

COMBATING TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN & CHILDREN IN VIETNAM



The Asia Foundation is a leader in the fight against trafficking in persons in Asia, one of the most egregious human rights abuses in the region. In Vietnam, women and children are trafficked to China, Cambodia, Taiwan, and South Korea for sexual exploitation, forced marriages, labor in sweatshops, and/or domestic servitude; and the number of trafficking victims increases annually. Even when these victims manage to return to Vietnam, they face tremendous difficulty in reintegrating into their communities. Stigmatized by society and traumatized by their experience, they generally do not have the education and skills necessary for gainful employment. These women are at a high risk of being re-trafficked.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The Asia Foundation recognizes that to have meaningful impact on trafficking, both local and national solutions are essential and must be linked to broader regional and international initiatives. As the trafficking situation grows in scope and complexity, and as traffickers find new ways to adapt to anti-trafficking measures, the Foundation's programs are continually evolving in response.

The Foundation works with local partners on interconnected program activities designed to address both the underlying causes and consequences of trafficking. Programs focus on building local capacity to address the problem; empowering at-risk groups economically; establishing community monitoring groups to prevent trafficking; helping survivors reintegrate into society and seek justice; providing educational scholarships for disadvantaged girls; and promoting cross-border collaboration between Vietnam, Cambodia, and China.

ENHANCING LOCAL CAPACITY

Building local capacity to address development issues and to support reform initiatives is key to ensuring program impact and sustainability. As such, The Asia Foundation provides grants and ongoing technical assistance to selected partners on key issues over time to ensure program impact and sustainability. Programs supported by the Foundation have increased women's representation in governing bodies; taught skills for negotiation, policy formulation, and public administration to enhance women's effective performance in office; and educated women about their legal rights.

The Foundation has partnered with the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) since 1994 and the Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women (CEPEW) since 1998. The Foundation has worked closely with both organizations to help them design, plan, and implement a range of anti-trafficking activities. These have included capacity-building to train their staff and others on the complex set of social and legal issues related to trafficking and facilitating their engagement in regional anti-trafficking activities.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION & INTERVENTION

Because many trafficking victims actually know their traffickers, the need for communities to reach out to their members is critical. The Asia Foundation has established community monitoring and support groups in two communes each in An Giang, Quang Ninh, and Can Tho Provinces to increase community awareness of the trafficking problem, which can aid prevention. These groups organize public information sessions on trafficking; work to include trafficking on the agenda of the commune meeting; monitor the local trafficking situation; identify illegal residency or migration of women and children lured by



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strangers; and provide basic counseling to victims as well as vulnerable women and children.

Over all, these community monitoring and support groups have proven to be an innovative and effective first line of defense against trafficking. The prime minister recently decided to institute such a mechanism in all communes in Vietnam, and the Foundation will continue to work with local partners to support establishment of these groups in other locales.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Because of official condemnation of illegal prostitution as well as a prohibition on emigrating without notifying authorities, many survivors of trafficking are left with few avenues to receive assistance. Often, they are reluctant to seek help for fear of further abuse by traffickers, debt bondage, punishment from government authorities for illegal border crossing, or stigma from being labeled a prostitute. This isolation and fear leaves them vulnerable to re-trafficking.

The Asia Foundation has worked closely with VWU and CEPEW in Quang Ninh and An Giang Provinces to address this problem and establish programs that provide trafficking survivors and at-risk women with vocational training, job placement, and micro loans to pursue business opportunities. More than 1,000 women have received micro-loans. Participating women have become key players in monitoring to prevent trafficking, have gained more economic opportunities, and have participated more confidently in community decisions.

CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION

With The Asia Foundation's support, VWU organized and hosted two cross-border workshops between Vietnam-Cambodia in An Giang Province and between Vietnam-China in Quang Ninh Province. More than 50 participants attended, representing governments and non-governmental organizations working on trafficking in persons in Cambodia, Vietnam, and China. Participants discussed the trafficking situation, existing anti-trafficking legal instruments in each country, and strategies to prevent trafficking and protect victims. These workshops have helped to enhance mutual

understanding of the current trafficking situation between Vietnam and China and Cambodia. Participants also developed country-specific action plans to improve cross-border cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation is leading to the extradition of traffickers back to Vietnam from China for prosecution. The Foundation is committed to the effort of promoting better cross-border cooperation to combat trafficking and will continue to work with partners to find effective ways to do so throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

LEGAL AID SUPPORT

The Asia Foundation is providing legal assistance for victims of trafficking in Quang Ninh, An Giang, and Can Tho Provinces in partnership with the National Legal Aid Agency of the Vietnamese Ministry of Justice. Working at the provincial, district, and commune levels, this program provides trafficking survivors with representation at hearings, case handling, legal counseling, and assistance with reinstating their land and/or house, re-registering their citizenship, and obtaining birth certificates for their children. Thus far, the program has provided legal counseling to 109 victims, free legal aid services for nine victims, and representation at 15 court hearings. The program also seeks to build the capacity of an inter-agency network to increase in-country coordination among relevant government agencies and organizations through training and information dissemination.

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DISADVANTAGED GIRLS

It is recognized that girls who attend secondary school are less susceptible to exploitation and abuse, have expanded job opportunities, and are better prepared to play an active role in society. Increasing opportunities for girls to learn basic skills opens up more prospects for them and makes them less vulnerable to traffickers. To that end, The Asia Foundation supported a scholarship program that allows girls of disadvantaged families to attend and complete primary and lower secondary school and provides additional ways for them to learn basic skills. The program is currently supporting 140 girls from poor families in the Mekong delta and a province in the Red River delta.

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



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