectations about government listening more closely to women's specific concerns.

*"The Children's Forum hears the children; I hope we can receive the same attention. We need to raise our voices through the women's unions to our hamlet and commune leaders. To tell them about our situation, our lack of funds, to propose more fund support. When it comes to awareness raising, the more direct approaches are most useful, for example, hamlet meetings and forums."*

## Schools develop students as IEC workers

The advocacy work among children and by children in Thanh Hoa was described by the principal of Ngu Loc's lower secondary school. He asserted that they have motivated children to return to school, to stay in school, and to reach out to other children and families in their communities.

*"I am happy that we in the education sector played a role in raising awareness, and to help students understand dignity. The children participate in the IEC campaign. Every student in school is an IEC worker. Each one feels responsible for sharing knowledge with brothers and sisters."*

*"We especially try to mobilize children in difficult family conditions, such as those who are working outside the village, and attract them back to school. For this, we organized evening informal classes for children."*

*The principal boasts "We have already achieved the Education for All targets for secondary school. The IEC campaign motivated the return to school."*

### First Hand Knowledge: A PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP TO REVIEW PROJECT RESULTS

The report on the review workshop in March 2004 to review the TICW project phase I in Thanh Hoa Province described how it brought together for the first time members of the project steering committees and women and children from the target communes.

Objectives of the workshop:

- To enable the project partner organizations and other stakeholders, particularly women and children who are the project's target beneficiaries to identify the good practices and lessons learnt from the first phase of TICW project in Thanh Hoa province
- To document suggestions, recommendations for improved operation of the project in the second phase

Methodologies used:

The workshop is designed and implemented using participatory approach to mobilize participants' optimal comments and intelligence. Major methodologies used in this workshop include:

- Presentation
- Group discussion
- Plenary discussion
- Drama
- Games

#### Participants:

The workshop participants consist of representatives from most of organizations, agencies and individuals directly involved in or related to the project implementation, especially two target groups of the project who are women and children at risk of trafficking and labour exploitation. There are 52 participants (28 female, 24 male) including 7 girls and 2 boys. One participant is from national level, 16 from provincial level, 6 from district level, and 29 from commune level.

#### Involvement of participants:

The salient point of this workshop is that the participants are directly involved in the project implementation. Their experience and understanding is shared among them, creating an efficient, serious and responsible atmosphere. The workshop has mobilized great contribution from all participants, including children, women amongst target groups as well as project steering committee members at national, provincial, district and commune levels. This is the very first time when the at-risk children and women of three project communes participate in a workshop together with representatives from national and provincial authorities. In fact, their comments have significantly contributed to the workshop success and are acknowledged and highly appreciated by senior officials of the project steering committees. The high ranking officials themselves are also very active in group discussion (in joint discussion with others as well as in their separate group). Nevertheless, the workshop would be more successful with full presence of the PPSC members.

#### Lessons learnt from workshop preparation and organization:

The workshop is successful firstly thanks to good preparation. The relevant documents given by the project office as well as preparatory meetings and discussion with the project staff provided the consultant with information required for the design of the workshop agenda.

Before the workshop, the consultant visited two project communes to work with the project steering committees at provincial and commune level, borrowers and children among the project's target groups in the two communes. In addition to further understanding on the project activities, the consultant also talked with the visited people about the objectives and methodologies of the workshop. The women and children in Ngu Loc and Thanh Van communes were helped to prepare themselves in advance so that they could see their roles and abilities to contribute to the workshop. They were also guided to prepare their reports and drama performance, helping them participate in a self-confident and enthusiastic manner. Ngu Loc commune prepared a report on the project's direct assistance in the first phase and a drama performed by the children while Thanh Van commune would present a report on awareness raising activities and a drama performed by the women.

Meeting was held between the consultant and Sub –DSEP staff and project staff to reach an agreement on how the workshop is organized and how to collaborate and facilitate group discussion. This preparatory work also contributed to the efficiency and harmony of the workshop process.

#### See also:

- *Report: Workshop to Review TICW Project Phase I in Thanh Hoa Province, 10-11 March 2004, by Tran Thi Lang*
- *Participatory monitoring – TIA-E*

## Children Gear Up for National Children's Forum in Hanoi

The children's group in Hai Ha Commune – of 12 members, ages 12 to 16 - have met 17 times since they were organized by the Commune Committee for Population, Families and Children (CPFC) and youth union staff in June. They were elected by the community and have spent some time collecting information, talking with people, friends, and returnees from the city about trafficking. They have been busy writing stories, making drawings, preparing dramas which they hope to present at the national Children's Forum in Hanoi in late August.

For the 10 minutes that they are allotted at the Children's Forum, they have prepared 2 dramas, 4 songs, and a few games. They were more than ready to perform the dramas that they wrote based on direct experiences that they had learned about. The first episode depicted a child domestic helper who was overworked and constantly abused by her master. The second showed a mother going to work, her child almost kidnapped until police stepped in, and a street child helped by a government vocational training program.

Their four songs dwell on messages such as

- My friends and I know about trafficking and how to avoid being victimized.
- Trafficking has bad consequences, so keep alert.
- Consult adults and the family before leaving for work.
- Report suspicious persons to local authorities.
- Parents, pay more attention to your children.

One girl in the group said she had participated in a project evaluation workshop in March. She performed in a short drama for which she had written her own story and which she had previously performed in the village for her neighbors and school friends.

In Ngu Loc Commune the Children's Group also had 12 members, 13-17 yrs old. They had been organized the month before. When asked "Why do you think you were chosen to be part of this group?" they gave an interesting array of answers:

- *"My family situation is difficult."*
- *"I represent children working away from home, such as in Thanh Hoa city, or Hanoi. I came back last year when my parents asked me to come back. I was working from 5 am to 11 pm selling shrimp and also as a domestic nursemaid and wrote to my parents about my hard life. Now I am back at home, helping my uncle who is a fish dealer, by sorting and packing fish. I can earn 150,000/m."*
- *"I can represent 4,500 children and bring their voice to the forum."*
- *"I have a higher level of understanding."*
- *"I was elected by the other children."*

As in Ngu Loc commune, their hamlet meetings had them discussing, writing letters

and stories about the trafficking situation in their community. They were guided by leaders of the youth and women's unions, and were selected after three meetings.

Their program for the Children's Forum in Hanoi includes storytelling, drama, drawings, letters, and questions for government officials who will be attending the forum. They say their drama reflects real stories of friends. The script was drafted by the youth union leader after which they reviewed and revised it. They performed the short play showing three children working in a city far from their village in the house of an abusive and often drunken master. They were overworked, but when they complained, were booted out of the house without receiving any pay. Crying and roaming the streets, they were later found by concerned friends from the village who had gone out to look for them and persuaded them to go home.

Drama performances such as this are recognized by everyone - community leaders, IEC workers, women and children - as useful IEC methods. Drama elicits the participation of young and old alike during the long process of script preparation, rehearsals, performances, and most importantly, in the discussions among the audience after the performance. The performances bring community members together in a stimulating information - education - communication method that helps imprint the messages in people's minds. Because true-to-life stories are reflected in the dramas, they carry powerful IEC messages on trafficking prevention.

Some children in the group recalled the Children's Forum the previous year with its theme on child rights. They also described the consultation last March during which children talked about their situation, and found themselves more comfortable interacting with their commune leaders. They said more of such forums and consultations should be organized in other communities.

*"I liked the forum. I learned more about my friends' situations. I made friends with adults and received consideration from older people."*

*"I felt lucky - There were many things beyond my understanding. It was very interesting to learn new things. Everyone had a chance to talk and share, and to discuss our own experiences, difficulties, plans."*

*"It was fun and useful. I was very happy when I met with adults and friends. I could talk and share my own family story. The adults appreciated the children's participation."*

When asked what they plan to say to the leaders, ministers, and People's Committee at the upcoming Children's Forum, they replied:

*"We will ask them - 'How can you support children so that they can go to school?' We will ask DOLISA 'How can you create jobs for women and children? We have small land and a high population - what solution can MOLISA give?' We will expect answers from them on the spot."*

## The project team

The project team reiterates that the children's forum has changed adults' perception of children and children's perception of themselves. They have proved that children are change agents, who are aware of the problems facing them and who take responsibility to address the problems together with adults, as IEC workers, for example. After some time in the forum preparation process, the recognizable difference in the children is the obvious confidence that can be seen on their faces and heard in what they say.

The project team stresses that it is greatly because of the good IEC work performed by different members of the communities that the obvious reduction in trafficking over the past years has occurred. Whereas before, trafficking in children and women was considered a private matter for families, it has become a matter of community concern for discussion and prevention. The team reports that various agencies, mass organizations, schools, villages, men, women and children are all involved, forming a community strength to combat the problem. They hear provincial and commune project steering committees as well as local people confirming that awareness raising activities and specific support to at-risk groups have reduced trafficking in children and women. Though some women and children still work outside their hometowns, their number has dramatically decreased in comparison to the past. Families are more vigilant about offers of outside employment and are more likely to check out the job situation in advance before leaving for their destination.

## SUMMARY

This account from Thanh Hoa province in Vietnam draws from focus group discussions with the provincial steering committee, with the commune steering committees in Hai Ha and Ngu Loc communes, and with their respective women's groups and the youth groups organized to participate in the Children's Forum.

It highlights the role of young people and women designated and trained to become IEC workers in their communities. Provincial and commune authorities attest to the necessary and critical contribution of these IEC workers to dramatically reducing the incidence of trafficking in the villages.

The women IEC workers each of whom has been assigned families to watch over and support in their respective hamlets are trusted individuals who volunteer their services to the community. They are neighbor-confidantes and counselors who seek out women and families who are vulnerable to being trafficked or who are contemplating seeking employment outside the community. They also assist returning residents to find reason to stay by trying better alternatives to making a living at home. In both cases, the IEC worker facilitates their access to the different support services provided through the TICW project and other development assistance that they know about.

The IEC workers also serve as spokespersons for the families and women who need and are asking for more or other kinds of support. Because women in particular are becoming more confident that the community and government leadership are truly concerned about their welfare, they are now saying that part of IEC work is to make women's voices better heard. The lines of communication and trust have been opened up between women and leaders, as between children and leaders, and both groups are confident about getting a wider hearing from now on.

The continuing dialogue between children and women on the one hand and the commune and higher-level authorities on the other are expected to address the persistent and more complex issues raised by children and women about the longer-term improvement of living conditions in their communities.

Prominent among these are the need for wider employment and livelihood opportunities, access to land and other productive resources, opportunities for higher education, as well as anxieties about possible dislocation by development projects.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

6

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

## 6. CHINA (Yunnan Province)

### Voices from Yunnan Province: *“It’s About Promoting Gender Equality”*

Five young girls had traveled 100-200 km. from their homes in Jiangcheng and Menghai counties to come to a meeting in Simao City in Yunnan to share their stories. Three of the girls were students in their third year of middle school. Before anything got started, one girl brandished copies of her school composition on gender equality which she had brought with her to read out to the group.

The first schoolgirl said she lived with her parents and older brother. Her father was with the education bureau, her mother a primary school teacher, and her brother a soldier. The second schoolgirl lived with her parents and brother in their farm. The girl with the composition had a sister, and parents who worked in a tea company.

The three girls spoke of the changes that they had seen in their schools and communities since the TICW project began more than three years ago. They agreed that living conditions in their villages have improved significantly. But they also reminded themselves that they knew of a few children and families who were still in economic hardship.

#### Student 1

*“ I am happier with my own family life. But many of my classmates are poor and come from the mountainous areas. Two classmates dropped out because of poverty. But there are fewer dropping out now.”*

*“ We have learned to spot strange men wandering in front of the school – who may rob or cause violence or kidnap children.”*

#### Student 2

*“ The Education Bureau distributed brochures in school. They gave us some legal knowledge especially about gender equality and we wrote compositions about it. (But still) I see 2 or 3 classmates dropping out every year, either because of poor academic performance, or because of poverty, or because they have to help with work at home.”*

*“I had a classmate in primary school whose mother died. Her father took a new wife with 2 children. He had borrowed money but cannot repay. He is in an emergency situation and cannot enroll his children.”*

### Student 3

The third girl related how happy she was with the positive changes in how girls were now treated better in school, compared to the past, by their boy classmates as well as by their teachers.:

*“ Before, boys looked down on the girls, they saw the girls as inferior. Now they are changing also, and teasing girls less. The teachers also treat girls better now. Before, there was an instance when we were doing homework and the boys were making noise but the teacher blamed the girls. Now, they give girls the lighter work in school like cleaning the windows and give the heavy work to the boys instead.”*

Another confirmed the improvements in the community.

*“Yes, the boys are changing, they are much nicer now. The villagers are better off today than 3 years ago. The families are also smaller now.” She saw improvements in the new pig factory in their village and in the fact that farmers are changing their crops every year, planting higher-value crops like rapeseed.”*

As to their plans after secondary school, one wanted to go to university in Beijing for language studies, the second similarly wanted to study in Beijing University. The third wanted to take a vocational course to become a tourist guide or to work in a big hotel in Jinghong.

When asked if they could imagine a woman president or premier in China in their lifetime, they all gave a resounding “YES. Even ourselves!”

## Twinning gender equality education with trafficking prevention

All the stakeholders who participated in the focus group discussions about the TICW project in Simao City and in Menghai and Jiangcheng counties were unanimous about the dramatic impact of twinning gender equality education with trafficking prevention in the community. They said they were really surprised by the results since they had not anticipated such significant changes – and in so short a time - especially in the lives of girls and women in the community. Comments from representatives from the education and agriculture bureaus, the women’s federations, and the public security bureaus– now the strongest proponents of gender equality education - bear this out.

These project partners said that in the beginning, they did not think gender equality training was a crucial element for the project against trafficking. It was without much thought that, while working together on the initial project proposal, the Women’s Federation and the Education Bureau decided to put in gender equality training. Then during their OOPP workshop in March 2000, they said they realized gender inequality i.e., the inferiority of women, was a root cause of trafficking, along with poverty and the

feudal social structure. But they said it was during project implementation that they discovered how really important it was.

They related how, in general, a training seminar on gender equality and trafficking prevention takes three days and is co-facilitated by the education bureau (day 1), the women's federation (day 2) and the public security bureau (day 3). The first day discusses topics such as the laws that protect women's rights and children's rights. The second day deals with gender equality, trafficking, and women's participation in social affairs. The third day studies examples to prevent trafficking such as victims' stories. The seminar ends with an evaluation by the participants.

## First Hand Knowledge: OOPP - A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO PLANNING

For project planning in all countries, the participatory tools of the Objective Oriented Project Planning (OOPP) approach of the Management Development Foundation (Sri Lanka) were applied (after a workshop on its use.) These include visualization techniques for problem analysis, proposals and prioritization of key issues in the target communities, and they help to cut across hierarchies and power levels among the participants, so that all can participate in planning.

To contribute to the development of integrated and holistic approaches to combat trafficking, training in OOPP approach was provided to key stakeholders from target Township, County, Prefecture and Provincial levels. OOPP is a participatory planning technique, in which all parties involved identify and analyze the problems to be addressed in the project, and prepare a concrete and realistic project plan together.

By discussing the problems and possible solutions, the participants can come to a mutual understanding of each other's points of view. Once some form of consensus is reached, these problems are organized into a logical sequence, and reformulated into objectives. Based on a number of criteria, some of the objectives are selected to be the focus of the project and are translated into a Project Planning Matrix or Logical Framework. This planning matrix describes the objectives at different levels, referred to as Overall Objective, Immediate Objective, Project Outputs and Project Activities.

### Identifying Problems

In an OOPP workshop, the participants anonymously write their problems on cards, which are then displayed on a wall. This way, difficulties some people feel in expressing problems in front of others with conflicting interests can be overcome. Subsequently, the session moderator leads a group discussion to clarify the issues. Sometimes, problems mentioned need to be further specified in order to uncover other underlying difficulties. The moderator avoids linking what is written on the cards with either the originator or the source of the problems.

### Building Trees

The next step is to select a starter problem, for which both causes and effects can be identified. The causes are identified from the cards displayed on the wall, and placed in a cause-effect relationship underneath the starter problem. A problem tree will gradually

emerge as each problem is related to other problems. The logic is rechecked and problems that were not mentioned yet can be included. Lines are drawn to show the relationships between problems, and arrows mark the direction of effects.

Participants are then assisted to reformulate the problems into realistic objectives. These objectives are displayed on another sheet. The sequence is checked and reorganized as needed. Once the sequence is acceptable to all participants, lines are drawn to visualize the means-end relationships. Groups of related objectives dealing with a similar topic are clustered and labeled.

### **Planning Matrix**

The first step in the Planning phase is to make an initial selection of the clusters of the Objective Tree, which can and will be included in the intervention strategy of the project. These selected clusters, on the basis of set criteria, determine the Overall Objective (s), the Immediate Objective and the Project Outputs of the project plan and will be included as such in the Planning Matrix.

See also:

- “Working towards Sustainability through Ownership Building and Participation”*,
- “Participatory and Action-Oriented Research (TIA-C)”*
- “Participatory Project Design” (TIA-D)*
- “Participatory Monitoring “ (TIA-E)*

## Participatory training methods make for happy learning

The group maintains that the training has been very effective because they use participatory methods – with project staff, community leaders, teachers, and students alike. This method for “happy learning” was described by a project partner from the education bureau.

*“Before, teachers had students keep their hands behind their backs and did not allow them to talk. But with the new teaching methods that they themselves experienced, teachers now ask students to talk freely, asking them to relate their own trafficking stories. What teachers have learned in teambuilding and trust-building they now transfer to other beneficiaries. We see it as a method for happy learning.”*

To accompany the lectures they say they use brochures which outline national laws, illustrate gender equality, or show cases of trafficking. They discuss examples of what men can do and what women can do. They stress that girls have rights, too, in particular under the compulsory education law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Other project staff from the education bureaus elaborated on the surprising results of their gender equality training.

*“A key TICW element is the gender equality training introduced by the project. Gender equality training promoted the “civilization” of families to treat girls and boys equally – to send both to school.”*

*“At the first meeting with 300 schoolteachers, we introduced to them a new concept of family violence. They were shocked to learn that it is a crime for a man to beat his wife, and surprised to hear us say that women deserve respect.”*

*“Women believe themselves to be inferior to men. They now know otherwise and have changed their ideas about themselves. Among students, before, boys walk in front, girls behind, now they walk together side-by side. Before, boys left school earlier while the girls stayed behind to clean the classrooms. Now the boys are already sweeping the floors. Before, monks cannot walk with girls, but now they do.”*

From the Education Bureau of Jiangcheng County came this story about a 13-year-old schoolgirl who took her gender equality lesson to heart and brought her troubled family back together again as a result.

*“With knowledge of the law and of the CRC incorporated into the school curriculum, children are now aware of how to protect themselves. There is the example of a 13-year old girl student, whose father beat her mother, the mother left, and her sisters dropped out of school. It was one classroom project that was responsible. She wrote to her father and mother about the law. When the parents read her letters, they reflected about their children. The mother returned and the father apologized to his wife and children. The father is now helping out in the fields and even helping with the children’s homework.”*

## First Hand Knowledge: RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH A CAS-CADING PROCESS

In Yunnan Province of China, as part of a holistic approach to prevent trafficking in women and children, awareness raising on the dangers of trafficking, and gender equality, is provided to communities. Schools in target counties had never been exposed to information on gender equality and trafficking prevention, nor were teachers and students familiar with these issues. As part of the project, education departments of the two counties proposed to train 135 headmasters of primary and middle schools and 332 key teachers, who in turn would “cascade” the new knowledge to other students in other schools and classes. In this way, 4, 127 students in primary and media schools of two townships were reached with awareness raising on trafficking prevention and gender equality over two terms. In addition, trained students formed volunteer teams to advocate relevant knowledge in other villages. The same exercise was repeated in two more townships. (insert graphics showing cascade process province to village.

The use in Yunnan of trained student volunteer teams to reach out to the whole community has proved an effective way to enhance cross-generation communication on sensitive issues such as gender equality and trafficking. It has opened a public platform for discussions of these issues and for community action.

In order to make more children and villagers understand gender equality and trafficking prevention, the trained children from the target villages formed into 48 publicity sub-teams to advocate, during their holidays, gender equality and trafficking prevention in their communities. During these efforts, teachers organized students to talk with local

villagers and analyze local cases of trafficking. They also discussed what was positive and what was negative in the villages, and how to change things in their communities. This proved to be an effective way of raising awareness and having the community take better control of their own communities.

See also: *Cascade Training*  
*The medium is the message in awareness raising – SELL-11*

## Women's Federation – Simao

*“Gender awareness training + economic development = raised social status of women.”*

This is the formula which the women's federations in Simao say significantly reduced trafficking. They cite the valuable role of the strong education bureaus – with headmasters, teachers, and children together influencing the community as a whole. The gender awareness training has also influenced television – with television dramas in the ethnic language which carry the messages: “I want to go to school” and “It's equally okay to have a boy or a girl.”

Their achievements are clearly visible to them and to the wider community, and are recognized and appreciated by the county governments. The social status of women in the community has been raised, and the credibility and prestige of the women's federations have increased.

*“What achievements can we show? Community awareness was raised. Social status of women was raised. School enrollment increased in the whole county. The dropout rate among girls was reduced. The labor skills of women improved. Female migration especially in border counties was reduced. The poor population in the project sites was reduced. The parents' mistreatment of girls was reduced. All these have helped reduce, if not eliminate, trafficking.”*

## Women's Federation - Jiangcheng

*“The prestige of the Women's Federation has increased through the project. The county government has recognized the federation's work and allocated allowances for women's representatives. Celebrating International Women's Day has become a big community event. All villages now celebrate International Women's Day and have made it Villagers' Day because the whole community is involved.”*

## Women's Federation – Menghai

*“The results have been good for legal rights protection. I am happy about the increased awareness about the law, trafficking prevention, and gender equality – especially among government officials. Women are now more able to protect their legal rights, in issues e.g., about land-lease, family disputes, or raising children. They now report problems to the Women's Federation and to the police.”*

Two concrete examples of young women who had sought the assistance of the women's federations and the police were presented by the president of the Women's Federation of Menghai County. One was a trafficking victim that they had succeeded in bringing back to her home after her father sought their assistance to rescue her. The other had made her way back home after seven years and asked for help to prosecute those who had kidnapped her.

These young women, now 20 years old, also gave firsthand accounts of their experiences during the separate meeting together with the three schoolgirls from Menghai and Ji-angching counties. Following are their stories.

### Lured by a cousin and a best friend

Among the five young women in an earlier meeting were two 20-year-olds who had been victims of trafficking – sold to husbands in other provinces - and had returned to their home villages. During the discussion about school, the two returning victims both said they had liked school, but were forced to stop studying. The first girl said she was in grade 4 and was 13 when she was trafficked. The second said she had to stop after her first year in middle school because her parents could no longer afford it

The first girl was tricked by her girlfriend 7 years ago and was away from home all that time until she returned to Menghai in June 2004.

*“I was tricked by my best friend. I was 13 and she was 3 years older. It was during the Water Spring Festival, and after spending the day together, she did not allow me to go home. I think she and her boyfriend drugged my drink and when I woke up, we were on a train. My girlfriend told me we were leaving. We ended up in her boyfriend's home in another province. I cried every day - they detained me for three months. Sometimes they gave me food and water, sometimes not. I tried to escape many times but never succeeded. I could not contact my family because there was no telephone and I was uncertain about my family's postal address.”*

She said that her friend and the boyfriend sold her to an old man to be his wife. The old man treated her well but would not listen to her pleas to return to her family because he had paid RMB 30,000 for her. In October 2003 he finally agreed to let her go, she says because he was already getting too old. She left for Guangzhou with a friend to work there and earn some money before trying to head home. She returned to Menghai last June. Her father fainted in shock upon seeing her.

Now that she is back, she has filed a complaint against the girlfriend who tricked her. But she says that the police have told her it is too late because her complaint is beyond the prosecution period. She insists that this is the second time in 7 years that her family has complained to the police. In 2000 she says that her brother saw her friend visiting the village and asked about her. According to her, when the girlfriend said she had no

idea, the brother brought her to the police. They said he had no evidence and she claims that the police threatened to beat up her brother and her girlfriend disappeared again. This time she has filed a complaint with the county and the women's federation and county police are studying her case.

When asked what she wants to happen about her girlfriend, she answers in a plaintive voice:

*"I don't really want her put in jail. I just want to see her and ask her why she did what she did to me. She was my best friend. I used to lend her my things and clothes to wear. She was even wearing my clothes the day they kidnapped me. Up to now I just cannot understand how she could have done that to me."*

The second returning victim had a much shorter ordeal away from home, in large part because of the assistance from the women's federation and the police. She recounts

*"I was fifteen when my 26- yr- old cousin who had married outside, persuaded me to go with her. She took me to Hunan which is 2 days by train. When we got there, she forced me to marry and left me to stay with my new husband at his cousin's home. I was able to get the address from the cousin's wife. I telephoned my father, and I told him where I was, and what had happened to me, and he instructed me to stay put and pretend as if nothing was happening. I called him regularly, and because I spoke in our dialect, no one understood my phone calls. Three months later I was rescued."*

*"My family was forced to sell our pigs trying to rescue me. My husband's family did not mistreat me but they were charging us RMB 10,000 if I wanted to go home to get back what they had paid for me"*

Since the successful rescue arranged by the women's federation and the county police in July 2002, she has found work in a rubber plantation and hopes to save enough money to build a house.

Both victims had a clear message to other young girls: *"Do not trust even your best friend or your cousin. They may be wolves in sheep's clothing."*

Despite the visible and dramatic progress in the project, the project steering groups in Simao, Menghai and Jiangcheng are not about to rest on their laurels. The president of the women's federation in Jiangcheng reminds everyone:

*"Gender inequality is everywhere. At one of our project trainings, I asked one question: do you notice how many women headmasters there are? Only 4 out of 74 are women."*

The man from the Education Bureau in Menghai County concurs:

*“There has been some change. However traditional ideas are still strong. We need stronger efforts  
---long term efforts, and we must keep on going.”*

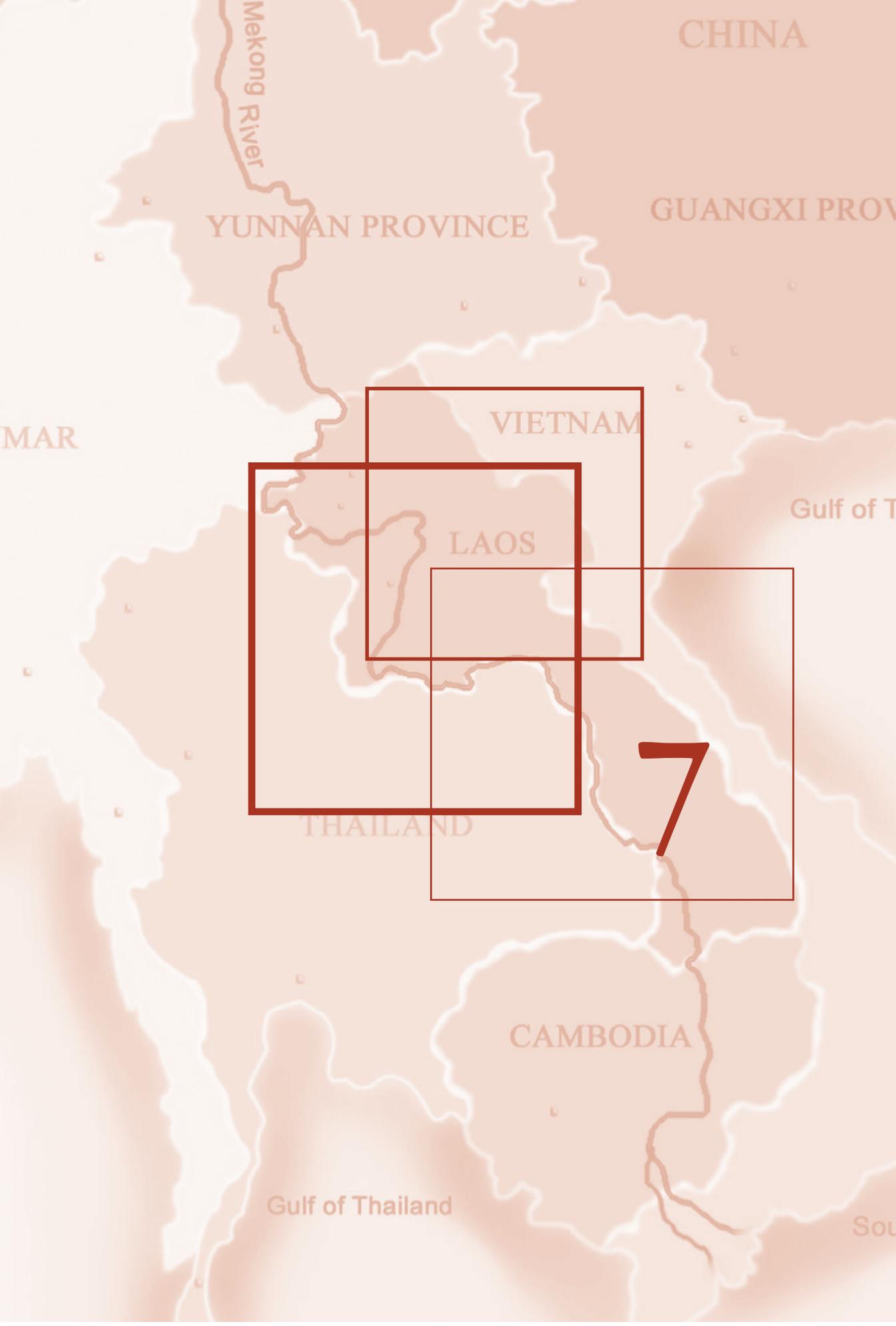
## SUMMARY

This account from Yunnan province in China draws principally from the focus group discussions with the steering committees of Simao city, the project groups from Menghai and Jiangcheng (representing the women’s federation, agriculture bureau, and education bureau), and with the heads of the women’s federations, as well as with the five young girls from Menghai and Jiangcheng counties.

It highlights the approach taken by the project partners in Yunnan to link actions to reduce and prevent trafficking with gender equality education. More importantly, their story reflects the dramatic results that have surprised them and which they say have made them happy.

The project has raised the status of participating girls and women in the family, in the school, in the community, and in the political arena. Women’s federations have gained prestige and credibility through their involvement in the project and are enjoying increasing political and material support for their efforts.

These results motivated them to convene a replication workshop which calls for more extensive “cascade training” across the province, and the lessons from which have been recognized by the central government as applicable to other provinces at-risk of trafficking in women and children. The initial success is spurring accelerated and wider coverage to promote gender equality education and thereby reduce the likelihood of children and women falling victim to traffickers.



CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

7

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

## 7. SUMMARY

### Voices Across the Mekong

After presenting the individual “voices” and recounting the stories of children, women, and community leaders from the project provinces in the five countries, this section of the report attempts to point up what may be considered some of the more interesting threads running through their stories. Most of these threads have been discussed as lessons learned or good practice in project reports. All countries, for example, have demonstrated significant reductions in the incidence of trafficking in women and children. They all show heightened levels of awareness, increased capacities for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at all levels, increased livelihood skills resulting in increased family incomes, better school attendance, and better access to more community services and resources.

The aim here, however, is to present these messages of success in a somewhat different slant, namely, in terms of the changing relationships brought about by the project.

Such a slant was suggested by the conclusions and recommendations put forward by Crawford in the Evaluation Report on TICW. In particular, the evaluation found that :

*...Through the work of the project:*

- 1. Rights-based approaches are facilitating the way that the complex issues involved in trafficking are addressed,*
- 2. Participation, attention to inclusivity and encouragement of Stakeholder Ownership have been given constant attention and are being developed,*
- 3. Children, young people and women are beginning to participate in decisions which affect them, and although there is still room for improvement, innovations... are proving that investments in young people's participation pay off as they strengthen all aspects of community involvement,*
- 4. Increasingly, the relationship between primary stakeholders and others is changing so that all stakeholders can work together to identify needs and to work together to prevent trafficking.*

Based on their testimonials above, the significant changes in relationships spoken about by children, women, members and leaders of the community may be seen to cover the following areas, among others.

### 1. Children are seeing changes in their relationships within the family, in school, and in the community

Within the family, children are more aware of their rights to parental care and protection, and are asking and receiving better family care, including the right to an education. They can also see their schoolteachers soliciting their views and opinions more often and about more matters, not only with respect to child rights and trafficking, but in their teaching sessions in general. For some, there is also better treatment from teachers in school.

Girls in particular are being given greater value by their parents, enough to warrant sending and keeping them in school. Girls are receiving better treatment from boy classmates and teachers in school. They no longer feel inferior to boys as much as they did in the past.

In the community, they are gaining the ear and trust of adults such as the community's leaders, and are increasingly called on to directly get involved in awareness raising activities. They are also seen to be more effective communicators than most adults when it comes to reaching other young people. Thus they are more confident about speaking up and performing at community gatherings.

With what they have learned about their rights and about the tricks related to trafficking, children are confident that they know how to spot dangerous persons and how to protect themselves, and say that they are not likely to fall into the traps set by traffickers.

### 2. Communities are more caring and supportive of children, women, and families at risk of trafficking

As they learned more about the rights of children and women, about the situation of trafficking in their own communities, and about the pertinent laws, communities began to assume responsibility for the welfare of their members. While before incidents of trafficking, child abuse, or domestic violence were seen as strictly personal or family affairs in which the community need not intervene, these same situations have now become concerns for the community as a whole, about which they are prepared to act.

They closely monitor the situation in the community, keeping track of families and their movements, reporting to and working closely with security forces in cases of trafficking, or setting up their own child protection networks.

They have organized self-help groups, credit and savings groups for women and families deemed vulnerable to trafficking, or for those returning to the community. And for those who continue to seek employment outside, they provide counsel and practical advice to minimize the dangers of migrating to work.

### 3. Young people are becoming their own advocates and exercising the responsibilities that come with their rights

Once they learn about their rights and the issues related to trafficking, young people feel it their role and responsibility to share their newfound knowledge, especially with their families and their friends. They are easily motivated to share the information with the larger community as well, upon the urging and guidance of adult initiators. Thus, groups of young advocates have been organized and trained in drama, drawing, story telling, song and dance, and video production to broadcast the situation of trafficking in community and school performances. Now and then they are able to perform in bigger provincial or national events. They say they are motivated not only by the desire to help the community, but also to develop themselves as persons.

Aside from performing in activities that are conceived and planned by adults during the project implementation, some youth groups have been active in getting to know and analyze the situation of trafficking in their own communities, either as preparation to designing project interventions, or more specifically to designing communication messages. Ex-victims of trafficking are among the most willing advocates and communicators.

Some youth have joined community mapping exercises and project planning activities. For the most part, some have interviewed or consulted neighbors or friends and returning or trafficked victims to get firsthand accounts of trafficking experiences. A number are also directly engaged as members of self-help groups and community watch groups. Others are into peer education activities.

Young people have also increasingly been involved in project evaluation. A number have participated in monitoring and evaluation workshops. In Children's Forums they are also able to express their views about the project.

Finally, they have continued to raise persistent concerns such as guaranteed access to education, even to higher education and skills training, adequate work opportunities for themselves and their families, and faster improvement of general living conditions in the community.

### 4. Women are finding strength in organization

Much has already been said about the significant difference brought about by gender equality education in women's lives in the project communities.

A consistent message from the women was about how the project was supported by women's groups and how women's groups were in turn supported and strengthened by the project. Where before women in the community were not organized, or where

women's groups did not make their presence felt in the community, the project called for selecting women for leadership roles in village development committees, and for organizing women into self-help groups, credit and savings groups. Through the series of awareness-raising activities and training sessions, and more directly during project implementation, group members found themselves spending much time in close interaction and over time developing trusting relationships and strong support systems among themselves. They were supporting each other not only in terms of their shared project activities but also in terms of their personal and family concerns.

Women are saying, and others in the community corroborate what they are saying, that they are now more confident about their own abilities to make decisions, to speak up and assert themselves, to do things which they were previously not able or inclined to do, and in general, to take more control of their lives. Moreover, they see themselves as more desirous of becoming more helpful and useful members of their community, especially to those who are neediest, and looking for ways to share the benefits which they have gained from for example, the project experience.

As members of official or unofficial women's groups, they have also become accepted as legitimate spokespersons for women in the community. They have begun to represent themselves better in village meetings and decision making processes. In some instances, they have brought their concerns to district and provincial forums. Leaders of women's groups have been recognized for their effective work and a few have been elected to political positions in their communities and higher administrative levels.

#### *5. District and provincial authorities are creating enabling and participatory environment for local action*

Children, women, and community leaders in one way or another cite their relationships with district and provincial authorities as a most critical dimension in the project. For many, their interaction through the project with local officials has led them to believe that "the government cares."

District and provincial authorities not only provide overall project direction but articulate relevant policies and laws which facilitate local community action against trafficking. Provincial and district plans of action are translated into community plans of action through a participatory series of consultations and training activities.

Communities receive direct and continuing training and technical support from provincial and district offices, and when necessary or appropriate, from non-government organizations with whom government chooses to partner. In some cases, provincial and district programs and budget allocations have been increased or reoriented to respond to the needs indicated by local plans of action. It is precisely these forms of guidance and support that communities say have made significant impact in their lives, and which

have turned around the trafficking situation for their women and children.

Provincial and district bodies provide the valuable links between higher policymaking and decision making levels and the community. The upward and downward linkages have facilitated joint thinking and work in identifying target communities, selecting partners, conducting needs assessments for training and gainful employment, implementing joint activities, sharing information and experience, and reinforcing overall collaboration. They ensure opportunities for sharing of knowledge and skills and resources, and progress reports downwards (for empowerment), upwards (for mainstreaming and influencing policy) and horizontally (for scaling up), and provide the momentum to mobilize key stakeholders at various levels.

#### *6. National governments are thinking more about their poor and vulnerable groups*

The project experience at community level has encouraged national governments to look even more closely at the situation of population groups that have been identified as most vulnerable to trafficking.

The significant results and the lessons learned from the project have been important impetus for mainstreaming the issue of trafficking into national policy and policy processes. Governments are incorporating the trafficking issues into poverty alleviation programs and national development plans, to back up more specific national plans of action to combat trafficking and plans for the protection of children. These plans call for increased allocation of government resources toward poverty reduction and trafficking prevention in identified vulnerable areas and sectors.

In all countries, national steering committees have expressed readiness to step up their poverty alleviation and trafficking prevention efforts. They continually try to generate financial and technical support (topping up village development funds, e.g.) to mobilize varied technical know-how in relevant areas for the benefit of target villagers, to improve target group access to existing services, and to improve linkages among agencies to better respond to community needs. They are also improving data collection and management about the local poverty and trafficking situation to inform policy and decision making at national levels.

Governments are also increasingly aware that addressing the situation of constituent vulnerable families and communities in their own countries requires addressing the situation of their vulnerable citizens, in other countries. Discussions, studies, and initial cooperative agreements between countries on preventing irregular migration, for example, are also now focusing on preventing trafficking, and including legal labor migration alternatives to illegal border crossing.

Increasing international interest in community-based action to prevent trafficking has also goaded national governments to scale up their initiatives. Multilateral and bilateral development assistance have become more accessible as donors see the concrete results brought about by multilevel and multi-sectoral political commitment to helping communities help themselves out of poverty and the living conditions that put them at risk of trafficking. Governments are keener than ever to partner with agencies such as ILO, UNICEF, IOM, ESCAP, UNIAP, ADB and World Bank, whether separately, or in consortium, not only to strengthen and sustain their beginning efforts, but to more quickly multiply the benefits across their entire populations.





CHINA

YUNNAN PROVINCE

GUANGXI PROV

MAR

VIETNAM

Gulf of T

LAOS

8

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

Sou

## 8. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

### Keep on going

The summary section enumerated some of the more significant positive changes in relationships that have occurred during the life of the TICW project to date. From the testimonials of children, women, and community leaders in particular, these changing relationships have been both cause and effect of successful project implementation. For all stakeholders concerned, these are at least important if not necessary ingredients for project sustainability and scaling-up. To paraphrase one stakeholder's viewpoint: We must keep on going – changing our relationships - to claim our rights - and to exercise our responsibilities.

### Lifting more families and communities out of poverty

Certainly among the children, women, and community leaders participating in the project, the constant challenge they pose for themselves and for their governments is to reduce or alleviate poverty in their midst. They know that child protection and trafficking prevention are so intertwined with living conditions in their communities. The small, immediate, and tangible improvements in life conditions resulting from the project have made them more determined to address the poverty situation in their communities. They expect to see national government paying more serious attention to improving their living conditions.

Project sustainability and impact are therefore critically dependent on more broad-based poverty reduction efforts – at local levels – but more importantly at provincial and national levels. Job creation, infrastructure investments, improved basic services were constant development requirements mentioned by children, women, and communities. These poverty reduction agenda imply cross-border and international frameworks as well, in light for example, of the impact of globalization on a country's poverty situation, and consequently, on a country's trafficking problems.

### Charting our children's future

Again, from children, women, and community leaders in the project, there were persistent expressions of their continuing concern about the future of the children in their communities. Most were already too happy that more children could now attend school, that they knew more about their rights, and were beginning to be active and useful citizens in their own communities.

But they still saw limited opportunities for accessible and affordable higher education for their children. Even when vocational training was available, these were not found to be relevant to livelihood options in the community. More importantly, alternatives to moving away from the community after schooling to find work or make a living, were still absent or limited. For many children and families, the question remained: where will the children be in the near, medium, or long-term future?





**Contact information:**

**ILO Mekong Sub-regional Project  
to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women**

United Nations' Building

P.O. Box 2-349

Rajadamnern Nok Ave.

Bangkok, 10200 Thailand

Tel: +662 288 2218 Fax: +662 288 3063

E-mail: [prevention@childtrafficking.net](mailto:prevention@childtrafficking.net)

[www.childtrafficking.net](http://www.childtrafficking.net)



ISBN: 92-2-118064-6